



"Marielena" in Knee Socks, Puerto Rico, 1968.  
Photographer unknown. Permission Iris Toro.

## INTRODUCTION: **CARIBEÑOS, COUNTERSTREAMS AND CULTURAL REMITTANCES**

**M**arielena was 15 when her family moved back to Puerto Rico. It was 1965, and she found it hard getting used to her new surroundings after growing up in the South Bronx. With all the romantic illusions she held about her enchanted island homeland, she felt unwelcome and sadly disappointed. She and her sister were ridiculed by the other kids at school and in the neighborhood, for the way they looked and spoke and everything about them. "What am I?" they asked themselves. "Am I really Puerto Rican the way I always thought, if here there are Puerto Ricans laughing at me and calling me gringa and treating me like a slut? Am I Americana after all, when up there I was always treated 'different,' and where I was even proud to be different? I was deeply confused, and felt lost." It was the most painful experience of her life, but she did struggle through it, and made adjustments while never losing her dignity and pride in herself.

"As time passed and we found our way around a little, they started to accept us, and give us a chance. In fact, after a while we even became popular. We still had our own unique style, that stood out, but they began to think it was cool, and admired it and imitated us. You know, the way we walked, jitterbuggin' and all, and our hair with the zig-zag cut and pony tails, and our music, rock and roll and Motown and Latin soul. And I was proud of all that, 'cause you know, I came to Puerto Rico at a rebellious age. They challenged us, but we challenged them back, too. I wasn't about to give up my diddly-bop for no one, I was proud of the blackness in me, even though I was blond with blue eyes. So, they started to like our style, they wanted to learn about it and act that way, too. Like me and the other Nuyorican kids in the school and in our neighborhood. 'Cause as time went by there were more and more of us. And there was salsa, and there was Pedro Pietri and

Nuyorican poetry that they started to hear about, partly from us. This is the stuff we brought with us."

And so, with time, Marielena went from being the butt of ridicule and insults to being a teacher, a mentor in cultural ways that the kids on the Island wanted to learn. "So I remember one time during free hour when I was in high school, we were listening to music and practicing dance steps. And I was doing some moves to something, I think it was the Wobble or one of those dance crazes of those years, or maybe it was some Joe Cuba record, some boogaloo, and I remember those same kids that used to bring us such grief coming over and saying, 'Oye, enséñame ese paso!' 'Hey, show me that step!' I'll never forget it, how the tables turned, 'Enseñame ese paso!'"

Looking back, she realizes that her battle was worth it after all: "Because of my experience, and the same experience that a lot of other New York *boricuas* have lived through here, the new generation of people here are more tolerant. We have taught them, by example and from what we have said, to accept people as they are, to be less narrow-minded, and to know racism and prejudice when they see it, just as we learned it on the streets of Nueva York."

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The theme of this book first occurred to me during several visits in recent years to the Puerto Rican city of Mayagüez, where I had been invited along with a few other Puerto Rican writers from the States to offer readings and discussions of our work. Surprisingly large and animated crowds attended the events, and cheered us on as we read not only in Spanish, but in English and in that widely practiced switching of codes, Spanglish.

The audience seemed hungry for the voices and images of Puerto Rican communities in U.S. urban settings, and to relish that bi-cultural mixture of nostalgia for their ancestral island homeland and assertive pride in the fabled "mean streets" of the Bronx and other inner-city neighborhoods in the United States. They went wild when Tato Laviera read his poem "nuyorican," where he speaks directly and defiantly (and in Spanish) to his beloved Island, and especially the lines "Now I return, with a *boricua* heart, and you, / you scorn me, you look askance, you attack the way I speak, / while you're out there eating mcdonald's in american discotheques, / and I couldn't even dance salsa in san juan, which i / can dance in my neighborhoods full of your customs." Or when Mariposa performed her signature poem, "Ode to a Diasporican," with its proverbial chorus, "No nació en Puerto Rico, / Puerto Rico nació en mí" ("I wasn't born in Puerto Rico, / Puerto Rico was born in me.") We felt like rock stars.

As I was to learn in the lively receptions that followed the readings, and in those joyous days spent in discussions on the Island, many of my newfound friends turned out to be the college-age children of return migrant

families. They all seemed to share some version or other of the same familiar story of rejection and disillusionment on their arrival "home," along with a strong affective identification with the big-city life they had left behind in the United States. They felt marginalized by the Puerto Rico they encountered, yet at the same time entitled to assert themselves and take full part in the life of the society. Their ambivalence and divided loyalties were reminiscent to me of what I knew of expatriate communities, or even more interestingly, of the similarly marginalized and similarly self-assertive Nuyorican diaspora in New York. The way that they hung out together and shared a sense of group belonging in an often unaccepting environment made them seem like a diaspora, or actually a kind of reverse or return diaspora within the homeland society itself. We joked, and made up the term "Re-asporican." To me it was a startling twist on the questions of Latino identity and everything I had been studying and writing about for decades.

I also observed their interaction with friends and family who had never left the Island, and with their uneasy and bewildered teachers, parents, and other authority figures. I noticed that the "Re-asporicans" frequently found themselves confronting and challenging stubborn assumptions about all kinds of hard-set cultural values: what it means to be Puerto Rican, what is an acceptable language of public discourse, how to relate to one's blackness and African heritage, the traditional roles and life-choices of women, and a range of other pressing social issues. I also observed the responses of their peers and others who were at home on the Island, and it became clear to me that, as in Marielena's story, along with the disdain and fear the returnees typically evoked there was also an admiration and even emulation of their ways and ideas. The "stayees," "los nativos" as they were sometimes called, thought the Re-asporicans were cool and liked their style and way of looking at things. There was not only interesting cultural contact going on here, but the seeds of change, some covert and reluctant, some vocal and quite public.

Here, I thought, in this fascinating, highly charged collision of distinct but intertwined experiences, lies an important key to the future of this country, and of many countries and regions of the world. Some major social changes must already be underway, and many more in store, because of this intense intersection of transnational desires. Such a dynamic and suggestive zone of cultural contact is surely worth a closer look and some creative analysis.

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In many parts of the world, return migrants and their children are bringing significant changes and challenges to home countries, and thereby altering the direction and impact of cultural and political flows that result from international migration and diasporic settlement. Whether it is Turkish or Spanish "guest workers" returning from long-term stays in Germany,

Japanese Brazilians moving "back" to Japan, Mexican immigrants in the United States taking active part in the civic life of their hometowns, or Dominicans shuttling between San Juan or New York and the Dominican Republic, returning emigrant nationals ("remigrants") of many countries bring cultural ideas and values acquired in diaspora settings to bear on their native lands or that of their forebears, often with boldly innovative and unsettling effect. While these and related social phenomena have received growing scholarly and journalistic attention in terms of political economy and global migration, most studies continue to focus strictly on money remittances and transnational community formation by way of civic activity, entrepreneurship, and institutional development.

What most gripped my attention, however, was what I have come to call "cultural remittances," that is, the ensemble of ideas, values, and expressive forms introduced into societies of origin by remigrants and their families as they return "home," sometimes for the first time, for temporary visits or permanent re-settlement, and as transmitted through the increasingly pervasive means of telecommunications. Thus, after years of studying, teaching, and writing about migration and the resultant cultural changes and continuities in receiving or host societies, I was now eager to explore a new and unknown side of the same phenomenon: the reverse flow or "counterstream" resulting from massive circular and return migration and the ongoing remittance of cultural values and practices through friends, relatives, and the media.

The history of Puerto Rican migration, community formation, and returning home provides an especially rich field for studying modern-day processes of transnational identity formation, trans-locality, circular migration, and diasporic communities, and will therefore serve as the primary and paradigmatic case in point in this book. In the Puerto Rican case it is possible to examine such processes as they unfold through several generations of social history and play out in highly charged political and cultural contexts. For over thirty years a diasporic, "Nuyorican" identity location has been staked out, and circular migration has become a prevalent mode of movement. Puerto Ricans thus anticipating by a decade or more experiences undergone by millions of transnational migrants around the world. The re-entry of thousands of Puerto Rican families, many of them born and raised in U.S. cities, has had an enormous though largely uncharted impact on the Island society, such that assumptions about the meaning of national culture itself, and intersecting issues of territory, citizenship, language, gender, race, political representation, and social class, are of necessity addressed in new ways.

