Cultures of the Puerto Rican Queer Diaspora

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Puerto Ricans are a queer bunch: simultaneously Afro-Diasporic, Caribbean, Latin American, Hispanic, Latino/a, and American, at least since 1898; insular, migratory and translocal, with U.S. citizenship and passports since 1917; speaking Spanish or English or sometimes, perhaps rather often, some variation of both; living here and there and sometimes in several places at once. This anomalous, colonial and post-modern predicament has had its negative consequences, at least as far as attracting the attention of scholars of international migration to the United States: for the most part, they have ignored the situation of diasporic Puerto Ricans, focusing more on Puerto Rico as a destination for Cuban and Dominican migration and seeing Puerto Rican migrants as a “native” or colonial minority similar to African Americans.1 While, in a certain sense, it is correct to recognize Puerto Rican difference and not to lump all migrants together indiscriminately, it is quite unfortunate that the dramatic similarities that link Puerto Ricans to other migrant populations in the United States have not been recognized. Much is lost by this omission, particularly since colonized diasporic Puerto Ricans (as well as colonized Chicanos/as in the U.S. Southwest) have historically anticipated many of the linguistic and cultural experiences that other Spanish-speaking Latin American immigrants have faced.

When Puerto Ricans migrants happen to be queer, that is to say, lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender (LGBT), or rather patos, patas, marimachos, marimachas, mariconas, maricones, bugarrones, dragas, vestidas, travestis, homosexuales, lesbianas, locas, homo thugs, queens, butch dykes, papichulos, or on the down low, as we tend to say in the vernacular, then the similarities to, and differences from, other Latin American migrants are quite relevant. Simply stated, being queer and
Rican has had very particular historical and personal consequences: sometimes provoking migration, but almost always provoking at least some form of social marginality. The particularities of what we will here refer to as “queer Rican migrations” or “queer Boricua diasporas” have been mostly ignored. In fact, sexuality and divergent gender expression and sexual orientation have only recently come to be acknowledged as causal factors in national (internal) and international (cross-border) migration—what the Venezuelan filmmaker Irene Sosa has termed “sexual exile” and the Puerto Rican sociologist Manuel Guzmán calls “sexile”—even though they have long been recognized as important, crucial or even “dangerous” variables affecting immigrant experience, as ethnic studies scholar Eithne Luibhéid lucidly explains in Entry Denied and in her chapter in this volume. These physical movements or displacements entail meaningful numbers of people at a global scale, something literary scholars and anthropologists such as David Eng, Gayatri Gopinath, Martin Manalansan, and the contributors and editors of Cindy Patton and Benigno Sánchez-Eppler’s volume Queer Diasporas have shown. The persecution of individuals on the basis of non-normative sexual practices or identities, and the particular difficulties produced by their localized, autochthonous manifestations or by health-related problems such as HIV/AIDS (an issue which is clearly not limited to the homosexual community), are now documented by international non-governmental organizations such as Amnesty International and the International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission (IGLHRC), which understand them, in general, as joining catastrophic natural and man-made phenomena (war, political persecution, religious intolerance), economic necessity, and personal aspirations as conditions recognized to affect migration.

Insular and diasporic Puerto Ricans and U.S. Latinos/as have been at the forefront of sex/gender migrations, in close contact with (and participating in or affected by) the ways in which hegemonic northern sexual paradigms have extended to other locations. Slowly but surely, sexual orientation has come to be seen as a category relevant to their experience, as well as a constitutive element of metropolitan-colonial relationships and of the diverse transnational, multidirectional flows of sexual paradigms, such as those addressed in Arnaldo Cruz-Malavé and Martin Manalansan’s anthology Queer Globalizations: Citizenship and the Afterlife of Colonialism and, in the specific case of Puerto Rico, in the work of the geographer Luis Aponte Parés, the sociologist Elizabeth Crespo-Kebler, the literary scholar Rubén Ríos Avila, and the cultural critic Juana María Rodríguez. Literary scholar Brad Epps has further noted how the particularities of homosexual immigration make it similar yet different from other types; he proposes the term “passing lines”—which has been taken up and expanded in the present volume—as a conceptual framework for understanding the performances that non-normative immigrants engage in order to be able to succeed, a topic also explored by Rodríguez in her book Queer Latinidad in the context of the INS Tenorio case, which involved a grant of asylum to a Brazilian man on the grounds of sexual orientation (84–113). The field of public health, concerned with the critical situation of the HIV/AIDS pandemic, has aggressively immersed itself in new migrant sexualities, as the research of the epidemiologists Alex Carballo-Diéguez, Curtis Dolezal, Luis López-Nieves, Rafael Díaz and others makes clear for Latino men. At the same time, Latina anthologies such as the groundbreaking 1987 volume Compañeras: Latina Lesbians, edited by the Puerto Rican sociologist and lesbian activist Juanita Díaz-Cotto (under the pseudonym Juanita Ramos), explore the specificity of women’s experiences in the context of migration. Such individuals as New York City Councilwoman Margarita López or the recently deceased founder of the Latino/a youth-oriented educational program ASPIRA, Antonia Pantoja (who came out publicly as a lesbian at the very end of her life in 2002), remind us of the intersections of multiple struggles for social justice. Finally, historians such as Martin Duberman and Eric Marcus have demonstrated the fundamental contribution of transgender Latinos/as to the modern LGBT liberation movement in the United States, as in the case of the Puerto Rican/Venezuelan Stonewall veteran and trans activist Sylvia Rivera, who passed away in 2002.

While the particular status of Puerto Ricans as U.S. citizens (or colonial subjects, according to one’s political perspective) would suggest significant differences from the experience of other Latin American migrants, there are still remarkably numerous parallels. It is well known that Puerto Rican life was profoundly marked during the 20th century (most dramatically from 1945 to 1965) by the massive migration of many of its peoples to the United States, a displacement provoked by the island’s colonial situation as an American territory since the end of the Hispanic-Cuban-American-Filipino War in 1898, when Spain ceded control of its former possessions (including Guam) to the United States. Research on the effects of migration on the Puerto Rican diasporic community have often focused on socio-economic mobility, living standards, mental health, rates of intermarriage and degrees of
assimilation, always with the assumption of normative heterosexuality. With the exception of AIDS-related public health research, there has been little recognition of how different sexual orientations can make for different immigrant experiences and indeed of how Puerto Ricans' constructions of gender and sexuality can produce different immigrant "homosexualities" from those which are more common in the United States or even in the site of origin. There has also been scant attention paid to how the sexual paradigms of both countries have been affected by the contacts that immigrants have established or the roles that culture plays in documenting and forming such experience.

In the present essay, I will offer some observations about queer Puerto Rican diasporas and then go on to trace some historical and generational shifts that attend queer cultural productions. My observations here condense parts of my forthcoming book Queer Ricans: Cultures and Sexualities in the Diaspora (University of Minnesota Press), where these topics are fleshed out in much more detail. I will argue here that cultural productions show how queer migrant experience (or, at the very least, its portrayal or representation) differs or has differed according to such factors as gender, age, race, class, place of birth and historical period. While cultural analysis cannot substitute for historical and ethnographic research, it can show how particular individuals—here artists, filmmakers, and writers—present their experience. Accordingly, I will briefly focus on three figures, Manuel Ramos Otero, Frances Negrón Muntaner, and Erika López, in relation to their peers and to a broader history of queer Boricua migrant culture.

