

An abstract painting depicting a massive, swirling ocean wave. The wave is rendered with thick, expressive brushstrokes in shades of blue, purple, and white. A large, bright white circle is positioned in the center of the wave, creating a focal point. The foreground shows the base of the wave with dark, turbulent water and some lighter, foamy areas. The overall composition is dynamic and powerful.

# I Have No Ocean

Nicole Arocho Hernández'

I Have No Ocean

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*Odio el mar, que sin cólera soporta  
Sobre su lomo complaciente, el buque  
Que entre música y flor trae a un tirano.*

*I hate the sea, who without fury supports  
over its complacent back the ship  
that brings, between music and flowers, a tyrant.*

–“Odio el Mar” by José Martí,  
translation by Nicole Arocho Hernández





## As I tell Siri I want to die since Puerto Rico is dying

Did I ever tell you  
I am an unincorporated territory.

My grief hugs the chair,  
spooning me hostage.

Did I ever tell you  
my parts are not available.

Mutts do not get repairs.  
Instead, they burst into glitter.

Did I ever tell you  
where my wishy-washy comes from.

My land swallows birth's  
breath. No need to wallow for  
a death meant to happen.

Did I ever tell you  
I have never been to prison.

A hospital replaced my bones with  
sugar. American. I got out melting.

Did I ever tell you  
I want to be a brown bag.

My sister, la trigüeña. Her skin  
reaps warmth. I am toast with no butter.

Did I ever tell you  
I wish I had collected dioramas.

The crisp of my mountains. Moths  
in my mouth at sunrise. Chewing wings.  
Growing feathers in the wrong places.

Did I ever tell you  
my Horatio lives as a ghost.

Panadería. Rincón. Pantalones.  
Abuelo. Calle. His handfuls. Gringüño.

Did I ever tell you  
I have a metabolic problem.

Pills have no effect. My breast  
tickles. My feet moan. I walk without my sea.

Did I ever tell you  
the problems come with white dirt.

Trampled. Soles de la gente de razón.  
A mattress with no name. Because  
it's for us. Soiled soil.

Did I ever tell you  
my sun grates their teeth at night.

In an island without power,  
even stars worry. It shall metastasize.

Did I ever tell you  
the beaches died long ago.

The government pours  
alcohol right before daybreak.

Did I ever tell you  
there are no eyes in the clouds.

Tears thunder from the dead.  
Tears merrily streak from disaster  
capitalists. In the eye of the storm, no one  
waits for whimper. Everyone  
expects song.

## Rosary prayer to hurricane María before landfall

Creo en juzgar a los vivos  
y a los muertos.  
Creo en el espíritu  
de los infiernos.  
Creo en el poder del cielo y la tierra, concebido  
bajo la derecha de dios.  
Creo en la comunión de la carne,  
que nació santa por obra y gracia de la resurrección  
del hijo de los muertos.  
Creo en los pecados que han de venir  
al tercer día con la vida eterna.  
Amén.

Padre, tu reino y tu voluntad  
nos ofenden; tu nombre no es nuestro.  
Danos el cielo y nosotros  
perdonamos tu reino.  
No dejes caer el pan; líbranos  
de los que nos ofenden.  
Que nuestras ofensas sean  
el amén de la tierra.

María,  
en la hora de gracia,  
tu vientre es el fruto

## Oración del rosario al huracán María antes de que tocara la orilla

I believe in judging the living  
and the dead.

I believe in the spirit  
of many hells.

I believe in the power of heaven and earth, conceived  
under god's right side.

I believe in the communion of the flesh,  
birthed holy due to the labor and grace of the resurrection  
of the son of the dead.

I believe in the sins of those that shall come  
on the third day with eternal life.

Amen.

Father, your will and reign  
offend us; your name is not ours.

Give us the heavens and we  
will forgive your kingdom.

Do not let the bread fall; release us  
from those that offend us.

May our offenses be  
the amen of the earth.

María,  
in your time of grace,  
your womb is the fruit

de nuestra muerte.  
María,  
los pecadores rogamos:  
salve a las madres, benditas.

Las mujeres  
llenar el ahora  
con tu amén  
o  
contigo  
es el ahora  
que tu amén llena.

