Article

NATION, MIGRATION, IDENTITY: THE CASE OF PUERTO RICANS

Jorge Duany
University of Puerto Rico, Río Piedras, Puerto Rico

Abstract

This article explores the impact of transnational migration on the cultural identities of Puerto Ricans on the Island and in the US mainland.[1] The author argues that, although Puerto Ricans are US citizens, they cross significant geographic, cultural, and linguistic borders when they migrate between the Island and the mainland, and this displacement helps to reconfigure their national identities. More specifically, the author proposes that the emergence of cultural nationalism as a dominant discourse in Puerto Rico is partly the result of a growing diaspora since the 1940s. The author's thesis is that cultural nationalism is better attuned than political nationalism to the widespread geographic dispersion and the continuing colonial status of Puerto Rico. This historical trend helps to explain why most Puerto Ricans today do not desire political independence.

Keywords

transnationalism; diaspora; identity; cultural nationalism; political nationalism; Puerto Rico

Puerto Rico has a peculiar status among Latin American and Caribbean countries. As one of Spain's last two colonies in the New World (along with Cuba), Puerto Rico experienced the longest period of Hispanic influence in the region. On July 25, 1898, however, US troops invaded the Island during the Spanish-Cuban-American War.[2] In 1901, the US Supreme Court defined Puerto Rico as "foreign to the United States in a domestic sense," because it was neither a state of the Union nor a sovereign republic (Burnett and Marshall, 2001). In 1917, Congress granted US citizenship to all persons

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born in Puerto Rico, but the Island remained an unincorporated territory of the United States. In 1952, Puerto Rico became a Commonwealth (or *Estado Libre Asociado*, in Spanish) with limited self-government in local matters, such as taxation, education, health, housing, culture, and language. However, the US federal government retains jurisdiction in most state affairs, including immigration, citizenship, customs, defense, currency, transportation, communications, and foreign trade. Today, the Island's electorate is almost evenly divided between supporting Commonwealth status and becoming the 51st state of the Union; only a small minority advocates independence.

As an overseas possession of the United States, the Island has been exposed to an intense penetration of American capital, commodities, laws, and customs unequaled in other Latin American countries. Yet today Puerto Ricans display a stronger cultural identity than most Caribbean peoples, even those who enjoy political independence. Many observers have noted the growing rift between the push for a sovereign government and the assertion of a separate culture on the Island, as manifested in popular music, sports, and beauty contests, among other areas. At the beginning of the 21st century, Puerto Rico presents the apparent paradox of a stateless nation that has not assimilated into the American mainstream. After more than 100 years of US colonialism, the Island remains a Spanish-speaking Afro-Hispanic-Caribbean nation. Puerto Rico may well be considered a "postcolonial colony" in the sense of a people with a strong sense of national identity but little desire for a nation-state, living in a territory that legally "belongs to but is not part of the United States."[3]

In addition to its unresolved colonial dilemma, Puerto Rico is increasingly a nation on the move: a country whose porous borders are incessantly crisscrossed by migrants coming to and going away from the Island. Since the 1940s, more than 1.6 million islanders have relocated abroad. Today, nearly half of all persons of Puerto Rican origin live in the continental United States (see Table 1). At the same time, the Island has received hundreds of thousands of immigrants since the 1960s, primarily returnees and their descendants, and secondarily citizens of other countries, especially the Dominican Republic and Cuba. By the year 2000, approximately 9% of the Island's residents had been born abroad, including those born in the mainland of Puerto Rican parentage (see Table 2). This combination of a prolonged exodus, together with a large influx of returnees and foreigners, makes Puerto Rico a test case of transnationalism, broadly defined as the maintenance of social, economic, and political ties across national borders (Schiller *et al.*, 1992; Basch *et al.*, 1994). The growing diversity in the migrants' origins and destinations undermines the ideological premises of traditional discourses of the nation based on the equation among territory, birthplace, citizenship, language, culture, and identity. Above all, it is increasingly difficult to maintain that only those who were born and live on the Island, and speak Spanish, can legitimately be called Puerto Rican.

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2 Conventional accounts in the United States have usually called the war of 1898 simply the "Spanish-American War," thus omitting that Cubans had been struggling for independence from Spain since 1895 (and even earlier, between 1868 and 1878). Some historians now use the cumbersome expression "Spanish–Cuban–Filipino–American War" to include the insurrection in the Philippines. As I am emphasizing the long-term consequences of the war in the Caribbean, I prefer the term "Spanish-Cuban-American War."

3 Since 1898, Puerto Rico has occupied a juridical limbo within the framework of the US constitution. For excellent analyses of the legal doctrine establishing that the Island "belongs to but is not part of the United States," see Burnett and Marshall (2001) and Rivera Ramos (2001).

Throughout this essay, I will use the term "colony" in the classic sense of a territory under the direct political and economic control of an external power, a definition that clearly applies to Puerto Rico. Juan Flores (2000) has used the term "postcolonial colony" to refer to US domination over the Island after the establishment of the *Estado Libre Asociado* in 1952.

