
Abstract: Waleska Torres' life was documented in a nonfiction story entitled *Lucky* by director Laura Checkoway, produced by Neyda Martinez. The film which debuted in 2013 spanned more than five years on the streets of New York City and followed Lucky Torres, who grew up as an orphan in a system that made her feel like a nobody.

In this paper, Martinez and Potashnik's analysis will reflect past Lucky's visage, to reexamine the urgency of her story, evolution, and journey as an unlikely heroine who dares to live life on her own terms. The authors contend that Lucky's story remains as vital and current today as it was at the time of the premiere, as Lucky's life underscores the plight of countless marginalized and abandoned poor youth facing similar life circumstances.

Masked in tattoos, Lucky transformed herself into her own canvas. Her face etched in ink charts a lifetime of violence and resilience and creates a self-imposed barrier between herself and the mainstream world. Producer Neyda Martinez explains, "Lucky's story is that of a generation with parents lost to the 1970s/1980s AIDS crisis. Forced to endure a transient upbringing without the security, safety, and support provided by responsible role models, they rely on the media to shape their dreams of success. Why do people shun Lucky? Why are people shocked by her stance and bravado? We, our society, are both responsible for abandoning and creating her. As artists, our job is to hold up a mirror to show plainly what many refuse to see."

Having forged a path all her own, Lucky unabashedly shared her story to illuminate how one among the countless and invisible and forgotten LGBTQ homeless youth fought, in her own way, to survive. Reared by New York City streets, she was on a crooked path from the start when their mother abandoned them to foster care.

Martinez, who is now on the teaching faculty of The New School in New York City and continues to work as an independent producer of documentary film, will revisit LUCKY with its protagonist, director, and field experts; drawing as well from scholarly texts and articles to explore what it means for a marginalized LGBTQ woman to redefine her place in the world as a survivor and non-traditional heroine.

The work will interrogate and critique the misconception of gender-based, capitalist, and even political oppression among marginalized persons given that both film subject, Torres, and producer/educator, Martinez, are part of the Puerto Rican diaspora-- a territory of the U.S. called by some authors as the world's oldest colony.

The paper will highlight how persons fashion the desire to seek more out of life in spite of given conditions, how systemic and personal trauma is negotiated and exacerbated by poverty and isolation while revealing humanity's interconnectedness.

Throughout the work, the feminine journey will be referenced by contrasting Maureen Murdock's *The Heroine's Journey: Woman's Quest for Wholeness* to Joseph Campbell's *Hero's Journey* model where Murdock states the soulful search of the woman seeks to heal and reclaim while the male experience is driven by external quests.

Reflections: *La vida, Lucky* links *Lucky* to a substantial albeit controversial work researched and authored by Oscar Lewis, *La vida: a Puerto Rican family in the culture of poverty--San Juan and New York*. In 1967 the title garnered a U.S. National Book Award in Science, Philosophy and Religion for its documentation of generational cycles of poverty and violence among the abject poor.

Keywords: patriarchy - narratives- urban - violence - hip-hop - oppressed - diaspora - LGBTQ2S - documentary - poverty.

[Abstracts in spanish and portuguese on the pages 285-287]

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Reflections: *La vida, Lucky*

Waleska "Lucky" Torres is the protagonist of the documentary film *Lucky* (Checkoway, 2013). The film follows *Lucky*, a queer single mom in her late 20s of Puerto Rican descent.

She is a member of a subaltern class, abandoned, displaced and abused. Lucky dreams of being rescued by her idol, celebrity rapper Lil' Wayne, hoping that money, fame and stardom will save her from a lifetime of poverty and violence.



Figure 1. Waleska “Lucky” Torres, ca. 2012. Photo Credit: Nicolas Hudak/Counter Film. Working through trauma in the body, Lucky, rightfully, owns her pain, her personhood and humanity. Defiantly rebuking respectability politics, her presence alone forces people to stop and look at the mapping of her life. “The tattoos on my face people would think it was pain but actually I was trying to find the pain.” — Lucky

“The Nature of This Flower Is to Bloom.
Rebellious. Living. Against the Elemental Crush.
A Song of Color. Blooming For Deserving Eyes.
Blooming. Gloriously For itself.”

— Alice Walker, *Her Blue Body and Everything We Know, Earthling Poems*

Introduction

Western, white-supremacist, patriarchal systems and ideologies criminalize, victimize, exoticize, eroticize, objectify, ultimately dehumanizing the Other. As contemporary discourse about critical race theory arouses debate among policymakers and the media, scholars actively work to deconstruct and disabuse mythologies as history amid the global movement for Black lives. In “Orientalism,” Edward W. Said’s (1978) seminal discussion reflects on dehumanization:

“...what Anwar Abdel Malek calls ‘the hegemonism of possessing minorities’ and anthropocentrism allied with Europocentrism: white middle-class Wes-

terner believes it is his human prerogative not only to manage the non-white world but also to own it, just because by definition 'it' is not quite as human as 'we' are. There is no purer example than this of dehumanized thought. (p. 108)

Depriving persons of the fullness of their humanity is an act of dehumanization, enabling perpetrators of cruelty and violence to remain apathetic to their victim's suffering thus rendering the oppressed to fight for the right to a life with dignity, an incessant battle.

Recognizing this, the World Conference on Human Rights reaffirmed in Vienna, 1993: that all "human rights derive from the dignity and worth inherent in the human person." When systemic racism and discrimination are employed by the dominant culture to deny persons like Lucky their personhood, how do young girls and women navigate their place in the world?

Exploring the personal and political histories of Waleska "Lucky" Torres, a queer, urban youth of Puerto Rican descent, this article aims to bring into stark relief Lucky's struggles and journey as put forth by the protagonist during the period of filming; at once an act of raw disclosure and a performance of desire through which she seeks to assert her right to be and define her own narrative.

As a filmmaker and producer of color committed to decolonizing documentary and building on the struggle of the anti-establishment cultural phenomenon that culminated with the Civil Rights era working towards liberation, my position is to reject analyzing Lucky as a character or scientifically as a subject-object. Rather, I engage with her person, as a person, respecting the lived reality she has experienced uniquely, individually, and those realities that we share as inheritors of unjust histories and policies imposed onto our existence as women of the Puerto Rican diaspora, whereby our existence within this framework in and of itself challenges the status quo.

In this paper, as part of my activism (a portmanteau word combining art and activism), I intentionally blur the lines between the portrayal of Lucky in the documentary film and Lucky outside of the nonfiction portrayal to explore the adage, "the personal is political," for a more grounded reading of Lucky. Advocating for "a more diverse and inclusive praxis," radical filmmaker, teacher and writer Trinh T. Minh-ha is widely known for her discussions on why her films are neither documentary nor fiction. In a 2019 interview with the London-based contemporary art magazine *Frieze* she asserts the need for "commitment to understanding how, in relations of power, the embedded questions of gender, ethnicity, race, class, sexuality, religion and culture overlap and intertwine." Accordingly, if the phrase the personal is political were depicted mathematically, with an equal sign to describe equality between the values or expressions on either side, then in turn is not the political personal, too? Therefore, the historical overview offered below is not a new contribution to the fine research conducted by countless scholars on whose work I lean on but rather to offer context and continuity, as well as to underscore the longitudinal dialectical tensions embodied by Lucky's hero and heroine journeys, and to convey that it matters who tells the story and how it is told.

A Historical review of Poverty, Hip Hop & Displaced Black-Latinx Communities

“Colonialism is not satisfied merely with holding a people in its grip and emptying the native’s brain of all form and content. By a kind of perverted logic, it turns to the past of the oppressed people, and distorts, disfigures, and destroys it...”

— Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*

The Puerto Rican Plight: Forced Migration, Poverty and Negligence

Joseph Campbell’s widely published archetype of the masculine, *The Hero’s Journey*, describes the journey of the male hero who brandishes the sword, glorifies violence and the individual at the expense of community, to ultimately dominate.

