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## *Hablo Español, You Know?* Language and Identity in the Puerto Rican Diaspora

Rachel Ann Denton

University of Tennessee - Knoxville, [rdenton1@vols.utk.edu](mailto:rdenton1@vols.utk.edu)

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We have read this thesis and recommend its acceptance:

Sébastien Dubreil, Ruyard J. Alcocer

Accepted for the Council:

Carolyn R. Hodges

Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School

(Original signatures are on file with official student records.)

*Hablo Español, You Know?*  
**Language and Identity in the Puerto Rican Diaspora**

A Thesis Presented for the  
Master of Arts  
Degree  
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Rachel Ann Denton  
August 2014

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## **Dedication**

Dedicated to everyone who has ever asked, “who am I?”

## **Acknowledgements**

I would like to thank my committee members for their help, encouragement, and contributions throughout the creation of this project.

## Abstract

This thesis explores the relationship between language, personal identity, and culture among members of the Puerto Rican diaspora. Puerto Rico represents a unique situation socially and politically because of its colonial relationship with the United States. This relationship has facilitated a continuous circular migration to and from the mainland U.S. over the last century. As of 2012, the diasporic community now represents a greater population than those who remain on the island. While nationalistic debates in Puerto Rico have traditionally excluded this group (collectively dubbed “neoricans” or “Nuyoricans”), its recent contributions to literature and Puerto Rican cultural theory, as well as its sheer numbers have led many to reconsider traditional views about Puerto Rican identity. In this paper I first examine recent theories about definitions and constructions of identity and culture. This analysis specifically focuses on the role that language plays, both integrally and functionally, in identity constructs among bilingual communities and racial minorities. Next, I briefly discuss the historical context of Puerto Rican migration and debates about national identity. These debates have traditionally included language as a central factor, which becomes problematic when multiple generations of “nuyoricans” with varying Spanish language abilities are taken into consideration. Finally, I present an analysis of interviews with second generation “nuyoricans” who returned to the island in late adolescence or adulthood to live and work. In this analysis, I look at their perceptions of identity and culture and attempt to draw connections between their personal experiences and the perspectives presented in the literature.

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## Chapter 1

### Introduction

Where language and culture come together, personal experience and an individual sense of identity help Nuyoricans determine where they fit in the Puerto Rican sociocultural landscape.

*“It's ironic-- I've always been a misfit. [. . .] And in Puerto Rico, I was the new girl, I was the-- the Nuyorican... So, you know, I am still la Nuyorican, and if I go to the states I'll be the Puerto Rican and I-- I don't care. I've gotten used to it. I'm somewhere in the middle. I'm at that generation that's in the middle.”*

In her closing remarks, this is how one participant summarizes her experiences--and, in a way, those of thousands of mainland Puerto Ricans (“Nuyoricans”) who have returned to the island after a generation or multiple generations. They often come from pockets of Puerto Rican culture in cities such as New York and Chicago. Self-identifying as Puerto Ricans, they nevertheless fall into a separate category that is sometimes difficult to define, but is almost always separate from “true” (island native) Puerto Rican identity.

Since the American acquisition of Puerto Rico at the beginning of the twentieth century, national identity has been fiercely debated among scholars and policy makers. The one aspect that has remained virtually unquestioned, however, is the role of the Spanish language as a defining characteristic. Prominent writers and social theorists such as Seda-Bonilla (1972 & 1980) and Maldonado-Denis (1984) have insisted that Spanish is an indispensable part of what constitutes Puerto Rican identity, and that Nuyoricans of varying language abilities must necessarily be excluded from such constructions. While notable Nuyorican writers such as Tato Laviera have challenged this exclusion, studies like Zentella (1990) continue to find that Puerto Ricans generally differentiate between island natives and mainlanders. Currently, however, more Puerto Ricans reside outside of Puerto Rico than on the island, and it is becoming more and more difficult to exclude the diasporic community from the national collective.

This case study is an attempt to shed some light on the issues of language identity and cultural membership through an analysis of the cultural narratives of two Nuyorican women who currently reside in Puerto Rico after having spent their formative years in the mainland United States.

### **Statement of Problem and Rationale**

Identity construction is a complex and fluid phenomenon, incorporating both internal and external elements and experiences. The particular situation of Puerto Rico contributes an additional layer of complexity to this process. As such it warrants closer scrutiny. In an increasingly globalized context, such phenomena will only increase and become more nuanced as we move towards a pluralistic, multilingual global society. One way to better appreciate the processes that contribute to and affect identity construction is to examine how they play out in a social context. This study attempts to shed light on the identity-construction processes exhibited and performed by two Puerto Rican/Nuyorican women to better understand the reconfiguration of linguistic and cultural landscapes in such communities.

### **Purpose of the Study and Research Questions**

The purpose of this study is to examine the role of language in the process of identity construction in Puerto Rican women who represent the “Nuyorican” sector of the population. To achieve this goal, I pose the following research questions, general inquiries in an attempt to answer them via a case study of two individuals.

1. How do Nuyoricans define their concept of identity, and how do they self identify?
2. What is the linguistic profile of Nuyoricans? What are their language use patterns?
3. What role does language play in the identity construction process of Nuyoricans?
4. What are the tensions in Nuyorican issues of cultural belonging (puertorriqueñidad)

### **Delimitations**

This study focuses on the issue of language and the place of Nuyoricans in the construction of a collective Puerto Rican identity. I realize, however, that it is difficult to

address Puerto Rican nationalism or discussions of identity without acknowledging an omission that predates that of the Nuyoricans: the African contribution to the whole of Puerto Rican culture. Music, food, language, and race in Puerto Rico all bear traces of their African origins, even if a predominantly white intellectual elite has vehemently denied their influence or dismissed them as a “seasoning” in what is essentially an inherited European culture. Nevertheless, this subject represents an issue far too complex for the scope of this study. Numerous writers have dedicated themselves to this topic over the last half century, exploring the specific contributions of African culture and also defending their inclusion in the national narrative. (See Laó-Montes & Dávila [2001] and Flores [1997 & 2009]) In the future, it would be interesting to research the role that race (or perceived race) played in the experiences of Nuyoricans.

The nature of this study (a case study) also excludes broad generalizations and does not purport to make absolute claims about the experiences of the Puerto Rican diaspora. Literature and research have documented statistics and characteristics, and have drawn conclusions about the Puerto Rican migrant community as a whole. While I anticipate finding common factors, just as important in this project are the individual circumstances and experiences that have influenced a given concept of identity. Also fundamental in my qualitative approach is the idea that identity is ultimately determined on a personal level. Stereotypes, shared experiences, and common cultural aspects may produce similarities, but individuals ultimately make their own decisions about who they are and what defines that “self.” Thus interpretation is ultimately left up to the participant, while I, as a researcher, attempt to make connections between events and influences and the beliefs and perceptions they have produced.

## Chapter 2

### Literature Review

Identity is never a simple matter, but it is especially complicated in the case of Puerto Rico. An ambiguous political status, a historically problematic relationship with the United States and the English language, and dynamic diasporic communities that could potentially represent more than half of the actual population all contribute to the confounding debate over what qualifies someone as legitimately “Puerto Rican.” *Puertorriqueñidad*, or “Puerto Ricanness,” is described by Ruben del Rosario (1980) as the “totality of the sentiments and traits characteristic of the Puerto Rican people” (p. 58). The simplicity of this definition scarcely disguises the underlying ambiguity of what has been a source of constant debate over the last century. In order to begin to understand the complex matter of identity in the context of Puerto Rico, the major dimensions of national, ethnic, cultural, and linguistic identity must be taken into consideration. I will examine these areas, both from a theoretical stance and in relation to their role in the social reality of Puerto Rico. Before delving into questions of identity and their implications, however, it is important to account for the historical context of the island inasmuch as it is relevant to the interface with identity.

### History and Background

Puerto Rico, like much of the Americas, was colonized by Spain beginning at the end of the 15th century. When the Spanish arrived in Puerto Rico in 1493, the island was inhabited by the indigenous Taínos, all of whom were eventually eradicated or assimilated by the Spanish colonizers. The augment of the slave trade brought millions of Africans to the island, which served as a gateway to the rest of the Spanish empire. Thousands of slaves also remained in Puerto Rico and contributed to the ever-expanding genetic variety of the island. Thus the contemporary Puerto Rican “race” is a varying mixture of indigenous, African, and European elements, significant primarily because of the social and political confusion and discrepancy caused by such multiplicity, further

complicating matters of identity in Puerto Rico. The arrival of slaves and the growth of the sugar industry produced a system of wealthy landowners and a large labor class. During the final decline of the Spanish empire, Puerto Rico was increasingly neglected; by the Spanish American war at the end of the 19th century the island was almost exclusively agrarian, largely illiterate, and included relatively little industry or infrastructure.

Puerto Rico was ceded to the United States after the defeat of the Spanish in 1898. The first few decades of the twentieth century saw varying manifestations of an aggressive Americanization campaign that sought to transform the culture and inject English into island society, an effort met with constant resistance and antagonism by the inhabitants of the island. English was mandated as the language of instruction in public schools, and would remain a central point of bitter disagreements until the official reinstatement of Spanish in 1949, making language one of the earliest points of contention in the conflictive relationship between Puerto Rico and its North American proprietor. Early discontent produced a movement for independence that reached its zenith in the 1930's and would continue into the 1940's, despite efforts by the United States and Puerto Rican government to subdue it. Eventually, though, the rise of distinct political currents led to the implementation of an intermediate political status in 1949, when the first popularly elected governor was instated. The Puerto Rican constitution was ratified in 1952, establishing the island's official status as a commonwealth; the United States remained the sovereign power, but the newly established "free state" was largely able to determine its own internal rule.

Although Puerto Rico's official political status remained undetermined for the first half of the 20th century, residents were given United States citizenship in 1917. Citizen status permitted free movement to and from the island, and thus 1917 marked the beginning of what would come to be known as the "vaivén," a pattern of circular migration that characterizes the movement of Puerto Rican population. The last century has seen a series of waves leaving, and later returning to, the island. Following the second World War, the late 1940's and 1950's saw a net migration of nearly half a million

people to the United States. Minimum wage hikes on the island and industrial restructuring in New York City (the destination of the overwhelming majority of Puerto Ricans) swung the momentum back towards the island in the 1970's as many of these migrants returned to Puerto Rico with their families (Duany 2003). The exodus picked up again in the 1980's, and began to taper into the 1990's in conjunction with another wave of returnees. By 2000, nearly half of the entire Puerto Rican population was represented by the diaspora, and the most recent census data suggest that Puerto Ricans living outside of the island now constitute a majority of the population.

The circular flow of migration has contributed to a number of problems, most significantly the challenge of integrating (often English-dominant) children of return migrants into the Spanish-medium public school systems and local communities. The term "Nuyorican" is applied generally to Puerto Ricans from the United States, whether born on the mainland or returning after many years of absence, from New York City or from other areas (Zentella 1990). Traditionally excluded from the "authentic" Puerto Rican collective, the Nuyoricans of the diaspora now constitute a majority of the population. Prominent Nuyorican writers have emerged in recent decades, authoring the Nuyorican experience and claiming a place within the Puerto Rican collective. The diasporic majority has added another dimension of complexity to question of national identity and has forced a re-examination of many of the traditional aspects of what constitutes *puertorriqueñidad*.

## **Identity**

For the purpose of this study, I use "identity" as described by Groebner (2004): "an individual's subjective sense of self." When discussing matters of identity, however, it is nearly impossible to divorce the singular from the collective. Research and literature on identity traditionally focused on group phenomena such as nationalism, until Erickson (1968) pioneered the study of identity on a personal level, situating the personal within its social context and emphasizing the continuity between the two. Regardless of the subjectivity of a given individual's experience, Edwards (1990) corroborates, "the course

of human history, and its implications for every *individual*, is by and large fueled by perceptions of *groups*” (p. 22). Thus identity is twofold; we are each defined by a combination of the identity that we perceive, choose, or imagine for ourselves, and that which is imposed upon us by the perception of others (Kramsch 2009). Barth (1969) describes it as the conjunction of “two subjective processes, ‘self ascription’ -- how one defines oneself -- and ‘ascription by others’ -- how others define one” (p. 13). Identity, then, is a necessary combination of the collective (group membership or exclusion) and the individual (perception, experience, and interpretation).

Collective membership can often be traced to racial, political, geographical, or linguistic factors, both objective and subjective. Similarly, individual identity is inherently subjective, constructed from a person’s experiences and influences, but can also be subject to exterior impositions (Garrett 2007). It is also contextual, entirely dependent on time, place, and circumstances (Bailey 2007). Factors such as socialization and interaction highlight the necessary relationship between the individual and society as a whole, as identity in a given moment is ultimately the “result of processes of self presentation, which emerge socially in the course of a person’s encounters with others” (Niño-Murcia & Rothman 2008b:12). Most importantly, identity is dynamic, constantly being reevaluated and adapted to new situations, ideas, and experiences.

Never has this adaptation and reconstruction been more prevalent than in the twentieth century, marked by unprecedented levels of transnational migration, resulting in numerous diasporas and “disrupted communities” (Niño-Murcia & Rothman 2008b). Traditional group affiliations are suddenly fragmented and de-centered, leading to tension as individuals and groups attempt to establish meaning and coherence in a shifting identity (Pavlenko & Blackledge 2004). The individual experience and collective subjectivity intersect when dominant narratives are imposed on minority groups who also have their own ideas about their sense of self. Thus stereotypes, assumptions, and generalizations often fail to accurately represent the true nature of a group or an individual within that group.

This unstable and subjective nature makes identity difficult to define at a given moment, which often creates the need for an “Other,” a means to identification through what one is *not* (Morris 1995). Identity is then reduced to a set of static, homogenous characteristics which serve to contrast with a group to which one does not belong. A simplistic, black-and-white definition of identity is easily disseminated and perpetuated, as classification through absolute characteristics creates the impression of neatly delineated group borders. A closer examination quickly reveals, however, that exceptions, anomalies, and multi-group memberships create borders that, in reality, are often porous, disputed, or at times even imperceptible. This paradox of group identity can explain how seemingly contradictory ideas about identity and membership can coexist within in a collective like Puerto Rico. Combined with the subjectivity of the individual’s perception, experiences, and actions, determining and assigning identity becomes an increasingly difficult task.

On an individual level, identity can be argued to be a series of decisions about one’s social presentation, and nowhere is this more true than in a multilingual setting<sup>1</sup>. In the case of members of a multilingual collective (such as Puerto Ricans), language takes both a functional and elemental role in the construction of identity. Realities and identities are crafted through discourse, and at the same time serve as characteristics within the discursive paradigm. On an individual level, speakers use language to label and differentiate themselves and others, whether through identification or contrast (Bailey, 2007). Additionally, speakers of multiple languages develop both new dimensions within their previous identities, and separate identities through which they view themselves in the different languages (Kramsch, 2009). Thus the languages themselves function as part of what constitutes the multilingual’s “self.”

In a similar fashion, language serves as an identity marker for multilingual communities on a collective, especially in a community like Puerto Rico where language

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<sup>1</sup> Linguists disagree about what qualifies a person as bi-, tri-, or multilingual in terms of language knowledge and use (see Montrul, S. [2013]; and Aronin, L. & Singleton, D. [2012]). For the purposes of this study, I use “multilingual” generally in contrast with “monolingual.”

is inextricably tied to the most deeply rooted cultural debates. Pousada (1996) examines the factors that have influenced the question of language in Puerto Rico, and finds that disagreements over language use and education originate from disagreements over identity. “[S]peaking a particular language means belonging to a particular speech community; speaking more than one may (or may not) suggest variations in identity and allegiances.” (Edwards, 2009: 248). “Those whose bilingual competence is nurtured early will, other things being equal, have a firmer foot in the two (or more) camps (252).

This study focuses on this critical role that language can play in the formation of an individual’s identity. As previously mentioned, however, identity is a complex phenomenon that is the product of numerous factors and influences. Before discussing language, it is important to understand several of the other major components that contribute to identity and how they come into play in the context of Puerto Rico.

### **National Identity**

Collective identity, or “groupness,” manifests itself in perhaps its most potent form and on the largest scale in the phenomenon of nationalism. I employ “nation” as the “imagined community” described by Anderson (1980), wherein individuals share a cultivated (albeit imaginary) sense of unilateral fraternity, often to a political end. Among the most studied social developments of the modern age, national identity is often determined by a select group of individuals and applied collectively to include (or exclude) members based on certain criteria, almost always for political purposes (see Anderson, 1983; Connor, 1980; and Gellner, 1983 & 1997)<sup>2</sup>. Often drawing from preexisting aspects of group identity, such as ethnicity, culture, or language, “national self-determination is an assertion of political legitimacy” for a given (imagined) community (Connor 1980).

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<sup>2</sup> Interestingly, Anderson notes that it was perhaps the development of regional vernacular languages in a Latin-dominated Europe that originally led to distinguishing between “nations” in the sense of collective commonalities. Communities were suddenly able to initiate an internal discourse apart from the dominance and exclusivity of Latin, and thus language became the original characteristic of “the nation.”

The question of political legitimacy is problematic in the case of Puerto Rico, however, as the heretofore colonial status of the island has directly negated the possibility of such legitimacy. Nevertheless, nationalistic debates are continuous, and political forces have resorted to other means of establishing national identity, namely through contrast with an Other. Ever since the North American acquisition of Puerto Rico, concepts of nationalism have been constructed in opposition to the imposition of American law, authority, and language (Duany 2000). Such an essentialist discourse, framing identity within a limited set of absolute criteria, is well suited to political strategy. As a result, Puerto Rican identity is often reduced to a series of simplified dichotomies. As early as the 1940's these dichotomies were evident in society and discourse about national identity (Steward 1956). Islanders describe others as being "de allá" or "de afuera" ("from there" or "from outside") in contrast with "de aquí" (from here) to differentiate themselves, both from North Americans and Nuyoricans (Ramos-Zayas 2004). In 1969, an anti-Vietnam War protester famously proclaimed, "Either you're a Yanqui or you're a Puerto Rican" (*New York Times* 1969). As Barreto (2001) notes, however, the nationalist constructs that gain the most popular support focus on one defining characteristic with which to unify the people. And no characteristic has appeared at the forefront of nationalist discourse as consistently as language, an invariable and absolute criterion in contrast with the United States.

