

**Diaspora Writers Affirm Their “Puertorriqueñidad” While Revealing
Transnational Influences On Puerto Rican Identity.**

Roberto C. Sánchez Zayas

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**Department of English
College of Humanities
University of Puerto Rico**

Dr. Michael Sharp
Reader

Dr. Nick Faraclas
Reader

Dr. Maritza Stanchich
Director

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Dedication

To my mother and father, Lourdes F. Zayas Rivera, and Roberto E. Sánchez Nieves, for teaching me the value of work.

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Abstract

This thesis pertains to a selected group of Puerto Rican diaspora writers revealing *transnational* influences on Puerto Rican identity through their respective oeuvres. I address certain issues that come as a result of this transnational phenomenon, such as how the island's *criollo* intelligentsia protects Puerto Rico's long-standing *cultural nationalism* and act as *cultural gatekeepers* against the Puerto Rican diaspora. The "talk back" from stateside Puerto Ricans toward the *criollo* intelligentsia concerning *Puerto Rican-ness* is discussed as a consequence of a majority of Puerto Ricans having to relocate to the U.S. in search of survival and upward mobility.

Gender is discussed regarding women's role as disseminators of transnationalism in Puerto Rican society, pillars of the familial structures, and main players in the work force. The *vaivén*, as my main theorist Jorge Duany theorizes, is addressed to describe the back and forth traffic of Puerto Ricans from the island to the U.S. since the 1950s. The "in-betweenity" created by the U.S.-imposed colonial status in Puerto Rico is discussed to explain the space in which Puerto Ricans must navigate. Racial heterogeneity is addressed to analyze the complex hybridity that exists within Puerto Rican society and its relationship to socioeconomic issues.

The reliance of Puerto Rican identity on markers, such as *culture*, and not solely on geographical space, birthplace and language is addressed. The 2017 atmospheric event Hurricane María is also noted to provide insight into the new turn the Puerto Rican diaspora is taking demographically. The *geopolitical* implications of transnationalism for the future of Puerto Rican society are pertinent to an ever-expanding and evolving diaspora.

“...i am puertorriqueña in
english and there’s nothing
you can do but to accept
it como yo soy sabrosa
proud ask any street corner
where pride is what you defend
go ahead, ask me, on any street-
corner that i am not puertorriqueña,
come dímelo aquí en mi cara
offend me, atrévete, a menos
que tú quieras que yo te meta
un tremendo bochinche de soplamoco
pezcozá that’s gonna hurt you
in either language, así que
no me jodas mucho...”

---Tato Laviera
“Brava” (1985)

Introduction

Puerto Rican identity has been influenced by a *transnational* phenomenon spanning over a century. Puerto Rico has been in a colonial relationship with the United States since 1898, and the U.S. has extended Puerto Ricans U.S. citizenship since 1917. Although granted such citizenship and having U.S. influences on the island at several levels, the Puerto Rican people –island and diaspora– maintain and cultivate an indomitable sense of homeland culture. In relation to transnationalism in this colonial context, a strong effect of *cultural nationalism* makes the issue of Puerto Rican identity even more complex. This cultural nationalism has also been a source of much argument in Puerto Rican identity discourse over what being Puerto Rican means, and what criteria are used to measure *Puerto Rican-ness* or, “*Puertorriqueñidad*” in Spanish. Important research questions, taking the Puerto Rican diaspora into account, include questions such as, who are we? What does it mean to be Puerto Rican? How does transnationalism influence Puerto Rican identity, and how do Puerto Rican diaspora writers expose and enact it? This thesis will show how these writers reveal such complex phenomena. It is imperative to state from the onset that I consider stateside Puerto Ricans just as Puerto Rican as those residing on the island. Puerto Rican identity has evolved to the degree that it transcends old constructions of Puerto Rican-ness. The main theorist of this study, Jorge Duany, addresses this issue in his article “Nation, Migration, Identity: The Case of Puerto Ricans” (2003). The author states:

The growing diversity in the migrants’ origins and destinations undermines the ideological premises of traditional discourses of the nation

based on the equation among territory, birthplace, citizenship, language, culture, and identity. Above all, it is increasingly difficult to maintain that only those who were born and live on the island, and speak Spanish, can legitimately be called Puerto Rican. (425)

Though the main topic of this thesis is transnationalism in Puerto Rican identity, the intersecting subtopics of gender, race and Puerto Rican-ness are also within the scope of this project. Gender is necessary in order to understand women's contributions to the building of Puerto Rican identity on the island and abroad. Also, women have always been a major force for cultural resistance to both Spanish and U.S. colonialism within the Puerto Rican community, and within the sphere of family, which is also essential to the discussion of identity. A study of race is also important so that we gain a clear picture about who we are as a people who share native Amerindian *Boricua*, African, Spanish, and further European ancestry. The eclectic characteristic of the Puerto Rican people's racial make-up has often been seen as a problematic issue, despite its overlapping yet specific shared concepts of *mestizaje* within the Caribbean region and Mexico, Central and Latin America, which I will address because it is a source of heated debate to this day. Puerto Rican-ness is perhaps the most controversial of these sub-topics because it begets the question: what are the markers that construct Puerto Ricans?

My purpose in this thesis is to ascertain how the works of Puerto Rican diaspora authors Aurora Levins Morales and her late mother Rosario Morales, María "Mariposa" Fernández, Miguel Piñero, and Tato Laviera reveal a transnationalism with which those in the mainland affirm their Puerto Rican identity stateside, while "talking back" to

islanders who might challenge their authority to determine what is and is not sufficiently Puerto Rican.

Transnationalism in this study refers to the constant reciprocal but asymmetrical relationship Puerto Ricans have with the U.S. due to more than a century of U.S. colonialism that is present in the daily lives of Puerto Rican people. This relationship is manifested in what theorist Jorge Duany calls the “*vaivén*,” or “back-and-forth,” that has been taking place in large numbers since the post-war era. Transnationalism is a middle ground between two worlds, U.S. society’s purported assimilationist culture, and Puerto Rico’s own Caribbean and Latin American culture. For a comprehensive analysis about transnationalism, I will first discuss the definitions provided by Steven Vertovec, Jorge Duany, and Agustín Laó Montes. Steven Vertovec’s view of transnationalism in his article: “Transnationalism and Identity” (2001) is important because it expresses the duality in transnationalism and identity discourse. He writes:

Transnationalism and identity are concepts that inherently call for juxtaposition. This is so because, on the one hand, many peoples’ transnational networks are grounded upon the perception that they share some form of common identity, often based upon a place of origin and the cultural and linguistic traits associated with it...On the other hand, among certain sets of contemporary migrants, the identities of specific individuals and groups of people are negotiated within social worlds that span more than one place. (573)

With this passage, the author establishes that the construction of identity transcends geographical space. Vertovec also establishes how the construction of identity happens

through internal and external sources. This is important, given that some sources are out of our control, like race or gender. The author states: "...identities are seen to be generated in, and constructed through, a kind of internal (self-attributed) and external (other-ascribed) dialectic conditioned within specific social worlds" (577).

I also chose the definition of Jorge Duany and Agustín Laó Montes because not only does it discuss transnationalism in the specific context of Puerto Rico, but also covers the issue of Puerto Rican-ness, which cannot be overlooked when analyzing transnationalism. Duany's article: "The Rough Edges of Puerto Rican Identities: Race, Gender, and Transnationalism," (2005) states the following:

Agustín Laó Montes has elaborated the useful notion of Puerto Rico as "translocal nation" whose boundaries shift between the archipelago of Puerto Rico and its U.S. diaspora...Lao Montes further points out that 'the ultimate territory of Puerto Rican-ness is the body of the fragmented subject.' Although I doubt that any nation can be completely de-territorialized, I agree with Laó Montes that it can transcend the geopolitical borders of the state, colonial or otherwise. Similarly, I have proposed the expression "nation on the move" to describe the constant back-and-forth movement of people between Puerto Rico and the continental United States. (187)

Since I am going to be discussing cultural nationalism in this thesis, I will provide a definition of the term. Cultural nationalism is a kind of national affirmation through culture instead of a politics of national independence, a cultivated sense of collective identity and pride that is considered to be under threat of disappearing, but also discards

or represses attempts at political nationalism. It is, as John Hutchinson states: “A movement distinct from that of political nationalism concerned with the identity and regeneration of the national community” (1999). Cultural nationalism was fashioned as the Puerto Rican people’s defense against total Americanization, as conceptualized by the architects of the Estado Libre Asociado or Associated Free State, as Puerto Rico’s territorial status has been referred to since 1952. Cultural nationalism is a kind of bulwark to combat some U.S. influences upon a then rapidly industrializing Puerto Rican culture. It works under the premise that Puerto Rican culture supersedes U.S. citizenship. In his article: “Nation, Migration, Identity: The Case for Puerto Ricans,” (2003) Duany alludes to this:

As an overseas possession of the United States, the island has been exposed to an intense penetration of American capital, commodities, laws, and customs unequalled in other Latin American countries. Yet today Puerto Ricans display a stronger cultural identity than most Caribbean peoples, even those who enjoy political independence...After more than 100 years of US colonialism, the island remains a Spanish-speaking Afro-Hispanic-Caribbean nation. (425)

Colonialism has been practiced by multiple powerful nations for centuries. The specific colonialism addressed in my thesis is the kind established in Puerto Rico since 1898 as result of the Spanish-American war. Though it has been disguised since 1952 by the establishment of the Commonwealth or Free Associated State, a substantial number of diaspora and island Puerto Ricans of different political affiliations refer to it as a colony.

Given the importance of the term “diaspora” to this thesis, I would like to provide a clear definition. In Jana Evans Braziel and Anita Mannur’s book, *Theorizing Diaspora* (2003), the authors provide the following definition:

Etymologically from the Greek *diasperen*, from *dia-*, “across” and -*sperien*, “to sow or scatter seeds,” diaspora can perhaps be seen as a naming of the other which has historically referred to displaced communities of people who have been dislocated from their native homeland through the movements of migration, immigration, or exile...diaspora suggests a dislocation from the nation-state or geographical location of origin and a relocation in one or more nation-states, territories, or countries...Diaspora, in the rapidly changing world we now inhabit, speaks to diverse groups of displaced persons and communities moving across the globe... (1).

This thesis is concerned with the Puerto Rican diaspora to the United States. This diaspora has been triggered throughout generations by the Puerto Rican people’s search for survival, a better quality of life, work opportunities, gender and sexual liberation, and social advancement. Despite being relocated in the U.S. for most of their lives, or being born there, a great number of Puerto Ricans stateside cultivate strong cultural affiliations to their homeland, or “la isla” as many Puerto Ricans refer to it.

The methodology I will employ in this thesis is researching and analyzing the works of the primary authors along with the critical theory for a comprehensive analysis about this topic. This methodology aims to look at this complex topic with a different optic provided in part by the intricacies that Puerto Rican stateside literature brings forth.

The first chapter of this thesis will focus on select women authors' perspective on transnationalism. Aurora Levins Morales, Rosario Morales, and María "Mariposa" Fernández's poems and narratives shed light on the "in-betweenity"¹ in which Puerto Ricans of the diaspora live as consequence of colonialism, as markers of Puerto Rican transnationalism. Aurora Levins Morales, through her work "Puertoricanness" suggests that Puerto Rican identity is carried within: "It was Puerto Rico waking up inside her" (1983) and does not reside in any geographical location. Levins Morales' "Child of the Americas" discusses the "in-betweenity" where diaspora Puerto Ricans must navigate and construct their identity. The often anthologized "Ending Poem" by Levins Morales and the late Rosario Morales is a work of great importance to my thesis given that the authors cover the issues of race, gender, and transnationalism in relation to Puerto Rican identity. The mother and daughter duo point out the eclectic racial composition that problematizes identity issues. The pair shine a light on the feminist point of view of women □ "All the civilizations erected on their backs / *All the dinner parties given with their labor*" (1986, 37, 38) □ as a key driving force in the formation of Puerto Rican identity. They also provide great insight into the intersections of gender and Puerto Rican-ness by conveying women's contributions to Puerto Rican identity. Fernández's "Ode to the Diasporican" is very pertinent to this work because it discusses the problematic "authenticity" issue in Puerto Rican identity and culture.

Puerto Rican women have always stood out for their ambition and drive to succeed in their respective fields. The Puerto Rican people witnessed Puerto Rican

¹ I was first made aware of the term "in-betweenity" in Dr. Maritza Stanchich's dissertation: *insular Interventions: Diasporic Puerto Rican Literature Bilanguaging Toward a Greater Puerto Rico*. University of California, Santa Cruz, 2003.

women's determination by witnessing the island elect its first woman governor in 2000, Sila M. Calderón. As much as Puerto Rican women have achieved great feats in the island, they also have achieved greatness in the diaspora. Justice Sonia Sotomayor is the living example of both Puerto Rican women's hard work and transnationalism. Sotomayor, unlike Calderón, who was born into a wealthy family, came from a working-class background, became the first Hispanic to be appointed to the U.S Supreme Court.

The second chapter of this thesis will consist of select poems by Miguel Piñero, "This Is Not the Place Where I Was Born" and "A Lower East Side Poem." The main topic discussed here is Puerto Ricanness rooted in a working-class diaspora experience of resistance. The author's narrative in these poems conveys defiance against the role of Puerto Rican elite as self-appointed guardians of the island's cultural nationalist identity. The title of the poem itself, "This Is Not the Place Where I Was Born," tells us how he believes the island's identity has changed and become influenced by the U.S., and not for the better. Occupying a vantage point from New York, as a self-professed Nuyorican, Piñero's poems reveal that diaspora Puerto Ricans affirm their Puerto Rican identity abroad, while challenging island Puerto Ricans to show that they are influenced by U.S. culture and transnationalism also. The poem "There is Nothing New in New York" is Piñero's way of conveying the oppressive circumstances stateside Puerto Ricans must deal with. Also, this poem states that the Puerto Rican diaspora has fluency in Spanish as well as in English, a direct critique to those in the Puerto Rican *criollo* intelligentsia who say diaspora Puerto Ricans do not speak standard Spanish.

The third and final chapter of this thesis will cover the literary work of Tato Laviera, which astutely discusses Puerto Rican-ness as a theme. Through Laviera's

verses we will see how diaspora Puerto Ricans vehemently affirm and defend their Puerto Rican identity while residing in New York. Transnationalism is also covered by Laviera in his poem: “AmeRícan,” in which the author discusses the importance of Puerto Ricans to both island, and U.S. societies. The poem “Nuyorican” is essential to the “talk back” from the diaspora to the island concerning the “authenticity” question in Puerto Rican identity discourse. “Asimilao” is a poem that covers the African ancestral contribution to Puerto Rican culture and language, while also addressing the cultural assimilation that diaspora Puerto Ricans might experience—or get accused of—in the U.S.

A female voice of this “outcry” is represented in his poem from the point of view of the persona “Brava,” where the narrator conveys the indignation felt by stateside Puerto Ricans who feel that their identity is being questioned. These verses represent an “outcry” against the Puerto Rican elite cultural nationalist identity that is similar to the defiance seen in Piñero’s poems. I call it an “outcry,” or “pregón,” because in his poem “Nuyorican,” Laviera is speaking directly to the island in a melancholic tone, “...Por favor, no me / hagas sufrir, ¿sabes?” (53, 23, 24). The author also affirms his Puerto Rican identity stateside while informing islanders of their “Americanized” identity. I will also employ Tato Laviera’s poem “My Graduation Speech,” from his 1979 book: *La Carreta Made a U-Turn*. to discuss the use of “Spanglish” in Puerto Rican society from a diaspora perspective. Rounding up the selection is the poem “Nideaquíndeallá,” from his 2008 book, *Mixturao and other Poems*. This work reflects the transnational phenomena always present within Puerto Rican culture. Laviera exposes how Puerto Rican identity has evolved through the decades to a much more complicated and problematic phenomenon that cannot be easily categorized.

Puerto Rican. “Puertorriqueño.” “Puertorro.” “Boricua.” “Borinqueño.” “Borincano.” Nuyorican. Chicago-Rican. Diasporican. Orlando-Rican. Regardless of the terminology, island and stateside Puerto Ricans use to describe themselves, they all share a collective pride in being Puerto Rican. Whether born on the island or born abroad of Puerto Rican parentage, most of them affirm a Puerto Rican identity. This transnationalism greatly influences and enriches the Puerto Rican experience by problematizing the issue of the so called “genuine” Puerto Rican, or the “boricua de pura cepa,” “authentic Puerto Rican.”

There is no “authentic” or “bonafide” Puerto Rican, especially in a modern society where both island and diaspora Puerto Ricans wear their culture on their sleeve. Let’s think back for a minute. Was Sonia Sotomayor’s confirmation to the United States Supreme Court in 2009 only celebrated by diaspora Puerto Ricans? Was Mónica Puig’s gold medal victory in the 2016 Río Olympics celebrated only by island Puerto Ricans? Or were these victories part of a Puerto Rican transnational identity decades in the making?

Both of these achievements suggest a strong transnational connection. Justice Sotomayor was born in the Bronx, New York, and raised by a Puerto Rican mother. Despite being a native New Yorker, Justice Sotomayor is very proud of her Puerto Rican ancestry and culture. Tennis gold medalist Mónica Puig was born in Puerto Rico, but left to, and trained in Florida at only one year of age. However, Puig presently represents Puerto Rico in Olympic competition and travels frequently to the Caribbean island to visit family and attend social events. Once again, we see transnationalism manifested through these two luminary women. Although Sotomayor has resided in the U.S. since birth, and Puig since being a year old, they both have strong bonds to the island.

These are two examples of transnationalism concerning the emotional ties many have with Puerto Rico. Besides this emotional connection, other examples of transnationalism concern the economic field. An example of the economic field is revealed when many young Puerto Ricans who reside in the U.S. relocate temporarily in Puerto Rico to attend college because of the high tuition costs stateside. Another example, the many Puerto Ricans in the diaspora who left the island due to lack of employment and advancement opportunities. In contemporary Puerto Rican society, many professionals have opted to relocate in the U.S. due to a lack of employment opportunities and social advancement, which have only worsened in times of historic economic crisis. As of this writing, about 5 million Puerto Ricans live in the continental United States, and the island population, currently 3.2 million, is in historic decline.