Table 1 *Puerto Rican Population in the Continental United States, 1900–2000*

Year	*Number*	*Percent increase*	*As percent of entire population of Puerto Rican origin*
1900	678	—	0
1910	1,513	223.2	0.1
1920	11,811	680.6	0.9
1930	52,774	346.8	3.3
1940	69,967	32.8	3.6
1950	301,375	330.7	12.0
1960	892,513	196.1	27.5
1970	1,429,396	60.2	30.9
1980	2,013,945	41.0	38.7
1990	2,727,754	35.4	43.6
2000	3,406,178	24.8	47.2

Sources: For 1900, Campbell T. Gibson and Emily Lennon, "Historical Census Statistics" (1999); for 1910–1950, US Department of Commerce, *US Census of Population: 1950* (1953b); for 1960–1980, US Department of Commerce, *1960 Census of Population* (1963), *Persons of Spanish Origin by State* (1982); for 1990, US Census Bureau, "Profiles of General Demographic Characteristics" (2001c); for 2000, US Department of Commerce, *The Hispanic Population* (2001).
Note: Between 1910 and 1940, the available figures refer to persons of Puerto Rican birth only; after 1950, they include persons of Puerto Rican parentage and, after 1970, they include all persons of Puerto Rican origin.

The purpose of this article is to explore the impact of transnational migration on the cultural identities of Puerto Ricans on the Island and in the US mainland. So far, scholarly discussions on transnationalism have tended to exclude the Island and its diaspora because Puerto Ricans are US citizens and therefore do not cross international frontiers when they move abroad. However, Puerto Rican migrants cross significant geographic, cultural, and linguistic borders between the Island and the mainland, and this displacement helps to reconfigure their national identities. More specifically, I propose that the emergence of cultural nationalism as a dominant discourse in Puerto Rico is partly the result of a growing diaspora since the 1940s. Puerto Ricans have increasingly moved away from imagining the Island as a sovereign territory apart from the United States, and yet most continue to cling to the notion that Puerto Rico is a distinct nation with its own territory, language, and culture. Other historical factors (aside from transnational migration) that help to explain this phenomenon include the political persecution of the independence movement, the growing economic dependence of the Island on the mainland, and the continuing ideological and military presence of the US government on the Island.

Table 2 *Foreign-born and US-born Populations of Puerto Rico, 1899–2000*

	Foreign-born					*US-born*			
Year	*Total*[a]	*As % of population*	*Cuba*	*Dominican Republic*	*Spain*	*Total*	*As % of population*	*Continental US.*	*Outlying territories*[b]
1899	13,872	1.5	N/A	N/A	7,690	1,069	0.1	1,069	N/A
1910	11,766	1.1	340	340	6,630	2,500	0.2	2,303	197
1920	8,167	0.6	264	220	4,975	2,729	0.2	1,617	1,112
1930	6,017	0.4	203	N/A	3,595	3,361	0.4	2,595	766
1940	5,039	0.3	307	N/A	2,532	8,078	0.5	6,639	1,439
1950	8,453	0.4	753	N/A	2,351	14,225	0.6	13,176	1,049
1960	10,224	0.4	1,070	1,812	2,558	52,116	2.2	49,092	3,024
1970	80,627	3.0	26,000	10,843	4,120	106,602	4.0	106,602	N/A
1980	70,768	2.2	22,811	20,558	5,200	199,524	6.2	199,524	N/A
1990	79,804	2.3	19,736	37,505	4,579	230,384	6.9	229,304	11,989
2000	109,581	2.9	19,021	61,455	3,800	245,589	6.4	233,508	12,081

Sources: For 1899, War Department, *Report on the Census of Porto Rico, 1899* (1900); for 1910–1930, Department of Commerce, *Census of the United States* (1913, 1921, 1932); for 1940–1990, US Department of Commerce, *Census of Population* (1943, 1953a, 1961, 1973, 1984, 1993); for 2000, US Census Bureau, "Census 2000 Summary File 3 (SF 3) Sample Data" (2002a), "Profile of Selected Social Characteristics: 2000" (2002b).

[a] Includes persons born outside of Cuba, the Dominican Republic, and Spain.

[b] Includes Alaska and Hawaii (until 1950); the Philippines (until 1940); the US Virgin Islands (after 1920); the Panama Canal Zone, Guam, American Samoa, the Northern Mariana Islands, and Americans born abroad.

Recent debates on Puerto Rican cultural politics have focused on the demise of political nationalism on the Island, the rise of cultural nationalism, and continuing migration between the Island and the mainland (Alvarez-Curbelo and Rodríguez Castro, 1993; Rivera, 1996; Torre *et al.*, 1994; Morris, 1995; Carrión, 1996; Coss, 1996; Dávila, 1997; Negrón-Muntaner and Grosfoguel, 1997; Kerkhof, 2000; Pabón, 2002). Although few scholars have posited an explicit connection among these phenomena, I would argue that they are intimately linked. For instance, most Puerto Ricans value their US citizenship and the freedom of movement that it offers, especially unrestricted access to the continental United States. The ability to migrate to the mainland and back to the Island has been claimed as a fundamental right by Puerto Ricans on both shores of the Atlantic Ocean. Ways to preserve this "right" are currently being considered under all political status options (Commonwealth, free association, independence, and, of course, statehood). However, as Puerto Ricans move back and forth between the two countries, territorially grounded definitions of

national identity become less relevant, while transnational identities acquire greater prominence. My thesis is that cultural nationalism is better attuned than political nationalism to the widespread geographic dispersion and continuing colonial status of Puerto Rico. Rather than weakening the sense of national identity, transnational migration has actually strengthened "long-distance nationalism," that is, the persistent claim to a national identity by people residing away from their homeland, even for long periods of time (see Anderson, 1992; Schiller and Fouron, 2001). What has declined over the past five decades is the public support for the political nationalist position, which holds that Puerto Rico should become an independent country in order to preserve its culture apart from the United States.