Much of Lucky’s history lies next to trauma enforced by colonial structures rooted in white dominance and empire. Puerto Rico’s culture and people, caught between the legacy of four centuries of Spanish colonialism and more than a century of U.S. control, began in 1898 once the Treaty of Paris ceded the archipelago to the U.S. (Duany, 2002, pp.1-2). “While the U.S. presence in Puerto Rico has brought some undeniable benefits, it has also deformed the island’s economy and psychology of its people, fostering a wholly dependent relationship for which Puerto Ricans are blamed.” (Gonzalez, 2011, p. 279).

The Puerto Rican people are of mixed-race, multi-ethnic, multicultural and of diverse heritage. “The Papal Bulls of May 3, and 4, 1493 granted Spanish monarchs the exclusive right to issue travel permits to newly discovered lands” (Carrion, 1983, p. 31). At the point of contact with the Spanish colonizers, the island was populated by The Taíno and The Igneri, indigenous Arawak people in the Caribbean. Puerto Rico’s African diaspora was the result of the enslaved Africans who, once kidnapped, were transplanted to the island by the Spaniards as part of the Transatlantic Slave Trade in the 16th century to ostensibly preempt the expeditious genocide of the native Tainos, by working the fields and cultivating sugar cane, tobacco and coffee, while amassing wealth for the colonial Spanish settlers and Spanish-ruling class.

In the film, both the protagonist, Torres (Lucky), and the documentary’s producer, Martínez, are of Puerto Rican descent. Their lives have been impacted by U.S. colonization, intergenerational poverty, structural racism, and histories of collective trauma. As part of this diaspora, their legacies and personal-political histories intertwine. The outcome of policies in present-day Puerto Rico are the culmination of neglect, colonial-capitalist exploitation, environmental degradation, intergenerational trauma, disinvestment, and austerity, which regardless of ethnicity, race, socio-economic status or caste, all persons have to contend with, including the heirs of the Spanish creole class.

The outcomes of compounding crises which have unfolded in Puerto Rico as described by Juan Gonzalez in *Harvest of Empire* (2011, p. 290) stem from a key root cause:

[...] a more deeply rooted malady – the structure of colonialism itself. How else could the U.S. government justify to its people the continued possession of a colony except by cultivating an image of Puerto Ricans as helpless and unable to care for themselves?

Largely an agrarian, laborer class, relationship to the land and one another signify to a great extent the cultural identity of Puerto Ricans epitomized by the *Jíbaro*, a rural agricultural farmworker, a symbol of cultural nationalism in the collective Puerto Rican psyche. Appropriating this symbolism, the island nation marked a shift to partial self-governance when, in 1947, Puerto Ricans were finally able to elect their own governor (Carrión, 1983, p. 256). The values put forth and embodied in the *Jíbaro* were conformed by the Puerto Rican-elected Governor Luis Muñoz-Marín with the slogan “Bread, Land and Liberty” for Muñoz-Marín’s Popular Democratic Party, which promoted a relationship with the U.S. as a commonwealth, a “free” and associated state.

A key economic development strategy, “Operation Bootstrap,” devised by Muñoz-Marín was implemented in the 1950s and 1960s to chase industrialization for progress and profit by engineering a shift from agriculture to manufacturing. Government programs gave tax breaks to U.S. companies, but for this model to work, the island needed to strike the right balance between jobs and laborers. Economists projected that one million Puerto Ricans needed to leave, prompting a massive migration of Puerto Ricans seeking work in industrial zones across the U.S. in search of “a better life.” By mid-century, nearly one million U.S.-bound Puerto Ricans left the island with approximately 600,000 to 700,000 arriving in New York City’s Spanish Harlem and the Bronx (Library of Congress U.S.A., 2021).

Emigration was promoted aggressively, and in fact, it was a necessity. The shift in an economy from agriculture to manufacturing and even tourism was expected to incorporate at least some of the island’s agrarian workforce. Meanwhile, continental enterprises actively recruited laborers to join a workforce that included both seasonal migrant workers and volunteers to work in the manufacturing sector in urban areas. (Sanchez-Korrol, 1994) Yet, from March 1979 to March 1985, the *New York Times* reported that manufacturing jobs in New York declined by 11.3 percent, from 1.49 million to 1.32 million, representing newly unemployed or underemployed persons, including the many Puerto Ricans who had hoped for a new chance and a better life on the mainland. Many families headed by women fell below the poverty level. For example, industrial restructuring, such as a declining garment industry with predominantly female labor, resulted in reduced opportunities and inferior job conditions for women. (Madamba and De Jong, 1994, pp. 54-56). Increasingly dependent upon public assistance, women and children suffered the impact of a downward socio-economic spiral that would continue unabated for generations.

The trajectory of dispossession and displacement is depicted in *La Carreta*, the 1952 book by Puerto Rican writer, René Marqués, which follows the story of a family of *Jíbaros*, or rural peasants, who move from the countryside to San Juan and end up in La Perla, an oceanside slum area. Later, the family is dispossessed and displaced in a New York City ghetto.



Figure 2. Children play in the huge slum area known as “El Fanguito” (the mud), San Juan, Puerto Rico by Jack Delano, photographer ca. 1942. Source: Farm Security Administration, Office of War Information Photograph Collection (U.S. Library of Congress)

Yes, Puerto Ricans do have a blue U.S. passport, but it comes at a huge price. A century-old federal maritime law, *The Jones Act* of 1917, provided citizenship to Puerto Ricans, but not the full rights of the citizenry. While Puerto Ricans fight in U.S. wars, the people of Puerto Rico do not vote for the president. In addition, the U.S. Federal government held a covert citizen surveillance program from the 1940s to the 1980s which banned any discussion of national independence, made it illegal to display the Puerto Rican flag, and coordinated actions to suppress a nationalist or independent movement by enacting Law 53 of 1948, better known as the Gag Law (*Ley de La Mordaza*) to suppress the independent movement. Other atrocities took place, such as the forced sterilization of the island’s women, known as “La Operación;” illegal bombing over civilian territory; the Ponce Massacre and the persecution, incarceration, and torture of Puerto Rican nationalist icon, Pedro Albizu Campos; and massive environmental damages caused by U.S. business ventures in the main island and in Vieques, which still reels from the toxic results in the land from decades of U.S. Navy bombing target practice, leading to alarming cancer rates among inhabitants and more (Denis, 2015).

In 2000, Yale professor emeritus, Arcadio Díaz-Quiñones, published an influential essay, *De cómo y cuándo bregar* (2000) in which he reflects on a key aspect of the Puerto Rican collective imaginary. As the title suggests, central to his exploration is the term *bregar*, ubiquitous for its use among the island’s people and its diaspora, relating to the persistent struggle and creative ways a person and a people work around adversity to get by. Puerto Ricans are always en la brega, vulnerable and alert.

In the early 20th century, devastating hurricanes, *San Felipe* and *San Ciprián*, ravaged the island amid deep political and economic crises and revealed the interconnectedness of infrastructure, environment, and public health. As noted in the photo by Delano above, many of the people lived without running water and electricity, and life expectancy hovered at no more than 50 years of age. Decades later, in 2017, Maria made landfall under similarly precarious conditions.

Revealing a side of Puerto Rico rarely seen, the world witnessed the U.S.'s massive failure in its shockingly negligent federal response after Hurricane Maria. The overwhelming toll of relentless man-made and natural disasters the Puerto Rican people must overcome incited peaceful protests which led to the resignation of the governor in the summer of 2019, while the people were still mourning their dead. Hurricanes are not new events in this part of the world, climate events have become increasingly unpredictable and catastrophic due to climate change.

