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### ON MEMORY AND RESISTANCE: MOTHERHOOD, COMMUNITY AND DISPOSSESSION IN ZORA MORENO'S *COQUÍ CORIHUNDO VIRA EL MUNDO* (1981)

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#### **Abstract:**

This paper examines Zora Moreno's play *Coquí corihundo vira el mundo* (1981) as an alternative to the identitarian investment in the patriarchal myth of the *gran familia puertorriqueña*. I argue that by offering a feminist rewriting of Adolfina Villanueva through the protagonist Anastasia, Moreno combats the privileging of Puerto Rican identity as a light-skinned, male figure. Moreno critiques these colonial vestiges of racial discrimination through her interrogation of the spatial politics of home. *Coquí corihundo vira el mundo* problematizes the construction of a Puerto Rican identity that would erase Afro-Puerto Rican identity and thereby replicate a racialized hierarchy. Thus, in the act of remembering Adolfina/Anastasia, Moreno uses memory as an act of resistance that demonstrates the contemporary effects of myths of identity on the local community. Furthermore, the lasting performance of

Adolfina/Anastasia as traumatic social memory redefines the centrality of Black women's experience to the marginalization of the Afro-Puerto Rican community at large.

La sangre inocente nos cubrió de duelo. Los gritos de  
 Muerte despertaron a un pueblo.  
 Cuerpo acribillado, que lección encierras: para el pobre,  
 El Cielo: pa'l rico, la tierra!

Innocent blood covered our grief.  
 The shouts of Death woke a people.  
 Riddled body, what lesson you hold:  
 for the poor, Heaven: for the rich, the Earth!  
 —Ruben Blades  
 and Willie Colón,  
 “Desahucio”

The story of Adolfina Villanueva has been mythologized in various cultural forms, from song to graffiti and theater. Adolfina Villanueva was an Afro-Puerto Rican woman who was murdered by the police while she attempted to protect her family from eviction on February 6, 1980. By looking at the transformation of Adolfina's life and death into cultural memory, I argue that the repeated performances of her as subject transmits an embodied knowledge that provides an alternative Puerto Rican identity to the exclusionary mythology of the *gran familia puertorriqueña*.

Nowhere is the power of Adolfina's mythology more evident than in the lyrics of the song *Desahucio* [Evicted] by *salseros* Ruben Blades and Willie Colón. Located in the epigraph of this essay, the line of one stanza reads “Innocent blood covered our grief/the shouts of Death woke a people” (Curet and Blades, 1995). These lyrics contest the official police narratives that mark Adolfina as a criminal and danger to the police. Instead it avows her innocence and rewrites her death as both sacrifice and murder. Furthermore, in

understanding Adolfina as innocent victim and understanding her death as part of a mythology of sacrifice, Blades and Colón (and, as I will touch upon later, Moreno) use familiar mythologies of Christian sacrifice to mark the inevitability of her death. Furthermore, the singers use the imagery of “un cuerpo acribillado,” or a riddled body, to convey a lesson taught to them. Rather than remain silent, this riddled corpse speaks the lesson Adolfina embodies for the Afro-Puerto Rican residents of Loíza, Puerto Rico. This line, “For the poor, heaven: for the rich, the Earth” (Curet and Blades, 1995), is quickly understood to be a maxim that speaks to the reality for Loiceños (residents of Loíza), namely in the continued use of state-sanctioned police violence and the spatial politics of class and race.

As one of the first plays that remembers Adolfina Villanueva, Zora Moreno’s 1981 play *Coquí corihundo vira el mundo* or *Anastasia* [The Story of Anastasia] questions the legitimacy of a culturally homogenous nation by negotiating the multiple logics of myth, history and identity. In addition, she employs the local dialects of Anastasia as a marginalized, black female subject to demonstrate the power of other knowledges and vocabularies for marginalized subjects. In drawing from the past, Moreno offers an opportunity to re-member and re-make the past so that the future still holds new conditions of possibility.

*Coquí corihundo vira el mundo* (1981) or *Anastasia* (as it was later renamed in 1987) details the story of Anastasia, her husband Antonio, and their children, as they are in the process of being evicted from their home. Based on the real story of Adolfina Villanueva, the play opens with Adolfina reading her children a book entitled *Historia de nuestros indios*, or *History of our Amerindians* as a bedtime story. The story is interrupted by the arrival of Don Viramundo, a real-estate developer, who has purchased the land where Anastasia and her family reside. After a brief discussion, Don Viramundo leaves, incensed that the land has yet to be vacated in a timely fashion. The tension of the play resides

in the opposition between Don Viramundo and Anastasia as they disagree on who the rightful owner of this house is. As the play continues, scenes of local life including children playing with earthworms and hens, a birthday party and music, are contrasted against the conniving legal machinations of eviction between Don Viramundo and his lawyer. The play concludes with the final confrontation between Anastasia and the police, where they shoot her in front of her children and the local community.

