

**MEMORY, MIGRATION, AND *NUEVAS RAÍCES*:  
MODERNIZATION IN PUERTO RICO AND THE CREATION OF NEW IDENTITIES  
IN NUYORICAN POETRY**

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Memory, Migration, and *Nuevas Raíces*:  
Modernization in Puerto Rico and the Creation of New Identities in Nuyorican Poetry

In 1948, Luis Muñoz Marín became the first elected governor of Puerto Rico by the Puerto Rican people. Under his governance, Puerto Rico was established as an *Estado Libre Asociado*, or a commonwealth of the United States. While Muñoz Marín and his administrations were responsible for the modernization of the island, his efforts of industrializing Puerto Rico were met with concerted public policy of emptying the island's working class communities through air migration and political projects such as Operation Bootstrap, also known as *Operación Manos a la Obra*,<sup>1</sup> which transformed the economy of Puerto Rico and condensed a century's worth of modernization into just a decade. This planning would modernize the island to comply with U.S. standards but at the cost of the inhabitants' cultural affiliations and practices, leading to displacement and massive migrations not only from their homes and communities but eventually from the island itself. In an act of creative protest, writers witnessing this modernization began creating literature as a warning against the Puerto Rican government, United States intervention, and the false promises of financial success outside of the island. This literature also involved a sense of reclaiming heritage, language, and cultural values while

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<sup>1</sup> In May 1947, the Puerto Rican legislature passed the Industrial Incentives Act eliminating all corporate taxes, to promote U.S. investment in industry. This was proposed by then Senator Luis Muñoz Marín and became known as Operation Bootstrap. This act intended to move Puerto Rico away from its agrarian system and into an industrial economy. The government's Administration of Economic Development, today known as the Puerto Rico Industrial Development Company (PRIDCO), encouraged the establishment of factories leading to the rupture of agrarian self-sustainability on the island.

causing an act of identity introspection and validation in diaspora.

René Marqués' play *La carreta*, published and first performed at the San Sebastian Auditorium in New York City in 1953, is one of Puerto Rico's most recognizable texts. Although not every citizen on the island has read this play, the story of a Puerto Rican family caught between the frontiers of culture and politics is a story that every Puerto Rican has witnessed. While many Puerto Ricans found themselves forced to migrate to the United States in search of better opportunities (this idea promoted by the federal and state governments depicted Puerto Rico as overpopulated, poor and unable to provide a sustainable life for its residents), the literature of *La generación del cuarenta* and *La generación del cincuenta*<sup>2</sup> strongly advocated for Puerto Ricans to hold true to their cultural history as *jibaros*. The *jibaro* refers to the Puerto Ricans who dedicate themselves to preserving and sustaining the land and agriculture, oftentimes evoking the land as a metaphor for the roots of the Puerto Rican people. It was common for literature of this time to warn against the stripping away of the island and its people through the unstoppable assimilation that the United States forced upon the islanders through occupation since 1898 and steady but progressive Puerto Rican migration that dates back to the mid-nineteenth century. Writers René Marqués, Abelardo Díaz Alfaro, and José Luis González warned Puerto Ricans moving to the United States of dissatisfaction and instability, promoting the idea that true patriotism meant staying on the island, resisting the modernization that altered and proved to interrupt Puerto Rican culture, and fighting to keep the island in the hands of the Puerto Ricans themselves. Witnessing this historical moment of modernization, René Marqués, Abelardo Díaz Alfaro, and José Luis González began to write short stories and plays about the

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<sup>2</sup> These writers were inspired by texts published in the 1930s, such as Antonio S. Pedreira's famous book *Insularismo* (1934) and while most published their works throughout the 1950s, considered their ideals and political formations to have been established in the 1940s.

industrial experience and the process of migration. They warned their readers that through succumbing to the opportunities the United States provided, Puerto Ricans would not only lose their culture and connection to the island, but also become a “*vende patria*,” someone selling their patriotism for better opportunities.

While this warning of assimilation, and cultural death, is one of the most important themes in those works, more recent generations of Nuyorican poets such as Tato Laviera, Sandra Maria Esteves, María Teresa “Mariposa” Fernández, Willie Perdomo and later still Urayoán Noel, among others, provide an alternate narrative for those in the diaspora. These writers have displayed a new cultural identity that is not only Puerto Rican, but also considered American and multicultural. Through Nuyorican identity poetics, these writers in the diaspora defend their cultural environment and identity both on and off the island. Going against what some critics conceive as classic Puerto Rican literature during times of hectic political and cultural change, both when these anti-colonial texts were written and in more recent decades on the island, Nuyorican poets have established that being from the diaspora does not eliminate the anti-colonial and nation-affirming sense of identity promoted by the writers of *La generación del cuarenta* and *La generación del cincuenta*. On the contrary, the act of leaving the island, being born stateside or being raised on the island and thus becoming diasporic gives way to new reflections of the transformations that identity undergoes in the diaspora experience. This study focuses on the importance of Nuyorican poetry as a contestatory means to ensure that Puerto Rican identity has not been lost in the diaspora, as the Puerto Rican insular texts of the 1940s and 50s feared but rather has survived through various transformations throughout the diasporic experience.

## The Industrial Colony

Beginning at the end of the 1940s, the United States saw Puerto Rico as an island of industrial opportunity. Under the governance of Luis Muñoz Marín in 1948, and prior to it, Puerto Rico offered United States companies limitless opportunities to thrive on a Caribbean island, such as the Industrial Incentives Act of 1947.<sup>3</sup> This extensively attractive publicity campaign brought many prospective U.S. investors to the island and has inspired many legal, historical, and socio-political research projects interested in U.S. industrialization and the migration caused by it.

*Puerto Ricans in the United States: A Contemporary Portrait*, a historical study on Puerto Rico written by Edna Acosta-Belén and Carlos Santiago in 2018, explains the relationship between the United States and Puerto Rico during what they consider the three stages of migration, as identified by Bonilla and Campos (1986). The third stage, named the Great Migration, develops during the post WWII period and “encompasses Puerto Rico's transition from an agricultural to an industrial manufacturing economy also dominated by U.S. capital investments” (59).

The island’s industrialization was not the only cause of the Great Migration. Puerto Ricans witnessed the passing of laws that created Puerto Rican dependence on the United States and a voiceless presence in Congress. In their chapter “Early Migration to the United States,” Acosta-Belén and Santiago explain,

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<sup>3</sup> This act offered Americans a ten-year exemption on local taxes for firms establishing businesses on the island.

The ultimate result... was an enduring condition of economic dependency that evolved throughout the twentieth century but, in a broader sense, would remain unchanged in some concrete ways. The consistency of the pattern is clear: under U.S. rule, Puerto Rico was to serve the specific economic interests of U.S. investors and corporations, initially in the agricultural sector and later in labor-and capital-intensive industries during the Operation Bootstrap years. Additionally, because of the persistent levels of unemployment, the island's workers would serve as a source of cheap labor to satisfy shortages in the colonial metropolis and find themselves compelled to migrate in order to make a living (65).

