

# When 'I' became ethnic: ethnogenesis and three early Puerto Rican diaspora writers.

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## When 'I' Became Ethnic: Ethnogenesis and Three Puerto Rican Diaspora

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### ABSTRACT

Criticism of Esmeralda Santiago's use of the phrase "I became ethnic" in her novel *When I Was a Pirate's Wife* revealed the ambiguity of debate surrounding the concept of ethnicity in the

and uncovered the essentialist perception of “lingers. Looking at the development of Puerto “nationality” from a sociohistorical perspective reasons for Puerto Ricans in the United States the latter, a phenomenon that critics must take understanding the literature of Puerto Ricans point, this study analyzes the “ethnogenesis”- signs—in the texts of three early diasporic Puerto studied texts of the three writers—Jesús Colón Miranda Archilla—demonstrate that each writer and rhetorical purpose for, Puerto Rican ethnicity whenever ethnicity has been emphasized, national displaced or minimized. That the ethnic project writer affirms the idea that ethnic identity, as is perceived and valued differently. These three writers enhance our current understanding of issues of identity that continue to vex our community work sheds new light on how Puerto Rican ethnicity [Key words: ethnicity, ethnic studies, diaspora Puerto Ricans in New York, narrative]

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In 1993 Addison-Wesley published Esmeralda Santiago's *When I Was Puerto Rican* to favorable reviews and health Puerto Ricans, however, was not completely positive. *Hispanic Nation: Culture, Politics and the Constructing*

of Santiago's memoir “disturbed some American-reared from the island, for it seems to imply that one can cease. If “mainland” Puerto Ricans responded in this manner

more hostility from “islanders.” In an article *Caribena*, island-based critic Michele Dávila Gonçalves notes that “chocó mucho con la sensibilidad patriótica-nacional.”

According to Lisa Sánchez González, island feminists took to task for what they perceived as the work’s effacement. This feminist perspective holds that the text contains “appear compelling and positive but which in reality “f “assimilationist tenets of the ‘American Dream,’” all of a certain hegemonic thirst (and market demand) for the acceptance—even celebration—of colonial paternalist comments would indicate that for once in recent memory waived their traditional agenda and have actually come bashing in Santiago’s work in a concerted defense of the reaction apparently situates the feminist position with imperative “national” one. Sánchez González claims that with the two other narratives analyzed in this particular Carmen de Monteflores’s *Santando bajito* and Judith Ortiz Sun—represent texts that “speak from the margin” only American center. These texts are thus deemed political in comparison to the earlier feminist works (of Luisa C Sánchez González’s tenuously constructed literary diaspora. Planting Santiago’s memoir within a political Rico’s ambiguous and highly politicized condition this González derisively dismisses it along with other “nov “uppity white female ‘I’... might like to be in America “the brown and down female ‘we’ outside has many v critical stance and the reaction the book has received contrast sharply with how Santiago views her own work.

In responding to the criticism of her book, it is revealed “immigrants who have returned to their countries” and understand the irony of the past tense in the title, and

feeling that, while at one time they could not identify themselves as having any identity but the nationality to which they belong, once they’ve lived in the U.S., their “cultural personality” is compromised, and they no longer fit as well in their own country nor do they feel completely comfortable as Americans.

Here Santiago refers primarily to questions of ethnicity. She, like her book, articulates that odd Puerto Rican experience of oneself from a “national” to an “ethnic” subject with time.

In an interview with Carmen Dolores Hernández, Santiago

of being renamed and refigured from “Puerto Rican” to “American,” she says, “the minute you arrive—that you lose your connection to a specific place—you’re now lumped into this morass of people. For Puerto Ricans who have constituted the diaspora in the United States, the experience she observes here is only the beginning. Like so many of her friends, she does not help but assimilate some of the “American” ways of thinking and acting. She, a puertorriqueña, doesn’t know of any Puerto Rican who has returned to the island. She asserts, “Every Puerto Rican I know wants to be Puerto Rican on the mainland.” For “mainland” Puerto Ricans, she has experienced the bitter irony of returning to “homeland,” an experience that only reinforces the desire to return home. For Santiago, that return marked a significant revelation: “home was no longer home,” and that she had changed. She asks Puerto Ricans in the island to see her as different, not because she is different, but because she is so Americanized. And this rejection becomes the prodigal son or daughter realizes how assimilated

Puerto Rico was so Americanized...I thought, I was the only puertorriqueña who have never left the island and I want to allow the American contamination I was seeing in the States. There were McDonald’s, Pizza Huts, and so on. I used to be proud of our culture. Big Macs are not our cultural legacy. They at least have an excuse for being Americanized. That was a big part of what drove me away!!.