The issue of language represented an ideal foundation for an elite-led nationalist campaign in Puerto Rico, in part because of the lack of other definitive national identifiers, but also because language could at once unify and dictate a standard (Zentella 1990). Anderson (1996) states that in contrast with the isolation of ancient communities, the modern industrialized society must define and defend its existence through an "abstract, literacy-based high culture." Thus the intellectual elite write the idealized nation into existence. Shared language, daily habits, culture, and political institutions come to represent the abstract concept of the "national character." In the case of Puerto Rico, the intelligentsia have had an especially prominent role, as writers and intellectuals such as Pedreira (1934), Marqués (1967), González (1980), and Díaz Quiñones (1993)

have essentially served as the architects of political nationalism (Ramos-Zayas 2004). Over the course of the last century, canonical writers such as these have addressed the racial, historical, linguistic, and social factors that constitute the Puerto Rican nation in their respective opinions, each disputing and qualifying the claims of his predecessor. In fact, the entire political party system in Puerto Rico is essentially based on disagreements over national identity (see Morris 1995). Beyond the island's borders, however, the matter becomes less sharply defined, which brings to light other aspects of *puertorriqueñidad*.

### **Ethnic Identity**

Often so closely tied to nationalism as to become inextricable, or even used interchangeably and merged with the concept of “the nation,” ethnicity or ethnic identity is nevertheless another volatile and ambiguous aspect of debates over what warrants inclusion in the Puerto Rican collective. In discussions about group identity, “ethnicity,” “nation,” and even “ethnonationalism” are often employed indiscriminately or synonymously to refer to the same concept. It is important to distinguish, however, between the fundamentally political nature and motives of nationalism, and the social and anthropological character of ethnicity (Hobsbawm 1996).

I employ Conversi's (2002) interpretation of “ethnicity” as a “belief in putative descent, [...] a perception of commonality and belonging supported by a *myth of common ancestry*” (emphasis mine). Thus ethnicity exists in a mythical, immaterial realm based on the subjectivity of perception (Connor 1997)<sup>3</sup>. Easily mythologized, shared origins readily lend themselves to the fabrication of the “imagined community” among members whose common characteristics may extend no further than such origins. Nationalism can then be viewed as a natural “extension of ethnicity,” distinguishing between the “self-defined” nation and “other-defined” ethnicity (Edwards 1985: 5). As ethnic groups are often synonymous with minority groups, the dominant group which considers itself the

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<sup>3</sup> Glazer and Moynihan (1975) note that the term “ethnicity” entered into the English language only recently; they cite its first sociological use as appearing in David Riesman's work in 1953.

default, natural, or neutral ethnicity, draws the boundaries of ethnic divisions. Thus separatist movements in particular tend to be drawn along ethnic lines.

According to Connor (1972), a nation is essentially an ethnic group that is self-aware (and has theoretically asserted itself politically). Group identity, then, is inherently psychological, as Connor argues that all overt characteristics could be eliminated and the individual would still maintain the fundamental identity of membership. Often ethnic groups, much like their nationalist manifestations, must establish what they are *not* before they are able to establish what they *are*, again necessitating an Other to serve as contrast. Akin to universal concepts of identity, theories of ethnicity and its origins are generally divided between primordialists, who view ethnic affiliations as given rather than chosen, and immutable rather than malleable, and constructivists who view ethnicity as subjective and changeable (Fishman 2002). Multi-group membership (such as that of Nuyoricans) validates the latter, as a “diffuse” identity results from a less sharply defined sense of ethnicity (Clachar 1997b).

Shared, static characteristics contribute to the myth of origin, and language is often presented as the most fundamental aspect of ethnic identity. At the very least it is the most objective, easily identified, and frequently referenced aspect of ethnic identity, and has been tied to national identity since the beginning of the 19th century (Niño-Murcia and Rothman 2008b). The emergence of the field of ethnohistorics exemplifies the connection between the two (Edwards 2009). Meanwhile, ethnic constructivists argue that loss of language does not necessarily imply a loss of ethnic identity, citing examples of groups whose identity has persisted in spite of the loss of their traditional languages to colonial influences or greater nationalistic interests. Puerto Rican linguist Ruben Rosario (1962) concedes that “there is not, ultimately, a necessary connection between nation and language, because the language is not a faithful reflection of the collective soul of the people.[ . . . ] However, since the Renaissance, European languages have acquired a *symbolic* value for the governing and the governed” (p. 30). It is precisely this argument that Nuyoricans claim in support of their inclusion in the Puerto Rican collective. Much

like the flag, the Spanish language is simply a marker to point to when borders come into question.

In Puerto Rico, ethnicity is yet another piece of the complex puzzle of identity, but it differs from characteristics such as language in that it is often arbitrary and contradictory. On the island, distinctions of “ethnicity” are based exclusively on physical characteristics, whether skin color, hair texture, or facial features (Seda-Bonilla 1972). In the context of the United States, however, race and ethnicity are often confused, and in a strictly black/white classification system, any amount of “black” makes one “black.” The Puerto Rican *mélange* of indigenous, African, and European heritage understandably becomes problematic in such a system. In contrast, any amount of other racial elements is generally sufficient to make one “not black” in Latin America (Landale & Oropesa 2002). Further complicating the matter is the fact that most Puerto Ricans consider themselves to be “white.” That is, until they find themselves in a North American society that considers them “non-white.” In the context of mainstream society in the United States, Puerto Ricans, failing to fit neatly into the binary categories, are forced to identify with one group or another, and often divide among lines of skin color. Lighter-skinned Puerto Ricans intermix with other white-looking “assimilated” minorities, such as European immigrants, while the darker-skinned fall in with similar groups of Hispanics or Blacks (Seda-Bonilla 1972).

Seda-Bonilla (1972) also notes that while earlier waves of mid-century Puerto Rican migrants attempted to assimilate into mainstream American culture, a second generation of Nuyoricans in the 60’s and 70’s rejected the “white” standard and instead chose to embrace the Black Power movement, promoting the legitimacy and value of the minority group. The relationship between blacks and Puerto Ricans, particularly in New York City, reinforces the debatable nature of Puerto Rican ethnicity. In contrast with other Hispanic groups (most notably the Chicano community), Puerto Ricans in urban areas have a close affinity with blacks, often adopting the same speech patterns and modes of dress. Some attribute this connection to the shared African heritage that links the groups both racially and culturally, an influence that is much more diluted or even

nonexistent in most of Latin America beyond the Caribbean (Flores 1997). Landale and Oropesa (2002) found that ethnic self-identification was often based simply on appearance and could easily be altered by language preference, education, socioeconomic status, or even by the phrasing of the inquiry. The inconsistency of ethnicity and its frequent confusion with race make it at best a dubious means of defining identity and certainly fails to resolve disagreements over membership in the case of Puerto Rico.

### **Cultural Identity**

While the ambiguity of ethnicity leads to its entanglement in conceptions of nationalism on one end, on the other end it is also difficult to distinguish it from matters of culture. The complexities of internal and external confusion over ethnic identity have led Puerto Ricans to search for other means of establishing criteria for group membership, and cultural elements have become the markers by which many identify themselves. Culture can include everything from food and music to gesture and expression. In contrast with the essentialist potential of national and ethnic definitions, culture is perhaps the most amorphous of the group characteristics. In this case, I employ “culture” as described by Reyes Cruz & Sonn (2011) to refer broadly to shared values, beliefs, practices, products and norms of social groups (e.g., nation-states, ethnic groups). And while there exist entire institutions dedicated to the study of culture, I am going to focus primarily on the most visible aspects, as an in-depth analysis of social attitudes and behavioral nuances exceeds the scope of this study. Additionally, a limited number of “iconic” cultural elements (often generalizations themselves) tend to recur as evidence or justification of membership in the case of Puerto Rican identity.

In his eloquent travel narrative, Victor Hernández Cruz (2010) describes a journey to Morocco where he draws connections with Puerto Rican culture. The influence of the Spanish is readily apparent in Puerto Rico, as in most of Latin America, particularly in the language and the Catholic Church. Spanish culture itself is also deeply rooted in the long history of contact with Arabic culture, with much of the Spanish lexicon originating from Arabic. He notes the warm openness of social interaction and an emphasis on

hospitality shared by both Hispanic and Arabic culture. He makes a distinction in the case of Puerto Rico, however, where North American “hostility” towards strangers has been adopted by many. Puerto Rico also emphasizes social interaction and community, valuing the art of conversation and an expressiveness of communication. Such characteristics are easily named, but difficult to justify as objective markers of culture. Thus “culture” is often reduced to a list of clearer items that can be pointed to.

A simple inquiry reveals the variability of “culture” within the collective context. When asked what constitutes “culture” in Puerto Rico, individuals include everything from specific foods to ambiguous aspects such as gestures or ways of speaking. Morris (1995) reported that interviewees frequently listed “customs,” “traditions,” and even “culture” itself as markers of the Puerto Rican culture. Other frequent responses include music, food, religion, greetings, and, most consistently, speech: from ways of speaking to the language itself. An emphasis on family ties also reflect Puerto Rico’s shared heritage with its fellow Latin American cultures. In contrast with the United States, female return migrants often cite a marked difference in gender norms between mainland and island society. Attitudes and expectations for women tend to be much more restrictive in Puerto Rico, particularly in more rural areas (Pérez 2004).

In spite of the lack of consensus over cultural elements, both island natives and Nuyoricans alike point to culture as an indicator of identity, although ideas about what constitutes this culture may never coincide from one individual to the next. What also becomes problematic is the disparity between ideas about Puerto Rican culture on and off the island. The preservation of key cultural aspects in the diasporic communities has been widely observed, as mainland Puerto Ricans are constantly defending their belonging against the plurality of cultures that coexist in the United States. Solidarity and ethnic identity accompany knowledge of and participation in “official traditions.” It could even be argued that the *barrio* culture presents more objective characteristics that identify it as “Puerto Rican.” The luxury of an immediate Other facilitates essentialist identifications, as Nuyoricans assert their membership within a minority community. The “Puerto Rican” culture of the New York City *barrios*, however, actually represents an anachronism in the

contemporary island context. Nuyoricans who have grown up eating traditional dishes and dancing to salsa music are often surprised to discover an absence of salsa clubs and an abundance of fast food restaurants on the island. Membership, then, becomes a question of “authenticity,” as implicit knowledge of cultural norms is deployed as social capital. “Authentic” Puerto Ricans are aware of social norms on the island and can use such knowledge to claim membership, even though the island culture is nearly impossible to conclusively define (Ramos-Zayas 2004).

Cultural characteristics also bleed over from racial and ethnic ambiguities, but again differentiate the cultural experiences of Puerto Ricans on and off the island. In urban settings, Nuyoricans (along with other afrolatino groups) often adopt the dress and speech styles of the black hip-hop culture. Flores (2009) cites language, sports, and religion as significant markers of the afrolatino culture in the United States, but adds that music is by far the most significant. For Nuyoricans, salsa and hip-hop mingle with jazz, mambo, conga, and bossa nova in broader multicultural urban contexts where Puerto Ricans are integrated into Latin and Afro collectives that serve as contrast to dominant white culture. In Puerto Rico, the drum-based music and dance “bomba” is both characteristically Puerto Rican and also the symbol of African cultural heritage, while the calypso and rap-influenced reggaetón represent urban music on the island (Rivera Rideau 2013).

What is significant in the case of culture is the authenticity of the “Puerto Rican” experience in both places, illustrating the influence of context on identity as well as the subjectivity and multiplicity of its construction.

### **Linguistic Identity**

“Puerto Rico habla español.” With this unembellished declaration, Ernesto Juan Fonfrias begins his eloquent, albeit romanticized, genealogy of Puerto Rican Spanish in his essay “Geografía, Voz y Espiritu de Puerto Rico en el Idioma Español.” He adds, “Puerto Rico speaks Spanish because it is the language of its culture, [. . .] its mother tongue. In [the language] resides its nationality” (Fonfrias, 1966: 57). While the opening

statement is indisputable (Spanish is, in fact, universally present in Puerto Rico), any further assertion about how, where, when, why, and to what degree launches discussion into areas of increasing ambiguity and subjectivity.

Numerous linguistic studies have documented the nuances of Spanish in Puerto Rico. On a general level, it exhibits similarities to other Caribbean varieties, primarily those of Cuba and the Dominican Republic. Two notable characteristics distinguish Puerto Rican Spanish from neighboring dialects: the frequency of the ñ [ɲ] sound, in large part attributable to the influence of African languages, and the use of a fricative, velar [ɣ] sound (similar to that of French or German) in place of the trilled [ʀ] (Rosario 1962). “Clipped endings” also characterize the Puerto Rican tendency to drop final consonants (Pérez 2004). The influence of the United States is evidenced by the frequency of anglicisms, borrowings, and calques in Puerto Rican Spanish, but the effects of North American influence are not limited to linguistic variations.

Forcible efforts to Americanize Puerto Rican society and a century of political struggle have fueled the conflict over language, which at once symbolizes national identity and represents the cultural imperialism of the United States. Beginning in 1902, Spanish and English shared official status for government and business, until a 1991 law established Spanish as the single official language. By 1993, however, the 1902 precedent was reinstated in a move characteristic of the volatile and discordant politics of the island. As mentioned earlier, battles over English in public schools spanned the first several decades of the American presence in Puerto Rico. A century of official bilingualism, though, hardly reflects Puerto Rico’s linguistic reality. Spanish is still overwhelmingly the language of daily life and affairs among all members of Puerto Rican society. Figures on functional bilingualism range from 15 to 25% of the population, but surveys as recent as 2012 find that at least half the population is functionally monolingual in Spanish (U.S. Census Bureau 2012). While most recognize the educational and economic benefits of also knowing English, Steward et al. (1956) observed that Spanish became a symbol of national identity only after the United States worked so hard to eradicate it.

One of the greatest concerns about the Spanish language in Puerto Rico is its supposed debilitation as a result of the presence of English. Some even argue that the mixture and confusion between the two will ultimately result in the disfiguring of both languages beyond recognition (Zentella 1990). That particular claim was made in writing three decades ago, and the currently thriving status of Spanish is evidence to the contrary. Even so, contamination is still a concern among purists. Zentella also points out that the close link between language and national identity makes a threat to the language seem like an attack on national identity itself. Given the nebulous nature of the presence of North American media and mass culture, critics often find the Nuyoricans to be a much more visible scapegoat for perceived degradation of the Spanish language (Pousada 1996).

The problem of language loss and debilitation over the course of several generations of immigrants has been well documented, and Puerto Ricans are no exception. By the third generation, many of them demonstrate the common characteristics of the progressive loss of a minority language: they may possess a limited linguistic knowledge, or may even be passive bilinguals, who understand but do not speak the language (Wiley 2007). In their majority, they are also illiterate in Spanish, thanks to an academic formation in an English-speaking school system that even prohibited the use of Spanish in some cases. Many times, subsequent generations then consider themselves more culturally than linguistically linked to their heritage.

It is precisely the linguistic aspect, however, that disqualifies Nuyoricans' claim to membership in the eyes of the cultural elite. Seda-Bonilla (1972) claims that second generation Puerto Ricans are only considered such because of the North American racism that continues to marginalize them. "The Nuyoricans," he writes, "do not realize that their language is English and the language of Puerto Ricans is Spanish" (457). While they may attempt a return to Puerto Rican culture, Nuyoricans are the "prototype of a people without a homeland" (459). On another occasion Seda-Bonilla claims that even 100,000 Puerto Rican pride parades and 100 years of living in Puerto Rico could not change the fact that one was born, raised, and educated in the United States (1975). A Nuyoricano

sociologist was acutely aware of this attitude when he stated, “to be Puerto Rican is to be inseparable from your language, so it is particularly offensive to any Puerto Rican to listen to anyone who claims to be Puerto Rican and does not know the language” (Betances, quoted in Ghigliottty 1983).

### **Language and Identity**

As mentioned previously, identity is the product of constant negotiation in a situation where multiple languages are present. A collection of interviews conducted with Puerto Ricans of all political persuasions found the most consistently cited element of Puerto Ricanness was the Spanish language. It was described by the majority as “fundamental” or “extremely important” to their conceptions of Puerto Ricanness. (Morris 1995:82). As Edwards (1985) points out, “the basic distinction here is between language in its ordinarily understood sense as a tool of communication, and language as an emblem of groupness, as a symbol, a rallying point.” As mentioned previously, Nuyoricans and island natives alike distinguish outsiders using a here-there or inside-outside dichotomy to differentiate the island from other environments. Even in contexts outside of the island, however, the choice of language and its content both reflect attitudes about belonging.

Puerto Ricans who have lived their entire lives on the island enjoy an implicit membership in the Puerto Rican collective. Those who are part or have been part of the diaspora, however, must negotiate membership that is much more complex. As is often the case with minority groups in a “dominant culture” setting like the United States, language is as much a trait as a tool for defining different groups. Confusion over race and ethnicity in the United States has popularized the “Hispanic” label as a blanket term for people of predominantly Spanish speaking heritage, regardless of their actual ethnicity or linguistic status. Millions of people are indiscriminately homogenized by this label, but it is frequently adopted by Hispanics themselves as a means of self identification in solidarity (Oboler 1992).

Labels are often used not only as a claim to membership, but also to mark a distinction between self and an Other. Although heard less frequently now than in past decades, Puerto Ricans and Nuyoricans alike refer to members of the United States mainstream as “Yanquis.” This term is also employed by cultural island elite as a disparaging reference to Nuyoricans who (“undeservingly”) claim Puerto Rican identity (Seda-Bonilla 1972). Puerto Ricans in the United States often refer to “Americans” or “*americanos*” as a separate group, implying membership in something distinct from mainstream society (Bailey 2007). “Gringo,” a term with derogatory origins, is also used frequently to refer generally to white English speakers in the United States. Once on the island, however, the tables are turned, as return migrants find themselves labeled “gringo” or “american” in contrast with island natives. While maintaining that they are in fact Puerto Rican, Nuyoricans also qualify the claim, distinguishing themselves from the “real” or “regular” Puerto Ricans, belying the subjective character of their *Puertorriqueñidad* (Zentella 1990).

The categories and hierarchies established through labeling create conditional membership within the Puerto Rican collective while simultaneously calling into question the rigidity of its borders. Much less explicit, but perhaps even more significant, is the language itself. In a multilingual setting, language choice is always significant, as a speaker evokes a particular identity or discourse through a given language (Garrett 2007). Often described as a “damned if you do, damned if you don’t” dichotomy, the polemical status of language in Puerto Rico contributes an additional dimension of conflict to multilingual tensions (Schweers & Vélez 1992). Bilingualism, for Nuyoricans, is stigmatized in both contexts: the use of Spanish is an affront to the homogenous, monolingual ideological currents of “mainstream” American society, while the use of English is a betrayal of Hispanic heritage and identity in Puerto Rico.