While the island promised an escape from certain U.S. labor and environmental regulations and offered American companies cheaper manual labor, the state and federal governments diligently offered the Puerto Rican worker opportunities to migrate with the hopes this would produce more job opportunities for the Puerto Ricans who stayed on the island. However, as the necessity for manual labor in factories, such as the Corco oil company, increased, the demand for agriculture on the island dramatically decreased from 230,000 paid agriculture workers in the 1940s to only 34,000 by 1995. This direct attack on agriculture affected Puerto Rico's self-sustainability and caused the United States to become the main provider of goods on the island.<sup>4</sup> Leaving Puerto Rico food dependent was legally assured through the Jones Act of 1917 that prohibits any ships that are not U.S. owned, exclusively navigated by the US Merchant Marine, or carrying U.S. approved goods to arrive on the island, significantly raising the price of imports.

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<sup>4</sup> Currently, more than 80% of the produce consumed by Puerto Ricans on the island is imported.

With this in effect, more landworkers decided to take advantage of the opportunities offered in the United States and as a result, the state and federal governments implemented the Migration Law of 1947, commencing air migration to the United States. Through this, the government not only presumably attacked the so-called problem of overpopulation by systematically depleting the island of many of its inhabitants, but also provided American industries with cheap Puerto Rican labor.

In his book *Sponsored Migration: The State and Puerto Rican Postwar Migration to the United States* (2017), Edgardo Meléndez writes that migration policy was not an afterthought for the *Partido Político Democrático* (PPD) and Luis Muñoz Marín. For the PPD, it was an intrinsic element in the postwar economic and political development project for Puerto Rico. In his chapter “Puerto Rican Migration and the Colonial State,” Meléndez further considers this aerial migration and how 70,000 Puerto Ricans migrated to the United States in the late 1940s, at the same time that pro-independence texts began to appear in Puerto Rico. He also describes how this migration was created and limited by the United States in pursuit of maintaining colonial control over the island. Of the U.S.-appointed colonial functionaries he writes, “Most understood Puerto Rico’s main problem to be a lack of resources, a lack of capital and industries, and overpopulation” (34).

This so-called overpopulation was the indicator for the government to begin to promote the exodus of the Puerto Rican people by air: moving them out of the island not only produced cheap labor for U.S. companies, but also a reduction in population pressure and the labor market on the island. This allowed those that did stay, composed mostly of the Puerto Rican elite, to have better income and job opportunities. In his chapter “There Ain’t No Buses from San Juan to

the Bronx: Postwar Migration and Air Transportation,” Meléndez writes, “Air transportation not only allowed Puerto Ricans to move to the United States relatively cheaply and quickly but also made the idea of migration itself more acceptable, including specific patterns of migration like return migration and circular migration so characteristic of-- but not unique to-- the Puerto Rican experience” (95). However, the beginnings of this migration brought dangerously desperate measures concerning the different airlines that were authorized to make trips from the island to the United States.

The beginning of air migration from Puerto Rico to the United States quickly became an economic battle. Meléndez informs readers that airline carrier Pan American’s first flight to Puerto Rico from Miami arrived in 1929; in 1940, what came to be popularly known as Pan Am offered four weekly flights on that same route, and on July 1, 1946 Pan Am made its first nonstop flight from New York to San Juan. On March 27, 1950, Eastern Airlines, Pan Am’s direct competition for nonstop flights to and from the island, made history in Puerto Rico’s air transportation system with the first nonstop flight by jet from New York to San Juan. While these events were celebrated, the negative side of air travel from Puerto Rico to the United States caused the death of hundreds of Puerto Ricans who lacked financial stability to be able to afford the prices offered by regular airlines, such as Pan Am, Eastern, Delta, Southern, Air France, and Iberia, and found themselves buying cheaper tickets from nonscheduled airlines such as Coastal Airways lacking safety regulations, leading to various mortal plane crashes.

By purchasing used warplanes, nonscheduled airlines provided most of the air transportation after the war ended, offering tempting airfares to Puerto Ricans looking to migrate to the U.S. These airlines gave way to violent plane crashes, most notably the Newark flight to



Puerto Rico on July 13, 1947. Considered the deadliest air tragedy in Puerto Rico's history to that point, the DC-3 carried thirty-three passengers and a crew of three and crashed in the vicinity of Melbourne, Florida at 4:30 am; twenty-two Puerto Rican passengers were killed in the accident, coming back to the island to visit family or to permanently return to the island. Various other nonscheduled flights ended as deadly plane crashes for the same reasons: overbooking their flights and overworking their pilots and staff. Another plane crash on January 7, 1948 led to fifteen dead on the way from Newark to Puerto Rico and that same year, a lost flight carrying twenty-seven Puerto Ricans on their way to the island for the Christmas holidays was never found.

While a flight to New York symbolized seemingly ascending economic and social status for Puerto Ricans living on the island, it was difficult for that type of migration to be accessible to everyone on the island. Many Puerto Ricans would purchase one-way tickets to the United States to then be confronted with false promises by private American corporations and harsh working conditions, which ended with many Puerto Ricans losing their jobs and their chances of economic stability. The process of migration from the island meant that Puerto Ricans were confronted with racial prejudice, leading to the "Puerto Rican problem," where Puerto Ricans living in the United States were seen as potential violent threats due to their inability to speak English, leading to a possible life of crime. Puerto Ricans were also seen as potential threats to the employment market, taking up jobs that would have been available to the rest of the American community. To manage migration, "the colonial government created its own bureaucratic institutions, such as the Bureau of Employment and Migration (BEM) in San Juan and the Migration Division in New York" (Meléndez 31). The Migration Division of the

Department of Labor of Puerto Rico acted as mediator between the colonial and federal government and mitigated the adjustment process of new arrivals, informing new coming Puerto Ricans about employment, housing, equal rights, and other critical concerns.

Despite these problems, the Puerto Rican government viewed migration as a way for the island to obtain financial stability. Meléndez explains, “In Puerto Rico, the government used its bureaucratic institutions, like the Departments of Labor and Education, to advise and organize the flow of migrants to the United States, be it as individual migrants or in organized migration. The Department of Labor’s BEM created a vast government superstructure to oversee and regulate the flow of people to the U.S. mainland” (34). However, while migration became a normalized occurrence for many, the idea of “brincando el charco” or skipping over the puddle from one land to another, was also welcomed with a morbid awareness of the reality that many Puerto Ricans would never be able to return home.

### **Literature of Resistance, Migration, and Belonging**

The concept of home, departure, and arrival is visible in René Marqués’ *La carreta*. Marqués’ character, Luis, Doña Gabriela’s oldest son is ambitious and full of desire to find economic stability through migration and modernization. He is quick to stray away from his rural home, the land that his grandfather Don Chago loves, admires, and belongs to. It can be assumed that Don Chago has seen the strength of *el jíbaro* and demonstrates antiquarian respect for what the island’s earth provides; his admiration for the land connects readers to Puerto Rico’s rural history of the interior. Don Chago must have been a child in the late 1800s, experiencing the lifestyle of *el jíbaro* in its formation and also witnessing their resilience after the San Ciriaco

hurricane in 1899, one of the deadliest Atlantic hurricanes in recorded history, which killed more than 3,000 people. Seeing his island rebuilt after such a natural disaster forms Don Chago's stubborn resolution to stay close to his land and tend to it as it has cared for him and his family.