Zora Moreno, a multifaceted Afro-Puerto Rican playwright, is also a dramatist, actress, director and founder of a socially-minded theater group Flor de Cahillo (1977). Following the technical training of epic theatre, her works focus on issues of social injustice to bring about change through performance and raise her audience's consciousness. The play was first performed in 1981 for the Spring Theater Festival at the Ateneo Puertorriqueño in San Juan, Puerto Rico, and has been claimed to be part of the controversial Nueva Dramaturgia Puertorriqueña or New Puerto Rican Dramaturgy as outlined by playwright Roberto Ramos Perea. As theatre historian Lowell Fiet (2004) argues, with few exceptions, those artists identified as part of this school of thought have privileged a closed workshop, remained in a literary debate that privileges the authority of the text and has remained stuck to the ideals of a past national theatre (p. 316).

While Zora Moreno does remain more of a lesser known figure in Puerto Rican theater, her training, including her time with Miriam Colón and the Puerto Rican Traveling Theater, the dissemination of her works transnationally, and her works' connection to social injustice mark her as an exception to Fiet's classification. A version of *Coquí corihundo* was published as "Anastasia" by the Mexican theater journal *Tramoya* in a 1985 issue that was devoted to the New Puerto Rican Dramaturgy. The following year, in 1986, the play was selected to be performed in the 28<sup>th</sup> Annual festival of Puerto Rican theater, to represent the trends in Puerto Rican theater (Velez, 1994, p. 246).

Ultimately, this article offers a brief introduction to the significance of Zora Moreno's play that seeks to actively remember Adolfinia Villanueva as a symbol of resistance for the Afro-Puerto Rican community in the face of competing cultural mythologies around Puerto Rican identity. Furthermore, as iterations of Adolfinia continue to appear in songs and murals even today, the mythology of her life offers commentary on the significance of memory in the postcolony. The slippages between Adolfinia, Anastasia, and Zora Moreno's performance as Anastasia mark her transformation into social memory. However, as the lines between Adolfinia/Anastasia and Moreno herself become blurred, the collective nature of her trauma and its power to be transmitted through embodied performance grows. Adolfinia Villanueva's story is mired within the racialized politics of space as she attempts to defend herself and her community from the police, urban businessmen, and colonial politics of the state. These sociopolitical struggles continue to face Puerto Ricans today in the wake of PROMESA, Puerto Rico's debt crisis and the question of its future. As we see the inclusion and logics of other marginalized groups in Puerto Rico to the opposition of continued colonization, Black feminist epistemologies, like that of Adolfinia, continue to be important to social protest today.

### **Performance as Social Memory**

*Coquí corihundo vira el mundo* was performed one year after Adolfinia Villanueva's death in 1980. The 1980s in Puerto Rico marked a time of economic depression and increased out-migration to the continental United States. During the 1950s and 1960s with Operation Bootstrap, Puerto Rico became a gold standard for Caribbean development and capitalist growth. However, the booming figures of rapid growth and rising income merely hid the structural problems of industrialization on the island that led to persistent high and growing unemployment rates and a stagnating local economy (Dietz, 1982, p. 501). This, coupled with the impact

of Ronald Reagan's elections and his policies to cut government social expenditure, led to recession on the island.

Similar to the contemporary response to the most recent manifestation of Puerto Rico's debt crisis in 2014, the response to this economic depression was invested in a capitalist logics of US colonialism. In Ed Morales's online article, "The Roots of Puerto Rico's Debt Crisis," University of Puerto Rico professor, Rafael Bernabe noted (2015), "The economy of Puerto Rico is mainly controlled by US corporations, which generate a tremendous amount of profit that is not reinvested and does not create economic growth. It's a cycle of dependency that reproduces itself." If Puerto Rico's contemporary crisis is embedded within this "cycle of dependency," then *Coquí corihundo vira el mundo* has much light to shed on the colonial and racialized logics of space in the case of Anastasia/Adolfina's eviction. We must understand this play, not simply as a cultural object, but instead as a retainer of social memory.

To understand performance as social memory, we must look to Diana Taylor's critical interventions on cultural memory in the Americas. Taylor (2003) argues,

Looking at performance as a retainer of social memory engages history without necessarily being a 'symptom of history'; that is, the performances enter into a dialogue with a history of trauma without themselves being traumatic. These are carefully crafted works that create a critical distance for 'claiming' experience and enabling as opposed to collapsing, witnessing. (p. 210).

Adolfina/Anastasia's permutations throughout various cultural objects demonstrates the lasting lessons that her story has for marginalized Puerto Rican subjects. Don Viramundo's attempt to claim ownership of Anastasia's land and home was part of the post-1898 strategy of the *gran familia puertorriqueña* for wealthy

landowners to contest their own displacement by colonization. Anastasia's resistance to her double marginalization as an Afro-Puerto Rican woman is rooted in her indigenous and Black heritages that contest colonial logics of space and capital. This is further exemplified by the title of the play *Coquí corihundo vira el mundo*. The *coquí* is a local frog indigenous to Puerto Rico and *corihundo* plays off the word *oriundo* meaning "originating from." Anastasia's resistance is rooted in indigenous logics which are reinforced in her nightly storytelling performances for her children. These performative histories do not only "retain social memory" like Taylor indicates, but rewrites them to include alternative epistemologies that offer the potential for her listeners, both audience and actors) to incorporate these logics into their own consciousness.