Homosexualities and Society

Social discourses on sexual difference in both Puerto Rico and the United States have traditionally—even after the historic 1969 Stonewall revolt—presented non-normative sexual orientations as forms of deviant behavior against which the national population needs protection. In Puerto Rico, homosexuality has been viewed at different moments during the 20th century as a threat to the national character. As the lawyer Mildred Braulio and the sociologist Elizabeth Crespo-Kebler point out, sodomy was criminalized in 1902, when the Puerto Rican Penal Code was altered to follow North American models more closely. The 1974 reform of the code extended the definition of sodomy, which previously only referred to men, to include sexual acts between women. Only in 2003 was the act decriminalized in Puerto Rico, barely three days before the Supreme Court, with Lawrence v. Texas, overturned anti-sodomy laws in the United States. Homosexuality, and especially gay liberation, have at times been seen, by virtue of the island's colonial relationship with the United States, as imported or inflated: modern-day homosexuals, that is, are often seen as foreign or as tinged with something foreign, as a menace from the outside, in short, as other than "Puerto Rican," especially if they are activists. This understanding parallels discourses in other Latin American countries (as Jorge Salessi has shown with respect to Argentina), where homosexuality and other putatively "unsociable" behaviors at the beginning of the 20th century were attributed to immigration.

Often times, social discourse that posits the foreign provenance or "unnaturalness" of homosexuality is accompanied by social measures that seek to confine or expel homosexuals, whether by placing them in institutions of social control or by actually forcing them beyond the national borders. In keeping with the shift in the understanding of homosexuality in the mid- to late 19th century (by which time homosexuality was viewed, as Michel Foucault has studied, as an identity and not as an act or conduct), older forms of homosexual persecution, such as the deadly punishment of sodomites during the Inquisition, were transformed. In their place, incarceration and psychiatric treatment became commonplace. In the United States, immigration laws that prohibited the entrance of people on the basis of ideology, race, behavior or handicaps also technically excluded homosexuals, specifically from 1917 to 1990, under such categories as "moral turpitude." While it is likely that the effects of the law were often more cosmetic than practical, there were documented cases of exclusion. The laws did not apply to Puerto Rican migrants, who received U.S. citizenship in 1917, but they are still indicative of ideas about who should and should not be admitted into the country. That said, U.S. citizenship has allowed Puerto Ricans to partake in recent times of what is referred to as the "air bridge" or "air bus," by which individuals move back and forth from the island to the U.S. mainland; this has been particularly important for those affected with HIV/AIDS, who travel for medical and family reasons. The "air bus," or "guagua ñeđer," as the Puerto Rican writer Luis Rafael Sánchez styles it, facilitates general patterns of circular migration, a constant movement of gays and lesbians who have experienced living both on the island and in the United States and who at different moments may settle in one or the other place. Such is the case of Hernanino (Nino) Adorno, one of the most important gay activists on the island.
In the case of Puerto Rico, as well as that of many Latin American countries, displacements have occurred first from rural to urban locations and then, in those countries where there are feasible opportunities for international migration, to other countries such as Brazil, Canada, Mexico, and the United States. The displacements occur in the context of specific social policies and laws, including anti-sodomy statutes, but also as a result of social intolerance, discrimination, poverty and persecution. The “threat” or option of migration affects those who remain on the island as much as those who leave, especially those who have relatives and friends who have already left. Generalized intolerance of homosexuality and increased awareness and organization within the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender community in the United States has led, particularly since World War II, to massive geographic displacements, especially towards large urban enclaves on both coasts, particularly San Francisco and New York.10

Until recently, general social intolerance of homosexuality in Puerto Rico has had an impact on specific expectations, conventions, and patterns of behavior, at least as far as middle and upper-class individuals are concerned.11 These patterns of behavior include secrecy or non-disclosure of personal matters in familial, professional, and social environments (homosexuality is “tolerated” as long as it is not discussed in public) as well as, at the opposite end of the spectrum, voluntary, encouraged, or even forced migration. The development of activism on the island since the 1970s has challenged the conventions that attend, or even generate, such behaviors, yet there remains much to be done—just as in the United States. Many Puerto Ricans are still profoundly closeted or engage in complex negotiations of their “open secret,” as Lancaster explores in the present volume.

Several points bear consideration: 1) individuals who participate in same-sex relations or have divergent gender expressions may migrate to the United States or to another country for reasons other than those of sexual/gender orientation; 2) not all of the individuals who identify as homosexuals (or LGBT people) or who engage in same-sex relations migrate or leave their countries of origin; 3) the existence of a visible gay community in a country does not contradict the perceived or real necessity of specific individuals to migrate. These observations are similar to the preliminary findings that Héctor Carrillo has obtained in his research focusing on male Mexican migration to the United States. Sadly, it has become increasingly apparent that LGBT migration does not necessarily ensure safety, as the tragic murders of Gwen Araujo, Eddie Garzón, Paola Matos, and Rodney Velásquez remind us—not to mention the deaths of Matthew Sheppard and Brandon Teena.12

The experience of first-generation gay and lesbian Puerto Rican immigrants varies according to a number of factors, including the places where they settle; their contact with diasporic Puerto Rican and North American LGBT communities; their race, class, gender, age, self-presentation, educational background, political orientation, command of the English language, mental health, and HIV/AIDS status; the conditions under which they migrated; the degree to which they maintain ties to their families and communities of origin in Puerto Rico; and the ways that they identify sexually. In some cases, apparently quite similar individuals can have very different experiences and perspectives.

Second- and third-generation Puerto Rican LGBT immigrants often have different concerns from those of first-generation individuals, concerns that bear on their degree of acculturation, on their relations to other U.S. ethnic and racial communities, on their loss of Spanish in favor of English and Spanglish, on their uncertainty about their cultural baggage, and on their possible rejection by island-born Puerto Ricans. All generations face, however, problems of discrimination. At the same time, the links and shared experiences of second- and third-generation LGBT Puerto Ricans with African Americans (observed most clearly in the investment in African American politics and youth culture) are generally stronger than is the case for first-generation immigrants. The involvement of all of these immigrants in their communities (be it the diasporic Puerto Rican community or the LGBT community or both) can be a source of tension and often requires careful negotiations. Primary and secondary allegiances on the basis of different aspects of identification can strain an individual’s energy, but, as the British historian Bob Cant has observed, they can also have creative results.