Luis' dream of leaving what Marqués describes as a small "*barrio*" or neighborhood in the mountain district near the city pushes him toward the capital of San Juan, where he moves his entire family, except his grandfather, who stays behind, firmly holding on to the idea of defending and caring for the land. While living in the emblematic San Juan shantytown La Perla, Luis' family begins to fall apart. Although as an urbanite himself, Marqués may be guilty of romanticizing the rural interior for the purposes of cultural nationalism, the family's gradual disintegration reaffirms Marqués' warning that leaving the family land symbolizes the rupture of the Puerto Rican connection to home. While Doña Gabriela anxiously tries to keep her family together, her daughter Juanita is raped, which for Marqués symbolizes not only a female's loss of purity, but also suggests that the city's corruption and filth of modernization leads to the rupturing of ethical and cultural values. This rupturing of Juanita's purity also equates her chastity with the honor of the country, as women are often depicted as gendered stand-ins for the nation in the need of rescue or defense.

After La Perla, the family moves to The Bronx, New York, where Luis feels his dreams will surely materialize as the self-appointed man of the family. It is in The Bronx where Marqués strengthens his critique of modernization and its deadly iron hand: Chaguito is arrested for his crimes, Juanita separates from the family through prostitution, and Luis begins his work at a cauldron factory that he has forced himself to believe will be the salvation for the family. Luis' employment and obsession with the factory reflects Marqués' criticism of modernization and

offers an example of the machine's ruthless extraction and obsessive consumption of the individual, physically destroying those who are not quick to assimilate, while figuratively destroying those who do through the eradication of Puerto Rican identity and adherence to cultural practices.

One afternoon in the Bronx, Luis, Juanita, and Doña Gabriela speak about Luis' job in the factory. Juanita, rebellious after her newfound sexual liberation as a prostitute, argues with Luis about his fascination with the cauldron factory. He leaves in a rush and moments later, Mr. Parkington, an American who declares that he is fighting for Puerto Ricans and equal labor rights, knocks on the door. He begins a conversation with Doña Gabriela and tells her about the most recent accident at the factory. He says, "*Pues resulta que un obrero estaba examinando el interior de una de las máquinas. La máquina empezó a funcionar y el hombre quedó atrapado entre las mil piezas de acero que siguieron moviéndose a toda velocidad,*" (169).<sup>5</sup> While Parkington informs her, Juanita storms in to confirm that Luis has been brutally killed in this accident. After this violent and destructive death, Doña Gabriela and Juanita decide to move back to Puerto Rico, with Juanita, now the new leader of the family. Her actions demonstrate her position as a strong, independent female, leading the oxcart back to the land that both sustains the family and is itself sustained by its presence. In her 1953 foreword to *La carreta*, Puerto Rican educator María Teresa Babín writes,

*Una familia campesina es el protagonista de La carreta. Cada uno de los miembros de este personaje colectivo tiene vida propia, pero su conducta y la realización de su sueño particular está sujeto al destino común del todo. Podría decirse superficialmente que el*

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<sup>5</sup> "It turns out a worker was examining the interior of one of the machines. The machines suddenly turned on and the man was stuck inside along with the thousand pieces of iron that moved with complete velocity." (my translation)

*tema de la comedia es la patria errante, no por quijotismo aventurero, sino por necesidad económica, y sin embargo, por debajo de ese tema aparente fluye una corriente más honda que trasciende de lo externo a lo interior del problema y nos hace meditar en la posibilidad de otro tema: Puerto Rico sólo puede hallar el camino seguro de la libertad verdadera en la unión de todos... (XI)<sup>6</sup>*

In the play's ending, Marqués suggests that in order to keep their culture and identity, the family's return home to the rural interior was inevitable. Babín also suggests that not only is return inevitable, but that collective unity and spirit of independence are necessary components for the thriving of a Puerto Rican nation. Here, she also expresses that transcendental changes on the island must rely on a national commitment to the island and its culture and a call for socio-political sovereignty.

Born in Caguas in 1919, Abelardo Díaz Alfaro, like Marqués, came of age as a writer during this politically questionable time in Puerto Rico; his most well-known work is his book of short stories titled *Terrazo* (1947). While each short story in *Terrazo* has its importance, Díaz Alfaro's most revered short story is "El Josco." In his work, Díaz Alfaro reveals his literary influences: he used *costumbrismo*, a Spanish literary movement popular in the 20th century that reflects the social customs and uses of the time period, along with what is known as the *estampa literaria*, a way for the writer to display common *jíbaro* scenes to readers not familiar with the daily life of Puerto Ricans close to the land. El Josco is a strong Puerto Rican bull that works the

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<sup>6</sup> "A peasant family finds itself to be the protagonist of *La carreta*. Each of the members of this collective character has his or her own life, but their conduct and achievement of their particular dreams are subject to the common destiny of the entire family. Superficially, it could be said that the theme of this so-called comedy is concept of the home in movement, not because of adventurous Quixotism, but because of economic necessity, and yet, under that apparent theme, a deeper current flows that transcends from the external to the interior of the problem; making us meditate on the possibility of another topic: Puerto Rico's only sure path to true freedom can only be found in true union..." (my translation)

land in a small farm in the town of San Lorenzo. Although Don Leopo, the farm owner, admires El Josco, he is aware of a new species of bull that has come to Puerto Rico, El Jincho. El Jincho, literally meaning the “white one,” is a direct critique on U.S. imperialism on the island and its attempts to infiltrate and overthrow Puerto Rican culture and resistance, represented also in gendered terms by El Josco. El Jincho is physically stronger than El Josco in the story and while El Josco wins the fight over territory, he is wounded and dies soon after. Upon receiving the news, the *jibaro* Jincho Marcelo exclaims that El Josco was not meant to be tied down; he is and was “*padrote de la nación, no nació pa’ yugo*” (63).<sup>7</sup>

Still read today in schools and universities throughout the island, “El Josco” displays a message of the Puerto Rican nation under attack by U.S. culture and consumerist values. Díaz Alfaro’s work urges readers to take action: care for the land and, by doing so, fight to keep it. Throughout his career, Díaz Alfaro was heavily influenced by fairy tales and used them in his stories as a way to help Puerto Ricans understand the political situation on the island. Dannelle Gutarra explains that the work of Díaz Alfaro “is distinguished through its folkloric representation of the complexity of colonial relations during the history of Puerto Rico as a U.S. non-incorporated territory. His fables metaphorically depict the inherent violence of colonialism and denounce the economic exploitation of the Puerto Rican people in the twentieth century” (72). She continues to explain, “Abelardo Díaz Alfaro’s work conceptualizes U.S. interventionism as a cultural war and responds with the act of writing as a way to unveil the nonsenses of colonial ambiguity and uncertainty” (72). Díaz Alfaro’s message is clearly displayed not only throughout “El Josco” but also in his many other short stories where nature

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<sup>7</sup> “father of the nation, he was not meant to be yoked.” (my translation)

takes on the role of narrator and warns readers of the demise of Puerto Rico and its cultural heritage at the hands of U.S. colonialism.