If there was any doubt, after the hurricane in 2017, the world finally understood that Puerto Rico's relationship with the U.S. as a free associated state was and remains an ambiguous euphemism. Colonization is the reality, and the people of this island are treated as inconsequential to U.S. hegemonic aims, policies and politics. The asymmetry of power, unfair trade policies, and an unelected fiscal austerity oversight board known as *La Junta* created a chokehold on the island. These recent events, Hurricane Maria, the debt, and the austerity as a response, once again forced a new migration of nearly 600,000 to the U.S. mainland. Among those who remain are the most vulnerable: the poor, the elderly and the children. Austerity turns disinvestment into disaster.

Displaced and Disposed: The Urban Experience

Underprivileged U.S. children in the South Bronx of the 1970s grew up in government-neglected neighborhoods. During that time, the 41st Police Precinct located in the blighted borough coined its nickname, Fort Apache, referencing a historic military outpost in Arizona, its purpose to control the Coyotero Apaches, a division of the Indigenous Apache tribe. In the U.S., the military-industrial complex has named missions with Native American references. "The 'Indian Country' metaphor also represents the language of colonization in the present" (Silliman, 2008, p. 243) and, as a naming strategy, its purpose is revealing – permission to harass, surveil and the license to kill from behind enemy lines. In the 1950s, the South Bronx was home to one of the most integrated neighborhoods in the U.S. The interdependence and vibrant community life was a welcoming factor for the Puerto Rican families who moved to the community alongside African American families who came up North looking for new opportunities having fled the legally enforced racial segregation of the Jim Crow South. Here, the Puerto Rican migrants and African American families got a taste of the possibility of the "American Dream" alongside their Irish, German and Jewish neighbors (Flood, 2010, pp. 161-163).

During the 1970s, miles of crowded South Bronx neighborhoods were reduced to vacant shells and fields of rubble. About 40 fires a night for 10 years eventually destroyed 80 percent of the housing stock and displaced half a million people, leaving behind shells of buildings surrounded by rubble. The documentary *Decade of Fire* (Vazquez-Irizarry, Hildebran, Steele-Allen, 2018), also produced by Martínez, reveals a web of failed policies and political trends – such as disinvestment, redlining, urban renewal, benign neglect, and false media narratives – that all contributed to the socioeconomic decline of the borough, the South Bronx especially. Scapegoated by the media and subjected to political machinations, the Black and Brown communities bore the shame and blame for the

devastation. As manufacturing and white, middle-class families abandoned big cities, vulnerable communities of poor and working class families were left in an environment resembling a war zone.



Figure 3. My Playground” © 1980 Perla de Leon. A native New Yorker of Puerto Rican and Cuban heritage, de Leon, grew up in Harlem and remembers the outrage she felt over the magnitude of the devastation, neglect and abandonment in the South Bronx. “In a country that promotes family values, the laws protect perpetrators of violence instead of the girls, who under these unjust and inhumane conditions are the real heroes.” – Perla de Leon

A form of methodical race-based community divestment practice dating back nearly a century, and arguably contributing to generational physiological and emotional impairment of New York City’s children of color, is Robert Moses’ public parks policy. During the height of the depression in the 1930s, Moses built 255 playgrounds, yet he bestowed only one playground onto Harlem’s children (Caro, 1975, p. 510). Dubbed the “Highway Man,” Moses’ mired legacy also includes the destruction of functional communities to accommodate white flight and suburban sprawl. In a blatant example of environmental racism, the South Bronx is choked by three freeways, including the Cross Bronx Expressway. By literally tearing communities apart and creating structural, physical impediments for equity and access to open and green spaces, highways were a hazard for communities like the South Bronx, enveloping them in smog and noxious particulates, which heightened cases of asthma in the community, especially among children. This type of disruptive carving of the South Bronx directly links to the collective trauma of ruined economic, health and social cohesion, and the isolation of displaced residents stripped of their sense of place and belonging (Fullilove, Peterson, & Travis-Basset, 2016).

A federally endorsed practice called redlining – a refusal to issue a loan or insurance to persons in communities deemed to be a poor financial risk and not worthy of investment – ultimately became an attack on Black and Puerto Rican communities, denying credit and insurance to housing where people of color lived – providing no mortgages or loans and no means to fix aging buildings (Gonzalez, 2004, pp.126-127). This coupled with another federal program, Urban Renewal – or, Negro Removal, as succinctly and famously explained by author James Baldwin in U.S. mainstream media – demolished poor neighborhoods, pushing 100,000 disadvantaged and dislocated people from Manhattan into the Bronx.

Underpinning the fires, the government colluded in a system of for-profit mechanisms with insurance companies, real estate and landlords. Meanwhile, the G.I. Bill and other federal assistance programs also denied non-white families loans to purchase homes in the suburbs. Thus, as Richard Rothstein explains in the *Color of Law* (2017), segregation in the U.S. is the byproduct of explicit local, state and federal government policies. Policies and practices that were long viewed as the outcome of private activity by unscrupulous real-estate agents, mortgage lenders, and exclusionary covenants working outside the law led to “de facto segregation.” His research reveals that private activity could not have imposed segregation without explicit government policies designed to ensure the separation of African Americans and persons of color from whites. The Fair Housing Act of 1968, could not undo a century’s worth of state-sanctioned violations of the Bill of Rights. These structural conditions established by 20th-century federal policy endure to this day (Rothstein, 2017, p 182-184). Compounded by the destruction and loss of working-class jobs in New York City, one million white people fled New York City, and those who remained, including Black and Puerto Rican families in the Bronx and citywide, were the people that could not afford to leave (Flood, 2010, pp. 169-174).

Today, the South Bronx remains the nation’s poorest area, with low health indicators, substandard education, and lack of affordable housing reaching crisis levels. Low income drives families to consume inexpensive and unhealthy fast-food products provided by corporate chains. Lacking a fundamental diet of balanced and decent nutrition, the well-being of children is compromised. In addition to hunger, homelessness is a major stress factor for children. Recent data from the New York State Education Department revealed that more than 36,000 Bronx public school students were homeless during the 2018-2019 school year, accounting for 32 percent of all homeless school kids in New York City (Deutsch, 2019). Though economic and resource deprivation created the difficult realities for residents of the South Bronx, one major, global, youth-led movement grew out of this state of neglect – an art form that birthed generations of talent, icons and a voice for the forgotten people. Without the South Bronx, the world might not have witnessed Hip Hop culture.

Hip Hop and the Reagan Years

“Don’t push me, cause I’m close to the edge
I’m tryin’ not to lose my head
It’s like a jungle sometimes it makes me wonder how I keep from going under
It’s like a jungle sometimes it makes me wonder how I keep from going under.”

— Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five, *The Message* (1982)

New York is recognized as the birthplace of Hip Hop, but one borough stood out from the rest: the address where it is said to have started is 1520 Sedgwick Avenue, The Bronx, New York. Hip Hop exposed the underlying injustice of ghetto life and violence when the world heard the lyrics by griots of the underprivileged, Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five, in their breakout hit *The Message*. Released in 1982, one year before Lucky's birth, its unflinching chorus introduced the world to the cultural production of Black creation, born in what some perceive as the ghettos and slums of "the urban" New York (Edmin, 2010, p. 22).

A cultural and social phenomenon, Hip Hop grew out of precarity and blight but also from an inclusive social, cultural, political identity and aesthetic among urban, African American, Puerto Rican, Caribbean, and West Indian youth, rooted in diaspora and bound together as African descendants living side by side as experienced uniquely in New York City. It remains one of the most influential and unprecedented global youth movements and cultural exports from the Bronx to the world.

