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Puerto Rico at the Crossroads: Alterity and Difference in the Caribbean, a translation of excerpts

from *Porto Rico à la croisée des chemins: Altérité et différence dans les Caraïbes*, edited by

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by

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Preface

The book *Porto Rico à la croisée des chemins: Altérité et Différence dans les Caraïbes* is a compilation of essays written by university professors and writers from Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic, Argentina, and France. These authors write about Puerto Rico and its relationship to the rest of the Caribbean from a literary and sociohistorical standpoint. Their combined articles pose the question about what a possible solution for Puerto Rico and its longstanding relationship with colonialism is. This work is also based on the premise that generally, in France, not much is known about the island of Puerto Rico, despite its strong European heritage. That is why, throughout the book, the fact that Puerto Rico has been a commonwealth of the United States since 1952 is highlighted while also elaborating on the issue of the island's identity crisis.

The book is divided into three parts. The purpose of the text as a whole is thoroughly explained in the foreword. The text then approaches Puerto Rico's identity issues and literature in the first part and its sociohistorical issues in the second part. The book *Porto Rico à la croisée des chemins: Altérité et Différence dans les Caraïbes* is 141 pages long, far more than the requirement for a translation thesis. To present a coherent excerpt and capture what I think is the essence of the book, I decided to translate the foreword, one article from the first part and two articles from the second part. Translating the foreword by Françoise Léziart is an appropriate way to introduce the contents of the rest of the essays since it explains the importance of this book by filling a void about Puerto Rican culture that exists in France. From the first part of the book, which examines identity issues and literature, I decided that the chapter *Nouvelles du Déluge* by Eduardo Lalo was the most relevant, so that I may have a Puerto Rican writer's perspective to contrast with the following ones written by French authors. From the second part, I chose the chapter written by

Rodolphe Robin that concentrates on sociohistorical issues. From all of the other texts, this one is crucial, since Robin writes about Puerto Rico from a political and economic standpoint, comparing and contrasting these aspects with the island's identity issues. It is an interesting perspective from the part of a French professor who lived in Puerto Rico for a few years. Lastly, I finish with an article from the second part of the book, written by Grisel Reyes Núñez, who analyzes how cooperativism in Puerto Rico and entrepreneurship would work to help the local economy. She envisions a future for Puerto Rico from an educational standpoint and it is important to add a text as a closing statement that looks into the future of Puerto Rico's education system. These four authors may have different backgrounds, but they share the same motivation to make Puerto Rico's colonial situation visible to French-speaking scholars and the general reading public. I feel that it is important that Puerto Rican students who study languages, especially English and French, know that there is a book that was published in France with the intention of presenting the island's colonial history and making Puerto Rico's issues more visible to the world. That is the reason why the intended audience for this translation is a scholarly one. It is my goal to portray as best as possible the works of the authors that I chose to translate, who deal with these issues from their own professional points of view.

I chose to translate these four chapters from French into English, because it is the first book about Puerto Rico that was created in collaboration between professors from the University of Puerto Rico, Río Piedras Campus (UPR-RP), and the Université de Rennes 2 (UR2) in Brittany, France. From 2017 to 2019, I had the opportunity to work as a graduate teaching assistant at UR2, giving Spanish courses to students of all nationalities. While working there, I was presented with this book in French which is composed of a series of articles about Puerto Rico's literature, identity, history and society. I was very surprised to learn that a book about Puerto Rico was funded

and produced in a university system in the middle of Brittany. After reading the text, I knew that a few of the chapters in the book would serve as a good translation project to further strengthen the academic relationship that exists between the University of Puerto Rico and l'Université de Rennes 2. For example, the text written by Eduardo Lalo would be very important to include, because he tackles the concept of Puerto Rico's "invisibility," as he often does in most of his literary work. Additionally, two articles on sociohistorical issues in the second part of the book were the most pertinent to work with, especially since there is a contrast of opinions from both Puerto Rican and European authors. It serves as an opportunity to compare both perspectives and how Europeans view colonial issues from the outside. In addition to that, I chose to include the foreword by Françoise Léziart, because she is the person responsible for compiling the essays to create the book and her text also serves as an introduction for this translation.

