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ISLA Y DIÁSPORA

LA NACIÓN PUERTORRIQUEÑA

ISLAND & DIASPORA: THE PUERTO RICAN NATION

QUE ONDEE SOLA
JUNE 2008 VOL. 36 NO. 4

EDITORIAL

Xavier "Xavi" Luis Burgos

Puerto Rico is a nation that extends beyond the shores of the Caribbean archipelago; state many of the great Puerto Rican writers and thinkers of the late 20th Century. In the 60 years since the beginning of the Great Puerto Rican Migration from the island to the U.S., Boricuas have build a homeland far away from "home" while building a cross-Atlantic bridge permitting the constant flow of ideas, innovations, and practices between Diaspora and patria. The nation-state and nationalism are human constructs that some might say are imagined communities (which very real implications, of course). In this day and age of neoliberalism and globalization, where the Puerto Rican was the experimental people, people are migrating by the millions all over the world (especially from former colonies to the metropolitan powers). Mi-

grants might just carry the clothes on their backs to their new beginnings, but they carry with them the memories, traditions, wisdom, and idiosyncrasies of their nations. A transnational identity begins; and in the context of the U.S., produces possibilities for Puerto Rican culture and identity (from salsa to the redefinition of race relation to the independence movement) but also a frightening feeling of isolation: no soy de aquí ni de allá. Today there are 4 million Puerto Ricans on the island and in the U.S., populating in the thousands everywhere from Northern Ohio to Western Alaska. How will our communities and people look like, think, create, and envision in the next 60 years? What will that mean for Puerto Rico? To ask and understand those questions is to ask the future of Empire and colony and the relationships of humanity.

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Misión

Que Ondee Sola was established in 1972 and remains the oldest Puerto Rican & Latina/o university student publication in the U.S. Our mission is to provide the NEIU community with a relevant and engaging publication that deals with student issues with a focus on Puerto Ricans and Latinas/os, our communities, and our *patrias*.

Que Ondee Sola continues to affirm the right of Puerto Rican self-determination, freedom for all Puerto Rican political prisoners, and support for a truly participatory democracy.

PUERTO RICO: THE PLEASURES AND TRAUMAS OF RACE

ALAN WEST-DURÁN

The following is an abridged version of Alan West-Durán's essay on race and racism in Puerto Rico and the Diáspora through music and literature. Originally published in *Centro Journal of the Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños at Hunter College, New York*. The edition was called *Puerto Rican Music and Dance: Rican Structing Roots/Routes, Part II Spring 2005 Vol.XVII, No.1*.

Puerto Rico's racial history is centuries old, sometimes troubled, always intricately layered, plagued by misunderstandings and denials, laced with insights, and just plain vexing. In what follows we will examine some of those baffling complexities through some canonical works of literature: *La cuarterona* by Alejandro Tapia y Rivera, "Mulata-Antilla" by Luis Palés Matos, *Maldito Amor* by Rosario Ferré, "Negrito" by Tato Laviera, Edgardo Rodríguez Julia's *El entierro de Cortijo*, and Mayra Santos Febre's short story "Marina." These works will be discussed in the light of Žižek's analysis of the Lacanian Real as it pertains to nationalist *jouissance*, Foucault's notion of bio-power, and Bauman's analysis of how societies deal with otherness.

This article addresses only six authors spanning the last one hundred thirty years, and so it would be misleading to think that what follows is either exhaustive or "representative." Each work or author has something important to say about race and identity in the construction of Puerto Rican national consciousness, and they have been chosen because as writers their views are not only steeped in history, but also are engagingly nu-



Photo by Jack Delano, 1941

anced with regard to the island's racial plight. In 1937, Tomás Blanco, one of the island's seminal writers and thinkers, wrote the following: "Compared to the most intense explosions of that virulent behavior, our racial prejudice is the innocent game of a child" (Blanco 1985: 103). Blanco was contrasting Puerto Rico with the southern United States, and the comparison made several references to lynchings, segregation, and Jim Crow. Blanco's criticisms are all true with regard to his analysis of the U.S., but when looking homeward, his critical perspective is conspicuously absent. During most of his essay, "Racial Prejudice in Puerto Rico," he offers a benign (and inaccurate) racial history of the island, drawing a portrait suffused with Hispano-Catholic compassion, if not condescension. Two years earlier, in a classic essay, "Elogio de la plena," Blanco had written: "We have abundant black blood in us, and this should not make us feel ashamed; but, in honoring the truth, we cannot be classified as a black people" (Blanco 1975: 1004). The inconsistencies and racism of Blan-

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co's insights have not held up well, even though his views are still echoed by some.

Thirty-seven years later Isabelo Zenón Cruz spoke of the hypocrisy of the expression *negro puertorriqueño*, where Puerto Rican has become an adjective. Why is a black Puerto Rican identified as black before he is considered Puerto Rican, he sarcastically asks in his monumental two-volume study *Narciso descubre su trasero* [Narcissus Discovers his Backside]. Zenón Cruz's painstaking analysis, more than 700 pages long, of historical documents, poems, literature, jokes, religion, lyrics to songs, and popular culture is a landmark study that perhaps not so curiously has been out of print for more than two decades.

Not long after Zenón, writer José Luis González stated in 1979 that Puerto Rico was basically an Afro-Caribbean nation in *El país de cuatro pisos* [The Four-Storied Country, 1993]. Using a architectural metaphor, he said the first and foundational floor of the island edifice was laid down by black slaves, and that subsequent floors (Spanish, European, and North American) have elaborated on, changed, or transformed these African origins. Gonzalez's essay engendered substantial debate and controversy, and to date it still remains—whatever its flaws—a crucial reference in the intellectual discourse on race and identity.

These writers reflect the tensions and contradictions in examining the racial dimensions of Puerto Rican identity, and could be broadly described as Hispanicist (with racist overtones), anti-racist, and Afrocentric. Most *boricuas* would claim a mixed-raced heritage in a cultural sense, but a more whitened definition in a strictly racial sense. Some of this ambiguity might

be partially explained by the most recent census (2000), since for the first time since 1950 Puerto Ricans answered questions about race in an official census. The country's racial reality, however, might be too elusive to capture on a governmental form. Social scientist Jorge Duany, trying to imagine this incongruity, alludes to the racial complexities of the island by offering a long but by no means exhaustive list of terms most commonly used: *blanco* (white), *blanquito* (upper class or well-to-do white), *colorao* (white with reddish hair), *rubio* (blonde), *cano* (person with grey or whitening hair and light skin color), *jincho* (pasty or flour-colored white), *blanco con raja* (white with a streak of color), *jabao* (mixed race with light skin and chestnut or blond hair but with other "black" physical features), *melao* (honey-colored), *trigueño* (wheat-colored, light brown), *moreno* (dark skinned-mulatto or black), *mulato*, *indio* (Indian, bronze colored), *café con leche* (coffee with milk), *piel canela* (cinnamon-skinned), *grifo* (kinkyhaired, black), *de color* (of color), *negro* (black), and *negrito* (a small or little black person). Many of these terms, depending on attitude and tone, can be expressions of endearment, grudging acceptance, contempt, or condescension (Duany 2000; see also Stephens 1999). Despite this complexity, whiteness is still considered the norm, as will be argued further on, given both sociological data and literary examples.