This often unwitting and unintended cultural challenge—which I encapsulate with the term "the diaspora strikes back"—has a particular edge because it is lodged not by "foreigners" imposing their ways in accord with reigning systems of international power, but by "one's own," as it were, fellow Puerto Ricans who continue to claim full-scale membership in the national

community but whose life-experience has had the effect of differentiating them from their Island-based compatriots in myriad ways. Contrary to their illusions and expectations, returning home has been a sobering moment for many Nuyoricans, causing them to feel like "strangers in the ethnic homeland" (the title of one book on return migration of Japanese Brazilians). They are outsiders and "others" whose presence all too often spurs resentment, ridicule and fear, and even disdain and social discrimination with clear racial and class undertones. Yet at the same time, their presence also elicits fascination, engagement, and change. With all of the ambiguities and complexities involved, and though difficult to measure with any precision, this highly charged cultural encounter has unquestionably had an unsettling and de-centering effect both on the remigrants themselves and on the cultural realities and assumptions in the home countries and regions.

The Puerto Rican case is of course idiosyncratic in some important ways, perhaps most of all because of the abiding colonial relationship under which its entire migratory movement and diaspora formation have transpired. The longevity, volume, and working-class composition of the migration and return migration are among the most salient consequences of this political and economic dependency, as is the intensity of its transnational and cross-cultural connections; perhaps most obviously, the U.S. citizenship status of all Puerto Ricans differentiates them from other Caribbean and Latino groups. Nevertheless, I would hold that rather than merely exceptional, and in some ways precisely because of its exceptional qualities, Puerto Ricans serve as an excellent focus by anchoring me in a paradigmatic and especially illuminating instance of transnational life and culture.

In thinking through my Mayagüez encounters and extending them with further study, I rapidly came across a wide array of congruent and contrastive experiences of co-ethnic "remigrants" and "cultural remittances" in other countries. Dominican and Mexican stories would appear to be closest to those of returning Puerto Ricans; while I do treat the Dominican experience here, the Mexican case, and the whole idea of Chicano culture haunting the traditional Mexican imaginary, while obviously of central concern for any consideration of U.S. Latino life, is so huge that it really requires a study in its own right. Other illuminating parallels can also be found among West Indians, African Americans returning to the south (as captured by Carol Stack in her book *Call to Home* (1996)), Filipinos and Koreans, Japanese Brazilians, and Turkish and southern European "guest workers." In reference to earlier stages in American immigration history, the largely overlooked drama of European return migration has also been addressed in more recent studies, as in Mark Wyman's *Round-Trip to America* (1993), and that of African Americans returning to Africa in James T. Campbell and David Levering Lewis's *Middle Passages* (2006).

But for the sake of focus, the Puerto Rican experience is the privileged example in this study, as is New York City the central diasporic location for

that and so many other transnational communities historically and in our times. Of course no such case can be taken in isolation, so that to assure the generalizing power of my analysis I identified the Dominican and the Cuban experiences as offering the most promising lines of contrast and comparison. The Hispanic Caribbean, the three Spanish-speaking Antillean islands with huge, vibrant Caribbean Latino enclaves in the United States, are as closely linked in their common cultural heritage and regional location as they are distinct in their political status and migratory and diaspora histories. I refer to this tri-national focus of my analysis as "Caribbean Latinos," or to use the Spanish word, "*caribeños*."

Combining as it does close family resemblances and sharp political divergences, the Caribbean Latino experience thus makes for an ideal testing ground for the study of transnational cultural flows and interactions. All three countries endured four centuries of Spanish colonial rule, which involved the virtual extermination of the indigenous Arawak populations and importation of millions of enslaved Africans. In differential ways, all demonstrate a troubled relation with that African heritage, and all have spent the past century under the direct and overweening sway of U.S. imperial power, which has included the formation of huge diasporas in North America. On the other hand, in addition to differing processes of national formation, their respective relations to their imposing northern neighbor exemplify the full gamut of modern-day political possibilities, from direct colony (Puerto Rico) to neo- or semi-colony (Dominican Republic) to tenuous breakaway from the imperial orbit via revolutionary socialism (Cuba). As a result, while the three diasporas bear many commonalities and intersections, making them almost seem like one pan-ethnic Caribbean Latino community in various historical periods, closer inspection shows them to make for very diverse historical realities. The same may be said for the processes of return migration and remittances, such that it is only by marking off those discrepancies that one can speak meaningfully, as I attempt to do, of a single "Caribbean Latino counterstream."

The longest-standing, most consistent and voluminous of the three migratory, diasporic, and return experiences is the Puerto Rican one, which is ample reason for allowing it a certain pride of place among the three instances. The Dominican case bears closest comparison with the Puerto Rican one over the past forty-some years, but that massive diasporic presence has been more recent and the cultural changes under study more abrupt, both differences attributable to the differing relations of colonial power at work. While the flow of cash remittances to the Dominican Republic has been far more abundant and that of challenging cultural transfers more abrupt and sharper, there has been far less migratory return, especially of a long-term or permanent kind.

The most anomalous of the three is of course the Cuban experience; demonstrating their compatibility within the analytical model I seek to develop will be the most obvious challenge to the validity of my argument. Historically, Cubans were the main protagonists of Spanish Caribbean exile in the nineteenth century, and shared close inter-diasporic connections with Puerto Ricans through the first half of the twentieth. But the 1959 revolution and its aftermath have meant the veering off of the Cuban community from the Puerto Rican and Dominican, and indeed an exceptional status within the larger "Latino" pan-ethnicity in recent generations. While the transfer of cash and other material goods has been ample and consequential and the ideological challenge posed by the exile community as extreme as can be, there has been virtually no return migration and resettlement in the homeland. Nevertheless, between many and meaningful temporary visits and incessant communication between diaspora and homeland locations, a cultural counterflow has definitely been evident all along and, as in the other two cases in point, has been a thorn in the side of the traditional homeland culture in terms of the reigning values, ideological perspectives and expressive means.

But the main reason for including Cuba and not, say, Mexico or Haiti or Panama, is not because of such direct commonalities, nor even its belonging to the Hispanic Caribbean family of national experiences. The idea is that if an analogous experience can be established in such a diametrically opposite situation, the line of analysis may then be applicable in a wider and more universal way. What I hope to show is that the "cultural remittances" entering and so consequentially affecting Cuba in our times stem not so much from a nationally defined and specified diaspora, but from broader Caribbean and Afro-Atlantic diasporic sources also influential in contemporary Puerto Rican and Dominican counterstreams. In other words, the process is indirect and oblique in the Cuban case, the diaspora and its cultural diffusion effectively disengaged from its explicitly national moorings and comprised of an already transnationalized mix of multiple cultural traditions.

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The Caribbean Latino diaspora and its varied relations with the home countries and region is thus the geo-cultural location for my study. I attempt to characterize this space and its historical trajectory in chapter 3, and then ground it with narrated life-experience and creative expressions in the remainder of the book. Before arriving there, though, it is important to address the key theoretical issues of diaspora and cultural "return" and set forth my own understanding of these complex concepts and social processes. What is a diaspora? What is a "transnational community" and what is new about modern-day transnationalism as compared with earlier instances of local and

global migrations and transformative cultural contacts? What can be said of cultural migrations between diasporas and homelands, and especially of the impact of return flows of people and their diaspora-forged cultural experiences and values?

I seek to address such and other related questions in chapters 1 and 2. In offering a critical review of previous scholarly and journalistic accounts, I was surprised to find myself bringing into dialogue two integrally tied but as yet relatively disconnected theoretical discourses; that is, I realized that the vast theoretical literature on diasporas and transnational communities rarely dealt directly with the phenomenon of migratory return or the impact of remittances, and that the equally expansive studies of return migration and even remittances bore little if any explicit relation to the comparatively newfound fields of diaspora and transnational studies. By implication I am proposing that the two discussions be brought into interaction with one another so as to arrive at a more coherent approach to contemporary transnational experience.