While “El Josco” warns against U.S. occupation in Puerto Rico and *La carreta* takes its protagonists from Puerto Rico to New York, José Luis González’s “El pasaje” (1954) takes place entirely in the diaspora. The story tells the tale of a Puerto Rican migrant named Jesús living in New York who finds himself unable to get a job. Running into each other by chance as they exit the subway on 103rd Street in East Harlem, Juan and Jesús decide to grab a beer together to catch up. Walking over to the bodega “*La Flor de Borinquen*,” Juan complains that he is unhappy at the factory and although he makes \$35 a week, he is overworked and forced to stand during all of his shifts while he adds the knobs to the radios as they pass on a conveyor belt. Jesús tells Juan that he shouldn’t complain: three months have passed and he has been unable to get a job. While they drink their beer together, Jesús decides that he wants to move back to Puerto Rico. He tells his friend, “*Me rajo. Me voy pa Puerto Rico... Esto aquí es la muerte. Yo tengo un cuñao mecánico que trabaja en la General Motors en San Juan. A lo mejor me consigue una pega... Lo malo es el condenao pasaje. No tengo la plata*” (98).<sup>8</sup>

One week later, Juan returns to the bodega. His back aches and as he walks through the door, the owner of the bodega tells him that his friend is in the newspaper. A picture appears on the front page: Jesús face-down on the floor of a delicatessen, and two police officers next to his body, smiling at the camera. After seeing this, all Juan can muster is “*El pasaje*.” When the owner questions him, he repeats, “*Si, el cabrón pasaje*,” and then walks out the door into the street. Here, Juan is confronted with a reality that could have very well been his own. If he, like

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<sup>8</sup> “I give up. I’m going to Puerto Rico. This here is death. I have a brother-in-law who’s a mechanic and he works at General Motors in San Juan. Maybe he can find me something. The only thing is the damn flight. I don’t have the money.” (my translation)

Jesús, would have been unemployed in a city where he did not speak the language, would his fate be the same?

González wrote another short story that further displayed the troubling truths of migration in his work “La carta” (1948). Here, a young Puerto Rican man writes a letter to his mother telling her about his fantastic life in New York City. He tells her that his new job is paying him well and that when he has some free time, he will send a care package to his family members living on the island. After he finishes the letter, he folds it, stuffs it in an envelope and extends his hand out to ask for money. Afraid to tell his mother the truth, he actually lives on the street as a beggar yet offers her exuberant stories so that she may believe, like Luis in *La carreta*, that migration opens doors to professional success.

The works by Marqués, Díaz Alfaro, and González all emphasized the fact that most Puerto Ricans migrating to the United States, particularly to New York in the late 40s and early 50s, were treated as second-class citizens with little chance of accessing the dream sold to them. This constant issue of being considered a second-class citizen combined with the fear of the inability to return home made migration harder for some Puerto Ricans to achieve. In his 1997 essay “Puerto Rican Identity Up in the Air: Air Migration, Its Cultural Representations, and Me ‘Cruzando el Charco,’” Alberto Sandoval Sánchez argues, “Migration is an awareness of death: an awareness of relatives and friends dying in the place of origin while realizing the impossibility of being there, an awareness of one’s own death and the choice of burial place as there or here, and even experiencing a cultural death in assimilation” (190). Like Edgardo Meléndez, Sandoval Sánchez studies the figurative and literal deaths of hundreds of Puerto Ricans in their act of “*brincando el charco*” on the “airbus” to New York. The concept of the



“airbus,” coined by Luis Rafael Sánchez in his 1984 book *La guagua aerea* receives its name due to the frequency of visits to and from the island, however the addition of “bus” depicts the form of migration as inexpensive transport for the working class. While economically stable migrants could afford regular airfares, only those desperate for economic stability through migration would opt to use the “airbus” (nonscheduled flights) and risk their lives. Sandoval Sánchez suggests, “The *jibaro*’s only dream after migration is to save money to return to his native countryside” (195). While many Puerto Ricans migrate to the United States in pursuit of better lives, even though they live in fear of assimilation, loneliness, and death, a large number of Puerto Ricans still pray for the ability to be able to be buried at home on the island.

For the migrant, however, the concept of home must be evaluated under cultural, political, and social standards. At the beginning of his essay, Sandoval Sánchez quotes cultural theorist Stuart Hall’s “Minimal Selves.” He writes: “The classic questions which every migrant faces are twofold: ‘Why are you here?’ and ‘When are you going back home’? No migrant ever knows the answer to the second question until asked. Only then does she or he know that really, in the deep sense, he’s never going back. Migration is a one-way trip. There is no ‘home’ to go back to. There never was” (189). For Hall and many other cultural theorists, the concept of home becomes studied and pursued. Theorists Jorge Duany and Juan Flores dedicated their studies and academic work to understanding the diaspora of Latinx immigrants, attempting to analyze the diasporic Latinx population, their assimilation (or lack of) into American culture, and their definition of identities upon being raised outside of what was considered “home.”

In his seminal work on the Latinx diaspora *Divided Borders: Essays on Puerto Rican Identity* (1993), Juan Flores studies assimilation, diaspora, and identity as well as the integration

of Puerto Rican culture in the United States through Nuyorican poetry. Notably, while the Puerto Rican writers of the 1940s and 50s experiencing the transformation of Puerto Rico under the aegis of the United States on the island warned against U.S. colonialism, cultural death, and ultimate assimilation, Nuyorican poets emerging at the time of the Nuyorican Poet Cafe's creation in 1973 and after, began to write poetry in response to this assumption of cultural death. While seen as a call to action, one of the negative implications of the cultural nationalist insular literature of the 40s and 50s in Puerto Rico expressed that those in the diaspora were less Puerto Rican or had abandoned their roots. In response to this, now generations of Nuyorican writers had to respond to both the impact of industrialization and the questioning of their Puerto Rican identity. Their words were clear: we are not less Puerto Rican because we were raised outside of *la madre isla*; we are Puerto Rican, even if American as well.