As indicated above, competing and layered origin stories are embedded within Moreno's play. First, the audience is introduced to Anastasia's lessons to her children about the history of the Amerindians in Puerto Rico. Reading from the book *Historia de nuestros indios*, Anastasia begins to recite the story of conquest and colonization after the arrival of Juan Ponce de León. However, the play's rendering of the peaceful Amerindians offers an idealized portrayal of life amongst the different tribes, who are depicted as peaceful farmers and agriculturalists (Moreno, 1981, p. 151). However, Moreno (1981) suggests that her portrayal of Anastasia parallels the massacre of the Amerindians in Puerto Rico through foreshadowing: Anastasia tells her children, "Although our Amerindians lived peacefully in their pueblo and rarely fought between each other, in many occasions, they were obligated to defend their land against the Spanish conquistadors" (Moreno, p. 151).<sup>1</sup> In this statement, Moreno captures the spirit of resistance from which Anastasia will find justification for her resistance to the state.

Don Viramundo, a representative of the financial developer Veremundo Quiñones, who evicted the Villanueva family, is

depicted to be cold, ruthless and obsessed with financial gain. Viramundo attempts to establish his power over Adolfinia by claiming knowledge that she wouldn't understand. He (1981) states, "Although right now you don't want to understand, this will greatly benefit all residents equally from Medianía, las Carreras, Colobó, all of Loíza and you yourselves if you stay in that area" (Moreno, pp. 152-53).<sup>2</sup> In this first encounter between Viramundo and Anastasia, Anastasia is presented as a strong woman who holds her own against this man who believes himself to be a superior and benevolent figure for the community. Don Viramundo's assertion that Anastasia and her family simply "don't want to understand" the ways in which his plans to develop her land in Loíza presents a huge divide between who can and cannot produce knowledge. Viramundo and Anastasia represent competing epistemologies that are grounded in their conception of the land (and ownership). At every opportunity, Viramundo denies any possibility that Anastasia could converse about business dealings or have knowledge about what is best for her community. Viramundo embodies the national mythology of the *gran familia puertorriqueña*.

Frances Aparicio (1998) argues, the political and cultural rhetoric of the *gran familia puertorriqueña* was "activated as a strategic response to the economic and social displacement suffered by them [the *hacendados* or landowners] after 1898" (p. 5). This rhetoric was used by the displaced *hacendados* to resurrect a positive imagery of patriarchal dynamics in which these landowners took care of their workers in a peaceful dynamic that mirrored a family. The use of the family imagery presented a sense of unity and harmony. Later, Aparicio (1998) notes, this discourse was resurrected in the 1930s by writers like Antonio Pedreira, Tomás Blanco and René Marqués as a nostalgic cry for an idealized past (p. 5). Through this look backward these Puerto Rican writers "were able to displace the gaze of their readers from a present moment of strife, social conflict, racial emergence of the black proletariat, women's participation in labor, migration to the cities and a more visibly heterogeneous society to the tenets of a historical period very



much desired strategically” (Aparicio, 1998, p. 6). Thus, although embedded in personal greed, Viramundo draws upon this familiar narrative of a nostalgic path to redefine his razing of Anastasia’s home not as destructive but productive to the community at large.

In his speeches to Anastasia, Viramundo defines the limits of possibilities inscribed on the Afro-Puerto Rican population through the lens of a racialized national imaginary. In his obvious racialization of Anastasia and her children as “of color,” he denotes their place within Puerto Rican society as objects of entertainment or servitude. As such, the “spatial/temporal distancing” in the folklorization of blackness is embedded in a slave-holding plantation imaginary in which Viramundo envisions himself as the wealthy *hacendado*. Viramundo reveals his hidden agenda as his contributions to the community are methods to profit from the development of the land by either selling it to the church or building hotels. He tells Anastasia that if she and her family plan to stay in Loíza, she would quickly find a job as a domestic worker and the community would be a source of fascination for the future hotel guests. Don Viramundo is only able to see the value of the community as it is rendered in its folkloric blackness, thus referencing Loíza, Puerto Rico’s oft-cited claim as the heart of the Afro-Puerto Rican culture. However, Petra Rivera Rideau notes that Loíza’s blackness is deemed to be a folkloric blackness. She writes, “Loíza’s blackness exemplifies the ‘folklorisation’ process described by Isar Godreau (2002, 2006), during which blackness is subject to a ‘spatial/temporal distancing’ that fosters ‘nostalgia’ for African-based traditions assumed to exist exclusively in the past and within very specific geographic boundaries” (p. 618). At work, then, are two forces of nostalgia, when Viramundo attempts to articulate a benevolent paternalism that is grounded in a process of racialization that locates Loíza as a remnant of Puerto Rico’s African past.