The borough withstood 10 years of traumatic fires, while children played in burned-out rubble and decay. Heroin addiction, followed by the crack and then the AIDS epidemics, devastated families. Against this backdrop, over-policing, surveillance and mass incarceration fed tens of thousands Black and Brown bodies to the prison industrial complex and disrupted low-income communities of color. New York's Drug Policy Alliance explains that draconian and racist Rockefeller Drug Laws, enacted in 1973, on the books for more than 35 years, failed to curb drug use or abuse in New York. Yet, that would not stifle the vibrancy of youth and its energy and impulse to innovate for self-expression, to create safe spaces to experience community and joy. In *Voices from the Battlefield* (1992), Dr. Marta Moreno-Vega provides context:

The pioneering, culturally grounded arts movement of the 1960s and '70s actively engaged in the transformation of our communities' conditions and the multifaceted international dimension of our racial and cultural lineages. Together with Native American and African American communities, we [Puerto Ricans] changed the society's overt practice of excluding and devaluing our cultural heritages and presence. (p. 105)

In this climate, DJ Kool Herc and Zulu Nation, among others, sought ways to broker a more peaceful communal coexistence while collectively negotiating and interrogating the oppressive social issues youth in their community faced – police brutality, poverty, incarceration, oppression and unemployment (Birkhold, 2011, pp. 303-321).

Despite this, organizers, parents and community came together to create safe spaces, such as the use of private and public spaces for Afro-Cuban religious and secular Rumba; Al Quinones' 52 People for Progress' Salsa concerts, and parties by Puerto Rican and Nuyorican living legends such as Ray Barreto, Eddie Palmieri, Hector LaVoe, Jerry González's Fort Apache Band, and countless more. Puerto Rican women, such as legendary organizer, Evelina Antonetty, spearheaded initiatives such as summer lunch programs, and youth development programs. The community also spurred the largest co-op-tenant organizing movement in the nation. In the South Bronx, a cadre of clergy, parents, unsung heroes

and heroes alongside legendary Puerto Rican organizers such as Ramon Rueda – a co-founder of the People’s Development Corporation in 1972, the first community group to publicly reclaim and rebuild abandoned housing for Bronx residents – worked together to stop the ravaging fires and save their community and their buildings, many often risking their lives in unsafe conditions, using their own bare hands to rebuild, brick by brick.

This history of Hip Hop and its appropriation informs Lucky’s own worldview and aspirations. Lucky was born in 1983 during the War on Drugs, the implementation of neoliberalism and austerity policies in full force under President Ronald Reagan. Her life was shaped by deep inequality and poverty as a resident of one of the poorest congressional districts in the U.S., the South Bronx. Lucky was born into this reality. At the time of the documentary’s release, Martínez wrote for the film’s website: “Lucky’s story is that of a generation lost to the 1970s/1980s AIDS crisis. Forced to endure a transient upbringing without the security, safety and support provided by responsible role models, they rely on the media to shape their dreams of success.”

Throughout Lucky’s lifetime, Hip Hop became commodified, an art form extracted to serve white capitalism and a rapidly growing white fan base (Tate, 2003). The maverick genre was subsequently bastardized to conform to the staid stereotypes of inner-city communities and urban youth. Assimilating and emulating anti-hero, popular-culture narratives, such as the film *Scarface* (1983), directed by Brian dePalma and written by Oliver Stone, dovetails the ascendancy and shift in values in Hip Hop.

Hip Hop artists who remain committed to the original tenets and its authentic, underlying values – social justice, peace, respect, self-worth, community, and having fun – get less notoriety and acclaim in the U.S. Overwhelmingly, however, this spirit informs and inspires youth across the globe: from Native American reservations in the U.S. to Central and South America, African countries, the Middle East, including Palestine and Israel, to the outskirts of major international cities like Paris and London, and many more where, like in the South Bronx, the original lyrical content and messaging speaks truth to power and serves as a testament to the lives of youth in marginalized communities. The commercialization of Hip Hop morphed into idolizing a gangster’s lifestyle, ethos, imagery, and misogyny, extolling individual success over the well-being of the collective, and hustling to make money by any means whatsoever.

The Hero vs Heroine’s Journey: A Gender Analysis

“Women’s bodies are public domain ... Everyone has an opinion about what a woman should or should not do with her body.”

— Maureen Murdock, *The Heroine’s Journey: Woman’s Quest for Wholeness*

The hero hears the call, crosses a threshold and experiences external success; an experiential and narrative construct celebrating product and achievements over the process. In contrast, the heroine's journey is a lifelong cycle of development, growth and learning that begins with the search for identity.

In 2020, author, artist, psychotherapist, teacher and healer Maureen Murdock reissued her classic text, *The Heroine's Journey: Woman's Quest for Wholeness*, to mark its 30th anniversary. Notably, the phrase "the personal is political" emerged as a political argument and rallying slogan of second-wave feminism from the late 1960s underscoring the connections between personal experience and larger socio-political structures, a concept evident in Murdock's work. The author developed her response to and in conversation with Campbell's work exploring gender distinctions, and how these play out in one's personal life and the wider social contract. In *The Heroine's Journey*, Murdock's framework illuminates the non-linear nature of the feminine quest:

Like most journeys, the path of the heroine is not easy; it has no well-defined guideposts nor recognizable tour guides. There is no map, no navigational chart, no chronicle age when the journey begins. It follows no straight lines. It is a journey that seldom receives validation from the outside world; in fact, the outer world often sabotages and interferes with it. (p. 3)

Murdock developed the arc of the heroine's journey during the second wave of the women's movement in the U.S., a time when the global majority, descendants of extraction, were fighting for a better world. Building on a trajectory of 500 years of resistance, Black and Indigenous comrades formed intersectional movements rooted in racial justice and equality. During that period, Black and Puerto Rican communities understood the oneness of their struggles as they strived for a world without exploitation and oppression. After the COINTELPRO, (covert and illegal projects conducted by the United States Federal Bureau of Investigation aimed at surveilling, infiltrating, discrediting and disrupting domestic political organizations and leaders) murders of civil rights leaders, including Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Malcolm X, and Fred Hampton (chairman of the Illinois chapter of the Black Panther Party/BPP, and deputy chairman of the national BPP), at the grassroots level, people were carrying on with a tradition to redefine themselves. In solidarity, Black and Brown brothers and sisters came together to affirm their shared humanity (Fernandez, 2020, pp. 128-129).

Murdock found that Campbell's structure did not address the issues of the women she was studying, learning from and working with. Murdock is interested in how to heal the deep wounding of the feminine nature both on an individual and cultural level. She looked at how women have been separated from their nature as a result of the masculine-defined culture and society people inhabit. The healing quest is part of a life cycle of testing, trying, failure, learning, and exploration that all beings undergo as they interrogate and wrestle with the existential questions around their being and purpose (Murdock, 2020, pp. 5-12). But, for those of the underclass, and progenitors of persons who historically were not even deemed as fully human, the relational positionality of the author reveals a place of privilege – degrees, marriage, and outward professional success.

The attainment of these life goals, such as prestigious academic degrees and lucrative professional careers, were within reach for white women whose adjacency to power afforded them advantages and access. But, for marginalized children of the underclasses, like Lucky, born into generational poverty and structural oppression, these opportunities were virtually non-existent. Born into impoverished and under-resourced communities, denied the joy of exploring the world safely, they are stripped of opportunities to develop into 'wholeness.'

As storytellers, ethics and care are paramount, always, and chiefly when depicting the lives of persons who do not embody the archetype of a perfect victim, for example. Or, as in Lucky's case, a perfect storm resulting from society's intentional disinvestment. The human inquiry and how these stories are told are perhaps even more important than their mere (re)telling, especially as we take a closer look at whether Lucky's story can be seen as a heroine's journey and how it diverges from it. Debates wrestling with contemporary social issues, such as the lives of persons with disabilities and their relationship to an ableist society; gender expansive and non-conforming identities in relationship to heteronormativity; neo-feudalism as a result of neoliberalism and austerity; and the present-day global movement for Black lives, demand a racial reckoning and the fashioning of just and liberatory frameworks from unyielding, white supremacist structures.