Cultures of the Queer Diaspora

Cultural studies offer productive ways to understand queer Puerto Rican diasporas. The analysis of a wide variety of cultural materials, in the context of historical and social scientific research, allows us to map a queer diasporic Puerto Rican community that extends from the island, across the sea, to the United States and elsewhere.13 Puerto Rican, Nuyorican, and diasporic cultural productions grapple with migration, including resistance to it, in diverse ways: most notably, in literature, film, theater, performance, music and cartoons. These
productions can be categorized roughly according to the authors' or artists' biographies or according to the portrayals of themselves and others in their works, especially in terms of geographic location, life experience, and generational affiliation. Other parameters for analysis include primary linguistic, cultural, and geographic attachments to the society of origin (Puerto Rico) or the receiving country (principally the United States), as well as primary identifications in terms of such ideologically marked categories as gender and gender politics, most notably feminism or sexual orientation and queer social movements. In this chapter, I will discuss differing depictions of first-hand migration and its diachronic progression over time, paying special attention to the tensions between first- and second-generation productions. It is important to look at the phenomenon of Latino/a queer migration from a long-range, historic perspective rather than as a single occurrence frozen in time.14

As Puerto Rican intellectual Juan Flores notes (as well as Jorge Duany, Frances Aparicio, Yolanda Martínez-San Miguel, and Raquel Z. Rivera), Puerto Rican migrants have participated in a wide array of cultural productions, ranging from traditional genres such as literature, film, performance, photography, painting, graphic arts, dance, and music, to more popular or unusual forms such as nostalgic vernacular architecture (as in the case of rural “casitas” or traditional wooden country houses built in abandoned lots in urban environments), clothing (particularly T-shirts), hip-hop, graffiti, jewelry, tattoos, bars, social clubs, dance club culture, customized cars, performance art, and Internet websites. What is more, as Frances Negrón-Muntaner shows in Boricua Pop, predominantly white American cultural producers have taken up, or appropriated, Puerto Rican culture and the contributions of individual Puerto Ricans in their own work. All of these forms, in one way or another, contribute to our understanding of immigrant experience and serve different functions in the diasporic communities themselves. Literary works, for instance, have long shown how emigration has served as a regulatory measure, a source of (dis)comfort, and a liberatory strategy in Puerto Rico with regards to non-normative sexualities. As Carlos Gil reminds us, Bernardo Vega, while migrating in 1917, throws his watch overboard as he nears New York City after hearing rumors that he might be considered “effeminate” for wearing it. He later describes arriving in the city only to find out that watches similar to his were extremely popular.15 At different moments throughout the 20th century, many other Puerto Rican authors, including José

I. de Diego Padró, Pedro Juan Soto, José Luis Vivas Maldonado, Emilio Díaz Valcárcel, and Luis Rafael Sánchez, have all included episodes of sexual marginality linked to emigration in their works.

However, it is not until openly, self-identified gays and lesbians begin to document and explore their migration, or exile, that more insightful, contestatory voices come to the fore, at least among island-born artists. Perhaps the two paradigmatic figures here are Luz María Umpierre, who migrated in 1974, and Manuel Ramos Otero, who migrated in 1968 and died of AIDS in 1990.16 In their literary works, both explore—albeit in very different ways—the experience of first-generation migrants as they move between traditional Puerto Rican values and foreign realities in the United States. In her poetry, Umpierre does this by freely switching from Spanish to English and by proposing the invention of new tongues; in contrast, Ramos Otero wrote his poetry and narrative almost entirely in Spanish. Umpierre traces a continuum from previous migrant subjects such as Puerto Rico’s greatest poet, Julia de Burgos, to the present, inserting, in the process, her own lyrical voice of denunciation in a discourse framed by 1980s U.S. Latina Third World feminism. Umpierre uses strong sexual vocabulary and explicit, even “shocking,” images to convey her frustration and courage in the face of widespread social injustice, colonialism, and anti-lesbian prejudice. Umpierre also establishes a literary dialogue with second-generation Nuyorican poets, particularly in her famous exchange with Sandra Maria Estevés, which entails four poems, two by each poet. Ramos Otero’s literary production also invokes Julia de Burgos and documents a series of moments in immigrant experience, which include initial alienation and anonymous wandering, partial integration into the established New York gay world, and, finally, an approximation to the Puerto Rican community of that city and to the wider history of Puerto Rican migration. Literary critics have devoted copious pages to the work of both these artists, neglecting to some extent that of others who write in Spanish, such as Víctor Fragoso (who died of AIDS in 1982), Nemir Matos Cintrón, Daniel Torres, or Moisés Agosto and Alfredo Villanueva-Collado (both of whom live with HIV/AIDS).

English-language Puerto Rican writers have also received scant attention. A notable exception is the now classic Nuyorican writer, Piri Thomas, one of the subjects of an important article, titled “What a Tangled Web?” by Arnaldo Cruz-Malavé, in which the critic points out that Thomas’s Down These Mean Streets, Pedro Pietri’s The Masses are Asses, and Miguel Piñero’s Short Eyes, all include, or are structured
by, episodes of male homoeroticism—whether masculine rites of initiation, behavioral acts associated with femininity, or in the context of prison—which tend to function as an unredeemable abject. Alberto Sandoval-Sánchez, in his work included in this volume and elsewhere, has also commented on the back-and-forth nature of Puerto Rican migration, but has clearly resisted participating, as a first-generation immigrant gay man with AIDS, in a nostalgic view of his country of origin as the place to which he must return to die. A younger poet, filmmaker, and scholar, Frances Negrón-Muntaner, who is also a first-generation migrant, presents yet another picture: her work benefits from the twenty years of cultural production and activism that separate her from Ramos Otero. Like Luz María Umpierre, Negrón-Muntaner feels equally at home in English and in Spanish, yet unlike earlier artists, she uses a mixture of film and writing to explore questions of migration and sexuality.

As important as literature is, there is a danger in focusing exclusively on it in an attempt to trace a historical—or even generational—model of queer Rican culture; after all, performance and filmmaking actually antecede gay liberationist literary portrayals. Appearing in the 1960s and early 1970s, 1.5th and second-generation trans performers and activists such as Sylvia Rivera, Holly Woodlawn, and Mario Móntez (née René Rivera), along with the first-generation, island-born underground filmmaker José Rodríguez-Soltero (many of whom engage in what might be called, following José Muñoz, “disidentificatory” political or artistic representations), predate “open” first-generation literary voices, though they are only recently being reclaimed as Puerto Rican. The cases of Woodlawn and Móntez are particularly complex, as Negrón-Muntaner has observed in Boricua Pop, because they are more often known for their associations with gay, white, avant-garde artists such as Andy Warhol, Jack Smith, and Charles Ludlam than for their own talent and originality. Negrón-Muntaner does not, however, mention Rodríguez-Soltero, who was an important part of this circle and who can be seen as an auteur of a stature at least equal to that of his Anglo colleagues. In his research on the Harlem ball scene of the post-war period, historian George Chauncey has also found that Puerto Rican drag queens were active participants and even won titles as early as the early 1950s. On a different note, Sylvia Rivera, a Stonewall veteran, Gay Liberation Front militant, and trans activist, held political “performances” of quite a different nature from that of individuals in the world of the arts, though she too constructed a public persona that served to advance a collective desire for political rights.

In addition to the new cohorts of first-generation migrants such as writer Angel Lozada (author of La patografía), painters Angel Rodríguez Díaz, Rafael Rosario-Laguna and Nayda Collazo-Lloréns, and performers Jorge Merced (from Pregones Theater), Laritza Dumont, or the deceased grande drag diva of La Escuelita, Lady Catiria, there are now a healthy number of second-generation gay, lesbian and bisexual Nuyoricans—or, to quote Mariposa (María Fernández), “Diasporicans”—whose work reflects the often dramatically different experience of being born and raised Puerto Rican in the United States. These second-generation Nuyoricans include playwrights Janis Astor del Valle, Milton Díaz, Charles Rice-González, and Edwin Sánchez; dancer/choreographer Arthur Avilés and his first-cousin Elizabeth Marrero; writer and cartoonist Erika López (whom we shall discuss later); writer Aldo Alvarez; L.A.-based performance artist Marcus Kuidland-Nazario; and poets or spoken-word artists like Rane Arroyo, Samantha Martínez, Mariposa, Elliot Torres, and Emanuel Xavier. These “younger” generations can be said to follow in the footsteps of their “elders,” but they also depart from the models of earlier 1.5 generation artists such as Holly Woodlawn or bisexual Nuyorican poets such as Miguel Piñero and Miguel Algarín. Some of the more notable features of their work include a pronounced tendency to write or perform in English or Spanglish; significant redefinitions of traditional culture; a greater reliance on Santería and African religious beliefs; and a more intense engagement with the historic diasporic communities of the Bronx, Brooklyn, the Lower East Side (Loisaida), and Spanish Harlem (El Barrio), as well as with Boston, Chicago, Philadelphia, Los Angeles, and San Francisco, as authentic or original sites of Puerto Rican culture. In fact, over and again, the U.S. sites are considered to be principal referents of Puerto Ricanness.