Given that transnationalism is a central factor in this thesis, and the current historic exodus that all but guarantees it deepens, I will address the fact that the U.S. government has implemented an Oversight Board under Congress's PROMESA (Puerto Rico Oversight, Management, and Economic Stability Act) bill ostensibly to relieve Puerto Rico's growing fiscal crisis. This is pertinent to my study because it is yet another example of an intensification of the colonial condition under which the island finds itself. Puerto Rico must rely this time on U.S. intervention to relieve its debt and restore its credit. This action by Congress is a transnational one because it is meddling with Puerto Rico's fiscal problems, not a state's. The Oversight Board is imposed upon the island, making it a colonial instrument. This "Junta de Control Fiscal," as it is known on the island, works in favor of the interests of the island's creditors, including predatory vulture hedge funds.

To move forward collectively as a nation, we must face and have a serious discussion about what it means to be Puerto Rican, and what are the markers that define this identity. Place of birth, the Spanish language, and residing on the island can no longer be the sole markers of “puertorriqueñidad,” or, Puerto Rican-ness. Puerto Rican-ness does not reside exclusively in these markers. It also resides in Puerto Ricans who carry their culture within themselves, “that being Boricua is a state of mind, a state of heart, a state of soul” (“Ode to the Diasporican,” “Mariposa” Fernández, 2424, 24-27), regardless of geographical space. Race is also important to this study due to centuries of racial mixing in Puerto Rico. Such an eclectic mixture problematizes the identity issue, especially when contrasted with U.S. racial constructions. Puerto Ricans export their culture wherever they choose to reside. Since U.S. colonialism has undermined Puerto Rican culture, Puerto Ricans vehemently defend and hold on to this culture, thus maintaining a strong cultural nationalism that is present and relevant to this day. We must look at this complex issue with an open mind in this new century given how Puerto Rican identity has expanded and transcended geographical locations.

Gender also plays a major role in Puerto Rican identity due to the consequential contributions made by women to the development of a resistant and resilient Puerto Rican identity despite the colonial encroachments of the Spanish and the U.S. Americans. Puerto Rican women have created a distinctive Puerto Rican family structure that has kept African and indigenous Caribbean lifeways, by lifeways I mean “a way of living,” a way of keeping the contributions of the Amerindian and African cultures alive within the family sphere, alive and thriving in both diaspora and on the island, even though many, if not most, work outside the home as well, or are single mothers.

I propose in this research that it is of the utmost importance to address how Puerto Rican diaspora writers reveal a transnationalism that influences Puerto Rican identity in their respective narratives, and “talk back” to the island from that perspective. The geopolitical and ethno-sociological implications of this transnationalism, and what they mean for the future of Puerto Ricans’ identity, are what this thesis will deal with. As a man who was born in Puerto Rico, but who grew up in transnational “*vaivén*” between Puerto Rico and New York City, *vaivén* functioning as a term commonly used by theorist Jorge Duany, I feel compelled to focus this M.A. thesis on this transnational phenomenon.

Chapter I

Women Enact Transnationalism (Aurora Levins Morales, Rosario Morales, and María Fernández a.k.a. “Mariposa”)

Puerto Rican-ness. “Puertorriqueñidad.” Regardless of the tongue in which it is uttered, it is something held in high regard by many people on and off the island of Puerto Rico. Who are we? What is a “bonafide” or “genuine” Puerto Rican? This is complicated because both words carry a connotation of something—in this case someone—official, legitimate, original or authentic. There is no way to determine such “genuineness” or “authenticity,” but it is important to address the issue because it is at the heart of Puerto Rican identity discourse. In addition, there are important and long-established markers of Puerto Rican identity that cannot be discounted. These markers include place of birth, residence and language, among others. Diaspora Puerto Ricans’ contributions to Puerto Rican culture in the United States must not be overlooked when discussing identity.

Transnationalism affects both diaspora and island Puerto Ricans. Puerto Rican diaspora writers suggest that diaspora Puerto Ricans affirm their identity through cultural expression abroad, while pointing out that their island counterparts are also influenced by U.S. culture and transnationalism. Aurora Levins Morales and Rosario Morales, María Teresa “Mariposa” Fernández, Miguel Piñero and Tato Laviera all affirm their Puerto Rican identity by stressing through cultural expression that their Puerto Rican-ness is as “bonafide” as any island Puerto Rican. Tato Laviera and Miguel Piñero go further in their narratives to express –and “talk back” to– how island Puerto Ricans are influenced by U.S. culture, or, “Americanized” as well.

I begin with an aptly-titled poem for this thesis, author Aurora Levins Morales' "Puertoricanness" (1986). The persona of this poem begins by speaking about the island of Puerto Rico being a part of a woman's identity and relating it to the "rooster's crow." This rooster's crow is symbolic of Puerto Rican identity and culture. The author uses the classic symbol of "el canto mañanero del gallo boricua," the Puerto Rican rooster's morning song, to establish her Puerto Rican identity. A symbol such as the *coquí*, a small tree frog that is Puerto Rico's national symbolic animal, is equal to the bald eagle of U.S. Americans. The rural *Trova* or *Jíbaro* music (music from the rural mountainous areas of the island) and the Bomba and Plena music (music inherited from African descendants) are other markers of Puerto Rican-ness.

It is no coincidence that most Puerto Rican stateside homes include paintings and artisan works of the *coquí*, the *jíbaro* figure, beautiful Puerto Rican beaches and landscapes, Major League Baseball Hall of Famer Roberto Clemente, the first ever Hispanic Baseball player inducted into such Hall of Fame, *Bomba* and *Plena* musicians, and of course, the fighting morning rooster. Levins Morales goes on to write: "It was Puerto Rico waking up inside her...remembering the rooster that used to crow...but she loved him..." (1983).

The writer is revealing that Puerto Rican identity transcends geographical space and is carried within by on and off-island Puerto Ricans, a clear sign of transnationalism. This poem shows the characteristic duality or "in-betweenity" in which many diaspora Puerto Ricans must construct their identities. Levins Morales writes: "She found herself between languages, between countries, with no land feeling at all solid under her feet" (1984). The author reveals the melancholy (also seen in "Nostalgia," a poem of that same

title by Rosario Morales) present in Puerto Rican diaspora society. Such melancholic feeling is a yearning that Puerto Ricans residing abroad have for the island. This emotional attachment to the Caribbean nation is one of the markers that keeps Puerto Rican identity alive and thriving outside Puerto Rico. It is an affirmation that diaspora Puerto Ricans also feel linked to the island, and a defiance against complete “Americanization.” It is a way of holding on to Puerto Rico’s centuries-old culture and ancestry. Levins Morales writes in “Puertoricanness:”

...in the endless bartering of a woman with two countries, bring herself to trade one-half of her heart for the other...she would live as a Puerto Rican lives en la isla, right here in North Oakland, plant the bananales and cafetales... (984-985)

The usage of codeswitching, in “Spanglish”—Puerto Rican lives en la isla—further shows how the author alludes to her Puerto Rican transnational identity. Theorist Jorge Duany suggests that Puerto Rican identity has been altered throughout the years of “el vaivén” and has come to transcend geographical location. Duany writes in “Nation, Migration, Identity: The Case of Puerto Ricans:”

...culturally speaking, the Puerto Rican nation can no longer be restricted to the island. But is instead constituted by...Puerto Rico itself and of the diasporic communities settled in the United States. (429)

Duany is suggesting that Puerto Rican identity has expanded due to the diaspora, and that such diaspora holds the same weight as the island concerning identity. This can be attributed in part to the fact that many Puerto Ricans cultivate their culture wherever they go, out of emotional attachment and pride. This is part of the cultural nationalism that

both island and diaspora Puerto Ricans exhibit. With a majority of Puerto Ricans stateside, residing in the island and speaking Spanish are no longer the exclusive markers for an “authentic” Puerto Rican identity. Duany states in “The Rough Edges of Puerto Rican Identities: Race, Gender and Transnationalism” (2005):

...one must question the easy equation between being born in Puerto Rico, living on the island, and speaking Spanish as the sole criteria for establishing a person’s Puerto Ricanness. (179)

Rosario Morales refers to this melancholy over the emotional attachment to the island, in her poem “Nostalgia.” The fact that Puerto Ricans who have been residing in the diaspora for many years still yearn for it, shows how even if they have had no contact with Puerto Rico, the island remains a closely guarded part of their identity. Morales suggests that Puerto Rican island cultural characteristics are so strong, diaspora Puerto Ricans often miss a homeland they have not lived in. The oral tradition, or stories told from the outgoing to the incoming generation, is the lens through which many diaspora Puerto Ricans view the island. These stories tend to romanticize Puerto Rican culture, but there is also the matter of pride. Though some romanticize Puerto Rican culture, the culture’s characteristics trigger sentiments of pride in both island and diaspora Puerto Ricans. Morales states: “with nostalgia for green landscapes and tropical fruit, for broad leaves and red flowers, for the smell of coffee roasting, the sound of cocks crowing...” (88)

“Ending Poem” is perhaps Aurora and Rosario’s most compelling work concerning Puerto Rican identity. This poem conveys the eclectic vision of Puerto Rican culture. The mother and daughter begin by stating they belong to more than one America, not only to America referring to the U.S. By using the plural “Americas,” the authors

suggest Puerto Ricans' identity is as much related to Latin America as it is to the U.S. The authors write: "*A child of the Americas / A light-skinned mestiza of the Caribbean.*" (1985, 2, 3). This is also the authors' way of pointing out Puerto Ricans' characteristic racial hybridity. Aurora and Rosario are suggesting that Puerto Rican identity is more complex than believed, "*a child of many diaspora...*" (1985, 4). This clearly alludes to the pluricultural element in Puerto Rican identity, not only the African, Amerindian, and Spanish trifecta endorsed by the Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña □ Institute of Puerto Rican Culture.

The writers stress the importance of New York City upon Puerto Ricans' identity regardless of place of origin. New York City has been referred to as "El pueblo más grande de Puerto Rico" or "La segunda capital de Puerto Rico," (Puerto Rico's biggest town, or Puerto Rico's second capital) by many diaspora and island Puerto Ricans. This gives us an idea of New York City's impact upon Puerto Ricans' identity. The historical significance of the lower-class slums, to which many Puerto Ricans migrated during the 1950's, is such that Aurora and Rosario give the city an honorary place in their identity despite Aurora being brought up in Chicago and living in the Bay Area in California. The authors write: "...*a California Puerto Rican Jew / A product of the New York Ghettos I have never known... / Boricua. As Boricuas come from the isle of Manhattan*" (1985, 8, 9, 20). This passage is the writers' way of pointing out the transnationalism in Puerto Rican identity, and that New York City cannot be separated from such identity, even in more complex lived trajectories such as this one.

Aurora and Rosario affirm their Puerto Rican racial identity by addressing the trifecta believed to be the constitution of Puerto Rican racial ancestry. The writers are

suggesting that Puerto Rican identity, although much of it is constituted by the African, Amerindian, and Spanish ancestry, has more depth than believed due to the multiple diasporas that have taken place from Europe and Africa toward the American continent and the Caribbean. Levins Morales and Morales write:

I am not African / *Africa waters the roots of my tree, but I cannot return* /
 I am not Taíno / *I am a late leaf of that ancient tree* / and my roots reach
 into the soil of two Americas / *Taíno is in me, but there is no way back* / I
 am not European, though I have dreamt of those cities. (986, 1-7)

Levins Morales and Morales convey the significance of women's contributions to Puerto Rican identity by tying women to hard work and showing how women were directly involved in the building of society itself. The writers state: "I am a child of many mothers / *They have kept it all going* / All the civilizations erected on their backs / *All the dinner parties given with their labor*" (986, 35-38).

This prior passage reveals the authors' feminist views while situating Puerto Rican women as central to the culture, on equal footing to Puerto Rican men. It refers to women being a driving force behind the formation of cultures throughout history just as much as men. Women are protagonists of transnationalism through the dissemination of culture and familial ties stateside. The female gender, especially in the role of mothers and grandmothers, is responsible for a majority of kinship-related activities characteristic of transnationalism. In his book *Blurred Borders: Transnational Migration Between the Hispanic Caribbean and the United States*, (2011), theorist Duany cites writers Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo and Ernestine Avila to drive this point home:

Some of this research has focused on the key role of women, especially mothers in transnational households. Women are largely responsible for the emotional, caring, and ritual work required to maintain kinship bonds between home and diaspora communities. Through constant visiting, writing, and talking on the phone, women often keep transnational households in touch with each other across long distances and stretches of time. More so than men, women frequently travel back and forth to take care of relatives, raise children, and participate in their family's rites of passage, such as baptisms, birthdays, weddings, and funerals. (31)

By using the phrase: "*History made us... / and we are whole*" (986, 44, 46), the authors are suggesting Puerto Rican identity is complete despite the clashing aspects that constitute its formation.

To demonstrate the "talk back" between stateside and island Puerto Ricans, I discuss Aurora Levins Morales' essay: "Forked Tongues: On Not Speaking Spanish," included in her 1998 book: *Medicine Stories: History, Culture, and the Politics of Integrity*. In this publication, the author discusses the differences between "los de aquí y los de allá" by pointing out the island elite's discriminatory attitude toward diaspora Puerto Ricans concerning language, class, race, literature, and gender. Levins Morales explores the complex transnational space in which stateside Puerto Ricans find themselves, who must deal with racism and other forms of discrimination abroad, and deal with discrimination and effacement of their Puerto Rican identity on the island by members of a *criollo* intelligentsia who think they can define who is and is not an "authentic" Puerto Rican.

One of Levins Morales' objectives is to analyze Puerto Rican-ness in the transnational context in which she was raised, without stateside or island stereotypes. Levins Morales suggests that diaspora literature is the conduit through which Puerto Ricans can combat these negative stereotypes and clear a space in which to analyze Puerto Ricans' very problematic transnational selves. The author states:

This is why we write: to see ourselves on the page. To confirm our presence. To clear a space where we can examine the lives we live, not as the sexy girlfriends, petty crooks and crime victims of TV cop shows, and not as statistical profiles in which hardship, bravery and resourcefulness lose all personality, but in our own physical and emotional reality. Where we can pull apart and explore this complex relationship we have with the island of our origins and kinship, and this vast many-peopled country in which we are writing a new chapter of Puerto Ricanhood. This necessity gives shape to our literature, to our urgent poetry of the streets, our ever-so-biographical fiction, our legends of collective identity. Most of what we write, we write under pressure. (62)

Aurora Levins Morales continues by stating that stateside Puerto Ricans have mixed Spanish and English as a creative tool to affirm their dual identity abroad without neglecting the diasporic or island side. This is also a symbolic trend used by other Puerto Rican diaspora writers— as with Tato Laviera in “Brava,” employed in the epigram of this thesis— to express that their Puerto Rican-ness is always present without question despite residing in the U.S. or speaking English. Levins Morales uses language to exemplify how both island and stateside Puerto Ricans have been influenced by the transnational

phenomenon. For example: in the island, for garbage bin, many people use the word “zafacón,” a derivative of safety can, which was used for so many years on the island, it became a Puerto Ricanism, as Levins Morales states. In New York City, a similar example is exemplified with “La jara,” meaning the police. Such a term stemmed from a policeman whose last name was O’Hara. Levins Morales writes:

And we do it in English, in Spanish, in a delicious blend of the two. Because one of our most important tools has been our creativity with language. Our linguistic sabotage, right and left. Anglo-American words transformed into Puerto Ricanisms revealing no trace of their gringo ancestry, like zafacón...and the Irish name O’Hara made into a generic code for the New York City police, la jara. (62)

Levins Morales is suggesting that “Spanglish” often present while codeswitching, as it is called in the field of linguistics, is an important tool to describe the complex idiosyncrasies of Puerto Rican diaspora culture, which should not be limited to standard language, especially in the realm of art. It is important that the Puerto Rican diaspora have its own ways of expressing its peculiar identity. Such peculiarities cannot be circumscribed to standard English or standard Spanish because it would be disingenuous, given that the intention of diaspora writers is to reflect their identity and transnational experience without language restrictions or approval from any literary canon. The author also suggests that stateside writers are more concerned with describing their real-life experiences abroad, than with the Eurocentric and Latin American magical realism their island counterparts seem to adhere to. The writer states:

Tales of invention and the fantastic have not interested us as much as the defiance of our daily lives. It is there that we struggle for an authentic cultural terrain, in which we are what we are, without asking anyone's pardon...Because our writing is testimony, written under pressure, in words we invent to describe what official language is totally inadequate for, we specialize in fiction with an autobiographical flavor. (63)

Again, "Spanglish" is applied to affirm the "in-betweenity" of stateside Puerto Rican identity, which is firmly rooted in the United States, but with a strong and vivid island cultural fervor. Levins Morales's statement means that only by using language their own way can Puerto Rican diaspora literary production be effective in expressing and describing its unique transnational experience. It is in this "in-betweenity" that Levins Morales suggests diaspora Puerto Ricans construct and affirm the identity. The writer states: "Spanish is in my flesh... / My first language was Spanglish / I was born at the crossroads / and I am whole" (1983, 9, 18-20). This is her way of stating how Puerto Ricans must deal with the identity issue and achieve their wholeness from a sort of "middle ground."

The writer goes on to speak on the complex relationship between Puerto Rican diaspora and Puerto Rican insular literature, denouncing the condescension historically perpetrated by part of the island's *criollo* intelligentsia. The author makes poignant observations concerning this issue. Puerto Rican diaspora literature has been received with disdain by some of the island's intelligentsia. It is these "gatekeepers", I use this term to describe people who believe they have the authority to decide what is and what is not literature, and who pass judgment on what literary works should and should not be

part of the Puerto Rican canonicity, who Levins Morales accuses of having an arrogant, classist, racist, nationalistic, and chauvinistic stance against Puerto Rican diaspora literary production, though notable shifts have taken place in this regard in more recent years.