In his work, Flores postulates that there are four moments in the awakening of a Nuyorican national consciousness. These four moments lead up to the formation of the diasporic Puerto Rican, or "diasporican" as coined by poet María Teresa "Mariposa" Fernández. This awakening contributes to the Nuyorican's creation of new identities, a moment of rejecting the mentality of pain that the other writers have connected to "never going back home." The Nuyorican writers, for the most part, accept the one-way ticket Sandoval Sánchez mentions in his essay. Flores describes these four moments in the Nuyorican's process of identity acceptance as the "here-and-now, Puerto Rican background, reentry, and branching out" (192). The "here-and-now" may also be seen as a "state of abandon," where Nuyoricans feel far removed from Puerto Rican culture, while the memory of Puerto Rico turns into the "state of enchantment." During that second moment, many Nuyorican writers such as Piri Thomas and

Miguel Piñero romanticize Puerto Rico, without historical or geographical accuracy, but although inaccurate, such moments then present the concept of “reentry” for the Nuyorican, who has now accepted a cultural consciousness, although perhaps self-made, through romanticized memories of the island. Once re-entry has been attempted, Nuyoricans branch out to the cultures closest to them (African American, Dominican, Cuban, or other Caribbean or Latin American), creating Black and Caribbean cultural connections. Flores argues, “It is possible for new cultures to emerge without loss or abandonment of the old, certainly a vital lesson for young Puerto Ricans being pressed into a foreign mold” (189). Flores further explains,

This ‘growing together’ is often mistaken for assimilation, but the difference is obvious in that it is not directed toward incorporation into the dominant culture. For that reason, the ‘pluralism’ that results does not involve the dissolution of national backgrounds and cultural histories but their continued affirmation and enforcement even as they are transformed. (192)<sup>9</sup>

With these ideas in mind, Flores reminds his readers that Nuyorican writers like Tato Laviera, Miguel Algarín, Miguel Piñero, and Pedro Pietri have provided an abundant source of cultural and political energy through their writing and performances to both the United States and Puerto Rico and continue to do so through the dissemination of their written works, long after three out of the four writers have passed away.

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<sup>9</sup> William Burgos also touches on the topic of assimilation in his essay “Puerto Rican Literature in a New Clave: Notes on the Emergence of the DiaspoRican,,” which I mention below. He writes of an interview with Latino critic Richard Rodriguez, “Remarkable here is the way Rodriguez takes a familiar scene of colonial oppression (the Franciscan padre and his wafer) and suddenly allows us to see it from the perspective of the oppressed, suggesting that what appears to be an act of submission may also be an act of consumption. The *india* eats more than the emblem of European hegemony. She eats the European” (128).

### ***La isla in New York***

Tato Laviera's *La Carreta Made a U-Turn* (1979) is one of the most recognized books of poetry written by a U.S. Hispanic author, and certainly of the Puerto Rican diaspora. In the foreword to the 1992 edition, Arte Público publisher Nicolás Kanellos explains that the book gained so much popularity because of its "clear enunciation of a U.S. Hispanic esthetic" and "its unashamed proclamation of a bilingual-bicultural, working-class, Afro-European-Amerindian-New World literature" (5). Not only did Hispanic and diaspora Puerto Rican poets and writers living throughout the United States admire and identify with Laviera's poetry, but the poems were, for obvious reasons based on the title, seen as a direct response to René Marqués' earlier work, *La carreta*. Seen as the fourth act to Marqués' play, Laviera's book of poetry gave a voice to the Puerto Ricans who did not or were unable to return to the island or successfully resist cultural "assimilation" and colonialism. Laviera's poetry accomplished what had never been done before its publication: it reshaped the cultural consciousness shown in *La carreta* and presented the existence of a people who found themselves culturally and psychologically whole yet still connected to Puerto Rico despite remaining in the diaspora. Through his contestatory poetry, Laviera gave a voice to the Nuyorican and rejected Marqués' warning that leaving the island equaled losing one's Puerto Rican culture and identity.

One of the poems that clearly responds to Marqués in *La Carreta Made a U-Turn* is "even then he knew," noticeably envisioning his central poetic persona papote as Don Chago. Laviera ends the poem, "papote sat on the stoop/of an abandoned building/he decided to go nowhere" (19-21). Like his predecessor before him, papote refuses to leave what he sees as

home. While Don Chago proudly died in the *Cueva del Indio*, returning him to his origin while referencing *taíno* culture, hidden from everyone, he embodies his belief that he must stay close to the land he cultivated in order to pass away honorably. Here papote's land becomes the stoop of the abandoned building; home is the city around him even though he recognizes that it is full of:

the sunday garbage    three days old  
 a burned car  
 yards full of junk    an addiction center  
 drunks on every    empty milk box  
 velloneras    parties screams  
 firecrackers  
 air    infected    with    summer heat  
 junkies of    all kinds    all ages. (4-11)

While papote's stoop is witness to the filth, morbidity, and despair of the inner city, like Don Chago, papote has been "miseducated/ misinformed" while sitting on the stoop and even though the land he has cultivated is that of addiction, nostalgic memories of home, and infection, papote decides that he belongs there. "even then he knew" carries Flores' four moments that create the Nuyoricana cultural consciousness and firmly make it multicultural: papote is in a state of abandon, as Laviera mentions in the poem: the abandoned building a body of lost memory where recollections of *la madre isla* no longer reside. Sitting on the stoop, he listens to the "velloneras," a juke-box typically found in bodegas, colmados, or bars where you place a coin in the slot and choose the song you want to listen to. In the distance there is an enchanted memory of Puerto

Rico as home. However, the romantic concept of the *vellonera* is quickly erased as papote is transported back to his dirty surroundings. He re-enters the city and branches out to the rest of the street, accepting that this is home and firmly sits on what was now abandoned, yet is filled by his presence. While the concept of home has changed for papote, he embraces the new definition of home and embodies it as part of the continuously transforming identity within diaspora.

Laviera continues his response to Marqués' play, demanding his readers' attention as a new world poet. In "a message to our unwed women," Laviera writes to Juanita and brings back memories of when she first loses her virginity in La Perla. At the beginning of the second act of *La carreta*, Juanita tells her mother that everything was clean in the mountains and that her heart and body ache to return. Doña Gabriela replies, "*Nojotroh también. Eramoh limpioh, limpioh por dentro*" (63).<sup>10</sup> While the two women state that the city has converted the purity and innocence of the land into unavoidable filth, Juanita later finds herself pregnant and forced to abort the baby. Her disruption of purity is reinforced in her friend Matilde, a thirty-five-year old prostitute in La Perla. When Juanita comes to her in distress, Matilde helps her make the decision to abort, a decision that would make Juanita feel unclean and remorseful.

Laviera's "a message to unwed women" is not only a celebration of the woman finding herself, but also pays homage to Juanita and her unborn child: the embodiment of the Nuyoricana woman now envisioned by a diaspora writer. In the poem, Juanita decides to keep the baby. Here, once again, Flores' discussion applies: Juanita has accepted and recognized her culture and situation yet through her re-entry, she has branched out and given birth to a new identity. Laviera finalizes his poem with this strong verse:

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<sup>10</sup> "Us, too. We were clean, clean on the inside." (my translation)

the sun radiated  
 the streets became alive  
 “to give birth A LA RAZA  
 is the ultimate that i can  
 ever give” (61-65).

While Juanita in *La carreta* aborts her child and suffers from her traumatic decision to terminate her pregnancy, Juanita in “a message to unwed women” is the mother of the Nuyorican. For Lavieria, Juanita’s sacrifice and decision to keep her child is what produces la RAZA or the new race, once again enforcing the message that the Nuyorican is a new identity born from Puerto Rican descent, but symbolizing much more in a different geographic space.