For many Puerto Ricans who have spent a good portion of their lives in the United States, Santiago’s words resonate as validated truth. To attempt to describe the many complex nuances of that experience with the title, with its suggestion of national and cultural abandonment, is to do justice to Puerto Ricans, especially those who cannot fully comprehend the complex form of ethnicity that retains only traces of some percentage of

It was precisely the Nuyorican poets who began to articulate their experiences with their island brethren. Miguel Piñero’s poem, “The Day I Was Born,” is an angry diatribe centered on the return to the island. Piñero, a prominent Puerto Rican poet, says “this damn blessed land

Pinero portrays Puerto Rico as "this slave blessed land  
search of spiritual identity" and "are greeted with prof  
points to the irony of being considered an outsider by  
colonized and, from his perspective, do not have a ger  
own culture:

puertorriqueños cannot assemble displaying the  
nuyoricans are fighting & dying for in newark,  
south bronx where the fervor of being  
puertorriqueño is not just rafael hernandez (Lbs)

Similarly, Miguel Algarín's "A Mongo Affair" attacks the  
American Dream-inspired delusions that some island  
Puerto Ricans, in the United States. Significantly, the p  
recognizing and accepting the loss of "home," an ange  
in what the author perceives to be Puerto Rican deper

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man's claims that Puerto Ricans in the States are doing  
compatriots, the speaker in the poem lashes out that t  
sucked the virility and spirit out of the Puerto Rican m  
extended metaphor of the flaccid penis that informs tl

mongo means flojo  
mongo means bloodless  
mongo means soft  
mongo can not penetrate  
mongo can only tease<sup>3</sup>

Like Algarín's poem, Tato Laviera's well-known poe  
and anger that explode when the nuyoricana female sp  
who would dare question her puertorricaness:

go ahead, ask me, on any street-

corner that I am not puertorriqueña  
 comedimelo aqui en mi cara  
 offend me, atrevete a menos  
 que tu no quieras que yo te meta  
 un tremendo bochinche de soplamoco  
 pezcoz that's gonna hurt you  
 in either language, .14

These poems, written more than two decades ago by  
 poets, represent a strong, harsh response to an island  
 minds eludes and alienates them. In certain ways, San  
 Nuyorican tradition in narrative form. In an original and  
 Santiago's autobiography, Hugo Rodríguez Vecchini's  
 "ethnographic autobiography" contains picaresque and  
 difference that the generically expected conversion in  
 Rodríguez Vecchini sees in the title the complexities of  
 an incomplete past ("un pasado inconcluso") that defines "a  
 limit" at the heart of the author's perception of her hybrid  
 "halfway conversion."<sup>5</sup> The book thus illustrates the complex  
 identity conundrum, what Rodríguez Vecchini calls the  
 destined to live simultaneously between two languages.

Rodríguez Vecchini claims that Santiago creates in her work  
 a counter-history of the American Dream. If this is the case,  
 to note the response to Santiago's attempt at narrating  
 and describing her "hybrid" experience. That her memoir  
 aroused a "nationalistic" resistance against this construction  
 puertorricanness in a nineties' narrative suggests that  
 prevalent in Puerto Rican culture has re-surfaced yet a  
 consciousness. More importantly, however, the critique  
 uncovered the fixated, essentialist perception of identity  
 of the Puerto Rican community. According to Agustín  
 conceptualizing the Puerto Rican national formation through  
 essentialized cultural identity, which almost always has

danger of being annihilated by cultural imperialism. T  
as a “privileged space of resistance from an indigenou  
argued, as most of the essayists in *Puerto Rican Jam: Ess*  
that the island’s elite, the so-called *blanquitos* continue to  
essentialized schemata as a diluted nationalist project  
anything, their failure to accomplish their historically  
nation-state. Indeed, this seems an established critica  
González expounds in his seminal essay *Literatura e ide*  
which links this nationalist agenda, and its attendant l

In the absence of a nation-state, and with the masse  
traditionally conservative tendencies of nationalism ir  
developed in the island, through its various ideological  
identity based on an illusory “nation.” The present Esta  
and promotes that illusion because it gives the sensati  
people are controlling an “internal space” outside of h  
when ultimate power remains in the hands of the Uni  
President. In turn, the Puerto Rican diaspora has com  
nearly half of the Puerto Rican population resides out  
The distancing of Puerto Ricans from this illusory “nat  
affords a concrete geographical site) has led to the “in  
on “ethnicity” and national identity:

“The Puerto Rican people share a feeling of na  
translated into traditional nationalist claims to  
Puerto Ricans have formed an ‘imaginary com  
imaginary belonging to a territory that spans th  
certain areas on the mainland (e.g. South Bron  
North Philadelphia). This imaginary communi  
feelings of nationhood and ethnicity; that is, P  
simultaneously imagine themselves as a nation  
group. Puerto Ricans’ self-perception does not  
of a ‘nation’ or that of an ‘ethnic group.’ I belie  
‘ethno-nation’ accommodates the Puerto Rica  
peculiar subject positions better than that of ‘r