What Blanco, Zenón, González, and Duany address, directly or indirectly, is a complex racial history that is both local and yet intersects with the racial dynamics of two imperial powers: Spain (1493 1898) and the United States (1898 to the present). Before analyzing the literary works previously mentioned, it is germane to retrace some of the salient

features of the island's racial history.

Whitening and racial self-perception: Mulattoes and blacks disappear

At the beginning of the twentieth century Puerto Rico still perceived itself as whitening. In the 1899 census the figures are as follows: 62 percent white, 32 percent mulatto, 6 percent black. In 1910 the figures are 65 percent white, 30 percent mulatto, 5 percent black. Ten years later (1920) it is 73 percent white, 23.5 percent mulatto, and 3.5 percent black. In 1930, where no differentiation between mulatto and black is reported, we see the following: 74 percent white and 26 percent colored. By 1950, 80 percent of Puerto Ricans identified themselves as white (Guerra 1998:220-1). As scholars have noted, this shift cannot be explained by an influx of foreignborn white immigrants, since between 1900 and 1930 this figure decreased by more than 40 percent!!! Perceptually, Puerto Ricans who saw themselves as mulattoes at one point became whites, and those who previously identified themselves as blacks became mulattoes. Such perceptions have been emphatically questioned. An established Caribbean scholar, Franklin Knight, lists the 1985 population of the island as 80 percent non-white. Another study from the late eighties of Puerto Ricans in New York yields a figure of 67 percent non-white (60 percent as tan, 7 percent as black) and 33 percent white (Rodríguez 1989).

These contrasting perceptions reflect the radically different worlds of racial categorization used as reference points by U.S. observers compared to Puerto Rican subjectivity. In Puerto Rico's own racial

history under Spanish colonialism, miscegenation was viewed as a whitening, not a darkening process. Also, Puerto Ricans continued to resist the imposition of U.S. racial classifications. Indeed, many darkskinned Puerto Ricans were often identified as African-Americans, a label they rejected not only for racial reasons, but also out of nationalism and culture. It is not that Puerto Ricans are not race conscious, but cultural belonging supersedes it, a common enough attitude throughout the Caribbean. Moreover, the uniqueness of the island's history often makes racial self-definition an expression of resistance to U.S. colonialism. Puerto Ricans in the U.S., when asked what they are, respond that they are Puerto Ricans, not black or white. Sociologist Clara Rodríguez states the dilemma as follows: "Within the U.S. perspective, Puerto Ricans, racially speaking, belonged to both groups; however, ethnically, they belonged to neither. Thus placed, Puerto Ricans soon found themselves caught between two polarities and dialectically at a distance from both. Puerto Ricans were White and Black; Puerto Ricans were neither White nor Black. From the Puerto Rican perspective, Puerto Ricans were more than White and Black" (1989: 51). Rodríguez tries to explain race attitudes on the island with a family example: an interracial couple has two children, one Anglo-looking, the other dark skinned. Both go to the same school. One is considered white, the other *trigueño oscuro* (dark brown); in the U.S. both children would be considered black.

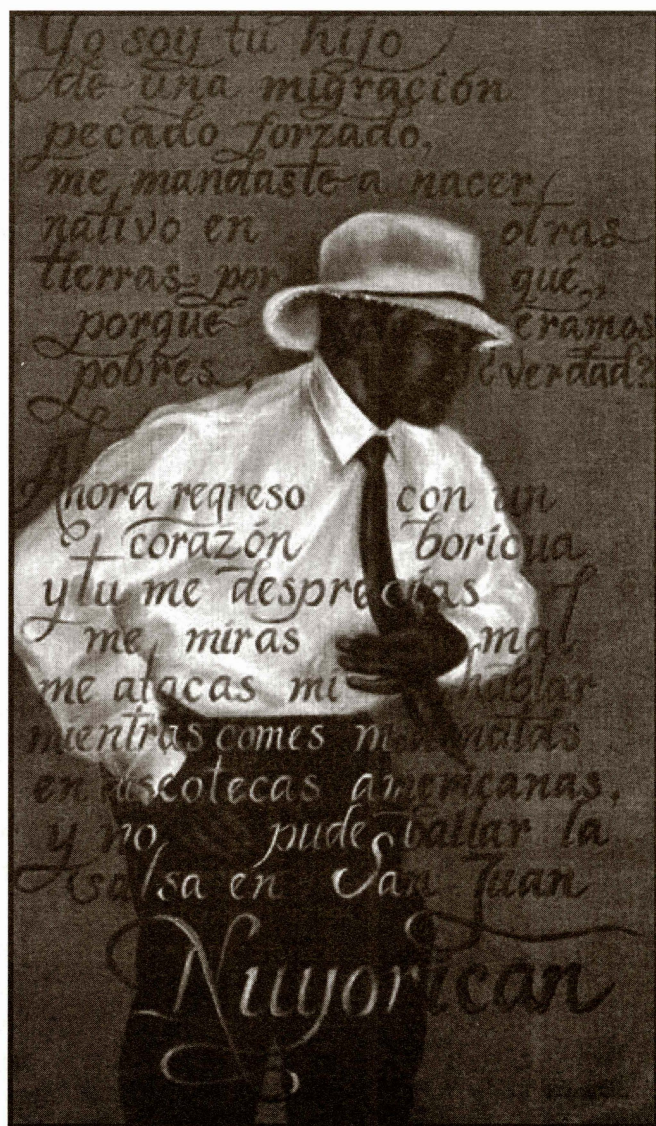
These complexities are eloquently described in Piri Thomas's celebrated *Down These Mean Streets* (1967) or in Tato Laviera's poem "Negrito." Interestingly,

many black and mulatto Puerto Rican writers born or raised from infancy in the U.S. have taken on issues of race in their literature: aside from Thomas and Laviera, there is Nicholasa Mohr, Ed Vega, Louis Reyes Rivera, Esmeralda Santiago, and Jack Agüeros. The shocking experience of moving through two worlds of race—one nuanced and complex, the other cruelly absolute—stimulates a struggle often expressed through art or political activism.

In Laviera's "Negrito," a young, dark-skinned Puerto Rican boy has just moved to New York and converses with his aunt. The aunt tells him "No te juntes con los prietos, negrito" (Don't hang out with black folks, negrito) (Lavieria 1985: 41). He says to his aunt that he is as dark as the black folks she has warned him about. She keeps insisting on his whiteness, which only brings on sadness and confusion to the young boy. Laviera, who admits the poem is autobiographical, keenly underlines the different perceptions of race between the U.S. and Puerto Rico, beginning with the title of the poem. "Negrito" can literally refer to a small black boy, who is the subject of the poem. But negrito and negrita have other connotations as well: they can be expressions of affection to a friend, family member, or loved one, regardless of their race. Pedro Pietri in *Puerto Rican Obituary* says it means honey. So the young boy's aunt is also using a term of affection as well, understandable with a family member. But her trying to explain the U.S. color line underscores two things. First, she is trying to enforce the Puerto Rican insistence on cultural and national identity over racial identity. Second, although her nephew is phenotypically similar to African-Americans, she is aware of what being black means in the U.S. as compared to Puerto Rico. Not sur-

prisingly, the young boy of the poem is perplexed: "new york waved hi/and said to him 'confusion'" (Lavieria 1985: 41).