The author ties this discrimination to what economically disadvantaged Puerto Rican migrants suffered before leaving the island, and as what triggered such diaspora in thousands of citizens. Aurora Levins Morales is denouncing insular racism and Eurocentric behavior on the part of the island's *criollo* intelligentsia and questioning why it is that places such as the South Bronx, a section of New York City with an enormous economically disadvantaged and marginalized Puerto Rican population, Hartford and Philadelphia are excluded from the purview of island intelligentsia. The author writes:

And what of our relationship to literary and cultural production on the island? The greatest obstacle, until very recently, to the development of this relationship has been arrogance. Arrogance of class, race, and gender with a strong flavor of the nationalistic and the patriarchal. That same arrogance that the migrants, always the poorest and darkest of our population, always the women who, for lack of resources or inclination, couldn't play their assigned role in the stories of the señores, hoped to leave behind them. This disdain for the oppressed, one of those inherited luxuries the regime continues to permit to the colonial elite, has framed all attempt at dialogue. The island elite persists in seeing the creators of this new diaspora culture as runaway children who lack and discrimination to the Hispanic house from which we supposedly came, although the African

house has housed us through generations of exile and rebellion, and we have lived in a house of American mestizaje for a very long time now. Those who partake of this anachronistic view tend to see our writings as scribbles in the margins of real literature, undeserving of serious study. They market their books to Argentina and Mexico and turn their cultured backs Hartford and Philadelphia. The Real Academia, supremely irrelevant as it is to the South Bronx, continues to be at the least a point of navigation to those who feel that three generations of creative ferment in Harlem have nothing to say to them. (63)

The prior passage reflects Levins Morales' feminist stance against the island's patriarchal culture in the past. It is important to hit on this due to the importance of women in Puerto Rican society. As I mentioned before, women disseminate transnationalism through familial ties, the work force, and cultural and religious practices in the island and abroad. When the patriarchal attitude is imposed upon society, women's ability to achieve a certain standing in the transnational spectrum is hindered because patriarchy undermines the female authority figure in Puerto Rican culture. Duany touches upon this by discussing Patricia Pessar's and Sarah Mehler's model to "bring gender into transnationalism." Duany writes in *Blurred Borders*: "...gender differences structure people's access to resources and power over mobility. These 'gendered geographies of power' help map how gender shapes transnational experiences" (31).

Levins Morales firmly states that Puerto Ricans' participation in the diaspora is too significant to be ignored by anyone, and that it can contribute greatly to insular improvement if it is acknowledged. Levins Morales aims to dispel the myth that suggests

the diaspora is not as tantamount to Puerto Rican identity as is the island. The author states: “The truth is that half of all Puerto Ricans have taken part in the creation of this new culture, and it is more than possible that the future vitality of island culture will depend on recognizing and celebrating this fact” (64).

Levins Morales raises yet another important issue pertaining to transnationalism upon Puerto Rican identity when she speaks of being able to take a new approach toward insular Puerto Rican society due to a diaspora that is “continually in motion.” Duany calls it “nation on the move.” This approach allows us to rid ourselves of outdated melancholic notions about the island of Puerto Rico. The transnational phenomenon that is taking place for decades now has made Puerto Rican identity evolve into a wider, more complex array of issues. Levins Morales writes:

Ours is a diaspora continually in motion, swinging between the island of Puerto Rico and the cities of the United States. To the degree that the realities of this continually shifting life have freed us of nostalgic idealizations of earlier generations, it has become possible for us to look at island society with new eyes. (64)

The major theme in María Teresa “Mariposa” Fernández’s celebrated poem “Ode to the Diasporican” is exactly that of the so-called “genuine” or “bonafide” Puerto Rican. She tackles the issue of not being considered a “bonafide” Puerto Rican because of being born and raised in the United States instead of the island. This is indispensable to this thesis because it opens the heated debate, or “talk back” that has been going back and forth for decades between the insular population and those who reside stateside,

specifically in New York City as in “Mariposa’s” case. This poem also clearly reveals the transnational aspect of Puerto Rican identity.

“Mariposa” begins by addressing race in her poem to suggest that she possesses the physical characteristics attributed to Puerto Ricans in her understanding of the Puerto Rican identity’s constitution. Phenotype is a very important racial marker of Puerto Rican identity; although it is hardly uniform and many varieties exist, the post war migration to New York City was largely working-class, and therefore often marked racially and phenotypically. The writer provides her facial features, hair, pigmentation and pride as proof of her Puerto Rican-ness. She writes: “Mira a mi cara puertorriqueña / Mi pelo vivo / mis manos morenas / Mira a mi corazón que se llena de orgullo / Y dime que no soy Boricua” (2424, 1-5).

The poet is also attacking the lack of worth African ancestry is given in some Puerto Rican creole elite circles by attributing Puerto Rican-ness to this lineage--- Tato Laviera does the same in his poem: “Asmilao” by celebrating the “lao” in “Asimilao” as an African characteristic in Puerto Rican popular Spanish. In Mariposa’s poem, the words “pelo vivo” refer to curly or coarse hair, as opposed to “pelo muerto,” as it has been called on the island for a long time, which refers to straight or non-curly hair. The term “vivo” was used to describe coarse hair because it never would slide down your face. “Muerto” was used because straight hair would always slide down your face and be subject to the wind and movement. Other such terms like “pelo malo,” or bad hair, used to describe coarse hair, or “pelo bueno,” good hair, used to describe straight hair, are also used but they carry different, often charged, connotations.

Personally, when I was a kid growing up in Caguas, Puerto Rico, I would hear my grandmother and the neighborhood barber saying: “El nene salió con el pelo bueno,” which translates to: “the boy came out with straight or ‘good’ hair.” “Mariposa’s” usage of “pelo vivo” to claim Puerto Rican-ness also conveys a sense of irony because Puerto Ricans’ racial construction presents a broad and colorful picture characterized by hybridity.

This picture has evolved into an amalgam where the black and white lines have blurred and become something else. Duany states this in *Blurred Borders* while revealing the statistics of the 2009 American Community Survey, where he discusses what he calls “four main patterns in the social construction of race among Hispanic Caribbean migrants” (78). Duany writes while describing the second pattern: “...many people employ ‘some other race’ as equivalent to ‘brown,’ ‘tan,’ or *trigueño* (literally, wheat-colored; figuratively, dark-skinned)” (78).

It is also through culture that “Mariposa” firmly states her Puerto Rican-ness. Fernández does this by making an analogy between Puerto Rico and New York City in which she compares sights on the island to those in the city to suggest she feels these places are her personal Puerto Rico. This comparison is to clearly state that Puerto Rico is with her in the imaginary every single day of her life while growing up in The City. It is as if “Mariposa” is in two places at the same time: “What does it mean to live in between” (2424, 22).

The polar-opposites of the rural Puerto Rican landscapes and the urban metropolis are merged into an “in-between” world that Puerto Rican folk can navigate throughout comfortably without having to acquiesce to either completely. This is so because the

island's population is about 3,411,307 or 3.4 million, according to the 2010 U.S. Census, though of course, this number includes the few thousand people of other nationalities who reside in Puerto Rico, and also has dropped considerably due to the economic crisis and the catastrophic hurricanes of 2017. And also because New York City (also using the 2010 U.S. Census as a metric) is home to roughly 1,070,558 Puerto Ricans who possess an unbreakable sense of cultural awareness. Not to mention other major diaspora communities throughout the Northeast, Florida and increasingly in Texas. Both locations do not cancel each other out. This is a sure sign of the influence of transnationalism upon Puerto Rican identity because it explicitly reveals the "in-betweenity" in which stateside and island Puerto Ricans increasingly find themselves. "Mariposa" speaks from the diasporic point of view. The author chooses classic Puerto Rican and New York City landmarks to express a dual cultural identity and claim Puerto Rican "authenticity." The poet writes:

Cause my playground was a concrete jungle / cause my Río Grande de
Loíza was the Bronx River / cause my Fajardo was City Island / my
Luquillo Orchard Beach / and summer nights were filled with city noises /
instead of coquis. (2424, 13-18)

Puerto Rican diaspora writers such as "Mariposa" claiming and affirming a full Puerto Rican identity should come as no surprise. Multiple stateside Puerto Rican writers have made the same claim of Puerto Rican-ness as Fernández, and none have used the term Puerto Rican American. These writers acknowledge transnationalism in their narratives while still holding on strong to their Puerto Rican culture and roots though

residing abroad. Duany's extensive research reveals this fact among the general population as well. He states in *Blurred Borders*:

...Puerto Ricans are the most adamant on a national terminology, rarely describing themselves as "Puerto Rican Americans" ...because "Puerto Rican American" sounds redundant or because they resist becoming another ethnic minority, stateside Puerto Ricans continue to define themselves primarily as *puertorriqueños* or *boricuas*. (76)

The author goes on to state that being Puerto Rican requires much more than just being born and raised in the island, that it is more than a place or any tangible characteristic. Here is where the author hits on birthplace, which is at the epicenter of the Puerto Rican identity discourse, and which is deemed by some islanders as one of the markers of "authenticity" concerning Puerto Rican identity.

"Mariposa" defies the notion of birthplace as a marker of "authenticity" in her verses. This poem is a tribute to those Puerto Ricans who were born stateside and who carry their culture within but have been labeled as inauthentic by some island Puerto Ricans. "Mariposa" writes:

Some people say that I'm not the real thing / Boricua, that is / cause I
wasn't born on the enchanted island / cause I was born on the mainland /
north of Spanish Harlem / cause I was born in the Bronx / some people
think that I'm not bonafide. (2424, 6-12)

This discrimination denounced by "Mariposa" stems from an old and ongoing nationalistic practice by a creole elite on the island that establishes a class-based and geo-political-based hierarchy in which stateside Puerto Ricans are deemed as not primarily

Puerto Ricans. This is not only a discrimination due to national pride. This entails much more sinister motives of racism, classism, and patriarchy. By creating this national image, based partly on the quintessential male *jíbaro* figure, of what Puerto Ricans are supposed to be, this creole elite pushes aside any Puerto Rican-ness that does not fit their interpretation. Of course, the intention is to retain control over the sociological constitution of the Puerto Rican people and label stateside Puerto Ricans as nonessential to Puerto Rican identity discourse.

This discriminatory action works against the evolution of Puerto Rican identity, and ignores the impact of transnational phenomena upon Puerto Rican identity that diaspora Puerto Ricans reveal in their narratives. Ana Y. Ramos-Zayas explains this action in her article: “Implicit Social Knowledge, Cultural Capital, and ‘Authenticity’ among Puerto Ricans in Chicago.” Ramos-Zayas writes:

The creation of national subjects sustains hegemonic notions of “authenticity,” that is, of gradations of cultural purity and means of distinguishing a “true” national from contaminating hybrids. The creation of a social space in which to express belongingness and at the same time define the Other is the effect and practice of the social, political, and historical power relations of the nation. (34)

The melancholic notion of Puerto Rico as a utopic paradise-like location is briefly covered by “Mariposa” in this poem. The author suggests that it was this fictitious version of the island which diaspora Puerto Ricans were sold while growing up in New York City. She writes: “and Puerto Rico / was just some paradise / that we only saw in pictures” (2424, 19-21). Rosario Morales calls this: “Nostalgia.” Others call it

melancholy or yearning, a kind of affection for the island their ancestors left behind. This feeling is a characteristic of a transnational phenomenon that is very much alive in Puerto Rican identity and consciousness. However, many people misinterpret this “nostalgia.” Stateside Puerto Ricans use this notion to point out other, more urgent and distinct aesthetic matters than the island’s natural landscapes, as will be seen later when I discuss Tato Laviera’s works.

Although the Puerto Rico that diaspora Puerto Ricans have been sold is not exactly accurate, they nonetheless affirm their full membership in Puerto Rican identity from abroad. Whether their views of the island are accurate or not, stateside Puerto Ricans consider themselves an extension of Puerto Rico. Despite residing thousands of miles away from the island, stateside Puerto Ricans tenaciously cling to a full Puerto Rican identity without acquiescing to hyphenated terms such as: Puerto Rican-American. This fact reveals that the island’s influence is present in their everyday lives, a strong sign of transnationalism. “Mariposa” writes: “What does it take to realize / that being Boricua / is a state of mind / a state of heart / a state of soul...No nací en Puerto Rico / Puerto Rico nació en mi” (2424, 23-27, 33, 34). This passage is reminiscent of Morales’ “It was Puerto Rico waking up inside her” (983, 1).

Women have been present in every aspect of Puerto Rican identity since its inception. Whether it is as pillars of the Puerto Rican family structure on the island or abroad, or as part of the island’s and diaspora’s work force, Puerto Rican women are arguably the main disseminators of transnationalism in Puerto Rican society. Aurora Levins Morales and Rosario Morales’ literary works reflect a Puerto Rican culture filled with the complexities of the “in-betweenity” within a Puerto Rican identity that must

balance influential colonial forces imposed by Spain and the United States throughout five centuries. This mother and daughter's feminist approach is important for gaining a grasp on Puerto Rican identity discourse, which has been controlled by cultural nationalistic and patriarchal forces for quite some time.

María Teresa "Mariposa" Fernández is a female voice of a more recent generation that vehemently defends the Puerto Rican-ness of diaspora Puerto Ricans while acknowledging the transnationalism of their identity. "Mariposa's" verses reveal that Puerto Rican-ness is comprised of much more than geographical location and birthplace. Fernández also dispels the old melancholic notion that suggests Puerto Rico is a faraway utopic paradise.

These women authors of the Puerto Rican diaspora suggest that Puerto Rican identity is one that is evolving. And in such evolution, women are going to challenge long-upheld notions of patriarchy as constituting Puerto Rican-ness. The transnational phenomenon upon Puerto Rican identity is clearly revealed throughout their poetry and prose. What is reflected in these women's works is evident in daily insular and stateside Puerto Rican culture, and shows that gender must be addressed in discussions pertaining to Puerto Rican identity.

Chapter 2

A Lower East Side Rebel (Miguel Piñero's Defiance of Puerto Rican Nationalist Identity)

“Lower East Side Rebel.” “Bad Boy Genius.” Co-founder of the Nuyorican Poets’ Café. Puerto Rican diaspora poet and playwright Miguel Piñero was perhaps the most controversial of the diaspora writers of his generation. As he well stated in “A Lower East Side Poem:” “I am the Philosopher of the Criminal Mind” (1994). Although his life was plagued with poverty, familial problems, drug addiction and criminality, it is that darkness from which part of his street-savvy poetry, prose and plays emanate. His ability to portray what was then the harsh environment of New York City’s Lower East Side stems from having experienced it personally. Such ability is seen through his handling of heavy subject matter in his works.

Piñero was accused of everything from drug addiction, robbery to even child molestation, but legally speaking, he was only charged and convicted of armed robbery during his youth. Criminality is not alien to great artists. World renowned actor and Academy Award nominee Robert Downey Jr. confessed to heroin addiction for half of his life. Acclaimed film Director Roman Polanski (who fled to France the very day he was to be sentenced after a guilty plea of unlawful sexual intercourse with thirteen-year-old Samantha Geimer) and multiple Grammy Award winning singer and dancer Michael Jackson (who was accused of sleeping with children twice) are other examples.

Modernist poet Ezra Pound was tried for treason and sentenced to life in a mental institution after supporting anti-Semitism and the Mussolini dictatorship over Italian radio during wartime. The list goes on. These examples are not meant to excuse the

alleged actions of anyone, but to provide context when discussing the literary works of one of the greatest Puerto Rican poets of the twentieth century.

According to León Ichaso, director of the 2001 film *Piñero*, famed theater producer Joe Papp had to send Piñero to Philadelphia because the family of a boy he allegedly molested wanted to take revenge on him. However, the boy he allegedly molested was accused of similar sexual hustling that Piñero reportedly practiced in his youth. This does not justify any sexually exploitive behavior, but it must be accounted for before expressing any opinions about Piñero's character. Adriane Ferreira Veras cites an interview that Ichaso gave in December 2001 to *The New York Times* in her article "La Bodega Sold Dreams: A Reading of Miguel Piñero's Poetry":

He said in the interview Mike and his friends, when they were 13 or 14, 'started hustling at the movie theaters on 42nd Street [...] later on he had a taste for street kids very much the way he'd been.' (36)

In addition, for those who might demonize Piñero, I remind them that there was a very human and vulnerable side to him as shown in the 2001 film. Adriane Ferreira Veras provides a real-life example of this. Ferreira Veras writes:

In 1971 he was caught in an armed burglary of a Lower East Side apartment. Two witnesses at his trial agreed that he was 'the nicest burglar they had ever met.' (34)

Also, since I am not discussing Piñero's 1974 play *Short Eyes*, which covers the subject matter of sexual molestation, I will not be going deeply into Piñero's personal character or alleged transgressions. Only the following issues, which pertain to this study will be discussed.

This chapter deals with Piñero's vehement affirmation of Puerto Rican identity while defying the Puerto Rican cultural nationalism established by a *criollo* intelligentsia on the island. I will also discuss the "talk back" from the Puerto Rican diaspora toward the Puerto Rican islanders, of which Piñero is a major practitioner. These are complicated issues to say the least, given the number of Puerto Ricans in the United States. Markers of Puerto Rican identity have evolved and broadened throughout the years, and the exodus post hurricane María will surely test current theoretical limits. Culture has now the same standing as birthplace, place of residence and language. This development triggers a new dialogue over where Puerto Rican identity is headed. In *Blurred Borders*, Duany affirms this of Puerto Ricans, Dominicans, and to a "lesser" extent, Cubans:

In each case, the massive displacement of people has raised difficult questions about how national membership is defined and who can claim citizenship rights in the home country. (80)

In this vein, Piñero expresses transnational Puerto Rican identity and cultural praxis through his poetry.

Piñero was born Miguel Antonio Gómez Piñero in Gurabo, Puerto Rico in 1946. At the age of eight his family relocated to the Lower East Side of New York City. Over time, his identity began to acquire its distinct urban flavor. During his years residing in "Loisaida," the street name for the Lower East Side, he absorbed all the idiosyncrasies of street-life in such a marginalized, poverty-stricken and crime-infested neighborhood. Piñero fittingly conveys the "talk back" from stateside Puerto Ricans toward those on the island. He personifies the transnational phenomenon addressed in this thesis because

although he was born on the island, he was raised in New York City since age eight, and always acknowledged and defended his Puerto Rican-ness.

Since all Puerto Ricans are U.S. citizens, they do not fit neatly into the immigrant category. They must be categorized as migrants, however, since Puerto Rican culture is so strong, and differs in many ways from that of the Anglo-Saxon American and Black American: hence, Puerto Ricans' identity—specifically for this study—must be categorized as a cultural one. Moreover, the all-year sun-drenched Caribbean location of the island, the long dominion of the Spanish language, the African-based practices such as the Santería religion, and the racial hybridity of a Latin American country, make Puerto Ricans protagonists of a transnational phenomenon par excellence. This situation of being close to the U.S concerning citizenship, and yet culturally so distinct, makes this transnationalism evident. Duany discusses this in *Blurred Borders*:

“...how Puerto Ricans cross the cultural border with the United States, which is technically not an international boundary because Puerto Rico is a territory that ‘belongs to but is not part’ of United States. And yet the geographic, linguistic, religious, and racial contrasts between the island and the mainland are sufficiently large to conceive them as transnational.