Even without full proficiency, Spanish language knowledge and use represent an ingroup marker among Puerto Ricans in the United States. The lack of proficiency, however, becomes the paradoxical marker of Otherness, and English becomes the ingroup language for return migrants who find themselves stigmatized by their peers

(Clachar 1997b). Kramsch (2009) notes that speech communities are quick to stigmatize, and adds that accent alone is sufficient to betray an outsider. Even after decades on the island, many Nuyoricans still “agonize over speaking correctly” for fear of giving themselves away as outsiders (Pérez 2004). In spite of linguistic difficulties and discrimination, however, many return migrants admit to an unwillingness to use Spanish even with people who do not know English, asserting their membership in the English-dominant Nuyoric group (Clachar 1997b). This linguistic divergence presents a challenge to absolutist notions of identity as Nuyoricans maintain their claim to membership.

Numerous surveys have been conducted on the views of both Nuyoricans and Puerto Rican island natives regarding the necessity of language. As much as 90% of Nuyoric respondents in a given survey will not consider Spanish to be essential to claim a Puerto Rican identity (Zentella 1990). And while the cultural elite of the island may aggressively dispute such a claim, the question remains: who is ultimately the authority? And furthermore, if the Spanish language is neither an essential nor a unique characteristic, then what does in fact constitute a legitimate claim to a Puerto Rican identity? Ultimately, I believe the answer lies somewhere in the middle. The culture of the diaspora is one characterized by duality and the space in between: both Nuyoricans and island natives find themselves between two languages, two places, and two cultures. In my research I examine how they interpret and reconcile this duality on an individual level, and what role language has played in their experiences and their perceptions of self.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Methodology**

#### **Participants**

For this study I interviewed two people. I sought second generation Puerto Ricans who had either been born or moved during infancy to New York, and who had moved to Puerto Rico in late adolescence or early adulthood. This way, they would still have fairly close ties to Puerto Rico (through first generation parents) but would have spent their formative years primarily outside of the island. Having grown up in the mainland United States also implies having attended English-medium schools in the United States.

The first participant is a female university professor in her mid-fifties. For purposes of confidentiality, I will refer to her as Yolanda. It is important to note that Yolanda's father is actually Cuban. As her interview reveals, however, she self-identifies as Puerto Rican, and also had relatively little contact with her Cuban family. Her parents also divorced when she was fairly young, and she remained with her mother and/or other maternal family members. Born in New York City, Yolanda lived in various Hispanic neighborhoods in the city, but spent summers and Christmas holidays with relatives in Puerto Rico. She completed high school and began college in New York, but moved to Puerto Rico after the first semester and ultimately completed her bachelor's degree there. She returned to New York briefly for a master's program and then made a final transition back to the island, where she currently resides. She married and divorced in Puerto Rico, where her parents and only child live as well.

The second participant, whom I will call Adriana, is also in her mid-fifties and works as a journalist. Adriana was born in New York City to Puerto Rican parents and lived in the Bronx until her parents abruptly decided to relocate the family shortly into her junior year of high school. While she had intended to attend college in New York, moving to Puerto Rico excluded her from "resident" status, making entry into the university nearly impossible. She instead completed a bachelor's degree in journalism at

the University of Puerto Rico. Married and divorced, she has two children who reside on the island. In spite of her initial resistance to leaving New York, she has yet to return since she left nearly 40 years ago.

### **Procedures**

For this study I employed a qualitative research methodology, as I am primarily interested in the personal experiences of the participants and how they perceive themselves as a result of these experiences. Qualitative research allows for the full scope of individual variability without restricting or generalizing human behavior and perception. As a researcher working from a constructivist paradigm, I am also interested in allowing for the variations that accompany unique individual realities. I feel that I do not have the authority to confirm or deny what someone perceives as reality. A case study seemed most appropriate for my research objectives; Yin (2003) states that case studies are best suited goals such as answering “how” and “why” questions, identifying contexts, and limiting boundaries, given the close relationship between the context and the phenomenon being studied.

To gather data, I chose to conduct interviews. Seidman (2006) describes the root motivation for interviewing as “an interest in understanding the lived experience of other people and the meaning they make of this experience,” which precisely describes my intentions in this study. Using a semi-structured interview protocol, I interviewed each of the participants using Skype and a call recorder that archived audio and video of the interviews<sup>4</sup>. Each of the interviews lasted between 60 and 90 minutes. I initiated the interviews in Spanish, although I encouraged the participants not to feel restricted to a single language and to answer as they felt comfortable. Yolanda responded almost exclusively in Spanish, while Ariana began in Spanish but quickly switched to English. I found this curious, as she seemed to feel less comfortable in English. Anecdotally, I have experienced this on multiple occasions in Puerto Rico in spite of my Spanish fluency. My

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<sup>4</sup> See Appendix A for interview protocol

appearance is very clearly Caucasian, and I found that Puerto Ricans often default to English with people they perceive (or assume) to be American, regardless of their actual competency in English.

During the interview, I took what Kvale and Brinkman (2009) describe as a “traveler” approach; I began with very few assumptions and remained open to whatever discoveries might be made during the course of the interview. The questions included inquiries about general biographical information (Where were you born? When did you move to Puerto Rico?), social and linguistic experiences (What was your home language environment like? Did you ever experience discrimination because of your race or language? What was your initial experience like upon moving to Puerto Rico?), and self perception and identity (Did you consider yourself to be Puerto Rican? What qualified you as Puerto Rican? Do you think language was an important part of that identity?). The participants frequently volunteered information about things like awareness of their cultural identity, experiences with discrimination, and difficulties with language. I asked follow up questions as necessary, for clarification or elaboration. Occasionally I would follow a topic or opinion that I found interesting or surprising with probes for further information.

The interviews were transcribed and then coded, looking primarily for indicators of cultural and linguistic identity, while remaining open to other themes that emerged. A running list of codes was maintained and evolved through the coding process<sup>5</sup>. I obtained consent from the participants to record the interviews, and I followed the University of Tennessee’s IRB protocol for ethical research practices.

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<sup>5</sup> See Appendix B for the list of codes.

## Chapter 4

### Results and Discussion

The interview protocol was intended to follow a more-or-less biographical trajectory, establishing early environments and experiences before discussing the transition to Puerto Rico and their current retrospective thoughts about their experiences. In spite of profiles that seemed similar at first, Yolanda and Adriana both recounted unique experiences that shaped their views and ideas of self. Each painted a complex picture of inclusion, exclusion, and self-awareness. They also revealed how much their individual personalities affected their perceptions and reactions. Adriana displayed a brashness and self-confidence that proved advantageous both during her time in New York and in her transition to life in Puerto Rico. On the other hand, Yolanda described herself as a quiet child who kept to herself and preferred the familiarity of home and family. What was clear throughout both interviews, however, was that an identification with the Puerto Rican collective was constant, even if marked by caveats, complications, or multiplicity. While language remained prominent, a complex array of factors formed an intricate, multi-faceted picture of individual identity.

There were two defining themes that appear repeatedly throughout the participants' discussions of self. The first is identification through contrast. While identity can be impossibly complex, it is easy to point to simplistic classifications. Thus it is often the Other who serves as the negative for the image of self in many of the moments when participants are most confident in their identities. It is clear that their concepts of self are not limited to such simplistic dichotomies, but such comparisons certainly play a part in facilitating self-categorization and definition. The necessity of contrast also emphasizes the duality of an in-between identity such as that of the Nuyoricans. When the context shifts, so too does the nature of the contrast and the implications of definition through an Other. Thus context often proves to be a central factor in defining the self in a given moment.

A second theme that appears to surface represents the opposite extreme of the spectrum of identity. When not limited to identification through contrast, the participants' perceptions of self and their explanations of their identities frequently fall outside of discernible categories. Instead, they define themselves through the intangible, amorphous aspects of sentiment and intuition, which suggests that, to some degree, the true nature of identity is unable to be defined, categorized, or even articulated. Even so, there are still definitive aspects that can be used to construct a picture of what constitutes identity for some Nuyoricans.

### **Nuyoricans' Concepts of Identity and Self-Identification**

In determining the role of language in the Nuyoric identity, it is first necessary to understand how Nuyoricans define and view themselves. There were several ways in which Yolanda and Adriana self-identified throughout the interviews, revealing the ways in which they perceive identity, as well as how context and circumstances influenced their personal sense of identity. Puerto Rican, Nuyoric, Hispanic, Latino(a), Spanish-speaking, English-speaking, and New Yorker all form part of the repertoire of self-identification of the speakers at one point or another, each with its own context and implications. First and foremost is the central question of *puertorriqueñidad* from the perspective of the Puerto Rican.

On multiple occasions, both participants explicitly identified themselves as both Puerto Rican and Nuyoric, establishing a trend of duality that embodies the essence of the “in between” Nuyoric. These two labels, while not necessarily mutually exclusive, never appeared together. The pattern that emerges suggests that rather than a fundamental characteristic, being Puerto Rican or Nuyoric alternated as a means of distinguishing from another group, and was strictly dependent upon context. Yolanda remarks,

*Bueno, siempre me sentí puertorriqueña. Sí. Siempre me sentí puertorriqueña. Aunque yo era bien consciente de que mi papá era-- era cubano. Eh, papi, lo que pasa es que pa-- mami viene de una familia bien grande. Bien extendida. Son dieciséis hermanos. Y papi era hijo único. So hay más peso. Era... hay más peso*

*y más peso cultural. Yo no tuve la oportunidad de ir a Cuba hasta hace.... unos años atrás. Este... y mi familia cubana llegó a los estados unidos en el 47. Este.... que mi papá hablaba español, pero también hablaba el inglés... se sentía más como... entre comillas... (makes "comillas") "americano".*

*Well, I always felt Puerto Rican. Yes. I always felt Puerto Rican. Even though I was very aware that my father was-- was Cuban. Uh, Dad, the thing is that Mom comes from a big family. Very extended. There are sixteen kids. And Dad was an only child. So there's more weight. It was... there's more weight and more cultural weight. I didn't have the opportunity to go to Cuba until... a few years ago. And my Cuban family arrived in the U.S. in '47. And my father spoke Spanish, but he also spoke English. He felt more like... quote-unquote (makes air "quotes") "American." [My translation -- All translations mine unless otherwise noted.]*

Yolanda always felt that she was Puerto Rican, despite her Cuban heritage, her father speaking English and being more "American." She always viewed herself as Puerto Rican rather than something else, and also made this statement with respect to her identity growing up in New York. In this sense, being Puerto Rican serves to contrast with the non-Puerto Rican context of New York City. The Anglo-American mainstream, minority groups such as Blacks, and even other Hispanics collectively represent the non-Puerto Rican Other. Again, though she lived in New York City, she saw herself as Puerto Rican. Later, describing her experiences upon returning to Puerto Rico, she explains:

*Entonces, fines de los sesenta, principio los setenta. Entonces, este....para esa época, eh, en la Interamericana habían tenido una-- una-- unos-- unos encontronazos bien feos. En la universidad, mayormente estaban alimentado por estudiantes que eran nuyorican. Entonces pues decían "nuyorican" en Puerto Rico y yo era "nuyorican". Entonces, este, como yo puse que era parte de ASPIRA, pues, este, fue una de las razones por la cual no me-- no me aceptaron.*

*Back then, the late sixties, early seventies. Back then... in that era, in the InterAmerican [University], they had had some ugly confrontations. In the university they were mainly constituted by students that were Nuyorican. Back then, well, they said "Nuyorican" and I was "Nuyorican." So, since I put that I was part of ASPIRA<sup>6</sup>, well, that was one of the reasons why they didn't accept me.*

Now, within Puerto Rican society, Yolanda acknowledges her identity as a Nuyorican and demonstrates the fluid duality of an identity in context. While the affiliation in this context is somewhat negative, she seems to claim it more as an objective, albeit externally imposed, category to which she belongs. She recognizes the stigma associated with this group, and does not wholly own the term, but still experiences discrimination because of it. Belonging to an organization that was a positive presence in New York but represented subversion and confrontation in the Puerto Rican context becomes part of the Nuyorican identity that distinguished her from the "Puerto Rican" standard.

In an explanation very similar to Yolanda's, Adriana asserts her Puerto Rican identity with equal confidence, and also despite factors that could be cause for doubt. In her case, it was not nationality but appearance that deviated from a "Puerto Rican" norm. Light-skinned and auburn-haired, she remarks, "I was Puerto Rican. Even if I didn't look it." In fact, she reiterates her identity on the basis of ethnic heritage (even though she was not born in Puerto Rico) as she recounts:

*I mean eh-- uh, picture this: in high school, in New York before coming to Puerto Rico, I eh, I was in-- I think it was yeah, the beginning of eleventh grade, and um, I met this girl in my English class. She was right next to me, and she was, she was your typical "gringuita." When I [say], "gringuita," you know, she was little, white, you know, light eyes and so forth. And um, she, we started talking, and then*

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<sup>6</sup> Prior to this statement, she explains: "ASPIRA es una organización que ayuda a hispanoparlantes entrar a la universidad. Y ofrecen tutorías y dan talleres, pero en Nueva York ASPIRA también era eh...una organización que tenía muchos puertorriqueños que eran independentistas." ASPIRA is an organization that helps Spanish speakers get into college. And they offer tutoring and give workshops, but in New York ASPIRA was also an organization that had many Puerto Ricans who were pro-independence.

*she told me about ASPIRA. [. . .] ASPIRA was new at the time. [. . .] I hadn't heard about it, and she says, [. . .] and this is for, you know, eh, Puerto Ricans. Her last name was not typically Puerto Rican. I think she wa-- her mother was-- her father was... I don't know what nationality, and her mother was Puerto Rican. [. . .] So, she had mentioned it and like two or three weeks later I walk in, and the first person who opens her mouth, I mean, out loud, goes, "YOU'RE Puerto Rican?!" I said, oh, I said, "Yes! Full blooded!" you know? "Both sides," I remember saying, and she said (gasps) you know, I said, "who this freaking half Puerto Rican calling me, you know, surprised that I'm Puerto Rican?"*

She also clarifies the location--New York--where it was necessary to justify herself as a Puerto Rican. Using “gringuita” and “white” to describe her classmate distances her from categories to which she does not belong, reinforcing her claim to Puerto Rican membership. Later, she matter-of-factly identifies herself as a Nuyorican, but only once she has arrived in Puerto Rico, where “Nuyorican” becomes her identity in the context of a “native” Puerto Rico and we see the duality of context manifest once again. Upon arrival at her new high school in Puerto Rico, English becomes the central point of her identity as a Nuyorican, and is suddenly the contrasting characteristic which differentiates her from her peers:

*I was a Nuyorican, and every time I spoke English they would go to me, "oh, oh, mírala, you know, look at her pronunciation!" you know, "she's th-- like, the perfect one." You know how they, they kid each other? [. . .] I remember that same week, [. . .] I had this whole semicircle of students form almost around me, just staring at the new student.... Who spoke English. [. . .] It was the weirdest thing in the world! They were staring at the new student, and the new student who spoke English. I mean, I was one of the new Nuyoricans coming in. You know, wave of Nuyoricans coming in to Puerto Rico and then small town Puerto Rico.*

She mentions English first, as the primary identifying characteristic, and then clarifies by adding “Nuyorican.” In this case, language takes a central role in her identity at this moment, although she acknowledges her status as a Nuyorican. Not only a

personal identity, being Nuyoricana in Puerto Rico also linked Adriana to a group of students who shared her experience and with whom she identified, carrying “Nuyoricana” beyond her individual identity into its greater social context. Among the group, English fluency was a marker of belonging, as well as a point of pride. The language of the North American mainstream suddenly becomes the language of the outsider in the Puerto Rican setting, regardless of fluency. She expounds on the diversity within the “Nuyoricana” collective, from first-time arrivals to return migrants, all of varying levels of Spanish ability. Once on the island, they were all collapsed into one absolute category of the English-speaking Other.

*R: So it was all Nuyoricans in that [high school English] class?*

*A: All Nuyoricans. We were all recent-- we had recently arrived in the last, mm, year or so. One or two years. Este... and, um, one of them was, I think, the type that had, you know, lived in the states and came back, and lived in Puerto Rico for two years and then went back, and came back, you know, those were migrating back and forth. But, the rest of-- just-- I-- we were in the same boat. Our parents decided to come back home, and took the kids with them, and the kids that were born and raised in New York, that-- you know, I came to Puerto Rico on-- couple of times on my summer vacation, but my parents spoke Spanish all the time at home.*

Here Adriana describes the variety that composed the group collectively known as “Nuyoricans.” While many were moving to the island to live for the first time, previous experiences ranged from stints of residency, to vacations, to experiencing Puerto Rico for the very first time upon moving there. Much like their language abilities, the Nuyoricans’ familiarity with Puerto Rico varied widely. As Adriana mentions, many (if not most) of the children were victims of their parents’ compulsions. Differing from their parents in their status as New York natives, the adolescents found themselves obligated to make the transition to a school system that did not welcome them and a society that regarded them with suspicion. Experienced, unfamiliar, willing or unwilling, bi- or monolingual, they

were unceremoniously lumped into one category, where they were all able to relate to their common status as outsiders.

In addition to being Puerto Rican, Yolanda frequently identified herself within a larger community in the context of New York City. Living in neighborhoods where Puerto Ricans were mixed with people of other Spanish-speaking origins, she uses “Hispanic” to describe the Spanish-speaking community collectively:

*Lo que le dicen los "housing projects"... Entre...eh....el Lexington y Park...avenue. Eso es lo que se llama "el barrio"... O sea, allí casi may-- mayormente eran personas...habían muchas personas que hablaban español mayormente... hispanos... eh... de Puerto Rico y bien pocos hispanos de otros sitios.*

*What they call the "housing projects"... Between Lexington and Park Avenue. That's what they call "el barrio." That is, there they were almost-- mainly they were people... there were a lot of people who spoke mainly Spanish... Hispanics... from Puerto Rico and very few Hispanics from other places.*

At one point she describes living in a different neighborhood where she identifies (“we”) as Latina, as well as Spanish-speaking. Hispanic solidarity acquired an even greater level of significance in the face of racial tensions and gang violence that divided along ethnic lines:

*Allí fue... allí sí yo pude presenciar mucha...eh... Cuando yo estaba en el barrio, la, aunque era una comunidad donde fuéramos una minoría, que he sentido que era una minoría latina en el barrio, uno sentía, este, una diferencia entre la gente. Entonces cuando nos mudamos a...a la vecindaria irlandesa, este, había mucho conflicto entre los irlandeses y los hispanohablantes. Había muchas peleas en la calle, muchas gangas..*

*There it was... There I was certainly able to witness a lot of... When I was in el barrio, even though it was a community where we were a minority, that I felt was a Latin minority in el barrio, one felt a difference between the people. So when we*

*moved to the Irish neighborhood, there was a lot of conflict between the Irish and the Spanish speakers. There were a lot of street fights, a lot of gangs...*

Later she finds another home among the Hispanic community in “otro bolsillo de hispanoparlantes/ another pocket of Spanish speakers” on the Lower East Side. After finishing high school, and finding herself culturally bewildered in the prestigious and predominantly white Cooper Union, she again identifies with the other two Hispanics in the program. In contrast with the context of Puerto Rico, where a “Hispanic” classification would be superfluous, identifying with this collective in New York City again differentiated the members from non-Hispanics. As Seda-Bonilla (1972) explained, Puerto Ricans often unite with other Hispanic groups in the face of the dominant white culture. For Yolanda, “Hispanic,” rather than a disparaging term, represents solidarity with people who share her language as well as her struggle in the urban environment.