In situating himself between two worlds Laviera's poem not only expresses the confusion and disappointment of the young boy in the poem, but also a coming to awareness of his Afro-Puerto Rican heritage. (Curiously the two worlds are not echoed linguistically, and unlike many of his poems, "Negrito" is entirely in Spanish.) Laviera, instead of heeding the aunt's words, has chosen to affirm his Afro-Puerto Rican heritage (and its links to a greater



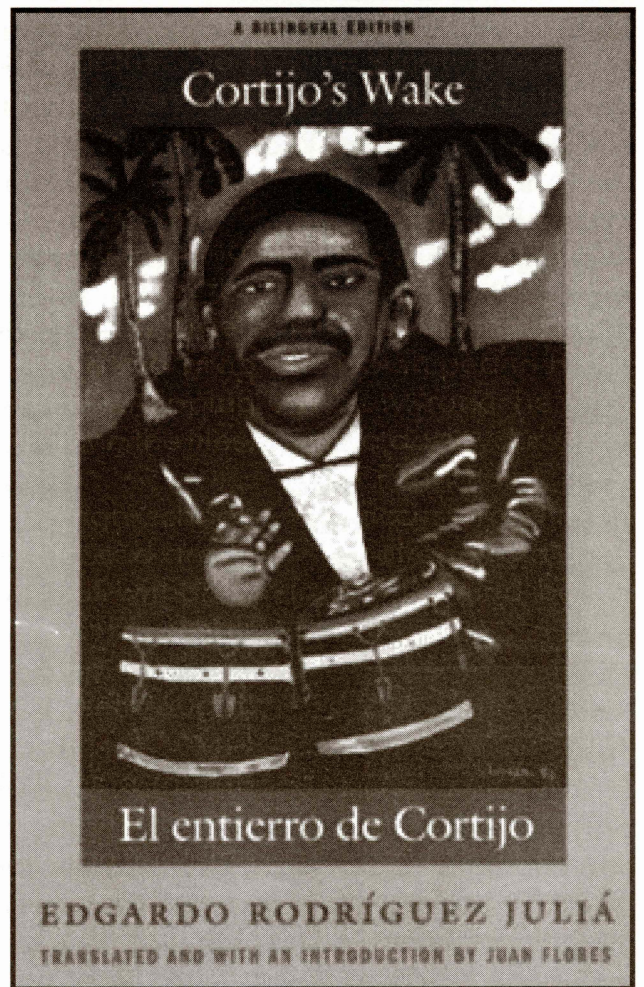
Painting by Yasmín Hernández, Nuyorican (Sour Rebel: Tato Laviera), 2006

Afrodiasporic dialogue), be it through the use of certain rhythmic structures, themes, or drawing on street vernaculars. In an interview, Laviera admits that half of his poetry readings are for black constituencies (Hernández 1997: 81).

The fact that many Puerto Ricans are living in places like New York, in close physical proximity with African-Americans and other peoples from the Caribbean, has resulted in drawing boricuas into the orbit of other African-based cultures. In dress and language, many Puerto Ricans show the influences of U.S. African-Americans and many identify with hip-hop culture. There are Puerto Rican rappers (like Big Pun, Rick Rodríguez, Anthony Boston, Charlie Chase, Tony Touch, Angie Martínez) who sing in English and/or Spanish, and many others who are graffiti artists, like the legendary Lee Quiñones. This does not include the extraordinary boricua presence in the evolution of break dancing (Rock Steady Crew, The Furious Rockers, The New York City Breakers and others). This intercultural effervescence is happening on the island as well, with rappers such as Vico C, Lisa M, Francheska, Ruben DJ, Welmo, and Tego Calderón.⁸ What is particularly interesting about island rappers is that they invoke and celebrate island culture, but no longer buy into the portrait of Puerto Rico as a big, happy multiracial family (Calderón 2002).

Cortijo, salsa, and afroboricua pride: Mulattoes own the streets

Since the 1960s there has been greater awareness and debate of racial issues, and increasing pride in being *Afroboricua* (Afro-Puerto Rican). The new self-esteem came through music, not literature. One of the turning points in



that new consciousness was the work of bandleader Rafael Cortijo (1928–1982) and singer Ismael Rivera (1931–1987), who teamed up in the mid-fifties to create some of the island’s greatest music, based on the traditions of bomba and plena, both Afro-Puerto Rican musical traditions. Cortijo’s sound became known internationally, just as before him the songs of Rafael Hernández (1893–1965) were greatly admired throughout all Latin America and the Caribbean. (One could argue that Rivera’s version of Tite Curet Alonso’s “Mi gente negra” did more for shaping a positive image of Afroboricua pride than all of Pales Matos’s poems.) Cortijo’s music (along with Afro-Cuban musical tradi-

tions) formed the basis of salsa, a hybrid genre that grew out of the urban experience of many Afro-Puerto Ricans in New York City and dealt with themes of poverty, racism, social violence, education, and drugs. It was equally a period of great community mobilizations, the creation of the Young Lords, and the Nuyorican Poets Café. The experience of American-style racism gave many boricuas a new sense of their Afroboricua roots, which had they stayed on the island might have taken more time to coalesce.

All these issues suffuse *El entierro de Cortijo* (1983) by Edgardo Rodríguez Juliá, a highly charged, humorous, hard-hitting chronicle of Cortijo's funeral, which took place on November 6, 1982. Held at the Luis Lloréns Torres housing project, the chronicle plays with the notion of death as the great equalizer that cuts through all the divisions (class, race, gender) within Puerto Rican society. Although a thorough analysis of this book is not possible here, there are some points worth mentioning. Rodríguez Juliá's chronicle reflects the shift in Puerto Rican popular culture towards Afro-Puerto Rican and working class expressions, notably analyzed by the likes of Juan Flores, José Luis González, Ángel Quintero Rivera, and Jorge Duany in the seventies and eighties and a host of scholars since the nineties (Frances Aparicio, Ruth Glasser, Edgardo Díaz Díaz).