Nation and migration

Two key questions guide my analysis of the relationship between nation and migration in Puerto Rico. First, how can most Puerto Ricans imagine themselves as a nation, even though few of them support the constitution of a separate nation-state? I address this issue by making a careful distinction between political nationalism – based on the doctrine that every people should have its own sovereign government – and cultural nationalism – based on the assertion of the moral and spiritual autonomy of each people, as expressed in the protection of its historical patrimony as well as its popular and elite culture (Hutchinson, 1994). Whereas political nationalism insists on the necessity of independent states, cultural nationalism can be reconciled with other forms of self-determination, such as free association. Whereas political nationalists concentrate on the practical aspects of achieving and maintaining independence, cultural nationalists are primarily concerned with celebrating or reviving a cultural heritage, including the vernacular language, religion, and folklore. Cultural nationalism conceives of a nation as a creative force based on a unique history, culture, and territory, while political nationalism equates the nation with the state. This distinction is made only for analytical purposes, because the two basic forms of nationalism often overlap in practice.

While political nationalism is a minority position in contemporary Puerto Rico, cultural nationalism is the dominant ideology of the Commonwealth government, the intellectual elite, and numerous cultural institutions on the Island as well as in the diaspora. Most Puerto Ricans now insist that they belong to a distinct nation – as validated in their participation in such international displays of nationhood as Olympic and professional sports and beauty pageants. In 2001, the nearly simultaneous victories of Félix "Tito" Trinidad as world boxing champion and Denise Quiñones as Miss Universe sparked a wave of nationalistic pride among Puerto Ricans of all political parties. At the same time, most Puerto Ricans have repeatedly expressed their wish to retain their US citizenship, thus pulling apart the coupling that the very term "nation-state"

implies. Put another way, the majority of Puerto Ricans do not want to separate themselves politically from the United States, but they continually assert their national identity in cultural, largely symbolic, terms.

The second question asks what has been the cultural impact of the massive exodus to the mainland over the past five decades? I argue that diasporic communities are part of the Puerto Rican nation because they continue to be linked to the Island by an intense and frequent circulation of people, identities, and practices, as well as capital, technology, and commodities. Over the past decade, scholars have documented the two-way cultural flows between many sending and receiving societies through large-scale migration. Peggy Levitt (2001) has referred to such movements of ideas, customs, and social capital as "social remittances," which produce a dense transnational field that blurs the geopolitical borders between the Dominican Republic and the United States. Similarly, Puerto Ricans moving back and forth between the Island and the mainland frequently carry not only bags full of gifts, electronic appliances, and personal effects, but also their cultural practices, experiences, and values, such as ideas about respect and dignity. I propose that, culturally speaking, the Puerto Rican nation can no longer be restricted to the Island, but is instead constituted by two distinct, yet closely intertwined fragments: that of Puerto Rico itself and of the diasporic communities settled in the continental United States. The multiple implications of this profound territorial dispersion on popular expressions of nationalism have not been fully explored. More specifically, the cultural impact of return and circular migration on the Island awaits systematic exploration. I therefore advocate a transnational approach to contemporary Puerto Rican culture that moves beyond territorial boundaries to analyze the continuing sociocultural ties between the diaspora and its communities of origin (Schiller *et al.*, 1992; Basch *et al.*, 1994).

Here one needs to question the fixed locations from which much of the nationalist discourse has traditionally framed the nation. To quote Benedict Anderson's (1991) famous definition, nations are not always imagined as "inherently limited and sovereign." As a consequence of large-scale and sustained migration, popular images of Puerto Ricanness have been thoroughly deterritorialized and transnationalized. Still, they may impact people's everyday lives by providing powerful and evocative representations of their cultural identities. For instance, the *jíbaro*'s *pava* (the straw hat typically worn by highland subsistence farmers on the Island) is constantly displayed as a visual icon of Puerto Ricanness in the United States. The *pava* reappears in the most unlikely places, such as public schools in Brooklyn, folk festivals in Central Park, the Puerto Rican Day Parade along Fifth Avenue, and Smithsonian Institution exhibits. Another example is the construction of *casitas*, small wooden houses reminiscent of the Island's rural dwellings, in the abandoned lots of the South Bronx and the Lower East Side of Manhattan (Aponte-Parés,

1996). *Casitas* represent the reinvention of a preindustrial time and place, nostalgically remembered as a tightly knit community of relatives, friends, and neighbors, before the advent of urbanization and migration. In Chicago, the *Paseo Boricua* along Division Street has attempted to reclaim the neighborhoods where most Puerto Ricans live, by erecting two enormous steel Puerto Rican flags, building a *casita* in honor of the nationalist leader Pedro Albizu Campos, and celebrating street festivals on such occasions as Three Kings Day, the People's Parade, and patron saints' feasts (Flores-González, 2001). These examples suggest that symbolic expressions of Puerto Rican identity are no longer circumscribed to the Island and may well have intensified in the US mainland. Similarly, cultural practices and identities have often moved back from the diaspora to the Island, as the cases of salsa and rap music, to mention just two examples, suggest.