Yolanda’s identification with the Hispanic community illustrates how widely the experiences of Nuyoricans varied prior to coming to Puerto Rico. Adriana, in contrast, never expresses a connection with other Hispanic groups. Instead, her only mention of non-Puerto Rican groups serves to differentiate hers from the Central and South American immigrants who arrived to the neighborhood and to her school. Even her Spanish set her apart, she claims, as many of these immigrants lacked formal education or demonstrated low levels of literacy. Strongly identifying with her own Puerto Rican community in New York, Adriana seemingly did not feel the need to incorporate herself into a larger collective. She also identified with being a New Yorker, which would become more prominent after moving to Puerto Rico, where “New Yorker” would become “Nuyoricano” as she assumed an adapted identity.

For Adriana, being “Nuyoricano” in Puerto Rico was often superseded by the identification with an “elite” group of English speakers at her school. This represented the strongest association of belonging in the context of her high school in Puerto Rico, where she would later remark she never really settled in.

*There were five of us in-- in the school who were taking the following year, you know, so the 12th grade we took the first year-- you know, first year college? In*

*English, primera, you know like, English 101? Instead of 12th grade English. And there were five of us. Only five of us. In one room, and there was-- uh, apparently their best English speaking teacher was teaching us. And it was a breeze. It was easy! But I was among my own, you know? It was funny because we were among our, you know, we were the English speakers!*

With this statement, Adriana seems to imply that she identifies first with her English-speaking peers, regardless of their origins. Much like the connection between the New York context and Puerto Rican self identification, once she is in Puerto Rico, Adriana's emphasis shifts to the differences between herself and her peers. Removed from her original environment, she becomes aware of the characteristics that differentiate her from her classmates, and recognizes the aspects of her identity that are a product of her environment. She chooses to identify with English speakers, revealing how she wants to be perceived. This identity is at once internal and external; while she elects to adopt it into her definition of self, it is also used by others to define her within the Puerto Rican social context. In a similar manner, she begins to distinguish herself, electing to identify as a New Yorker in contrast with the Puerto Rican mainstream:

*Since the first day, I went to school, I don't know [. . .] but maybe if you're a New Yorker you-- maybe you grow up a little faster, I don't know. I walked in, and despite my having the school uniform, I used the former-- that-- that year the school uniform had changed, and they had-- it was different colors... I had the little white shirt, and I had little, this brown skirt, and I had-- and I wore heels, because I didn't have any flats. And, uh, at that time in school in New York, we wore our heels! You know, and I didn' weart these little bobby socks. I walk into the school, and they, coup-- two or three students, they stop me and ask me if I was the new teacher.*

Later she describes the "survival strategies" of street-savvy New Yorkers who know better than to button their coats or let their hair hang loose, lest they be grabbed on the street and unable to get away. The character of the New Yorker was essential to Adriana's sense of self, and has proved to be one of the most durable aspects of her

identity. Even in the present she defines herself in this way, choosing to differentiate herself from Puerto Rican natives through such identification.

Although Adriana identified very closely with the culture of New York, Yolanda, who often expressed solidarity with the broader Hispanic collective, makes little mention of life in New York or bearing any cultural remnants of the city. Her references to English are also only incidental, as a sometimes problematic interference in her Spanish, or as a source of difficulty in her experiences in Puerto Rico. Yolanda also spent a much greater portion of her time in Puerto Rico as a child and adolescent, and at one point she describes the island as a sort of maternal figure in her life. She seems to identify more with the Hispanic aspects of herself, and less with the city where she was often merely surviving as a transient resident.

Both women clearly (and explicitly) identified with the most conspicuous groups that contribute to their sense of identity. This was largely accomplished through direct declarations in the affirmative. On a couple of occasions, however, Adriana also implicitly identifies herself through a contrast with an Other. Mixing religion, nationality, race, and ethnicity, she describes the schools she attended:

*It ended up being the kids, even going to school, you know, since they were little, going to the schools, even if their-- even their y-- teachers were, at the time, were not Hispanic, or most of my teachers or-- were either Jewish or... just... americanos, you know, from New York. People who were from New York were teachers in the school system. And I remember they spoke perf-- you know, standard English. And despite that, the-- a lot of Puerto Ricans would speak with accents. In my middle school, it was predominantly Puerto Rican and black. There was one Chinese. That's it. No whites.*

By using labels such as *americanos*, Adriana separates herself from a category with which she does not identify, positioning herself as something *other than* (Bailey, 2007). *Americanos*, much like *gringos*, refers generally to English-speaking caucasians who belong to and represent the racial and cultural stereotype of an “American.” In this case, *americanos* are simply the Other with which to contrast, neither minority nor

foreigner. She makes a similar distinction with the phrase “people from New York,” implying a different origin her own case. This is interesting because she frequently makes reference to being a New Yorker or being from New York, an apparent contradiction that reflects the problematic nature of dichotomous, essentialist categories. The distinction lies, again, in the context: when in New York, she differentiates herself from the New York Other, much as she adopts a New Yorker identity in opposition to the Puerto Rican islander majority. In stating that there were “no whites” in the school, she similarly dissociates herself from this category, claiming an alternative racial identity.

When it came to describing the essence of *puertorriqueñidad*, the complexity of such a concept became readily apparent. Throughout the course of the interviews, matters of identity surfaced constantly, both from direct questions and spontaneous revelation. The end result was a collection of aspects attributed to *puertorriqueñidad* that ranged from individual to collective, from voluntary to involuntary, and from explicit to indescribable. Here we will discuss the main factors that Yolanda and Adriana associated with their identity as Puerto Ricans. These characteristics fell into three major groups: aspects that could be considered on an individual level, collective characteristics, and externally imposed (but also internally recognized) features.

The aspects of identity that could be considered on an individual level also happened to be the most superficial factors mentioned by the participants. Appearance was the most prominent characteristic described by both Adriana and Yolanda on an individual level. Adriana felt that there was an appearance typical of Puerto Ricans, an ideal she did not represent. She repeatedly describes herself as a misfit, stating “I was one of the lighter-skinned Puerto Rican girls. And I looked-- I looked Italian. And I looked ‘gringuita.’ So that-- that didn't help.” Light-skinned enough to look Caucasian, Adriana’s physical appearance failed to differentiate her from the anglo-americans, or *gringos*. Later she adds that in addition to not really looking “Puerto Rican,” being light skinned was even a cause for discrimination in her school, which was constituted almost exclusively by minorities:

*A: Yeah! Oh yeah. Funny thing, I experienced prejudice in-- in my-- in my Puerto Rican black neighborhood school, yeah.*

*R: Even though you were Puerto Rican.*

*A: I was Puerto Rican, but I wasn't your typical Puerto Rican! My sister looked a little more Puerto Rican. I looked a little more... and we-- and my last name was not a González García Rodríguez, something very very Puerto Rican. It sounded Italian. [. . .] And uh, [my last name] was like, um, like, where the hell did you come from, you know? And... in the winter you get pale as a ghost! So I looked whiter than white... than your-- you know... I was, you know, in a-- in a latino ehm, mulatto, basically me-- mainly, you know, majority mulatto and-- and black, eh high-- in junior high school I was one of the whiter ones. So I was discriminated like, yeah, me-- and the attitude was always like, oh you think you're better than me because you're white, you know?*

In this case, “Puerto Rican” seems to imply dark hair and skin, or at the very least dark enough to be differentiated from Caucasian. The ambiguity of this characteristic evokes the perplexing matter of ethnic and racial identity in Puerto Rico. In accordance with Seda-Bonilla’s (1972) observations, Adriana’s racial ideal is arbitrary and vague, based on characteristics that are purely relative. The fact that she ultimately lends it little importance, insisting at one point that “[she] was Puerto Rican, even if [she] didn’t look it,” also reflects how unreliable race is as an aspect of Puerto Rican identity.

Adriana also introduces another superficial characteristic into her “Puerto Rican” prototype: a last name that was a direct link to Spanish patrimony. As seen previously, she described her direct descentance from two island-born Puerto Ricans as qualification for her status as a “true” Puerto Rican. More objective than a racial category, a proper Spanish last name is, at the least, a requirement in a “typical” Puerto Rican, which she does not consider herself to be. Many of the characteristics she discusses later she also considers “typical,” but does not personally demonstrate.

While phenotype is generally wholly beyond the control of a given individual, choices about things like clothing and hairstyle are not. Adriana also acknowledges that there was a style typical of Puerto Ricans, which she also did not exhibit:

*And on the train [to school], they would always uh-- I'd have Fordham University students eh, talk to me and ask me if I was going to the University. If I was from Fordham. And that's how I would say-- that's how different I must have looked, you know? In high school, I didn't look.... Puerto Rican. I didn't look from the "hood;" I-- I-- I looked-- and Fordham University was very very conservative looking, you know, the students, at the time.... So it was uh, it was a mess.*

Here Adriana equates a Puerto Rican appearance with looking “from the ‘hood,’” but again excludes herself from the characteristic. She has now described three separate features that she considers to be fundamental in a “typical” Puerto Rican. It is important to note, however, that the characteristics she described, especially clothing styles, would have served to distinguish Puerto Ricans in the context of New York. As we will see later, Adriana frequently uses “Puerto Rican” in a contrastive sense that is directly dependent on a context outside of the island. She describes standards that, while common, were unique to Puerto Ricans in New York. In spite of not conforming to any of these standards, however, she is unwavering in her assertion that she was, in fact, Puerto Rican. For her, the essence of *puertorriqueñidad* is more than the superficial, as she reveals later on.

While Adriana separates herself somewhat from the most apparent characteristics of “Puerto Ricans,” Yolanda views the conscious aspects of her appearance as an extension of her culture. When she finds herself utterly unable to relate culturally to her majority white, affluent architecture school peers, her appearance is a significant factor differentiating her from the rest of the group.

*Y: No tenía la gente a-- como que la gente apo-- apoyo y encontré que no podía manejar la universidad. Era... era demasiado para mi. Este... culturalmente fue bien fuerte también. Yo era, prácticamente éramos eh... dos hispanos, además de mi persona, dos hispanoparlantes, en el programa que yo estaba en el año que yo*

*entré. Este...y no pude conectar, \_\_\_\_\_ que se me hizo bien difícil conectar con otros estudiantes que estaban allí, y ellos conmigo. Yo era como el... la, la cosa más extraña para ellos. Este...a veces pasaban pa mirar como yo estaba vestida, como yo estaba con mi pelo, los accesorios, mi-- mis manos, porque yo pintaba las uñas y eso era como una cosa tan extraña en la escuela de arquitectura... Este...(laughs) Fíjate, en algunas clases me fue muy bien, en otras clases me fue muy mal. Pero no me-- no lograba ubicarme en la escuela.*

*I didn't have the people to-- like the people [for] support and I found I couldn't handle the university. It was too much for me. Uh... culturally it was really hard too. I was, we were practically, uh... two Hispanics, besides myself, two Spanish speakers, in the program I was in the year I entered. Uh... and I couldn't connect, \_\_\_\_\_ that it made it really difficult for me to connect with the other students that were there, and them with me. I was like the... the-- the strangest thing for them. Uh... sometimes they would come to see how I was dressed, how I had my hair, my accessories, my-- my hands, because I painted my nails and that was like, something really strange in the architecture school. Uh... (laughs). You know, in some classes it went really well for me, and in other classes it went badly. But I didn't-- I never managed to fit in in the school.*

Yolanda recognizes the intentionality of her style, which set her apart from her peers in the architecture program. Her appearance was specific to a particular identity, which was not even necessarily Puerto Rican. In this case she is nearly alone in her identity and her affiliation, and her identification is with the only other Hispanics in the program who are also excluded from the dominant culture of the white Other. In this context her appearance served more as a marker of isolation than as a symbol of belonging.

The characteristics of the second group extend beyond the individual to incorporate the idea of belonging, as they relate most directly to the shared collection of customs, practices, and social norms known as “culture” and serve to unify a group of

people. A shared culture signifies membership and a means of indicating authenticity. For questions of identity, it often serves a referential function, as knowledge and practice become a sort of capital deployed to authenticate an individual's identity.

To Adriana, in apparent non-conformity with her self-professed "typical" Puerto Rican characteristics, authenticity needed a different source. Instead, she gives more weight to cultural knowledge, treating it as a more valid measure of legitimacy. She then describes what this "culture" represents:

*R: And so, what-- you said that it's-- you knew the culture and so that's, I mean, you feel like that was what...?*

*A: I mean, if I would-- if I would, would go to um, summer, you know, out in the street, I-- I'd know what the games were, you know, the games that the people would like to play. I knew the attitude of the m-- you know, the Puerto Rican moms wo-- why they were, you know, when they get or so forth. I knew why they were doing it. I know the-- the prejudices, ye-- and the, let's say the "superstitions..." The... the... you know, the typical things where, you know, "¡No te mojes!" you know, este... whatever.... este... eh... why they would believe certain things, you know? I knew what the foods were, and I, uh, I knew what they ate, I knew what was typical dishes, I-- I knew what the typical Christmas, you know, there, or celebrations were. And um, and then able-- cause I even knew the, the... the music! I knew-- I knew what was gonna happen in the summer, when the summertime, you know, when it started. You know, they would have at the time, they would have, um, a lot of the men were-- would-- eh, would bring out their congas and they would start playing, you know, from one-- one neighbor-- one-- one building-- one-- one, um, block to the other and you would hear all summer long, the-- the music, the rhythms. And you knew they were Puerto Rican rhythms, you know? You could tell when the blacks were playing, you could tell because they were more jazzy, and you could tell the Puerto Ricans. Even to that point.*

In one statement, Adriana manages to cover the laundry list of iconic items that often come to represent "culture." Similar to the participants in Morris' (1995) study,

Adriana offers beliefs, food, holidays, and music as the core elements that truly constitute Puerto Rican identity. Ultimately it is familiarity with culture that represents the link to authenticity as a Puerto Rican, according to Adriana. Once again, however, there is a certain context to her concept of Puerto Rican, as she differentiates the music (and therefore the culture) of the “blacks” from that of the Puerto Ricans. What she either does not acknowledge or fails to realize is the African influence on the “Puerto Rican” rhythms. She makes a clear distinction between the Puerto Rican and black cultures in New York, even though the racial and cultural heritage of Puerto Rico reflects the fluidity of a European, African and indigenous hybrid.

Later, while reflecting on her sense of identity after decades on the island, she offers a different picture of the culture that also includes behaviors and social practices. Not surprisingly, her sense of cultural belonging is now more nuanced, contrasting with the generalized features she pointed to previously.

*A: So I know-- I know it.... And I feel Puerto Rican, I-- because I haven't been living in the states, I relate more to the local Puerto Ricans. I can-- I can-- I can unders-- I can detect a... a-- a-- stateside Puerto Rican, or let's say, you know, from a re-- from a, a local Puerto Rican, you know, right away. Just by how they behave, by the way they talk or whatever, you know?*

*R: Yes, so you say there's certain things that-- that differentiate them, and you're aware of those things now?*

*A: Oh, very aware. Very aware of them. I can tell-- I know right away, just, just by whatever-- yeah, I don't know, just the way they behave. Is-- ah, here, in Puerto Rico, you can tell a Dominican, by just-- by the body language.*

Her sense of belonging now also includes the ability to identify outsiders as she distinguishes between Puerto Ricans from two categories, “stateside” and “local.” In doing so, she acknowledges (perhaps without realizing) that the culture she considered “Puerto Rican” in New York, while no less legitimate, was nevertheless distinct from that of the island. She cites body language as the characteristic of the Puerto Rican collective

that separates it from foreigners (in this case, Dominicans). This reflects a more social concept of culture, based on interaction and a connection with the larger group.

Body language is also the characteristic that emerges first in Yolanda's concept of *puertorriqueñidad*. Her understanding of culture and identity are more subtle, as she was more intimately connected to the culture of the island in many ways.

*R: Entonces, ¿qué características o qué aspectos crees que-- que eran parte de esa identidad puertorriqueña? ¿La cultura? ¿Las costumbres? ¿El habla?*

*Y: Bueno, tiene que ver mucho con el habla, eh... la manera de gesticular.... el... el... eh, como-- lo que es-- lo que se llama lenguaje corporal. Yo encuentro que tenemos, sí, una manera de mover el cuerpo y las manos que no es-- que no es como la contra-- no es la contraparte, sino como...*

*R: So, what characteristics or what aspects do you think were-- were part of that Puerto Rican identity? The culture? The customs? The speech?*

*Y: Well, it has a lot to do with the speech, uh... the way of gesturing... the... the... uh, how-- what is-- what is called body language. I find that we have, indeed, a way of moving the body and the hands that's not-- that's not like the counter-- it's not the counterpart, but like...*

Before abruptly shifting topics, she mentions the gestures and the particular movement of the hands that characterize a Puerto Rican, reiterating Adriana's assertion that at least part of being Puerto Rican is physical, an essential incorporation of the body into communication. She continues, describing another social practice that differentiated Puerto Rican culture from Cuban:

*Había una diferencia entre mi familia cubana y la-- y-- y la familia puertorriqueña. Por ejemplo, este, cosas tan sencillas como, este, los modales en la mesa... como se usan las herramientas. Yo encontraba que mi familia Cubana-- lo aprendí, ¿verdad? Este... como se usaba las herramientas de la mesa, los cubiertos, era distinta a la familia cubana a como se usaba la familia puertorriqueña. En... en la familia puertorriqueña, no les prestaba tanta atención*

*a como se usaba las herramientas. La cosa era que comieras. Pero, en la familia, yo sabía que cuando iba a casa de mi abuelo, no podía coger el pollo con mis manos... Tenía que coger el cuchillo, y el tenedor, y cortar cada pedacito, y deshuesar el pollo con las herramientas. (laughs). Entonces... era como más formal en algunas cosas.*

*There was a difference between my Cuban family and the-- and-- and-- the Puerto Rican family. For example, uh, things as simple as, uh, table manners... how they use the tools. I found that my Cuban family-- I learned it, right? Uh... how they used the tools at the table, the utensils, was different in the Cuban family from how the Puerto Rican family used them. In... in the Puerto Rican family, they didn't pay as much attention to how you used the utensils. The point was that you ate. But, in the [Cuban] family, I knew that when I went to my grandfather's house, I couldn't grab the chicken with my hands. I had to take the knife, and the fork, and cut every little piece, and take out the bones with the utensils. (laughs) So... it was like, more formal in some things.*

Recognizing the distinct character of the cultural practices of each group, she also demonstrates a certain legitimacy within both groups. In this case, her identity not only involved cultural knowledge but the ability to differentiate between the two. On an individual level, both Adriana and Yolanda are able to appreciate some of the less apparent social aspects of culture in Puerto Rico. At a group level, such knowledge locates them within the greater cultural collective that shares these practices.