In part this reflects the importance of two authors who polemically brought issues of race to the forefront: Isabelo Zenón Cruz (1939–2002) and José Luis González (1926–1996). Zenón's exhaustive 1974 two-volume study, *Narciso descubre su trasero* [Narcissus Discovers his Backside], is subtitled "The Black in Puerto Rican Culture." Although the author draws

heavily on literature and the arts, Zenón's book includes much historical, political, and educational material, even government reports. His work was controversial because it attacked much of the hypocrisy around race on the island, drawing on unexamined assumptions from popular culture, such as jokes, sayings, and proverbs, to prove his point. Zenón spares no one in his meticulously documented study. González's 1979 essay was first published in Puerto Rico in 1980. Although the "Four Storeyed-Country" has been criticized both for what it says (or does not say), the essay brought the discussion of the country's African roots to the fore.¹⁰ Most importantly, after Zenón and González, it was impossible for intellectuals, historians, and literary scholars to ignore racism and its insidious consequences. Secondly, *El entierro de Cortijo* shows how racial discrimination is now indirectly expressed through concern about crime. The author, from the beginning, shows apprehension, knowing that he is a middle-class and white, in a neighborhood where most are dark-skinned and poor. He even mentions a street that divides Lloréns Torres (described as lumpen) from the next neighborhood, Villa Palmeras, which is working-class and also the site where the chronicle ends. The crime is real enough (the island has high murder and armed robbery figures), but it has been racialized, with black and darker-skinned mulattoes suffering the brunt of arrests, even though the police do not keep statistics on race (Santiago-Valles 1995).

To his credit, Rodríguez Juliá never claims to be merely an observer, but acknowledges that he is situated socially and racially, although he clearly is an "outsider" in that particular neighborhood. This is perfectly summed up

when he mentions the act of recreating this event through the written word:

"Dark-skinned folks, dark-skinned folks all round and all I have is a Mont Blanc to write with....No, that eighteenth century craft of the chronicler forbids it: not even a notebook, a tape recorder, not even a Minox camera. I prefer to write the chronicle passing it before my eyes and ears, I'm stubbornly underdeveloped [...] The chronicler's filter is memory, personal and collective, and also one's prejudices, why not? You try and save what can be saved between the lived moment and the written chronicle. You lose almost everything, for sure, but the images remain, the most persistent details, those that cannot relinquish remembrance despite the treacheries of memory...." [Rodríguez Juliá 1983: 17-Author's Translation].

Perhaps the greatest achievement of Rodríguez Juliá's chronicle is his capture of the ever inventive and multiform colloquial Spanish spoken in Puerto Rico. Through certain words or verbal rhythms, the author reveals an extremely complex portrait of Puerto Rico, especially issues of race, class, and gender.

Since he is a writer and not a sociologist or politician, Rodríguez Juliá offers no neat, tidy, and consoling summations. He debunks the patriarchal myth of the great Puerto Rican family, constantly invoked by politicians and pundits; and shows how the old class order is being overturned, exemplified in how the burial turns into a street party, to the alarm of some. Although he knows the old ways were often repugnantly racist and classist, the emerging situation can be confusing, disruptive, and disorienting, reminding one of Bauman's *proteo-*

phobia. Not surprisingly, the book ends with the following: "Again, we are living in a time of ghostly intentions and unburied gestures, tradition explodes in a thousand conflictive pieces. How to reconcile so much waywardness with so much tenderness?" (Rodríguez Juliá 1983: 96—author's translation).

Rodríguez Juliá's crónica, despite the obvious focus on Cortijo's life and work, seems to have as a historical soundtrack two landmark songs, one Puerto Rican, another Cuban. Both songs are steeped in Afro-Caribbean working class culture: "Los entierros de mi gente pobre" by Tite Curet Alonso (made famous by singer Cheo Feliciano) and "Los funerales del Papá Montero" by Enrique Byron and Manuel Corona. The first, written by the recently deceased great Afro-Puerto Rican composer, Rodríguez Juliá, seems to have appropriated the spirit, authenticity, and humility of lower class life in the island, where funerals are genuine outpourings of grief thankfully bereft of hypocrisy. In the latter, we find the kind of raucous and irreverent humor from the guaracha tradition that can turn even a funeral into a celebration. But even more remarkably, Rodríguez Juliá's book seems to exemplify central tenets of Yoruba philosophy, where character, coolness, and beauty are intimately intertwined within a context of post-WWII social mobility, and later post-muñocista Puerto Rico. This might seem a contradictory assertion given the excessive, almost chaotic denouement of the funeral, but the deeper forces brought to the fore are those that emphasize generosity and the surfacing of a beauty that is neither too beautiful nor too ugly, of capturing a certain *aché* that suffuses the text between the lines (Thompson 1993: 3–18).

PATRIA O MUERTE

THE CONSTRUCTION & POSSIBILITIES OF NATIONALISM

XAVIER "XAVI" LUIS BURGOS

"...The narrative of the nation as it is told and retold in national histories, literatures, the media, and popular culture...provide[s] a set of stories, images, landscapes, scenarios, historical events, national symbols, and rituals which stand for, or represent, the shared experiences, sorrows, and triumphs and disasters which give meaning to the nation. As members of such an "imaged community," we see ourselves in our mind's eye sharing in this narrative. It lends significance and importance to our humdrum existence, connecting our everyday lives with a national destiny that pre-existed us and will outlive us (p613)." Stuart Hall in The Question of Cultural Identity

It might be said, with a certain comical element but deserving of a thorough exegesis, that if you look-up the word "pride" in the dictionary what you will find is a picture of an exuberant Puerto Rican holding the one-stared flag of the island attached to a six-foot stick. Furthermore, if the picture could speak, they say, it would be yelling the word "BORICUA!" - the collective name of the long-murdered indigenous inhabitants of Puerto Rico. For the past two years, students and activists of Chicago's Puerto Rican Cultural Center (PRCC) and Dr. Pedro Albizu Campos High School (PACHS) mobilize and participate in marches calling for

human rights for undocumented immigrants in the United States. The act, according to the ideology of the PRCC and PACHS, is specifically in honor of Puerto Rican and Mexican solidarity and, generally, in solidarity with other Latinas/os and oppressed peoples of color. On May 1, 2008 as the Puerto Rican youth returned to the Puerto Rican community of Humboldt Park in Chicago's Northwest Side, waving Puerto Rican flags, many residents, in front of their homes, in their cars, and outside their windows yelled out "Boricua!" while cheering and honking their horns. The simple act of waving a flag brought out an instant and seemingly visceral reaction of pride and acknowledgement between individuals with almost no prior contact or knowledge of each other as unique biographical persons. Individuality disappeared for a moment and what replaced it was a "collective knowing" - "We are both Puerto Rican and that is to be celebrated." Even the usage of "Boricua," which after the indigenous genocide subsequently transformed into the national term of endearment for the modern citizens of the colony-nation, indicates the complex process of national formation and identity. It must also be noted that these acts of spontaneous Diasporic Puerto Rican nationalism were in the context of a march whose goal is to break the paradigm of exclusion according to racial and ethnic lines that defines the national character of the

U.S. Furthermore, these acts took place in a highly contested urban space – a historical Puerto Rican community undergoing gentrification by a multi-cultural, but mostly white professional class – where nationalism is used in order to mobilize, resist, and claim spaces.

However, who and what gets defined as Puerto Rican and non-Puerto Rican? How is it possible to simultaneously denounce the exclusion of non-white human beings from citizenship – a symbol of national inclusion - while opposing the inclusion of white citizens in a gentrified community? Some of these very specific questions I hope to address in a general analysis of nationalism as it relates to race and ethnicity. I specifically would like to look-at the historical formation of a national character and identity, the ethnoracial exclusion-inclusion character of nationalism, the possibilities that nationalism allows for positive social change, and to challenge the idea that nationalism is equated with racism.