(110)

The year 1974 was big year for playwright and poet Miguel Piñero. His play *Short Eyes* was brought to Broadway by the legendary theatrical director and producer, Joseph Papp, who saw the play off-Broadway in the Riverside Church and was greatly impressed. Papp then moved it to Broadway. However, the works I will be discussing here are the poems “This is Not the Place where I was Born,” “A Lower East Side

Poem,” and “There is Nothing New in New York,” all published in 1974. “This is Not the Place where I was Born” reflects Piñero’s Puerto Rican identity affirmation, while defying the era’s insular *criollo* intelligentsia’s cultural nationalist definition of Puerto Rican-ness and their complicity with the colonial chokehold on the island by the U.S.

By *criollo* intelligentsia, I am referring specifically to those intellectuals in Puerto Rico who see it as their role to define what is and what is not definitely Puerto Rican. I also refer to them with a term that I coined for this study, *cultural gatekeepers*. This group is not strictly necessarily affiliated to a particular political party or ideology. However, some members belong to certain political parties and are currently active in government, hence members of the “ruling class.” Most belong to the middle and upper-middle class. A bastion of this group has traditionally worked from the University of Puerto Rico, Río Piedras campus.

I will also cover this issue by discussing the 2001 film, *Piñero*, which dramatizes the writer’s life. The film is important because it brings to life the tensions and contested terrain of Puerto Rican-ness brought forth by Piñero. “A Lower East Side Poem” conveys that the Lower East Side is home to Puerto Ricans who deem themselves as authentic as any island Puerto Rican. Both poems reflect Puerto Rican identity as a transnational phenomenon and “talk back” to the insular *criollo* intelligentsia about Puerto Rican-ness, which are the two main issues of this thesis. “There is Nothing New in New York” reflects the language duality among diaspora Puerto Ricans by addressing the usage of English and Spanish, hence affirming the bilingual aspect that stateside Puerto Ricans possess without losing their “Puertorriqueñidad.”

In “This Is Not The Place Where I Was Born” Piñero deconstructs the myth of Puerto Rico being a paradise-like location. He reminisces about his mother’s portrayal of the island, which is still in his consciousness. The author laments that Puerto Rico does not fit the description provided by his mother. Piñero is criticizing the false premises upon which many insular Puerto Ricans base their identity. Piñero relates his mother’s tale about idiosyncratic Puerto Rican details such as “el bodeguero” (the grocery store man) and eating mango to establish that he had personal experience with Puerto Rican culture since a very young age despite residing in the diaspora— here Piñero exercises this knowledge as *cultural capital*.² Piñero writes:

this is not the place where i was born / remember□ as a child the
 fantasizing images my mother planted within my head□ / the shadows of
 her childhood recounted to me many times / over welfare loan from el
 bodeguero / i tasted mango many years before the skin of the fruit / ever
 reached my teeth. (1394)

Piñero is suggesting these idiosyncratic details are what promulgate culture. The “bodeguero” is such a strong and characteristic trait of Puerto Rican culture, that it is seen in the diaspora as well as on the island. In all five boroughs of New York City you can find Puerto Rican-owned “bodegas,” working class neighborhood grocery stores, whose owners give credit to loyal and low-income customers. Mango fruit is not only symbolic of Puerto Rican culture due to its lusciousness, but also because of the tree itself, “la sombra del palo de mangó,” the mango tree shade, is famous for the shelter it provides during scorching Puerto Rican summers. Piñero chooses these symbols to state the

² The term cultural capital was popularized by Pierre Bourdieu in his book: *The Forms of Capital*, 1985.

importance of the nostalgic yearning for the island and culture in diasporic Puerto Rican identity. Duany stresses this in *Blurred Borders*, while discussing stateside Puerto Rican farmworkers:

...the transnational ties of contemporary Puerto Rican migrants, especially on the reconstruction of their cultural identities. Even though most Puerto Ricans in the United States are no longer farmworkers, they preserve strong emotional and cultural attachments to their homeland. (103)

The above lines reflect that emotional attachment, yearning, melancholic feeling, and nostalgia have played an important role in Puerto Rican identity since the beginning of the diaspora. This love for the island abroad plays an important role in diaspora Puerto Ricans' construction of identity. This view of the island came about as a response to the heavy U.S. influence upon Puerto Rican culture. Adriane Ferreira Veras discusses this in her article, "La Bodega Sold Dreams..." as follows:

in an attempt to regain cultural identity, cultural nationalists turned to Boriquen in the late 60s and early 1970s. Their literary production and political ideology reflected a romantic and idealized vision of the island. Boriquen was transformed in an ethnic myth that previous generations had fed to their young...Clearly, to the generation that followed, Boriquen was a dream that their parents had embraced in an effort to hold onto an identity. The first generation of Puerto Rican migrants in the United States lived with the dream of returning to the homeland. (24-25)

Piñero continues his defiance by pointing out the hypocrisy of the *criollo* intelligentsia, who boast about Spanish-only as a marker of Puerto Rican-ness, and yet

this privileged insular crowd engages in English as much as diaspora Puerto Ricans. Piñero is revealing the existing transnational phenomena in Puerto Rican identity, and denouncing the acquiescence of many insular Puerto Ricans to the U.S. colonial imposition that undermines the established language on the island. This is Piñero's way of pointing out how insular Puerto Ricans criticize or look down upon diaspora Puerto Ricans while they themselves have been Americanized and act oblivious to it. In "This Is Not the Place Where I Was Born" Piñero writes: "where spanish was a dominant word / & signs read by themselves" (1394, 12, 13).

In addition, Piñero points out that even the institutions on the island, such as the police force, practice repression in similar fashion to those stateside, being that police brutality was common for minority communities and civil rights groups such as The Young Lords. Piñero is using a classic Puerto Rican figure of the neighborhood police officer who is known by all neighbors and comes as public "servant" and "friend," and not as brutal oppressor or foe. This brutality by the police force in Hispanic and Black American neighborhoods has been well documented by U.S. media throughout the years, especially in cities such as Los Angeles and New York. Piñero states that Puerto Rico has been contaminated with such brutality and criticizes the governing *criollo* ruling class, who are responsible for setting the norm concerning police departments' behavior, for their acquiescence to such oppressive tactics. The author also makes a poignant statement "in slogan clothing" directed at the quintessential law enforcement slogan: "To serve and protect" to better convey his message. Piñero writes:

I was born in a village of that island where the police / who frequented
 your place of business-hangout or home came as / servant or friend & not
 as a terror in slogan clothing. (1394, 14; 1395, 15, 16)

These lines are Piñero's way of denouncing how the transnational phenomenon I propose in this thesis has influenced even institutions such as the police force. Piñero suggests that Puerto Rican law enforcement, originally founded as a colonial apparatus, has retained its Spanish colonial *modus operandi* and more deeply ingrained the "American way" of doing things.

Piñero goes on to criticize how Puerto Ricans now deem each other untrustworthy, suggesting this is another influence of U.S. culture upon Puerto Rican society, after the establishment of the status of Free Associated State that propelled Puerto Rico's great migration of the 1950s. The author also states how Puerto Rican society has lost its characteristic and centuries-old respect and regard for previous generations. Piñero states:

I was born in a barrio of the village on the island / where people left their
 doors open at night / where respect for elders was exhibited with pride.
 (1395, 17-19)

These are clear examples of the transnational phenomenon Piñero and other Puerto Rican diaspora writers reveal. Piñero is denouncing what has become of the island in his absence. The "outlaw poet" is pointing out that throughout twenty years (1954 to 1974) the fast-paced industrialization and urbanization Puerto Rico underwent at the time ushered in an oppressive capitalist system.

Piñero discusses how U.S. cultural characteristics have infiltrated Puerto Rican society, and how Puerto Rican society has allowed this to happen. The author suggests certain Puerto Rican freedoms have been stifled by the influence and imposition of U.S. culture, down to the way that Puerto Ricans fall in love, thereby denouncing the invasion of privacy that has increased throughout the years. Piñero suggests that people feel they must keep their romantic relationships secret, and without public displays of affection. Piñero also suggests that the oppression of colonialism has stripped Puerto Rican youth of their natural *joie de vivre*, with increasing violence toward one and other betraying their civility. Piñero writes:

where courting for loved ones was not treated over confidentially / where
children's laughter did not sound empty & savagely alive / with self
destruction... (1395, 20-22)

Moreover, Piñero also criticizes the lack of depth in insular Puerto Ricans' Puerto Rican-ness by suggesting they allowed themselves to become aliens in their own land and acquiesced to the status of second-class citizens. This is Piñero's way of lashing out against the so-called culturally nationalist *criollo* intelligentsia, who in his view, have forgotten what it means to be Puerto Rican, and what this identity entails. The "bad boy genius" is criticizing the colonial status quo that has proliferated on the island during his years in the diaspora. The Commonwealth, as a political and economic project headed by Luis Muñoz Marín, and its consequences upon Puerto Rican cultural identity are also among Piñero's concerns. Piñero writes:

i was born on an island where to be Puerto Rican meant to be / part of the
land & soul & puertorriqueños were not the / minority / puerto ricans were

first, none were second / no, i was not born here... / no, i was not born in
the attitude & time of this place. (1395, 23-28)

This passage brings forth Puerto Rico's 119-year colonial status as a possession of the United States— which it belongs to but is not a part of— while the island's citizens struggle with the “in-betweenity” they live in culturally. Puerto Ricans' sense of value diminishes because they are U.S. citizens, but also colonial subjects. This is how Piñero's verses reveal the repercussions of the transnational phenomenon that is felt all throughout Puerto Rican culture. Adriane Ferreira Veras points to this in her work: “The island's history as a colony has a crucial role on the self-worth and validation of its citizens and their culture” (2).

Piñero suggests that Puerto Ricans on the island have allowed themselves to be oppressed and have submitted to working and living in slave-like conditions under a capitalist system that forces them to take low-paying jobs in the tourism industry to make ends meet. Piñero stresses how islanders who reside in touristic areas have gone out of their way to accommodate tourists by building houses that function as hotels or guest houses. The author expresses that these workers must adopt a cutthroat attitude to survive in such a competitive environment. Piñero writes:

this slave blessed land / where the caribbean seas pound angrily on the
shores / of pre-fabricated house / hotel redcap hustling people gypsy taxi
cab / fighters for fares to Fajardo. (1395, 31-34)

Piñero continues his critique of insular Puerto Rican identity by pointing out the rampant superficiality on the island. This superficiality has stifled Puerto Rican culture to the

point that the culture is not allowed to freely express itself. Piñero writes: “& the hot wind is broken by fiberglass palmtrees” (1395, 34).

Piñero sharpens his denouncement of the stranglehold upon Puerto Rican identity by stating the *criollo* elite have allowed the island to become alien and hostile to its own diaspora sons and daughters, while also allowing island Puerto Ricans to be subjected to subservient work in their own land. This is Piñero’s way of shining a light on the *criollo* elite’s inefficiency in protecting the Puerto Rican people and culture from foreign intrusion. Moreover, Piñero is also providing important points concerning the “talk back” from the diaspora viewpoint regarding Puerto Rican identity. Piñero writes:

where nuyoricans come in search of spiritual identity / are greeted with
profanity / this is insanity that americanos are showered / with shoe shine
kisses. (1395, 44-47)

These lines convey Piñero’s indignation when some island Puerto Ricans allege that they are the “authentic” Puerto Ricans, and that those in the diaspora are less Puerto Rican due to their residence in the United States. Piñero is vehemently denouncing the audacity of the island Puerto Ricans who think they can decide unilaterally who is and who is not Puerto Rican, especially when it is the islanders who have acquiesced to U.S. cultural influences. Piñero writes: “& foreigners scream that puertorriqueños are foreigners / & have no right to claim any benefit on the birthport” (1395, 38, 39).

Ferreira Veras (2004) also discusses Piñero’s indignation in her work. She writes:

He was amazed how Puerto Ricans who had never left the island could
accuse him when they allowed the American contamination that could be
seen all around the island. (47)

Continuing the “talk back” from the diaspora toward insular Puerto Ricans, Piñero criticizes how those on the island have allowed U.S. influences to stifle Puerto Rican national identity and spirit while trying to deny diaspora identities primordially linked to the island of their ancestors. Piñero uses blood as a symbol to point out that the island itself has lost its Puerto Rican-ness and needs to reclaim it. The author suggests that Puerto Rican-ness is the “lifeblood” of the nation, which he finds the island is lacking. And by using the word “confusion,” Piñero is commenting on the level of exploitation in which island Puerto Ricans live. Piñero writes: “in modern medicine is in confusion needs a transfusion...” (1395, 52).

In addition, Piñero points out that insular Puerto Ricans have lost idiosyncratic peculiarities that are markers of their cultural identity. Peculiarities such as: “Qué pasa,” a classic Puerto Rican greeting that means “What’s going on” or “hello.” The “Lower East Side Rebel” also exposes the ruthless tactics of colonialism that turn Puerto Rican against Puerto Rican and gag those who wish to express their national identity by waving the Puerto Rican flag by itself, and not along the U.S. flag. Furthermore, Piñero ingeniously uses the compound word, “left-in” to stress that the flag has been abandoned by many island Puerto Ricans. This is also another knock by Piñero on the rampant consumerism that has coopted Puerto Rican culture. Piñero writes:

stale air & que pasa stares are nowhere / in sight & night neon light shines
bright / in el condado area puerto rican under cover cop / stop & arrest on
the spot puerto ricans who shop for the flag / that waves on the left in
souvenir stores. (1395, 57-59; 1396, 60, 61)

Besides criticizing the lack of nationalist fire in the island Puerto Ricans' identity and spirit, Piñero goes further and suggests that it is really diaspora Puerto Ricans who are carrying the Puerto Rican nationalist struggle. And that diaspora Puerto Ricans are the more "authentic" Puerto Ricans given that it is them putting their lives on the line stateside for their Puerto Rican identity and nationhood. This is reminiscent of the Puerto Rican proverb: "Nadie es profeta en su tierra," "nobody is prophet in their own land." Piñero is stating that the Puerto Rican creole elite who control the country's political class is stuck in the past, out of touch, and does not acknowledge the transnational phenomenon happening in Puerto Rican cultural identity, which the diaspora embodies.

puertorriqueños cannot assemble displaying the emblem / nuyoricans are fighting & dying for in newark, lower east side / south bronx where the fervor of being / puertorriqueños is not just rafael hernandez. (1396, 62-65)

As the aforementioned critic Adriane Ferreira Veras (2004) discusses this in her work, and then cites William Luis' book: *Dance Between Two Cultures: Latino Caribbean Literature Written in the United States* to drive the point home:

Luis' study (1997) claims that Piñero uses his poetry to depict the difference between Puerto Ricans on the island and those in the mainland. The one in a North American environment cannot express their nationality and the "Puerto Rican-ness" in the same way; 'Piñero suggests that Puerto Ricans in New York are more Puerto Rican than those who reside on the island.' (30)

Piñero also hits upon an aspect of Puerto Rican culture and identity that has always been swept under the rug by the *criollo* intelligentsia: racism. Racism from whites towards people of color in Puerto Rico differs from racism in the U.S. in that in the island's upper-class whites reproduce a distinct specific history, and Piñero shows how these subtleties are quite nuanced. In Puerto Rico racist expression is less verbal and more about treatment, exclusion and marginalization. For example: racist upper-class Puerto Ricans may not utter the nefarious epithet "nigger" in public, but they will oppose their son or daughter having a relationship with a Puerto Rican black man or woman because in their view "daña la raza," "it ruins the race." This means that African ancestry is seen as somehow diminishing the quality of the individual's race. This distorted view of race is shared by many in the upper-class. Prejudice leads them to believe that Puerto Rican black people are criminals, undesirables, and inferior to them.

Researcher Isar P. Godreau explored the long-hidden issues of racism and class-based discrimination in Puerto Rico in her 2015 book: *Scripts of Blackness: Race, Cultural Nationalism, and U.S. Colonialism in Puerto Rico*. The author writes about many *criollo* whites in Ponce who historically have marginalized and discriminated against Puerto Rican black men and women due to a misplaced sense of superiority. Godreau writes:

...power-laden relationships and racial differences between the urban *criollo* bourgeoisie and the *mulato* and black cane workers who live in the rural working-class barrios of the nineteenth century. Historians have documented how *criollos* availed themselves of the idioms of morality, health, hygiene, labor and sexuality to control the black and brown

working-class poor who lived in the fringes of cities like Ponce...Anti-vagrancy laws enacted between 1817 and 1862 restricted access to land and criminalized the black and *mulato* population as vagrant. In Ponce, these so-called vagrants were identified with black and poor neighborhoods such as La Cantera, Bélgica, and San Antón, which were commonly represented in public discourse and newspapers managed by *criollo* elites as ‘dark dangerous places, where ignorant, unruly people danced the *bomba* to African rhythms. (136)

Godreau goes on to point out that racial and class-based discrimination have been tied together in Puerto Rico since the nineteenth century. This discrimination was not restricted solely to San Antón, but to the whole island. The center of town was reserved for the more affluent *criollo* whites, while the economically-disadvantaged black laborers were relegated to the outskirts of town. Therefore, besides the anti-vagrancy laws, the poor black population also had to suffer marginalization in their own home country, for being both black, and poor. Godreau reveals these discriminatory practices perpetrated by the *criollo* whites:

an island-wide decree issued in 1893 established that...cities should be divided into three zones. Structures in the zone surrounding the main plaza (zone 1) had to be built in rubble masonry; structures in the areas surrounding zone 1 (zone 2) were to use stone, and structures in the outer fringes of the city (zone 3) were to be built with wood (Rodríguez-Silva 2012, 102). Those who could not abide by the code had to leave the zone. Thus, as Rodríguez-Silva states, ‘The physical reorganization of cities, in

effect, translated into a new regime dividing physical spaces along racial and class lines, with the heart of the city becoming the reserved domain of the upper-class whites.’ (136-137)

Puerto Rican blacks suffered for many years the onslaught of racism and marginalization. Piñero suggests that Puerto Ricans have also engaged in this distorted white supremacist thinking inherited from Spain and the U.S. Piñero states that this racism and corruption has extended into the Puerto Rican police force. This is also the poet taking another shot at the *criollo* intelligentsia for fomenting such racism as well as capitalizing from a colonial system that also does. Piñero provides examples such as John Wayne, a Hollywood icon who symbolized movies of the Wild West from a dominant white perspective, and the Ku Klux Klan – who historically have murdered and terrorized thousands of blacks – to make his point. As Piñero writes in “This Is Not the Place Where I Was Born:”

police in stocking caps cover carry out john wayne / television cowboy
law road models of new york city detective / french connection / death
wish instigation ku klux klan mind. (1395, 48-50)

There is an existing parallel between Piñero’s 1974 narrative, and contemporary society, with the links between both countries’ expansionist and colonial histories giving way to institutionalized and culturally pervasive stereotypes demonizing poor urban communities as dens of criminality. This was the case at the time Piñero was writing as it is in today’s highly charged atmosphere of visibility on social media. As for the Puerto Rico side of the transnational equation, then and now, corruption and brutality in the Puerto Rican police force have been rampant since its inception. The police force has also

been characteristically colonial in its *modus operandi*. The methods of repression utilized by “la uniformada” (the uniformed one), as they are known on the island, are well documented. And much like in the U.S., the correlation of brutality and the black population is seen throughout Puerto Rico, especially in the economically-disadvantaged sectors of the island.