The final category of characteristics included as part of *puertorriqueñidad* take the broadest perspective on group identity, recognizing the role of an external gaze as well as one from within in characterizing the group as a whole. While individual identity is ultimately subjective, aspects of identity within a greater social context are often beyond the control of the individual subject to external perceptions. Individuals' experiences are then influenced by these external factors (Edwards 1990). Both Yolanda and Adriana acknowledged the generally negative stereotypes associated with New York

Puerto Ricans, a traditionally marginalized group whose history in New York City includes numerous struggles with discrimination. In the case of both Yolanda and Adriana, however, these stereotypes were not part of their personal identities, but rather something that differentiated them from the majority of their peers. Yolanda only makes one mention of generalizations about Puerto Ricans when describing her elementary school: she was one of very few students whose parents did not receive welfare benefits in a setting where virtually everyone received some form of government assistance.

Adriana expressed something very similar when asked why she thought her overall style and appearance were so different from that of her peers. Her family's economic situation was the first factor she offered in explanation.

*R: Why do you think tha-- I mean, do you think that you... obviously you don't have any control over your being white, but, like, the way you dressed and stuff, do you think that had more to do with your family? Or your personal preferences? Or...?*

*A: I think it was a combination of both... My family was-- was... my-- my family wasn't your typical Puerto Rican family either, in the sense of we weren't on welfare. I'd say the majority of the people... My parents had-- were more like, middle class, low-middle class, compared to these, you know-- my parents were never on welfare. Most of the kids we knew, parents were on welfare. Um... the parents...um.... they would have-- they had a lotta kids, and they-- they were always having trouble...fighting. Or they would, you know, summertime, they would just hang out on the stoop and drink, the fathers sometimes were not working, the mothers were, you know, were just housewives...*

In addition to welfare status being almost universal, she adds a number of aspects that were considered stereotypical of Puerto Ricans in New York: high birth rates, marital strife, unemployed fathers and mothers who did not work outside of the home. Adriana readily incorporates stereotypes into her concept of Puerto Ricans, thus revealing her susceptibility to external elements in her concept of self. Indicative of greater social problems, these characteristics were nevertheless seen, by outsiders and Puerto Ricans

alike, as standard among the Puerto Rican collective. Adriana includes a final aspect she saw as nearly universal among Puerto Ricans: the use of illegal drugs.

*A: Yeah, I mean, it never occurred to me to hang around the block and... and-- and smoke w-- you know, smoke weed or whatever. I mean, I was invited to it! And my parents, I was-- my parents weren't home. I just... had my set, you know, my sights set on I wasn't gonna do that. And my cousins who lived in the building next door, I mean, there were four of them, and their parents had grocery stores, too. So we were like, the strange ones. We lived in the neighborhood, we never-- we didn't move out, you know, because uh, the-- at least their grocery store was-- was walking distance, was two, three blocks down. And it didn't occur to them to use drugs either. So, we hung out with people who we knew were taking drugs!*

Along with the constant presence of drugs came the gang culture also common to urban environments (and urban stereotypes). At one point Yolanda compares her neighborhood to West Side Story based on the constant violence between Puerto Rican and Irish gangs. For Adriana, gangs, like drug use, represented another “typical” aspect of life as a Puerto Rican in New York in which she did not participate.

*I was like a misfit. You know, I was and I wasn't, because I was Puerto Rican, I knew the culture, I knew the attitude, I made everything else, but I was invited to join gangs; I didn't want to. And then I was rejected by the gang members because I-- I had spurned them. And that was very dangerous. Then I didn't, um, I didn't fit in with the black girls, and I didn't fit in with the Puerto Rican girls in that sense.*

Again, failing to “fit in with the Puerto Rican girls” has no effect on her sense of identity. On an individual level, it was simply a choice that separated her from her classmates. She did not conform to any of the stereotypes she described as being so common among Puerto Ricans, she was an outcast and a misfit among her Puerto Rican peers, and yet Adriana again reiterates her claim to *puertorriqueñidad*. In this way she minimizes the value of the stereotypes in determining identity, as she feels confident in claiming belonging regardless of her deviation from what she viewed as the norm. This is

an example of the intangible nature of identity as demonstrated by the participants. Adriana offers a set of defining characteristics, but simultaneously discredits them when she claims belonging without demonstrating any of them, which would indicate an element of identity that goes beyond the readily discernible aspects of identity. Rather than “typical” characteristics, she again confirms her cultural knowledge as the legitimate source of her identity:

*R: So... even though you lived there and kind of like, didn't fit in with the rest of the thing... Did you still feel Puerto Rican? I mean, like, how would you have identified yourself at the time when you were living in New York?*

*A: Oh I knew-- I understood it perfectly. I mean, I understood the-- I mean, I knew the culture. I didn-- I didn't DO what they wa-- they did, but I knew the culture.*

*R: And you felt like you were Puerto Rican, even so.*

Although she offers a variety of detailed justifications of *puertorriqueñidad*, a list of characteristics still seemed to fall short of encompassing the identity *puertorriqueñidad* embodied. Adriana adamantly maintains her Puerto Rican-ness throughout her interview, minimizing deviations and reiterating that she *was*, in fact, Puerto Rican. Still, she seems to concede (albeit unintentionally) that there was something that could make one more so:

*A: [My sister] came to Puerto Rico ah-- when we got here, sh-- I was in, like I said, eleventh grade, she was in eighth grade. Lived more time in Puerto Rico. To the point where I was always referred to as "her sister". Because I was-- I was-- I hadn't-- I didn't live in Isabela long enough to make, you know, lo-- more, este, longer lasting relationships. I mean, barely when I was barely getting to know people there I graduated high school, and I jumped over to Mayagüez [for college]. And my sister, sh-- I mean she was there eighth, ninth, tenth, eleventh, twelfth. So, a lot of people got to know her more, you know? Made a lot more friends in Isabela. So I was referred to as her sister. You know, "Chiqui's sister." They would call-- her nickname was "Chiqui."*

*R: Mmhmm?*

*A: Yeah. But you know, she had no problem with the languages either. You know, she-- she assimilated faster too. And by the time she went to college, I mean she was Puerto Rican.*

*R: Yeah, full blown?*

*A: Full blown Puerto Rican.*

Though she never explains what was responsible for her sister's assimilation, Adriana's statement implies that there was something lacking from her sister's "completeness" as a Puerto Rican, something variable and incremental, which casts doubt upon the validity of a hard membership boundary. She also seems to suggest that she herself never achieved this level of authenticity. Through her earlier statements she appears to have made the transition to being fully Puerto Rican at some point over several decades of residence on the island. What it was precisely, however-- the missing element that completed the picture of *puertorriqueñidad*, remains something of a mystery, symbolizing the purely subjective aspects of individual identity.

For Yolanda, identification as a Puerto Rican was as much a personal and social awakening as a default fact of her identity. For her, being Puerto Rican was framed in many ways by what it was *not*, and was intimately tied to her social context. As with her experiences living among and relating to Hispanic people of varied origins, her awareness and identity are not only Puerto Rican but more universal. She describes how discovering things such as inequality and injustice provoked an awareness of difference that defined what was Puerto Rican in contrast with what was not. In urban New York society, "Puerto Rican" became "disadvantaged" as this identity adopted the character of its setting. From her Hispanic *barrio* she takes the train to school and watches the landscape evolve from tenement housing into the affluent neighborhoods in a different part of the city.

*R: ¿ahora te sientes más puertorriqueña que...que antes?*

*Y: Bueno, es que he siempre... este... cuando me estaba criando en Nueva York, en eh...(pause)... fui a escuelas católicas. Y en esas escuelas católicas, yo no sé hasta qué punto ellos se dieron cuenta de que me estaban enseñando dentro de la*

*indoctrinación... (pause, shuffling things out of view on the desk)... eh, tomar consciencia de las injusticias sociales. Eh, el concepto de que hay algo justo y algo es injusto, y lo injusto no es bueno y lo justo es bueno. Yo lo empecé a aplicar bien joven eh-- a mi entorno. Y cuando ya yo-- eh podía montarme en tren y ir del barrio donde yo estaba viviendo sola, y ir a la escuela sur-- superior que ca-- tomaba casi cuarenta minutos, y ver el cambio que había en la sociedad, empecé a ver por qué adonde yo vivía faltaban cosas que sobraban en otros barrios. Este... y allí empezó a... a yo despe-- a despertar, no a despertar, que, pues, que era puertorriqueña, y... y posiblemente, eh, el estar...en ese nicho allí, había algo de injusticia. Y había alguna injusticia simplemente porque me pertenecía a esa minoría. Y de allí empecé a tomar conciencia y tratar de entender, tu sabes, lo que era la cultura puertorriqueña.*

*R: Do you feel now more Puerto Rican than before?*

*Y: Well, it's that I've always...uh... when I was growing up in New York... I went to Catholic schools. And in those Catholic schools, I don't know to what degree they were aware that within the indoctrination they were teaching me to be aware of social injustice. The concept that there is something just and something is unjust, and the unjust is not good and the just is good. I began to apply it to my surroundings from a young age. And when I was finally able to take the train by myself from the neighborhood where I was living, and go to high school, which took almost forty minutes, and see the change in society, I began to see why there were things that were lacking where I lived that abounded in other neighborhoods. And there I began to... I began to awaken-- not awaken, that, well, I was Puerto Rican and... and there was possibly some sort of injustice in that niche [where I lived]. And there was some injustice simply because I belonged to that minority. And from there I began to be aware and try to understand, you know, what Puerto Rican culture was.*

The variety of self-referential terms, as the participants describe themselves, points to the complexity of their concepts of identity. A certain multiplicity allows them to be either, both, and neither all at once. There is one aspect, however, that surfaces repeatedly and continues to play a significant part in the discussion on identity: the importance of context. As the participants describe their experiences and perceptions, geographical and social contexts provide the grounds for the contrasts that often define what the individual is or is not in a given moment. Insiders at times and outsiders at others, the participants locate themselves relative to the context of the experience. Not only the perspective, but indeed the descriptors themselves reflect a contextual dependency.

The titles that the participants apply to themselves can easily be divided into two categories: the context of New York City versus the context of Puerto Rico. The role of contrast in the process of self-definition becomes quickly apparent; they are Puerto Ricans when they are not Anglo-Americans, but they are Nuyoricans when they are “inauthentic” island Puerto Ricans. The contextual Other and the contrast it offers become an essential part of the participants’ self perceptions as they demonstrate the fluidity of individual identity.

### **Nuyoricans’ Linguistic Characteristics and Language Use Patterns**

As mentioned previously, both Aura and Yolanda possessed a reasonable level of Spanish fluency when they arrived in Puerto Rico. Language ability and use vary widely among the whole of the Nuyoricano collective, however. Adriana describes the ease with which the Spanish-speaking residents of her New York neighborhood interacted in a mixture of both languages, where code-switching was a natural part of daily communication:

*When I was in-- around the neighborhood with Spanish speaking, you know, Puerto Rican kids... At the time there was all Puerto Rican where I lived. It was all Puerto Rican, some blacks, and a spattering of, it was like, Polish or Irish or whatever. Este.... it was-- there was no Dominicans, there were no Central/South*

*Americans at the time. It was all, uh, Puerto Ricans, and most of em like-- like myself... But I remember at one-- mm, one day, one summer, I remember speaking Spanish to my-- we were speaking Spanish. But the first thing that we, you know, just came out of, um, came out of our heads, it if was in Spanish, Spanish, and in English, English, and the other one would answer in English, and I understood perfectly and vice versa. Ah, we start in one language and end in the other... With one word-- well, the first one that came, you know, first word that would come into our mind.*

While the interplay of languages may appear seamless and innocuous in a *barrio* environment, Adriana goes on to describe the ongoing battle for language dominance in a setting where younger generations saw less need for Spanish in their circumstances. Children born and raised within the culture of the United States resisted their parents' efforts to maintain the Spanish language in the home.

*And there-- it was-- the situation at home, for a lot of these kids, was that the-- the parents wa-- they would speak English to their parents and the parents would be forced to speak to them in English because the kids didn't wanna speak Spanish. Or acted like they-- they didn't understand the Spanish. It's like, "háblame en--" you know, "talk to me in English!" you know? Like a power struggle. The parents would give in, and you'd hear these Puerto Rican mothers speaking this broken English, and um, pero, and-- and scolding the kids in real bad English, and-- and-- yeah. It was really funny and the kids talking back in reg-- you know, in his best English...*

Adriana then adds, "...There were so many Puerto Ricans that they would all speak a lot of really accented English. Despite the fact that they were born and raised in New York. The neighborhood was *so* Hispanic, so Puerto Rican, that their English had a heavy Spanish accent." Thus, in spite of their rejection of Spanish and a native fluency in English, Puerto Ricans in Hispanic neighborhoods still bore the traces of their linguistic heritage. As Adriana would go on to explain, this characteristic would also differentiate Puerto Rican students from their peers in school.

Yolanda explains the dilemma of Spanish-dominant students at her almost exclusively Puerto Rican elementary school, where Spanish was prohibited under all circumstances:

*Y: Y en la escuela elemental, era prohibido, totalmente, hablar el español.*

*R: En la escuela?*

*Y: Oh sí. No podían hablar español. No podía hablar español entre...tus amistades, este...entre...no podía entrar, como entrar con tu papá y tu mamá a la escuela y hablar español, tenía que hablar el inglés.*

*Y: And in elementary school, speaking Spanish was totally prohibited.*

*R: In the school?*

*Y: Oh yes. You couldn't speak Spanish. You couldn't speak Spanish among.. your friends.. among... you couldn't come in, like, come in with your father and your mother to the school and speak Spanish. You had to speak English.*

Despite the prevalence of Spanish use among Puerto Ricans in New York, including many families with monolingual Spanish-speakers, the school system would prove to be a recurrent battleground, a locus of negotiations for contested linguistic and cultural boundaries in the self- and other- identity-building process. In these interviews, language issues surfaced at all levels of the school system, from primary to post-secondary.

Both Adriana and Yolanda learned Spanish at home, typical of heritage speakers in a setting with a different dominant language. Spanish was truly a “mother tongue,” as neither of their mothers ever mastered English and were the source of an almost exclusively Spanish home practice. The home environment often represented a realm distinct from the outside world, in terms of language and identity. Both describe transitioning, both literally and metaphorically from one language (or dialect) to another. This is similar to the phenomenon described by Kramsch (2009), wherein multilinguals develop discrete personae in each of their respective languages. Experiences lived in these languages, and even the nature of the language itself, shape the identity of each of these linguistic “selves.” Yolanda describes her childhood Spanish experience:

*Y: Entonces, la única..eh..la..mi español lo aprendí por oído en casa con mi mamá y mi papá.*

*R: Entonces, hablaban solamente español en la casa, o una mezcla, o como fue?*

*Y: Mayormente español. Porque mi mamá no dominaba muy bien el inglés. Y papi dominaba el inglés pero hablaba español en casa.*

*R: Okay....entonces será como noventa...noventa y pico por ciento español?*

*Y: Sí. Yo te diría que...noventa y cinco. Vamos a decir noventa y cinco por ciento. Porque las personas que me cuidaban, la señora que me cuidaba durante del día antes de que mi mamá llegaba del trabajo, este... Doña Paca, ella no hablaba nada del inglés.*

*R: Nada?*

*Y: Nada. Nunca habló inglés en los más de cuarenta años que vivió en Estados Unidos. (laughs)*

*R: Pues, si se quedaba allí en el barrio...¿no?*

*Y: No ella se quedaba en la casa... allí en la casa todo el tiempo.*

*R: Entonces, hablabas español en algún otro ambiente fuera de la casa?*

*Obviamente se prohibía en el-- la-- en la escuela, pero...*

*Y: En la reunión con mi familia, con la familia. Era el núcleo de la familia, era bien importante. Sabes, mis amistades eran mis primas. Era como bien.... como el núcleo de la familia era bien protegido. Era... este... mi mamá, mi papá, mi tía, mis tíos políticos, mis primas, primos... eso era el núcleo de amistad. Entonces allí en ese núcleo pues, se hablaba español. Se hablaba el as-- el español puertorriqueño obviamente, por mami, y se hablaba el español con el acento cubano por papi. Y era cómico porque yo sabía desde chiquita que yo tenía que cambiar la manera de acentuar el español cuando estaba con los cubanos. Mi familia cubana. Porque eran, eh bien peculiar, eh.... era bien como que... había como una sensación de ellos sentían hostilidad oír algo que no fuera con el acento. Era bien cómico... era bien cómico. Entonces yo cambiaba. Era como que entrar en otra... persona.*

*Y: So, the only... uh, the... I learned my Spanish by ear at home with my mother and father.*

*R: So, you spoke only Spanish at home, or a mixture, or how was it?*

*Y: Mainly Spanish. Because my mother did not know English very well. And Dad knew English but he spoke Spanish at home.*

*R: Okay... So it would be like ninety... ninety-something percent Spanish?*

*Y: Yes. I would say... ninety-five. We're going to say ninety-five percent. Because the people who looked after me, the older woman who took care of me during the day before my mother got home from work... Doña Paca, she didn't speak any English.*

*R: None?*

*Y: None. She never spoke English in over forty years that she lived in the U.S. (laughs)*

*R: Well, if she stayed there in el barrio, no?*

*Y: No she stayed at home.... There in her house all the time.*

*R: So, did you speak Spanish in any other environment outside of the home? Obviously it was prohibited in the school, but....*

*Y: In gatherings with my family, with the family. It was the nucleus of the family, it was really important. You know, my friends were my cousins. It was like, very... like the nucleus of the family was very protected. It was... my mother, my father, my aunt, my uncles, my [aunt's/uncles' spouses], my [male and female] cousins... That was the nucleus of friendship. So there in that nucleus, well, you spoke Spanish. We spoke Puerto Rican Spanish, obviously, because of Mom, and we spoke Spanish with a Cuban accent because of Dad. And it was funny because I knew from very young that I had to change the way I accented my Spanish when I was with the Cubans. My Cuban family. Because they were, uh, really particular... it was really like... there was like a sensation that they felt hostility*

*when they heard something that wasn't with the accent. It was really funny... it was really funny. So I would change. It was like entering in another.... person.*

She notes that, like most heritage speakers, her Spanish was acquired in the home aurally and orally. To a certain degree, necessity dictated her linguistic practice, as she mentions; neither her mother nor her caretaker spoke English. Spanish was also the language of familial interaction, where it came to be associated with the more intimate, emotional aspects of her life. Her description reveals the nature of many Spanish-speaking “pockets,” as she describes them, where one could live a lifetime without ever needing to know English. Spanish was a very present element of daily life in the *barrio*, even if it was restricted or persecuted in other contexts.