In addition to thus conjoining these two theoretical discussions, I also draw out my own points of emphasis so as to best set the stage for the evidence presented in the remainder of my study. My two main interventions have to do with the issues of power and of the cultural, both of which have in my view received inadequate attention in most theoretical reflections on diaspora and diasporic return. In thinking diaspora, we need to make clear which social sector of the home and host societies goes to comprise the given diaspora community, and what international power relations motivate and condition the diasporic formation. The phrase I take as the title of chapter 1, "thinking diaspora from below," signals my focus on working-class and economically based migratory movements and diasporas, and on colonially defined relations among home and host societies. The social and cultural worlds forged of such experience—which I refer to with the playful phrase "*créolité* in the hood"—is an expression of these structured relations of power, and therefore resist or at least go to qualify the idea of some generic diaspora reality. In different ways, all three *caribéño* diasporas exemplify these coordinates of transnational power, and the cultural goods moving between homeland and diaspora locations need to be understood as—to take the title of one pertinent book—"streams of cultural capital."

I have also found that previous study of these relations has tended to focus inordinately on political and economic, or more broadly sociological, aspects, and to treat the cultural dimensions in minimal or marginal ways. While motivations for migratory movement as well as the relative placement of migrant communities clearly have economic and political sources, it is in its cultural manifestations that diaspora life and return can be understood in its human, experiential qualities, and differentiated at more specific, idiosyncratic levels. I also argue that when scholarly writers do take up cultural

considerations, they generally conceive of "culture" in limited and often individualistic terms of social behavior and attitudes. Likewise, they take a narrow view of "politics" as civic consciousness and participation. Issues of ideology and collective challenges to traditional values and social identities usually get short shrift when they are not totally absent, while the humanistic sense of culture having to do with creative expressions and styles has no role in the analysis. The vast literature on the ubiquitous contemporary phenomenon of remittances provides ample examples of these shortcomings.

It is in terms of power and the cultural that I introduce the concept of "cultural remittances," perhaps the guiding idea of my book. In doing so, I hope to expand on the term "social remittances" as developed by anthropologist Peggy Levitt in her book *The Transnational Villagers* (2001). Scholars have long been saying that it is not just money and financial capital that are transferred in the multiple cross-border transactions of today's society, but also values, ideas, beliefs and a host of other features of social life. Levitt did the welcome service of injecting this insight into the used and abused concept of "remittance," and thereby provided a handy term for a whole range of transnational studies. However, I contend that her theoretical innovation fails to live up to its potential because of the methodological and philosophical limitations of her notion of the cultural. In order to recognize that the non-monetary aspects of today's "remittances" may bear even greater consequences than the "cash transfers" to which most of that discussion is limited, and indeed to understand the potential deeper significance of all "transfers" emanating from diasporas, our notion of culture needs to embrace collective, ideological, as well as artistic meanings of the term.

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With these theoretical and historical bearings in view, I then seek to ground my ideas by providing evidence in the form of personal life-stories and instances of expressive creativity. I think of the "Tales of Learning and Turning" that make up Part 2 as the heart of the book, the narrative fulcrum on which the more abstract and interpretive efforts turn. My commentaries included before and after the tales themselves ("Introducing the Tales" and "Reading the Tales") are intended to explain how they came into being, and what conclusions or insights I suggest might be gleaned from them as illustrations or illuminations of my main arguments and the social phenomena under study. The tales are based on interviews I conducted in a range of sites over several years since around 2000, and especially in 2006 and 2007. I have changed the names, arranged them chronologically (and alphabetically for ease of reference), and reorganized each tale so as to enhance its dramatic appeal and draw attention to those experiences most germane to the present study. The result is a rich and engaging tapestry of Caribbean Latino lives

as real people from different walks and stations of life navigate the joys and challenges—the intensive “learning and turning”—of transnational cultural reality. In this context it is also intended to serve as an archive or database of evidence for the controversial theoretical and interpretive perspectives set forth in the remainder of the book.

Indeed, in Part 3 I make frequent cross-reference to the stories so as to connect and associate my reflections on poetic, musical, and artistic innovations with this qualitative experiential data. Some of the writers and performers who illustrate the “Style Transfers” of that part are also storytellers of “learning and turning” experiences, and I am therefore obliged (with their permission, of course) to blow their cover, as it were, and reveal their biographical identities. In chapters 5 and 6 and in the Coda, “Bring the Salsa,” “Open Mic,” and “Visual Crossings,” respectively, Puerto Rican cultural history forms the point of departure and most fully substantiated case in point, in part because it is the longest-standing and in part because of my own greater familiarity with that experience. Clearly, I view the emergence and assertion of a “Nuyorican” field of group identity and creative expressivity in the later 1960s and early 1970s as the benchmark of the cultural ground-shift of central interest here. Nevertheless, it becomes evident that, despite the marked variations among them, Dominican and Cuban experiences may well bear even more radical implications for social and cultural change than the Puerto Rican case itself. In all three national instances, and in the pan-national regional framework, the Caribbean Latino cultural counterstream has the effect of de-centering national, ethnic, and racial identities, and of redefining the sources and catalysts of cultural innovation.

Though salsa and Nuyorican poetry, both from the 1960s and early 1970s, are my primary examples of “remitted” culture forms, it is hip hop, since its diffusion as of around 1990, that serves as the main conduit of cultural styles forged in the diaspora that then exert such a challenging and even subversive influence in contemporary Puerto Rico, Dominican Republic and Cuba. That diffusion has of course been global in scope, and the presence of hip hop in the Caribbean is obviously part of a broader transnationalizing process. One difference, however, is that in the Caribbean Latino case the bearers of that traveling stylistic modality are themselves ethnic diasporans from those very nations, and many stem from the very social location and context in which hip hop originated; some of them, in fact, especially in the Puerto Rican case, were among the actual creators of hip hop from the beginning.

Furthermore, it is becoming ever clearer that hip hop is the stylistic current most closely identifiable with contemporary globalization. It is perhaps the aesthetic remittance par excellence because it emerged just when financial remittances became the most visible, tangible manifestation of transnational social relations in our times. Thus, in addition to being the uncontested lingua franca for youth cultures all over the world, it is also serving as the main

vehicle for cultural solidarity and contestation. Its eminently subversive role, the assertion of which might seem counterintuitive and even questionable when limited to the U.S. context, is blatantly evident when transferred to other national and regional cultural realities. Though the commercialized, domesticated and ideologically venomous qualities most familiar in the U.S. setting do of course spill over to the close neighbors in the Caribbean, the radical democratic impulse that characterized hip hop in its inner-city beginnings still infuses much hip hop in the Puerto Rican, Dominican, and most of all in the Cuban context.

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I have arranged the three parts of this book in a sequence that makes most sense to me. I have placed first a definition of terms, an extended theoretical reflection about diasporas and cultural return, along with a discussion of the cultural history of the Caribbean Latino transnational space and cultural "counterstream." This more abstract and reflective exposition is then given personal and narrative substance, or experientially "grounded," with representative life-stories with which any reader anywhere can identify. And then in the last part, building on that theoretical and ethnographic foundation, I interpret new cultural traditions and practices. Cultural remittances from below, as elaborated conceptually and as narrated in the oral histories of those who live them, take the form of stylistic transfers capable of exerting an innovative and catalytic influence on the course of national and regional histories. They illustrate in a cogent way how the cultural dimension of human experience can involve remarkable agency and power, and often embody profound lessons in democratic and cosmopolitan values and social practice.

Little did Marielena or my friends in Mayagüez know that their "Re-asporican" stories would open up a whole new world to me. Thanks to them I have been able to develop an extensive network of helpful and generous people whose life-stories give me confidence in the tenability of my ideas, however controversial, and in whose very personal, unique experiences I recognized patterns and interfaces with those of countless others that I encountered directly, by word of mouth, or in my research. Of course there were many others whose views or life-experiences diverged from those patterns, or even contradicted them, people who fit neatly into the home society on their return, or whose presence or "remittances" go to reinforce the status quo there more than to challenge or unsettle it. But I believe that the lives I describe, while sadly understudied, are actually much more common in today's transnational reality, where the working poor far outnumber the more privileged migrants, exiles, and returnees, both at home and abroad. It is to these remigrants, starting with the twenty-two who have shared their life-stories that I dedicate my book.