Nonetheless, Anastasia (1981) counters Viramundo’s claim, asserting, “Look Don Viramundo, I thank you for your good

intentions, but I already know that story. Now I ask you, where are you looking? Look again, my children aren't of color, they're black" (Moreno, p. 153).<sup>3</sup> In this exchange, Viramundo splutters and denies Anastasia's attempt to "know that story" of asymmetrical relationships and tales of colonization. Anastasia reaffirms her knowledge that the members of this community are hardworking and only seek to create happiness for everyone, which members of the upper-class, like Viramundo, continue to destroy. In addition, she notes the continued stripping of land from the local residents parcel by parcel and asks him whether the only piece of land left for these Black residents will be the cemetery. Outraged, Viramundo yells "Mire, déjese de pendejía," the equivalent of "Don't be an idiot." But Anastasia is clearly not an idiot, as she quickly critiques his claim that "Us men understand each other better" (p. 153). However, rather than seeing this as Viramundo does, an indication of male superiority, she breaks down his racial and class privilege. She (1981) argues, "It's like Yoli, the woman who studies at the Sagrao, says, that in the same academy where Socrates studied, Sophocles studied and Christ studied. There, they didn't permit entry to the Virgin Mary, to keep us submissive..." (Moreno, p. 153).<sup>4</sup> Therefore, what Viramundo understands as superiority, Anastasia identifies as gendered processes of exclusion against learning.

As evidenced from the opening scene, Anastasia has transformed her home into a site of learning and designated herself a figure that produces knowledge. In telling her children about the history of marginalized groups including the Amerindians and questioning the exclusion of women in school, Anastasia promotes an alternative feminist epistemology that promotes the welfare of the entire community rather than a benevolent paternalism. Furthermore, this alternative feminist epistemology is notably *negra* and grounded not in solely a folkloric understanding of blackness, but rather the shared material experiences of exclusion and discrimination faced by Loiceños. The transformation of her house as school denotes the importance of the spatial politics of home

where alternative logics can be shared rather than a singular monolithic history presented in official spaces for these marginalized residents.

### **(Trans)National Imaginaries and Trans(Local) Interventions**

In remembering Anastasia/Adolfina's resistance to forced displacement, Zora Moreno negotiates the geographic and linguistic displacements that separate Loiceños from an imagined "Puerto-Rican-ness" and demonstrates how Loiceños respond to internal conditions of displacement. One of the most notable aspects of this play is its orality, and another significant demarcation is the use of dialect that denotes the linguistic displacements mapped onto space, race and class. Moreno was trained in the tradition of epic theater and is a proponent of popular theater. Moreno notes that the purpose of founding Flor de Cahillo was to create an alternative, counterhegemonic discourse through popular theater. She (1981) argues, "... [es] un género artístico que tiene el potencial de entretener, prevenir, educar, concienciar, y fomentar [los] valores socio-culturales. [Un] arte que permite hablar con [su] propia voz" [...it is an artistic genre that has the potential to entertain, prevent, educate, awaken, and foment sociocultural values. [It is an] art that lets one speak with one's own voice] (p. iii).

Popular theater supports the representation of diverse popular subjects that represent the everyday conflicts and contradictions they encounter. Moreno specifically was dedicated to telling the stories of marginalized peoples, including indigenous, Afro-Puerto Rican and poor subjects for her theater to have the possibility to carry a social message to a larger community. Moreno believed that to ethically represent the most marginalized subjects of the state, the playwright needed to embrace the multifaceted polyphonic nature of language, including using local speeches and dialects. Moreno (1981) employs popular theater to "[servir] como espejo a [sus] vecinos al despertar de una conciencia colectiva sobre su propia realidad" [serve as a mirror to one's neighbors to awaken a

collective consciousness in one's own reality] (p. iii). By using these diverse forms of language, particularly, Moreno affirms how creole functions in the Caribbean to break down systems of power.

The speech of the members of the community, including Anastasia and her family, is juxtaposed against that of Don Viramundo and his lawyer. The official speech of Viramundo, however, only serves to reify his embodiment of the mythology of the *gran familia puertorriqueña* and ultimately replicate discourses of power that mark Anastasia as other. Nonetheless, in Anastasia's subaltern speech, we find the realities of lived experiences for the residents of Loíza. In one exchange between Anastasia and Antonio they comment on the singing talent of Anastasia's sister. They (1981) remark,

ANTONIO: (Subiendo a la casa.) Qué lindo canta esa hermana tuya. Ella debe il a vé si le dan una oportunidad en esoh programa de television.

ANASTASIA: ¡Oh sí! Es ta difícil que le den oportunidad a negros que no sea salí de sirviente. La oportunidad la van a tené ello de ponehla en ridículo. Poke cuidao que se burlan de nosotros en eso programa. Ni se lo miente. Mejol que se quede cantando entre nosotros.” (p. 194)

[ANTONIO: (Heading up to the house.) How beautifully your sister sings. She should go see if they will give her an opportunity on that television program.

ANASTASIA: Oh really! It is very difficult for them to give opportunities to Black people that aren't in the roles of servants. The opportunity that they would give her is going to make her look ridiculous. Because we should be concerned that they make fun of us on that program. And they don't even lie about it. It's better that she stays here singing amongst us.]

In this exchange, Anastasia recognizes the space of political and racial subalternity that affirms her knowledge that the roles Afro-Puerto Ricans would have on television could never exist beyond representations of servants or objects of ridicule, which directly addresses their perceived status within the imagining of Puerto Rican identity.