Youths like Lucky fear for their lives at the hand of the police; are surveilled and criminalized, and have been force-fed white supremacy and U.S. imperialism. It is imperative to name the problem. In this geopolitical construct, the Hero's Journey is manifested by the U.S. empire and colonization, such that the oppressor requires an oppressed in order for the hierarchical system of domination and social control to work. With violence at its core, systematic disenfranchisement denies education, adequate housing, and leads to our next inquiry, the gendered alienation of Black-Latinx and queer youth. A patriarchal culture that celebrates the exceptional individual hero belies the ensconced, structurally racist frameworks in society that keep Lucky and people like her disempowered and confined to caste.

Gendered Poverty, Alienation and the Systemic Disadvantages of Black and Queer Youth

Are Lucky and children like her not worthy of care? Trapped in a vicious cycle of inherited depravity, Lucky states that she became a runaway and street kid as a result of having been raped by her foster-care father in her early adolescence. A significant portion of her life and that of her peers, a generation of stigmatized youth, is spent on the waterfront piers in New York City's Greenwich Village. Lucky's quest for fame is an implicit desire to be recognized and earn a livelihood, like the television stars and popular culture celebrities she reveres, which may allow her to escape the confines she was born into.

Aleksandra Wagner, Ph.D., invited Martínez as a guest lecturer in her course *Psychoanalysis: An Urban Experience* at The New School on December 3, 2020, after having assigned students to view two feature nonfiction films produced by Martínez, namely *LUCKY* and *Decade of Fire*. In a follow-up email interview with a student, Sana Hussein Makké, they

shared the following reflection, “Lucky is only displaced in the eyes of American democracy. Lucky is oriented in a world of Lucky, where her power comes from her refusal to comply with the order of things, an order that has never served her.”

Lucky makes these challenges visible as evidenced by recent findings in leading U.S. studies, such as the 2017 article and report from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation entitled *Traumatic Experiences Widespread Among U.S. Youth*, which found that children of color face a heightened risk of exposure to traumatic events. Studies show that 64 percent of Black children and 51 percent of Hispanic children have family histories that include Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE), as compared with 40 percent of white children (RWJF.org, 2017).

ACEs occur more frequently among children in low-income families. In families living on incomes under 200 percent of the federal poverty level, 62 percent of children have endured at least one ACE. Those indicators include the following: somewhat often/very often hard to get by on income; parent/guardian divorced or separated; parent/guardian died; parent/guardian served time in jail; saw or heard violence in the home; a victim of violence or witness of violence in the neighborhood; lived with anyone mentally ill, suicidal, or depressed; lived with anyone with alcohol or drug problem, and often treated or judged unfairly due to race/ethnicity (RWJF.org, 2017).

In 2017, the Georgetown Law Center on Poverty and Inequality study, *Girlhood Interrupted: The Erasure of Black Girls' Childhood*, revealed that: adults view Black girls as less innocent and more adult-like than their white peers. Authored by Epstein, Blake & Gonzalez (2017), the study details the following:

The quantitative data, collected under the leadership of Dr. Jamilia Blake, showed that `even in the age bracket of 5-9 years old, adults perceive Black girls as needing less nurturing, protection and comfort than white girls of the same age, and that they're more independent. The peak difference in adults' perception of innocence appeared in the 10-14-year-old age bracket. The potential implications of these findings are profound: They may help explain why Black girls tend to receive harsher treatment in schools and the juvenile justice system. If authority figures hold Black girls to a more adult-like standard or view them as fundamentally less innocent, they may be less likely to extend leniency, or give them a second chance. (p. 8)

The aforementioned studies find that without protective measures, girls like Lucky are 20 percent more likely to be charged with a crime; receive harsher treatment, and are punished at a disproportionate rate in school and the juvenile justice system. Moreover, adultification biases, the studies contend, erase the distinction between childhood and adulthood, making lasting, harmful effects on those same lives. Girls like Lucky are seen as threatening, disrespectful, loud, aggressive, and angry. Criminalizing victims of rape, abuse, and trauma, feeds the sexual-abuse-to-prison pipeline. Ignored, and worse, not treated humanely and holistically for post-traumatic stress disorder and mental health, girls like Lucky are not dignified with the tools to fashion a purpose-filled life as imagined.

Despite this, Lucky demands the right to be and to walk in the world as a creative person. Fully aware that her narrative is her currency, the commodity she knows how to sell and negotiate in exchange for services from the public system that told her she is worthless, a nobody. Lucky was a stripper, she sold drugs, never had a “real” job (steady employment with fixed salary and working hours incompatible with an unconventional lifestyle), and aged out of the foster care system. “From slavery to civil rights to the modern Black Lives Matter movement, Black childhood has been and is a place of vulnerability, trauma, disparity and condoned violence,” wrote Jen-I S. Costosa in *Pawns of Policy and Problematized Perception: The Sustainability of Inequality Through the Space of African-American Childhood* (2018). Society writes people like Lucky off yet she and her spirit persist.

The Right to Be: Queer Deviance as Resistance

“Patriarchy is a political-social system that insists that males are inherently dominating, superior to everything, and everyone deemed weak, especially females, and endowed with the right to dominate and rule over the weak and to maintain that dominance through various forms of psychological terrorism and violence.”

— Bell Hooks, *Understanding Patriarchy*

Lucky’s defiant nature and rebellious positionality in the world invokes a deeper inquiry that leads us into queer theory – particularly the radical queer histories of Black and Latinx communities. In Ki Namaste’s *The Politics of Inside/Out: Queer Theory, Poststructuralism, and a Sociological Approach to Sexuality*, (1994) we understand that queer theory explores the relationship between heterosexuality and homosexuality, furthermore how homosexual subjectivity is included and simultaneously excluded within the culture – “both inside and outside its borders.” Namaste reminds us that in the past, we have seen sociologists overlook the social construction of heterosexuality – examining homosexual identities and communities, but ignoring the social implications that contribute to the oppression of queer communities (Namaste, 1994, p. 220). While the colonial project dictates and constructs our understanding of “gender” and “sexuality,” bell hook’s acclaimed theorization of “imperialist, capitalist, white-supremacist patriarchy” identifies the path of Lucky’s defiant nature.

Lucky erodes the colonial structures of gender and sexuality, further challenging what we know as deviance. Queer liberation echoes this defiant stance Lucky embodies. This rejection of heteronormativity, expressed in queer culture, gender fluidity, trans-narratives, non-binary, break this colonial construct. Lucky’s deviance, defined as “violation of the norm,” strikingly outlines the metaphor between queer liberation-rebellion against the normative culture in society. Lucky embodies this queer deviance, and much of queer culture articulates this deviant subculture: characterized as a group of people that directly

challenge the dominant culture. While hooks theorizes the process of the colonial project in defining gender and sexuality, queer culture shatters this colonial manifestation.

Lucky's plight, as a queer Puerto Rican heroine, a rebel, did not come out of a spontaneous location. Lucky's rebellious, radical stance was forged far before her time. The trailblazing legacies of two 2SLGBTQ+ activists, Sylvia Rivera and Marsha P. Jackson, who met in the early 1960s, defined these queer movements that made it possible for subcultures of queer deviance to thrive: uncaged, let free, open to breaking the ceiling of colonial constructions of gender. Though Rivera and Jackson's work incited a movement, it has now been co-opted by white gay-men, capitalism and the movement of Pride to satisfy commercialized corporate interests. Before the trending rainbows and parades in the central streets of busy cities, queer histories in Black and Latinx communities were (and still are) neglected histories. We consume, or at least see, these mass corporate celebrations of commercial Pride, yet we cannot manage to contribute towards protecting many homeless queer youth living in poverty.