Conjunto La Plata, Puerto Rico, 1947  
(Davilila appears second from left).  
Photographer unknown. Permission  
Gregorio Marciano.

### 3 CARIBEÑO COUNTERSTREAM

From Cuba to the Guyanas and across every inflection which language confers on the chosen tongue of each territory, this style of performance is evident and travels whenever this island people, and those islanded on the mainland, migrate without any loss of innocence to forge exotic and subversive enclaves in cities whose prestige once made them certain of their names. London, Paris, New York, Amsterdam. These are the Caribbean external frontiers.

George Lamming

#### Caribbean Diaspora and Return

Caribbean peoples are considered an "exemplary case of a cultural diaspora." In his overview of the history and typology of "global diasporas," Robin Cohen identifies the Caribbean and its scattered emigrant and exile populations as privileged sites for the study of contemporary diasporic life under globalization.<sup>1</sup> Culture and cultural change make up the dimension of collective experience that distinguishes modern-day Caribbean migratory processes from those primarily marked off by relations of trade, victimization, imperial, labor or religious relations between homelands and countries of destination. In this view, it is cultural dynamics that define the content of Caribbean diasporic life first of all because of the common African descent of its populations and Afro-Atlantic moorings of their cultural histories, that is, "being phenotypically African and being conscious of racism."<sup>2</sup>

The Caribbean region and its peoples are thus a site of diasporic formation throughout its history. Beyond that Afro-diasporic foundation, and thinking of the modern Caribbean and its new migrant communities in Europe and North America, the Caribbean is a quintessential "cultural diaspora" because of the ample evidence of "cultural retentions or affirmations of an African identity, . . . a literal or symbolic interest in 'return,' . . . cultural artifacts, products and expressions that show shared concerns and cross-influences between African, the Caribbean and the destination countries of Caribbean

European colonization and the African slave trade. The latter involuntary migration was of greatest consequence, as it was formative of the culture of the entire region and made of it a central component of the African diaspora, or the Black Atlantic. The constant scattering of Caribbean peoples throughout their history, and the resultant multiple layers of colonial and neo-colonial rule, have made for extensions and reinventions of the African diaspora and at the same time new, nationally and regionally formed diasporas, primarily in Europe, North, Central and South America, and within the region itself.

This two-tier phenomenon of new diasporas spawned of a formative civilizational diaspora is unique to, or at least strongly characteristic of, the Caribbean, as is the passage from an extended epoch marked by European colonialism to a subsequent one under the dominion of the United States. Each of those colonial epochs generated major diasporic formations, especially in England until the end of World War II, and in the United States and Canada since the mid-twentieth century. The experience of intense racism in those metropolitan centers and the real and imagined "return" to Afro-Caribbean homelands make for the special content of the lived reality of that transnational imaginary. The complex, mutually enriching relations forged with other non-white diasporas in England, and with African Americans and fellow Caribbean peoples in the U.S. enclaves, become a significant component of the cultural remittances introduced into Caribbean life, especially in the period since formal independence. These latter ties, and the spanning of the Caribbean into Central and the northern rim of South America, are what lead Orlando Patterson to identify the Caribbean as the hub of what he calls the "emerging West Atlantic system."<sup>7</sup>

These qualities issuing from an analysis of the Anglophone countries are paradigmatic for the Caribbean as a whole, such that the "West Indies," the Antilles, and the Caribbean often appear virtually coterminous in the public mind and in much of the research on migration and "homecoming." There has been some important work on the Francophone Antilles transnational experience, notably that of Nina Glick-Schiller and Michel Laguerre on the Haitian diaspora and its links to homeland politics.<sup>8</sup> Generally, Haiti, Martinique, Guadalupe and other Francophone examples are treated as closely analogous to the Anglophone experience with its strong African presence and ongoing colonial and cultural links to the European metropolis.

It is the Hispanic Caribbean, "las Antillas," the second most studied instance of Caribbean cultural remittances after the English-speaking, which is most often seen as running askew of the more general regional paradigm. Representatively, in mapping his new "migration systems" Patterson separates the "Afro-Caribbean societies" (meaning the West Indies) from what he calls the "insular and south Caribbean Latin societies."<sup>9</sup> Similarly, in their important co-edited volume *Caribbean Life in New York City* (1987),

Constance R. Sutton and Elsa M. Chaney divide their case studies into two distinct sections, "Afro-Caribbean" and "Hispanic Caribbean." Similar cases abound and, aside from the differentiation in language culture, the issue is clearly about the designation "Afro-." For in the view of many Caribbeanists, and as articulated in cultural self-definitions as well, the Spanish-speaking Caribbean countries have more trouble with the African background, and with blackness, than the rest of the region. It is also clear that this real or perceived difference has its effect on the diasporic experience, and as regards the baggage and reception of cultural remittances on their re-entry into the home societies.

Before turning to the study of the cultural counterstream from Caribbean Latino diaspora enclaves back to the diverse island homelands, it is important to have a sense of the historical trajectory of Puerto Rican, Cuban, and Dominican life in the United States. Paralleling the intersections and divergences among the three national cultures and histories, the diaspora experiences of U.S. *caribeño* communities have witnessed both close bonds and sharp contrasts over the decades. At different historical periods one or the other of the groups has been of primary importance both in terms of its presence in and impact on the host society and its interaction with the home culture and politics. In broad terms, during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries the Cuban community was the protagonist in that story; then for most of the twentieth century through the 1980s it was the Puerto Rican experience; and since the 1970s and into the new millennium Dominicans have come to take on an increasingly prominent place in U.S. Latino reality and its transnational relations. Taking a cue from the life of Davilita, a beloved Caribbean Latino musician from the early decades, let us trace some of the contours of that diaspora history. We can then return to consider the main lines of thinking about the longstanding "counterstream" that has accompanied that history, and especially its intense impact in our own times.

### Islands and Enclaves in song

#### "Son tres" (The three sister islands)

*La música de Borinquen, y la música cubana, y la quisqueyana,*  
 [coro]: *que sabe a ron, sabe a miel, sabe a caña*  
*Que lindas son, que lindas son, las tres islas hermanas,*  
*Por eso yo, por eso yo, las adoro con el alma*  
*Lo lei lo lai, lei lo lai [etc.]*  
*Es el tabaco cubano el mejor del universo,*  
*Y el café de Puerto Rico ni hablar mi hermano de eso*  
*De Cuba es el son guajiro, de Puerto Rico la danza,*  
*De Quisqueya es el merengue que a todo el mundo le encanta.*

*Fue en Cuba José Martí quien luchó su libertad,  
Y Duarte fue por Quisqueya, y por Borinquen, ¿quién será?  
Son tres, son tres, las islas hermanas  
Que las quiero ver, las quiero ver, las tres soberanas  
Que no me quiero morir sin ver la unión antillana.*

The music of Puerto Rico, and from Cuba, and from the Dominican Republic / [chorus]: it tastes like rum, tastes like honey, tastes like sugar cane / How beautiful they are, how beautiful, the three little sister islands / and that's why I, that's why I adore them with all my heart. / Cuban tobacco is the best in the whole universe, / and coffee from Puerto Rico, brother, let's not even talk about that. / [chorus]. / From Cuba the *son guajiro* and from Puerto Rico *la danza*, and from Quisqueya the *merengue* that everyone loves. / [chorus] / In Cuba it was José Martí who fought for its freedom, and Duarte was for Quisqueya, and for Borinquen, who will it be? / [chorus] / And I want to see, want to see the three of them sovereign, / I don't want to die without seeing the Antillean union.

Davilita sings "las Antillas": "Son tres, las islas hermanas," the three islands—Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Dominican Republic—are sisters, bound together in deep cultural and historical affinity. In his beautiful song of that title, the great Puerto Rican vocalist and composer Pedro Ortiz Dávila ("Davilita", 1912–1986) evokes the distinctive flavors and rhythms of his Spanish Caribbean, "el Caribe hispano," "las Antillas." He sings adoringly of their physical beauty, their seductive music, and their world-renowned cigars and coffee, all to the delicious flavor ("sabor") of rum, honey and sugar cane, whose praise he sings in the lilting refrain: "It tastes like rum, it tastes like honey, it tastes like sugarcane" ("sabe a ron, sabe a miel, sabe a caña"). Davilita also voices great pride in the three countries' struggles for freedom, and in national leaders of the stature of José Martí and Juan Pablo Duarte. But, as we shall see, it is here, when he turns to the historical experiences of the Island sisters, that the seams in that sibling kinship begin to show, and the great singer's adoration gives way to uncertainty, and the forceful proclamation of an unfulfilled political ideal.