Finally, it is worth mentioning that sexual migration has been addressed not only in diasporic works but also in diverse island-centered cultural productions. Manuel Ramos Otero’s short story “Loca la de la locura” (The Queen of Madness) portrays inter-island migration, as the protagonist moves from the small town of Hormigueos to the capital, San Juan. Violent expulsion from a black community, leading to death, marks Luis Rafael Sánchez’s poetic short story, “Humil,” which has been carefully studied by Agnes Lugo-Ortiz. Migration to the United
States also figures in Magali García Ramí's *Happy Days, Uncle Sergio*. Resistance to migration is, however, a widespread phenomenon, as obviously not all LGBT individuals migrate or are represented as migrating: such is the case of Antonio Martorell's aunt Consuelo Cardona, as portrayed in his autobiography *La piel de la memoria*, and Lidia, the protagonist of García Ramí's novel.19

**Manuel Ramos Otero and First Generation Experience: The 1970s and 1980s**

The life and writings of Manuel Ramos Otero are profoundly illustrative of the experiences of first-generation gay Puerto Rican migrants to the United States, particularly college-educated, middle class males who left their homeland in the late sixties motivated to a great extent by the persecution, repression, or discomfort they felt in Puerto Rico on account of their sexual orientation. An analysis of a series of Ramos Otero's short stories will allow us to chart some of the different moments of that migratory experience and to reflect on the understanding of departure and distance from Puerto Rico as emancipatory. For Ramos Otero, dislocation was essential to the elaboration of his work and to the representation of his homeland. In New York and, to a lesser extent, New Jersey, Ramos Otero's interaction with gay North American and immigrant Nuyorican communities was particularly important for his writing and for his understanding of Puerto Rican culture.

The short stories of Manuel Ramos Otero, set at first in unspecified geographic spaces, soon become fixed on two principal locations: Puerto Rico and New York. Ramos Otero spent half of his life in the northern metropolis (1968–1990) and produced a body of work that privileges the urban center as both a utopia and dystopia of immigrant Puerto Rican and queer experience. It is no coincidence that New York should have been the destination for the author who, above all other writers of his generation, embodied the confluence of emigration and homosexuality. New York is, after all, the cradle of the modern gay and lesbian liberation movement; it is a huge city, inhabited by hundreds of thousands of Puerto Ricans, where Puerto Rican drag queens such as the recently deceased Sylvia Rivera confronted the police at Stonewall, while others, like Mario Montez and Holly Woodlawn, graced—and were exploited by—Andy Warhol's famous Factory.

It is this New York, a would-be microcosm of the world, where a good number of Ramos Otero's stories are set. The city figures in, for instance, "Hollywood Memorabilia"; "El cuento de la Mujer del Mar" (The Story of the Woman of the Sea), which is located on Christopher Street, the former center of the gay West Village; "Página en blanco y staccato" (Blank Page and Staccato), where Afro-Puerto Rican-Chinese Loisaida detective Sam Fat inhabits a world straight out of 1940s film noir; and "Descuento" (Untelling, or Discount), a deeply personal and philosophical meditation that chronicles the relationship of two exiled (white) gay Puerto Rican men. Approaching the work of Ramos Otero through the optic of his queer poetics of exile allows us to discern a gradual transformation or evolution in relation to the Puerto Rican diaspora. Critic Juan G. Gelpí has astutely pointed to "Hollywood Memorabilia" as one of the most representative stories of Ramos Otero's initial phase of exile in New York.20 The writings from this period are characterized by the protagonist's loneliness and by first-person narration: Ramos Otero's first book is also marked by the general lack of specificity regarding geographic location and, occasionally, the characters' or narrators' gender.

In "Hollywood Memorabilia" (1971), the narrator/protagonist, having finished his studies in Puerto Rico, has moved to New York City. He is 23 years old, an author, and works as a social science research assistant and film projectionist. He describes his past relationships with three men, with whom he currently has no relationship, although he thinks of them constantly. Not only does he not seem to have any friends, but he also does not seem to know anyone in New York; he is, in short, alone. Against such a backdrop, the protagonist's main relationship is to storytelling and cinema—particularly, to gay camp classics of Hollywood's so-called Golden Age. In contrast to the putative sterility of Puerto Rico, New York becomes the space where the protagonist's nocturnal wanderings lead to sexual encounters. Yet, even here, there is a dichotomy between the physical exchanges and the cerebral meditations on film (that is, the protagonist's fantasies of being a glamorous film character or diva and of reenacting their death scenes). The protagonist's exchanges with men seem rather common or simple: he invites them to his apartment for coffee or tea; has lunch or dinner with them; and, at times, has sex with them. In "Hollywood Memorabilia" two spaces are negotiated: the abandoned, dark, desolate streets that lead to sexual encounters and the imaginary, mental space of film predicated on a camp sensibility. These two spaces are resolved,
as it were, in narration: the scene of writing allows for constant intersections, as the very act of reminiscing conjures forth the memories of men and of film.

Ramos Otero’s second collection of short stories, published in 1979, includes a narration that is representative of a second moment of emigrant, exilic production. “El cuento de la Mujer del Mar” focuses on the relationship between the story’s narrator, an unnamed, unemployed homosexual Puerto Rican writer and his Italian-American boyfriend, Angelo, an X-ray technician from New Jersey. Their relationship is sustained by mutual storytelling involving differing versions of the Woman of the Sea: for the Puerto Rican writer, the woman in question is Palmira Parés, “la Mujer del Mar,” inspired by the poet Julia de Burgos; for Angelo, the woman is his grandmother, Vicenza Vitale, “la Donna del Mare.” Not only is the story squarely set in New York City and, more specifically, on Christopher Street, but there are also a number of additional locations—Manati, San Juan, New Jersey, Italy, Montreal—to which the narrator and Angelo travel and where parallel stories take place. The initial resistance to specificity yields to a concrete effort to map significant locations: a web of loci that the writer, nomad-like, inhabits both in his literary work and in his travels and writing.

Another significant aspect of this second moment in Ramos Otero’s work is the opening towards linguistic plurality: while predominantly written in Spanish, the story contains important passages in English and occasional sprinklings of Italian as well as an internal process of translation, as Martínez-San Miguel has observed. The protagonist mentions that his communications with Angelo are in “broken” English, indicating that English, or some version thereof, is the language that enables the two immigrants to communicate. English is here a “street” language, a vehicle for colloquial communication, neither erudite nor literary. Tellingly, even though the protagonist uses English in his relationship with Angelo, he never uses it in the story to transmit his feelings or ideas; this he does almost exclusively in Spanish.