Lavieria’s “the congas mujer” further celebrates the new woman and the creation of a new cultural identity. He starts the poem, “a new woman was born!” (line 1). Throughout the poem, he elaborates on her importance:

her outstretched hands  
 carried the echoes  
 of madness to far away ears  
 oppression and love merged  
 pain and happiness fused...  
 america the beautiful woman  
 also was a prostitute in disguise  
 all prostitutes became mary magdalenes...  
 the ultimate despojo of oppression released

machismo and respect confronted each other. (2-6, 8-10, 12-13)

Here, Laviera also acknowledges the importance of Matilde along with Juanita. In *La carreta*, Matilde tells Juanita how she has slept with many “*yanquih*” men, connecting Juanita to American modernization, while still reminding her of Puerto Rico and *el barrio*. Like Matilde, “America” is a beautiful prostitute in “the congas mujer,” and in Laviera’s version, her sacrifices purify her, converting her into an image of Mary Magdalene and a collective mother of Nuyorican identity.

The plurality of these Nuyorican identities becomes even more evident with the influence of hip hop and salsa in the poetry. Laviera’s poem “Spanglish,” appearing in the later collection *Mixturao and Other Poems* (2008) not only carries a movement of national consciousness and awakening with it, but also exemplifies the influences of other cultures. Laviera writes,

pues estoy cuando spanglish  
 bi-cultural systems...  
 inter-textual integrations  
 two expressions  
 existentially wired  
 two dominant languages  
 continentally abrazándose...  
 en las aceras del soil  
 imperio spanglish emerges...  
 las novelas mexicanas  
 mixing with radiatorocknroll...



hip-hop prieto street salsa

corner soul enmixturando...

spanglish is literally perfect

spanglish is ethnically snobbish

spanglish is cara-holy inteligencia

which u.s. slang do you speak? (1-2, 4-8, 10-11, 14-15, 20-21, 25-28)

The ending of “spanglish” declares that every citizen in the United States is an immigrant, reaching out to other cultures, embracing them, and acknowledging their influences in Nuyorican poetics.

Along with Laviera, poets Miguel Algarín, Sandra Maria Esteves, Pedro Pietri, Miguel Piñero, and Piri Thomas not only formed the Nuyorican movement but the original foundation of the Nuyorican Poets Cafe. This creation of an open artistic space influenced following generations of writers looking to define their diasporic roots. In her article in *The New York Times*, “The Poetry of the Nuyorican Experience: Writers Following in the Literary Tradition of Miguel Piñero Thrive in a Poet’s Cafe,” Mireya Navarro connects Nuyorican poetry to “identity and culture.” Navarro writes, “Nuyorican poetry can range from sonnets to the frenzied verses of competitive slams, and its themes are universal: the politics of daily life, sex and love, discovery of self” (2002). Of this universality and the conflict of Nuyorican literature as part of the American canon, poet and academic Martín Espada explains to Navarro “We write about the same things everybody writes about. The difference is that the people who populate our poems suffer from the system that we live under rather than benefit from it; therefore, our work is considered political.”

While this study mainly explores male diaspora poets, it is equally important to look at the contributions of a few women artists and what they add to Puerto Rican diaspora poetics, most notably the defiance of male patriarchy, gender relations, and female identity. Sandra María Esteves, mentor to many poets emerging from the Nuyorican Poets Cafe, has used her poetry and graphic art as a method of communicating the numerous struggles she faced throughout her process of understanding her identity and confronting issues faced by both Puerto Rican women and women of color. Her poem “A la Mujer Borriquetña,” published in *Yerba Buena Poems & Drawings* (1980), not only embodies the Nuyorican woman’s identity, but also represents the suffering of oppressed women all throughout the United States:

My name is Maria Christina  
 I speak two languages broken into each other  
 but my heart speaks the language of people  
 born in oppression...  
 I am the mother of a new age of warriors  
 I am the child of a race of slaves  
 I teach my children how to respect their bodies  
 so they will not o.d. under the stairway’s shadow of shame  
 I teach my children to read and develop their minds  
 so they will understand the reality of oppression... (13-16, 21-26)

“A la Mujer Borriquetña” acts as an ode to the woman coming from Puerto Rico and forging a new identity through new experiences while still respecting certain cultural representations of the island. The speaker of the poem is a kind mother, a fierce lover, and a provider to all: “I am a

Puerto Rican woman born in el barrio/ Our men... they call me negra because they love me/ and in turn I teach them to be strong” (33-35).

Although her poem received a controversial rebuttal from Puerto Rican writer and LGBTQ rights activist Luz María Umpierre in her poem “In Response,”<sup>11</sup> Esteves’ poems continued to impact the Nuyorican community and create a space for both respecting traditional Puerto Rican values and the exploration of new experiences in and out of the island. She replied to Umpierre with her poem “So Your Name Isn’t Maria Cristina” in her collection *Bluestown Mockingbird Mambo* (1990):

María Cristina was naive when she wrote her first poem,  
 just beginning her metamorphosis...  
 Discovering new meanings for old words  
 listed in the encyclopedia of colonialism.  
 Each day becoming reference volumes,  
 forming bridges of correspondence from old to new worlds...  
 So your name isn’t María Cristina,  
 but you forgot to tell me if you understood  
 she was just one person,  
 one Borinqueña within our universal identity. (16-20, 21-23, 47-50)

While Umpierre’s “In Response” had criticized Maria Cristina’s initial inception as a woman, Esteves confidently explains that just as a woman develops into herself and discovers her place in the world and her personal and collective desires, the diaspora female must also go through

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<sup>11</sup> Umpierre replies to Esteves: “I express myself in any voice, in any tone, in any language that conveys/ my house within./ The only way to fight oppression is through/ resistance” (16-20).

that process of cultural discovery and growth, returning the reader to Flores' "branching out" stage after the romanticized memories of home and gender roles are questioned and either accepted or altered. Esteves' second incarnation represents a diaspora female who has established new roots through growth and independence while still recognizing the importance of understanding her colonial and cultural history.

Of the influential female diaspora poets, it seems impossible not to mention María Teresa "Mariposa" Fernández. In her interview with Jill Toliver Richardson for *CENTRO: Journal of the Center for Puerto Rican Studies*, Mariposa explains that her poem "Ode to the Diasporican," originally written as "Ode to the Nuyorican" in 1993,

resonates with other young people because the poem is like armor and [becomes] the weapon to have the last word in the matter. The phrase is the last word. Because it doesn't matter. Doesn't matter if I can speak perfect Spanish or not, or if I can read Spanish, or if I was born in the Bronx. It doesn't matter. Because I wasn't born in Puerto Rico. Puerto Rico was born in me.

Mariposa's poem offers another contestatory reply to those who have questioned her identity.