Yolanda also describes the awareness she had, from a young age, of the difference between her Puerto Rican and Cuban families. Arguably two of the most similar Hispanic groups in New York City, the Puerto Ricans and Cubans in Yolanda's family were different enough that she felt the need to adapt herself to each group. The difference was primarily phonological, although there was likely a difference in dialect as well. Within the same language, however, she developed what she describes as different “people,” or selves, in order to be included in (or more importantly, to avoid rejection by) these two collectives. On another occasion she explains the behavioral norms that accompanied these associations, as her Cuban “self” paid close attention to customs such as table manners, while the Puerto Rican “self” saw simply eating and sharing with family as the primary concern.

Adriana's family also spoke Spanish in the home, as her mother did not ever fully master English. For Adriana, her division of “selves” corresponded to the spaces she inhabited, as context again plays a role in delineating a fluid, multi-faceted identity. She describes how she transitioned from the Spanish-language home environment to an English-speaking exterior:

*I understood the Spanish. Eh... that was spoken in class and everything. Because my parents spoke it in-- at home. The minute we walked in through the door it was like going to a new-- a new... a new, uh.... world. A different world. It was*

*like transitioning from world to world. Yeah, so, at home, my mother and father would speak only Spanish. My father understood English, but he only-- we don't-- you know, with-- at home we only spoke Spanish. And my father taught me the-- the alphabet in Spanish, he would-- he would have me read, um, the newspapers in Spanish. So I would understand how to pronounce it. And I-- eh, em... but the minute I walked out the door, to school, I was-- we spoke English.*

The Spanish-speaking home culture and Spanish interactions in the *barrio* contributed to forming the Puerto Rican persona that Adriana defends so confidently. It is this knowledge of the language and a familiarity with its pragmatics that she uses as justification for her identity as a Puerto Rican. The fact that Adriana's father encouraged literacy in Spanish (compared with Yolanda's learning "by ear") likely contributed to her later competence in the language.

In New York, Puerto Rican children grew up speaking English in school and outside the home, but the influence of Spanish produced a heavily accented English among students was stigmatized as non-standard. In some cases it was treated as a disability, reinforcing the deficit model of bilinguals as inadequate speakers of both languages. The classroom surfaces yet again as battleground for matters of language and identity as Adriana recalls:

*In second grade, we were-- we were herded into, eh, once a week into speech class, and we were forced-- and my group was the "TH" (says letters). We were-- we were, I don't know, maybe it's because I was still pronouncing the "TH" as a "D," saying "dat" and "dey;" "dem," "dose".... And, um, I remember there was a cousin in the group, and we're in second grade, it was always-- every Tuesday, at certain time, eh, "those of you..." you know, "those of you who have to go to speech class...." Speech class. And we had speech class for a whole semester. Until we finally, finally learned how to pronounce the "TH." So that's how heavy the accent was, that despite the teacher speaking correctly, we would, amongst ourselves, speak it, you know, however, y'know, we had learned it.*

Hispanic students being herded into speech class is a classic example of a particular variety of English being preferred over another. The Hispanic accent, spoken by students who were, in reality, native speakers of English, was de-valued and treated as a deficiency. In addition to potentially creating problems with self-esteem, these practices in institutions such as public schools perpetuate dominant cultural ideologies and societal hierarchy as characteristics associated with a particular group are continually associated with a lower, less “educated” or less acceptable standard. The students’ continued use of their original dialect, in defiance of the school’s efforts, represents an act of solidarity in their resistance to the dominant cultural influences, and also serves to identify them within the group that they differentiate from the official norms.

Repeatedly stereotyped as a Spanish-deficient Nuyorican, Adriana nevertheless expresses complete confidence in her Spanish abilities from early on, stating, “I realized in New York, when I was taking Spanish in New York, that I was much more-- I knew much more Spanish than even the, the newcomers that came in from Central and South America at the time.” She goes on to explain that this was due in part to the lack of education among the immigrants from mostly rural areas. It is not surprising, then, that Adriana is insulted when the principal of the high school in Puerto Rico wants to set her back a grade, assuming she has limited Spanish skills. After admitting that she threatened to go back to New York, she explains:

*So, the principal was so... she was startled, I think. She was surprised, that I was so-- you know, that I reacted in such a way, that, um, she said, "well, um, talk to me in Spanish." So I said, "should have started with that, you know." This is how she should have started. But I looked at her and I said what-- In Spanish, I said, "¿Qué quieres que le diga?" [What do you want me to say?] And then she goes, "pues hablame algo" y yo, "pues, pregúntame algo." [“well, talk to me about something.” And me, “well, ask me something.”] You know, it's like, I'm kinda snotty. (laughs) I'm moody to the end. Entonces, I said well, ¿Qué me quieres-- eh, pregúntame lo que sea." Entonces ella me dice, [“What do you want-- uh, ask me whatever.” Then she says to me,] then she asked me something, she goes, eh,*

*"tú hablas españ--" and I said, "sí, lo hablo, y lo hablo en mi casa," [ "you speak Span--" and I said, "yes, I speak it, and I speak it at home." ]*

This exchange is revealing of the circumstances surrounding the "wave" of Nuyoricans arriving in the seventies. First, it is indicative of the negative attitudes towards and perceptions of Nuyoricans among islanders. Adriana describes a number of experiences that she attributes purely to prejudices on the part of the teachers at the school, such as the English teacher who refused to give her an A in the class. Second, it is clear that a mastery of Spanish was rare among incoming migrants, and that the average arriving Nuyorican may have presented major difficulties in the language. At the end of their debate, the principal allows Adriana to remain in grade level classes in every subject except Spanish, where she maintains she was fully competent. "And then I was in tenth grade Spanish. And I read it better than a lot of the students there, which was funny, in Spanish. And I was better, their Spanish, too. And in tenth grade, culture shock, I was reading mi-- el Mio Cid, which was the equivalent of reading Shakespeare." Later, however, she does confess to committing errors in Spanish:

*I did make a lot of-- some mistakes in e-- in the-- and embarrassing moments speaking Spanish. My first year in Puerto Rico, um, ahh.... for example, the word "ducha," which is "shower," all my life I had pronounced it with an "L." And my parents never corrected me! I would say, "Mami, voy a... meterme la lucha." Like, "lucha." [battle/fight] And my parents NEVER, NEVER, NEVER co-- corrected me. So when I said it in Puerto Rico, somebody just laughed at me. They said, "what do you mean, 'lucha'?" And I said, "pues, en la lucha." "¡No! Es ducha." I learned it from somebody else. Outside the home. Okay? And there were like, you know, stupid mistakes that you make, eh-- eh, like for example, eh, I-- eh, this guy, I remember saying, este, "la agua, " instead of "el agua." Which is, you know, typical. And then I said, este, instead of, um, when you, when y-- um, el.. el palomar. [ . . . ] Little houses where you, you know, build your little houses, you put 'em on top, and y-- that's where the pigeons [ . . . ] You know, where it's on top of the houses [ . . . ] where people who like to have birds [ . . . ] let them go, and*

*they come back, and the birds nest in these houses-- those are palomares. I called it palmero. I told this guy, "porque en el palmero..." and he goes to me, "what?" you know? And he laughed at me. You know, laughed, I mean, ha-- hard, you know? And I said, "Okay! So I make mistakes!" and I said "I wanna hear you speaking English!" and then he just said, "no, it's okay, it's okay. Es un palomar."*

Even with her confidence, Adriana is still susceptible to the errors common among heritage speakers who have learned in a limited context. Even with the continued use of Spanish in the home, the acquisition of a second language outside of the home leads to a certain degree of debilitation in the first language (Montrul, 2013). Errors of gender agreement (“la agua”) are common in this situation. A lack of sufficient input, the result of only being exposed to the language at home, also contributes to an incomplete development of the language, producing the type of word confusion that she reports. It is then after moving to a Spanish-dominant environment (and therefore increasing input in Spanish) that she becomes aware of these errors. Even so, Adriana’s relatively high level of Spanish competence likely facilitated her transition to Puerto Rican society.

In a similar situation, Yolanda also spoke Spanish at home from an early age, with parents, caretakers, and other family members. In spite of early exposure, however, Yolanda admits to struggling with Spanish throughout her childhood, especially with vocabulary:

*Mi español era motivo de burla en mi familia. Me burlaban mucho, sabe, y la gente se reía de la manera en que yo hablaba español, las cosas que decía, que decía muchos disparates, este...que me inventaba palabras...que....empezaba hablando y...y...en el medio yo pensaba que estaba hablando español pero realmente estaba diciendo una palabra en inglés.*

*My Spanish was something of a joke in my family. They made fun of me a lot, you know, and people laughed at the way I spoke Spanish, the things I said, that I said a lot of nonsense, uh... that I made up words... that... I would start speaking*

*and... in the middle I thought I was speaking Spanish but I was really saying a word in English.*

The difficulties with language she experienced as a child and continues to experience as an adult seem to have influenced her self perception. She repeatedly expresses insecurities about her language abilities, and maintains that her Spanish has been and continues to be flawed. While Adriana lived in the same majority-Puerto Rican neighborhood over the years, Yolanda moved several times and was not always surrounded by Spanish-speakers, which would have provided her with even less interaction to strengthen her Spanish. An only child, she describes herself as very reserved, spending hours alone in her room drawing. Even so, her language ability was such that she considered herself to be bilingual, albeit imperfectly.

*R: Sí. Pues, de niña, ¿te hubieras descrito como bilingüe?*

*Y: Yo pensaba que era bilingüe, sí.*

*R: ¿Pero ahora no? Ahora no... ¿no dirías que sí?*

*Y: Ahora estoy... a veces soy bilingüe.*

*R: Pero tú, como eres ahora, ¿hubieras descrito a tú de niña como bilingüe?*

*Y: Sí, que podía entender... yo podía...tenía conocimiento, podía entender...*

*R: Yes. Well, as a child, would you have described yourself as bilingual?*

*Y: I thought I was bilingual, yes.*

*R: But not now? Now you wouldn't... You wouldn't say so?*

*Y: Now I am... sometimes I am bilingual.*

*R: But you, as you are now, would you have described your child self as bilingual?*

*Y: Yes, that I could understand... I could... I had knowledge, I could understand...*

Citing knowledge and comprehension of the language as justification for her “bilingual” status, Yolanda demonstrates another characteristic of heritage speakers who often have a high level of receptive fluency, even if their spoken language skills are

imperfect. Qualifying her description, however, she exhibits a lack of confidence in her abilities when she states that she is “sometimes” bilingual. She seems to struggle with the belief that she should have been more capable or more fluent--it was only natural that she *should* have been bilingual, but was unable to achieve what she saw as an acceptable level of completeness. Yolanda then frames her perception of self within her linguistic difficulties, as her identity does not align with what she considers to be the ideal.

She spent considerable time in Puerto Rico every year and continued to use Spanish at home, Yolanda still had weaknesses in her spoken Spanish, so much so that she was unable to get into the universities in Puerto Rico. Well-qualified for the programs she applied to, she was still unable to demonstrate an acceptable level of competence in Spanish. She explains:

*Cuando yo vine a Puerto Rico, mi Español estaba TERRIBLE...para..lo que se esperaba de un estudiante universitario. Teni-- yo tenía mucha destreza, este, conocimiento en términos de...de las artes plásticas, porque a mí me habían puesto en una escuela de artes plásticas o yo estaba estudiando artes plásticas formalmente de los nueve años. Entonces, yo tenía mucha destreza para dibujar, para diseñar, y...este...intenté entrar en la escuela de arquitectura de Puerto Rico. Hice bien todo el examen, hice bien, eh, lo...las pruebas de diseño, pero no pasé la entrevista. [. . .] Yo no pasé la entrevista en la UPR. Pues decidí, que iba a intentar entrar entonces a la Interamericana que tenía un programa de artes plásticas, y allí ir mejorando el español.[. . .] Pues dije, pues (déjame) la oportunidad y quizás si yo me...pulo con el idioma, se va a hacer más fácil hacer la entrevista.*

*When I came to Puerto Rico, my Spanish was TERRIBLE... for what they expected of a university student. I had a lot of skill, uh, knowledge in terms of... studio art, because they had put me in a visual arts program or I had been formally studying art since I was nine years old. So, I had a lot of drawing and design skill, and...I attempted to get into the architecture school in Puerto Rico. I did well on the exam, I did well on the design tests, but I didn't pass the interview.*

*I didn't pass the interview in the UPR (University of Puerto Rico). So I decided that I was going to try to get into the InterAmerican University then, which had a studio art program, and work on improving my Spanish. So I said, well, let me take this opportunity and maybe if I... polish myself in the language, it will make the interview easier for me.*

Although she cites deficiencies in Spanish as what prevented her from being accepted into the university, we have already seen that there were other elements at play, such as her involvement in ASPIRA in New York. Yolanda painstakingly defends her qualifications for the program (she had, after all, been admitted to Cooper Union, in one of the most prestigious architecture programs in the region), including her knowledge and skills. Her language ability represents her only shortcoming, but the one that ultimately determined her value as an applicant. In her area of expertise she clearly demonstrates confidence in her skill, but she continues to feel defined by her linguistic inadequacy.

Yolanda did eventually gain entry to a university program, although she was placed in a program for non-Spanish speakers, and was again denied the formal study in Spanish that she feels would have made the difference in her proficiency. This sense of inadequacy persists, and she describes her struggle with “perfect” balanced bilingualism that continues in the present, acknowledging that she has made gains but still has problems using Spanish. She emphasizes the effect that a lack of formal instruction has had on her language skills (although it is impossible to know to what degree university-level Spanish classes would have affected her overall proficiency).

*R: Ok. Y..... ¿aho-- ahora te consideras bilingüe a veces?*

*Y: Bueno, todavía yo creo que por... por haber estudiado en estados unidos, eh, tengo lagunas en términos de gramática en español.*

*R: Mhmm... Pero, te sientes-- o ¿sientes que ha cambiado el el--equ-- el equilibrio de tu bilingüismo?*

*Y: Sí...*

*R: En comparación con cuando era niña*

*Y: Está mejor. Esta mejor, sí. Y lo que pasa es que también con el tiempo, y-- y el estar reubicado en Puerto Rico, pues el vocabulario se va ampliando. Y-- y eso es lo que alimenta, eh, el conocimiento de una idioma.*

*R: Claro. Pero, ¿sientes que todavía tienes algunas faltas de gramática?*

*Y: O sí, definitivamente, y... faltas de pronunciación. Especial-- particularmente las palabras que son casi iguales en español y en inglés.... este... que lo que cambia es una letra. Y hay palabras en español y en inglés que no cambian ninguna letra.... palabras como eh... algunas palabras, este... sencillas, que no hay problemas de pronunciación, pero una palabra como "important" and "importante" que es una letra de... de... realmente lo que cambia. Pero hay otras palabras que... tengo dificultad pronunciando en español porque es que.... la manera que tengo que poner la boca, se me hace más fácil, la palabra me fluye más en inglés.*

*R: Ok and... no-- now you consider yourself bilingual sometimes?*

*Y: Well, I still think that because I studied in the United States, I have gaps in terms of grammar in Spanish.*

*R: But you feel-- or do you feel that the equilibrium of your bilingualism has changed?*

*Y: Yes*

*R: In comparison with when you were a child.*

*Y: It's better. It's better, yes. And the thing is that with time, too, and being re-established in Puerto Rico, well, my vocabulary increases. And that is what feeds the knowledge of a language.*

*R: Of course. But you feel that you still lack some grammar?*

*Y: Oh yes, definitely, and... lack of pronunciation. Especiall-- particularly words that are almost the same in Spanish and English...uh..what changes is one letter. And there are words in Spanish and English that don't change even a letter... Words like uh.. some words... simple words, where there are no problems with*

*pronunciation, but a word like “important” and “importante,” that is one letter of... of... that’s really what changes. But there are other words that... I have difficulty pronouncing in Spanish because it’s that... the way I have to put my mouth, it’s easier for me, the word flows more easily for me in English.*

Years of practice on the island have expanded her vocabulary and fluency in Spanish, although Yolanda acknowledges that there are still moments of difficulty. She cites pronunciation in particular as an ongoing problem, confusing similar words and sounds. This is typical of bilinguals who learn two languages simultaneously from an early age, which leads to “compound” bilingualism. The shared semantic representations that characterize compound bilingualism tend to produce more frequent phonetic (pronunciation), syntactic, and semantic errors (Montrul, 2013). The division of use and vernacular in the two languages could also have contributed to this problem. She describes how experiences and education have divided the languages in their use and purpose, which contributes to the sense of incompleteness in her bilingualism.