The diaspora has mobilized standard concepts of the nation, culture, language, and territory. Population displacements across and within geopolitical borders have weakened political nationalism and broadened cultural identities in many countries (Basch *et al.*, 1994). In Puerto Rico, five decades of uninterrupted migration to the mainland have unsettled the territorial and linguistic boundaries of national culture. For instance, second-generation migrants who return to the Island – often dubbed pejoratively Nuyoricans – may speak English better than Spanish and still define themselves simply as Puerto Rican (Zentella, 1990). While the Spanish language continues to be a basic symbol of national identity on the Island, it has become a less reliable mark of Puerto Ricanness in the mainland. Furthermore, the extension of US citizenship to the Island since 1917 has undermined the juridical bases of a separate identity (Rivera Ramos, 2001). Although Puerto Ricans lack their own citizenship, they have a clear sense of their collective selves. In a stance typical of cultural nationalism, most Puerto Ricans insist on distinguishing between their US citizenship and their national identity, a contradiction from the standpoint of political nationalism, which argues that one's citizenship and nationality should go hand in hand (Rivera, 1996).

Any definition of the Island's political status must take into account the growing strength of cultural nationalism, as much as the increasing dispersal of people through the diaspora. Thousands of Puerto Ricans have developed mobile livelihood practices that encompass several places in the mainland as well as on the Island. Most Puerto Ricans on the mainland have expressed a strong desire to participate in referenda on the Island's political status. According to recent polls, the status preferences of Puerto Ricans residing on the mainland are very similar to those on the Island – that is, they tend to favor Commonwealth status, rather than statehood or independence (Falcón, 1993). Those who live abroad, speak English, and participate in US politics must be included in public and academic discussions on the future of Puerto Rico. They are part and parcel of a nation on the move.

El Vaivén: moving back and forth

The Spanish folk term for the back-and-forth movement of people between Puerto Rico and the United States is *el vaivén* (literally meaning "coming and going," or, according to the *Appleton New Cuyás English–Spanish Dictionary*, "fluctuation"). As used in the present essay, this culturally dense word refers to the constant comings and goings in which thousands of Puerto Ricans are involved (Rodríguez, 1993). For some, it implies that some people do not stay put in one place for a long time, but move incessantly, like the wind or the waves of the sea, in response to shifting tides. More ominously, *vaivén* also connotes unsteadiness, inconstancy, and oscillation. I prefer to use the term in the more neutral sense of a back-and-forth movement, without implying that people who engage in such movements never set roots in particular communities. Nor do I mean that most Puerto Ricans are circular migrants in the restricted sense of relocating frequently between Puerto Rico and the United States. *La nación en vaivén*, the "nation on the move," might serve as an apt metaphor for the fluid and hybrid identities of Puerto Ricans on the Island and in the mainland, suggesting that none of the traditional criteria for nationhood – a shared territory, language, economy, citizenship, or sovereignty – are fixed and immutable. All of these criteria are subject to constant fluctuation and intense debate in Puerto Rico and its diaspora, even though the sense of peoplehood has proven remarkably resilient throughout.

Over the past few decades, Puerto Rico has become a nation on the move through the relocation of almost half of its population to the United States and the continuing flow of people between the Island and the mainland. Contrary to other population movements, much of the Puerto Rican exodus entails a restless movement between multiple places of origin and destination. The number of returnees to the Island began to surpass those leaving for the mainland in the early 1970s, especially as a result of minimum wage hikes on the Island and the industrial restructuring of New York City, the traditional center of the Puerto Rican diaspora. But mass emigration resumed during the 1980s, at the same time that return migration continued unabated, foreign immigration increased, and circular migration emerged as a significant phenomenon. Between 1990 and 1999, net migration from Puerto Rico to the United States was estimated to be 325,875 persons, compared to 490,562 persons between 1980 and 1989 (Table 3).[4] Between 1991 and 1998, Puerto Rico received 144,528 return migrants (Junta de Planificación de Puerto Rico, 2000). In 1994–1995 alone, 53,164 persons emigrated from the Island, while 18,177 immigrated. Nearly 95 percent of those who moved to the Island were return migrants and their children (Olmeda, 1998). The 2000 Census found that 6.1 percent of Puerto Rico's entire population of 3.8 million had been born in the United States and that 3.2 percent had been living there in 1995 (US Census Bureau, 2002b). In short, contemporary Puerto Rican migration is best visualized as a bipendular

4 The estimate is based on the difference between outbound and inbound passengers between the Island and the mainland, as reported by Puerto Rico's Planning Board. Many scholars have

noted the unreliability of this method of calculating the volume of population movements between Puerto Rico and the continental United States. The US Census Bureau recently released much more conservative estimates of net migration between the Island and the mainland: 126,465 persons for the 1980s and 111,336 for the 1990s (Christenson, 2001). However, to ensure the consistency of the data, I prefer to use the historical series based on the Junta de Planificación (2001).

Table 3 *Net Migration from Puerto Rico, 1900–1999*

Years	*Net migration to the US mainland*	*Total passenger traffic*
1900–1909	2,000	2,000
1910–1919	11,000	11,000
1920–1929	35,638	35,638
1930–1939	12,715	12,715
1940–1949	145,010	145,010
1950–1959	446,693	460,826
1960–1969	221,763	151,770
1970–1979	26,683	85,198
1980–1989	490,562	287,451
1990–1999	325,875	−226[a]
Total	1,717,969	1,191,382

Sources: For 1900–1919, José Vázquez Calzada, “Demographic Aspects of Migration” (1979); for 1920–1949, US Commission on Civil Rights, *Puerto Ricans in the Continental United States* (1976); for 1950–1989, Junta de Planificación, *Balanza de pagos* (1978–1989); *Estadísticas socioeconómicas* (1972–1989); for 1990–1999, Junta de Planificación de Puerto Rico, “Movimiento de pasajeros entre Puerto Rico y el exterior” (2001).