However, Puerto Ricans imagine themselves as an “  
emphasis on both sides of the hyphen: self-representa  
deterritorialized ethno-nation in the United States, an  
in Puerto Rico?<sup>23</sup>The significance of this point cannot k

available to Puerto Ricans for their own self-represent  
comprehending the fundamental differences between  
boricuas on the island and the United States. It is impo

Grosfoguel's comment that "the historical context of t in question and what objectives are sought at any part "the hegemony of ethnicity over nation or nation over of "ethnicity" support this assertion. Social anthropolo construction of "ethnicity" as a response to a collectiv "ethnic" is rooted in the "othering" proces<sup>25</sup>A group wil itself so as to distinguish itself from others and therefo

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insure its survival. There is, then, a political basis for e Sollors argues, it is this political drive, fueled by the co moves an ethnic collective to "recreate" their distincti "distinctiveness," groups establish boundaries and me calls "cultural markers of difference," that maintain th common ones of kinship, commensality, and commo present or visible, the collective will resort to seconda recognition at a distance?<sup>28</sup> Sometimes it is the preserv construct "tradition" that motivates and unites an eth completely disassociate this concept from political co

Returning to Grosfoguel's remark about the emphasi "nation," we can readily see that for Puerto Ricans in t obvious reasons behind the emphasizing of their ethn Separated from their geographic base, "their homelan Americans, it is not surprising that Puerto Ricans in th recreatingpuertorriqueñidfor reasons of survival and p signs produced in this process will not always jibe witl island, and they probably represent hybrid forms, but to keep a cultural connection alive. The muralsFinBarri of the process and symbolic manifestation of "Puerto murals, as with the "ethnic" literary texts produced by ancestry residing in the United States, it is crucial to n

"ethnicity" a very real, living, and human process is no importance that individuals within the group ascribe t cultural production of these two sets of United States.

cultural production of these two sets of United States demonstrates Stuart Hall's idea, one that we should not signs acknowledge the place of history, language, and

The idea that Puerto Ricans constitute a "floating nation" is a metaphor for the Puerto Rican diasporic condition. How with every passing generation firmly rooted in the United States relevance and currency. The present and future generations in the United States do not and will not necessarily adopt a "floating" nationhood. Writers representing these generations Rodriguez, create literature grounded in a Puerto Rican beat of a different timbale. It is quite possible that these writers from a widening distance that foments weary recognition of island culture, politics, and current events. In an interview "the island is a myth...It doesn't exist for me at all" Rodriguez may not feel any profound responsibility towards the island they might not even see their literary work as part of a Puerto Rican literature. Instead they see themselves as following the traditions of American literature—even as they consider these significant developments, the essentialization of the diaspora continues, and apparently so does the desire to nationalize the people of Puerto Rican ancestry.<sup>34</sup> The adherence to this model on the part of some Puerto Rican critics and writers becomes a diasporic Puerto Rican literature which has always been one of hybridity<sup>35</sup> and which has primarily followed the dialectic of ethno-genesis—the semiotic process of producing sign

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ethnicity<sup>36</sup> The misunderstanding and mishandling of the diasporic subject's perspective, underlines a deep wound that continues to widen. The nationalistic project and rhetoric of the diaspora space inhabited by Puerto Ricans *de aquí y de allá* holds

Rican imaginary. However, our questions over the false identity become even more pressing and crucial when the diaspora were also compelled to create texts from

nationalistic, position, as they engaged their new surroundings placed on them. From these earlier writers, and their thoughts on how the stark differences between the populations respectively grow more glaringly apparent with the consequent creation of a new generation. These differences will eventually necessitate an impulse to unite all writings created by any writer of Puerto Rican descent require establishing a space for that literature written by those residing in the United States.

In actuality, then, Santiago's contribution to the dialogue of the diasporic, following Maria "Mariposa" Fernández in a series of literary texts written by authors more commonly associated with a different brand of Puerto Rican identity, one that typically relies more on identification with ethnicity than with nationality. As a result, the formation and expression of that identity is most recognizable in the work of these writers, but there were precursors—Bernardo Vega and others who quickly come to mind—and others who, for the most part, remain obscure. Jesús Colón, known but under-theorized, Puerto Rican writer, and Graciana Miranda Archilla, an estranged islander whose lives overlapped as they migrated, resided, and worked in New York, a period that covered most of the twentieth century.<sup>37</sup> The work of only a handful whose work we have available for study. In truth, selecting these writers does not represent a complete picture; it follows the logic of dealing with what Sánchez González refers to as the diaspora's "paperlessness."<sup>38</sup> Each of these writers also prominently recognized for allowing members of a collective to voice their exigencies and draw possible resolutions for the social and political group. Their work, although only a limited and partial representation of the literary production of all Puerto Ricans living in the United States, nonetheless illustrates how three Puerto Ricans recreated their narrative in this new land, not only as a way of making sense of their collective experience, but also as a means of fulfilling their political and cultural aspirations.