A third moment of exile/migrant experience in Ramos Otero’s work can be found in the stories that comprise Página en blanco y staccato (1987). These stories evince a profound engagement with the history of Puerto Rican and other migrations, such as the Black and Caribbean Diasporas, as well as an acute appreciation of the different geographic spaces that Puerto Ricans occupy. The stories are also marked by a common central figure: a gay Puerto Rican writer who lives in New York.

The eponymous short story, “Página en blanco y staccato,” is illustrative of the interconnections between homosexuality and migration. The story is marked by its frank treatment of AIDS, which devastated the Latino and gay communities in the 1980s, and by the narrator/protagonist’s relationship with a fellow diasporic man. In it, we see how a gay Puerto Rican writer with AIDS named “Manuel Ramos” meets a second-generation Chinese Afro-Puerto Rican private detective called Sam Fat, with whom he has a short but crucial relationship. The initial encounter between these two men occurs at the Aguas Buenas Social Club, a Puerto Rican hangout on Avenue A in Loisaida (the Lower East Side), on December 31, 1983. Loisaida, it should be remembered, is a historically Puerto Rican and Jewish neighborhood in New York, immortalized by Miguel Piñero and other members of the Nuyorican Poets Café. The sexual and affective encounter between the white first-generation and the Afro-Chinese second-generation gay man in Ramos Otero’s story allows for a complex negotiation of desire, racial inequality, historical difference, and resentment. At the end of the story, it is suggested that Sam Fat is responsible for the death of Ramos in an act of symbolic vengeance on the part of a descendant of slaves against a “white” Puerto Rican of European descent: the triumph of Santería over Catholicism.

By setting the action in such a neighborhood and, moreover, by making the neighborhood the protagonist of the story, Ramos Otero attempts to integrate questions of homosexuality into a traditional Puerto Rican enclave. As Arnaldo Cruz Malavé has shown in “What a Tangled Web!”, while other Nuyorican writers have tended to present homosexuality as flatly abject (that is to say, undesirable, suspect, or marginal), Ramos Otero flips the meaning of abjection and shows homosexuality as an integral, constitutive, and profoundly meaningful category: a productive, transformative abjection, as Sandoval-Sánchez posits in the present volume. Such moves, of course, do not free homosexuality from stigma—that is precisely the importance of the representation of AIDS in the story. Ramos Otero is not interested in “sanitizing” homosexuality, but rather in exploiting its subversive potential.

Stories of migration and travel mark the text and leave readers with the image of New York as a place where disparate communities come
to alleviate poverty on the island. It was under his stewardship that the “Great Migration” of Puerto Ricans took place, something that Nuyorican poets like Tato Laviera have vociferously decried. Negrón-Muntaner places herself solidly in the framework of the “gran familia puertorriqueña” by adopting Marín as the surname for her allegorical film persona. She also makes clear the stature and importance that she expects her ideas to receive, as the direct, if rebellious, heir of the great patriarch. If Ramos Otero, by way of the abject, tends to deconstruct and delegitimize the master narratives with which Negrón-Muntaner flirts, the filmmaker herself has rather anxiously stated in various essays and interviews that she too is engaging in deconstruction.

Brincando el charco begins with a slow-motion introductory sequence of a Puerto Rican Day parade, full of American and Puerto Rican flags and of faces that we assume are Puerto Rican. The film’s Spanish title is superimposed on the images while a voice-over in English posits—in a manner that recalls yet another of Puerto Rico’s patriarchal cultural figures, the renowned 1930s intellectual Antonio S. Pedreira—the central question of the film: What is a Puerto Rican? Or rather: How have traditional definitions of Puerto Ricanness excluded numerous types of individuals? In the words of the narrator: “From the moment I learned how to read I have known of Puerto Ricans asking themselves, to the point of despair: Who are we? What is our common destiny? I am an echo of these questions, even as I contest them. That is why I must point my lens elsewhere, to see what escapes the us in nosotros.” The voice that we hear is that of the main character, the photographer and filmmaker Claudia Marín. Yet, of course, it is also the voice of the photographer and filmmaker Negrón-Muntaner, who plays the role of Claudia, and who is, in fact, the person responsible for Brincando el charco. Just as with Ramos Otero, we see the intersection of autobiography and narrative (and of the authorial persona) in the construction of the diasporic document. Claudia is based on a real lesbian Puerto Rican emigrant filmmaker; hers is not, in other words, some random role that is played by some random heterosexual actress. Her strategy of self-representation is not uncommon among gay and lesbian independent filmmakers, who often include themselves in their productions, as film critics Richard Dyer and Judith Mayne have observed.

The validation of Claudia Marín’s character as a “real” subject who goes through a series of events, some of which are akin to the ones in which the filmmaker participates in daily life, operates in tandem with...
the notion that the individuals interviewed in the film are not fictitious subjects. I am referring not only to the aforementioned performances but also to five "portraits," such as that of Ramón González, who is showed "voguing" at the beginning of the film. Even though González and the others are not identified when they first appear, the credits at the end of the film reveal who they are. Since several of the people portrayed have relatively public profiles, such as Agnes Lugo-Ortiz, professor of Latin American literature at the University of Chicago, and Moisés Agosto, poet and AIDS activist, the film "speaks" with a certain documentary authority. It is not surprising that Negrón-Muntaner would want to take advantage of the audience's tendency to grant documentary a higher truth-value than fiction. It is also no coincidence that groundbreaking women-of-color feminist and lesbian anthologies such as This Bridge Called My Back, Compañeras: Latina Lesbians, Chicana Lesbians: The Girls Our Mothers Warned Us About, and Telling to Live: Latina Feminist Testimonios include many testimonial and oral history pieces in which speaking subjects attempt to validate their assertions by drawing on personal experiences. Brincando el charco flirts with testimonial narratives while refusing to be a documentary; and yet, it is nonetheless caught up in documentary discourse all the same.

The problem with flirting with testimony and documentary is, of course, that people tend to believe everything that they see. This is rather notoriously the case with the representation of expulsion from Puerto Rico: a "typically," or "stereotypically," dominant father kicks his daughter out of their home after he finds out that she is a lesbian. While the situation is plausible, the scene itself, according to the director, was inspired by, and styled in the manner of, melodrama—specifically, Latin American telenovelas or soap operas. Furthermore, it in no way corresponds to the filmmaker's actual experiences in Puerto Rico; Negrón-Muntaner left the island after finishing college in order to pursue graduate studies in the United States. Critics such as Licia Fiol-Matta have argued that the representation of the family, particularly with its prominent religious iconography, relies on stereotypes of working-class intolerance that are incongruous with the characterization of the protagonist. People nevertheless come up to Negrón-Muntaner all the time and thank her "for showing it the way it really is.”

As mentioned earlier, both Negrón-Muntaner and Ramos Otero avail themselves of romantic relationships between island-born and U.S.-born queer individuals to explore different experiences and per-

ceptions of Puerto Ricaness, such as those of Manuel Ramos and Sam Fat in “Página en blanco y staccato” and of Nuyorican lawyer Ana Hernández and Claudia Marín in Brincando el charco. As Negrón-Muntaner has observed, these pairings constitute "foundational fictions" in the sense advanced by the literary critic Doris Sommer, yet with an important difference. In traditional 19th-century Latin American novels centered on family romances, the pairings of opposites tended to resolve differences through procreation: the protagonists' children represented the hope for a new society over and against regional, economic, and social distinctions that threatened to pull apart the national whole. Of course, sexual reproduction is by no means a given in queer narratives and, in fact, does not occur in the Puerto Rican texts analyzed so far. What we do see, however, is a gesture towards the construction of a new community based on better understandings of human differences (Negrón-Muntaner) and, quite differently, on revenge and murder (Ramos Otero).