### **Imagined Community, Racial Imaginary**

In the play, Afro-Puerto Rican subalternity is further explored in witnessing the divide between those in power and the urban residents of Loíza. To stay their notice of eviction, Anastasia and Antonio write to the governor, believing that he would keep his political promises to the people. While Anastasia remains worried, Antonio (1981) reassures her, “Don’t lose hope Anastasia, it was very clear what the governor said in that. (In the tone of a political speech.) ‘There will not be a mouth without bread, nor a family without a home’” (Moreno, p. 160).<sup>5</sup> Echoing the words of former Puerto Rican governor Luis Muñoz Marín’s campaign “*Pan, Tierra, Libertad*” (Bread, Land, Liberty) in the late 1930s and early 1940s, Antonio articulates an important gap between the construction of the Puerto Rican subject as *jíbaro* and the coastal Black residents of Loíza

During Muñoz Marín’s campaign for the Partido Popular Democrático (Popular Democratic Party; hereafter referred to as PPD), the *jíbaro* became the central representative figure to whom his message of social justice had been aimed. Nathaniel Córdova (2007) notes,

Hence, the story of the PPD campaign, is, in many ways, the story of Luis Muñoz Marín speaking to the *jíbaros*. Muñoz Marín’s campaign brought him face to face with the segment of the population that had been considered wretched, sickly, aloof, and morally suspect. These same *jíbaros* had also been represented as the keystone of Puerto Rican national identity,

embodying the qualities of closeness to the land and the authenticity that branded them as the bearers of ‘Puerto-Rican-ness.’ (p. 259)

However, the notion of “Puerto-Rican-ness” captures the definition of an Andersonian “imagined political community” (1991, p. 6). Much as the tension between myth/reality presented in Hall’s writing on Caribbean identity, Anderson argues, “Communities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they were imagined. In this way, the Puerto Rican subject is imagined to be a simple worker, close to the land and, in return, given basic rights of food and liberty.

In *Scripts of Blackness: Race, Cultural Nationalism and U.S. Colonialism in Puerto Rico*, Isar Godreau demonstrates how Puerto Rican national discourses (like that of the *gran familia puertorriqueña*) were used as a mechanism to combat U.S. imperialism but oftentimes privilege whiteness and erase processes of racialization. Specifically, around the figure of the *jíbaro*, she (2015) writes,

Hence, to understand the underlying precepts behind the unspoken racial image of this national symbol (and the racism Zenón rightly exposed), one must also look at the racialized constructed of regions in the production of national identity. This includes not only racialization of the rural landscape as an authentic national space that is nonblack, but also the corresponding erasure of coastal communities from national registers. (p. 90)

Unfortunately, the letter that Antonio and Anastasia write to affirm their own political rights, namely that “no family would be without a home,” remains unanswered. Moreover, as Loiceños, Anastasia and her family occupy the coastal community that is written out of the national registers as Godreau recognizes in her research. Ultimately, the black, urban residents of Loíza are at odds with the imagined identity of Puerto Rico as *jíbaro*.

The *jíbaro*, as figured in the Puerto Rican national imaginary, demonstrates the important ways Puerto Rican subjectivity flows across transnational borders, specifically to and from the diaspora and back again. The question of nation has long been a fruitful site of scholarly inquiry regarding Puerto Rico as Puerto Rican scholars note its continued status as dependent territory and lack of national sovereignty. In the Puerto Rican case the term transnationalism poses an interesting question. Many scholars note that the Puerto Rican identity needs to consider the increasingly transnational nature of the Puerto Rican population that is spread across geographic borders, imagined or real. In his critical study *The Puerto Rican Nation on the Move*, Jorge Duany contributes to the understanding of the mobile and fluctuating Puerto Rican identity. He states, “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” (Duany, 2002, p. 2).

Less relevant or not, “territorially grounded definitions of national identity” continue to inform Puerto Rican identity. Instead, we should look to how transnational flows continue to carry vestiges of cultural nationalism. To put it another way, I ask: how does the question of transnationalism shape forms of nationalism in a colonial context? To think through this question, I turn to Edrik López’s writing on the function of the “nostalgic *jíbaro*” in Puerto Rican diasporic literature. In his paper “Nostalgic *Jíbaros*: A Structure of Loss in U.S. Puerto Rican Literature,” López (2014) argues “that Puerto Rican literature in the United States has found a very specific figure through which racialization ‘is processed’—with its undertones of melancholia—in the historical and mythical persona of the *jíbaro/a*” (p. 1). Thus, if the *jíbaro* occupies a space of nostalgia for U.S. Puerto Rican writers, then their literature constructs Puerto Rico as a mythic paradise invested in a longing for a simpler, rural past that embodies the slogan “*Pan, Tierra, Libertad.*” For diasporic Puerto Ricans, this imagined nostalgia is

set up in stark contrast to the urbanization and alienation felt as consequence of migration.