Histories left behind or written out of national celebrations are found in the scholarship and intimate accounts of queer family, united by blood ties or by choice. Jackson and Rivera left torches to carry forward. Present and future generations must encourage discourse that prioritizes Black and Latinx queer liberation. Andrea Smith's *Queer Theory and Native Studies: The Heteronormativity of Settler Colonialism* (2010) and C. Riley Snorton's *Black on Both Sides: A Radical History of Trans Identity* (2017) provide in-depth queer analyses that stretch the imagination beyond conceptions of identity and representational-politics. Smith's articulation of colonial consumption of Indigenous culture also critiques the pitfalls in mainstream queer scholarship. Smith argues that queer theory can centralize and reproduce a white supremacist, settler colonialism narrative – it achieves this by wiping out the Indigenous peoples colonized in this land, who become the foils for the emergence of postcolonial, postmodern, diasporic, and queer subjects. Concerning Native studies, even queer of color critique does not necessarily mark how identities are shaped by settler colonialism (Smith, 2010 p. 446). As an imperialist, capitalist, white-supremacist patriarchy informs and shapes social realities, society is conditioned at times to reinforce this practice of erasure across communities. As such, the importance of queer deviance as rebellion seeks to defy the imposed ignorance of Black and Latinx queerness. As Smith helps us think past the colonial project of gender, Snorton depicts the racialized violence of Black cis and trans women from slavery to Jim Crow and beyond. Snorton points to the work of Enoch Page and Matt Richardson describing the process of state techniques creating “racialized gender” that produces “gender-variant social formations as an excluded caste” (Snorton, 2010 p. viii). So much of this history lies next to trauma enforced by colonial structures rooted in white supremacy. Emerging curator and cultural critic, Novel Idea, a Ph.D. Candidate at the Institute for Doctoral Studies in the Visual Arts, presently working on their dissertation titled “The Black Sublime,” attended the New York City documentary premiere of *LUCKY* in 2014. Nearly a decade later, Idea offers the following reflection lamenting in an interview with Martínez, “how nothing has changed.” Idea notes: “We have only to observe the current systems of oppression, which include its political economy, to witness the stated particular epistemology which binds Lucky into the inevitability of her current and ongoing reality” (2021).

Forced to maneuver through these dynamics, Lucky and persons like Lucky, are indelibly aware that their liberation stands on the queer movements and grit of visionary leaders who reframed narratives to change the course of history. Growing up as a pier kid in New York City, unwittingly, Lucky describes the lasting impact of Rivera and Johnson's vanguard resistance by acknowledging that on the pier and its adjacent areas everyone there is equal, the same. No one faces discrimination for being different and persons can be themselves, freely. While people fuck on the pier and fight on the pier, she exclaims "This is home! This is my home!" This historic location, which saw the birth of voguing and the emergence of Black and Latinx queer pride and liberation, provided Lucky with a sense of belonging she found nowhere else.

On Fractured and Fragmented Narratives

An Intimate Review of *Lucky*

A palimpsest of her own making, Lucky makes the invisible, visible and uses her body and her skin as the canvas to document her history, desires and memories as acts of protest, rebellion, destruction, creation and (re)creation. By using her body as a site of invention and innovation, she transforms herself into a "work of art – you might call it a freak show," she says in the film. Serving at once as a vehicle for spectacle and battle armor, the tattoos create a self-imposed barrier between herself and the mainstream world. The raw and diaristic quality of her body markings – scrawls, phrases, portraits and names combined – render a declarative gestural presence, proof-of-life, and a living testament to both her external hero and internal heroine journeys, both part of her existence, as articulated in the nonfiction film.

Words such as "Bitch" appear vertically on her right cheek; "Fuck" and "You" appear in parallel on each rear thigh; emulating her hero, Lil' Wayne, we see her in the film getting the tattoo "Fear God" over an eyebrow; the words "Super Star" are enshrined in a constellation of stars on her thigh; the letters "F R E E" individually appear on each forefinger of one hand; "Loyalty" on the exterior of her foot; "R.I.P. Julio + Rosa," a tombstone and dedication to her late parents on a calf; and "Sherice," her daughter's name, on the upper arm. These names, words and values matter to this young woman who masks her wounds behind a tattoo-covered face and a toughened shell. When asked, "Tell me about all your tattoos; Why?," Lucky replies to the host of an alternative radio program by and for queer youth: "At first I thought I was ugly. I thought I was trying to hide the ugliness. But then, I was trying to find the pain, but I couldn't find where it was located at [sic]; I was trying to find the pain but I couldn't find it."

In an ominous, anonymous corner of the South Bronx, ranked for decades as the poorest urban congressional district in the U.S., outside a gritty tattoo parlor, young boys, ages 8 and 9, play in the unforgivable heat and concrete with skateboards. Meanwhile, in the room's interior, Lucky, the center of attention, has an audience. Donning a makeup palette of deep blues, turquoise and green, her eyelids evoke a glorious peacock. The petite wo-

man, just over five-feet tall and weighing slightly over 100 pounds, writhes as she gets the contours of her hero and possible savior, Lil' Wayne, etched onto her ribs and a portion of her pained, hunched back – a product of severe scoliosis. In this scene, the documentary's protagonist is surrounded by friends, likely admirers, a cadre of young Black and Brown young women who drink beer and smoke cigarettes; grooving to the underlying ebb and flow of the rap beat.

While Lucky dreams of stardom, she writhes in pain as the contours of Lil' Wayne's face begin to take shape. Why is Lucky drawn to him? Lucky describes her attraction to the artist, below:

Lil Wayne is my man. I just love him so much. That's my nigga right there; he just doesn't give a fuck ... I just wanna be, I wanna be in his shoes. You know what I'm saying. I'm not a fan ... like oh my god a Lil Wayne fan ... I just like; I idol[ize] him ... 'cuz he don't give a fuck what people say, think or do. It's about making money and making the people happy and being happy within himself [...]. He doesn't care what the fuck the world say or do cuz, you know why, when ten don't like you, thousands will love you.

In this shift from feminine to masculine, Murdock (2020) explains:

The prevailing myth in our culture is that certain people, positions and events have more inherent value than others [...] Male norms have become the social standard [...] The girl observes this [...] and wants to identify with the glamour, prestige, authority, independence, and money controlled by men. (p. 31)

Having moved from shelter to shelter for as long as she can remember, her painful past is always present. Disregarded and neglected, the ever-present internalized trauma is conveyed when Lucky shares in the film:

Not many people wanted me when I was younger. Nobody gave me a loving home. I was always like a stepchild. Like, you are nothing, so we are gonna treat you like nothing. And all we are seeking is love. Love can make a person go a long way.

Systemic disinvestment among the most vulnerable is internalized, embodied. Lucky's reflective language reveals ingrained notions of disposability and worthlessness, but also a deep yearning for connection, emotional justice, and love – the kind of love that gives life meaning; the kind of love she has never had. Thus, in her quest to meet her idol, Lil' Wayne, she pens a heart-wrenching letter which reads:

I wish you could see the pain in my eyes. I would love to be under your wing. Help me grow. I need your helping hand. Allow me into your life and become your family. I'm waiting to be rescued by you. Take my hand and I will follow.

“Out of this darkness came an urgent need to heal what I call the mother/daughter split, the deep feminine wound,” inciting the heroine’s journey, which Murdock describes as separation from the feminine” (Murdock, 2020, pp. 4-5). Lucky laments not having a mother’s love and admits hating a woman she has never really known. Lucky recalls an interaction at the foster care agency and begging, “my mother to take me with her ... don’t leave me there. I needed her and she left me and abandoned me. So, I really didn’t forgive her for that ... I really hate her for that.”