*Y pues, el español sigue siendo eh... el idioma emotivo mío, y-- y el inglés es el idioma... como te digo... ¿pragmático? Es la palabra... que lo uso para estructurar... eh...(exhales) Ay. Como te digo.... El inglés es como... la parte.... de pensar ciertas ideas. Se piensan-- las pienso en inglés. Y otras ideas las pienso en español. La parte más creativa la pienso en español. Como-- este... la parte más, como la parte más científica, más analítica, eh-- la pienso en inglés.*

*And well, Spanish continues to be.... my emotive language, and English is the ... how do I say this... pragmatic language? That’s the word... that I use it to structure... uh... Ay. How do I say this... English is like... the part... for thinking certain ideas. They are thought-- I think them in English. And other ideas I think in Spanish. The most creative part I think in Spanish. Like, the the most, like the most scientific, the most analytical, I think it in English.*

The emotional division of languages is a thoughtful observation that Yolanda makes, at once characterizing her own language use and revealing how deeply and

intricately language is connected to her conception of self. Spanish, her mother tongue, is related to the most intimate, emotional aspects of her life: her experiences in home and in family, the holidays spent with relatives in Puerto Rico and lived in Spanish. Meanwhile, English has been the medium of learning, discipline, and knowledge throughout her educational career. Separate from the intimacy of the home environment, English learned in New York City represents the functionality and necessity of school, work, and survival. The separation of languages is likely also reflected in a division of self; like the persona for the Cuban family, English and Spanish represent different dimensions of her self.

In describing her language use, Yolanda reveals that the separation is not absolute. There is instead a degree of interference as the languages overlap, or as shortcomings in one language must be compensated for by the other. This difficulty is also due somewhat to the segregation of the language throughout her education.

*Y: Estoy bien consciente que... eh... de tener mucho cuidado cuando estoy relatando algo en español, porque puedo cometer errores, este, en términos estructurales en mi gramática. Porque recuerda que si estoy hac-- hablando sobre una área que conozco muy bien porque tengo la experiencia, pero, mi formación fue en inglés, mi pensamiento va a ser inglés, y una oración en inglés no es igual a una-- la misma oración en español. (laughs)*

*R: Claro que no.*

*Y: Y el orden de las palabras cambian, este...y eso sí, que todavía lo trat-- lo tengo que trabajar. Pero, yo creo que el problema se est-- se.... se.... ay, como se dice..... el problema mayormente..... es... eh.... porque no tengo la educación formal en español. Yo creo que si yo hubiese tenido eh, la educación formal en español como la he tenido en inglés, eh, no hubiese tenido ese problema. No... no hubiese tenido ese problema para nada. Eh... y yo únicamente he tomado, he tenido la oportunidad de tomar, un curso de español a nivel de-- de universidad, que es un curso de español de verdad, este...hace muchos años atrás. Tu sabes,*

*que yo soy un-- soy candidata para regresar a la universidad a estudiar español nada más. Yo sería idónea para eso.*

*Y: I'm very conscious that... of being very careful when I am telling something in Spanish, because I can commit errors, in structural terms, in my grammar. Because remember that if I am do-- talking about an area that I know well because I have the experience, but my formation was in English, my thought is going to be English, and a sentence in English is not the same as-- the same sentence in Spanish.*

*R: Of course not.*

*Y: And the order of the words changes.. and that is something that I still try-- I still have to work on. But, I think that the real problem is-- it's... oh, how do I say this... The problem is mainly... because I don't have formal education in Spanish. I think that if I had had the formal education in Spanish like I have had in English, I wouldn't have had that problem. No... I wouldn't have had that problem at all. Uh... and I only have taken, I have only had the opportunity to take one Spanish class at the university level, that was was real Spanish course... many years ago. You know, that I'm a-- I'm a candidate to return to the university to study Spanish alone. I would be ideal for that.*

Initially deemed insufficient by admissions personnel, Yolanda has, ironically, gone on to have a successful career in the university system. It is also important to note that the deficiencies she describes are primarily formal; while she may have little experience crafting written discourse in Spanish, her spoken ability is more than sufficient for her daily life. She raised her child exclusively in Spanish, and teaches in Spanish at the university level. She explains that speaking both English and Spanish has been a useful ability in the classroom, where she often uses both languages on a regular basis.

*R: Ok. ¿Usas español todo el tiempo? ¿O hay contextos en que no usas el español tanto? ¿O.... se divide, o está mezclado...?*

*Y: Yo diría que... este.... uso el español y el inglés indiscriminadamente. (laughs)*

*R: (laughing) En todos casos...*

*Y: Sí, en muchos casos y es interesante, porque mu-- en Puerto Rico, vamos a decir, eh, los textos y el material que yo doy, eh, se consigue muchísimo en inglés, pero no se consiguen en español. Entonces, eh, yo a veces cuando estoy dando la clase, estoy dando el término en inglés y en español para los estudiantes. Y--y--y.... este.... porque ellos también lo han aprendido en inglés. Pero trato de buscar el equivalente en español. Y me he encontrado en situaciones cuando estoy dando clase, como le he contado a mis estudiantes, donde he tenido un estudiante que no habla español en mi clase. Nada, nada nada. Y estoy dando la clase simultáneamente en español, y en inglés. Tu sabes, que es que paro de hablar español, "BAP", hago esa pausa, y empiezo en inglés, y doy ese segmento en inglés para ese-- esos dos estudiantes que tengo en el salón. Con la-- con las estudiantes de China. [. . .] fue completamente dividida la clase en español y en inglés. Y es-- y es interesante, porque los estudiantes me prestaban atención de igual manera. Porque les daba tanta curiosidad que yo podía hacer la transición en inglés..*

*R: Ok. Do you use Spanish all the time? Or are there contexts in which you don't use Spanish as much? Or it's divided, or mixed?*

*Y: I would say that I use Spanish and English indiscriminately.*

*R: In all cases...*

*Y: Yes, and in many cases it is interesting because man-- in Puerto Rico, let's say, the texts and the material that I give [in my classes], uh, you can find a lot in English, but you can't find them in Spanish. So then, I, sometimes when I'm teaching, I'm giving the term in English and Spanish for the students. And... because they too have learned it in English. But I try to find the equivalent in Spanish. And I have found myself in situations when I am teaching class, as I have told my students, where I have had a student in my class that doesn't speak*

*Spanish. None whatsoever. And I'm teaching the class simultaneously in Spanish and in English. You know, it's that I stop speaking Spanish, "BAP," I make that pause, and I begin in English, and I give that segment in English for that-- for those two students that I have in the class. With the students from China [. . .] the class was completely divided in Spanish and English. And it's-- it's interesting, because the students paid equal attention. Because it made them curious that I could make the transition in English...*

For Yolanda, making the change between languages is a natural transition for someone whose experiences have been characterized by such duality. The use of both languages is still a definite aspect of her identity and daily practice as she negotiates an area of the Puerto Rican environment that is also hybrid: the university. This exchange also reflects how closely Spanish and English coexist in Puerto Rico, where English is required for entry into the university, many courses are taught in English, and an overwhelming number of textbooks (as Yolanda notes) are written in English. It also brings into question whether a bilingual Nuyorican is not better suited for such a setting.

While Yolanda feels that she has gained language skills and benefited from her bilingualism, Adriana feels that she has lost language skills over time. To a certain degree, the shift in her language abilities has accompanied a shift in her sense of self. She has integrated herself into the culture, lifestyle, and also the linguistic practices of the island. She uses English less on a daily basis, and she compares herself to her sister, who continues to use English regularly while living in the United States:

*R: After having lived there for this long, do you feel more Puerto Rican? Do you feel different about your identity as a Puerto Rican? Do-- is your language situation different?*

*A: I do feel more Puerto Rican. And-- and um, since I don't always speak English here, I sometimes am speaking to eh, sometimes when I speak to people who I know are only English speaking, sometimes I may get stuck on a word, and-- and um, it doesn't come out! You know, I'm on-- I'm thinking about it in Spanish, and it won't come out in English. You know? And because I'm not, you know, that*

*fact, I, eh, I don't speak it as flue-- you know, as often. My sister who's living in the states, will talk to me in English. Eh, este, right-- you know, all the time, and um, I understand her, but I can tell, you know, that-- that, este, it's just, you know, i-- its-- I'm not as fast as she is. Or-- or as fluid, you know, I'm fluent, but I'm-- I, I can't speak it as easily as she does.*

The fact that she feels less comfortable in English but more Puerto Rican after several decades could suggest that the two are directly related. However, I believe it is more accurate as an illustration of the fluidity of identity constructs (and of bilingualism). Her English skills were a central part of her identity as a high schooler and a newcomer, but have become less prominent (and less necessary) as she has grown, adapted, and integrated herself into Puerto Rican island society. Now, ironically, it is her knowledge of Spanish that distinguishes her from some Nuyoricans and locates her closer to the “Puerto Rican” end of the spectrum:

*I-- I have cousins who-- who stayed living in the states. And they-- they know a lot more Spanish than the eh, average, uh, let's say Puerto Rican, because it's-- living in the states, because their parents always spoke Spanish, and they tend to be the interpreters, and you know, just-- one of them is working in a school. She's, um, she's usually, you know, asked to interpret my sis-- you know, my other cousin like I said, he was in-- in the police force, and he was always asked to-- to deal with these Puerto Ricans. Because like I said they knew the-- it was bicultural. They were bicultural, more than just bilingual. And uh, but they, but when they do come to Puerto Rico, they-- they do go through a culture shock. Because they are among Nuyoricans, but when they come to Puerto Ricans, you know, eh, it's-- it's-- and then the language, they have problems, you know, they were-- and they were always asking me. And a-- and this one particular one, who's in the school, is always asking me, "what does this mean?" You know? But she-- she'll understand half of it, and she-- or it's an expression, and she goes, "what does it mean? What do they mean by this?" And she's always texting me and asking me, so I'm kind of like a little dictionary.*

She now refers to Nuyoricans with some distance, similar to the way she once differentiated herself from the island natives at her high school. While she has not abandoned the label altogether, she seems to place herself in an intermediate category that distinguishes between the two groups. Describing her cousins as “bicultural,” she seems to contradict herself by immediately adding, “but when they do come to Puerto Rico, they--they do go through a culture shock.” The “culture shock” that her cousins experience is upon entering what has become her native culture in Puerto Rico. They are bicultural, but the two cultures to which they belong are still separate from the culture present in Puerto Rico. Theirs is then something of a third culture, like her own, differentiated at once from the American mainstream and the Puerto Rican island environment.

Adriana also includes language as a factor in this difficulty, as her cousins’ experience with Spanish in Puerto Rico is perhaps more typical of Nuyoricans. While they may know and understand it to a certain degree, it is not the language of their daily interactions and the vernacular may vary considerably. By distinguishing herself from the geographically and culturally distant Nuyoricans, and even by serving as the linguistic bridge between languages, it is clear that she has taken on a new role within the Puerto Rican-Nuyoricans collective. Her identity has shifted, and with it her language and perspective.

### **The Role of Language in Participants’ Identity Construction**

Much of the debate regarding language and Nuyoricans hinges on whether or not Spanish fluency is an indispensable characteristic of the Puerto Rican. Many of the intellectual and cultural authorities discussed previously have insisted on the absolute necessity of Spanish, maintaining that it is an indisputable requirement. Studies such as Alvar (1982) and Morris (1995) found that in general, when asked directly whether or not one must speak Spanish to be Puerto Rican, respondents overwhelmingly answered ‘yes.’ Further interviews and surveys, however, revealed that when the question is framed as open ended (“What constitutes *puertorriqueñidad*?”), language was rarely the first

criterion provided, and often did not appear at all. Zentella (1990) reported that as many as 90% of respondents on a given survey would not include language as an essential characteristic. At the very least, it is safe to say that true attitudes about the matter are ambiguous at best. In the case of bilingual Nuyoricans, the relationship between language and identity is also more complex than it initially appears. Yolanda offered her thoughts on the question of language:

*R: Sentías que... o ¿consideras que el lenguaje como tal es parte de ser puertorriqueño? ¿Es un requisito o una parte esencial?*

*Y: Bueno, sí, porque están en, este, en las pequeñas palabras, que nosotros vamos asumiendo, mientras estamos hablando. Este...y hay palabras-- eh, Puerto Rico, físicamente es pequeña, ¿verdad? Pero, tiene las características que cada región que tiene palabras para... eh... eh... objetos que todos usamos, ¿verdad? Como que... está dividido. Entonces, en el área en que yo vivía, en el grupo nuclear de mi familia, habían hasta expresiones que eran de mi familia nada más. Que únicamente la gente en la familia conocía esa expresión y sabía lo que estábamos hablando. So....\_\_\_\_\_ (indistinguishable) lo usábamos como un sistema de hablar sobre una situación sin que la otra persona se enterara. Es como-- como un tipo de código familiar.*

*R: Did you feel that... or do you think that the language as such is part of being Puerto Rican? Is it a requisite or an essential part? ]*

*Y: Well, yes, because it's in, uh, in the little words, which we assume while we are speaking. And there are words, uh, in Puerto Rico... physically it's small, right? But it has the characteristic that each region has words for... uh... objects that we all use, right? Like... it's divided. So, in the area where I lived, in the nuclear group of my family, there were even expressions that were only from my family. Expressions that only the people in my family would know and know what we were talking about. So... we used it like a system to talk about a situation without the other person realizing. It's like-- like a type of familial code.*

Although Yolanda initially asserts that language is indeed an essential part of *puertorriqueñidad*, what she goes on to describe is not the necessity of the Spanish language itself, but rather the significance of the dialect specific to Puerto Rico. Free from social and political implications, knowledge of the language is a matter of familiarity with the nuances of a given variety for the sake of understanding. She then reduces the question even further as she describes the “code” unique to her family. Her response suggests that there is indeed a certain necessity of Spanish knowledge, but that it is by no means exclusive.

The question of language was central to this investigation, but Adriana was not given the opportunity to explicitly respond to the requirement of language in the interviews. An anecdote that she provided independently, however, represents a more implicit version of an almost identical sentiment. The situation she describes resembles her encounter with the “half Puerto Rican” at ASPIRA, where she is indignant at having been questioned by someone who she considered less legitimate than herself. She frequently expresses strong opinions, both about her own identity and that of others, as she applies certain criteria to approve or disapprove of others’ legitimacy:

*And I remember speaking Spanish to this kid from the neighborhood, and I think he just didn't understand what I told him. But he-- he wouldn't, he, mm, I don't think he admitted it, so-- y'kno-- didn't want to admit it, so he just told me, "hey," you know, "speak English! Were in-- we're not in Puerto Rico, we're in New York! You speak English! Why d'you have to be speaking to me in Spanish?" And I remember I got so pissed at him, I said, "what, you don't know Spanish? You're Puerto Rican, you don't know Spanish? Stupid!" (laughs) And we had this, you know, argument, because he wanted me to speak to him in English, not Spanish! And he was Puerto Rican!*

Adriana, as a Spanish-speaking Nuyorican, considered it unacceptable for a Puerto Rican not to speak Spanish. Based on this occurrence, I did not pursue an inquiry about her opinions on language, as she clearly viewed Spanish as an integral part of being Puerto Rican. Furthermore, her incredulity at the boy’s preference for English over

Spanish would seem to suggest that language should be a primary aspect of such an identity. Asserting such an opinion outside of Puerto Rico, without ever having lived there herself, implies a prominent link between the Spanish language and Puerto Rican identity, even for some Nuyoricans. As we have seen previously, however, much like the participants in the aforementioned studies, Adriana repeatedly offers cultural knowledge as justification for her own Puerto Rican identity.

For Nuyoricans who find themselves between two languages and two social contexts, language can take on an especially prominent role in defining their identity, both in personal processes of identity formation and in externally imposed aspects. What often occurs is a double process of Othering, where the knowledge of a non-dominant language becomes the boundary of membership in two different contexts. Adriana describes how her knowledge of the *barrio* Spanish qualified her as an “insider,” differentiating her from non-Spanish speakers and from anyone who was not intimately acquainted with the neighborhood slang:

*A: And [to belong in the barrio in New York,] you knew the slang. You knew the importance in slang. For example, um, it was um, it wasn't even Spanish; it was just slang. You-- when you said "la jara," ah, "está la jara," este, you meant the pop-- the, the cops are there. I think Mexicans use that word, too. "La jara." You'd say, "voy pa'l rufo." I'm going to the roof. Dame un da-- "dame un nickel, dame un dime..." "un DIME" este... "ponte la suera(?)" Este... they would say things like, este... uhm.... like, "el ceiling." The ceiling. Yeah. You knew the language, you heard them talking. You understood it perfectly. Eh, they would say, "me dieron un 'holup' [holdup].... le dieron un 'holup' a fulano...." It was... You know-- you understood that one, right?*

*R: Yeah (laughs)*

*A: That-- the-- the-- the fire, este... la bomba de incendio, tu sabes, the-- they would all, este... what-- the ones that the-- ay, what do you call that? um... Where they always paint-- they always have the little dogs peeing on this...*

*R: The fire hydrant?*

*A: Uh huh fire hydrants were called "pompas" and they would always say, "ay! Abrieron la pompa!" meaning that they unscrewed it, and they would use this humongous can that was open on both sides and the strongest kid would hold it and-- s-- make this shower, you know, and everybody would just run into it, you know, with their clothes on, with-- to hell with it, they were just-- it was fun! It was like doing uh, in uh, a sprinkler system. And um.... They had so many slang words that you just knew it-- I just knew all the slang words! If I ha-- you know, if it was somebody else from some other Spanish speaking country didn't, you know, walked in, este... eh, to the neighborhood, they wouldn't understand it. But I understood perfectly. I understand English, I under-- I understood Spanish, and I understood the sp-- the neighborhood Spanish. The neighborhood slang. You know? And, uh, that-- and you would understand the slang from the old timers, and the new-- and the-- and the kids. Because the old timers had their own little slang. Like they would call young girls "pollitos..." "Esa pollit-- esa polla" like saying, this good looking chick, you know?*

It is important to note the context of this particular exchange, which followed an explanation of Adriana's *puertorriqueñidad* on the basis of cultural knowledge. Cultural characteristics transitioned into linguistic features, just as the examples transitioned from objective Puerto Rican cultural elements such as music and food to slang that was actually specific to New York. While Adriana intended this enumeration as a justification of Puerto Rican membership, it was ironically an unintentional demonstration of her belonging to a group that was clearly separate from Puerto Rico. In this case, "Puerto Rican" again takes on the contrastive in the context of the mainland United States. She first acknowledges that "it wasn't even Spanish; it was just slang," immediately suggesting a divergence from a purely Puerto Rican vernacular. Exclusively Puerto Rican anglicisms such as "el rufo" differentiate from other Hispanic groups in the same area. Meanwhile, in the use of a slang term such as "la jara," which, she notes, is also used by Mexicans, "Puerto Rican" slang takes on a more universal significance, distinguishing the Hispanic collective from the non-Hispanic Other(s). She even articulates the context

of this slang when she says that “if it was somebody else from some other Spanish speaking country [. . .] they wouldn’t understand it.” In this case, that would likely be true for someone from Puerto Rico as well. In this way, the “Puerto Rican” culture of New York City is, at the very least, a variety that is separate from that of the island, and it is precisely the “unifying” factor of language which serves as the dividing line between groups.