If writers of the Puerto Rican nation, both “at home” and “on the move,” turn to the *jibaro* as an important symbol of cultural identity, where does that leave those Puerto Ricans who are left out of this gendered and racialized (trans)national imaginary? How do we contend with the work of Afro-Puerto Rican writers and their writings about the experiences of police brutality, discrimination and poverty? To answer these questions, I suggest that we turn to the concept of the translocal, as written about by Mayra Santos-Febres and Agustín Lao-Montes. Santos-Febres (1993) states, “[t]ranslocality describes the ways in which displacement makes class, gender, sexuality, nationality, and racial classifications constantly fluctuate” (p.183). For Santos-Febres and Lao-Montes, the fluidity that marks Puerto Rican identity is a result of continued processes of dislocation and ultimately results in a “fragmented subject.”

As we turn to consider the place of Afro-Puerto Rican subjects through the figure of Adolfina/Anastasia, we should look at how the trans-local framework can be used to negotiate Puerto-Rican identities trans-locally to question the limits of the *jibaro* as representative of Puerto-Rican ness. Santos-Febres (1993) goes on to further note, “Translocality occurs at two levels: at the level of geographical and linguistical displacements and at the level of internal translocality. This internal translocality is the response to those conditions of displacement” (p. 183). Anastasia/Adolfina’s tale of displacement operates at the local level of dispossession that considers the racialized and gendered processes of exclusion at work in spatial politics.

### **Music as Trans-Local Epistemologies**

In addition to dialect, Moreno employs musical genres such as *salsa* and *bomba* as a method of trans-local intervention to negotiate



the subaltern positions of Loiceños through community. The plot of the play follows two arcs that ultimately conclude in the scene of Anastasia's murder. The primary arc which has been mostly discussed in this piece follows the conflict between Anastasia and Don Viramundo. This arc, however, is placed within the context of celebration, namely that of a birthday. Interspersed throughout the scenes are popular songs of the time, including songs like *El Negrito del Batey*, *A Bailar mi Bomba*, and *El Caracol*. Many of the songs included are not merely from Puerto Rico but Cuba and the Dominican Republic and songs that are easily recognizable from their popularity. The production notes give instructions to adapt these songs to *ritmos* including a majority in Afro-Caribbean styles, especially the Afro-Puerto Rican style of *bomba*.

In *Listening to Salsa: Gender, Latin Popular Music and Puerto Rican Cultures*, Frances Aparicio (1998) details how listening to salsa was a gendered and racialized activity. She notes,

The cocolo-rockero dichotomy based on musical taste permeated youth culture in Puerto Rico during the 1980s. *Cocolos*, an African-derived term, refers to young black men who attend salsa concerts and who drive old Toyotas with the driver's seat lowered and the loudspeakers playing salsa. The aesthetics of the car and the music, partly analogous to the Chicano lowrider tradition in the Southwest, associates salsa with this social sector. (p. 69)

It is in this understanding that I wish to read the inclusion of multiple *canciones* (songs) spaced throughout the play. The dynamics of the songs both within the play and to the audience constitute trans-local interventions that challenge the erasure of the Afro-Puerto Rican community from the Puerto Rican (trans)national imaginary. This is particularly salient in understanding the inclusion and adaptation of these songs to a *bomba ritmo*.

In considering the “local” in trans-local, the placement of popular Latin music including *salsa* and *bomba* recognizes the role of music as a marker of racial and class differentiation. The use of *bomba* also demonstrates the divide between Don Viramundo and Anastasia. In her article “From Soberao to Stage: Afro-Puerto Rican *Bomba* and the Speaking Body,” Jade Power Sotomayor (2015) analyzes how *bomba* functions differently in two spaces “between theatricalized representations of the form [the stage] and performative enactments of community [the *soberao*]” (pp. 707-08). Nonetheless, she is quick to underscore the dynamic tensions between them, where one space does not necessarily indicate an erasure of another. Ultimately, she (2015) argues

performances of *bomba* in each of these spaces, provide a window into the multiple power dynamics surrounding issues of authenticity, commodification, innovation, the circulation of this embodied practice as a source of pleasure and enjoyment and finally, of *bomba* as a signifier for racial and political subalternity. (p. 708)

Rather than merely a commodification of entertainment, as Don Viramundo suggests to Anastasia earlier, [“Those young kids can make money by entertaining tourists dancing to that music that they like so much”], then we can understand *bomba* as a way for the community to negotiate their racial and political subalternity. Re-writing these songs in the rhythm of *bomba* negotiates the two spaces that Power-Sotomayor identifies, namely the *soberao* and the *stage*. Although set within a piece of theater and on stage, I read these interjections of *bomba* and music as a “performative enactment of community.”

Thus, in using these popular songs of the time, Moreno doubly emphasizes the role of community. First, within the play, the inclusion of music is always within a scene of community that seeks to affirm the experiences of the local Puerto Ricans and create connections between the community in the face of oppression by

capitalist developers or the police. Secondly, by using popular songs and *dichos* [sayings], Moreno creates a connection between the *teatros* [theater artists] and the audience. Thus, in the process of having familiar lyrics come to hand, this music enacts community that places the audience within the experiences of the Loiceños and Anastasia. For example, the musicians in the play end the scene of birthday festivities with a song entitled *El Caracol* or “The Snail.”