Negrón-Muntaner's film, unlike Ramos Otero's writing, funnels the process of immigration to the United States into two moments: expulsion from Puerto Rico and incorporation into a multicultural community composed of different migrant generations. Tellingly, the film ends with the protagonist boarding a plane to return to Puerto Rico for her father's funeral. It is quite possible that the compression or ellipsis of a longer migratory process corresponds to the chronological difference between Negrón-Muntaner's work, produced between 1989-94, and Ramos Otero's, written roughly between 1967 and 1990. The gay author is an important precedent for the lesbian filmmaker. But what exactly does this heritage entail? Claudia Marín has a Nuyorican girlfriend and Latin American, Spanish, African American, K-

orean, and Latino/a friends who debate questions of race, ethnicity, and nationality and, more pointedly, of racism, ethnocentrism, and ultranationalism in the United States. Claudia has affirmed bonds with the African American community and with the LGBT community. She has friends of many ethnicities; she has a grasp of the history of Puerto Rican immigration, both its causal socio-economic factors and its impoverished, ghettoized, ghettoized results; and she also has friends in Puerto Rico who keep her abreast of the state of queer politics and activism on the island. As mentioned, she eventually returns to Puerto Rico to reconcile with her estranged family, after the death of her "evil" father. In a sense, it appears that she comes to have her cake and to eat it too. But does she really?
Negrón-Muntaner has claimed that the film is a provocation, a means to bring about discussion and generate controversy. She has certainly succeeded in doing just that. I, for one, believe that perhaps the greatest merit of Negrón-Muntaner’s project is, quite simply, that it is a film, and, as such, that it partakes of what is arguably the most important genre of our age. As I have claimed elsewhere, the film problematically portrays Americanization in Puerto Rico as a positive step to gay emancipation, a controversial position that coincides with Negrón-Muntaner’s more recent defense of “Radical Statehood,” which sees annexion as an opportunity for progressive, leftist politics. She also inadvertently misrepresents the predominantly English-speaking Nuyorican transsexual Cristina Hayworth, who originated the Gay Pride Parade on the island, as “una travestí americana” (an American drag queen), a common confusion on the island where language is frequently seen as synonymous with nationality. Such confusions not withstanding, Negrón-Muntaner is one of the most important voices of queer island-born Puerto Rican artists in the United States.

**1990s Second Generation Migrants: The Case of Erika López**

U.S. born Puerto Ricans often have different life experiences and artistic projects than those of island-born, first-generation migrants such as Ramos Otero and Negrón-Muntaner. This is especially evident with the writer, cartoonist, and performance artist Erika López, in whose work matters of Puerto Ricanness assume a significantly different spin. Her production is characterized by her innovative approach to gender and sexuality (defending bisexuality, for example), her engagement with third-wave feminism, and her reassessment of ethnic and racial identities in the United States. López’s genius resides in her ability to use drawings, visual images, words, humor, and her own body to discuss sexuality openly. Drawing on high and low cultural forms such as novels, cartoons, and performance art inspired by stand-up comedy routines, López moves between learned and mass media in a manner reminiscent of Nuyorican dancers and performers like Arthur Avilés and, especially, Elizabeth Marrero, but quite unlike such a second-generation artist like Rane Arroyo, who establishes a poetic dialogue with the high Modernist canon even while addressing working-class, gay Puerto Rican issues in the Midwest. López shares the militant social aspirations of poets such as Miguel Piñero, Pedro Pietri, Luz María Urnpierrre, and Sandra María Esteves, but she completely reorients their worldview into one that reflects her queer, hip, eccentric, and contemporary San Francisco-based Latina perspective.

If lesbian and feminist discourse in the 1970s and 80s was marked by a passionate and militant stance vis-à-vis women’s liberation, the advances and failures of those struggles have led younger Latina women writers in the mid- and late-1990s to adopt a more humorous and less rigid and dogmatic approach. Such is the case with López herself, who began her career as a visual artist and who has published, to date, a book of cartoons and stories titled Lap Dancing for Mommy: Tender Stories of Disgust, Blame, and Inspiration (1997) and three illustrated and loosely autobiographical novels which have at their center the exploits of a half-Puerto Rican bisexual Quaker motorcyclist from Philadelphia named Tomato “Mad Dog” Rodríguez. This “Trilogy of Tomatoes,” as it is known, is comprised of Flaming Iguanas: An Illustrated All Girl Road Novel Thing (1997), They Call Me Mad Dog!: A Story for Bitter, Lonely People (1998), and Hoochie Mama: The Other White Meat (2001). The first of these works recounts how Tomato crossed the United States on a motorcycle from New Jersey to San Francisco in a journey of self-examination and discovery that culminates with her first fulfilling lesbian sexual relationship with a woman named Hodie, renamed Hooter Mujer. The second describes how Tomato’s plans for revenge against the unfaithful Hodie lead Tomato to jail, unfairly accused of murder, where she is raped and engages in lesbianism and comical phone sex. The third work describes Tomato’s return to civil society and, more specifically, to a gentrified, over-commercialized, unrecognizable Bay Area overrun by Latte people and other Silicon-Valley yuppies. The centrality of California in these texts is key in as much as it addresses the dispersion of Puerto Rican culture across the United States, from sea to shining sea—complementing Ramos Otero’s discussion of Puerto Ricans in Hawaii in his story “Vivir del cuento” (1987).

As the literary critic Laura Laffrado has also observed, López’s Lap Dancing for Mommy includes two pieces on the character Pia Sweden that can be seen as an important antecedent to Tomato Rodríguez: “Pia Sweden: Idle Chatter” and “Pia Sweden Falls in Love with Hooter.” Pia’s mixed ethnic background is presented as the somewhat funny source of identity problems, specifically in relation to her body and linguistic skills: “Being ½ Puerto Rican + ½ Regular-White-Girl has left Pia Sweden a very hairy woman who doesn’t know how to speak Spanish”
López’s semi-autobiographical character Tomato Rodríguez is presented as the daughter of a distant and abusive Afro-Puerto Rican father and a German-American lesbian mother. The early parental separation and subsequent retreat into mostly white suburbia results in a somewhat artificial link to Puerto Ricanness for the protagonist. While López never disavows Tomato’s Puerto Rican identity, she leads the reader to understand that it is constructed on the vaguest of referents, mostly acquired from dominant stereotypes. Scholars of migration have scarcely considered such identity fashioning except in negative terms. But it also represents a departure from the central, first-generation characters portrayed by Ramos Otero and Negrón-Muntaner and comes closer to their depiction of second-generation individuals (Sam Fat and Ana Hernández). López’s work reverses the typical sources of identity models; she and her characters grow up in lesbian households and glean an ethnic identity from random sources.