For example, several of these abuses based on race and class are documented in a report published on June 2012 by the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) titled: “Island of Impunity: Puerto Rico’s Outlaw Police Force.” This report exposes the racial prejudice on the part of many police officers. Economically-disadvantaged Puerto Rican blacks and Dominican blacks are routinely harassed and targeted more frequently than non-blacks. The report reads:

PRPD officers assigned to tactical units regularly use excessive force while on routine patrols and checkpoints in low-income, black, and Dominican communities. During encounters with civilians in these communities, officers routinely use excessive force or resort to force unnecessarily and inappropriately, and they disproportionately target racial minorities and the poor. (4)

So Piñero’s poem of return gaze to the island is one of recognition; its colonial institutionalized violence against the poor is seen all the more clearly in double vision of transnational knowledge from the diaspora.

Piñero’s marginalization in U.S. culture and the “talk back” mode toward the island’s *criollo* intelligentsia that was created by the Puerto Rican transnational experience extends to the corporeal. Besides his writing, it is through his body that Piñero

expresses his frustration with these forces. Piñero's *self* struggles to find solid ground amidst the instability of Puerto Rican diaspora and island identity. This inner struggle pulls Piñero several ways and it is manifested through his self-destructive behavior with drugs and alcohol. And this "tug of war" is also expressed through his performances, in which he revels in the abjection he is subjected to from U.S. mainstream society and Puerto Rico's *criollo* intelligentsia.

For "The Lower East Side Rebel" his body is the only place where colonization cannot take place and the status quo can be defied. Piñero's considers his body the place where neither the influences of the Puerto Rican diaspora nor the Puerto Rican island can dominate. Instead, his body is completely free. Given that Piñero cannot dominate or bend social forces at his will, he utilizes his body as vessel for this action. Author Urayoán Noel covers this aspect of Piñero's identity in his 2014 book: *In Visible Movement: Nuyorican Poetry from the Sixties to Slam*. In a section titled: "Performing the Interzone" the author goes into Piñero's corporeal dilemma. Noel cites Piñero's Nuyorican Poets Café co-founder and fellow poet Miguel Algarín, and then offers his own acumen:

Algarín praises Piñero's willingness to confront 'an authority that indoctrinates and betrays at the same time,' yet from the interzone perspective, Piñero's performance appears bounded by his inability to do as Burroughs did and unwrite the external controls of the social order, and by his body's exclusion from both island Puerto Rican...and U.S. mainland territory. In Piñero's performances the ungovernability of the interzone is displaced onto the body itself; his performances seek to

imagine the body, as a site where national laws can only be weakly enforced, where illegal, unregulated encounters can flourish, breaking down social, psychic, and national barriers, as well as the boundaries that define self and other. (56)

Miguel Piñero's life was the focus of a 2001 film titled: *Piñero*, directed by León Ichaso and starring Benjamin Bratt as the Lower East Side poet. The film dramatizes many issues in the writer's life, but it is his trip to Puerto Rico in 1974 that interests me the most for purpose of this thesis. Since I am discussing his engagement with the problematic issue of Puerto Rican identity, this biopic is excellent for the discussion. It is important that I discuss this film because of Piñero's "talk back" toward island Puerto Ricans concerning Puerto Rican-ness and "authenticity" in identity. And due to the 119-year old colonialism still imposed upon the island. Piñero's engagement is not monolithic but diversified. His critique is aimed at the insular Puerto Rican *criollo* intelligentsia present during his apogee, the *cultural gatekeepers* of the of the mid 1970's.

This film functions as further proof that Piñero condemned the Puerto Rican *criollo* intelligentsia of this time-period (1974), their discriminatory stand concerning diaspora identity and unwillingness to acknowledge how colonialism is changing Puerto Rican culture—all perhaps even more compromised by the significant shift with the establishment of the Free Associated State in 1952. William Luis discusses this in his article: "Afro-Latino/a Literature and Identity:"

In some respects, that past was closed off to Nuyorican writers who were accused of not being 'real' Puerto Ricans, as portrayed in the film "Piñero" (2001), when the main character and his friends return to the

island and are treated as foreigners by their own compatriots. Piñero accuses them of ignoring their own identity and being blind to the U.S. control over the island. (39)

On the other hand, members of the Puerto Rican *criollo* intelligentsia of the 70s themselves and not only Spanish and U.S. colonial policies are targets of Piñero's critique. This is Piñero's way of attributing blame to all parties involved in the Puerto Rican cultural identity discourse for where it was at that time. Piñero pulls no punches concerning this because in his view, these islanders who should act as defenders and disseminators of Puerto Rican culture and not assign responsibility solely to Spain and the United States. Authors César J. Ayala and Rafael Bernabe cover this in their 2007 book: *Puerto Rico in the American Century: A History Since 1898*. The authors write:

Thus, although we feel U.S. colonialism has deeply shaped Puerto Rican life since 1898, we do not think all key events or turning points of Puerto Rican history can be attributed to U.S. colonial policies. We thus allot considerable space to the initiatives and the ideas, the contradictions and limitations, of Puerto Rican actors in this intricate drama. Similarly, while U.S. policies have been colonial, they have not been monolithic or static... They have also included flexible approaches, willing to tolerate Puerto Rican autonomy and even certain affirmations of Puerto Rican identity and culture. (10)

The film depicts Piñero's visit to Puerto Rico in 1974, when a group of members of the Puerto Rican *criollo* intelligentsia respond to his recital of "This Is Not The Place Where I Was Born." The scene exemplifies the differences concerning cultural identity

between Puerto Ricans living stateside and on the island. When Benjamin Bratt playing Piñero is finished reciting, the only acknowledgements emanate from the poet's fellow diaspora friends. Next, what ensues is a dialogue that covers these differences, and stirs up further debate about the transnational phenomena taking place in Puerto Rican diaspora identity. This exchange covers several important points concerning Puerto Rican identity as a whole, on and off the island.

First, Piñero informs the audience that the diaspora is not voluntary, but a response from poverty-stricken families to improve their lives and that of their children, or as Tato Laviera states in his famous poem "Nuyorican:" "pecado forzado" (53, 10). Second, the Piñero character stresses that his proud identification with the category, "nuyorican" is a product of a reality that cannot be ignored, and that this badge in no way diminishes his Puerto Rican-ness. Third, Bratt portrays the "bad boy genius," who expresses that he does not hide from who he is, and that islanders should not hide from who they are either to conform to U.S.-based cultural markers. Fourth, the film's Piñero states that his cultural hybridity, which encompasses New York City and Puerto Rico, is more authentic than any islander's Puerto Rican-ness. Finally, the "Lower East Side Rebel" points out that islanders are alienated from the colonial chokehold and reality that surrounds them. The exchange in the film happens about half way through the film and goes as follows:

Piñero: & the island is left unattended because the middle class /
bureaucratic Cuban has arrived spitting blue eyed justice / at brown
skinned boys in military khaki / compromise to survive is hairline length /
moustache trimmed face looking grim like a soldier / on furlough further

cannot exhibit contempt for what is/not cacique born this poem will
 receive a burning / stomach turning scorn nullified classified racist / from
 this pan am eastern first national chase manhattan / puerto rico...

Piñero: It's kind of quiet in here. Reminds me of the time I auditioned for
 the parole board at Sing Sing.

Auditorium man: Well, excuse me but I'm not sure that you know about
 our internal problems here. I mean, what is it that you feel for Puerto Rico
 besides an obvious affection and some kind of nostalgic notion of what we
 really are besides rum, and music, and dominoes on the sidewalk and God
 knows what else you need to feed this anger?

Piñero: You don't know?

Auditorium man: Listen, even if well intentioned, it is still out of place
 when it becomes a character that corrupts the language when you are
 calling yourselves "Nuyoricans," as if it was a race?

Piñero: Check this out. I was born here in the town of Gurabo, in 1948.
 Lived on the island till the age of seven. My family decided to move to
 New York – not a trip that I planned nor wanted. I am Puerto Rican. Now,
 I subnamed myself with a reality-given motherfucking slang of a title – in
 this case – "Nuyorican" – and wherever I go I am Puerto Rican and Rican
 and Nuyorican 24 hours a day. Now if you're embarrassed or afraid of
 what you are, don't blame me. It's not my fault. Blame that fucking
 Oxford shirt you're wearing from whatever prison you live in that forces
 you to wear it to fake something that you are not, to be something you are

not. See, cause even if I am half and half, any of those halves is more whole than all of you. I know who I am, and I know when it hurts and I'm still the same man. The same Puerto Rican 24 hours a day. But thank you. Thank you for your comments. Does anyone else have any comments, questions literary criticism? Don't be afraid. Speak up. This is a free country, I think. (2001)

The words "...wherever I go I am Puerto Rican and Rican and Nuyorican 24 hours a day" by Piñero accurately reflect the attitude of millions of diaspora Puerto Ricans every day in their own way. They are a statement of the power of Puerto Rican diaspora identity, and how it transcends geographical space and other markers. For example, Duany conducted a survey with second generation stateside Puerto Rican subjects concerning the identity issue for his book, *Blurred Borders*. Duany discusses the results:

Toward the end of the interview, I asked my informants: 'How would you define yourself, as Puerto Rican, Hispanic, Latino, or something else?' The overwhelming response – for fourteen out of sixteen interviewees – was simply Puerto Rican. Sandra felt '100 percent Puerto Rican,' ...For her, the island is 'the fatherland I love, even though it's far away When I moved here, I renewed my ties [to the island] and my identity has never changed.' She further explained: 'Many Puerto Ricans [Puerto Ricans] live with one leg in here and another in Puerto Rico. There's an underlying connection...' (123)

That “underlying connection” that Sandra describes is part of the transnational phenomenon that concerns this thesis. It is not only the nostalgic utopic notion of the island that drives people to define themselves as Puerto Rican, but also culture, pride, ancestry, and of course, family. The majority of these folks have family members they visit or keep in contact with through phone, email and even old-fashioned hand-written letters, and adding a high degree of fluidity and immediacy today, social media.

Piñero suggests that island Puerto Ricans at this historical period (1974) felt their national identity was being threatened by diaspora Puerto Ricans because of U.S. influence at the time, and due to their alleged assimilation into U.S. culture. This prompts islanders to hold on tight to simplistic constructions of identity. Alberto Sandoval discusses this in his article “Mira, que vienen los nuyoricans!: El temor de la otredad en la literatura nacionalista puertorriqueña:”

...estos hijos de inmigrantes activan los temores de aquellos isleños cuya identidad está amenazada por el mero hecho de que Puerto Rico es una colonia Americana. (308)

...these sons of immigrants activate the fears of those islanders whose identity is threatened by the mere fact that Puerto Rico is an American colony. (My translation)

And though Sandoval is referring to nationalist sectors and an important strand of the island’s literary canon, it nonetheless reflects attitudes worth interrogating. Moreover, some members of the island’s *criollo* intelligentsia have done an about face concerning the importance of the Puerto Rican diaspora in the Puerto Rican identity discourse. In addition, the works referred to by Sandoval in his analysis were published respectively in

1961, Pedro Juan Soto's *Ardiente Suelo, Fría Estación*, and in 1983, Ana Lydia Vega's controversial story "Pollito Chicken." Some of these attitudes toward the Puerto Rican diaspora have shifted in the last twenty years.

Puerto Rican island writer Ana Lydia Vega wrote about this in her 1994 work, "Saludo a los niuyorricans." Vega makes a clear statement on the indispensability of the Puerto Rican diaspora to the Puerto Rican identity discourse in general. The author acknowledges the large numbers of Puerto Ricans residing abroad and how language should not act as a sole marker of identity, even pointing out that the "Padre de la Patria," "Founding Father of the Puerto Rican homeland" Dr. Ramón Emeterio Betances resided in France and spoke French while addressing questions of Puerto Rican identity.

Vega's statements reveal that a sector of the Puerto Rican *criollo* intelligentsia recognizes that Puerto Rican identity in general is evolving and becoming something greater and broader than anyone could ever imagine. Vega alludes to the complexity of Puerto Rican identity and how it contains paradoxical elements within the collective subconscious. The author utilizes the popular Puerto Rican proverb "arroz con cuajo," which is used to describe a situation that is a mess, to show such complexity. Vega points out that eventually there will be a higher number of Puerto Ricans residing abroad than on the island itself, which became a reality in 2002. Vega addresses the characteristic "to and fro" between the island and mainland (or *vaivén*) as well to point out how many Puerto Ricans are not stable in one geographical location, but rather fluctuate between locations in search of a better quality of life and employment opportunities. She writes:

...he preferido darles una idea general del arroz con cuajo que reina en eso que llaman el subconsciente colectivo, acosado por tantas imágenes

contradictorias de la identidad puertorriqueña. Dentro de ese arroz con cuajo, la Conexión Niuyorrican es vital. En el siglo XXI, tendremos más boricuas viviendo allá que acá y mucho más, como las olas del mar Caribe, yendo y viniendo. ¿Cómo se definirá entonces esa obsesión inefable que hemos llamado puertorriqueñidad?...¿Cuántas veces nos preguntaremos, en español, en inglés, en *Spanglish* y hasta en francés, como lo hizo Betances, quiénes somos? (36)

I have preferred to give you a general idea of the mess that reigns in that which they call the collective subconscious, harassed by so many contradictory images of Puerto Rican identity. Within that mess, the Nuyorican connection is vital. In the XXI century we will have more Puerto Ricans residing over there than here, and much more, like the Caribbean sea's waves, coming and going. How then will we define that ineffable obsession we have named Puerto Rican-ness?...How many times will we ask ourselves, in Spanish, in English, in *Spanglish*, and even in French, like Betances did, who are we? (My translation)

Over 100 years of migration and the increasing “*vaivén*” of the past half century cannot be shoved aside as if it did not have an impact upon Puerto Rican identity and society in general. An identity filled with such complexities such as colonialism, race, gender, sexuality, class and migration cannot be looked at with a unilateral optic. No matter what essentialist image the Puerto Rican *criollo* intelligentsia wishes to portray before the world, such as the iconic *jíbaro*, there are realities they cannot control.

Moreover, there are roughly 5.14 million Puerto Ricans residing outside the island who will vehemently contest any simplistic and discriminatory construction of Puerto Rican identity, and who have a voice concerning their identity. Diaspora and island Puerto Rican identity must be looked at through a transnational lens, otherwise, it is lacking key areas of its constitution. Diaspora Puerto Ricans cannot be classified as the Other from an insular perspective, as occurred in Piñero's time, though recent decades have seen a marked shift. Geographical space is only one marker in such a great array. Alberto Sandoval discusses this as well:

De esta manera, el temor de la Otridad es el temor del ser nacionalista que teme perder su pseudoidentidad coherente, homogénea, y uniforme. Este temor nacionalista niega las realidades históricas de la migración masiva puertorriqueña a los estados Unidos desde los años cuarenta. (308)

In this manner, fear of the Otherness is the fear of the nationalist being who fears losing his coherent, homogenous, and uniform pseudoidentity.

This nationalist fear denies the historical realities of the Puerto Rican mass migration to the United States during since the 1940's. (My translation)

Although geography is important when discussing Puerto Rican identity, the *transgeographical* aspect of the diaspora cannot be ruled out. And though Puerto Rico is an archipelago in the Caribbean, millions of Puerto Ricans have made a "home away from home" in other geographical locations. These actions by these many people have created the transnational phenomena I discuss in this thesis. Puerto Rican identity is going through a flux that will force it to keep reinventing itself. Such continuous change is what Piñero reflects in his poetry. The 2000 book: *Adiós Borinquen Querida: The*

Puerto Rican Diaspora, its History and Contributions, edited by Edna Acosta Belén, et al. discusses this. Acosta Belén writes:

...it also befitting to say that there is ‘another Puerto Rico’ blossoming in the many deterritorialized communities located all over the United States. In these locations similar and different ways of being Puerto Rican are taking form, introducing a new dimension to the construction of identity and to the notion of what it means to be Puerto Rican. (2)

Ruling sectors of Puerto Rico’s *criollo* intelligentsia have presented a fictitious and incomplete picture of Puerto Rican culture and identity quite long enough. It is time we get down to the cold hard facts. Identity relies on markers of culture, not solely on markers of geographical space, birthplace, and language. Cultural elements such as music, art, food, religion, and other traditions are also markers of Puerto Rican identity. Author Arlene Dávila discusses the value of these elements as building blocks of Puerto Rican identity in her 1997 book: *Sponsored Identities: Cultural Politics in Puerto Rico*. The author provides the example of “festivales culturales,” cultural festivals, to state the importance of these markers to the construction of Puerto Rican identity. Dávila writes:

Most often, however, these groups promote elements of regional and popular culture and thereby serve as important venues for expressing aspects of Puerto Rican culture that go beyond what is recognized by official cultural policy. In the context of the festival, different aspects of contemporary life, including food, music, and contemporary folk arts were presented as expressions of Puerto Rican-ness. Similarly contributing to the festivals, such as by preparing cod fritters to sell or simply by

attending them, as referred to as *hacienda patria*, or helping to forge and strengthen the nation. (153)

The “in-betweenity” in which diaspora Puerto Ricans must navigate in is a kind of “limbo” that tortures their *self*. They experience racism, ostracization, and other adversities in the U.S. for defending and preserving their Puerto Rican culture, and not acquiescing to total U.S. acculturation. Ironically, and adding insult to injury, when they go back to Puerto Rico their Puerto Rican-ness is questioned and almost put on trial as if they were foreigners with no relation whatsoever to the island. Ferreira Veras mentions this dichotomy in her work while discussing the Nuyorican Poets’ Café founded circa 1973 by Miguel Algarín and Miguel Piñero. Ferreira Veras writes:

The members of the Café and its patrons were not quite Puerto Rican nor completely New Yorkers. They became a symbol of a culturally and linguistically hybrid experience of the Puerto Rican community living in New York, experiencing discrimination and marginality within U.S society. (29-30)

Piñero chose his poem, “A Lower East Side Poem” as his last will and testament. In this work, Piñero chooses New York City’s Lower East Side as his final resting place. Even though Puerto Rico was his birthplace and held in high regard for its people and culture, except the *criollo* intelligentsia, Piñero enacts the transnational phenomenon by declaring the “Lower East Side” his home. Piñero rejects Puerto Rico as final resting place because he is filled with indignation at what the island has become, a haven for rich tourists and business people where the poor continue to be exploited and marginalized.