Note: The available figures for 1900–1949 are for total passenger traffic only.

[a]The minus (−) sign indicates a net movement of passengers to the Island.

or “revolving-door” movement, rather than as an irrevocable and unilateral displacement.

Although scholars disagree as to the precise terminology, magnitude, and impact of circular migration, most agree that the Puerto Rican diaspora has become a sustained bilateral movement of people. Estimates of the volume of circular migration between the Island and the mainland range widely, depending on various definitions, sources, methods, and approaches. In Carlos Vargas-Ramos’s (2000) sample of return migrants in the town of Aguadilla, more than 42 percent would qualify as circulators. According to the 1990 Census, 130,335 people moved back and forth between the Island and the mainland more than 23 percent of those who left Puerto Rico during the 1980s (Rivera-Batiz and Santiago, 1996). According to a more recent survey conducted in Puerto Rico, more than 13 percent of all return migrants had moved at least twice between the Island and the mainland (Duany, 2002: 223). Regardless of the exact number, back-and-forth movement has become a key feature of contemporary Puerto Rican society. Although most people move from the Island to the United States, a growing proportion of the Island’s population are returned migrants and their offspring.

The current literature on transnationalism helps to frame Puerto Rican migration in a broader context. Transnationalism is commonly understood as

the establishment of multiple social, economic, political, and cultural links between two or more countries, including, but not limited to, actual physical movement (Schiller *et al.*, 1992; see also Mahler and Pessar, 2001). Applying this definition to Puerto Rico must take into account that the Island is not a sovereign state, and therefore the analytical distinction between state and nation must be made carefully. For example, government authorities do not police Puerto Ricans moving between the Island and the mainland, unlike those who cross international frontiers. However, the subjective experience of migration for many Puerto Ricans as a dual process of deterritorialization and reterritorialization has been well established (see Laó, 1997; Pérez, forthcoming; Ramos-Zayas, forthcoming; Whalen, 2001). As Puerto Ricans commonly say, moving abroad involves *irse pa' fuera*, literally "going outside" – their Island-country, that is. For most migrants, the United States is culturally as foreign as the Dominican Republic or Venezuela – although they share US citizenship with residents of the mainland. Even the colonial legislature of Puerto Rico recognized this fact in 1947, when it called the United States an "ethnologically strange setting" (see Duany, 2002: 171).

Over the past few years, the metaphor of Puerto Rico as a nation on the move has taken additional meanings. On May 4, 2000, the US Navy carried out Operation Access to the East, removing more than 200 peaceful demonstrators from its training grounds in Vieques, a small island-municipality off the eastern coast of Puerto Rico.[5] Those practicing civil disobedience included a wide spectrum of political and religious leaders, university students, and community activists. The protests had been sparked by the accidental death of security guard David Sanes Rodríguez during a military exercise in Vieques on April 19, 1999. Soon thereafter, Puerto Ricans of all ideological persuasions and walks of life called for an end to live bombings, the navy's exit, and the return of military lands to the civilian residents of Vieques. As a result of this prolonged struggle, the Puerto Rican nation was symbolically extended beyond the main Island to Vieques – *la isla nena*, or the baby island, as it is affectionately known – as well as to Culebra and other smaller territories of the Puerto Rican archipelago. It is now more appropriate than ever to speak about the *islands* of Puerto Rico, especially if one includes Manhattan in the discussion.

5 For an excellent anthropological analysis of how the Vieques peace movement galvanized cultural nationalism and other grassroots movements in Puerto Rico, see McCaffrey (2002).

A noteworthy development has been the active participation of leaders of the Puerto Rican diaspora in the "peace for Vieques" movement. Two of the three mainland Puerto Rican delegates to the US House of Representatives, Luis Gutiérrez and Nydia Velázquez, were detained during Operation Access to the East. The third, José Serrano, was arrested inside the White House grounds demanding the navy's immediate exit from Vieques. Many other Puerto Rican leaders from New York have publicly expressed their support for the peace movement on the Island. Thus, Puerto Rican national identity has moved abroad in two main directions – both across a short distance to Vieques and across the "big pond" of the Atlantic Ocean to the mainland. For the moment,

the public discourse on the Puerto Rican nation has broadened beyond territorial boundaries and across political differences.

Despite the strong solidarity displayed by Puerto Ricans on and off the Island, the US government insisted on continuing military exercises in Vieques until May 1, 2003 when the Navy left Vieques. Although motivated by a host of political and strategic factors, this insistence reveals the colonial nature of US – Puerto Rican relations. Without effective representation in Congress, islanders were forced to accept a presidential directive (timidly negotiated by former Governor Pedro Rosselló), which did not please most opponents of the navy's bombing of Vieques. This directive called for the resumption of military training activities, although with inert bombs, as well as for a plebiscite to tap the views of the people of Vieques. On July 29, 2001, 68.2 percent of those polled in Vieques supported the navy's immediate retirement from the island. No other issue in recent history has generated such a strong consensus in Puerto Rican public opinion. Throughout the controversy, high-ranking members of Congress raised the question of Puerto Rican loyalty to US citizenship and commitment to American security needs. On April 29, 2000, President Clinton's key advisor on Puerto Rican affairs, Jeffrey Farrow, reiterated the official position that Puerto Rico is not a nation but a territory of the United States (see García Passalacqua, 2000). As such, the Island is supposed to follow the defensive strategies established by the White House for the entire American nation.