An orphaned street kid, Lucky lost her father to heroin and her mother to AIDS. As a mother, Lucky tries to make her way through the rough and unforgiving streets of New York in the best way she knows. In 1998, the New York Times reported that “AIDS orphaned an estimated 100,000 in the United States since 1981 – but experts agree that New York City has been hit harder than any other American city.” The failure of the system in which Lucky and countless other youths like Lucky navigate is that it has not invested resources for true human development. The system did not teach Lucky “how to fish” and in response, she came up with a wildly dangerous scheme, one in which she could risk losing custody of her son. In a New York City Housing Authority apartment, Lucky joins a party where mellow Bachata music from the Dominican Republic plays, while in one corner of the apartment, young Black men in their 20’s flick wads of cash, and in another corner two young innocent children quietly play.

Sitting in the kitchen and breaking the fourth wall, Lucky boldly and directly speaks to the camera about how her scheme will provide her with some semblance of autonomy and freedom in the form of a monthly stipend, an apartment without a curfew, and no rules. Lucky articulates her urgent cry for independence below:

I’ve been in the shelter for fucking two years and eight months; what the fuck is going on? I can’t get any type of an apartment; no way, no how. So, the only way I’m gonna get an apartment is if I have an ACS (Administration for Children’s Services) case. One of my neighbors in my building is going to call ACS on me and tell ACS that I beat my son and I have no food and I don’t feed my son. So, then when ACS comes they’re gonna have to put me on a thirty-day trial, keeping the case open for only thirty days. ‘Cuz it’s mandatory until the investigation fully completes. Keepin’ the investigation open ‘til they find me a neglectful parent or an unneglectful [sic] parent ... and, so I can get a voucher, so I can get an apartment. Because that means I will be going to a program ... um, called preventive services to prevent me from catching another ACS case. You understand! It’s a fucking brilliant idea! The system thinks they can play me, but I’m playing them right back!

Teetering on a tightrope between dreams and despair, Lucky’s escape from a life of deprivation and unpredictability proves elusive. Through her story, myriad social issues come to light, such as the failures of foster care, abuse, systemic poverty and homelessness. Countless youth like Lucky are significantly overrepresented in homeless populations. Evidence-based research in a study by the organization youth.gov uncovered the top causes for homelessness among LGBTQ youth: family rejection resulting from sexual orientation or

gender identity; physical, emotional, or sexual abuse; aging out of the foster care system; and financial and emotional neglect. As a result of harassment and negative experiences in shelters, 2SLGBTQ youth are more likely to live on the streets with a significant negative impact on an individual's physical and mental health, well-being, functioning, human development, and life trajectory.

Lucky is a living example of the broken people spit out by failed policy and burdened bureaucratic government systems. For example, budget allocations promote the usage of pharmacological drugs rather than a focus on therapy to support deep interrogation and work on the multiple traumas Lucky has lived through. At a modeling agency, the intake manager asks her if she has experience going on auditions, modeling, or acting. Lucky quips back, "Well ... my psychologist says I'm schizophrenic." A telling glimpse into Lucky's journal contains childlike scrawls and print lettering with phrases describing her interior world, "Alone, no family; Death, when will it come; Block Heart leaves no more room to love;" and "E-pill makes me happy." In another scene, the filmmaker reveals that doctors from the South Bronx Mental Health Council have prescribed pharmacological treatment for Lucky's "mood disorder." The extensive treatment includes Depakote for manic episodes, Zyprexa for bipolar disorder and schizophrenia, Remeron an antidepressant, Cogentin used for symptoms of Parkinson's disease, and Ambien for insomnia. Murdock believes that an aspect of the dark feminine is to touch one's despair and rage. The Heroine's Journey requires honoring this descent to make the sacred journey with a balance that must be achieved between dark and light. Antidepressants, the author has stated, mask and numb the symptoms underneath. To achieve healing and wholeness, one has to break down before a breakthrough.

Closing Thoughts & Reflections

Principal photography for *LUCKY* began in 2007 when journalist turned filmmaker, Laura Checkoway, stumbled upon a group of fierce and unfiltered young women on the Christopher Street Piers, in New York City, a long-time safe haven for queer youth. Initially, the intention was to craft a nonfiction piece, a portrait of four young queer women navigating early adulthood, each trying to make their own way. The storylines were not organically coalescing and the editorial decision was made to center the story on one main subject. Six years later, the documentary *LUCKY* premiered at the Hot Docs Canadian International Film Festival, April 2013. The debut nonfiction feature directed by Checkoway and produced by Martínez, was executive produced by Steve James (*Hoop Dreams*, *The Interrupters*, *Life Itself*) who noted at the time of its release, "There are not enough of these kinds of stories being told today."

Inherent within the documentary genre is the power to engage communities in dialogue around complex and urgent social issues with the aim of provoking empathy through human-centered storytelling. In the 2018 article by professor and media artist, Amir Husak, *Exercising Radical Democracy: The Crisis of Representation and Interactive Documentary*

as an Agent of Change discusses the essential role of the genre in Alphaville, a Journal of Screen and Film Media:

Since its early days, documentary has been on the forefront of examining and critiquing society and challenging our knowledge about the world. It has aimed to do this through the stories of real people, daring to address the most pressing and complicated issues, probing various power structures, and frequently positioning itself as an active agent of social change. Documentary is, broadly speaking, principally concerned with ‘the real’... Being a documentarian implies poking around archives, spending months or even years living with the protagonists, charting strange new territories, and educating about people and situations that otherwise stay invisible and out of reach. (p.16)

Works such as *LUCKY* bring to the fore a lived experience that challenges the silence of complacency and begs the question, Why do we as a society not listen to the poor? How is it that in the most dominant country in the world, youth like Lucky are not protected or cared for? Lucky’s life experience could draw a direct line to sociologist Oscar Lewis’ tome, *La Vida*, a best-seller in 1966, who is known for coining the term “culture of poverty.” In it, he traced in more than 600 pages the plight of a poor family from the slums of San Juan to the ghettos of New York City replete with violence, abuse, alcoholism, poverty and prostitution. In a review published by Sir Arthur Lewis Institute of Social and Economic Studies, the University of the West Indies, in 1968, the critic notes “*La Vida* is not pretty, but it is cruel, harsh, violent, and that the environment is not conducive to social change. We have to care enough to do something about the lives of those who take us into their confidence” (Schlesinger, 1968, pp. 103-105). As works such as Lewis’ and *LUCKY* offer a glimpse into storied lives, we must always remain alert and sensitive to the complex power dynamics inherent in undertakings such as these, ever mindful of the complexity of our shared humanity and the accountability and responsibility of the creatives behind the telling of these stories.

Stories illuminating the disadvantaged positionality of children from communities not unlike Lucky’s are made all over the world. In Latin American cinema, documentary and narrative titles including, but not limited to: *Crónica de un niño solo* directed by Leonardo Favio (Argentina, 1965); *Pixote* directed by Héctor Babenco (Brazil, 1981); *Rodrigo D: no futuro* and *La Vendedora de rosas/The Rose Seller* directed by Víctor Gaviria (Colombia, 1990 and 1998, respectively); *City of God* directed by Fernando Meirelles (Brazil, 2002); *Gamin* directed by Ciro Durán (Colombia, 1977, documentary) and *Los herederos/The Inheritors* directed by Eugenio Polgovsky (Mexico, 2008, documentary) present these essential, naked truths.

Yet, director Luis Buñuel’s mid-century neorealist masterpiece, *Los Olvidados* (The Forgotten or The Young and the Damned) stands apart for his pointed depiction of urban blight, poverty, inequity, and children’s precarity. In his indictment, an outright challenge, Buñuel makes plain society’s failure for lacking a politics of care. In the seminal narrative, the director asserts the feature is based on real-life facts and authentic characters. The framing text provided by Buñuel reads:

The great modern cities New York, Paris, London, hide behind their magnificent buildings, homes of misery that shelter malnourished children, without hygiene, without schools, a harvest of future delinquency. Society tries to correct this evil, but the success of its efforts is very limited. Only if in the near future children and adolescents rights are vindicated will they be useful to society's progressive forces.

