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Core 20.03
Latin@ Diasporas in the United States

Mini Paper: Latino Poetry in the United States and Beyond

"I am the/Metamorphosized/.../Not the lost Puerto Rican soul in/Search of identity/Not the tragic Nuyorican in/Search of the land of the palm tree/Not fragmented but whole/Not colonized but free."- *Boriqua Butterfly*, Maria "Mariposa" Fernandez

I am a female Puerto Rican poet. Actually, I am a female Nuyorican poet. But it doesn't mean the same thing as a movement that changed how people looked at poetry from Puerto Ricans in New York. It just means I am a young female poet who happens to be Puerto Rican and from New York. The terms Nuyorican and Latino poetry are not deeply connected to who I am as a poet. I learned poetry from a Caucasian man in junior high school ten years ago. Poetry has been continuously taught to me by either Caucasian or African American writers and poets. Many of my poetry books are by Caucasian, African American and even Asian writers.

My exposure to Latino poets for sometime was limited to the classroom and only with a poem or two which has only happened in the recent years of college. I know who Pablo Neruda is. I have his collection sitting on my shelf. But beyond that, my knowledge is limited. It's also not a subject in my own poetry. I have written a handful of poems using Spanish (and usually with the help of an online translator). I

do not write about my curly hair, my wide hips or my love for alcapurrias. I am a female Nuyorican poet, but I have no idea what that really means.

Latino poetry movements in the United States from the 1960's gave me a history to learn. The two notable movements were the Chicano and Nuyorican literary movements. Both were about recognizing their diaspora in the United States and the struggles they went through. Poetry and politics were so intense in the Chicano movement that engagement was a matter of utmost importance. The clenched, militant poems of los gritones, the protest poets, for example, exhorted Chicanos to fight racism, take up arms in self-defense against oppression, and create "Aztlán," the symbolic and literal homeland of the race. The paradigms of the poetry of the Chicano movement -- bilingual, historical, and polemical forms -- negated Western and Anglo American knowledge and affirmed cultural resistance in the Hispanic Southwest to demonstrate how the United States system represented an attack upon the Mexican people as a whole.¹ (Rodriguez, 1996)

The first poets involved in the Chicano/a movement hailed from these grassroots traditions and were not influenced by academic conventions and expectations. Rodolfo "Corky" Gonzáles, the author of what has been acknowledged as the Chicano epic poem, *I Am Joaquín/Yo soy Joaquín*, was a boxer and political activist. *I Am Joaquín* disseminated a cultural-nationalist esthetic that provided a model for grassroots and student-activist poets. The poem, self-published bilingually in 1967, summarized Mexican and Mexican American history, reviewed the exploitation of the mestizos from colonial times to the present, and shaped a

nationalist ideology for activism, using the persona of the nineteenth-century social rebel, Joaquín Murieta.² (Kanellos, 2002)

Throughout contemporary Chicano poetry, especially in the work of recent time, one hears the harsh songs of reality and the struggle for a language of self-renewal. What has often been overlooked in these younger poets, with their higher education or Anglicized speech and manners, is the stress inherent in their position as sons and daughters of the deprived and as intellectuals uttering devastating needs of ancestry, history, and conscientious action. If in writing exclusively in English they have shown a degree of cultural estrangement from their "oral" sources, their "nonliterary" past, they have also shown this: an advance on the Chicano subject that takes the form of an outrage over the dispossession they see.³ (Rodriguez, 1996).

The Nuyorican movement in the United States happened around the same time. It is usually the more known movement of the time. Nuyorican writing made its appearance in the United States with a definite proletarian identity, emerging from the working-class, urbanized culture of the children of migrants. It arose as a dynamic literature of oral performance based on the folklore and popular culture within the neighborhoods of the most cosmopolitan and postmodern city in the United States: New York⁴ (Kanellos, 2002). From the movement was born a place of poetry that still is thriving today: The Nuyorican Poets Cafe in the Lower East Side of Manhattan. It was founded by Nuyorican poets Pedro Pietri, Miguel Piñero and Miguel Algarín among other poets of the time.

The poets serve as spokespersons for their community, using their writing as a mechanism through which their fellow community members can see themselves as unique social actors under particular social conditions. They give voice to their experiences in these documents and put that experience in context. In this sense, Nuyorican poetry can be looked at as collective life documents or life stories.⁵ (Rebollo-Gil, 2004) Read Pietri's "Puerto Rican Obituaries", Piñero's "Short Eyes" or Algarin's "Nuyorican Poetry: An Anthology of Puerto Rican Words and Feelings" to see the essence of Nuyorican poetry of the time.