The author also rejects the often-desired suburbs of Long Island also due to its lack of lower-class Puerto Ricans and superficiality. The Lower East Side of Manhattan is the only place he truly considered his home because it encompasses all the things that made up his identity in life, such as the lower-class Puerto Rican community, the drug and crime-infested streets, the prostitution and LGBTTT crowd, and the avant-garde creative literary scene of the Nuyorican Poets' Café. Piñero writes:

Here the hustlers & suckers meet / the faggots & freaks will all get / high /
 ... / There's no other place for me to be / there's no other place that I can
 see / there's no other town around that... / fancy cars & pimps' bars &
 juke saloons... / a thief, a junkie I've been / committed every known sin /
 Jews and Gentiles... Bums & Men... making sales... dope wheelers / &
 cocaine dealers... smoking pot / streets are hot & feed off those who bleed
 to death... I stand proud as you can see / pleased to be from the Lower
 East... / I am the philosopher of the criminal mind... / I don't wanna be
 buried in Puerto Rico / I don't wanna rest in Long Island cemetery / I
 wanna be near the stabbing shooting / gambling fighting & unnatural
 dying / & new birth crying / so please when I die... / don't take me far
 away / keep me near by / take my ashes and scatter them thru out / the
 Lower East Side. (1393, 15-17, 20-22, 25, 29, 30, 31, 34-36, 37; 1394, 45,
 46, 49, 57-66)

Authenticity is impossible to define in any culture, especially in Puerto Rican culture with all its complexities and nuances. Piñero is vehemently defending his Puerto Rican-ness while telling the island Puerto Rican *criollo* intelligentsia of the 1970s that

they are not who to unilaterally decide who is and who is not Puerto Rican, particularly when if they adhere to Spanish and U.S. cultural models and continue traditions such as racism and classism, and collude with a U.S. colonialism that has a chokehold upon the Puerto Rican culture they so much pretend to defend.

Piñero speaks for millions of stateside Puerto Ricans who have had their Puerto Rican identity questioned by a *criollo* intelligentsia that discriminates against a diaspora that was compelled by poverty and a lack of upward social mobility. The island *criollo* intelligentsia's *cultural nationalism* was then and is today out of touch with reality to a certain extent. Piñero infers that the island needs to decolonize from the U.S. and needs to face this identity conundrum to reduce racism and classism, especially in such a hybrid culture as that of Puerto Ricans. Piñero's work provides great insight into Puerto Rican ethnogenesis by debating such characteristically identity-defining Puerto Rican cultural traits.

The Spanish/English language dichotomy also needs to be addressed. The English language, regardless of the island's current or future political status, is here to stay. And the proliferation of it is due in great part to the back and forth movement of Puerto Ricans to New York City, Chicago, Orlando and other U.S. cities. English is also a reminder that Puerto Ricans must balance U.S. colonial forces with colonial forces inherited from Spain in their contemporary reality. Like all other authors covered in this thesis, Piñero discusses the "in-betweenity" experienced by the Puerto Rican population.

Piñero expresses his Puerto Rican-ness in English and Spanish in the poem, "No Hay Nada Nuevo en Nueva York," "There is Nothing New in New York." Very much like Tato Laviera in "Brava," used as the epigraph of this thesis. The author does this to

state he is Puerto Rican in either language, and that it does not take away from his identity as a Puerto Rican or New Yorker. The “bad boy genius” published the poem in English and Spanish, and in both versions the first line is in Spanish, further establishing his “Puertorriqueñidad” as well. Piñero conveys the situation of oppression that diaspora Puerto Ricans must deal with just for being Puerto Rican. Piñero writes:

no hay nada nuevo en nueva York / there is nothing new in New York / I
tell you in English / I tell you in Spanish / the same situation of
oppression. (68, 1-5)

The “bad boy genius” is also suggesting that Puerto Rico should reflect and conduct an introspection due to the great influence of a massive, and more than half a century-old diaspora. Piñero’s intention is to highlight that language, geographical space, birthplace and place of residence are not the sole markers of Puerto Rican identity, but it is culture that should hold a higher position in the Puerto Rican identity echelon. Piñero’s critique about racism on the island is one that merits discussion to this day. The racially-mixed constitution of the population does not eradicate racism, but only complicates it further.

The diaspora going on today is not only constituted by the economically disadvantaged but by professionals of the middle-class as well. Especially after hurricane María in 2017, which wreaked havoc, compelling many of these professionals to relocate to the U.S. in search for career opportunities. This calls for a new dialogue concerning what it means to be Puerto Rican, and the transnational phenomenon that this thesis elaborates must be in the center of Puerto Rican identity discourse.

Some of the negative attitudes by part of the *criollo* intelligentsia toward diaspora Puerto Ricans have diminished to some degree in the last decades, however, there is still much dialogue to look forward to. Although Piñero wrote about the issue of Puerto Rican identity in his poems during the 1970s, and we must now approach Puerto Rican identity with a different optic, the author's writings are relevant to the Puerto Rican identity discourse today, especially its cultural aspect. The transnational phenomena on Puerto Rican identity taking place in Puerto Rican society has changed much since its inception in 1898. The "bad boy genius" is one of the authors who tackled this complex issue in his writings by addressing it through culture. Piñero's stance is that diaspora Puerto Ricans affirm their Puerto Rican-ness through cultural and sociological traits. And that the ethnogenesis of the Puerto Rican nation also transcends the geopolitical arena.

Chapter 3

A Nuyorican's Outcry (Tato Laviera's "Pregón")

Tato Laviera. "'Taro' in English," is one of the most prolific and celebrated poets in Puerto Rican diaspora history. Born Jesús Abraham Laviera Sánchez in Santurce, Puerto Rico in 1951, as a young boy he moved with his family to The Lower East Side of New York at the age of 9. As a teenager he began studies at Cornell University and at the City University of New York's Brooklyn College afterward, but he did not complete his undergraduate studies in either institution. Instead, Laviera chose to dive into an education project called the University of the Streets. This project aided adults in earning a high school diploma and in some cases attending college. Although they both conveyed the topic of identity in their poetry, Laviera was not as edgy as Piñero concerning his personal life. If Piñero was the "bad boy genius," Laviera was the "self-less genius citizen" in service of his people.

Laviera also served the people as an administrator of the Association of Community Services. The ACS advances human services by offering members the information, support, training, education and connections they need to: inform the community about their services, and address pressing human services and issues.³ As a young man, Laviera directed the Hispanic Drama Workshop.⁴ During the 70s, Laviera taught at the Livingston College of Rutgers University. Laviera was deeply involved and active in the social issues of the community. This is where part of his socially-conscious

³ Information on the ACS provided by LinkedIn.
<https://www.linkedin.com/.../association-of-community-services->

⁴ Biographical information on Tato Laviera in this section was provided by the Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños, Hunter College, CUNY.
centroweb.hunter.cuny.edu/tato-laviera-bio

poetry derives from. His Puerto Rican ancestry and New York City upbringing account for the transnational characteristics within his writing. Laviera is also influenced by the Puerto Rican tradition of the poet as a, “pregonero,” towncrier, which is used to describe Puerto Rican popular music singers as well. I now provide the definition of, “*pregón*, ” or outcry, that best fits my argument.

Pregón. Outcry.⁵ 1 a: a loud cry: CLAMOR b: vehement protest. Laviera’s words are an outcry to express dissent against the status-quo concerning the construction of Puerto Rican identity.

Laviera’s *pregón* is socially conscious because it presents many Puerto Ricans—regardless of their socioeconomic background— as an equal part of the Puerto Rican what Lao characterizes as a “trans-local” nation. The transnational aspect of Laviera’s outcry is seen through the way island and diaspora Puerto Rican communities participate in Puerto Rican identity discourse. Laviera’s *pregón*, or “plea,” forces them to acknowledge each other. What I call, *pregón*, Wolfgang Binder calls “plea” in the introduction of Laviera’s 1985 work *AmeRícan*, which is the first I will discuss.

The poem “AmeRícan,” in the book of the same title, is an affirmation of Puerto Rican identity by poet Tato Laviera. When one pronounces the title of the poem, it sounds like “Am a Rican,” which is exactly what Laviera intended, to affirm his Puerto Rican-ness. However, this double entendre also means American, as in citizens that are an indelible part of the United States, which Puerto Ricans have been since 1917, thus beginning the transnational aspect of their identity. Laviera is suggesting that Puerto Ricans are a definitive characteristic of the American experience, “defining the new

⁵ Definition of outcry provided by the Merriam Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary.

America,” (95, 50) while remaining true to their island roots and culture. This creation by Laviera makes him another proponent of the same transnational phenomena that the other authors in this thesis are a part of.

Laviera begins by establishing the important contribution of the Puerto Rican nation to U.S. culture, and how Puerto Rican nuances have given shape to modern American life. Laviera writes: “we gave birth to a new generation... / AmeRícan, it includes everything/imaginable you-name-it-we-got-it / society” (94, 1, 6-8). Moreover, Laviera stresses the richness of Puerto Rican culture and its characteristic racial diversity, paying tribute to all who have contributed to the formation of the Puerto Rican nation: “We gave birth to a new generation, / AmeRícan salutes all folklores, / European, indian, black, spanish, / and anything else compatible.” (94, 9-12).

Duany’s theoretical approach in *Blurred Borders* is useful to comprehend Puerto Rican racial stratification, as expressed in the poem. Regarding Puerto Ricans in the diaspora, the mixture is seen as so diverse that they define themselves with terms such as “panethnic.” Duany writes: “Puerto Ricans in the United States may define themselves as a “racial,” ethnic, national, panethnic, or transnational group...” (111).

Laviera continues to affirm his Puerto Rican-ness by paying tribute to the great Puerto Rican ballad and bolero composer from Nagüabo, Puerto Rico, Pedro Flores. Laviera alludes to Flores’ song “Bajo un Palmar,” “Under the Palm Trees,” to drive his point across. The choosing of Flores as a symbol of Puerto Rican-ness is not trivial, given that Flores is a staple of Puerto Rican culture for famous songs such as “Obsesión,” “Obsession.” By alluding to such musical traditions, Laviera is stating that although he

resides stateside, the island is within him. Laviera writes: “AmeRícan, singing to composer Pedro Flores’ palm / trees high up in the universal sky!” (94, 13, 14).

The contributions of African ancestry and of African-descendant Puerto Ricans, such as Pedro Flores, are always present in Laviera’s work. The Amerindian, Spanish and Spanish-Gypsy or Roma ancestries are also celebrated by Laviera in this poem, which suggests that he attributes a starring role to all in Puerto Rican identity. The “*música jíbara*,” “rural native music,” is alluded to as another staple of Puerto Rican culture. These are all distinct ways in which Laviera affirms his Puerto Rican-ness, demonstrating his full knowledge of Puerto Rican culture and its idiosyncrasies. Laviera writes:

AmeRícan, sweet soft Spanish danzas gypsies / moving lyrics la Española
cascabelling / presence always singing at our side! / AmeRícan, beating
jíbaro modern troubadour / crying guitars romantic continental / bolero
love songs! (94, 15-20)

After affirming his Puerto Rican-ness, Laviera begins to reveal the transnational phenomenon that I address in this thesis. The *vaivén*, as Duany refers to it, is alluded to by Laviera to describe the constant movement of Puerto Ricans from the island to the U.S. and vice versa. Laviera writes: “AmeRícan, across forth and across back / back across and forth back / forth across and back and forth / our trips are walking bridges!” (94, 21-24).

Laviera goes on to point out the discrimination and marginalization that so many Puerto Ricans must endure when residing in the “entrails of the monster,” as Duany calls it in *Blurred Borders*, echoing José Martí. Laviera describes the intent of Puerto Ricans of the Muñoz era diaspora to adapt to U.S. culture without losing their island culture, but

they were rejected by mainstream U.S. society and even when managing to succeed often have been labeled as “affirmative action cases” on many occasions. Such was the case of the New York-born Puerto Rican Judge, Sonia Sotomayor, who in 2009 was selected by President Barack Obama to be appointed Supreme Court Justice. Sotomayor was deemed as an affirmative action case by the conservative and racist political commentator Pat Buchanan, and in her memoir also details how she had to confront such criticism while studying at Princeton University and Yale Law School. However, Laviera suggests that within that marginalization, Puerto Ricans have created their own identity to combat such ostracism, and as an antidote to those discriminatory and racist practices. Laviera writes:

It all dissolved into itself, the attempt / was truly made, the attempt was
truly / absorbed, digested we spit out / the poison, we spit out the malice, /
we stand affirmative in action, / to reproduce a broader answer to the /
marginality that gobbled us up abruptly! (94, 25-31)

Laviera states that Puerto Ricans must construct their identity on their own terms, without allowing anyone, whether it is a U.S. native or island Puerto Rican, to define who they are. Laviera affirms his Puerto Rican-ness within the United States once more by emphasizing the capitalized R and the accent on the í. The R is to express that he is referring directly to Rican from Puerto Rican. The accent on the í is an even a stronger statement for his Puerto Rican-ness because the accent is intrinsic to the Spanish language. Laviera is also suggesting that Puerto Ricans are as American as any other Americans. This is Laviera’s creative genius, the ability to use neologisms and language play to convey his message. In this case, the author suggests Puerto Ricans have both feet firmly planted on both sides of the fence concerning American culture and Puerto Rican

culture. Laviera writes: “defining myself my own way any way many / ways Am e Rícan, with the R and the / accent on the í!... / AmeRícan, integrating in new york and defining our / own destino, our own way of life” (95, 36-38, 48, 49).

Laviera states that although stateside Puerto Ricans may be physically far from the island, Puerto Rican music is deeply embedded in their identity. This poem reflects how the author writes of rejoicing in Afro-Puerto Rican music, Plena, while provoking admiration from other people in the City. This is also a way of suggesting that the beauty and influence of Puerto Rican music does not wither despite the distance or influence of another culture. Laviera writes: “AmeRícan, walking plena -rhythms in new york, / strutting beautifully alert, alive, / many turning eyes wondering, admiring!” (94, 32-34).

Laviera reveals the influence of transnationalism on Puerto Rican identity again when he speaks of the creation of “Spanglish” in the slums and street corners of The City, as New York City is often called. The usage of this speech method is an effect of Puerto Ricans being brought up while balancing two cultures and languages, the “in-betweenity.” Moreover, Laviera points out Puerto Ricans’ adaptability amidst all the different cultures that reside within the U.S., and in particular New York. Laviera writes:

AmeRícan, speaking new words in Spanglish tenements, / fast tongue
moving street corner “que corta” talk being invented at the insistence /of a
smile! / AmeRícan, abounding inside so many ethnic English / people, and
out of humanity, we blend / and mix all that is good! (95, 41-47)

Though it might seem ironic, being brought up in among multiple cultures provides ground for stateside Puerto Ricans to construct their own identity because it forces them to find their true self in a land far from Puerto Rico. And they are thrust into being part of

and contributing to the very same U.S. society that often marginalizes them and stagnates their chances at upward mobility. In her article, “The Playful ‘i’ in Tato Laviera’s Poetry: An ‘Arte Poética,’” Nancy Bird-Soto cites subaltern studies theorist Homi Bhabha to share light on this matter. Bird-Soto writes:

According to Homi Bhabha, ‘in-between spaces provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood---singular or communal---that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself.’ (2)

Laviera finalizes the poem by expressing his dissent with U.S. discrimination against Puerto Ricans and reveals why he cannot fully adhere to the plain term “American” in the U.S. context. Such discrimination does not enable Laviera to identify with the term so fully. Laviera’s verses reflect an air of hope, for he wishes he could identify with the term “American” because the U.S. is his second home, but it is impossible for him to do so completely under such oppressive circumstances the Puerto Rican communities in New York live. This shows that along with criticizing Puerto Rican island culture heavily as well, Laviera criticizes U.S. culture with the same ferocity, especially concerning acceptance. These issues reflect the complexity of a transnational culture such as that of the Puerto Rican diaspora. Laviera writes: “AmeRícan, yes, for now, for i love this, my second / land, and i dream to take the accent from / the altercation, and be proud to call / myself American, in the u.s. sense of the / word, AmeRícan, America!” (95, 56-60).