Davilita was a Caribbean Latino, *un caribeño*. With all the heartfelt love he expresses for the islands, and though born in Puerto Rico, he spent nearly all of his adult life in El Barrio, New York, having arrived there at age 15 in 1927, and not returning to live in Puerto Rico until the 1950s. Through the 1930s and 1940s, the formative decades in the history of New York's early Latino community, he established himself, and was widely recognized, as the premier vocalist in Puerto Rican music. Over his long and illustrious musical career, he recorded over 3,000 songs.

Shortly after his arrival in 1929, Davilita joined up with none other than the legendary composer and bandleader Rafael Hernández, and was lead voice in Hernández's Trio Borinquen, renamed the Cuarteto Victoria, during the height of its immense international popularity. He also sang both chorus and lead with the variously named groups of Pedro Flores for many years, and was the first to record many of the historic compositions of both Rafael Hernández and Pedro Flores, two of the foremost composers in twentieth century Latin American music. His associations and achievements were boundless in the musical field of that period, and included collaboration with musicians of the magnitude and variety as Manuel Jiménez ("Canario"), Alberto Socorras, Plácido Acevedo, Augusto Coén, Noro Morales and, after his return to Puerto Rico, Felipe Rodríguez ("La Voz"). Of exemplary note, his first recording, in 1930, was Rafael Hernández's "Lamento Borincano," and thanks to the prodding of Canario, Davilita entered history as the first to record that international anthem of the Latino migrant population, a composition that the author José Luis González considered the first protest song in the history of Latin American popular music. It was the voice of Davilita, a 19-year-old *boricua* from East 100th Street, that resounded from the record stores and tenement windows of El Barrio, and of many Latino working-class barrios, on the ominous eve of the Great Depression.

Musically, "Son Tres" is a *canción*. While it shows traces of Cuban *son montuno* and Puerto Rican *plena*, makes boastful mention of the Dominican *merengue*, and has a fade-out chorus of traditional *lei-lo-lai*, Davilita is careful to choose a more generic, hybrid song-form like the *canción* so as to encompass all three Caribbean traditions without privileging any one national style. He is intent, after all, to marvel at the symbiosis and cohesion of the three-part cultural family. And as long as he lingers on their shared sensorium—kindred tastes, smells, sights, and sounds—and expressive traditions, he is able to sustain that confident sense of delight and harmony. But when it comes to political history, the dissonance sets in or, more precisely, the sisters take divergent paths. For while Cuba and the Dominican Republic achieved national sovereignty, and can hail their founding leaders in Martí and Duarte, Davilita is made to ask, suggestively, of his own *patria*, "and for Puerto Rico, who will it be?" ("y por Borinquen ¿quién será?"). Of the three sisters, his Puerto Rico remains in direct colonial bondage, and thus stands apart from, despite their deeper affinities, the other sisters. As the song dates from around mid-century, and as Davilita was known for his strong affiliation with the Puerto Rican nationalist cause, one could surmise that the question "who will it be?" might well be posed in veiled reference to the supreme anti-imperialist leader Pedro Albizu Campos, who was then languishing in a federal penitentiary while his fellow combatants carried on the intense militant struggle for national independence. Or perhaps it is a sarcastic allusion to

What Vega fails to mention, though it would certainly sustain his case more convincingly than the doses of "myth" (as he calls them) that infuse his biographical version of events, is that already then, in the 1820s, the documentary and literary presence of Caribbean Latinos in New York had begun. In 1823, the 20-year-old Cuban poet and patriot José María de Heredia arrived to spend several years of exile in the American northeast, mostly New York City. Fleeing the Spanish and colonial authorities because of his avid clamor for the independence of his beloved homeland, Heredia founded and edited a newspaper, continued to write prolifically, and published his first book of poems, *Poesías*, in New York in 1825. Most memorably, he had occasion to visit Niagara Falls, to which he paid emotional and philosophical homage in his long poem "Niágara," one of the canonical texts of Cuban literature. It can also be considered, from today's vantage, one of the founding works of Caribbean Latino literature in the United States. Though it contains little by way of description of American society of the time, much less of any Cuban exile settlement, "Niágara" is nevertheless of cardinal importance in being such an early reflection by a Caribbean on the metaphysical significance of the U.S., written on North American soil, anticipating in this way the profound and prolific reflections of Martí, Hostos, and others later in the century.

Though "Niágara" stands as something of a curiosity item in the literary and historical annals, Heredia was not alone in his early exiled state, or the only one to give literary expression to that condition. In fact, another of his poems, "Himno del desterrado," became something of an anthem among exiled Cuban writers of the period, and served as the signature text in the first anthology of such writing, *Laúd del desterrado*, which was published in 1858.

New York shared the stage in this early period of Caribbean Latino history with Florida. As of the early years, as is also true in more recent times, "La Florida" took its distinctive place in the Latino imaginary. It was in Florida, not so much Miami as Tampa, Key West, and Ybor City, that the drama of Caribbean Latino life took on discernible shape during the middle half of the nineteenth century.<sup>10</sup> The tobacco industry played a central role in the formation of a Spanish and Cuban community and the racial and class divisions that unfolded in that context. Rather than the sporadic and numerically insignificant numbers of *antillano* exiles of the preceding decades, the Florida enclaves were the earliest evidence of a relatively dynamic and sizable population. Very little of this important pre-history finds its way into Bernardo Vega's account, which tends to leap over the mid-century period to arrive at the dramatic entrance of Hostos and Martí on the New York scene in the later decades of the century.

Vega acknowledges at several points the selective functioning of his aging uncle's memory, and comments on Tío Antonio's tendency to highlight and

lend uncritical preference to Puerto Rican actors in the drama. Bernardo even justifies this *boricua*-centric bias by pointing to the subordinate role given to Puerto Ricans in international affairs. But with all of Tío Antonio's exaltation of early Puerto Rican achievements, the nineteenth century is no doubt the Cuban chapter in the story of Caribbean Latino presence in the United States, from the earliest signs and articulations of an exile location to the tumultuous activism and vocal community presence in New York, Philadelphia, and Florida of the century's closing decades. As the principal Puerto Rican leaders and thinkers themselves recognized, it was the Cuban presence that comprised the bulk of the community in formation, and it was the Cuban struggle to which the Puerto Ricans remained integrally tied. If in Lola Rodríguez de Tío's vision Puerto Rico and Cuba were "two wings of a bird," then that bird was admittedly lopsided. The wings seemed as though they were not made for the same airborne creature. But in those heady times the ideal of Antillean unity was at the peak of its propagation, and such contrasts and contentions along national lines were not of overriding concern. The metaphoric bi-national bird, however awkward, will surely find its equilibrium, and soar to new heights of solidarity and sovereignty.

There is a wing missing, of course, from Lola's emblematic *antillano* mascot, the Dominican Republic, a further reflection of divergent historical experiences through the entire period. Of course some Dominicans did play a noteworthy role in the struggle against Spain—the towering revolutionary general Máximo Gómez was Dominican—and Santo Domingo itself was a significant location of exile activity—one thinks, above all, of the immense significance of Hostos in Dominican intellectual and educational history. But no sizable Dominican presence can be established in U.S. settings, much less any evidence of a distinctive Dominican enclave. Though much research remains to be done, the same can be said of the Dominican exile and emigrant experience through most of the twentieth century. Important exceptions like members of the illustrious Henríquez Ureña family and others have been identified, as have numerous individuals and *conjuntos* on the New York musical scene of the 1920s and 1930s. Bernardo Vega even mentions that a winner of the prestigious *Juegos Florales* literary prizes in 1919, according to him "the most outstanding event in the Spanish-speaking community in New York since the turn of the century," was a Dominican author, the esteemed Manuel Florentino Cestero.<sup>11</sup>

While a Dominican part in the building of the Latino community would wait until the final decades of the century, it would be mistaken to discount the ongoing Dominican role in the conceptualization of a pan-*antillano* ideal. One need only recall the dramatic opening lines of Pedro Mir's masterwork, *Contracanto a Walt Whitman*, written in mid-century, to recognize the co-conspiracy of Dominicans in opposition to U.S. domination over the region and its cultures. Generally considered the country's national poet,

Mir begins his majestic "counter-song" by asserting his own personal full-scale pan-Spanish Caribbean identity, a "yo" which he then goes on to counterpose to that of the formidable Whitman: "Yo," he begins,

I,  
a son of the Caribbean,  
Antillean to be exact.  
The raw product of a simple  
Puerto Rican girl  
and a Cuban worker,  
born precisely, and poor,  
on Quisqueyan soil.