After expressing my interest in translating this text, I was invited to be part of a live radio talk show titled *PUR Café* that took place in a conference room at the UR2 library. During the show, I was able to converse live with Françoise Léziart and Rodolphe Robin about the book and how it compared to current events on the island, as well as answer questions from the audience. The room was filled with students and professors who expressed their interest in understanding Puerto Rico's political status and valued my opinion as a Puerto Rican. From that day onward, I understood that whatever forum is available to talk about the sociohistorical issues and the "invisibility" of Puerto Rico, as Eduardo Lalo calls it, should be taken advantage of. On that premise, I recognized that English would be the right target language for this text. While the chapters are written in French, it merits translation so that non-French speaking readers interested in learning about or discussing Puerto Rico may have at least another reference in their institution. It is also an opportunity to bring this text into academic forums and discussions at universities in

Puerto Rico about how Europeans, in this case French, write about Puerto Rico's history, politics, and literature. English is a language that is not only studied in language-oriented programs, but also speaking or understanding English to a certain degree is necessary in the majority of universities in both Puerto Rico and France. Nevertheless, this language combination has presented me with a formidable challenge, English being my second language and French being my third.

Françoise Léziart, who wrote the foreword, was born in France in 1950 and is a translator and professor at UR2 who specializes in Latin American Literature Studies and the Spanish language. Her published works include the translations from Spanish into French of the book *El estado laico y sus malquerientes* by Carlos Monsiváis and the novel *El Zarco* by Ignacio Manuel Altamirano. The book *Porto Rico à la croisée des chemins* was compiled under her direction as part of a project to make available various scholarly essays on Puerto Rico's colonial history, literary evolution and current political status to the French-speaking community and scholars.

The second chapter I translated from the first part of the book was written by Eduardo Lalo, a Puerto Rican novelist, essayist, photographer, artist, and professor. He teaches at the University of Puerto Rico, Río Piedras Campus, and publishes columns of literary criticism and political opinion for the Puerto Rican newspaper *El Nuevo Día*. He has published numerous novels, one of which gained him international recognition when he won the Rómulo Gallegos Prize in 2013 for his novel *Simone*. Lalo's works are difficult to define as he often mixes genres.

The author of the third chapter is a French professor, court interpreter and legal translator, Rodolphe Robin. Born in the region of Brittany, Robin is the one responsible for coordinating an agreement in 2012 for an exchange program between UPR-RP and UR2. Robin is in charge of a master's degree program titled *Amérique latine et péninsule ibérique* in the Foreign Languages Department of UR2. In this program, he teaches contemporary Latin American geopolitics and the

relationship between Mercosur and the European Union. It is important to note that he also lived for a period of time in Carolina, Puerto Rico, and visits UPR on a yearly basis to maintain contact and a strong relationship with the institution.

The fourth and last chapter in this translation was written by Grisell Reyes Núñez, a professor at UPR-RP. Since 2012, Reyes Núñez has directed the Cooperativism Institute of the University of Puerto Rico. She holds a PhD in Psychology and a master's degree in Social-Community Psychology from UPR-RP. Her research focuses on social and solidarity economy (SSE) and entrepreneurship in Latin America.

All three chapters, along with the foreword, presented translation problems and my goal was to achieve a translation that was the most faithful to the text, while trying to be loyal to what each author wanted to express. Even if this book was published in 2017, most of the articles were written a few years before. This means that the majority of statistics used to reinforce Françoise Léziart and Rodolphe Robin's arguments on their articles are outdated. There is also some lack of research and fact checking from the part of said authors that create misleading and erroneous information. I sent my notes and recommendations to the book's author so that they would consider publishing a more thoroughly revised edition in the future.