One of the earliest and most prolific Puerto Rican writers was Jesús Colón, who arrived as a stowaway in 1918, and founded several of the Spanish newspapers in the city. Colón was a vocal defender of Puerto Rican independence who held various positions. Eventually, he became a journalist and columnist. He produced most of the material found in the two important anthologies: *A Puerto Rican in New York and Other Sketches*, originally published in 1949, and *It Was and Other Writings*, a posthumous collection published in 1971 by the Center for Puerto Rican Studies of The Recovering the United States Hispanic Literary Center for Puerto Rican Studies. In total, Colón wrote over 100 works throughout his life, according to Edna Acosta Belén and

His sketches, the focus in this essay, are often narrative in style that sometimes contain fictional techniques such as

Being a communist and internationalist, Colón reflects a deep concern for issues related to global capitalism and the unyielding support of Puerto Rican independence, his political and nationalist themes. We hardly ever witness a running commentary from the Puerto Rican cultural encyclopedia to prop up his argument. The idea of a cultural encyclopedia refers to signs established to the ethnic subject through “the processing system of the latter is rhetorical in nature, since it involves the strategic use of ethnic signs from memory and imposing them within a narrative. Although Colón brings up some of these signs, it is rare that he praises the homeland. In fact, some sketches actually criticize. “Fanguito is Still There,” which describes the famous San Juan Hometown Church,” which criticizes the racism in the

Indeed, most of the sketches in *A Puerto Rican in New York* are undercurrent of loss—those signs representing ethnic identity that are lost, stolen, or appropriated. Colón thus constructs Puerto Rican ethnicity based on the minority status of his group and the consideration its victimization and oppression. Notably, in “U.S. hegemonic power through the construction of ethnicity among Puerto Ricans,” for example, he writes about the bells of San Juan which were stolen by pirates and sold to the town of New York. This incident moves him to quip that when Puerto Ricans migrate to the United States, they should reply: “We came to trade.” In another sketch titled “José,” Colón narrates how a friend has his idea for a Spanish tune stolen and it becomes a

Even language, a distinct identity marker, functions as a site of victimization, alienation, and loss. The sketch “Because of the real incident of how Bernabé Nuñez, a soldier returned

in a bar for speaking his native language. The sketch demonstrates a nationalistic pride of Spanish, “the language of the Puerto Rican” (126), but uses linguistic difference to highlight the displacement

What we are saying now is that in order to avoid violations of rights, we have to organize the bloc in the neighborhoods for simple democratic ri

Colón often inverts signs to achieve rhetorical purposes. In instance, his mother-in-law's devout religiosity, including Puerto Rican signs appropriated for the defense of color. In sketch, Carmencita slowly draws away from the tainted Catholic ritual found in the United States (accepting no bingo in the Church, for example), and by the end of the 'The Prayer of the Eleven Thousand Virgins' as a way that will ever happen to Stalin" (PR in NY, 110). When a sign the island, as in "Castor Oil: Simple or Compound," it novelty of the diasporic condition. For example, when

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oil—"the purgative given to us by our grandmothers with my home town in Puerto Rico"<sup>42</sup>—he does not attempt to use it to stress the cultural difference between the two by the pharmacist if he wants the "simple" or "compound." Colón chooses the worse-tasting one out of ignorance

I drew a note of consolation when I congratulated you for having chosen the castor oil simple, instead of the compound. Only my dead grandmother and the devil himself could have mixed all the fiendish oils and ashes that this yankee pharmacist mixed into the simple innocently crystal clear

William Boelhower writes that "who you are" is a function

and "where you have been," or what he calls *habitar* proposition, 'I Am.'<sup>43</sup> This is what gives uniqueness to the forging together of past and present spatial-temporal

one. In the ethnic text, awareness of geographic sur-  
a moment of belonging if not owning. It certainly de-  
superimposing of identity or self onto the cultural terr-  
clearly operating in the sketch “Wanted—A Statue,” in  
the dedication of a statue honoring a Puerto Rican fi-  
very heart of the city” (PR in NY, 136). Even here, thou-  
Colón has opted, not for recalling an existing sign th-  
Ricanness, but for dwelling on what is absent. Yet it  
from this sketch, that Colón’s sense of ethnicity, and th-  
or recreation of it, is quite centered on his coming to  
geographic location.

The sketch that contains the most revealing insight  
ethnicity is “Nice to Have Friends in All Walks of Life.”  
club Vanguardia Puertorriqueña, for which he served  
to rent a larger than usual boat to get to its annual picn-  
sketch contains the most dominant Puerto Rican “nat-  
written, and the Puerto Rican enclave projecting so m-  
ship, floating, moving along a river, temporarily isolat-  
contained atmosphere, people eat the Puerto Rican de-  
brought—while using the American hotdogs served or-  
songs reminiscent of the island, dance danzas and run-  
sprinkle their conversations with Spanish, and chant E-  
In this text we have signs that come very close to those  
difference” described by Nash, particularly those relat-  
commensality that are most often associated with nati-  
Boelhower’s idea of the typescene—“a hypercodified,  
describing and defining ethnicity that illustrates ethni-  
instructional purposes.<sup>44</sup> The Feast is such a typescene,  
in many ethnic texts, and which emphasizes kinship and  
however, is Colón’s humorous but sobering criticism of  
ambition and foolish pride. The final message of this s-  
of pragmatism and common sense over the false allur-  
this narrative exemplifies Colón’s restrained approach.

and his preference for an ethnicity that represents pol especially from a Marxist perspective.