Profusely illustrated with rubber stamp art and cartoons, López’s narratives are further distinguished from other Latina texts by their explicit sexual descriptions, their presentation of bisexuality as a valid sexual orientation, and their emphasis on humor (which recalls standup Latina lesbian comedians and performers such as Marga Gómez, Mónica Palacios, Reno, and Carmelita Tropicana). López’s approach differs significantly from that of older, more established Latina lesbians such as Gloria Anzaldúa, Cherríe Moraga, and Luz María Umpierre. Even as humorous a play as the Cuban-American Dolores Prida’s 1977 musical Beautiful Señoritas, which does not mention lesbianism, seems overly militant if oddly dated in its denunciation of women’s oppression in comparison to the riotous excess of Tomato Rodríguez’s adventures and travails. This is not to say that López’s work eschews social criticism, quite the contrary. Its fundamental marker is one of tone. While the political exigencies of the 1980s under Reagan and Bush might have demanded a particular insistence and seriousness, the transformed panorama of the mid-1990s under Clinton allowed for a different type of expression. Needless to say, the situation under George W. Bush is hardly so supportive. Humor, however, did not constitute the only means of transcending rigid boundaries. For example, if it was once inconceivable for a feminist lesbian to interact sexually with men and to maintain her dignity (a view that tended to invalidate bisexuality as either “non-committed” or “intermediate”), nowadays bisexuality has come to be much more accepted. As Tomato puts it in Flaming Iguanas, “I wanted a Bisexual Female Ejaculating

(3). She also idolizes Farrah Fawcett as well as “that little blonde girl with bangs on ‘No More Tears’ spray-on conditioner (made by Johnson + Johnson),” in other words, “the queens of the HAIRLESS BLOND PEOPLE” (3). The graphic, illustrated story concludes by describing how Pia, in her “lesbian student mode,” attends a talk by Susie Bright, the radical sexual thinker, and goes home and demands that her heretofore sensitive boyfriend have rough sex with her—a feat which he finds almost impossible to perform.

This humorous approach incorporates a challenge to the ways in which mass media and advertising contribute to dominant modes of racialization in the United States and the ways in which non-white children internalize racism and white phenotype models as ideal images of beauty. Humor also posits a different conception of female sexuality, what the literary critic Melissa Solomon has termed “the lesbian bardo,” in reference to English professor Eve Sedgwick’s theorization of the Buddhist concept for “the space in-between.” Solomon brilliantly elucidates the radical nature of Lopez’s conception of sexuality, but she misses the ethnic and racial dimensions of the Puerto Rican novelist’s work, a blind spot that she shares with film scholar Douglas Crimp, who neglects the Puerto Ricanness of the Warhol drag performer Mario Montez in his article in the quasi-hagiographic Regarding Sedgwick, dedicated to the contributions of one of the key founders of queer theory. Solomon also does not mention third-wave feminism or broader social movements as significant to an explanation of the author’s approach to sexuality. In this sense, I clearly side more with Laffrado’s critical approach and her close attention to ethnicity and artistic form.

The shift from Pia Sweden to Tomato Rodriguez in these works indicates a conscious choice on the part of the writer to go from a name which indicates whiteness—“Pia,” a likely reference to the actress, singer, and scandal-mongering sex symbol Pia Zadora, and “Sweden,” a Scandinavian country which stands for white homogeneity, modern design, and cold weather—to one which indicates difference: the equally strange, cartoonish nickname “Tomato”—a fruit often considered to be a vegetable, the key ingredient in Mexican salsa, from the pre-Hispanic Nahuatl “tomatl”—and “Rodríguez,” a Spanish surname. In fact, midway through the first novel we learn that Tomato’s real name is Jolene Gertrude Rodríguez, names and a surname consistent with the character’s mixed ethnic background, which is tellingly disguised by her comical nickname.
Quaker role model” (251). Tomato has, in short, varied relationships, and struggles to reconceptualize categories in order to find something suitable to her own desires and idiosyncrasies.

Some other outstanding characteristics of López’s writing are her link to popular culture, particularly camp and Latino/a kitsch; her interest in lesbian genealogies (that is to say, lesbian daughters and mothers); and her consideration of what it means to be Puerto Rican or Latina, particularly when not raised in a Latino/a environment. Carmen Miranda, the guardian angel Chiquita, and the “Puerto Rican eyebrow” (a reference to particular cosmetic practices and notions of style), in addition to a meditation on “passing” as African American, are some of the main referents of Latinidad in López’s work. López’s more recent performance piece, first entitled “Grandma López’s Country-Mad Medicine Show (A Food Stamp Diatribe-in-Progress),” and now entitled “NOTHING LEFT BUT THE SMELL: A Republican on Welfare,” has centered on her critique of classism and racism in U.S. society and on her indictment of the corporate world, particularly of her former publisher, Simon and Schuster, whom she accused of poor treatment and inefficiency. The artist incorporates humor into her harangue and into her exploration of life on the welfare line, where she has become “the Welfare Queen” as she waits for unemployment checks and food coupons. López confronts dominant stereotypes about racialized Latina women like herself, portrayed as oversized individuals dependent on government support, vis-à-vis the reality of artists who refuse to feed blindly into a capitalist cultural industry. The writer has turned, moreover, to producing her next book by hand, in the belief that this anti-mass market project will enable her to revive a sort of “direct touch” with her craft, responding—indirectly, perhaps—to views such as those expressed by Laffrado, who has questioned López’s “marginality.” Be that as it may, López also maintains an informative website (www.erikalopez.com) and a subscription e-mail list, regularly bringing her fans up to date about current developments in her life.

Conclusion
As we have seen, LGBT or queer Puerto Rican Diasporic cultural producers have engaged the legacy and experience of migration in widely varying manners. Place of birth, historical moment and even personal idiosyncrasy have all shaped the ways in which an array of individuals portray their different yet intersecting experiences. Whether it be through literature, as with Manuel Ramos Otero; film, as with Negrón-Muntaner; or cartoons, words, and performance, as with Erika López, Puerto Rican and Nuyorican or Diasporican artists represent, engage, and analyze their richly complex and inevitably particular situations. There is not one homogeneous Puerto Rican queer diasporic experience, even when, as we have seen, many of the artists address similar issues. In English, Spanish, or Spanglish; in Puerto Rico, Manhattan, Philadelphia, New Jersey, or San Francisco; through the written word, celluloid, digital images, cartoons, or live bodies, queer Rican artists have documented and transformed an immigrant experience characterized by racism, poverty, linguistic difficulties, and homophobia (both from the receiving society and the community of origin), but also characterized by personal resiliency and cultural creativity. Puerto Ricans may have U.S. citizenship, but that has not meant that their integration into U.S. society has been easy, particularly for queer or LGBT individuals. Furthermore, the U.S. gay community has not necessarily been any more embracing of Puerto Ricans and other Latin Americans or Latinas than society at large. Much remains to be done, but an enormous amount has already been accomplished—at least in the realm of culture and the arts.

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Notes
1 See, for example, Portes and Rumbaut as well as Rumbaut and Portes; Puerto Ricans are scarcely mentioned in any of these books, and queer sexualities are not discussed at all. Yolanda Martínez-San Miguel’s landmark Caribe Two Ways is notable in its comparison of Cuban, Dominican, and Puerto Rican migration in the Caribbean and to the United States.

2 Manuel Guzmán claims authorship of the term “sexile”: “A sexile is a neologism of mine that refers to the exile of those who have had to leave their nations of origins on account of their sexual orientation” (227). I first heard Frances Negron-Muntaner employ the term, and am also familiar with Venezuelan filmmaker Irene Sosa’s use. I am not able to ascertain Guzmán’s role.