The foreword, "Puerto Rico and the Issue of Identity," written by Françoise Léziart, is not a complex text, yet it required certain phrases to be simplified due to somewhat ambiguous and overly long descriptions. The text presents some errors, such as missing punctuation, the misspelling of words such as "Nyorican" (page 8) instead of "Nuyorican," and references to the "University of Puerto Rico" as "l'Université de San Juan" on the same page. All in all, it is a foreword that paints a very superficial and brief portrait of Puerto Rico while also highlighting the importance of creating this book. Léziart makes reference in the first sentence of the first page of

the source text to “Antilles,” which I chose to translate to “Caribbean,” since in the source text she is referring to the whole of the Caribbean region and not just the islands known in colonial literature as the “West Indies.” On the end of the first paragraph, the author states that the Spanish American War was a result of The Lares Uprising, this is one of the examples of lack of research present in this foreword. I spoke to the author and he agreed on correcting that fact on a new revised edition of the book. In the second paragraph on page 7 of the source text, she refers to Puerto Rico as both a Commonwealth and a “Estado Libre Asociado.” By already mentioning Commonwealth, the intention of the author is to accentuate the title “Estado Libre Asociado” so that she may justify the argument that follows the sentence. That being said, I decided to leave that title in Spanish and insert a literal translation in parentheses as follows (Free Associated State) right next to it. On the same page, she refers to Puerto Rico as “la Isla del Encanto,” which I chose to leave it in Spanish since it is one of the official touristic slogans. On page 8 of the source text, I chose to reformulate the phrase “les manifestations comme les productions culturelles, ont contribué et contribuent encore...” to “have contributed” because it is redundant in English. In that same paragraph, the last sentence proved to be difficult to understand and I had to discuss it with some native French-speaking colleagues to grasp a better sense of what she meant with “Même si les intellectuels forment, sans doute plus qu’ailleurs, une sorte de microcosme pas toujours très représentatif du reste de la population.” My solution was “Even if intellectuals form something of microcosm, undoubtedly more apparent there than elsewhere, as a whole they are not truly representative of the rest of the population.” On page 9 of the source text, the author refers to Rosario Ferré and Ana Lydia Vega as “femmes d’action et passion,” my initial translation was “women of action and passion,” which was advised as being too cliché and not strong enough to describe what these women endured, so I thought “women of advocacy and dedication” would suit

as a better translation. At the end of this same paragraph on page 9, the author describes in parentheses what she thinks are the most explored themes by Mayra Santos-Febres and Yolanda Pizarro Arroyo. These themes, considered to be taboo at the time, are listed as “l’erotisme, la libération sexuelle et sociale des femmes.” I was advised to add “racial identity” to those themes and after some research on both authors, I agree that it is also the most important theme in their literary works. On the same page, the author writes that the African population “est venue” when they were in reality violently removed and shipped off to the Americas, and the description she uses in French is clearly too soft in meaning in relation to reality. While it is important that the English translation maintains the original sense of the text, yet the distinction of the violence in the action described should also be portrayed, so the final translation is that the African population was “forcibly brought over.” In the last paragraph of page 9, the author refers to an Anglo-Saxon omnipresence in the phrase, “de façon à contrebalancer l’omniprésence anlgo-saxonne dans tous les domaines.” I translated “anglo-saxonne” as “US American” because in France the term “anglo-saxonne” is used as a qualifying adjective that offensively encapsulates the British, Americans, Canadians and Australians as a single culture. It does not represent in English what she meant, but it does provide insight into how the term “Anglo-Saxon” is still wrongfully used by some native French speakers and many Spanish speakers to refer to certain elites in English-speaking countries. I eliminated a footnote “The act of liberating a slave by putting a hand over his shoulder” because it’s an unnecessary and ill-informed definition. On a final note, the last problem I encountered with the foreword was in the last paragraph of page 10, where Léziart mentions an important newspaper in San Juan called *La Nación* that published a news article of a seminar about Puerto Rico held in l’Université de Rennes 2. I found no Puerto Rican newspaper with the name *La Nación* in my research. However, I found the article that she refers to on the digital newspaper 80grados.net.

When I asked the author if she was aware that this could have been a mistake, and showed her the article that I found, she admitted that it was indeed a mistake and that the article I found was the one she was referring to. I decided to correct it and change “La Nación” to “80grados” and add a footnote with the direct link to the article.