If Colón's narrative contains ethnicity, Pura Belpré's mediating political and social role. Belpré migrated to shortly after began working with the public library. In in the Library School of the New York Public Library, v desire to write children's books. Her main concerns w and reaching the young Puerto Rican audience. Her fi Puerto Rican folktales into English so that children co them, learn about their heritage. Belpré's first book, p a translation of the popular Puerto Rican folktale Pérez y published The Tiger and the Rabbit and Other, The first folktales written in English. Among her other numerou a collection of Juan Bobo stories and various translatio American folktales and children's stories. Belpre's wor the recognition it justly deserves. Arte Público recently her novel about adolescence, written in the forties, titl The American Library Association honored her by nar literature after he<sup>45</sup>

Children's literature is not usually included among t canon and rarely, if ever, within ethnic literary studies should interest scholars of Puerto Rican diasporic liter Puerto Rican folktales serve as a fascinating study of h Rican views cultural material from her homeland and translated, "diasporican" text. The one text, though, p discussed in this essay is her book Santiago

Published in 1969, and written in English, the story Puerto Rican boy, the Santiago of the title, tries to make every Selina, a pet hen that he left on the island before movi This situation is made more complicated when Santia another hen on his way to school. Santiago's desire to as well as Selina's, becomes a desire tantamount to sel believes that "there was something else besides Selina really mattered now<sup>46</sup> The teacher realizes that the boy once" (3), but instead of criticizing him, she accepts th between those two worlds. Eventually, the boy, with th existence of both hens.

Unlike Colón, Belpré utilizes the ethnic sign to adva less leftist ethnic project. The incorporation of this pa

the New York cityscape perhaps represents the "worki fantasm—Frederic Jameson's concept of a familial tex as she herself ventured from nampoo metropolis<sup>47</sup> This r

island asserts itself, textually speaking, into the new te  
resistance that recalls Homi Bhabha's theorization of ]  
"destabilize the colonizer's disavowal of difference." The  
materializes the absent presence of Puerto Rico, which  
idea that the ethnic project needs memory for validati  
of "absent presence," one needs only to recall Piñero's  
years before the skin of the fruit / ever reached my tee

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of remembering is heightened by one other ethnic sig  
important events in Puerto Rican history, and to a less  
Museum, which the children pass on the way back to :  
of this absent presence conjures up a possible world th  
content because it promotes a hybrid world, where th  
present, his "here" and "there," come together to coex  
represents Jameson's "complex term," that part of Jan  
the "semiotic rectangle," appropriated from A.J. Grein

Jameson utilizes the semiotic rectangle "for explorin  
ideological intricacies of the text.<sup>50</sup> The semiotic recta  
oppositions and their contradictions within a text, and  
out" of these semes, the critic can better "read" the ide  
The complex term represents the "ideal synthesis of th  
Santiago these would be "the United States" and "Puer  
subcontraries being "campo" and "metropolis" or "cit  
text, then, would consider the "ideal synthesis" of botl  
Puerto Rico; textually, it is a hybrid world where a hen  
space, but at a deeper level it is the representational sc  
cultural, and ideological conflict represented by the tv  
Jameson's ideas, we can see how Belpré has transform  
a narrative that constructs a "wish-fulfilling text," whic

ideological content significant for her collective. And e  
resistance from a hybrid subject position, one can pro  
supports the ideological underpinnings of the status q  
suggesting that hybridity doesn't always resist politica

suggesting that hybridity doesn't always resist political  
Despite vestiges of linkage to the island, Belpré's "ethnic  
desire to engage the realities that constitute her new  
writer, Graciana Miranda Archilla.

Miranda Archilla migrated to the United States in 1948, during the repression of independentist activity on the island. Miranda is known for a poetic movement in the island, called "Atalaya de los Poetas," which moved away from romanticism and revolutionize Puerto Rican poetry. The poets supported socially conscious poetry and engaged in the independence movement. The repressive political climate to find better job opportunities, prompted Miranda to migrate to New York City. While there, he worked for magazines and newspapers, and participated in many Puerto Rican cultural and political clubs and organizations. His work includes essays and several books of poetry, written in Spanish and English.

Among his less known works are three fictional pieces published in the Center for Puerto Rican Studies. These three short stories are published under the pseudonym Mars Hillmar. Two of them—"The Lightning Strikes"—are in manuscript form, the third is handwritten, at times unintelligible, rough draft. It is best to discuss these three narrative works in depth, but it is clear that collectively they presented highly puzzling and challenging perspectives on Puerto Rican ethnogenesis. One of the stories does not have a sign or subject, and the other two include ethnicity through their titles. The glaring absence of the Puerto Rican sign and subject matter make them necessary additions to our study of Puerto Rican literature.