As described in one of the five elements of a national narrative by Stuart Hall, within the concept of the nation there exists an element of *ad infinitum* where the nation and ethnic and racial identities seem to have always existed and will forever exist. However, in Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* the origins are clear. The development of the nation-state has its beginnings in deliberate acts by the imperial monarchy and the forces of capitalism in order to solidify imperial and religious hegemony. The printing press in the age of capitalism in 16th

century Europe increased the creation of books. At first, they were in Latin for the Catholic elite (Anderson, p38), but due to Martin Luther's protestant reformation, books became widely published in the vernacular language of the popular masses. Between 1518 and 1525 one-third of all books published in German were of Martin Luther's works (Anderson, p39). Martin Luther therefore began to produce and influence a national religious character – a new Christian doctrine widely read and accepted by German speakers. The mix of language and religion became the element to unite German speakers in a concept of a German identity. It is also the mix of language and the print press that allowed millions of people to imagine a common linguistic origin and therefore a common destiny as a singular people.

"Speakers of the huge variety of Frenches, Englishes, or Spanishes, who might find it difficult or even impossible to understand one another in conversation, became capable of comprehending one another via print and paper. In the process, they gradually be-



came aware of the hundreds of thousands, even millions, of people in their particular language field...Through print, formed...the embryo of the nationally imagined community" (Anderson, p44).

According to Anderson, language was also used by European dynasties in the 18th and 19th century to unify their Empires and produce a "national identity," despite the fact that many of the monarchs did not speak those languages (Anderson, p85). The idea was that in order to maintain control and a unified commitment to the Monarchy, a singular, national identity must be formed. Although, as in the case of the print-press, the beauty of commonality allows human beings to imagine a sense of belonging and understanding between complex and different individuals, but at whose expense? Is conformity for the sake of a national identity in honor of commonality or designed to erase difference?

Nationalism simultaneously exhibits a sentiment of infinity while also mapping its origins. The nation and its subjects are the ground they walk on – a symbiosis of the natural world and that of *homo sapiens*. "...Either in the vocabulary of kinship (motherland, *Vaterland*, *patria*) or that of home (*heimat* or *tanah air* [earth and water, the phrase for the Indonesians' native archipelago])... Both idioms denote something to which one is naturally tied" (Anderson, p143). Like the mothers and fathers that produce us, care for us, teach us, and raise us (*Vaterland* and *patria* mean Fatherland and Motherland, respectively), the Earth and the imagined geographical boundaries of the nation become a part of us as much we are a part of it. While at the same time such a con-

cept allows for the intricate use of nature with all its chaos and beauty for the cultural productions that defines the nation, it also provides a problematic outcome. What will become of the children of other mothers and fathers, i.e. who becomes the time-honored and entitled native and the problematic and even dangerous settler? In "The Banana Enclave: Nationalism and Mestizaje in Honduras, 1910-1930s" author Darío A. Euraque details the metamorphosis of particular racial categories during a complex political, social, and economic context in order to exclude and include groups of people in order to solidify a homogenous Honduran *mestizo* national identity. In the early 20th century, Honduran intellectuals and elites hoped that British and U.S. corporate investment, like the United Fruit Company, would attract European immigration in order to "improve" the population. Instead, what the companies brought were black Caribs from Saint Vincent and Lebanese, Palestinian, and Syrian immigrants who became the dominant commercial elite on the North Coast (Euraque, p161-162). Since foreign investment did not produce the desired results, intellectuals and elites postulated an anti-imperialist using a re-defined nationalism and citizenship with a discourse of economic ownership. For example, the term *ladino* originally was decreed by the Spanish Crown as a non-white, non-Indian Spanish Speaker, incorporating mulattos, blacks, and other *mestizos*, but by the 1930s *ladino* and *mestizo* become more narrow categories that excluded both the black and mulatto West Indian immigrants and the indigenous Garifuna populations (Euraque, p151-155). By 1934 an Immigration Law was passed in which "the entry of Negroes, 'coolies,' gypsies and Chinese into the territory of the Republic [of Hondu-

ras were] prohibited." In this case, even those "indigenous" to the area temporarily defined as Honduras are excluded while those "mixed" with European blood ("settlers" and colonizers to the area) are placed into the national pedestal. However, the other "settlers," are excluded from inclusion into the nation. This complex tug and pull exists due to the interests of economic, political, and cultural hegemony that exist on multiple levels and change with those power struggles. One can conclude that there is nothing "natural" or "permanent" in national identity. The example of Honduras also provides a problematic element to nationalism: racism. Is nationalism an inherently racist project?

Juan Manuel Carrión's "The War of the Flags: Conflicting National Loyalties in a Modern Colonial Situation" describes Puerto Rican historian Carlos Pabón's critique of Puerto Rican nationalism's alleged inherent racist character. According to Pabón, neo-nationalism is still dangerous "because within it is the seed of xenophobic intolerance and the desire for ethnic cleansings. What a Puerto Rican nationalist really wants, deep down, is to kill a Dominican" (Carrión, p108). On the island, Dominicans are popularly viewed as the illegitimate settlers of the island of Puerto Rico. The Dominican's illegitimacy is transmitted through the popular view of them as too black, inassimilable, and blockers of Puerto Rican independence in the elections, ignoring the constant historical flow of seasonal sugarcane workers, musicians, and political exiles between the two islands for centuries. Such a postulation forces one to believe that Puerto Rican nationalism naturally and therefore indefinitely functions on a settler-native ideology and that

Dominicans will forever be the victim of a supposed independentista vendetta. As previously presented, power has a lot to do with the construction of a national identity. It is Puerto Rico's position as a colony and its lack of control over immigration or maritime laws that subject the immigrating Dominican, a people subject to neocolonialism, to the resentment of islanders. Interestingly enough, even "native" Puerto Ricans are excluded from full inclusion into the national identity along racial lines. As chronicled in Juan Flores' "Cortijo's Revenge," in August of 1988, Puerto Rican society, especially political and intellectual society, was up in arms over the bold suggestion that *El Centro de Bellas Artes* (an elite performance center) of the Capital City, which has halls named after the sophisticated (and white) national composers, singers, and playwrights, be named after a black, popular street musician of the lumpen *plena* (Flores, p92-93). Respondents to the articles in the island's most widely distributed and popular newspapers were appalled and debated the suggestion despite the fact that Rafael Cortijo probably represented the skin color, musical tastes, and experiences of most Puerto Ricans. His music, his racial category, and his rough, marginalized experience was too painful and embarrassing to be acknowledged as a national Puerto Rican character. One must acknowledge that the ideas of the nation or a national identity vary even within those who advocate for struggles of national liberation. It must also be noted that nationalism produces a profound feeling of love and creativity:

"In an age when it is so common for progressive, cosmopolitan intellectuals (particularly in Europe?)

to insist on the near-pathological character of nationalism, its roots in fear and hatred of the Other, and its affinities with racism, it is useful to remind ourselves that nations inspire love, and often profoundly self-sacrificing love. The cultural products of nationalism – poetry, prose fiction, music, plastic arts, show this love very clearly in thousands of different forms and styles” (Anderson, p141).