Rather than indict the individual for personal failures and pathology, Buñuel is making us aware that silence and complacency allows for systemic violence to persist. Or, as Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. stated in a comparable sentiment: "Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter."

Waleska Torres' moniker "Lucky" came about after having survived a car accident. She recounts how often people told her that she was lucky to have survived and to be alive. Death, it's haunting proximity, is an ever present factor in her life. Reflecting on her given street name Lucky states, "I wouldn't say that I feel very lucky at all."

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La vida de Lucky

Resumen: La vida de Waleska Torres fue documentada en una historia de no ficción titulada *Lucky* por la directora Laura Checkoway, producida por Neyda Martínez. La película, que se estrenó en 2013, se extendió por más de cinco años en las calles de la ciudad de Nueva York y siguió a Lucky Torres, quien creció huérfana en un sistema que la hacía sentir como una don nadie.

En este artículo, en el análisis de Martínez y Potashnik ambas reflejarán tras el rostro de Lucky, para reexaminar la urgencia de su historia, evolución y viaje como una heroína poco probable que se atreve a vivir la vida en sus propios términos. Las autoras sostienen que la historia de Lucky sigue siendo tan vital y actual hoy como lo era en el momento del estreno, ya que la vida de Lucky subraya la difícil situación de innumerables jóvenes pobres marginados y abandonados que enfrentan circunstancias de vida similares.

Enmascarada en tatuajes, Lucky se transformó en su propio lienzo. Su rostro grabado en tinta traza una vida de violencia y resistencia y crea una barrera autoimpuesta entre ella y el mundo convencional. La productora Neyda Martínez explica: “La historia de Lucky forma parte de una generación con padres perdidos a causa de la crisis del sida de los años 70 y 80. Forzados a soportar una educación transitoria sin seguridad y la falta del apoyo que brindan modelos a seguir responsables, en vez confían en los medios de comunicación para dar forma a sus sueños de éxito. ¿Por qué la gente rechaza a Lucky? ¿Por qué la gente se escandaliza por su postura y valentía? “Nosotros, nuestra sociedad, somos responsables de haberla abandonado y creado. Como artistas, nuestro trabajo es posicionar un espejo para mostrar claramente lo que muchos se niegan a ver “dice Martínez.

Después de haber forjado un camino propio, Lucky compartió abiertamente su historia para iluminar cómo una entre los innumerables, invisibles y olvidados jóvenes sin hogar LGBTQ luchó, a su manera, por sobrevivir. Criada en las calles de la ciudad de Nueva York, estaba en un camino tortuoso desde el principio cuando su madre los abandonó a hogares de acogida.

Martínez, quien ahora forma parte del cuerpo docente de The New School en la ciudad de Nueva York y continúa trabajando como productora independiente de documentales, volverá a visitar *Lucky* basándose también en textos y artículos académicos para explorar lo que significa para una mujer LGBTQ marginada redefinir su lugar en el mundo como sobreviviente y heroína no tradicional.

El trabajo interrogará y criticará la concepción errónea de la opresión basada en el género, capitalista e incluso política entre las personas marginadas, dado que tanto el sujeto de la película, Torres, como la de productora y educadora, Martínez, son parte de la diáspora puertorriqueña, un territorio del país estadounidense denominada por muchos autores y líderes como la colonia más antigua del mundo.

El documento destacará cómo las personas modelan el deseo de buscar más en la vida a pesar de las condiciones dadas, cómo se negocia el trauma sistémico y personal para sobrevivir y cómo la exacerba la pobreza y el aislamiento al tiempo que revela la interconexión de la humanidad.

A lo largo del trabajo, se hará referencia al viaje femenino contrastando *The Heroine's Journey: Woman's Quest for Wholeness* de Maureen Murdock con el modelo *Hero's Journey* de Joseph Campbell, donde Murdock afirma que la búsqueda conmovedora de la mujer busca sanar y recuperar mientras que la experiencia masculina es impulsada por factores externos entre ellos la conquista y la dominación.

Reflexiones: La Vida, Lucky también se vincula y hace referencia a un trabajo sustancial, aunque controvertido, investigado y escrito por Oscar Lewis, *La vida: una familia*

Palabras claves: patriarcado - narrativas - urbano - violencia - hip hop - oprimido - diáspora - LGBTQ2S - documental - pobreza.

A Vida de Lucky

Resumo: A vida de Waleska Torres foi documentada em uma história de não ficção intitulada *lucky* pela diretora Laura Checkoway, produzida por Neyda Martínez. O filme, que estreou em 2013, durou mais de cinco anos nas ruas de Nova York e seguiu Lucky Torres, que cresceu órfã em um sistema que a fez se sentir como um ninguém.

Neste artigo, na análise de Martínez e Potashnik, ambos refletirão por trás do rosto de Lucky, para reexaminar a urgência de sua história, evolução e jornada como uma heroína improvável que se atreve a viver a vida em seus próprios termos. Os autores argumentam que a história de Lucky permanece tão vital e atual hoje como era na época da estreia, como a vida de Lucky ressalta a situação de incontáveis jovens pobres marginalizados e abandonados enfrentando circunstâncias de vida semelhantes.

Mascarada de tatuagens, Lucky se transformou em sua própria tela. Seu rosto gravado por tinta traça uma vida de violência e resistência e cria uma barreira auto-imposta entre ela e o mundo convencional. A produtora Neyda Martínez explica: “A história de Lucky faz parte de uma geração com pais perdidos para a crise da AIDS dos anos 70 e 80. Forçados a suportar a educação transitória sem suspensão e a falta de apoio prestado por modelos responsáveis, eles, em vez disso, dependem da mídia para moldar seus sonhos de sucesso. Por que as pessoas rejeitam Lucky? Por que as pessoas estão chocadas com sua postura e coragem? “Nós, nossa sociedade, somos responsáveis por tê-la abandonado e criado. Como artistas, nosso trabalho é posicionar um espelho para mostrar claramente o que muitos se recusam a ver”, diz Martínez.

Tendo forjado um caminho próprio, Lucky compartilhou abertamente sua história para iluminar como uma entre os incontáveis, invisíveis e esquecidos jovens sem-teto LGBTQ lutou, à sua maneira, para sobreviver. Criada nas ruas de Nova York, ela estava em um caminho tortuoso desde o início quando sua mãe os abandonou para lares adotivos.

Martínez, que agora atua na faculdade da The New School em Nova York e continua a trabalhar como produtora de documentários independente, revisitará LUCKY com base em textos e artigos acadêmicos para explorar o que significa para uma mulher LGBTQ marginalizada redefinir seu lugar no mundo como uma sobrevivente e heroína não tradicional.

El trabajo interroga y critica la concepción errónea de la opresión basada en el género, capitalista e incluso política entre las personas marginadas, dado que tanto el sujeto de la película, Torres, como la de productora y educadora, Martínez, son parte de la diáspora puertorriqueña, un territorio del país estadounidense denominada por muchos autores y líderes como la colonia más antigua del mundo.

El documento destaca cómo las personas modelan el deseo de buscar más en la vida a pesar de las condiciones dadas, cómo se negocia el trauma sistémico y personal para sobrevivir

y cómo la exagera la pobreza y el aislamiento al tiempo que revela la interconexión de la humanidad.

Ao longo do trabalho, faz referência à jornada feminina, contrastando A Jornada da Heroína: A Busca da Mulher pela Integralidade de Maureen Campbell com o modelo De Jornada do Herói de Joseph Campbell, onde Murdock afirma que a busca pungente da mulher busca curar e se recuperar enquanto a experiência masculina é impulsionada por fatores externos, incluindo conquista e dominação.

Palavras-chave: patriarcado - narrativas - urbano - violência - hip hop - oprimido - diáspora - LGBTQ2S - documentário - pobreza.

[Las traducciones de los abstracts fueron supervisadas por el autor de cada artículo]