Contrary to such opinions, I argue that Puerto Rico is indeed a nation, but a nation on the move. In so doing, I redefine the nation not as a well-bounded sovereign state, but as a translocal community based on a collective consciousness of a shared history, language, and culture. This consciousness extends to the diaspora, albeit with significantly different inflections. As Ana Celia Zentella (1997) has shown, Puerto Ricans in New York City have redefined their cultural identity away from an exclusive reliance on the Spanish language to incorporate monolingual English speakers as well as English–Spanish code-switchers with family ties to the Island. In Puerto Rico, the Spanish language continues to be one of the primary symbols of national identity. The increasing number of island residents with mainland experience and bilingual skills may well challenge the dominant discourse that being Puerto Rican and speaking Spanish are virtually synonymous (Zentella, 1990). Instead, national origin, cultural affiliation, and a subjective sense of belonging are becoming increasingly salient markers of Puerto Ricanness.

The Island's juridical definition as neither a state of the Union nor a sovereign republic has created an ambiguous, problematic, and contested political status for more than 100 years. Paradoxically, this in-between status has strengthened rather than weakened national identity among Puerto Ricans. In a recent poll conducted on the Island, more than 60 percent of the respondents chose Puerto Rico as their nation, while some 17 percent considered both Puerto Rico and the United States to be their nation, and only 20 percent mentioned the United

States alone (cited by Muriente Pérez, 2002: 46). An even higher proportion – more than 93 percent – of a representative sample of the Island's population identified themselves as Puerto Rican, alone or in some combination (such as black, white, mulatto, Caribbean, or a member of another ethnic group, such as Cuban and Dominican) (Rivera, 1996: 194–195). Other empirical studies, conducted both on the Island and in the mainland, have confirmed that most Puerto Ricans see themselves as part of a distinct nation and share a specifically Puerto Rican, not American or Latino, identity (de la Garza *et al.,* 1992; Morris, 1995). Even in the mainland, few Puerto Ricans align themselves primarily with a pan-Latino identity.

One does not have to espouse an essentialist or primordialist viewpoint to acknowledge that the vast majority of Puerto Ricans – on and off the Island – imagine themselves as part of a broader community that meets all the standard criteria of nationality, such as a historic territory, language, or culture, except sovereignty. At the same time, the massive displacements of people between the Island and the mainland over the last half-century complicate any simple equations among territory, language, and culture. In particular, the mobile livelihoods of many Puerto Ricans challenge static approaches to national identity. Nonetheless, recent essays on the construction and representation of Puerto Ricanness concur on its sheer strength, intensity, and popularity (Morris, 1995; Rivera, 1996; Dávila, 1997; Guerra, 1998). Unfortunately, most of this work has centered on the Island and neglected how identities are transformed and reconstructed in the diaspora (for exceptions to this trend, see Zentella, 1997; Flores, 2000; Pérez, forthcoming; Ramos-Zayas, forthcoming). This is a significant gap in a literature that continues to be grounded on the territorial, linguistic, and often cultural boundaries of the nation, thereby excluding those who live beyond or between those boundaries.

From colonialism to transnationalism

During the first half of the 20th century, US colonial discourse denied the existence of a separate Puerto Rican nation. Part of the American rationale for occupying the Island was precisely its avowed incapacity for self-government and its lack of a well-defined cultural identity (Thompson, 1995). For most US government officials as well as for numerous American travelers, journalists, and scholars, Puerto Rico was unfit for independence. The Island's inhabitants were often depicted as racially and culturally inferior to Anglo-Saxons in world's fairs and museum exhibits; in the letters, diaries, and notebooks of American anthropologists; in academic journals and popular magazines; in the photographs taken by professionals and amateurs; and in official census reports. Such textual and visual forms of representation projected a paternalistic image of Puerto Rico as an undeveloped tropical paradise, ripe for American investment, and in dire need of American tutelage (Duany, 2002).

After World War II, following a worldwide wave toward decolonization, Puerto Rico obtained a greater degree of autonomy from the United States. In 1952, 81 percent of the Puerto Rican electorate approved the constitution of the *Estado Libre Asociado*. Although Commonwealth status did not alter the basic contours of the colonial situation, it permitted – perhaps even required – the adoption of cultural nationalism as a state policy on the Island. Since the mid-1950s, the Institute of Puerto Rican Culture and other government agencies have promoted a distinctive nationalist iconography based on powerful symbols such as the Spanish language, the *jíbaro*, the Taíno Indian heritage, and the folk art of carving *santos*, the small wooden sculptures of Catholic saints. Like other nations, Puerto Rico has developed its own set of collective myths, memories, rituals, and images, such as the flag, anthem, and seal, as well as participation in Olympic sports and international beauty contests. Such icons have been widely diffused on the Island and in the mainland, and have strengthened the sense of being Puerto Rican as opposed to American. Their popular appeal, however, has not translated into massive support for independence or even free association with the United States. Cultural nationalism has been practically divorced from political nationalism on the Island. As the sociologist Felipe Pimentel (personal communication, November 14, 2002) has argued, "Puerto Ricans have achieved many of the things that other colonized people only got after obtaining independence, of course, with the exception of political sovereignty."