In the play, the song begins with the lines, “There was once a time I did not know where to live. If there was rain, I endured the rain. If it was sunny, I endured the sun.”<sup>6</sup> Paralleling Anastasia’s housing dilemma, this metaphorical snail could not find a place to live. Anastasia’s dispossession and that of the community around her mirrored the sentiments of the third and second lines. Whether it was sunny or rainy, whether good news or bad news, Anastasia and the larger population had no choice but to endure. The spirit of endurance is itself seen in Moreno’s inclusion of a birthday party and scenes of everyday life amongst the tragedy of Adolfina Villanueva’s story. In the play, Don Viramundo’s visits are understood as interruptions to the daily lives of the family and Anastasia continues to live as if his threats will never come to pass. Furthermore, her crisis of where to live is not as simple as the snail’s absence of a home. Rather, Anastasia knows where her home is and that knowledge is being denied because of a legal absence of paperwork and Don Viramundo’s access to wealth and the correct papers in the face of the law.

The song’s refrain continues, “Frankly, to have to continue this agony, I would prefer to have been born a snail.”<sup>7</sup> The singer’s wish to have rather been born a snail marks the dignity given to mollusks as compared to marginalized human beings. As the last song of the birthday party, the musicians foreshadow the suffering yet to come upon Anastasia’s death. And yet, Anastasia/Adolfina is portrayed as being braver than this snail. Instead of wishing to be turned into a snail to ease this pain, she repeatedly stands up to Don Viramundo’s continued attempts at dispossession. Her agony is not solely located

in the plight of her own dispossession, but in the crisis of what will happen to her family and community.

In considering the “trans” in trans-local, I understand Moreno’s use of Latin popular music to highlight the shared experiences of suffering by dispossessed communities across the Caribbean generally and in the Dominican Republic and Cuba, specifically. In this way, the experiences of the Loícenos speak to the larger experiences of Afro-Caribbeans in an archipelagic and transnational sense as this music moves throughout the Caribbean and its diaspora.

### **Conclusion**

In his article “Negotiating Caribbean Identities” (1995), Jamaican cultural theorist Stuart Hall suggests that questions of identity are inherently invested in questions of representation and “almost always involve the silencing of something in order to allow something else to speak” (p. 2). He (1995) goes on further to say, “I want to explore the term ‘myth’ itself—the English are not good at myth, always opposing it on the one hand to reality, on the other hand to truth, as if you have to choose between them. I specifically do not want to choose between myth and reality, but to talk about the very real contemporary and historical effects of myths of identity” (p.1). The slippages between Adolfina Villanueva, the fictional Anastasia, and Zora Moreno speak to the effects of myths of identity for Puerto Rican subjects. The performance of Anastasia blurs the line between who is speaking. Is it Adolfina Villanueva? Is it Zora Moreno? Is it any subsequent actress who takes on the role or the audience who listens to her?

Zora Moreno’s remembering of Adolfina Villanueva through Anastasia marks her central belief that we must turn to marginalized individuals and their knowledges to challenge hegemonic ideologies. Nonetheless, there are limits to popular theater and the creation of new myths. Diana Taylor (2003) recognizes that

“popular theatre at times present[s] an oversimplified and programmatic view of conflict and resolution” (p. 198). Furthermore, because of its Marxist origins, it often ignores deep cultural differences to emphasize the primacy of class difference (Taylor, 2003, p. 198). To counter the challenges of popular theatre, we must heed Frantz Fanon’s (1965) warning that we cannot merely replace colonial myths with new ones (p. 34). Thus, Anastasia/Adolfina’s investment in indigenous and Afro-Puerto Rican logics is central to the power of this production.

Anastasia does not rely merely on one mythology but many. Nowhere is that seen more clearly than in the final scene where Anastasia’s death is preceded by the recitation of two narratives of mythology/history after her decision to confront the army of twenty police sent to execute the order of eviction. These narratives begin to be read when Anastasia’s two youngest children, five-year old Teté and four-year old Cocolito, find and begin to read *Historia de nuestros indios* that opens the play. At four and five, however, the children don’t read the book, but rather Anastasia’s voice is played over speakers reciting the lines. Alternating with the recitation, Teté begins to recite a familiar narrative that she does know—the prayer, Hail Mary.

Between the familiar words of the prayer and the *History of the Amerindians*, the entanglement of the final words of the recitation embody the processes of negotiating identities for the Caribbean. For Anastasia that is the negotiation of her identity as a Black, Christian mother in a moment of resistance and sacrifice. In having multiple stories of resistance, located theologically, historically and contemporaneously, Moreno destabilizes the binary produced between myth and reality. In remembering Adolfina as Anastasia she offers a new narrative of the future for Afro-Puerto Ricans that stems from the sacrifice of a woman who was black and mother.

A victim of what Cedric Robinson terms “racial capitalism,”<sup>8</sup> Anastasia/Adolfina’s death has been mythologized in the local

community, and she herself has been transformed into a symbol of resistance. However, in presenting multiple and competing mythologies in the play, Moreno is wary of replicating the silencing structure of myth. Instead, Moreno presents a protagonist that simultaneously recites Christian prayers, indigenous history, and promises of a democratic nation, to recognize the need to negotiate history and myth, alongside one another, to offer a politics of hope that continues to fight against the odds to realize new futures of possibility.