*Yo / un hijo del Caribe / precisamente antillano. / Producto / primitivo de una ingenua / criatura borinqueña / y un obrero cubano, / nacido justamente, y pobremente, / en suelo quisqueyano.*<sup>12</sup>

### Divergences and Convergences

Turning to the twentieth century, in the early years, along with the Cubans and Puerto Ricans, Spaniards figured prominently in that community. Whatever one thinks about the inclusion of Spanish immigrants and descendants in the present-day "Latino" configuration, there can be no doubt as to their presence and importance in the Florida and New York Latino settlements prior to World War I and beyond. This was particularly the case in the decades before and after the turn of the century, and most evidently in the world of tobacco and cigar production. Bernardo's entire account, from his first New York years and through the Spanish Civil War of the 1930s, makes constant mention of Spanish comrades and cultural activity, and he even counted the Sephardic Spaniard Jacobo Silvestre Bresman as one of his most faithful friends and influential intellectual and political mentors. The Spanish role in the anarchist and labor movements, including those in New York and Florida, is well-known and often told, a significant part of Latino history.

What often goes unmentioned in this necessary attention to Spanish immigrants in early Latino history, however, is the issue of class and racial differences in those multi-Latino interactions, where the seams of pan-ethnic enclave life showed through. As is described in the important memoir *Black Cuban, Black American* (2000) by Evelio Grillo, an Afro-Cuban who grew up in Florida in the 1920s and 1930s, Spaniards and white Cubans played an increasingly central role in the ownership and managerial operations of the cigar trade in later nineteenth-century Florida.<sup>13</sup> As a result, class and

black-white divides took an ever greater toll on the earlier unity among the Spanish-speaking *tabaqueros*. An Afro-Cuban consciousness thus emerged early on among the black cigar workers, with the obvious implication that subsequent Caribbean Latino history needs to be studied, and told, with that crucial differentiation squarely in view. In her book on Puerto Rican musicians in New York through the 1940s, *My Music Is My Flag* (1997), Ruth Glasser offers further evidence of this racist dimension of Latino community formation, and especially the role of Spanish cultural presence in that kind of discrimination. On the basis of extensive interviews, Glasser tells of the exclusionary policies of the Asturian, Valencian, and Gallician clubs and cultural centers, which often drew the line on black Latinos.<sup>14</sup>

But with the experiences of the Depression and inter-war years, including the final decline of the tobacco industry, the Spanish role in the New York Latino community came to recede in both volume and significance, and the Cuban and Puerto Rican components of the multi-Latino diaspora assumed the central place, which they held in that history until recent decades. While Cubans continued to prevail in Florida and in pockets of the northeast, the Puerto Rican population came to far surpass all of the other groups, particularly after the decreeing of U.S. citizenship for Puerto Ricans in 1917. By 1930, New York Puerto Ricans were already twice as numerous as Spaniards, and as Cubans and Dominicans combined. During those decades, and through the 1950s, the latter two groups found themselves in similar positions as exiles from long-term dictatorial rule, a situation that was further complicated by the overt and covert complicity of U.S. imperial power, including direct military occupation. Puerto Ricans, meanwhile, as citizens and as mobile labor reserves resulting from the orchestrated industrialization of the Island, saw their numbers increase geometrically in the post-World War II years, a development that brought their presence to nearly a million by the 1960s and made them the second largest Latino group in the country after the Mexican Americans.

But prior to this divergence in their paths, marked off emphatically by the Cuban Revolution of 1959, Puerto Ricans and Cubans during the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s constituted the core of the Caribbean Latino community in the United States. General social and cultural interaction can be documented, and is particularly conspicuous, for example, in popular music. Members of both nationalities proliferated and dominated in all the major bands and orchestras through those years, and shared musical repertoires and audiences. Styles were most commonly and preponderantly Cuban, which reflected the far greater visibility of things Cuban in the mass culture. It is sometimes recognized, as a telling example, that of the fifteen "Afro-Cubans" in Machito's unsurpassed orchestra of the 1940s, all but two were Puerto Ricans. It was the Cuban image that stood in as emblematic of the tropical, Spanish-speaking Caribbean, as evident in the proliferation of dance crazes

and of course in the entry into the American livingroom during the 1950s of the ubiquitous figure of Desi Arnaz. The Cuban American critic Gustavo Pérez-Firmat has provided sensitive and lasting analysis of this phenomenon, which he calls "The Desi Chain," in his book *Life on the Hyphen*.<sup>15</sup>

But while the swelling Puerto Rican demographic presence was thus typically eclipsed by that of Cubans in the public sphere, the relation between the two cultures was one not of contention, but of remarkable creative symbiosis and confluence. Davilita's songs resound with these fusions and blendings: though his repertoire comprised mainly Cuban song traditions of the *son*, *bolero*, and *guaracha*, many of them were written by the major Puerto Rican composers Rafael Hernández, Pedro Flores, and Plácido Acevedo. As is evident in "Son Tres," there is a smooth flow of continuity between Puerto Rican and Cuban traditions. Both create and partake equally of "el sabor." What better evidence than the music that came to be called "salsa" through the last quarter of the twentieth century?

### Afrodiaspora

The Cuban–Puerto Rican continuum, which has formed the crux of Caribbean Latino cultural history, is a field of blackness in the U.S. context. The shared African moorings of their national and popular cultures carry over strongly to the diasporic context, such that if they share language culture with other Spanish speakers, they at the same time share with fellow Caribbeans and other African-descendant peoples those deep cultural heritages, and of course deeply racialized social histories. *Afroantillanos* constitute by far the largest non-English-speaking black population in U.S. history, and Caribbean Latino history thus overlaps substantively with the history of Afro-Latinos in the U.S.

To a significant degree, in fact, what marks off *caribefios* within the Latino pan-ethnicity as a whole is precisely this interface with blackness and an Afro-Atlantic imaginary. As Afro-Latinos, they embody the compatibility of blackness with the notion of Latino identity in the United States. While in its dominant and consumer version Latino realities are often walled off from, or counterposed to, blackness and Afro-diasporic cultural experience, the *antillano* perspective instates the continuity and mutuality between them. This more porous border, of course, has made for a far more active reciprocity with African Americans. After a half century of close social interaction, Caribbean Latinos, and *afroantillanos* in particular, are the Latinos who most directly encountered anti-black racism in the U.S. setting, including from other Latinos. They are also those who have enjoyed the most productive sharing and exchange with American Blacks. Music history provides ample evidence of the latter dimension, while the figures of Afro-Puerto Ricans

Arturo Alfonso Schomburg and Jesús Colón illustrate, in different historical periods, the strong and complex attachments between the two populations at the intellectual and political level, and their unity in facing up to anti-black racism.<sup>16</sup>

This difference within the pan-Latino cultural configuration is not new to our times. The racial and color divide has been operative since early on, and has been evident over the long stretches of Caribbean Latino history in the twentieth century. The great Davilita is once again a key source on *caribefio* experience in this regard. The renowned black Puerto Rican emigrant of long standing once recalled the hierarchy he witnessed in the musical field, where Puerto Ricans and Cubans were typically paid less than other Spanish-language artists: "Victor never treated us like they did the Mexicans, the South Americans when it came to money . . . Venezuela, . . . and Argentina and all those countries charged a lot of money and [the company] paid them . . . [Xavier] Cugat was Spanish, [he] charged as if he were an American, wherever he went. But the Puerto Ricans, no."<sup>17</sup> Predictably, Cubans and Puerto Ricans, inhabiting as they do the darker end of the Latino chromatic spectrum, are also most frequently situated at the bottom of the pan-Latino pecking order of privilege. And it would seem that Davilita's observations about the world of popular music would apply fittingly to all other areas of U.S. society, and to most any historical era.