Gloria a los siglos.  
Santos los hijos de siempre.  
El padre solía ser el principio.  
Ahora amén para el espíritu. Por siempre.

Oh cielo mío, líbranos  
de tu fuego.  
Lleva tu infierno  
a Jesús.  
Todas las almas  
necesitan misericordia.  
Especialmente las que  
perdonan con pecados.

Oh  
Oh

of our death.  
María,  
we the sinners beg:  
save the mothers, blessed.

The women fill  
the present with  
your amen  
or  
with you  
is the now  
that your amen fills.

Glory to the centuries.  
Blessed the children of forever.  
The father used to be the beginning.  
Now amen for the spirit. Forever.

My darling, free us  
from your embers.  
Take your hell  
to Jesus.  
All souls  
need mercy.  
Especially those  
that forgive with sins.

Oh  
Oh



Reina María,  
muéstranos la misericordia  
de este destierro.  
Tu vientre  
vuelve a nosotros  
este valle de lágrimas.  
Llamamos a nuestra abogada Eva;  
nuestra esperanza no es dulce.  
Ea, pues, piadosa Señora  
de frutos que gimen y lloran,  
somos hijos sin clemencia ni bendición.  
La dulzura de la vida—  
¡dios nos salve!

Oh dios, ellos prometen  
imitar la vida.  
La bienaventuranza de Jesucristo contiene  
un amén misterioso:  
si es eterno es la muerte,  
si es unigénito alcanza  
al mismo santísimo.  
Los que meditamos  
merecemos un premio.

Concédenos una explicación, señor.  
Resurrección para todos, María.

Queen María,  
show us the mercy  
of this banishment.  
Your womb  
returns to us  
this valley of weeping.  
We call on our advocate Eve;  
our hope is not sweet.  
O, thus, merciful Lady  
of fruits that whimper and weep,  
we are children without clemency or blessing.  
The sweetness of life—  
god save us!

Oh god, these men promise  
to imitate life.  
The beatitude of jesus christ contains  
a mysterious amen:  
if it is eternal it is death,  
if it is an only child it reaches  
christ himself.  
Those of us who meditate  
deserve a prize.

Give us an explanation, lord.  
Resurrection for everyone, María.

El verano del '16, '17, '18, '19 // Grieving my complicity in american

You were just seven  
inches away from  
redemption—  
Oh, sorry, I meant  
a good fuck—  
Oh, sorry, I meant  
no good luck!

When in doubt  
smile and show the yellow brine  
I shower with both yours and mine  
*all* this grime:  
Have me for dinner!

I haven't touched my foundation in months  
Commute this! Commute that!  
Excuses that smile  
as my teeth hang from the sky

fall one by one  
on my chest, on my hair, on my pubes:  
the collage is reborn.  
I have the smile of a winner!

When the whites scream, say  
move on to sunbathing

topless and obsessive.  
I clean this body with possessive  
pronouns. aren't we excessive:  
Have me, a skinner!

Maybe the thing I trust the most is my anger



.dnuorg eht oT

.ti nrub woN

(no hay título)

Don't worry  
I imagined as much

...

They are making a census  
post-María

and they will pay me

...

and the keys  
that are reservations  
that nobody goes to

...

Niiiiice  
que brutal

I have no ocean.

I have no tongue.

I write with spilled wreckage.

With this wet language  
I try to make eye contact  
see my pupils in glass cups  
“Remember what you’ve lost.”

“Give me  
every letter  
that built  
your dream.”

With the sunset, you  
watch my freckles  
become periods  
my sentences estranged lovers  
of a face, or is it a creek, or is it a finger lake  
or is it

What *do* I think about  
on rainy days?  
I admit I went too fast.  
Absorbed the absence.  
Abscised my mouth with crisp air.  
Took to Longinglès.  
*You are a visitor, standing*

*on an island rimmed with sky,  
framed in blue.*

Is it me  
who wants to write?  
Is it you  
who barter for lines?  
We are  
a Spanglish slut  
selling lips for drippings.