Today Nuyorican poetry can range from sonnets to the frenzied verses of competitive slams, and its themes are universal: the politics of daily life, sex and love, discovery of self. The poets function in a less cohesive, more glamorized setting than in Piñero's days. This is now poetry promoted by hip-hop and delivered in a more theatrical, performance-oriented way, which some Nuyorican poets criticize as being more often about entertaining and shocking an audience than about self-expression.⁶ (Navarro, 2002)

If you really want to learn about Latino poetry, go to the islands of Puerto Rico, Cuba and the Dominican Republic. Go to the Latin American countries of South America. Go south of the border and visit Mexico. They are the counterparts, influence and foundation of what happened in the United States. The issues that arise from island poetry are mind blowing. You'll find racial conflict in the lines of Afro-Cuban and Afro-Dominican poetry. You'll find out that Cubans are a little bit more accepting of the African presence in Cuba heritage. The Dominicans pretend most of the time that Haiti does not exist and they have tried to push out African

influence from their poetry, though many contemporary poets who are Afro-Caribbean won't let them forget. In Puerto Rico today, you have island poets who have been influenced by the Nuyorican poets of the sixties. Not only do they perform in public areas of the island, but they produce books and CDs and code-switch (using Spanglish) their work.

What does poetry mean to the Latino communities of the United States? Today it means a history that opened up the nation to the Latino in the United States. Latinos weren't just people from the islands anymore. They were also people in the United States that were struggling to have an identity on U.S. soil and back at home. It also gave the United States counterparts a way to say to those back home, "Hey, I am a part of you too! I am Puerto Rican/Mexican/Cuban/Dominican no matter where I am. I am a real Latino." It's about maintaining culture and integrating it in their lives. It's about having a voice and having a family that will listen to that voice.

Poetry, no matter what diaspora it comes from, is about forging a family of writers, readers and audience together that will teach, share in and appreciate your words. It gives you a place in the world where you thought you had none and with belonging is the start of love and pride for self and one's heritage, culture and the life they are living.

notes

¹ Andres Rodriguez, "Contemporary Chicano Poetry: The work of Michael Sierra, Juan Felipe Herrera and Luis J. Rodriguez", in *Bilingual Review*; Sep-Dec1996, Vol. 21 Issue 3, p203, 16p

² Nicolas Kanellos, ed. *Herencia: The Anthology of Hispanic Literature of the United States*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2002

³ Andres Rodriguez, "Contemporary Chicano Poetry: The work of Michael Sierra, Juan Felipe Herrera and Luis J. Rodriguez", in *Bilingual Review*; Sep-Dec1996, Vol. 21 Issue 3, p203, 16p

⁴ Nicolas Kanellos, "An Overview of Latino Poetry: The Iceberg below the Surface", *The American Book Review*, 25th Anniversary edition, 2002, p.5

⁵ Guillermo Rebollo-Gil, *The New Boogaloo: Nuyorican poetry and the Coming of Puerto Rican Identities*, University of Florida, 2004

⁶ Mireya Navarro, "The Poetry of the Nuyorican Experience: Writers Following in the Literary Tradition of Miguel Piñero Thrive in a Poets' Cafe", *New York Times Online*, 2002

Most studies on Latin American migrants focus on population movements within Latin America or, particularly in the English-language scholarly literature, on their migration towards the United States. Not surprisingly, it is mostly in the latter context that the idea of a Latin American diaspora has drawn the attention of researchers, and that the emergence of a pan-ethnic identity in exile has been proposed and discussed. Outside the United States, Latin Americans have settled in many regions of the world, but they have created certain migration corridors that are particularly significant, in that they are establishing distinct realities--through an emerging sense of community and by means of shared experiences and aspirations. PDF | The contemporary Arab diaspora in Latin America has its main basis in migration from the last decades of the 19th until the middle of the 20th century. The migrants came mainly from the present-day countries of Lebanon, Palestine and Syria, which, before the end of World War... At the beginning I base my study on the Lebanese, Syrian and Palestinian Diasporas but in the next years I will broaden my perspective including other "nationalities". [more]. View project. Chapter. Historical writing on the subject published in the United States, less so in Britain, often remains an open defense of British imperialism intended to justify Zionist claims and condemn Arab arguments with clear implications for contemporary Palestinian-Israeli questions.