At the same time, black and mulatto musician, revolutionaries, and painters like Rafael Hernández, Dr. Pedro Albizu Campos, and Rafael Tufiño, respectively, are revered in films, monuments, and exhibitions. Nationalism also denotes an air of possibility and freedom. It has been through nationalism and its symbols that the call of freedom from oppression and marginalization has sprung – a common identity through a common struggle and a common enemy.

In Frantz Fanon’s epic *Wretched of the Earth*, the aim of colonialism by the Western European Empires, where the nation-state first formed, was to destroy the history and past of the people of the rest of the world in order to control them, manipulate them, and convince their subjects of their biological inferiority (Fanon, p148). It is, therefore, no surprise that the intellectuals of colonial districts (which would eventually become nation-states) sought to recreate the past in order to mobilize against their occupier. “...The existence of a nation is not proved by culture, but in the people’s struggle against the forces of occupation” (Fanon, p148). According to Anderson, dying for a revolution glistens with bright rays of grandeur and purity simply because it is self-sacrificing (Anderson, p144). The flag,

the ultimate symbol of national unity, has its origins in independence struggles. The Dutch *Prinsenvlag*, in their struggle against Spanish domination, is considered to be the first modern flag (Carrión, p103). Therefore, while nationalism has the possibility to exclude and exhibit racism, it has its modern origins in political and cultural affirmation and in a politic of human rights, such as the struggle to remove the U.S. Navy from the Puerto Rican island of Vieques. Nationalism, as ever changing as the nation itself, is full of possibilities and conceptualizations.

Nationalism and the Nation-State are complicated human constructions that are a part of complex historical processes with differential outcomes. However, nationalism cannot and should not simply be disregarded as passé and dangerous. One must understand the context that breeds hate and exclusion and in return work to change that. One must acknowledge the diversity of national expression and the benefit they bring to humanity. We are different but also the same, which can produce a greater understanding of humanity. Often times projects of assimilation, i.e. cultural destruction, which are sometimes called projects of national unity, are opposed with national and ethnic affirmation. Furthermore, it is the respect of that difference of customs, thoughts, and cultural practices and the work of solidarity that bridges those differences that can also teach us about humanity and our obligation to it.

HIP HOP BYZANTINE' ART

IN MOSAICS, AN ARTIST'S LASTING IMPRESSION

DAVID GONZÁLEZ, THE NEW YORK TIMES 2/25/08

There is life in the hands of Manny Vega. With nothing more than a pair of pliers, thick fingers and boundless patience, he transforms thousands of stubby tiles of stone and glass into glimmering mosaic portraits of poets, drummers, mothers and sons. By the end of the workday, he has to plunge his numb, dust-covered hands into hot water to revive them.

Five of his best-known mosaics are in East Harlem, including his most recent portrait of Julia de Burgos, the Puerto Rican poet whose words were as influential as her life was tragic. She died in East Harlem in 1953, felled by alcohol and despair, and was initially buried anonymously in potter's field. A half-century later, her portrait has returned to 106th Street and Lexington Avenue on a building, even as more of the area's working-class Puerto Rican residents are leaving.

"This is about permanence," Mr. Vega said. "El Barrio has history, but nobody was keeping it alive. This is



about being here for years and years, so when someone comes by and sees this, they'll say, 'Man, those Puerto Ricans had class. This is Byzantine cut!' "

Befitting a tropical people in a cosmopolitan city, his work draws on various traditions. He has taken an ancient art and infused it with elements of New York and Puerto Rico. As a devotee of the Afro-Brazilian religion of Candomblé, he crams his pieces with references to rituals and deities from Nigeria and Bahia, Brazil. Like New York, the city of his birth, his work is a dense tableau where hip riffs happily float against classic craftsmanship. "Who is going to define us if not us?" said Mr. Vega, 52. "In the projects where I grew up in the Bronx, our neighbors were Italian, Jewish, black and Puerto Rican. Every-

QUE ONDEE SOLA

LIBRADO ROMERO

body had their own palette and ear. But on the holidays we all got together. So I see us as a woven cloth where every culture is a thread that brings it together."

It was in the Bronx where he encountered his first mosaic, a tropical fish scene that still adorns an Art Deco building on the Grand Concourse north of 165th Street. He would pass by it on his way to grab autographs at Yankee Stadium, stopping long enough to run his hand along the tiles.

He gravitated to the arts in high school, spending time on printmaking and drawing. He went to art school, but withdrew after a few weeks when he lost his scholarship in a bureaucratic mix-up. He happily considers himself mostly self-taught.

In some circles, he is known as a muralist; among his earlier works is the towering painting of street scenes on the side of a building at 104th Street and Lexington Avenue, which he helped paint as a young assistant. In other circles, he is admired for exquisitely intricate beaded banners festooned with coins, feathers and photos, attesting to various rites of passage in his religion, which he adopted in 1985 during a trip to Brazil.

His love for Brazil — triggered, he said, by watching "Black Orpheus" on Channel 13 in the early '80s — drew him to a Brazilian dance class in New York, where he met Ana Araiz, whom he later married. She was a teacher who eventually became a noted promoter of tropical music concerts at the club Sounds of Brazil in Manhattan. She, too, would come to be initiated into Candomblé.

The beadwork he did for his religion, acts of devotion, led him to mosa-

ics. He already knew how to combine small pieces into a larger work of art; all the better that stone endures.

The man was into permanence.

"I liked painting," he said. "But paint fades."

His first mosaic was for the temple where he worshiped in Brazil. When he returned to New York, he practiced his technique with a do-it-yourself mosaic kit purchased from Pearl Paint. It was laborious, but he was accustomed to projects that took time — he already did large pen-and-ink drawings with mind-boggling layers of detail.



LIBRADO ROMERO

"Everybody wants instant art," he said. "This is old school. A good design, some good materials, and shut up and do the work. There is no shortcut."

His practice paid off in 1997, when he was chosen to design four panels for the

subway station at 110th Street and Lexington Avenue. The scenes on one level depict neighborhood life, but like his other work, they are thick with references to African religion in the New World.

"Manny is working in that current that flows from ancient Sicily to Lisbon to Rio and many other Brazilian cities, and on to New York," said Robert F. Thompson, a professor of art history at Yale University. "That is all part of Manny's cultural DNA."

And now it is part of the cityscape.

"Mosaics, they glitter, they have visual firepower that plain acrylic cannot have," Professor Thompson said. "That's what's wonderful about the subway mosaics. They pick up light and motion of the trains."

But after that commission, he would not pick up another public art project in New York for nearly a decade. Undeterred, he devoted himself to the craft, traveling with Ana to Mexico, where he sought out masters who taught him the visual grammar that he needed to express himself.

"Then Ana got sick on me," he said.

She received a diagnosis of brain cancer in summer 2000. He stayed home and cared for her. She died in his arms on Oct. 8, 2001.

"When she passed away, everybody abandoned me," he said. "People felt I was this tragic image. I lost her community and mine. I needed something to anchor to."

What he had were his art supplies.

"Through these trials, we had a love forever, forever, forever," he said.