Laviera reveals how Puerto Rican diaspora identity is an amalgamation of island culture and U.S. urban influences that are not necessarily mutually exclusive, but rather

in negotiation with one and other. It is from this negotiation that Puerto Rican identity emanates. When also looked at from this optic, one gets a clear picture of the transnational phenomenon also happening within island Puerto Rican society. Insular culture impacts Puerto Ricans residing stateside as much as U.S. culture impacts those on the island. Laviera uses the lower case “i” to suggest Puerto Ricans’ individual and collective identity is negotiated from that “in-between” position that is part of their history. Bird-Soto discusses this in her work:

Lavieria’s culturalscape encompasses both the Puerto Rican insular and the migratory/bicultural experience. This is a *yo poético* that dialogues with culture on all levels, as a migrant who bridges the island with the American metropolis. It is an “i/yo” that mingles within city streets, homeland connections, and other literary texts that shape its own sense of being...Resistance thus becomes a means of survival and, in the sense of the “i/yo” play, a way to anchor a collective persona. (3)

Lavieria’s statement is that U.S. and Puerto Rican cultures must acquiesce to the modern changes thrust upon them by a modern and evolving world filled with nuances. Like Levins Morales and Piñero, Laviera defies archaic paradigms of identity and culture imposed by both sides and addresses that through his poetry. The poetic effect compels both societies to acknowledge the transnational phenomenon taking place. Bird-Soto discusses this: “He also exposes his cultural critique of traditional American and Puerto Rican societies while expanding the horizons of language use as a transnational/bicultural subject” (2).

Now I will discuss the poem of this chapter's title, "*Pregón*," or outcry, expressed throughout Laviera's verses. This work also addresses the "talk back" from Puerto Ricans residing stateside directly to those on the island. The importance of this often-cited powerful poem to Puerto Rican identity discourse cannot be overstated. "Nuyorican" is perhaps the work in which Laviera most deeply expresses his feelings toward Puerto Rico and toward the *criollo* intelligentsia who historically discriminated against diaspora Puerto Ricans.

Laviera commences by vehemently affirming his Puerto Rican identity by standing up for Puerto Rico's honor. The author suggests that his identity should not be questioned when he is defending the island. And he should not be put through such suffering, especially from the collective he is advocating for. The author is stating that this rejection from some islanders provokes feelings of anger in those Puerto Ricans in the diaspora because those who migrated to the U.S. did so out of necessity, and that stateside Puerto Ricans are sons and daughters of Puerto Rico as much as islanders.

Laviera writes:

yo peleo por ti, puerto rico, ¿sabes? / yo me defiando por tu nombre,
 ¿sabes? / entro a tu isla, me siento extraño, ¿sabes? / entro a buscar más y
 más, ¿sabes? / pero tú con tus calumnias, / me niegas tu sonrisa / me siento
 mal, agallao / yo soy tu hijo / de una migración, / pecado forzado... (53, 1-
 10)

Duany sheds light in *Blurred Borders* on how stateside Puerto Ricans, specifically middle-class Puerto Ricans in Orlando who he interviewed in as a case study, feel much the same way as Laviera concerning their identity politics. Instead of labeling themselves

with terms such as Orlando-Ricans, they call themselves as Puerto Rican. This shows that they will not allow any discrimination or misconceived notions of Puerto Rican

“authenticity” question or define their Puerto Rican-ness. Duany writes:

Middle-class Puerto Ricans in Orlando resisted being assimilated into mainstream U.S. culture as well as being bracketed as a racial minority with other people of Latin American ancestry. They insisted on calling themselves Puerto Rican, rather than Nuyorican, Puerto Rican American, or any other compound expression. (130)

Much like Piñero, Laviera is pointing out the fact that the diaspora was triggered by poverty and a desire for upward mobility that was very limited on the island and not just by any trivial desire. Laviera also has no compunction about expressing his thoughts concerning Puerto Rican identity matters. This is also Laviera’s way of criticizing Puerto Rico’s characteristic and ever-present discrimination against the economically-disadvantaged on the part of the more affluent on the island. Even today misinformed people utter that those who receive government-funded assistance programs, such as food stamps and/or housing to not be homeless live better than those in the middle class. This belief stems from a long history of hatred and exclusion toward the poor. Laviera’s narrative reflects a socioeconomic situation in which the island wanted to rid itself of the poor. Laviera defends those born stateside by speaking in the first person in this poem, including himself despite being born in Puerto Rico. Laviera states: “me mandaste a nacer nativo en otras tierras, / por qué, porque éramos pobres, ¿verdad? / porque tú querías vaciarte de tu gente pobre ...” (53, 11-13).

Laviera goes into the rejection diaspora Puerto Ricans receive by some island Puerto Ricans when visiting the island. Here Laviera taps into language tensions. The author suggests that while diaspora Puerto Ricans visit their homeland, they are looked upon with contempt due to their speech despite the love they feel for the island. This is a consequence of the *transnational space* in which diaspora Puerto Ricans must navigate. Their speech has been heavily influenced by English due to the necessity of the language to survive in the U.S. work force and social arena. Of course, the upper classes in Puerto Rico are also often fluent in English, but that goes unquestioned.

Certain islanders feel that diaspora Puerto Ricans' speech has been contaminated with English, which in turn makes them less Puerto Rican somehow. However, Laviera sharply rebuts that nonsense by pointing out islanders' hypocrisy. Laviera places a mirror in front of the island Puerto Rican, including its accepted discourses from the *criollo* intelligentsia, that has the audacity to question stateside Puerto Ricans' identity and loyalty to the island's culture when in reality they engage in U.S. culture as much or even more than their diaspora counterparts. Laviera writes: "ahora regreso, con un corazón boricua, y tú / me desprecias, me miras mal, me atacas mi hablar, / mientras comes mcdonalds en discotecas americanas..." (53, 14-16).

In the above passage, Laviera also suggests that attacking one's language is a direct assault on a person's identity, and since this study concerns identity, I must now provide a theoretical analysis by Nancy Bird-Soto in which she cites Chicana writer Gloria Anzaldúa to make this point. Bird-Soto is suggesting that "idiolect" is an integral part of any individual's identity. When such individuals' idiolect strays from the collective "status quo" way of speaking, these persons are deemed as "inauthentic" by

language purists. Such actions intend to undermine diaspora Puerto Ricans and exclude them from the Puerto Rican identity discourse altogether. Bird-Soto writes:

Language is generally considered a fundamental element in the expression and understanding of identity. It is no coincidence that Gloria Anzaldúa asserts that denigrating someone's way of expression demeans the person in question. In Anzaldúa's own words, 'if you really want to hurt me, talk badly about my language. Ethnic identity is twin skin to linguistic identity--I am my language.' (6)

Language is one of the primary markers of identity in any society. Laviera attacks the negative stereotype that diaspora Puerto Ricans cannot speak "correct" Spanish. To combat this fallacy, Laviera writes "Nuyorican" entirely in standard or "correct" Spanish instead of the more creative "Spanglish." False notions of stateside Puerto Ricans' Puerto Rican-ness must be destroyed, for many have developed the ability to speak in both creative "spanglish" and standard Spanish. Diaspora Puerto Ricans' use of creative "spanglish" should not be used to attack their sense of collective Puerto Rican identity. In addition, it should be deemed as a plus that shows the resiliency of a people who have had to adapt to survive in an English-speaking country while still maintaining their "puertorriqueñidad." This is addressed by UPR Professor and director of this thesis, Maritza Stanchich in her 2014 article: "Insular Interventions: Tato Laviera's Dialogic Dialogue with Luis Muñoz Marín and José Luis González." Stanchich writes: "...Laviera's later often cited poem "Nuyorican" is strategically written in only Spanish to challenge island misconceptions of the diaspora..." (145).

In the poem “Asimilao” Laviera continues his critique of Puerto Rico’s *criollo* intelligentsia and its stubborn refusal to accept that Puerto Ricans’ identity has evolved to become much broader. Laviera stresses that assimilation has not overwhelmed Puerto Ricans in the diaspora. The first example of this is Laviera questioning the use of the word “assimilated” and changing it to the popular Puerto Rican Spanish African-influenced word “asimilao,” which substitutes the standard Spanish “asimilado.” Laviera writes: “assimilated? qué assimilated, / brother, yo soy asimilao” (54, 1, 2).

Here Laviera also includes the complex issue of race, and sharply criticizes the island’s racism against Puerto Ricans with African ancestry. Moreover, Laviera emphasizes that Puerto Rican blacks have carried the banner of Puerto Rican identity, so much so that the Africa-influenced way of pronouncing the word stuck, and that even the non-black Puerto Ricans have acquiesced to such pronunciation. This is Laviera’s way of acknowledging the strength of African ancestry in Puerto Rican identity and culture. Laviera adheres to “asimilao” instead of “asimilado” to make the point that diaspora Puerto Ricans are as “genuine” as any Puerto Rican and this assimilation cannot absorb or erase Puerto Rican culture. There is a paradoxical element in Laviera’s writing. He concedes that some stateside Puerto Ricans are being somewhat assimilated because of their closeness to the U.S. American experience. However, Laviera uses the colloquial “ao” at the end of the “Asimilao” to firmly state that the diaspora Puerto Ricans’ Puerto Rican-ness and African ancestry are ever present. Laviera writes: “así mi la o sí es verdad / tengo un lado asimilao” (54, 3, 4).

In “Three-way Warning Poem,” Laviera reaffirms the Puerto Rican-ness of diaspora Puerto Ricans while making a statement about José Luis González’s “En el

fondo del caño hay un negrito.” The poem consists of two sections. One is titled, “sin nombre,” and the other, “sin nombre the first.” In the first one, Laviera suggests that at the depths of the diaspora Puerto Rican’s character resides a Puerto Rican. The poem is also written in Spanish, emphasizing his domain of the island’s main language to signify stateside Puerto Ricans’ “authenticity.” Laviera writes: “en / el / fondo / del / un / yo / ri / can / hay / un / pu / er / to / rri / que / ño” (49, 1-17).

In the second part, Laviera goes further and suggests that not only are diaspora Puerto Ricans just as Puerto Rican as islanders, but also are willing to include islanders in their identitarian environment, unlike the island *criollo* intelligentsia that excludes stateside Puerto Ricans and classifies them as *The Other*. Laviera writes: “ste / reo / type / pu / er / to / rri / que / ño / sí / yes / we / can / cut / you / all / in” (49, 18-34). By adding the Spanish and English words for yes, Laviera is affirming Puerto Rican identity while criticizing the discrimination against diaspora Puerto Ricans by the island’s *criollo* intelligentsia. Stanchich discusses this second part of the poem in her article: “...while part two...critiques stereotypes of the diaspora and advocates, at the moment of the affirming “sí / yes” to colloquial English, for inclusion to Puerto Rico’s discursive national imaginary” (150).

The poem “Brava” functions as epigraph to this thesis and the last poem I will discuss from Laviera’s book, *AmeRícan*. Laviera uses the female voice to vehemently affirm the “authenticity” of Puerto Rican diaspora identity. The author chose the female voice to show Puerto Rican women’s characteristic strength of character, especially concerning this issue. As I suggested in chapter one, women are key disseminators of Puerto Rican identity. The poem is written in an aggressive and proud tone to dispel any

misconception that stateside Puerto Ricans are not “genuine” Puerto Ricans. Here, we appreciate the “talk back” from abroad to the island once more. This is Laviera’s way of stating that despite being raised within the transnational phenomena I discuss in this work, diaspora Puerto Ricans will defend their Puerto Rican-ness and battle any wrong portrayal of such identity by anyone. Laviera writes:

i am puertorriqueña in / english and there’s nothing / you can do but to
 accept / it como yo soy sabrosa / proud ask any streetcorner / where pride
 is what you defend / go ahead, ask me, on any street- / corner that i am not
 puertorriqueña, / come dímelo aquí en mi cara / offend me, atrévete, a
 menos / que tú no quieras que yo te meta / un tremendo bochinche de
 soplamoco / pezcozá that’s gonna hurt you / in either language, así que /
 no me jodas mucho... (63, 20-34)

In his 1979 book of poetry, *La Carreta Made a U-Turn*, Laviera began espousing his opposition to one-sided image of Puerto Rican diaspora identity endorsed by Puerto Rico’s *criollo* intelligentsia. In this collection, the poet suggested that New York City was indeed a viable destination for Puerto Ricans who sought to improve their working and living conditions, providing an antithesis to René Marqués’s *La Carreta*.

Language is an important marker of Puerto Rican identity. It is the poem “my graduation speech” that best reflects Laviera’s stance concerning language. The poem is written in a sarcastic tone. It is believed that the language in which people think is their native tongue. Laviera makes this point clear in the first lines of the poem to suggest that diaspora Puerto Ricans are as Puerto Rican as any Spanish speakers from the island, and that English compliments Spanish. Laviera writes: “I think in Spanish / I write in

English” (7, 1, 2). With the employment of both languages Laviera is also providing a ground in which Puerto Ricans in general can forge an identity because it is forcing them to face the transnational reality that produces so much of their experience. As Bird-Soto (2013) writes:

His use of language and the way he chooses to represent his role as poet confirm the collective dimension of his poetry...Playing with words as well as with traditional expectations of the use of English or Spanish, or both, Laviera revolutionizes poetry and charges it with a sense of social and political responsibility...And what that ‘i’ says is that language and poetry not only facilitate the validation of the experiences of ‘his people,’ but also create a space of contestation and reformulation of sociocultural, linguistic, and personal identities. (10)

Laviera then criticizes the racism in Puerto Rico that has been swept under the rug for many generations. Since his hair is coarse, he doubts he will be well-received in towns with a concentration of the bourgeoisie. Therefore, he opts for not returning to the island., at least at the time, as Laviera wrote these words in 1979. Laviera writes: “I want to go back to puerto rico, / but I wonder if my kink could live / in ponce, mayagüez and carolina” (7, 3-5). Today in 2018 there would be a sense of irony concerning Carolina because the town of Carolina is now one with a high concentration of Puerto Ricans with African ancestry. This passage is also reminiscent of the book’s title. Puerto Rican migrants might find it difficult to go back to the island because the sociocultural landscape has changed and there is little opportunity of upward mobility. Therefore, he chooses to make a “U-Turn” and return to New York City.

The language in-betweenity experienced by diaspora Puerto Ricans is very well represented here. Laviera speaks of the amalgamation of Spanish and English, and how he is the same Puerto Rican in either language, although it may sound different. Again from “my graduation speech,” Laviera writes: “escribo en Spanglish... / tato in spanish/ ‘taro’ in English” (7, 7, 10, 11). Moreover, Laviera is suggesting that diaspora Puerto Ricans can communicate effectively in “spanglish” because fluctuating between two languages is not an impediment, but a quality that shows a high level of intellectual competence. Theorists Juan Flores, John Attinasi and Pedro Pedraza Jr. suggest this while discussing this poem in their article: “La Carreta Made a U-Turn: Puerto Rican Language and Culture in the United States” (1981):

The entire poem, in fact, rather than degenerating into sheer nonsense or incoherent rambling is a carefully structured argument that demonstrates a wealth of expressive potential and rigorous logical ability... Thus ‘¡ay, virgen, yo no sé hablar!’ at the close must be understood ironically: the reader is by now aware that the speaker knows what he is saying and can say what he thinks, in both languages and in a wide array combinations of the two. (208)

In addition, choosing one tongue over the other is out of the question for Laviera because it would only serve as a stifling agent against expression. Flores, et al. refer to Laviera’s sarcasm and irony as “self-mocking.” Laviera’s sarcasm and irony make a strong case for diaspora Puerto Ricans’ characteristic duality in language. Flores, Attinasi and Pedraza Jr. write:

Prefacing his self-mocking ‘speech’ with the sucking paradox, ‘I think in spanish i write in english,’ the speaker then offers possible ‘resolutions’ to the conflict---return to Puerto Rico or deliberate gravitation toward one or the other language. Each is rejected, the second not only because his voice does not fit neatly into exclusive idiom, but also because such a choice would only limit his linguistic virtuosity. (208)

Laviera defies simplistic notions of language and identity. The author not only attacks past Puerto Rican *criollo* intelligentsia’s hispanophile construction of Puerto Rican identity and their exclusion of diaspora Puerto Ricans, but also their stance concerning language. The author is criticizing the then *criollo* intelligentsia’s hesitance to acknowledge an ever-evolving Puerto Rican identity that is constantly undergoing changes due to an ongoing transnational phenomenon. Flores, Attinasi and Pedraza Jr. write:

...his intention is to illustrate and assess the intricate language contact experienced by Puerto Ricans in New York, and to combat the kind of facile and defeatist conclusions that stem so often from a static, purist understanding of linguistic change. (208)

The poem “nideaquíndeallá from Laviera’s 2008 book *Mixturao and Other Poems* is the last work discussed in this thesis. In its lines Laviera reflects over the in-betweenity in which stateside Puerto Ricans must navigate and all it encompasses. The *vaivén*, as Duany describes it, and the transnational phenomena I discuss in this study are explicitly present in this work. Like Levins Morales and Piñero in the prior chapters, Laviera espouses that Puerto Ricans abroad are in a kind of “limbo” concerning their

identity because such identity is amidst complex evolution and non-stop growth. Laviera writes: “backnforth here soy de aquí / ...yet-to-be defined / evolucionario hybrid” (4, 2, 8, 9).

Here Laviera addresses the ambiguity of the Puerto Rican colonial status as a contributor to the in-betweenity experienced by Puerto Ricans on the island and abroad. Laviera also affirms his Puerto Rican-ness by using his characteristic and symbolic “Spanglish” to do so, implying Puerto Ricans in the diaspora are as “genuine” as their Caribbean counterparts. Laviera writes: “in my yet-to-be defined / birthplace homeland / dual citizenships accusations / indignations differentiations” (5, 36-39).

In the next passage, Laviera describes the amalgamation that encompasses Puerto Rican identity, being that Puerto Ricans are among only three groups that are Caribbean, Latin and U.S. Americans at the same time. Such complexity contributes to the Puerto Rican identity conundrum and sheds light on Puerto Rico’s geo-political status. Laviera writes: “original by parent’s birth / caribbean by folklore / hispanic by culture / nuyorican by geographic / migrational displacements / latino by mutual promotion” (5, 56-61).

Laviera ends the poem by discussing the discrimination endured by Puerto Ricans because their cultural heterogeneity goes on to this day. Historically, Nuyoricans and Chicanos have both suffered discrimination because of the Spanish language in the U.S. For example: in recent times it is a custom to insert the letter o at the end of an English word to mimic Spanish, like “friendo” or “no problemo,” when it is really an offensive trend that mocks the Spanish language. Laviera points to the same thing happening with Spanish names, “malnombrádonos.” Puerto Ricans abroad must also struggle against perception of total assimilation and acculturation, which is why they rely on a cultural in-

betweenity to combat at a moment's notice U.S. Americanization and preserve their Puerto Rican-ness. Laviera writes:

Siempre malnombrándonos / We fight not to be brainwashed... /
nideaquíndeallá / impossible to blend / impossible to categorize /
impossible to analyze / impossible to synthesize / our guerrilla cultural
camouflage. (6, 80, 81, 85-90)

Conclusion

Puerto Rico, 2019. Five hundred and twenty-six years of colonialism under the U.S. and Spain. A *transnational* phenomenon was born and has been evolving to this day. When I began to work on this thesis, I set out to show how certain Puerto Rican diaspora writers reveal how this phenomenon influences Puerto Rican identity. Authors Aurora Levins Morales, Rosario Morales, María “Mariposa” Fernández, Miguel Piñero, and Tato Laviera have been instrumental in achieving this feat. Theorist Jorge Duany and others also contributed greatly to this endeavor.