Therefore, I end this article with Anastasia's final words, perhaps an imagined memory of what Adolfinia's words would have been, punctuated only by the cries of her children screaming "*mami, mami*" and the sounds of bullets.

ANASTASIA: Do you all have no heart? Have they destroyed all feelings? But, my, what a thing, has that man gone crazy? Just last night he was here. How shameless, disgraceful, and cowardly man did that dirty capitalist Viramundo turn out to be. He thinks himself a bully. For that reason, I don't go to church. My temple is my home. Where is the justice of this country? Where? We too deserve the right to live.

What are you all pretending? As if you don't have family that lives in these conditions. We know we have to move. But you have to understand we are not robbing anyone. This piece of land belongs to our children. You can't make do with all that you have taken of us already?

Why don't you all go to the place where you can really do justice? Who gave us candles for this burial? We are not afraid because we haven't done anything wrong to be afraid. Get out! Out! It is you all who are invading our tranquility, our dignity.

Under hopelessness, confusion, and pain, she bends down to take hold of the grill. (Shouts). Where is the justice in this

country? Where is the justice in this country? Where are civil rights in this moment? Where is the so-called democracy? Where?"<sup>9</sup> (Moreno, 1981, pp. 201-02)

In these final words, Anastasia questions the many mythologies around nation, democracy and equality that permeate the Puerto Rican national imaginary both on the island and in the diaspora. Nonetheless, Moreno presents her play as a new mythology that offers a way to reimagine the conditions of possibility for Puerto Rican identity that is invested in a tale of a Black, matriarchal woman as a symbol of resistance through her act of remembering and memorializing Adolfinia in the figure of Anastasia.

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### Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> Translation Mine. Original Text: “Aunque nueh tro sindio vivían pacíficamente en su pueblo y rara vej peleaban entre sí, en mucha jocacione se vieron obligao a defendé suj tierra de lo conquihtadore jepañole.”
- <sup>2</sup> Translation Mine: Original Text: “Aunque ahora ustedes no lo quieran entender, eso va a beneficiar muchísimo a los residents tanto de Medianía, las Carreras, Colobó, a todo Loíza y a ustedes mismo si se quedaran por ahí.”
- <sup>3</sup> Translation Mine: Original Text: “Mire Don Viramundo, le agradehco suh buena intencione, pero esa historieta ya me la conojco. Ahora le pregunto yo. ¿En dónde uté tiene lo sojo? Fíjese bien, mi sijo no son de colore, son negro.”
- <sup>4</sup> Translation Mine: Original Text: “Es como dice Yoli la muchachita que ehtudia en el Sagrao, que en la mihma academia que ehtudió Sócrate, ehtudió Sófocle y también Crihto. Allí uttede no dejaron entrá ni a la Viljen María, pa’mantenelno, sumisa...y...”
- <sup>5</sup> Translation Mine. Original Text: “No te deseppere Anahtasia que bien claro lo dijo el gobelnadó en aquella propaganda. (Como un discurso politico.) No habrá boca sin pan, ni familia sin un hogá seguro”...
- <sup>6</sup> Translation mine. Original Text: “Hace ya un tiempo no se dónde vivir. Si hay lluvia aguanto lluvia. Si hay sol aguanto sol.”
- <sup>7</sup> Translation mine. Original Text: “Francamente de seguir esta agonía. Preferiría haber nacido caracol.”

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<sup>8</sup> See Leong on Racial Capitalism for further discussion. It is briefly defined here as “the process of deriving social and economic value from the racial identity of another person.”

<sup>9</sup> Translation Mine. Original Text: ANASTASIA: ¿Uttede no tienen corasón? ¿Le han dehtrosao loh sentimineto? Pero mi que cosa, ¿ese señor se ha vuelto loco? El anoche ehtuvo aquí... (Para sí.) Qué sinverguensa, dehgraciao y cobalde resultó el ricachón de Viramundo. El se cree el cheche. Pore so yo no visito la iglesia. Mi templo es mi casa. (A gritos.) ¿Dónde ‘ta la juticia de ehte paí? ¿Dónde? Nosotros también tenemo derecho a la vida.

¿Qué eh lo que pretenden? Parece que uttede no tienen familia que vivan en ehta condicione. Ya sabemo que noh tenemoh que mudá. Pero tienen que entendé que no le ehtamoh robando ná’ a nadie. Que ete pedacito ‘e tierra le peltenece a nuehstro sijo. ¿No se conforman con todo lo que ya noh jan quitao?

¿Por qué no se largan a donde realmente puedan cumplir con la justicia? ¿Quién le dio vela en ette entierro? No tenemo miedo polque na’ malo hemo hecho pa’tené miedo. Fuera, fuera, que son uttede lo que ‘tán invadiendo nuestra tranquilidad, nuehtra dignidá.

(Abatido por la desesperación, la confusión y el dolor, se agacha para coger la grilla. A gritos.) ¿Dónde ‘ta la juticia de’té pai? ¿Dónde ‘tá la juticia de’té pai? ¿Dónde ettán lo derecho civile en ehto momento? ¿Dónde ‘ta la llamada democracia? ¿Dónde? (201-02)