"How can I make my art forever?"

So it was that a month after she died, he sat down in his tiny living room and pieced together a mosaic of a doe-eyed woman, her face framed by tendrils of wavy hair. A tiny crown floated above her. The face was alive, even if Ana was not.

"I did that with tears falling down my face," he said. "The mourning and the grief were the motivation to create that piece. And that is how I discovered the momentum of mosaics."

These days, he spends his time in a cold basement studio at the Pregones Theater in the Bronx, slowly assembling a 20-foot-wide mosaic he designed for a Chicago cultural center. Upstairs in the theater's lobby, he is preparing to unveil a mosaic of Oshun, the Yoruba goddess, swimming in an iridescent ocean of blue Venetian tile.

"I see her like a patroness of the theater," Mr. Vega said. "She is about the arts, beauty and elegance."

He leaned in close, like a lover, almost, and stroked the tiles. He kissed his fingers and touched the figure's heart.

"You walk by and this can mean so many things to so many people," he said. "It could be what you need to see, depending on whatever is beating in your head."

Tucked away in a corner of the mosaic was a small crab, a quiet reference to Ana's astrological sign. It's all about permanence.

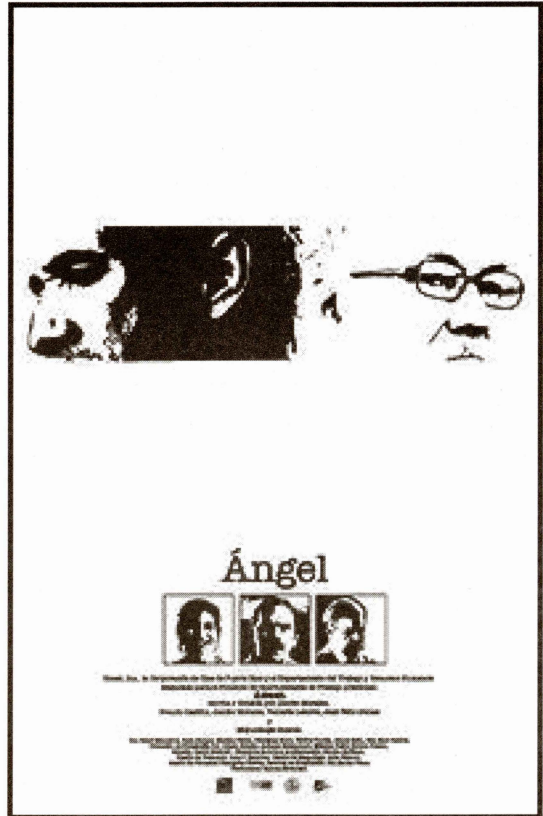
THE GREAT FILMMAKER

XAVIER "XAVI" LUIS BURGOS

JACOBO MORALES

Without a doubt, Puerto Rican Cinema is experiencing a Renaissance, and Boricuas outside of the island have a role to play. In the last few years, films such as "El Clown," "Cimarrón," and "Ladrones y Mentirosos" have expressed the beauty, horror, and contradictions of a contemporary and historical Borinquen. From slavery to the drug trade to finding community in a money-crazy society, contemporary Puerto Rican Cinema is provoking the minds and touching the hearts of a new generation of filmgoers. This year is no exception. During the second week of April, Paseo Boricua and Chicago were honored to receive arguably the greatest filmmakers of the Puerto Rican film industry, Jacobo Morales.

Every year the Chicago Latino Film Festival, presented by the International Latino Cultural Center in conjunction with Columbia College Chicago, honors a Latin American filmmaker for her or his contribution. On April 16, nearly 900 people packed a Northwestern University auditorium to honor Jacobo Morales, not only as a filmmaker, but also as a diverse man of creativity. From television, to political satire, poetry, and radio, Morales has been the essence of a Puerto Rican Renaissance man. He also directed the only Puerto Rican film nominated for an Academy Award – "Lo que le pasó a Santiago" – in 1989.



That night, his latest film, "Ángel," premiered for the first time in Chicago.

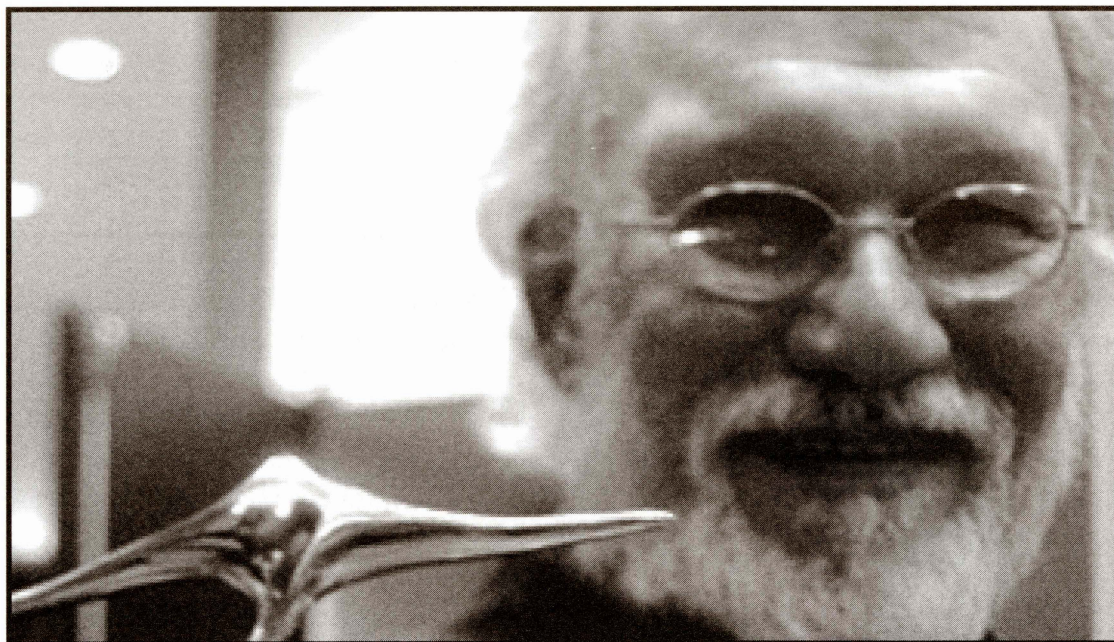
The Puerto Rican Cultural Center and Dr. Pedro Albizu Campos High School, aside from honoring Morales, his wife, and actor Braulio Castillo Jr. at Nellie's Puerto Rican Restaurant a few days earlier, mobilized over 200 people to the amazing film premier.

"Ángel" could be called the most political Puerto Rican film ever. The film

follows the lives of a group of people all connected to murder, corruption, and politics. Mariano Fariás is finally released after 15 years in prison, framed by "Ángel," a reactionary police lieutenant connected to a wide web of political persecution in the department. The film also follows a news reporter struggling between love and justice, a police officer yearning to escape his demons, and a lawyer trying to redeem his past. The film also draws on real political events to provide context to the characters' motives. "It is a combination of fiction with real events, such as the [University of Puerto Rico] strike of 1981. It includes real footage with recreations," says Morales. "Ángel" also highlights dis-

cussions on the colonial status of the island, the assassination of Filiberto Ojeda Ríos, and even features ex-political prisoner Rafael Cancel Miranda embracing Mariano, which evoked a strong applause from the audience.