In the first chapter I discuss how Puerto Rican women disseminate transnationalism, keeping Puerto Rican culture alive abroad and on the island. Women are not only a pillar of the transnational Puerto Rican family structure, but also protagonists of the work force, economy, and are a majority in the electoral process. Puerto Rican women have undertaken great tasks that span from Governor of the island (Sila María Calderón) to U.S. Supreme Court Justice (Sonia Sotomayor), to Congresswoman Nydia Velázquez and others. Puerto Ricans in the diaspora have multiple cultural festivals to celebrate Puerto Rican cultural pride, such as the Puerto Rican day parade. Women have been involved in and led these activities since their inception.

Aurora Levins Morales wrote about how stateside Puerto Ricans must construct their identity over an unstable base, “...with no land feeling at all solid under her feet,” (984) to point out the cultural and political “in-betweenity” they experience. The classic saying: New York City is the “second capital of Puerto Rico” is present in Levins Morales’ writing, “*Boricuas. As Boricuas come from the isle of Manhattan,*” to prove that Puerto Ricans in the diaspora are as “authentic” as any insular Puerto Rican. Levins

Morales and Rosario Morales refer directly to the hybridity that has forged this *transnational* phenomenon in “Ending Poem,” making them disseminators of transnationalism as well.

Puerto Rican women’s engagement in contemporary important issues ranging from social unrest, domestic violence, to political upheaval is seen every day on the island and abroad. These women’s involvement in these issues is vital in keeping Puerto Rican culture alive, combating discrimination based on gender, such as equal pay for equal work, and in advancing a healthier transnational society for all Puerto Ricans.

María Teresa “Mariposa” Fernández’s “Ode to the Diasporican” addresses Puerto Rican identity through the issue of “authenticity.” “Mariposa’s” transnational experience makes her a great spokesperson for the “talk back” from the diaspora to the island. Since Puerto Rican identity has evolved and grown so much in part due to the *vaivén*, it is impossible to refer to geographical location, language, birthplace and place of residence as the sole markers of identity in contemporary Puerto Rican society. Culture plays a big role in Puerto Rican identity discourse. Important cultural elements such as traditions, music, food, religion and customs are not to be discarded and must be included in this discourse, whether they be practiced by Puerto Ricans on the island or stateside. The “in-betweenity” in which diaspora Puerto Ricans live does not make them less deserving—“that being Boricua / is a state of mind / a state of heart / a state of soul” as “Mariposa” advocates for diaspora Puerto Rican identity inclusion (2424, 24-27).

“Mariposa” also alludes to her mixed racial ancestry to suggest that her Puerto Rican-ness should not be questioned. Fernández is stating that Puerto Rican heterogeneity is explicitly evident in her physical features, and that like her, many other Puerto Ricans

in the diaspora possess such appearances. It is through race, culture, and creating “her own” Puerto Rico in New York City that she affirms her Puerto Rican identity. It is also her way of addressing the transnationalism within all stateside Puerto Ricans.

Miguel Piñero’s work takes a direct no-nonsense approach to dealing with Puerto Rican identity issues. The “Bad Boy Genius” utilizes poetry to take on the Puerto Rican *criollo* intelligentsia of his day. Piñero, like “Mariposa,” is an outspoken opponent of the individuals on the island that pretend to be the sole authority to define what and who is “genuinely” Puerto Rican. Piñero’s “talk back” goes a step further than “Mariposa’s” and not only affirms his Puerto Rican identity in the diaspora, but also attacks the island Puerto Ricans among the *criollo* intelligentsia who are alienated from certain colonial realities surrounding them, and who have “sold out” to Spanish and U.S. American sociocultural and racial constructions that stifle and undermine Puerto Rican culture.

Although Piñero resided in New York City since age 8, he always affirmed how Puerto Rican he was, “i tasted mango many years before the skin of the fruit / ever reached my teeth,” (1394, 7, 8) while there. Piñero’s poetry, specifically his poem “This Is Not the Place Where I Was Born,” is important to read when discussing transnationalism because it suggests the Puerto Rican nation is undergoing a change concerning identity. Although the work was written in 1974, many of its main ideas resonate to this day, such as what really constitutes Puerto Rican-ness.

Tato Laviera’s contribution to Puerto Rican identity and transnationalism is enormous. “Taro in English,” the poet has affirmed Puerto Rican transnational identity from New York City through his creative use of codeswitching, and “Spanglish” to make the point that Puerto Ricans in the diaspora cannot be deemed as The Other. Like all

authors discussed in this thesis, Laviera is vehemently defending his right to call himself a Puerto Rican as much as any islander. His poems, especially “Nuyorican,” are powerful statements in favor of the *transnational* influences I here discuss.

Lavieria defends the agency of Puerto Ricans from the diaspora to identify as Puerto Ricans with the same aggressiveness as Piñero. The author feels infuriated by the treatment received from some insular Puerto Ricans who deem themselves more “genuine” than their diaspora brethren while on the island, “me desprecias, me miras mal, me atacas mi hablar / mientras comes mcdonalds en discotecas americanas” (53, 16, 17). Laviera wrote these words in 1985, unfortunately, this attitude is still seen among some island Puerto Ricans, though there has also been a shift in attitudes, particularly among youth and purveyors of youth popular music culture, such as reggaeton and trap. It also has shifted to some extent in the last years due to an ever-increasing diaspora, which now includes Orlando, Florida, and other places. *Pregón*, meaning “outcry,” or “plea” is the term which best conveys Laviera’s message concerning Puerto Rican identity because it describes how he addresses the relationship between Puerto Ricans in the diaspora and the island. It is these displaced boricuas saying “soy tu hijo” to the 100x35 Caribbean archipelago— a way of stateside Puerto Ricans expressing that they love Puerto Rico as much as their island-residing counterparts.

All authors discussed in this thesis defy Puerto Rican *cultural nationalism* through their respective poetic voices. They all affirm their sense of “puertorriqueñidad,” Puerto Rican-ness, and reveal *transnational* influences on Puerto Rican identity that are explicitly seen throughout the island and the U.S. communities. Whether it is referred to as a “nation on the move” by Duany, or a “translocal nation” by Laó Montes, Puerto Rico

has become a nation whose citizens strongly cling to their culture, regardless if they reside stable on the island or they are engaged in the *vaivén*. Diaspora Puerto Ricans have the same affection for the island's culture as island Puerto Ricans who have never left.

The way in which Puerto Rican-ness and love for the island transcends geographical space has been documented throughout the years in several mediums of pop culture, especially music. Puerto Rican composer Noel Estrada's classic 1943 song "En Mi Viejo San Juan" is a key example. Estrada expressed that it was his brother, while serving in the U.S. armed forces in Panamá, who asked him to compose a song to calm the nostalgia he and his friends felt for the island, "Un día mirando el mar desde un balcón en el Viejo San Juan, Estrada convirtió en canción los sentimientos de los puertorriqueños ausentes."⁶ "One day, while looking out to sea from a balcony in Old San Juan, Estrada turned absent Puerto Ricans' feelings into song" (My translation). The song was written for Puerto Ricans in the diaspora to express their "sentido patrio," or patriotic feeling.

A contemporary example of Puerto Rican identity transcending geographical space comes from former main vocalist of the world-renowned Salsa band "El Gran Combo de Puerto Rico," Charlie Aponte. In his 2017 album, *Pa' mi Gente*, Aponte recorded a song titled: "Aires Navideños," or Christmas Ambiance, in the rhythm of Plena. In this song Aponte sings: "Porque la patria borinqueña es una sola, y está presente donde algún boricua está," or: "Because the Puerto Rican nation is only one, and it is present wherever a Puerto Rican finds himself" (2017), (My translation). Diaspora Puerto Ricans have been on the forefront of Puerto Rican culture abroad. For example: salsa

⁶ Biographical information on Noel Estrada provided by the Fundación Nacional para la Cultura Popular, 2014.

music, whose greatest musicians and singers in history have mostly been Puerto Rican, and which has been indebted to African influences, developed dramatically in New York City and from there became known world-wide.

Stateside Puerto Ricans have always felt closer to the Salsa music genre due to their indomitable sense of Puerto Rican-ness. They feel that the eclectic rhythm of Puerto Rican music is an extension of the island they left behind, which then is further cultivated in the diaspora, as intimated by the book *From Bomba to Hip Hop* (2000), by the pioneer diaspora critic Juan Flores.

During the 1980s there was a musical rivalry in Puerto Rico between Salsa fans and Rock n Roll fans. The first were mostly from the working-class and the latter were mostly from the middle and affluent class. Moreover, we must ask ourselves, if insular Puerto Ricans are allegedly the representatives of Puerto Rican-ness, why is it that they are more attracted to North American rhythms like Rock n Roll and diaspora Puerto Ricans are often more attracted to Caribbean rhythms like Salsa? People of all nationalities can listen to and enjoy any musical genre, but like food, music is an important marker of the identity of all peoples. In writing about the Chicago diaspora, also forged during the Muñoz era, Ana Y. Ramos Zayas (2004) writes:

The relationship to American culture is indicative and ironic, since class and racialization processes actually render the island elite---bearers of authenticity---more assimilated than U.S. Puerto Ricans because of their nexus to the U.S. middle class. As one Chicago islander claimed, ‘when I was in high school in Puerto Rico, we’d listen to American music, never salsa. We’d listen to rock, pop, you know. But Puerto Ricans here don’t

understand that'...An upwardly mobile Puerto Rican from Chicago who happened to be a college classmate of mine still remembers how at the ivy league school we attended it was mainland Puerto Ricans who used to organize salsa parties...Puerto Ricans 'from the island' generally avoided them in favor of parties with rock or Motown music. (42)

Arlene Dávila (1997) reinforces this statement by Ramos Zayas (2004) in her book when speaking of Afro-Caribbean music and Rock n Roll during the 1960s and 1980's. Dávila writes:

While these social are not self-contained, *cocolos* are perceived as darker, lower-class Puerto Ricans in contrast to *rockeros*, which refers to whiter, middle- and upper-class Puerto Ricans. (155)

Music is in no way trivial to the identity of any culture in the world, especially to Puerto Ricans. Arlene Dávila (1997) states this fact while discussing the festival tradition on the island:

In order to understand this issue, it is important to note that music has been an important element around which identities are constructed in Puerto Rican society. (155)

Indeed, key to the ethnogenesis of the Puerto Rican diaspora in New York is marginalization, discrimination, racism, or poverty diaspora Puerto Ricans have had to deal with in the United States. They have suffered all kinds of discrimination abroad for being Puerto Rican and yet, the *criollo* intelligentsia of Piñero's era who did not consider them "authentic" Puerto Ricans knew nothing of facing such harsh treatment for being Puerto Rican.

In addition, the fact that Salsa music emerged in New York City with such a large participation of Puerto Rican –island and diaspora– musicians and singers is a clear example of the transnational phenomenon that has been taking place in Puerto Rican identity for many decades. I mention island and diaspora musicians and singers because although there were performers like Eddie Palmieri and Willie Colón, who were born and raised in New York City of Puerto Rican parents, there were also performers such as Ismael Rivera and Marvin Santiago – who were born and raised in Puerto Rico but traveled frequently to New York City to take part in the formation of this extraordinary rhythm and musical movement.

Then there is the one and only Héctor Lavoe, who exemplifies the transnational phenomena these Puerto Rican diaspora writers reveal. The “in-betweenity” covered by the authors in this thesis is manifested through Lavoe because he navigates between the island and diaspora with his music. Piñero’s “in-betweenity” is manifested through the corporeal and his writings. Both Piñero and Lavoe were as Levins Morales put it in “Puertoricanness:” “...with no land feeling at all solid under her feet” (984). These men’s lives were tormented by drug abuse and tragedy, in part a product of living in such “limbo.”

“El Cantante de los Cantantes,” “The Singer of Singers,” as Lavoe was baptized by Salsa dancer Aníbal Vázquez, was born in Ponce, Puerto Rico, but migrated to New York City at the age of seventeen. Although he resided in the City for the rest of his life, he always maintained a strong affinity for the island, so much so, sometimes he was called “El jibarito” because his nasal singing style combined a rural Puerto Rican flavor with the urban New York City Salsa scene, as demonstrated in the classic 1971 album

“Asalto Navideño” with Willie Colón. Salsa music serves as a protector of Puerto Rican culture because it embodies the characteristic ethnic amalgamation created by the transnational phenomenon being forged on the island since 1898. Salsa also embodies the paradoxical and evolving nature of Puerto Rican identity. Stephanie Álvarez Martínez (2006) covers this:

Therefore, Salsa and Afro-Latino music, transcultural manifestations, come to represent resistance to acculturation because its African root along with all its other cultural roots --- the European, the American, the Indigenous --- are intact, yet different. The result, then, is an entirely new cultural phenomenon. (39)

“Asalto Navideño” mixes the street-like style that characterized the Héctor Lavoe and Willie Colón duo with the rural native Puerto Rican music, or *música jíbara*, as it is called. The duo incorporated the “cuatro puertorriqueño,” Puerto Rican native guitar, played by Puerto Rican Yomo Toro. This mixture of the New York City modern style of Salsa music with the vintage rural native music is an example of transnationalism through the vehicle of music. This album is the highest selling Christmas album in Salsa music history on the island and diaspora. Ana Y. Ramos Zayas cites Frances Aparicio and Ruth Glasser to make the point:

...the emergence of salsa music as a product of the incessant traffic of performers, instruments, and styles between Puerto Rico and New York City has been convincingly offered as one example artistic cross-fertilization between island and mainland. (49)

The transnational phenomenon that these diaspora authors reveal is complicated and filled with nuances. For example: In the lower-class Puerto Rican neighborhoods of Chicago it is believed that it is the middle-class Puerto Ricans who reside in mostly Anglo-Saxon suburbs who lack Puerto Rican-ness because once they have moved up the social ladder, they forget their roots and where they came from, and try to pass for white. This is what Piñero means in “This Is Not The Place Where I Was Born” when he states: “nullified classified racist” (1395, 76).

Although the island is symbol of Puerto Rican-ness as a point of origin and in melancholic notions of the *jíbaro* image as “authentic,” it is those Puerto Ricans in the diaspora who carry (“la mono-estrellada,” “the single-starred one”) the Puerto Rican flag in the U.S. and other places around the world, and in whose hearts burns an inextinguishable fire for the island that is their ancestral home. Ana Y. Ramos-Zayas discusses this aspect of “authenticity” in her article:

The island invariably remains a geographical referent of cultural authenticity and a driving force in nostalgic narratives and imagery. However, discourses of Americanization are reenacted and invoked by barrio activists and residents to describe both elite Puerto Ricans on the island and those on the mainland but foreign to barrio life. Puerto Ricans who live outside the barrio, particularly middle-class Puerto Ricans from the island living in the Chicago suburbs, are often perceived as culturally “inauthentic.” (42)

These are only some examples of how the approach on “authenticity” concerning Puerto Rican-ness has shifted to become more inclusive during more recent times.

On September 20th, 2017 Puerto Rico was hit by a level 4 hurricane named María. This atmospheric event exacerbated the already growing diaspora to the U.S. Some people left prior to the hurricane, others after. The onslaught of this hurricane, coupled with the consequences of a fiscal control board, “*junta de control fiscal*,” which has cut almost half of the budget to the UPR and cut 17% of retirees’ pensions, among other austerity measures, and imposed by the U.S. federal government, created a massive number of Puerto Rican professionals from the middle-class and working-class people to migrate in search of a better quality of life, jobs and career opportunities.

These events have brought Puerto Rican identity discourse to the forefront. Since 2003 more Puerto Ricans reside outside the island than in it. All these Puerto Ricans relocate to different states, and even different nations, like those who decide to relocate to other countries in the Caribbean, Europe, Central and South America without abandoning their sense of Puerto Rican-ness. On the contrary, it is while outside the island where their cultural awareness, national pride and a certain level of melancholy kick in.

Now is the time to have a dialogue about the *transnational* influences on Puerto Rican identity. Puerto Rican identity transcends geo-political constructions. All markers of identity must be included in such an eclectic society. We must keep in mind that the Amerindian, African and Spanish triptych that forms the Puerto Rican culture has grown to include people from Europeans nations besides Spain, such as England, Italy and France. Puerto Rico also has a population of Cubans, Dominicans and Chinese, among others. The colonial relationship with the U.S. has opened the island to people from all over the world. Today more than ever, it is imperative that we acknowledge this extraordinary *transnational* phenomenon.

The authors discussed in this thesis revealed these *transnational* influences decades ago, and how Puerto Ricans on the island must acknowledge them as much as those in the diaspora. In this contemporary society where geopolitical discourse is front and center, *transnationalism* carries much relevance because nations are changing demographically. Other types of forces related to transnationalism besides the Puerto Rican are taking place, such as the refugee crisis around the world. *Globalization* has changed the world by making nations reach out to each other. But it has also spurred xenophobia and fear. For these reasons, it is time to take a closer look at *transnationalism* to appreciate what it means for the future of all societies on earth.

I close with this citation from prolific Puerto Rican diaspora writer Esmeralda Santiago to provoke a dialogue in which the complex issue of Puerto Rican identity can be exposed and argued further:

“los puertorriqueños mismos me negaron because I was so Americanized...Puerto Rico was so Americanized...I thought, how can *puertorriqueños* who have never left the island accuse us when they allow the American contamination I was seeing all around? There were McDonald’s, Pizza Huts, and so on. I used to think this was not our culture. Big Macs are not our cultural legacy. We in the states at least have an excuse for being Americanized. This ambivalence was part of what drove me away”

—Esmeralda Santiago, in interview with Carmen Dolores Hernández, *Puerto Rican Voices in English: Interviews with Writers* (1997).

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