The first chapter of the first part of the book (*Littérature et Identité*), “News of the Flood,” is by the renowned author Eduardo Lalo. This piece is written as a philosophical essay that delves into the concept of human memory and methods of storytelling, as well as the invisibility of certain civilizations and cultures over the course of history. The challenge of this text was to correctly translate the meaning behind his philosophical arguments. The text is originally written in Spanish, and after some research I found the Spanish version in order to compare the concepts translated to French and ensure that I had understood them well enough to execute a proper translation to English. Overall, the essay allows the reader to ponder the importance of humanity’s acts of wandering, as well as the uses of storytelling and the written text as key for the survival of the collective memory of civilization. After comparing the original Spanish version of this article to the French version, the source text presents some translation problems that made the chapter on occasion more difficult to translate correctly. For example, on page 15 at the end of the last paragraph, the phrase “quelqu’un chante là où le silence prend forme” when in the Spanish version he does not write that “someone is singing *where* silence is formed,” but that “someone is singing *about* the place where silence is formed.”

Lalo quotes the first tablet of the Epic of Gilgamesh to discuss the Flood and states that it dates back to between the twelfth and thirteenth centuries BC (page 14). I clarified in a footnote that even though the extant cuneiform tablets date from sometime around this period, the Old Babylonian tablets date from as early as c. 1800 BC, and are the earliest surviving tablets for a

single *Epic of Gilgamesh* narrative. Lastly, I chose to include the official translation of the excerpt that Lalo quotes on page 14 from Tablet I. The Coming of Enkidu.” *The Epic of Gilgamesh: the Babylonian Epic Poem and Other Texts in Akkadian and Sumerian* by Andrew George. The text then concludes with a song documented by Martin Gusinde, an anthropologist who Lalo describes as “chilien, né en Autriche” (p. 16). Interestingly enough, after conducting further research, I discovered that he is never referred to as Chilean, and that he is in fact Austrian. I was advised to correct this error, because translations can prove very useful, especially when good editors are not to be found. In my translation I refer to him as “the Austrian anthropologist Martin Gusinde.”

Rodolphe Robin’s chapter, titled “Puerto Rico: An Enormous Economic, Political and Identity Project,” is a more in-depth analysis of Puerto Rican identity, the Taíno influence, colonial administration, independence movements, the current political status, and economic realities. Unfortunately, the article has numerous punctuation issues. There are a lot of missing commas in the source text, which led to some misinterpretations that had to be reviewed with the author. After a few meetings with Robin, everything was double-checked, edited and submitted so that if another edition were to be released, these errors will be corrected. The initial challenges in Robin’s text were the long and unwieldy sentences and the specialized language pertaining to economics and finance. I resorted to researching and studying a few English-language articles about economics to familiarize myself with the appropriate vocabulary, since I lacked a degree of confidence in this field. On the first page, Robin refers to the University of Puerto Rico as having signed a bilateral agreement with l’Université de Rennes 2, but does not clarify that the campus involved in the agreement was only the Río Piedras campus, so I decided to add the campus to be more specific. Later, on page 103, there is a phrase that is written incorrectly, Robin explains that “On en compte 4.6 million dans l’un des 50 états des États-Unis” when in reality if you look at the statistics of

people of Puerto Rican origin that live in continental United States, it is not consistent. I brought up this issue with him and confirmed that he meant to say that “4.6 million people of Puerto Rican origin live in the continental United States.” Robin explains on page 103 that Puerto Ricans have the right to “résider sur le sol des États Unis.” However, Puerto Rico is considered American soil and he is referring to the continental United States, so I chose a more precise translation that says that Puerto Ricans are “authorized at birth to live in any state or territory of the United States.” Continuing to page 104, there is the idiomatic expression “entrer par la grande porte” in the following sentence: “Dès 1929 les conséquences économiques du krach boursier ne manquent pas d’affecter la société portoricaine, laquelle entre par la grande porte dans la Grande Dépression que vont connaître les États-Unis.” Robin uses this expression to portray how Puerto Rico was met with the Great Depression during those first 30 years of United States occupation. However, in French this expression has a rather positive connotation, it means “to enter a situation rapidly and in a noble manner,” so I decided to translate it as “The economic consequences of the 1929 market crash and the Great Depression impoverished the island of Puerto Rico during the first few decades under U.S. rule.”