Quiero beber de la fuente que regala vocales.  
*I want to drink your lush vocals. Become my fountain.*  
Allá, donde las lluvias son magras.  
*Take me where the rains are starving.*  
Dame tu voz, tu tejido, tus pupilas. Ya me cansé de las mías.  
*I shall create a voice, a tissue, a pupil so erectile we will never get tired.*  
Cuando llegue el verano, tomaré de tu agua e inventaré una madre sin noche.  
*I am a motherfucker of invention; I have no intention of letting them drink my summers.*



It is time to listen to my *word*: with villancico



I do not have your stretch marks, empire—  
my curves are more broken homily  
a parking meter that does not take quarters

My white lines do not look like a tidal wave  
like those of mothers  
like those of cream  
which is to say  
I look gringa  
and so what, why  
do I have to  
brincar el charco  
to live in

*alegría alegría alegría /  
alegría, alegría y placer /  
because María /  
has been born /  
convalescing  
without faith*

I scream to you, Judas without flavor in his eyelashes  
my kidnapper my deity my seller

plantain and  
rust and  
wind  
that I want to eat  
fuck, I want to eat



You ask for a chunk to toss around  
what, you want to come back this round  
has no victor

do not ask  
for TheShepherdsAreNotMen sermon  
do not ask  
for TheyAreNotWomenWith thunders

Let's get out of FEMA.  
Let's get shoes off our hillsides.

*and they're mine,  
they're mine,  
they're mine /  
only mine,  
living without skin /  
because they are my  
enemies /  
the memory and  
the living*



Give your birthright to the revived  
if you don't have a guide  
if you have a split spine  
here's homework  
miles of verbs

join me  
join me  
join me  
join me with  
join me now

*hacia el Caribe se encaminan  
María con su amante mar  
llevando en su compañía  
a una Diosa prodigosa  
Guabancex, Guabancex, Guabancex  
Guabancex, se nos olvidó  
que la Virgen eres tú  
de paso a la venganza*

## American conscience

6        King-President

*Some epiphanies take dimes*  
I think as a ruler.

I've made it here thanks to  
restraint in  
reshaping beauty.

I am performance:  
justification  
attention-seeking  
famine.

*Blame me for all the pain!*  
I will be your absolute goal. Now chew  
this troll-sized smile.

5        Politician

There is a different language  
around my bravery. It's aware  
of its quadruple consciousness.

Let me tell you  
people like to bury the dysplasia in us.  
All we had to do is say *take a joke*.  
The media will take care of it.

4        Abuela

The dogs cannot talk back to me.  
I look out the window.  
How do I connect my TV?

Talk front to me, use  
my space for renewal and  
disgust; discuss—  
nothing else, just        glass spots.

3        City

Can you not talk about my red lips?  
Yeah, you, Eyeballs Glazed.  
You're the spitting image of subway trains and  
Somewhere Else.

2        Damsel in Stress

When can I return to my form  
Please allow me to vex  
before sex

1        Mujerzota y Macharrán (become one by talking over each other)

Mu: I'm usually: ask him for permission to go ahead for myself  
Ma: This is something but not yet—

Mu: Despair immediately!  
Ma: Devour the sounds of vaginas!

Unison: Spare me the disperse.  
Mu: When Inanimate compliments me I say  
Ma: How come, doppelgänger? Please describe my luxury to the masses.

## Since you never ask

*After Carl Phillips and Richard Siken*

It's as if colonia never had color. Armed with dreams for yellow metals and land without soot, white landed and landed and landed and landed and who I was back then, light like the sand of coastline rimmed with blue, drowned. White had blue in its eyes but no sea. I can hear the fear as bodies named red rust with disease. White domination comes with Black imprisonment—if only the sand was not made of bones. White birthed the colonia and the colonia birthed me. Are the screams high-pitched in your dreams too? Do you see the ghosts colored by emptiness? I should have a memory of weeping while looking at the sea. While standing on ocean floor, my skin camouflages. Tears are the color of mercy. What does that even mean? I may be rebirth or sword, tongue or greened roots. Is there a storm worth embracing? Maybe

I missed it left it on the plane maybe I have tarnished flowers left behind what if I am nothing more than a dried yellow flower a useless sun for this nameless graveyard—

## An abridged story // Ode to Lx Guillotinx

The bark made of tears  
waves their body over bricked roads.  
They listen to the chatter about  
the protests, the steps that pierced  
their flag stripeless, black.  
They tell how the people  
live with dreams of retribution  
that don't bend the ground because  
the people don't sleep, nena.  
The people can't close their eyes.  
Every detail counts.