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Miranda's work naturally compels one to wonder why he would do such as he would so blatantly efface any sense of Puerto Rican identity.

At first glance, one would imagine that Miranda's stories have similarities with those written by Pedro Juan Soto and

same period. Both Soto and González wrote from the perspective of Puerto Ricans looking at the diasporic subject. Theirs is a sympathetic view of the Puerto Rican in the States as victim, but the reader sees

distance. José Luis González, an early defender of diaspora, argues that it is those Puerto Ricans living in the States who will produce the literature of the diasporic experience, and adds that it is written in English.<sup>54</sup> The Nuyorican writers, often cited as writing from the standpoint of those who are here to stay, constitute an exception to this comment. Soto and González lived for a relatively short time in the States, returned to the island and González lived a good portion of his life in Puerto Rico. Miranda lived close to forty years in New York City and his last years in Puerto Rico. In all of that time he seems to have cultivated, the persona of an exile, and these narrative choices reflect that. Though he lived considerably longer in the United States than Soto, his literary production in English does not integrate a diasporic one from a sympathetic distance.

There may be practical reasons why Miranda wrote in English under a pseudonym. He might have wanted to try his hand at writing in English and so used a pen name to protect his reputation as a writer in Spanish or as a pleasure or as a challenge for his English language skills. Whatever the reasons, we learn from Miranda's exercise that the ethnic project is only possible to the extent that there is a need for constructing it. And such a need must necessarily emerge from a direct engagement with the new geographical site. The author is playing the ethnic game, and how can this happen if he takes a stance of entogeny? Entogenesis can occur only if the ethnic subject wills to break the frame. He calls the "frame," a concept similar to "border"—that is, a boundary that experiences the new world and recalls the cultural enclosures of the old. To re-invent ethnicity within a new cultural context or space, the border necessarily preempts the possibility of any ethnic project. This is what is written by a writer within the ethnic group who stubbornly holds to the perspective of ethnicity.<sup>56</sup> Miranda's null Puerto Ricanness is what allows us to conclude that he held on tenaciously to a national identity that clashed with the hybrid identity embraced by contemporary Puerto Ricans. He believed in an "essentialized" Puerto Ricanness built on a fixed territory that would not allow him to "recreate" in narrative form a diasporic identity.

Even as Miranda fights to retain an essentialist image of himself, his spirit, and mind, the overpowering force of habitare dominates. The text that still attempts to mediate, however obliquely, between the here and there. In the story, "The Shadow," for example, a Polish immigrant, is used to subvert and resist the attempt to mediate. Sollors calls "consent," which seems like a euphemism for the immigrant who is drawn as a typical immigrant, a stowaway whose "h

the road" and who eventually arrives in America, "motivated by the hopeful horizons and helpless toils. Kultzke's story foll

traditional immigrant story: he takes on odd jobs, and opens up a meat market. His downfall is an American woman with whom he falls in love and marries.

Miranda shapes Mabel into an unflattering character, a representation of the United States. Miranda describes Mabel as “serpent-like” with “witchery black eyes, as though crawling out of the earth” (3). Mabel is also “narcissistic” and “debauched,” a succulent “prey” (4). Miranda intimates that Mabel’s beauty and her new home, is deceptive and perverse and will never be true. Two signs in the text support this reading: Kultzke’s knife and apron. The signs are “ethnicized” by their association with Kultzke’s working class status. They represent working accoutrements, strong symbols of unskilled labor that most immigrants traditionally performed. The apron as “white, with red dots and stains, like a banner with blood, recalls the emphasis placed on “blood” as a marker of one’s ethnicity. Thus, it is quite revealing when Mabel describes the apron as “a sign of my life” (5). Similarly, the knife at times personifies Kultzke, as described as “happy days for the butcher’s knife” (7). The knife works as a synecdoche for Kultzke’s class and ethnic status. The butcher hesitates to part with it. The knife “is a friend that has been penetrating” (6). When he runs after his adulterous wife with him. With that knife, he “dismembers,” “dissects” her in a jealous rage until he finds a “batch of photographs” (signifying “monstrosity” and “perversion. The sort of thing Nature

At the end, Mabel has apparently run off with the woman. Kultzke torches himself in the process of burning the woman. It is unfortunate that Miranda utilizes this heterosexist strategy within an ideologically oppositional agenda. It is clear that the Puerto Rican subject is absent, the text channels the author’s stance through another ethnicity. Unable to imagine a

from his geographical space, Miranda resorts to a circumscribed ethnic subject victimized and deceived by the false promise. In a passage from the story, Miranda writes: “A man of

plunges him into the realm of no return or when a blip in a fool's paradise" (8). Perhaps these words afford a glimpse of their own exiled life in the United States. They may also offer a key behind the absence of the Puerto Rican subject in his work.