A good example of the rhetorical displacement of political by cultural nationalism in Puerto Rico is the development of the largest collection of popular arts and traditions ever assembled on the Island, the Vidal Collection (see Duany, 2002, Chapter 6). Ironically, the Puerto Rican businessman, folklorist, and philanthropist Teodoro Vidal donated more than half of this collection to the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, DC. The collection documents Puerto Rican culture from the 1600s to the present, including many popular objects used in everyday life, such as games, toys, amulets, personal adornments, musical instruments, and carnival masks. But the hallmark of the Vidal Collection is the series on Catholic devotions, especially the art of woodcarving saints, or *santos* (622 of these images are part of the collection of 3,346 objects). Nearly three-fourths of the artifacts were classified as religious; all of these are related exclusively to popular Catholic devotions. The artifacts were primarily made in the 19th century and in the central mountainous region of the Island, the traditional site of the *jíbaro*. Thus, the Vidal Collection represents Puerto Rican culture primarily as a set of Hispanic and Catholic traditions of an agricultural past against a more Americanized, Protestant, industrial, and urban modernity. However, neither Vidal nor the curators of the Smithsonian exhibit propose that Puerto Rico should become an independent nation.

Whereas political nationalism has waned on the Island, cultural nationalism is firmly entrenched among Puerto Ricans. For instance, although less than 5

percent of the voters supported the pro-independence candidate in the 2000 gubernatorial elections, nearly 89 percent of those surveyed in a 2000 public opinion poll supported the immediate exit of the US Navy from Vieques (McCaffrey, 2002: 172–173). Across a broad spectrum of social classes, political affiliations, and racial groups, islanders identify themselves primarily as Puerto Rican, not as Caribbean, Hispanic, or American, even as they recognize the material and symbolic benefits of US citizenship (Morris, 1995; Rivera, 1996). Throughout this essay, I have argued that Puerto Ricans on and off the Island assert a strong national, not just ethnic, identity, even though most of them do not support independence for their country. I think it is appropriate to call this sense of peoplehood "national" because it is grounded in a shared past, a territory considered to be the homeland, and a linguistic and cultural heritage that may not be common to all Puerto Ricans on both shores, but continues to be cherished by most. In their daily lives, many Puerto Ricans experience a profound fissure between nationhood and statehood as sources of collective identity, as manifested in having two flags, two anthems, two languages, and two sets of allegiances, sometimes conflicting, frequently overlapping. Like Quebec, Scotland, or Catalonia, Puerto Rico remains a stateless nation, rather than simply another ethnic minority within an imperial state. As the sociologist César Ayala puts it (letter to the author, March 11, 2001), the Puerto Rican case suggests that "the idea of the nation has to be understood not as a territorially organized nation state, but as a translocal phenomenon of a new kind."

Since the beginning of the 20th century, the Puerto Rican government has sponsored large-scale migration to the mainland as a safety valve for the Island's overpopulation and unemployment problems. During the 1940s and 1950s, public officials and planners conceived Puerto Ricans in the United States as "migrant citizens" in need of assistance, orientation, and organization. For decades, Commonwealth leaders treated the Puerto Rican community abroad as a symbolic extension of the Island's culture rather than as an independent entity. In turn, migrant grassroots groups constructed their own identity primarily as Puerto Rican, but did not accept wholesale the traditional discourse of Puerto Ricanness, especially its exclusive definition of the nation on linguistic and territorial grounds. Those who move back and forth between the Island and the mainland are likely to be bilingual and bicultural, as well as unbound by a fixed location in either place; yet most perceive themselves to be as Puerto Rican as those who move less frequently.

Through migration, Puerto Ricans have become members of a translocal nation "whose boundaries shift between the archipelago of Puerto Rico and its US diaspora" (Laó, 1997: 171). Among recent Latino immigrants in the United States (including Mexicans, Cubans, and Dominicans), only Puerto Ricans insist on calling themselves simply Puerto Ricans, rather than Puerto Rican-Americans, which speaks volumes about their persistent stress on national

origin and their adamant rejection of a hyphenated ethnicity. No major Puerto Rican organization on the mainland calls itself Puerto Rican-American, contrary to many hyphenated associations among Cuban-Americans, Mexican-Americans, or Dominican-Americans, not to mention African-Americans, Italian-Americans, or Asian-Americans. Many contemporary representations of Puerto Ricanness in the mainland are thoroughly diasporic notions based on long-distance nationalism, especially of a cultural sort (see Anderson, 1992; Schiller and Fouron, 2001). Unlike well-established nation-states, Puerto Rico cannot be imagined from any fixed location as a sovereign community, exclusively tied to a single territory or language, and characterized by a sense of deep, horizontal comradeship (Anderson, 1991). Rather, it is a geographically, politically, linguistically, and culturally splintered country. Moreover, few Puerto Ricans can now imagine their nation apart from some form of permanent association with the United States.

Throughout the 20th century, Puerto Rican migrants have maintained strong social and cultural ties to their homeland and developed alternate conceptions of their own identity. Voluntary associations in the United States selectively appropriated the discursive practices traditionally associated with being Puerto Rican, yet they continued to portray themselves as part of a translocal nation divided between the Island and the mainland.[6] During the 1940s and 1950s, voluntary associations of the Puerto Rican community proliferated, especially in New York City, as well as other cultural practices, such as parades, folk festivals, popular music, and sports events. As a 1955 newspaper article published in New York put it,

6 For an overview of the cultural practices of Puerto Rican voluntary associations in the United States, see Duany (2002, Chapter 8).