Lx guillotinx,  
having just been born,  
has not seen  
the lion's den  
up close  
the unsplintered skin  
the unspeakable voice  
the uncalloused feet.

Lx guillotinx  
needs other people to move them  
but doesn't ask for help.  
*at some point they'll move me*



*at some point they'll need me  
they created me for a purpose, ¿verdá?  
I can just wait for the right time, ¿verdá?  
They cannot help but think  
colonia without bodies on the line.*

Lx guillotinx  
knows there's peril  
raining over their creators.  
Faces reflect the familiar  
sweat of desperation.  
They know their destiny  
is to kill. ¿But what?  
¿But who? ¿But how  
many?

Lx guillotinx  
sees their reflection  
in a puddle:  
how tall they are  
the chasm they make  
how hollow they look  
and wished to change  
their body. ¿Can I  
be human?

Pero en un dos por tres  
people lift them.

They walk on the shoulders  
of everyone in the crowd  
they listen to the music  
they listen to the wound  
and learn of the medicine  
the clamor that does not end.

Lx guillotinx comes with razor-sharp ears  
floating above, feeling the hands  
of dozens; many, some, more  
that beg:

expire those \_\_\_\_\_  
their by-date has passed  
#PresosTodos  
give them their last hit  
your face travels the world  
unlike our own.

The hands  
the songs  
the dances  
the cachelorazos:  
everyone  
teaches lx guillotinx  
that a human being's warmth  
is worth more  
than blood money.  
Lx guillotinx learns how

to make a scene.  
Lx guillotinx knows:  
Flesh can go to jail.  
Their message  
cannot make it to CNN  
without a symbol.

Lx gulllotinx  
stands  
naked  
black  
full of pride.  
Uses  
their voice  
for the first  
time.

*Here I come, here I go  
Yo soy la guillotina.  
You don't see me in dreams, no, no  
You see me in broad daylight  
Cutting the politician's tongues.  
I am your lies, carved  
I am the people, irate  
I am the dead  
I am the dying.  
Visiting you, looking at you  
Telling you: why*

*Why did you make me live  
Without food  
Without refuge  
Without temples  
With rising seas*

*We will haunt you  
Until our families  
Can breathe  
Without grief  
Without lack  
Without uproot  
Without empire.*

//

Guillotinx  
You who never sleeps  
I want you to spit  
My pain on  
Uncle Sam. Please grant me  
This prayer.

Guillotinx  
The one that shines for the people  
Do not let me get away with  
Indifference.

Guillotin  
Ceiba that became a boat with jaws  
I want to ink your body  
For all eyes to be  
hold.

## Reversing grief

How dare you  
step  
on me.

Do you  
wish  
to die?

Do not  
take me  
with you.

How dare you  
take  
from us.

Do you  
wish  
to live?

Why do you  
step  
on me.

Are you  
ready  
to die?

How dare you  
take me  
with you.

How do you sleep  
while taking  
from us.

Are you  
ready  
to pay?

Do not  
take us  
from here.

How dare you  
take us  
from dreaming.

## Rompecabezas / *It's puzzling, isn't it?*

Ahora desprende las vendas  
de las ventanas. She is not your  
vendor of choice, but what other  
venting can you do. Estoy  
aquí entusiasmada, relishing the  
vinegar

She carries more powder in her than  
pockets for eyes than flies keep growing become a food  
sé la pauta  
yo no sé como ella pausa antes de sumergirse is she fun. to watch

comes with power. Salió sin manchas. Ella me dijo, dame

otra razón para quedarme. Yo le dije, quiero

quejarme. This flood was

predetermined, honey. Let yourself flow.



Take pride in  
lunares. Drive far with  
your symptoms. How long  
can it be  
to make it  
to the moon.

De momento veo  
 kilómetros de aguacates.  
 I follow roads flushed green with *confía*  
 With so much pregnancy in green, when will I see otoño?  
 Oh wait—  
 eran mangoses, canopies cloyingly orange. Rotten fruit by my feet.