"Ángel" is an extremely important film because it challenges the audience to understand a Puerto Rico that is still haunted by inequality and oppression. Of course, no one could have done it as well nor as with such visual beauty than Jacobo Morales, who also left Paseo Boricua with some beautiful words of recognition. "The advancement of la puertorriqueñidad is outside of Puerto Rico, [where it is] most profound."



MY PATH OF ASHES

XAVIER "XAVI" LUIS BURGOS

I was not a great man.
I deserved nothing.
Blood flowed through my veins like any other life.
But, the stream has stopped.
I have joined the silence.

I deserved nothing, because I was just flesh,
like those of whom I craved warmth from.
I won't have 100,000 at my funeral,
My casket carried through the bourgeois streets
of Viejo San Juan.
My goodbye most likely will resemble
a final tear and a single white rose
falling on a wooden casket
on a shallow hole of dirt
like those every days
Of La Perla life overlooking the unforgivable waters of the Atlantic.

I was made of flesh, just like the forgotten,
and the idolized.
I was not Albizu Campos –
¡Que te decances en paz, Maestro!
Or Rafael Cortijo,
¡Ay pobre negrito!
Whose rhythms made las caras Linda smile
and El Sonero Mayor howl.
Cortijo, hermano,
you were loved, but could never escape,
never imagine a world where you could not be celebrated
through Borinquen's caseríos,
but never in el Centro de Bellas Artes,
which should have been named after you.
But you wouldn't have had it any other way
for that your congas yelled the names of the troublemakers
and the survivors
of Santurce's water filled streets.

Not any other way will I have my grand exit.
Lift-up my casket all those who breathed in my presence!

Carry me away covered in a sky-blue Boricua flag.
 Carry me away from the tearful
 and the bewildered.
 In death, I have not time for those who want to be sad.

Carry me away with drums and trumpets,
 with the thumps of feet and the swinging of hips,
 with bomba dancers and parranda singers, singing
 ¡Este es tu último belén,
 belén,
 belén!

Carry me away with yells and screams
 of not the mourning,
 but of excitement!
 People, avenge your slumber!
 I want a carnival,
 a celebration.

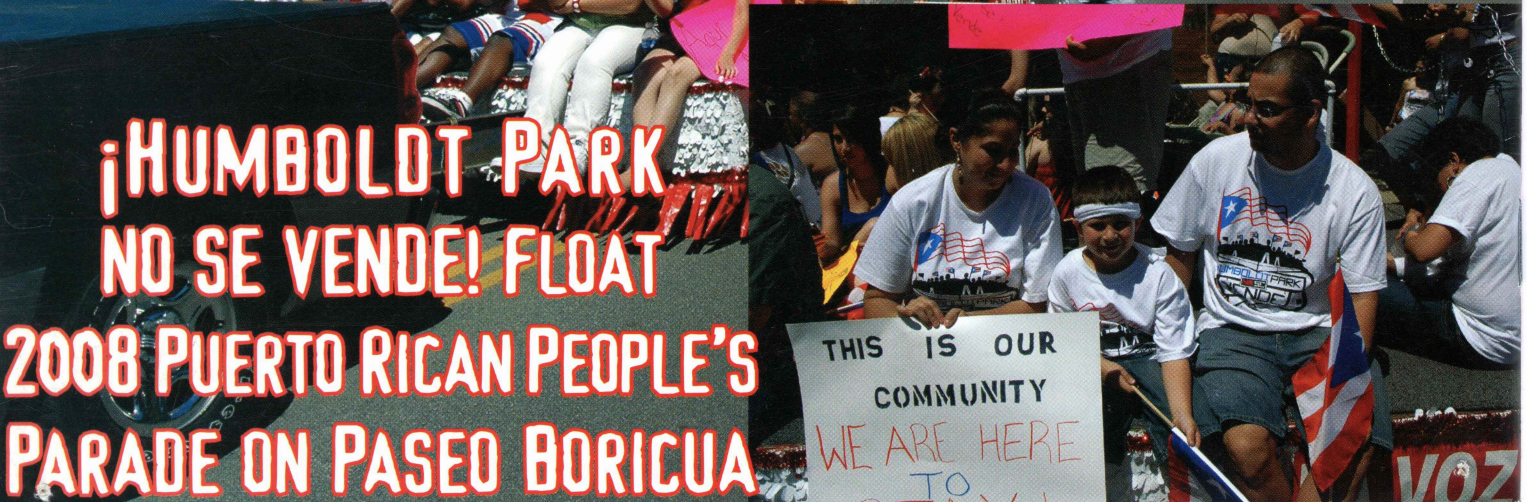
Roaring vejigantes scaring all,
 Cabezones hopping around.
 Don't celebrate my life,
 celebrate life itself,
 and death!
 For I have escaped laughing.
 Laughing for that now I can rest
 and not think of the chaos that is
 Puerto Rico.

The chaos that creeps into my final escape,
 that surrounds and immerses itself around my casket,
 the chaos that carries me from bandera to bandera,
 through the eternally resilient beauty of Paseo Boricua,
 with raised fists and stern eyes,
 brown eyes and green eyes,
 brown skin,
 white skin,
 black hair, blonde,
 straight, curly.....
 How varied are the Boricua people!
 How I will miss you....

Come all to my final escape.
 Hear the strings of rapidly playing cuatros,
 White dresses flying, twisting in the air.
 Carry me on your backs, I'm not heavy.
 Carry me surrounded by scratching guiros

and burning lechón.
Oh, set me ablaze!
Release me from your forgiving shoulders.
Set to fire, banish the ashes,
made from flesh like yours,
while poetesses read,
and flamboyán flowers fall,
while people sing the revolutionary La Borinqueña
and timbales pound.
Let all see the joy,
the insanity
of being Boricua.

Take my ashes
and make it a trail on a speeding truck.
Up, up
through the winding roads of Barrio Lirios Dorados.
Turn right, turn left,
like a merengue,
make it fast, make it quick
through the once dirt road that my mother escaped,
only to bleed on cold Chicago concrete.
Through the road of yellow flamboyanes of my grandmother
As she walked everyday on 50 cent shoes.
Up, up
turn after turn
whisk away my ashes.
Can't you see Juncos expanding under the factory smoke?
my ashes are now a trail
of the road of cane-workers that once lived
and weeping mothers for dead children that once giggled.
We are all flesh
and one way or another, we become ashes,
particles of dust,
remnants of lives never to be known again.
So let my remnants be that path,
a direction towards the smell of wet palm leaves
and bitter sweet realities
so that for those still breathing can carry out the prophecy,
my last wish of a free Borinquen.
As free as my ashes
that now flow through the warm Caribbean breeze
as the blood that once flowed through my veins.



**¡HUMBOLDT PARK
NO SE VENDE! FLOAT
2008 PUERTO RICAN PEOPLE'S
PARADE ON PASEO BORICUA**

VOZ