> "Thousands of *boricuas* [Puerto Ricans] are dispersed around the world and none of them, with very rare exceptions, denies his Puerto Rican homeland or race. That is the seal and the distinctive mark that we all carry with us. That mark or peculiar way of being is what distinguishes us from other races and fellow peoples of the New World. Through his presence, his way of acting or speaking, whether on purpose or unconsciously, the Puerto Rican is easy to identify wherever he may be. And this is markedly so both in the case of the *boricua* with little academic preparation and in nuclei with more education" (Marictta, 1955: 32).

Even in the 1960s, when second-generation immigrants began to assert their claims as a separate ethnic minority in the United States, they often deployed the rhetoric and tactics of cultural nationalism, rather than define themselves as hyphenated Puerto Rican-Americans. Thus, the Puerto Rican diaspora nurtured what Benedict Anderson (1992), Nina Glick Schiller and Georges Fouron (2001) have called long-distance nationalism as part of the rise of identity politics after World War II.

Is the Puerto Rican case unique or does it suggest any broader "lessons?" Today, the Island is one of the few remaining colonies in the world. Within Latin

America, Puerto Rico is the only country (with the partial exception of Cuba) that did not stage a successful independence movement against Spain, its former metropolis. Even in its immediate Caribbean context, the Island's dependence on the United States is anomalous given the strong decolonization movement in the region since the 1960s. Unlike other parts of the world, where political nationalism and ethnic separatism have re-emerged with a vengeance, Puerto Rico has quietly experienced a growing economic and political integration with its metropolis. Compared to other Latin American and Caribbean people, the Puerto Rican diaspora seems exceptional because it takes place within the geopolitical borders of the United States.

At the same time, Puerto Rico's predicament resonates strongly with the struggles of other peoples. Perhaps most clearly, the Island's continuing colonial dilemma invites comparisons with the dependent territories of the Caribbean, such as the Dutch and French Antilles, and the Pacific, such as Guam and American Samoa. Since 1898, colonial discourses on Puerto Rico developed under the framework of the American "imperial archipelago," including Cuba, the Philippines, and Hawaii (Thompson, 1998). Even more broadly, American images of Puerto Rican Others shared much of the "rhetoric of empire," common to British and French colonialism (Spurr, 1993; Duany, 2002). Symbolic expressions of local resistance to US domination – such as the assertion of a separate Puerto Rican "personality" despite decades of political and economic penetration, or the avowed moral superiority of indigenous values and practices over foreign ones – are typical of anticolonial movements in the so-called Third World (Chatterjee, 1995). Nor is the growing split between political and cultural nationalism solely a Puerto Rican phenomenon: it has recurred at various times and in various parts of the world (Hutchinson, 1994). Without suggesting that Puerto Rico represents identical trends in other countries, I would argue that the Island encapsulates many parallel and sometimes contradictory forces, such as transnationalism and nationalism, deterritorialization and reterritorialization, alterity and identity.

Conclusion

Rethinking the resilience of Puerto Rican identity against all odds provides general insights about the workings of colonial, nationalist, and transnational discourses. My analysis suggests that political nationalism tends to weaken with the constant transgression of national boundaries through large-scale migration and the emergence of a new (*lite*) form of colonialism. Diasporic communities often develop different representations of identity from the dominant nationalist canon by stressing their broad kinship, cultural, and emotional ties to an ancestral homeland, rather than its narrow linguistic and territorial boundaries. This strategy is typical of what some analysts have dubbed long-distance nationalism (Schiller and Fouron, 2001). In the terms proposed throughout this

essay, cultural nationalism may prosper more easily than political nationalism, where much of the population has become transnational. It can help to advance the multiple economic and political interests of various sectors of society, such as intellectuals, politicians, entrepreneurs, and even migrant workers, without necessarily establishing a sovereign state. Cultural nationalism may not pose a radical challenge to the colonial status of Puerto Rico, but it may slow down the further assimilation of the Island into the United States. Given the current lack of popular support for political nationalism in Puerto Rico, the struggle for citizenship rights, democratic representation, the entitlement of disenfranchised groups, and community empowerment will most likely have to be advanced within the limits of the established regime.

No country in recent history has undergone a more prolonged and massive displacement of its people than Puerto Rico. Recalling Ireland's experience during the second half of the 19th century, Puerto Rico exported almost half of its current population to the United States after World War II. Unlike Ireland and other major sending countries in Europe during the heyday of emigration, the Island has received a growing number of return migrants since the 1960s, as well as a large influx of foreign immigrants from neighboring countries like the Dominican Republic and Cuba. Such dizzying nomadism – a constant dislocation and relocation of peoples, practices, imaginaries, and identities – has been posited as one of the defining moments of a global, transnational, or postmodern age (Chambers, 1994). That may well be so. However, regardless of one's theoretical or political preferences, representing nations on the move remains difficult. I have explored alternative approaches to the problem, by mobilizing the object of study – the relationship between nation, migration, and identity – through time and space, as well as by looking at it from various methodological standpoints and identifying multiple social actors and ideological positions. Although much work remains to be done, it is increasingly clear that national identities flow and at the same time endure across many kinds of borders, both territorial and symbolic.

About the author

Jorge Duany is Professor of Anthropology at the University of Puerto Rico, Río Piedras. His research interests include transnational migration, national identity, and popular culture, especially in the Caribbean and Puerto Rico, and among Latinos in the United States. His latest book is *The Puerto Rican Nation on the Move: Identities on the Island and in the United States* (North Carolina, 2002).

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