But the implications of Davilita's comments run deeper still, and perhaps point to yet another distinction, this time within the *caribefio* diaspora experience itself. With his emphasis on the Puerto Ricans as those most devoid of any cultural preference or equal treatment, we are reminded again of the lines from "Son Tres," "and for Puerto Rico, who will it be?" ("y por Borinquen ¿quién será?"). All the other Latino groups, even the other *antillanos*, have their diplomatic representation, and their home countries are there to stand up for them, however feebly and selectively at times, in the U.S. context. The diasporas are an extension, as it were, of their native republics, as corrupt or tyrannical as those republics may be. Not so the Puerto Ricans, whose unique status as U.S. citizens has proved a mixed blessing at best, and whose U.S. residents are alone among the Latinos in their sense of disconnection from any governmental or institutional support from their home nation.

An editorial column of the same period makes a similar point about inter-Latino relations in New York; the Spanish-language weekly *Gráfico*, under the editorship of Bernardo Vega, included the following comment in an issue from 1927: "The most vulnerable group of those which comprise the large family of Ibero-Americans (in New York City) is the Puerto Rican. Truly it seems a paradox that being American citizens these should be the most defenseless. While the citizens of other countries have their consulates and diplomats to represent them, the children of *Borinquen* have no one."<sup>18</sup> This

paradoxical and "exceptional" orphan state of the Puerto Ricans among the many Latino groups is directly attributable to its colonial condition and the ramification of that status in the diaspora in the form of internal colonialism. What is more, if the colonial relation drew visible lines of differentiation between Puerto Ricans and other Latinos, including *caribeños*, in earlier times, the same continues to be the case today. Class and racial subordination is compounded in the Puerto Rican case by the fact and rule of ongoing colonial dependence, a dimension of collective social experience that puts a challenging test to the inclusiveness of the prevailing Latino concept.

Within the *antillano* subset, the Puerto Rican presence is, in this sense, of a very different order than both the Cuban and the Dominican, as extremely divergent as those two also are from one another. Fidel Castro once referred to Puerto Rico as the "perfumed colony," and that it certainly seems to be with respect to relative degrees of economic misery and political authoritarianism. But in the U.S. setting, the community forged of a colonial labor migration stands in greater long-term disadvantage than that which has issued from political exile, or even the more recognizable Third World immigration as in the Dominican case. The sheer relative volume of the Puerto Rican emigration movement, where the diaspora stands nearly equal in size to that of the Island population, is but another blatant indication of this disparity. The "perfume," and the sugarcane legacy, have a bittersweet taste when it comes to the racialized, pathologized circumstance of the colonial minority citizen.

### Interlocking Diasporas

On the other hand, Puerto Ricans are for related reasons the main U.S. *antillano* group who lived through and participated in the formative 1960s and 1970s period in U.S. history, though there was some Dominican and Cuban presence as well. The ethnic affirmation and political stridency of those years were of constitutive importance for the emergence of Latino identity in the context of U.S. minority struggles, and the emergence of a "Nuyorican" identity in those years came to pre-figure analogous developments among Dominican-Americans and some Cuban Americans in times closer to our own. These movements also demonstrated bonds of coalitional solidarity across national lines with African Americans, Native Americans, and Asian Americans, as well as the connection of these domestic social movements with political and cultural developments at an international level. In this respect, the social positioning and group history of Puerto Ricans would seem to approximate that of Mexican Americans more closely than that of the other Caribbean Latinos, whose cultural location and sense of group identity came to take shape subsequent to that dramatic and definitive stage. It is important

to call attention to this differential political history and social placement of the diasporic groups, because many discussions of Latino pan-ethnicity, especially those which limit the focus to immigration, or to language background and other cultural commonalities, tend to leave such crucial considerations out of account.

In our times, the three Caribbean Latino enclaves exhibit as many disjunctures and discontinuities in the U.S. context as do their respective "sister islands" in the contemporary Caribbean regional and international settings. The anachronistic direct colony, the beleaguered neo-colony, and the foundering experiment in dependent socialism issue up markedly divergent diasporas, whose principal commonality corresponds to the degree to which their current configurations mirror and are defined by the status of their home countries in world affairs. Despite their obvious affinities within the full Latino composite, and the long-term historical congruencies and interconnections that underlie the persistent Antillean ideal, no facile assumption of intimate family loyalties or automatic political cohesion among U.S. Cubans, Dominicans, and Puerto Ricans would seem in order, at least for the foreseeable future.

Indeed, one recent analysis even proposes a useful typology of the three diasporas, referring to the Puerto Ricans as "colonial/racial subjects," the Dominicans as "colonial immigrants," and Cubans as "immigrants."<sup>19</sup> This contrastive schema is not merely descriptive, but also speaks of a process of racialization according to which diasporic Puerto Ricans become "African Americanized," Dominicans increasingly "Puerto Ricanized," and Cubans, specifically pre-1980s Cuban migrants, intent on disassociating themselves from the Dominican experience of approximating Puerto Ricans in their social status. This idea of a dynamic range of diasporic options is valuable in thus differentiating the situation of the groups based on their relation to structures of transnational power and ongoing dynamics of colonial and racial subordination. For the three main ethno-national groups comprising the Caribbean Latino diaspora do in fact cover the gamut of possibilities among contemporary transnational communities and within the pan-Latino continuum, from the least to the most privileged in terms of economic, political, and cultural capital. The tendency to vie and dis-identify among them would seem to outweigh any prospects of cross-group solidarity.

However, historical experience shows these relations and disparities to be in continual flux, and it is therefore important not to fix our analytical gaze too squarely on the immediate present. Just as the island nations themselves can well undermine and re-figure the familiar patterns of international demarcation, so too the three diaspora enclaves may recognize new grounds for rapprochement and cultural coalescence along the contentious ethnic queue. The present study, based on ethnographic testimony and critical interpretation of cultural expressions, would suggest that the signs of such a

new development are already coming into view. Certainly the shared Afro-Latino background that tends most to distinguish them within the pan-Latino composite, and the attendant complementary relationship to blackness, promises to have unifying repercussions within the U.S. racial formation, where the significance of the color line seems to be in no way diminishing.

The socio-cultural location of Caribbean Latinos is thus defined by their relationship to non-Caribbean Latinos, on the one hand, and to non-Latino Caribbeans on the other. A key question for the future will be whether the prevailing Latino concept has the effect of perpetuating, in the enclave context, the Caribbean's long and tragic history of balkanization along the lines of language cultures, or whether alternatively it may help foster the kind of pan-Caribbean solidarity that shared life in the United States has engendered in earlier historical periods. It is clear that the transnational linkages and interrelations between diaspora and homeland politics are central to any prognostic view. As we shall see, the interactions among diasporic Puerto Ricans, Dominicans, and a new generation of Cubans reveal interesting convergences, and the impact of U.S. Caribbean Latinos could well end up changing the face of the Hispanic Caribbean.

### Notes on the Antillano Counterstream

After spending formative years and the bulk of his adult life in the New York diaspora, Davilita returned to live in his native Puerto Rico in the 1950s. There he formed a duo with the immensely popular vocalist Felipe Rodríguez, known as "La Voz," and together recorded some of the best-selling and most widely admired albums of his career. In spite of this ascending success, Davilita did not find happiness in his long-lost homeland, and grieved about the discrimination he was forced to endure because of his militant anti-colonialist politics, his blackness, and his life-long residence in the diaspora. Lacking the overdue recognition of the country's cultural establishment, this towering figure of the national music died sickly and isolated in his hometown of Bayamón. The full story has yet to be told, but this sad ending to such an illustrious life can only be explained by understanding the phenomenon of circular migration and the cultural counterstream shared by all *caribeños* through the decades of diasporic community life.