The writings of these earlier "diasporican" writers encourage a new understanding of how they faced the very same issues that face our contemporary writers. Since they represent the first generation, their narrative sheds new light on the issue of Puerto Rican identity and representation. Whether the identity is actually represented as in the case of Miranda's work, it is clear that each writer has a specific and rhetorical purpose and use for, Puerto Rican ethnicity whenever ethnicity was emphasized, such as with Colón's work. Concerns were displaced or minimized in the process. The insistence on a nationalist sense of identity perhaps influenced how they and conceive of a Puerto Rican subject functioning within the diaspora. That the ethnic project differs in the case of each writer is clear.

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identity, as social and textual construct, is perceived and understood. If we understand this, the lives and work of these writers and their struggle for the ethnic subject to reconcile group and individual identity is fundamentally historical. These ideas suggest that we are engaged in a diachronic yet synchronic process. Taking such an approach to reading Puerto Rican diasporic literature from a dialogic perspective emphasizes listening to the many voices that speak of their experience across the continuum. If we listen carefully, we will come to realize that the point is not when we are, were, or became Puerto Rican. The controversy over Santiago's book, but that we are always together yet differently. With this understanding should we begin to address the cultural differences between Puerto Ricans "here" and "there" in future literature that those inherent differences may create.

## NOTES

- 1 In 1994 Vintage picked up the book and published an English version. Under Vintage the English version sold 16,000 hardcover copies and 100,000 paperback copies.
- 2 (Tucson, AZ: University of Arizona Press, 1997), 201.
- 3 “La voz caribeña femenina en la literatura de los Estados Unidos,” *Caribbean Literature* (2001): 44.
- 4 Lisa Sánchez González, *Boricua Literature: A Literary and Cultural History* (New York: New York University Press, 2001), 159.
- 5 Sánchez González, 160.
- 6 Sánchez González, 160.
- 7 Reading Group Center, “Esmeralda Santiago, A Note on the Book,” *Reading Group Center* <<http://www.randomhouse.com/vintage/read/Puerto/Santiago>> (New York: Random House, 2000), 11, 2000.
- 8 Carmen Dolores Hernández, *Puerto Rican Voices in Exile* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1997), 165. My emphasis.
- 9 Hernández, 166.
- 10 Hernández, 165.
- 11 Hernández, 163.
- 12 Miguel Piñero, *La Bodega Sold Dreams* (Houston, TX: Arte Público Press, 1995), 11. Subsequent notes will be in parentheses.
- 13 Miguel Algarín, “A Mongo Affair,” in *Boricuas: Influential Puerto Ricans*, ed. Roberto Santiago (New York: Ballantine, 1995), 11.
- 14 Tato Laviera, *American Dream* (Houston, TX: Arte Público Press, 1995), 11.
- 15 Hugo Rodríguez Vecchini, “Cuando Esmeralda ‘era’ ] *Caribbean Literature* (2001): 44. etnográfica y autobiografía neopicaresca,” *Nómada* (1995): 156.
- 16 Rodríguez Vecchini, 156.
- 17 Rodríguez Vecchini, 154.
- 18 Agustín Laó, “Islands at the Crossroads: Puerto Rican Literature,” *Caribbean Literature* (2001): 44.

Translocal Nation and the Global City,” *Puerto Rican Journal*, eds. Frances Negrón-Muntaner and R. Grosfoguel (Minn Press, 1997), 172.

<sup>19</sup> José Luis González, *El país de cuatro pisos y otros ensayos* (New York: Huracán, 1980), 43-84.

<sup>20</sup> For illuminating discussions of ‘nationalism’ in Puerto Rican literature, see “Beyond Nationalist and Colonialist Discourses: the Puerto Rican Ethno-nation;” as well as Mariano Negrón, “Surviving Colonialism and Nationalism,” and Ramón Grosfoguel, “Nationalist Discourses from the Puerto Rican People: A Sociohistorical Perspective,” both in the same collection.

<sup>21</sup> Ramón Grosfoguel, Frances Negrón-Muntaner, Chloé Collado, eds., *Puerto Rican Journal*, 12.

<sup>22</sup> Ramón Grosfoguel, “The Divorce of Nationalist Discourses from the Puerto Rican People: A Sociohistorical Perspective,” *Puerto Rican Journal*, 17.

<sup>23</sup> Grosfoguel, et. al., 17-19.

<sup>24</sup> Grosfoguel, et. al., 18.

<sup>25</sup> See the Foreword in *Theories of Ethnicity*, ed. Werner Sollors (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), especially pages x-xii and the section on “ethnic, ethnical, ethnicity,” etc., pages 1-12. Also helpful in understanding the term is the introduction to *Ethnicity*, ed. John Hutchinson (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 1996), particularly pages 1-12.