Her words clearly define her Puerto Ricanness, even while living in New York and embracing multiple cultural influences. In his essay "Puerto Rican Literature in a New Clave: Notes on the Emergence of the DiaspoRican," William Burgos writes:

The switch from Spanish to English signals a shift from identity embedded in the body... and deriving from the island (and ultimately Africa and Europe) to identity resulting from the diaspora, the movement to the United States, to New York City... Through a series of juxtaposed place-names (Rio Grande de Loiza/Bronx River, Fajardo/City Island,

Luquillo/Orchard Beach), the speaker makes the conventional contrast in Puerto Rican American literature between the Puerto Rican pastoral and the U.S. urban environments that represent the two termini of Puerto Rican migration...having moved across the Atlantic, the poem argues, not only are Puerto Ricans transformed or, to be more precise, transculturated, but they transform the place they inhabit. (139)

There is no doubt that Mariposa's work has been influential in the recognition of Puerto Rican diaspora literature. Her poetry is a reminder that the Puerto Rico of the diaspora exists beyond geographical boundaries and is not only a fusion of cultures, but also a nation in constant movement and identity transformation.

These concepts of identity and transformation have been clearly visible themes in Puerto Rican diaspora poetics from the beginning of the Cafe and continued to be relevant topics while later generations of poets like Mariposa and Willie Perdomo took to the stage and began reciting poetry for shows such as HBO's Def Jam Poetry, hosted by Mos Def from 2002-2007. Willie Perdomo's poetry combines his inner city experiences of witnessing crime, drug addiction, overworked Puerto Ricans trying to survive and send remittances to Puerto Rico, and hip-hop on the streets with verses written against colonialism, fused with memories of *la isla del encanto*, history, and "*salsa, sabor y control*," as Héctor Lavoe's song "*Paraíso de Dulzura*" mentions in the chorus. Throughout his poetry, Perdomo references a number of salsa artists and songs. His poem "The Day Hector Lavoe Died" from *Smoking Lovely* (2003) and "When the Cure is Worse than the Sickness," written in honor of songwriter Tite Curet Alonso and singer Frankie Ruiz in *The Essential Hits of Shorty Bon Bon* (2014), makes reference to the musical genre and its importance in the artistic Nuyorican scene. While singers Frankie Ruiz, Héctor Lavoe, Willie

Colón, Eddie Palmieri, and others made music to affirm their Puerto Rican identity in New York, poets like Perdomo were later inspired to connect rhythm and poetry in his verses.

In “The Day Hector Lavoe Died,” Perdomo writes: “Mami Cuca yells from her dent in the sofa, where the world is a *telenovela*, where she can book flights to Miami and Mexico and get lost in other people’s drama” (20). Perdomo continues, “She knows that I will stop to see the voice that helped me sing my own song about *mi gente en El Barrio y la vida de las putas, los tecatos y las brujas, los dichososos, los tiburones, los cantantes y los soneros, los bodegueros, las gatas, los perros y las matas en las ventanas de los proyectos* in English” (20).<sup>12</sup> Using Lavoe as a cultural connection between Puerto Rico and the United States, Perdomo displays the Puerto Rican identity in Mami Cuca, the new identity of the Nuyorican in the speaker, and the mutual admiration for Héctor Lavoe as what brings the two identities together in cultural acceptance and understanding. Here, Perdomo affirms the existence of Nuyorican identity, brought to life by Puerto Rican culture (paying his respects while understanding its roots), but affected by new experiences only seen in the diaspora.

Perdomo’s *The Essential Hits of Shorty Bon Bon* is dedicated to his uncle Cortijito, known in Spanish Harlem music circles for playing percussion on live studio recordings of Charlie Palmieri’s classic albums *The Cesta All-Stars Vol. 1* and *The Cesta All-Stars Salsa Festival, Vol. 2*. From the beginning of the book, readers are introduced to *la descarga*, a spontaneous or programmed musical act, a jam session, usually including one or various artists before a small or private audience. The importance of the *descarga* involves an act of emotional release at a necessary moment, a creative connection that transforms individuals into a collective

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<sup>12</sup> “She knows that I will stop to see the voice that helped me sing my own song about my people in the Hood, the life of the hookers, the drug addicts, witches, and the lucky, the sharks, the singers and the *soneros*, the bodega owners, the cats, the dogs, and even the plants on the windowsills of the projects...” (my translation)

of musical force. In Perdomo's work, *la descarga* not only functions as a vital instrument in Puerto Rican *salsa* and *bomba*<sup>13</sup> music, but also as a living entity in his poetry.

In his poem "The Birth of Shorty Bon Bon (Take #3)," Perdomo writes,

The salseros, the real-live soneros,  
 the palo-players that gang-busted  
 dancehalls with fish-crate yambú;  
 the *tumberos* who recorded the earth  
 in clay jugs... who changed  
 their names from Joe Loco to Joe  
 Panama, Joe Ponce to Joe Cuba, who  
 Catskill'd then Corso'd...  
 their Africando  
 was so hot, co-op boards had to  
 call the police- this take is for  
 the *cocolos* who carried a nation  
 on their crazy, on their cool:  
 What can you say about Shorty  
 Bon Bon is that he never never  
 crossed the *clave*. He knew  
 it was all dirt at the end. (1-5, 12-15, 17-25)

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<sup>13</sup> Bomba is both a traditional dance and musical style of Puerto Rico. The African slaves residing and working on the sugar plantations of the island brought this dance with them and altered it once established on the island.

Here, Perdomo pays tribute to the *salseros*, or *salsa* singers, that carried *yambú*, a type of *rumba*<sup>14</sup> with movements and customs similar to *bomba*, from Matanzas, Cuba across the sea to New York. In this homage, Perdomo acknowledges the influence of other Caribbean cultures in the past, while acknowledging the present and recognizing the affirmation of a new nation carried by traditional cultural values, but transformed through migration; an occurrence that seemed impossible in the texts by Marqués, Díaz Alfaro, and González.

The plurality of Perdomo's work illustrates how New York and Puerto Rico coexist together as a transnational phenomenon and calls for Puerto Rican identity on and off the island to be understood and accepted as chaotic and/or dynamic and connecting to multiple cultures and socio-political situations simultaneously. While this plurality can be seen as chaotic, as is often displayed in a number of Perdomo's poems such as his famous "Nigger-Reecan Blues," where the speaker expresses cultural confusion at being considered neither Black nor Latino by Americans, the concept of chaos is vital in defining the Nuyorican identity and its artists' process. In Antonio Bénitez Rojo's introduction to *The Repeating Island*, a seminal statement on Caribbean culture, he defines the concept when he asserts that:

Chaos looks towards everything that repeats, reproduces, grows, decays, unfolds, flows, spins, vibrates, seethes; it is as interested in the evolution of the solar system as in the stock market's crashes, as involved in cardiac arrhythmia as in the novel or in myth. Thus Chaos provides a space in which the pure sciences connect with the social sciences, and both of them connect with art and the cultural tradition. (3)

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<sup>14</sup> Rumba is a music genre that originated in Cuba. It is highly influenced by the island's African heritage. The rumba is often danced with exaggerated movements and was introduced to the United States during World War I (Bailyn).