Of the three island nations of the Hispanic Caribbean, it is the Dominican Republic that has generated the largest body of literature on the transnational and return migratory experience. Perhaps because the dramatic growth of a huge Dominican diaspora coincides with the emergence of transnational studies, the Dominican experience is sometimes referred to as a transnational community par excellence. A slew of major social scientific volumes, by Dominicanists Sherri Grasmuck, Patricia Pessar, Peggy Levitt,

and Eugenia Georges, as well as important work by Luis Guarnizo, Jorge Duany, Silvio Torres Saillant, José Itzigsohn, and many others, all focusing on Dominican transnationalism, have appeared since 1990.<sup>20</sup> The massive out-migration after the end of the Trujillo era, concentrated in New York City and San Juan but fanning out to other U.S. settings, a range of European countries, other parts of the Americas, and elsewhere, has attracted broad scholarly, literary, and journalistic attention, and has made the Dominican case a central instance of transnational political and cultural life in the generation before and after the millennium.

Though diaspora-island relations have been of central interest in Puerto Rican cultural and political life for over a century by now, the phenomenon of return migration and remittances has generated far less focused attention than the much shorter-lived Dominican mass migration experience. José Hernández Álvarez' very early study mentioned above, *Return Migration to Puerto Rico* (1967), itself methodologically limited, has not been followed by significant subsequent interest in the subject, at least among scholars, though the theme has been treated in journalistic and literary work over the decades, especially since the return flow reached swollen proportions in the 1970s. The major contribution on Puerto Rican transnationalism thus far is no doubt Jorge Duany's 2002 book *The Puerto Rican Nation on the Move: Identities on the Island and in the United States*. It is indeed an important scholarly achievement, and contains a wealth of analysis of transnational cultural interactions. But even there, only one chapter deals directly with the sweeping experience of circular migration, and almost no mention is made of return movement and its cultural impact.

More directly on that subject is the excellent ethnographic study *Contested Belonging: Circular Migration and Puerto Rican Identity* (2000) by Dutch sociologist Erna Kerkhof. There the interesting life-stories and anecdotes gleaned from interviews in the west-coastal city of Mayagüez are accompanied by informed and sensitive critical analysis, the only drawback being that the author evidently did not have the opportunity to conduct complementary interviews in New York and other parts of the Puerto Rican diaspora itself. On the other hand, the book by Elizabeth M. Aranda, *Emotional Bridges to Puerto Rico* (2006) promises in the subtitle (*Migration, Return Migration, and the Struggles of Incorporation*) to address the return experience, but in fact most of its attention goes once again to problems of "incorporation" to the U.S. setting. "Emotional bridges" are of course an important part of the larger process of cultural flows, but this study unfortunately fails to address any of the other dimensions of that process. Further, the book's over-concentration on the "Puerto Rican middle class" tends to sideline the far more massive experience of the impoverished majority of the Puerto Rican diaspora and therefore makes the study of less interest to an analysis of cultural flows "from below."

Most directly in line with the present study is the book by Gina M. Pérez, *The Near Northwest Side Story: Migration, Displacement, and Puerto Rican Families* (2004), and especially the chapter "Los de Afuera, Transnationalism, and the Cultural Politics of Identity." On the basis of ethnographic work in Chicago and San Sebastián, Puerto Rico, where many "Chicago Rican" families come from, Pérez analyzes a range of cultural encounters by way of attitudes, changing values, and the stark and at times conflictive contrasts between the "outsiders" ("los de afuera") and those who stayed and have to deal with the influx of so many outsiders. The dramatic everyday clashes over language use, gender roles, valuations of family and education, what it means to be Puerto Rican, and racial identities are brought to dramatic life in this innovative work, which has been a frequent reference point for me in my own study. Pérez suggests that what the returnees bring to San Sebastián constitutes a challenge to accepted ways on many fronts, and one can assume that her own presence as a diasporic Puerto Rican woman contributed to that encounter. My goal here is to push this line of thinking further, by upping the stakes to include a collective challenge to the hegemony of an authoritarian and essentialist concept of national identity and history, and by expanding the idea of cultural practice to include the changes wrought in and by forms of artistic expression.

Finally, in the case of the Cuban diaspora, imaginings of the homeland are obviously more plentiful than actual returns, though cultural remittances may be even more consequential than for Dominicans or Puerto Ricans. In any case, with all the emotional charge attached to the topic, little scholarly work has been devoted to a Cuban cultural counterstream, though an important Spanish-language testimony, *Contra viento y marea* (1978), anticipates the historic visit of the Antonio Maceo Brigade, a group of sympathetic Cuban Americans during the opening of the dialogue in the 1970s. The personal memoir of one of that group, Román de la Campa, entitled *Cuba on My Mind: Journeys to a Severed Nation* (2000), offers an elegantly written reflection on the return, while the book by the more conservative Cuban-American critic Gustavo Pérez Firmat, *Life on the Hyphen: The Cuban-American Way* (1994), attests to the abrupt and at the same time long-term distancing between the diaspora and its embattled homeland. Nevertheless, mutually enriching cultural interaction, especially in the music field, continues under the radar screen, as is most dramatically evident in the worlds of Latin jazz and hip hop in our own times.

More general reflections on the Hispanic Caribbean as what might cautiously be called a cultural "sub-region" are surprisingly rare, particularly in view of the intense emotional and intellectual appeal of the "antillano" concept in the intertwined histories of the three islands. The extreme political trifurcation among the national narratives, especially since the second half of the twentieth century, do make generalizations difficult, though therein lies

at the same time the challenge and fascination of comparative and contrastive analysis. Like the national political histories, the modern diasporas of the three countries have been radically divergent, even the Puerto Rican and Dominican ones which would appear to have so much in common. For the same reasons, the nature of return and cultural remittances and their impact also varies widely among them. On the other hand, there are also important convergences and congruencies that warrant attention and justify a unified approach, as exemplified engagingly in the book by Puerto Rican cultural critic Yolanda Martínez-San Miguel, *Caribe Two Ways: Cultura de la migración en el Caribe insular hispánico* (2003). For one thing, in addition to the looming Hispanophile ideological presence to this day, there is the aforementioned "trouble" with the African heritage present in differential ways in each national history, a factor that becomes perhaps even more salient in the diaspora context in the United States. Further, as *Caribe Two Ways* highlights so well, there has been an ongoing and intensifying migratory interaction among the countries all along, and the presence of mutually interlocking diasporas in each country, most visibly a prominent Cuban and a massive Dominican enclave in contemporary Puerto Rico. Of greatest importance for the present study, of course, each country has a huge diaspora community in the United States, each of them then implicated in the newly denominated "Latino" diaspora with its towering significance in the present-day culture wars. Indeed, it can be said that for reasons of political and colonial history the Hispanic Caribbean has been closer to and more directly enmeshed in twentieth-century U.S. social reality than any of the other Caribbean cultures, this in spite of the language difference not present or as significant in the case of West Indian diasporas.

There is thus ample fascination in focusing analytic attention on the impact of the Caribbean Latino diaspora(s) as they come home to roost in their troubled island nation homelands, unsettling their entrenched cultural presumptions, and perhaps pressuring them, however unwittingly, into more direct interaction than has been possible in the archipelago of origin. Here again, as is so often the case, it is from the "outside," from the transnational vantage of exile and diaspora, that the most penetrating vision of the national culture becomes possible.

But in order to gain a full understanding of the deep challenge represented by the migratory counterstream it is necessary to think the concept of diaspora, and of cultural remittances, in the most expansive manner possible. Issues of economic development, entrepreneurial achievement, or energetic civic participation are all significant, to be sure, which is why they have been so preponderant in much transnational analysis to date. But the role of the cultural, in the sense of "the work of the imagination" as expounded so incisively by Arjun Appadurai and Stuart Hall,<sup>21</sup> needs to be centered in this challenging interpretive project. The cultural, as in cultural remittances,

means ideologies of racial and sexual identities as they intersect and collide with dominant national and class narratives. These aspects are perhaps best studied on the basis of personal testimony and lived social experience, so what follows, in chapter 4, will be a sampler of stories recounting cultural changes and challenges in this sense. But the cultural aspect also embraces the creative and expressive dimensions of social life as manifest in the poetry, musical styles, and visual iconography of group representations. The latter part of the book, chapters 5 and 6 and the Coda, will present some perspectives on the remittance of Caribbean Latino musical, poetic, and artistic styles and practices to the home countries, and their powerful, potentially transformative impact.