<sup>26</sup> See Paul R. Brass, “Ethnic Groups and Ethnic Identity,” in *Ethnicity*, ed. Werner Sollors, 17-19.

<sup>27</sup> Sollors, *Theories of Ethnicity*, 17.

<sup>28</sup> Manning Nash, “The core elements of ethnicity,” in *Ethnicity*, ed. Werner Sollors, 18. He argues that the secondary features or “surface pointers” include dress, language, and denoted physical features. Beyond these secondary features are “subsidiary indices of separateness.”

<sup>29</sup> See Elsa B. Cardalda Sánchez and Amilcar Tirado Avila, “The Affirmation of Puerto Rican Identity in the Community Murals of New York,” in *Montage: The Latinization of New York*, ed. Agustín Laó-Morales (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 263-289. Not surprisingly, these murals and study were political in nature.

<sup>30</sup> Sollors, *Theories of Ethnicity*, viii.

<sup>31</sup> Stuart Hall, “The New Ethnicities,” in *Ethnicity*, 162.

<sup>32</sup> In “Puerto Rican Identity: Up in the Air: Air Migration, Cultural Representations, and Me ‘Cruzando el Charco.’” Alberto Rivera, “The ‘floating nation’ metaphor in this very personal essay,” in *Puerto Rican Journal*, 141.

<sup>33</sup> Hernández, 141.

<sup>34</sup> In *Boricua Literature: A Literary History of the Puerto Rican People*, 18-21.

González analyzes the “nationalizing” moves of critics Yael and both try to argue for the incorporation of “mainland” Puerto Rican literature into the national canon. See pages 18-21. Sánchez González right

it ignores the “obvious and profound differences between” yet in further discussion of various “mainland” texts it is nationalizing undercurrent to her own arguments.

<sup>35</sup> In his seminal essay, “Puerto Rican Literature in the Perspectives,” Juan Flores writes that the literature’s most precisely its “straddling” of “two national literatures and Divided Borders: Essays on Puerto Rican Identity” (Houston: Arte. Despite Flores’ clear understanding of the hybrid nature

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subsuming it under a national Puerto Rican literature. See

<sup>36</sup> ‘Ethnogenesis’ comes from the work of Werner Sollors. Beyond Ethnicity: Consent and Descent in American Culture (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), Sollors introduces the term and credits it to his book Ethnicity in the United States (1974), used it to describe ethnicity,” 56-59. In his book Through a Glass Darkly: Ethnicity in American Culture (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), Boelhower explains the semiotics approach to mean how ethnic signs are produced and interpreted rhetorically within a text.

<sup>37</sup> Jesús Colón migrated to New York City in 1918, Belpre and other writers. The three writers lived and worked contemporaneously in New York City. In 1974, the year Colón died.

<sup>38</sup> Boricua Literature, 68-70.

<sup>39</sup> For information about Colón and his times, see their biographies and Other Writings (New York: Center for Puerto Rican Studies, 1987).

<sup>40</sup> William Boelhower, Through a Glass Darkly, 87.

<sup>41</sup> Jesús Colón, A Puerto Rican in New York and Other Sketches (New York: Mainstream, 1961; New York: International Publishers, 1974). All dates in parentheses will be in parentheses.

<sup>42</sup> Colón, The Way It Was and Other Writings, 84. Subsequent references to this work will be in parentheses.

<sup>43</sup> Boelhower, 43.

<sup>44</sup>

Boelhower, 99.

<sup>45</sup> For more biographical information on Pura Belpré and her work, see Lisa Sánchez González’s chapter 3, “A Boricua in the Mainstream.”

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46 Pura Belpré, Santiago. Pagination refers to a manuscript found in the Pura Belpré archives (Reel #12) in the Center for Puerto Rican Studies, Hunter College, City University of New York. Information for the book is as follows: (New York: Frederick Ungar, 1971). The book is also available in the Center's library. There is also a Spanish edition of the book published by the same publisher but released in 1971. Subsequent to the discovery of the manuscript and placed in parentheses.

47 Frederic Jameson, *The Political Unconscious* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1981), 180-181.

48 Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 180-181.

49 Miguel Piñero, *La Bodega Sold Dreams* (Houston: Arte Pùblica, 1973), 180-181.

50 Jameson, 47.

51 Jameson, 166.

52 Graciany Miranda Archilla, archives, Center for Puerto Rican Studies, Hunter College, City University of New York, New York (Reel # 4, Box 1).

53 In particular, I refer to Pedro Juan Soto's collection of stories *En Nueva York y otras desgracias* (1973).

54 See "El escritor puertorriqueño en exilio," *El país de los*

55 Boelhower, 110.

56 As defined by Werner Sollors, "descent" means the presence of "blood," "natural," or inherited traits or characteristics. The concept is contrasted with "consent," which refers to relations based on choice. See *Ethnicity* 5-6.

57 Miranda Archilla, "The Shadow," 2 and 7, manuscript notes will be in parentheses.

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