On page 105, the author discusses “la Loi Publique 600,” and even though he does add a footnote that provides a link to the website that explains said law, there is an official name for the law in English. Therefore, I translated the excerpt as follows: “Puerto Rico Federal Relations Act of 1950 (Public Law 600).” On another note, on page 109 in the source text, the author explains that Alejandro García Padilla stated that the Puerto Rican debt “est devenue insolvable,” the official phrase that García Padilla uses in English is “not payable,” I translated it accordingly. Along the article there were various expressions by Robin that were in need of fact checking. I discussed these facts with the author so that the mistakes would be pointed out and the article

improved. Robin was quick to admit that there were some parts where additional footnotes would have been important to support his research. All things considered, this chapter provided a challenge in terms of translating a text dense in technical language, idiomatic expressions and sentence constructions that cover complex subjects such as politics, finance and social history in French.

The last chapter that I translated, titled in English “Notes on the Cooperative Movement and the Puerto Rican Nation,” by Grisell Reyes Núñez, is a French translation of a text written originally in Spanish. Despite all the attempts made to contact the author and obtain the source text to use as a reference, I was not successful in acquiring it.

The main objective of this article is to “demonstrate that the cooperative movement is an option for constructing a nation state in Puerto Rico” (p.115). The author then explains the trajectory of the cooperative movement and entrepreneurship in Puerto Rico and how it has served as an illusion when dealing with a lack of national sovereignty. She concludes by highlighting the importance of including these movements within our education systems, because “It has the necessary potential to become an instrument of appropriation for our economy, thus favoring the active participation of the people in all economic and social processes.” (p. 119)

Throughout the essay, there are punctuation errors (most notably, the incorrect use of commas), however they do not really affect the understanding of the text. Other problems pertain to translation errors; for example on page 117 in the second paragraph, the author writes: “De mon point de vue, cette fonction peut-être observée à travers les noms que portent certaines cooperatives comme par exemple: *La Puertorriqueña* (La Portoricaine) o *Educadores Puertorriqueños* (Éducateurs Portoricains).”

In the last part of that sentence, the error lies in the fact that the conjunction “o” was left in Spanish, when it should have been written as “ou” in its place. Some phrases were translated literally from Spanish, which did not affect the understanding of the text, but the quality of the translation as a whole seemed compromised. For example, on the page 115, the phrase “Un programme de coopératives juvéniles” was problematic, because in French it would be “Les Coopératives Jeunesse” and it was translated verbatim from the Spanish “Cooperativas Juveniles.” I chose “youth cooperative program” as a solution in my translation. Consequently, on page 116, the phrase “par foyer paroissial” is “por casa parroquial” in Spanish, but in French it should be “par paroisse.” In the translation to English, the solution was “per parish.” The remainder of the text had no other problems that caused difficulties in translation, but it is worth noting that the translation to French of Reyes Núñez’s article is sometimes questionable. This led to some confusion and additional research. It would have made a difference to have acquired the original article written in Spanish.

In summary, the book *Porto Rico à la croisée des chemins: Altérité et Différence dans les Caraïbes* serves the purpose of introducing the French-speaking community to certain aspects of Puerto Rico’s past and contemporary history. Having a variety of authors, from both a European and a Caribbean background, provides the reader with a unique analysis of Puerto Rico’s issues. The fact that this book even exists represents another way to address the generously invoked concept of the island’s “invisibility.” It is also thrilling to see that Puerto Rico’s colonial situation and identity crisis are being analyzed and discussed in forums and academic institutions on the eastern shores of the Atlantic. It is my hope that this collaboration between UPR-RP and UR2 continues to promote the creation of more scholarly works that tackle all types of issues that are in need of a forum and, furthermore, that these works are translated for those audiences who would

like to know and understand more about our history, our literature, and our relationship with colonialism.

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Tablet I. The Coming of Enkidu." *The Epic of Gilgamesh: the Babylonian Epic Poem and Other Texts in Akkadian and Sumerian ; Translated and with an Introduction by Andrew George*, by A. R. George, Penguin Books, 2000, pp. 1.