The mere concept of the Puerto Rican diaspora and identity displays traits of the chaotic since the beginning of island migration to the United States: while Puerto Rico has been a territory of the United States since 1898, Puerto Ricans' connection to and creation of the island's culture has frequently rejected American assimilation, leaving more space for contested conversation about cultural and national identity.

In the introduction to his book *The Puerto Rican Nation on the Move: Identities on the Island & the United States* (2003), Jorge Duany argues, "While Puerto Ricans lack a separate citizenship, they have a clear sense of national identity. Any definition of the Island's political status must take into account the growing strength of cultural nationalism, as much as the increasing dispersal of people through the diaspora" (7). Duany explains further in *Blurred Borders: Transnational Migration between the Hispanic Caribbean and the United States* (2011), "The concepts of diaspora and transnationalism undermine the notion of the nation-state as the 'natural' container of the physical and cultural spaces in which people lead their daily lives. Instead, many people—especially transnational migrants—are part of broader social networks across nations" (3).

This spreading and creating larger webs of social networking across nations has formed a new generation of Puerto Rican diaspora poets; a generation where migration, constant air travel, and the formation of translocal communities are more possible than ever. Puerto Rican poets Raquel Salas Rivera, Nicole Delgado, and Urayoán Noel are all part of the current generation of diaspora poets that have left and returned to the island, some permanently, and others regularly riding *la guagua aérea*. San Juan born poet and academic Urayoán Noel published *Kool Logic* or *La Lógica Kool* in 2005. A poetic example of Puerto Rican culture in transit, Noel's poetry

displays the Puerto Rican who finds himself lost between two separate identities: not Puerto Rican nor Nuyorican. His poem “Spic Tracts” begins,

I'm the Puerto Rican  
 Whose dad is a gringo  
 Whose mom is a Platonist  
 Whose pain won't buy plátanos  
 Who drinks toasted almond  
 Who can't speak the lingo  
 Who made it to Stanford  
 Without knowing Windows  
 except for the ones on this  
 car service soapbox  
 that takes me uptown  
 thru the storefronts of a foreign land  
 houses of ancestors I don't recognize (1-13).

The speaker of “Spic Traits” feels as if he doesn't belong in both Puerto Rican and Nuyorican circles, yet still feels the accomplishment of success (by making it to Stanford without knowing Windows) while being simultaneously alienated. Like Laviera, he embodies the transnational migration and questions the definition of identity:

So whoever amongst you is pure  
 may he cast the first stone  
 or get stoned

and go home

‘cause I know where you live,

but I’m not selling this sermon door-to-door” (88-93).

His ending resonates with Laviera’s “which u.s. slang do you speak?” and forces his readers to question immigration/migration within their familial ties and cultural upbringing. In his attempt to question the concept of “pure” identity, the speaker creates a space for new identities to emerge and be accepted.

Following the warning of the Puerto Rican writers of the 1940s and 1950s, depicting migration and the city as cultural death, a number of Noel’s poems in this collection reply to that warning by expressing his belief that, at the end, critical masses are in process of migrating and transforming into something else. The Nuyorican and Puerto Rican identities co-exist alongside one another, both influencing the other and adding new layers. In Noel’s “The Wayside Story,” the speaker remarks:

Once upon a time I dreamed

Of a heroic exile,

So I fled my native isle...

I just swam like an amphibian

All the way through the Caribbean

From Port-au-Prince to Aruba...

Puerto Rico, China, Chile,

Santo Domingo, El Salvador

Pakistan, Mexico, Ecuador

Each exports its own hillbilly  
 Just like me, so quaint, so silly,  
 In dire need of a fix (a shave?)  
 “Leave your pigsties! Smile! Behave!”  
 Thunders Lady Liberty...  
 Hip-hip: the land of the free!  
 Hooray: the home of the brave! (1-3, 21-24, 71-80)

Here, the speaker sarcastically praises the U.S. and the assimilation that the Puerto Rican Jinsular writers warned readers about, but it is in his ability to criticize this assimilation in a humorous manner that affirms Noel’s resistance to assimilation and his acceptance of a new, ever-changing identity.

In his book *In Visible Movement: Nuyorican Poetry from the Sixties to Slam*, published in 2014, Noel celebrates Nuyorican and slam poetry. His chapter “Counter/Public Address: Nuyorican Poets in the Slam Era” studies recent Nuyorican poets and their drive to continue defining and recognizing their constantly moving identity. While Noel studies a variety of poets and their works, Noel’s analysis of poets Lemon (Andrew Andersen) and Flaco Navaja’s (Osvaldo Rivera) “Boriquas” provides a fundamental look at Nuyorican identity, its influences from Puerto Rican culture, and its formation into a separate, yet connected entity. Noel writes,

The term *Boriqua*, a variant of *Boricua*, is being used in a contemporary sense toward diasporic self-identification; whereas *Puerto Rican* is a generic term, the *Boriqua* identity in the poem is affective and defined in performance, in a rush of vernaculars and against

the backdrop of everything from salsa to reggaeton, and it refers... specifically to “urban” Puerto Rican life stateside, its past, its present, its shared imaginaries. (159)

The “Puerto Ricanness” has not died; it has just evolved into a new being.

While René Marqués, Abelardo Díaz Alfaro, and José Luis González formed and influenced a new generation of creative cultural nationalism against American imperialism on the island during the mid-20th century, poets Laviera, Levins Morales, Esteves, Fernández, Perdomo, and Noel wrote and continue to write while living in the United States, influenced by other marginalized cultures, and using that same opposition to imperialism to fuel their poetic discourse. Their poems are not only seminal examples of the Nuyorican search for identity, but also a *pièce de résistance* defining migration, cultural and social inequality, immersion into other cultures, and opposition to assimilation, all while demonstrating the fluidity of their own individual and collective identities. By using their writing, these poets are accomplishing what Stuart Hall describes in his essay “Old and New Identities, Old and New Ethnicities:” as “an enormous act of... imaginary political reidentification, reterritorialization and reidentification, without which a counterpolitics could not have been constructed” (74). Through this generation’s recovery of history and storytelling, Nuyorican poetry continues to construct the ever-forming concept of identity, cultural definition, and acceptance in a world that continues to experience cultural, social, and political transformations. Noel confirms: “The city has changed; the imperative to jam has not” (159).

This confirmation is the new call to action by the Puerto Rican community on and off the island to continue to fight against colonial conflict and the idealization of Puerto Rican identity: Nuyorican writers must continue creating, defining, and changing traditional views on identity.

As Noel ends his essay, he states that the diaspora, defined by Hall, is at “the intersection of transnational trajectories and local histories” (163). The term Nuyorican continues to document and remind us of its importance and its formation of new identities. As Noel writes, “There is no impasse between a Nuyorican tradition and a post-Nuyorican/Latino present. *We are already here*” (163). Not only has Nuyorican poetry successfully created its own identity, but it has firmly replied to the Puerto Rican writers of the past and affirmed that the new Puerto Rican/Nuyorican identity has arrived and continues a tradition of cultural productions that affirm and enact *patria*.

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