3 See Rios Avila’s essays “Final Inquery” and “Rambling” in La raza cómica (301–310; 311–318) as well as “Caribbean Dislocations,” “Migrant Hybridity,” and “Gaiety Burlesque.”

4 I view Antonio S. Pedreira’s harangue in Insularismo against effeminate men and René Marqués’s comments regarding Puerto Rican men’s “docility” as characterizations of unmanly, i.e., homosexual, behavior. In both, what is at stake is the very integrity of the nation.

5 The Reverend Margarita Sánchez de León was one of the leaders responsible for the elimination of Article 103 of the Puerto Rican Penal Code, which penalized consensual, adult male and female same-sex relations with up to ten years of imprisonment.

6 This is certainly how American gay male migration to Puerto Rico in the 1960s was seen; to this day, most gay-owned businesses on the island belong to non-Puerto Ricans; see Negron-Muntaner’s “Echoing Stonewall” and La Fountain-Stokes’s “1898 and the History of a Queer Puerto Rican Century.” In René Marqués’s novel La mirada, a subtext states that homosexuality on the island is linked to North American sexual liberation movements and that, as such, they are to blame for its preponderance.

7 Associations of male homosexuality and foreignness also occur in the etymology of the words used to describe male homosexuals. For example, the term “bugarrón,” used to refer to the “active” partner in same-sex male intercourse, has its origins in the Latin bulgarus, or “Bulgarian”; see Cela.

8 See Luibheid, for example, for an account of the period here in question. With respect to lesbian and gay immigration to the United States, see Merrett, Miles, Mohr, Park, Sclaf, Tuller, Turner, the articles in “Symposium: Stonewall at 25,” and “Gay Man Who Cites Abuse in Mexico Is Granted Asylum.” Similar analyses for other countries include Binne (Netherlands and United Kingdom), Bruns (Germany), Carabine (United Kingdom, with emphasis on women’s experience), Hart (Australia) and Schneider and O’Neill (Canada). The San Francisco-based International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission Asylum Project currently documents these immigration issues.

9 The most notable current case of exclusion is that of foreigners who are HIV positive or “have” AIDS. While there is no longer automatic exclusion on the grounds of homosexuality, and while asylum is now a possibility, it is still quite difficult to gain asylum on the basis of persecution due to sexual orientation.

10 See, for example, FitzGerald and Murray on migration to San Francisco and Weston on rural to urban migration. See Markowitz and McCormick for the reverse phenomenon. Green has documented migration from one New York City neighborhood (Greenwich Village) to another (Chelsea). See Ingram et al. and Bell and Valentine for a thorough discussion of lesbian and gay geographies.
11 It is generally recognized that working-class and rural communities have different paradigms and levels of tolerance for gender deviance, particularly for so-called effeminate men, though it remains risky to make generalizations; see Ramírez.

12 Gwen Araujo (born Edgar Araujo) was a 17-year-old transgender teen murdered in Newark, California in 2002; Edgar (Eddie) Garzón was a 35-year-old Colombian immigrant murdered in Jackson Heights, New York in 2001; Paola Matos was a 31-year-old transgender woman murdered in Brooklyn, New York in 2002; Rodney Velásquez was a 26-year-old Puerto Rican gay fashion designer murdered in the Bronx, New York, in 2002; Brandon Teena (born Teena Brandon) was a 21-year-old transgender man murdered in 1993 in Nebraska; Matthew Sheppard was a 21-year-old gay man murdered in Laramie, Wyoming in 1998.

13 The case of the Mexican-Puerto Rican painter Oliverio Hinojosa is exemplary of non-U.S. Puerto Rican queer migration. One can also think of scholar Iris Zavala, who for many years has resided in Spain and Holland.

14 See my dissertation, Culture, Representation, and the Puerto Rican Queer Diaspora for a more sustained analysis of these issues.

15 See Carlos Gil in El orden del tiempo (55–79).

16 Luz María Umpierre’s fundamental text continues to be The Margarita Poems. Manuel Ramos Otero’s oeuvre was centered on questions of homosexuality.

17 See also Cruz Malavé’s “Towards an Art of Transvestism.”

18 Gustavo Pérez-Firmat borrows the term “1.5” from sociologist Rubén Rumbaut, which is now in common usage in migration literature. In the words of Pérez-Firmat, “Born in Cuba but made in the USA, they belong to an intermediate immigrant generation whose members spent their childhood or adolescence abroad but grew into adults in America. Because this group falls somewhere in between the first and second immigrant generation, the Cuban sociologist Rubén Rumbaut has labeled it the ‘1.5’ or ‘one and a-half generation’” (1).

19 See La Fountain-Stokes’s “Tomboy Tantrums,” for an analysis of Lidia as a lesbian character.

20 See Gelpi’s “Manuel Ramos Otero” as well as his Literatura y paternalismo en Puerto Rico (137–54).

21 Martínez-San Miguel discusses the role of this central female character as a structuring fictional construct in her analysis of the story (344–50).

22 Ramos Otero comments profusely on his relation to English in his interview with Costa. Regarding his involvement in the New York gay world, he states: “[E]l mundo homosexual en el que me movía era exclusivamente en inglés” (the homosexual world in which I moved was entirely in English) (64).

23 The work of Fernando Ortiz and Lydia Cabrera, particularly El monte, is useful to understand the presence of African religious traditions in Cuba and the Americas at large.

24 The most notorious analysis of Luis Muñoz Marín as great father is Edgardo Rodríguez Juliá’s Las tribulaciones de Jonás.

25 See Negrón-Muntaner “When I Was a Puerto Rican Lesbian” and her interview with Alexandra Juhasz.

26 Negrón-Muntaner goes to great lengths to insist that the large American flag that appears in this sequence is queer, with fifty-one stars arranged in a circle: an American flag that incorporates the lone Puerto Rican star (“When I Was a Puerto Rican Lesbian,” 512).

27 See the interview by Dinah E. Rodriguez.

28 One can also think of films such as Marlon Riggs’s Tongues Untied or Jennie Livingston’s Paris Is Burning, although the latter film has been taken to task for appropriating and misrepresenting the subjects on which it focuses—a chronic risk of documentary production.

29 See Negrón-Muntaner’s “When I Was a Puerto Rican Lesbian” for an extensive discussion of this scene by the filmmaker (515–16).

30 Personal communication, March 1996.

31 See La Fountain-Stokes’s “1898.”

32 On third-wave feminism, see Baumgardner and Richards as well as Heywood and Drake.

33 On Avilés and Marrero, see La Fountain-Stokes’s “Dancing La Vida Loca.”

34 López’s reference to a Scandinavian country is reminiscent of Rane Arroyo’s poem “Island to Island” in which the poet speaks of his experiences as a Puerto Rican who visited Iceland; see Pale Ramón, 55–66.

35 See López’ website as well as “Postcards from the Welfare Line: The Rise and Fall of Erika López.” López’s entry into performance art occurred with her show titled “Grandma López’s Country-Mad Medicine Show: A Tonic for the Age,” subtitled “A Food Stamp Diatribe-in-Progress performed by Erika López” (November 2002, Rutgers University). This show was later advertised as “Erika López’s Tiny Fisted Tantrum Co. Presents NOTHING LEFT BUT THE SMELL: A Republican on Welfare,” with performances in San Francisco, Denver, and New York City.