I cannot trust you any more. Steps in crevice. There  
 lie

las herramientas y sus suspiros:  
 herraduras para delirios!  
 herrajes sin respiros!  
 anís

—mor —a —do —ma —duro  
 —mature  
 —nature  
 —sure  
 —ensure  
 —privilege  
 —village  
 —villano

I wore rings  
without colors.  
Blemishes of all kinds  
on my knuckles.

North!

Respite: is it attainable?  
Respiro: ¿puedo atarlo?  
Dame más  
de lo que tienen  
las nubes.  
There are no clouds left in our home.

If there is no more rain  
do I evaporate?  
Trapped as flies do  
happy with leftovers

Lóbulos y estrías  
plasma sin sabor—  
he perdido mi calor—

I taste test my shower water  
is it depreciated  
am I absorbing red clay  
do I smell bleach

! h t r o N

—We sit by the beach  
no raise no steaks.

I want to show you  
my stake  
I sleep with the machete  
by my side  
ready for the stretches  
oh, mercy  
don't come in.

¡Bienvenidos a la parranda!

¡Sientan el clamor de los cielos!

Truenos relámpagos y  
azul cielo por la  
peseta  
no estoy pa' ti  
si te fue la luz se  
yo tengo un poquito de  
guarapo del pai eso da y sobra  
para calentar al mundo entero aa  
nda pal si está caliente sorry déjame  
llamar a la mai que me parió que  
tiene cubitos de piragua ay  
ahora  
válgame estoy acabá cuando  
llegará tu estás bien  
vecino si, si te puedes quedar  
esta casa está bendita  
crece con las risas de  
los inocentes.





## Notes

The titles of the poems in this collection are set in Spanish case.

“As I tell Siri I want to die since Puerto Rico is dying” (pg. 9):

“Gringüño” and “trigüña” are grammatically incorrect, since they do not need the dieresis. What first started as a typo ended up showing me that language is more than what is defined for us. While wrestling with racist categories of skin color in Puerto Rico (trigueña), my rusty Spanish led to this new configuration. Urayoán Noel enlightened its meaning by connecting it to cigüña (stork). I’m hoping that by creating new soundscapes, we pay close attention to the racism embedded in language and find ways to move past it. This might be a naïve and unfounded hope, but still, I want to hold onto it.

“It is time to listen to my *word*: with villancico” (pg. 24):

In Taíno mythology, Guabancex is part of a triumvirate of gods who create hurricanes. Guabancex was the leader and controlled wind. Her male accomplices were Guatauba, god of thunder, and Coatrisque, god of flooding.

Taíno is the name given to the Arawak people inhabiting part of the Caribbean, including Puerto Rico, when Christopher Columbus begun his murderous imperial-colonial crusade in the region.



“An abridged story // Ode to Lx Guillotinx” (pg. 31):

“An abridged story // Ode to Lx Guillotinx” is a gender-neutral expression of La Guillotina (The Guillotine). This poem was written in response to the January 2020 protests in Puerto Rico where a wooden guillotine was brought to La Fortaleza, the governor’s mansion. The Puerto Rican people were protesting the disastrous recovery efforts after a series of earthquakes that gravely affected Guánica and other municipalities in the island’s south, as well as the discovery in Ponce of a warehouse full of three-year-old, expired emergency supplies from hurricane María relief efforts in 2017. Puerto Rico had a non-elected governor in 2020. The guillotine continues to be a symbol of resistance in Puerto Rico.

I chose to use the “x” as gender-neutral language instead of another common practice, that of substituting “a” and “o” in gendered nouns and adjectives with an “e.” This practice can make words sound and look French; for a poem tackling protests against colonial politics, I did not want to allude to the language of an imperialist country. I also wanted to have a grammatical connection between “Guillotinx” and “Guabancex” to link them as symbols of resistance and reconfigurations of Puerto Rican identity.

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This chapbook is being published a little more than a year after a 4-year hiatus from writing poetry. I want to thank myself for not giving up on poetry and poetry for not giving up on me.



## About the Author



Nicole Arocho Hernández is a poet and translator from Cabo Rojo, Puerto Rico. She has a BA in Writing from Ithaca College and is pursuing an MFA in Poetry at Arizona State University. Her poems have been featured in *Great Weather for MEDIA*, *Variant Literature*, *Acentos Review*, and the podcast *VS*. Her spirit never left Puerto Rico. You can find her on Twitter and Instagram: @nimaarhe.



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