Just as easily as Spanish served as a marker of inclusion in the New York City *barrio*, it became the indicator of exclusion in Puerto Rico, in another example of the fluidity of identity in context. Kramsch (2009) discusses the intensity with which speech communities scrutinize speakers for the slightest error or deviation that will betray an outsider. Adriana describes a similar experience, where a slight accent was enough to raise questions about her identity:

*And when I got into college, um, I was always asked, my first year in college, if I was-- uh, my parents were either South American or if I had lived in South America. I don't know why. But I can tell that the-- the-- my fellow students picked up on the fact that Puerto Rican Spanish was not, you know, I was not a native... In that sense. But I-- then I apparently assimilated because, you know, that never happened after second or third year of college. So... but I spoke it, uh, because I did speak it right, and-- and everything else they didn't think I was from the States, that I had lived in the states... They would either ask me, "is one of your parents," uh, "from Spain or... South American or..." you know, when I said, "no, I've never lived in, you know, in those places..." and-- and they would always like, think I was from-- from some-- from somewhere THERE, you know, from one of those countries.*

Adriana’s Spanish, while correct, still presented a subtle difference that marked her as an outsider--at the very least not a “true” Puerto Rican. In a more overt example, Adriana comments on experiences in which the errors in her Spanish in school were directly associated with her status as an outsider:

*It was just little embarrassing things in front of the group. But they would, you know, get to the point where they were saying, "yeah, you're the Nuyorican. You don't really know all the-- the Spanish, like, that you should know." But then they would also come to me and say, "how do you write this word, what do you say here?" you know, and so forth.*

Simultaneous deficiency and proficiency doubly differentiated Adriana from her peers in this case, as the characteristics of both her Spanish and English use contributed to her identity as a Nuyorican in Puerto Rico.

As mentioned previously, being a native speaker of English was a central part of how Adriana identified herself upon arriving in Puerto Rico. It was what connected her to the “ingroup” of Nuyoricans, but was also what identified her as an outsider, differentiating her from her Spanish-dominant peers. On multiple occasions she describes being singled out or made fun of by other students simply for knowing English, which she connects directly to her status as a Nuyorican, saying, “It was, because [. . .] I was a Nuyorican, and every time I spoke English they would go to me, ‘oh, oh, mírala [*look at her*],’ you know, ‘look at her pronunciation!’ you know, ‘she's th-- like, the perfect one.’ You know how they, they kid each other?” She seems to consider this an ongoing situation when she adds, “As much now. But at the-- back then, if you would pronounce English without an accent, they kidded you a lot. Like, ‘look at her, she's speaking the language,’ you know? That kind of attitude.”

Speaking English fluently was also a source of discrimination, although to what degree it can be directly attributed to language is not clear. She describes a few instances of discrimination where being Nuyorican, being new to the school, and even her self-professed defiant teenage attitude could have all played a part in being treated unfairly. In the case of English class, however, knowing English was an undeniable factor in provoking discrimination from the teacher:

*Yeah.... and, ironically, I had been taking-- this was really, you know-- they had something against, uh, Nuyorican students. I had the coup-- I had a couple of teachers who were just simply prejudiced against the new arrivals. So I had to*

*deal with that. Language-wise, my English teacher did not like me, because she thought we were one of those students who thought we knew it all. [. . .] She did discriminate against the students who knew good English.*

Whether the English teacher was provoked by jealousy, insecurity, or simply by the mean-spirited irrationality of prejudice, Adriana recognizes that the treatment she received was directly related to her language ability. She later discusses ongoing battles in the classroom, where she would quickly finish the brief reading assignments and activities, but would not be permitted to work on other homework or assignments. Whereas the school environment in New York City established the standards that challenged the legitimacy of Spanish, the Puerto Rican school environment challenged English as the intruder, in both cases resulting in the marginalization of a linguistic group. The Nuyoricans found themselves on the disadvantaged side of both contexts, balancing in between languages that linked them to an identity of inferiority. Ultimately, Adriana received a B in the English class. She managed to make her way with her peers, but she was continually aware of the fact that knowing English made her different.

For Yolanda, being English dominant meant being separate from the Spanish speakers. Once she was finally admitted to a program, she was grouped with English speakers from other places.

*La otra cosa que [. . .] era parte de mi programa [. . .] es que ellos no permitieron que yo matriculara cursos regulares en español. Yo tenía que tomar cursos que eran de estudiantes no hispanoparlantes. La universidad InterAmericana tenía muchos estudiantes que eran de las Islas Vírgenes porque ellos tienen un programa...eh...de educación física, y compiten a nivel de lo que se llama la LAI, la Liga Atlética Inter...universitaria, algo así. Este...y ellos, pues, se destacaban mucho en esa competencia y la universidad estaba abierta a estudiantes de las otras islas caribeñas, y particularmente las islas que no son hispanoparlantes. Entonces, ellos tienen ese programa. Pues yo me metí en ese programa. (laughs). Entonces....no podía tomar clases de español regular. Tenía*

*que tomar para no his-- hispanoparlantes. Pero obviamente, en esas clases yo salía muy bien.*

*The other thing that [. . .] was part of my program [. . .] is that they didn't allow me to register for regular Spanish courses. I had to take courses that were for non-Spanish-speaking students. The InterAmerican University had many students who were from the Virgin Islands, because they have a physical education program, and they compete at the level of what they call the LAI, the Inter...university Athletic League, something like that. And they, well, they really performed well in that competition and the university was open to students from the other Caribbean islands, and particularly the islands that are not Spanish-speaking. So... I couldn't take regular Spanish classes. I had to take the ones for non-Spanish-speakers. But obviously, I did really well in those classes.*

In this case, external forces converted English language into the sole factor representative of Yolanda's identity in the academic realm. Rather than being considered bilingual or even Nuyorican, English dominance simply translated to "not Spanish speaking" in a prime example of an identity imposed by an exterior entity (Garrett 2007).

Only a few years earlier, the ironic duality of Nuyorican identity had produced a nearly identical situation in reverse. Yolanda explains how she was first prevented from taking Spanish classes: "En la escuela superior en NY, no me permitieron tomar clases en español tampoco. Yo tuve que coger-- [. . .] los hispanoparlantes tenían que coger francés. Entonces, [. . .] aunque no hablara español, y tenían un espa-- un apellido latino, te metían en las clases de francés." In this case, Latin (Spanish) last names were presumed to universally correspond to Spanish speakers, and thus the mere assumption of Spanish knowledge sufficed to differentiate the two groups.

For both, the knowledge of a language was a marker that differentiated them from their peers. Being Spanish speaking in an English-dominant environment identified them with a group, and then English skills marked the difference among Spanish-speaking peers. For Yolanda, a particular manner of speaking also made a finer distinction between her Puerto Rican and Cuban affiliations. As was mentioned earlier, a change of accent

and dialect asserted her belonging to one community or the other (Niño-Murcia & Rothman, 2008a) as well as representing the distinct personae associated with each.

The pattern of inclusion and exclusion reiterates the importance of context in the Nuyorican identity. This duality allows a single characteristic, such as a language, to function as the marker of both member and outsider. In this way, the contrast specific to the context determines how a characteristic will define an individual in a given moment. While the linguistic characteristics of the participants remain constant, their significance shifts from one situation to the next as they negotiate their place in the broader context of identity.

### **Tensions in Nuyorican Issues of Cultural Belonging (*puertorriqueñidad*)**

To a certain degree, perceptions and presumptions were to blame for much of the negativity towards Nuyoricans. As Adriana explains, she was part of a wave of return migrants in the 1970's whose parents had been part of an exodus in the 1950's. The sudden influx of migrants included many with limited Spanish skills, which was problematic for the school systems expected to absorb and accommodate these students, and which also led to stereotypes of Spanish-deficient Nuyoricans. These factors produced an overall negative sentiment towards Nuyoricans, and the pre-existing resentment was often exacerbated by the types of cultural clashes documented by Pérez (2004). This was the social environment that Adriana encountered upon her arrival to Puerto Rico, as she recounts:

*Cuando llegamos a PR, eh, descubrimos que nosotros eramos una parte de una ola que hacía dos o tres años que había empezado, de puertorriqueños que estaban regresando desde EEUU a PR. Era la inversa de lo que está pasando ahora, que PR se está yendo pa' EEUU, eran aparentemente, eh, todos ex-soldados de la segunda guerra, y personas que habían ido a buscar fortuna en los años 50, a, a NY basicamente tri-state area. Entonces estaban regresando a PR buscando su, pues, su sueño dorado de regresar a su islita, y-- y pues, yo llegué a la escuela pública, y lo supe porque la principal de la escuela lo estaba diciendo.*

*Que estaban regresando muchos estudiantes "Nuyoricans". Este, que no sabían mucho, este, español. Yo no era ese tipo de estudiante pero ella lo comenta. Y al decir es-- ella decir eso, ella eh, yo recuerdo que yo fui a la oficina principal con mi papá a ingresarme en la escuela, tu sabes, eh-- eh.... matricularme, y la principal dijo, que ella me aceptaba pero que me tenía que bajar de grado. [ . . .]Yeah.... and, ironically, I had been taking-- this was really, you know-- they had something against, uh, nuyorican students. I had the coup-- I had a couple of teachers who were just simply prejudiced against the new arrivals.*

*When we arrived in Puerto Rico, we discovered that we were part of a wave that had begun two or three years before of Puerto Ricans returning from The United States to Puerto Rico. It was the opposite of what's happening right now, where Puerto Rico is leaving for the United States, [and] they were apparently all ex-soldiers from the Second World War, and people who had gone to seek their fortunes in the 50's in New York, basically the tri-state area. So they were returning to Puerto Rico seeking their, well, their golden dream of returning to their dear island, and, well, I arrived at the public school and I learned about [the wave of returnees] because the principal of the school was talking about it. That there were lots of "Nuyorican" students coming back. That didn't know much Spanish. I wasn't that type of student, but she commented on it. And to say it is-- her saying that, she, uh, I remember that I went to the main office with my father to enroll in the school, you know, uh, register, and the principal said that she would accept me but I had to drop down a grade.Yeah.... and, ironically, I had been taking-- this was really, you know-- they had something against, uh, Nuyorican students. I had the coup-- I had a couple of teachers who were just simply prejudiced against the new arrivals.*

As discussed earlier, the migration pattern of Puerto Ricans is overwhelmingly circular. Although Adriana never explains what prompted her parents' sudden decision to relocate, it was likely similar to the motives of the thousands of others who constituted

the incoming wave of the 1970's. Duany (2003) cites urban restructuring in New York City and minimum wage hikes on the island; the combination of social and economic factors would send many back to their origins in Puerto Rico. While most of the decision-makers in these situations (the parents) were from the island and moved to the mainland as adults, upon their return they brought with them a new generation of offspring who had been born and raised in the North American environment, and who had possibly never even visited Puerto Rico.

Given the truly “foreign” nature of this new generation, the culture that they brought with them was undoubtedly different from that of the island. It is also not surprising that they often demonstrated difficulty or even a complete lack of ability in Spanish. General disdain for the “americanized” culture of the Nuyoricans was present among adults as well, but educators and administrators were especially resentful of being suddenly forced to take on and cater to many students who had little or no knowledge of the language of day to day interaction and instruction. Adriana, ever certain of her competence in Spanish, excludes herself from this group when she says, “Lots of ‘Nuyorican’ students [. . .] that didn’t know much Spanish. I wasn’t that type of student, but she commented on it.” Deficiencies in language and general conflicts of culture and attitude created an environment for the prejudice that she mentions.

Adriana goes on to describe events of discrimination, such as the conflict with an English teacher mentioned previously and an incident with an Algebra teacher who accused her of copying from a cousin who she had only just met. Being placed a year behind in Spanish also meant that she had to take a summer class after her senior year in order to complete the requirements for graduation. Even so, she speaks highly of several teachers with whom she had positive experiences. In spite of initial difficulties, however, Adriana describes how she implanted her Nuyorican culture to revolutionize social events in the school.

*So that was eleventh-- the eleventh grade, I-- I-- I got m-- I-- I started-- I me the class-- eh, would-be class president, and I, I-- I, I integrated certain things we were doing in high school back in New York where I said, "let's do campaigning,*

*let's do buttons, let's do, um, posters, and-- and-- and, you know, promote, you know the presidency, and the-- that was so, totally new to them. And I-- I-- and I started, I was I was, um, a photographer for the-- the yearbook, and, uh, it was totally new to them! I said, "don't you guys take pictures of, you know, the students when they're around the school and doing stuff and, you know, and I-- I said, "yeah, let's put it!" You know, said, "let's not use the... the-- the-- the... traditional, you know, este, portrait pictures!" And um, I, uh, took pictures, and they would-- you know, I would-- they would develop-- and I'd give it to the class president, vice president, I'd go develop it. He came-- he was voted in as president, the guy, and um, so, you know, and I would \_\_\_\_\_ doing it.*

In this case, the confrontation of cultures was a positive one, as Adriana was able to contribute new ideas and practices to the school environment. As a straightforward New Yorker, she was not afraid to speak up and make suggestions, incorporating practices and ideas from her own experiences in New York. Her more progressive campaign strategies proved successful in the run for class president. At the very least, challenging the traditions of the school yearbook likely made for a more memorable experience for everyone involved. It was this very same assertiveness, however, that would later prove problematic in a less harmonious encounter of the two cultures.

Beyond the initial prejudice towards Nuyoricans, there were two main areas of cultural friction that Adriana encountered. The first was the seeming “naivete” of the Puerto Rican students. Compared to the rough, sometimes violent urban environment of New York City, the town in rural Puerto Rico where Adriana found herself was utterly benign. She was surprised to discover inhabitants who were accordingly unaccustomed to anticipating and preparing for the ever-present possibility of violence that was the norm in New York City. She describes some of the practices that were second nature to her:

*I found the kids to be so naive. So naive. So naive. I couldn't believe it. I said, "my God, this is-- these kids when they go to-- if they go to New York, they're gonna kill 'em." I-- I-- I mean, I was fifteen years old, and in my homeroom class, I remember, the black guy who sat behind me pulled out a cig-- a pack of*

*cigarettes, and-- and all he had was, you know, marijuana, este, reefers, eh marijuana, marijuana cigarettes in there. And he offered me them. He goes, "you want one?" I looked back and I said, "no. I don't want it." Yep. I just said no! So they would stand in the back door, and they would shake hands, supposedly, with fellow, you know, students walking the-- in the, in the hallway. And what they were doing was exchanging money for... for drugs.[. . .] And we knew that. [. . .] And straws were not allowed because straws were being used to-- to snort coke. I mean, this is me, in-- when I'm fifteen, fourteen, fifteen years old, you know, at sixteen years old I go to sa-- Isabela, Puerto Rico, where kissing, smoking--plain smoking cigarettes, you would get, you know, punished for that, and you were called to the principal's office. And if the kids were necking, petting, you know... making out in the-- in the back of the.... you know, whatever the building, they were OH, it was a big deal. I said, "hell!" I remember when I was nine years old. The-- the gang, uh there was a gang at the time in my neighborhood, and I'd walk down, you know, I always lived on the second floor, and I remember catching them making love! [. . .] You know, yo-- and you knew what they were doing! You know? It's not like... So when I got to high school in Puerto Rico, it was like, really? You know, like kids would say nowadays, "seriously?" I mean, seriously, these kids-- ye-- ju-- you know, they think they're doing something wrong? Este... so it was, like I said, a major culture shock.*

Puerto Rico, like most of Latin America, tends toward social conservatism, thanks in part to the widespread influence of the Catholic Church. In terms of development, Puerto Rico was also several decades behind most of the United States, and especially somewhere like New York City. Amenities such as running water and electricity did not reach many of the rural areas of the island until as late as the 1960's. Not surprisingly, media (such as cable television) that often influence ideas about things such as sexuality and social behavior did not become commonplace until even later. Norms in rural communities were instead remnants of Spanish colonial practices and reflections of the

heavily Catholic influences. Conservative attitudes towards sexuality not only dictated acceptable behavior, but were also reflected in attitudes towards gender norms.

The disparity between genders was the second major area of cultural conflict for Adriana. Spanish influence and the Catholic Church perpetuated male-dominated structures and restricted the role and behavior of women. Puerto Rico also has this in common with much of Latin America, (especially in the 1970's) where women often have less social independence and are subject to many more social restrictions than men. Given the general social attitudes that were often decades behind those of New York, it's not surprising, as she recalls, that "wearing pants to school was not allowed at the time. You had to wear a skirt. You couldn't wear este, eh, high heels. You had to be-- wear flats. Loafers. And-- and bobby socks. And I thought that was so.... retrógrada. Porque, in sixth grade, in-- in New York, I was wearing stockings. Ok? We didn't wear bobby socks. It was like elementary, you know... that was-- you-- you-- you were, you were a baby if you wore that." This would become the greatest source of ongoing friction for Adriana. She describes disputes with her mother over what was "socially acceptable:"

*I couldn't go to town in pants. My mother said "don't wear pants to town!" I said, "why?" Or, "don't wear shorts outside the house!" "Why?!" It was like.. it was-- y, entonces eh, it was li-- y tiene que-- entonces they expected me to go de Concha Perrón to-- to town. I said, "I used to get out of the train, in New York, and go to Central Park with my cousins-- just us, you know? And um, and.. go to the park, or go to the swimming pool-- the public swimming pools and so forth... on my own! Get on the busses, get on the trains, and here to go to the stupid town you want me to have to be-- go with somebody else? And go-- not go alone? I can't go with pants? Not shorts, mind you, just regular jeans." I said, you know... And if I went out eh-- later on and when I was-- went out with somebody, and I had to go with my sister because they couldn't see me with just, you know, us two, the couple, alone. I-- um, I said to my mom, you're out of it. You know, no puedo. [I can't (deal with this).] When I was in hi-- when I was in college, she says, "don't come ho-- alone with your boyfriend in the car. Invite somebody, you know-- que*

*no te vean llegar." este.. "que no te vean llegar con-- sola con él." [so people don't see you arrive. Uh, so that people don't see you arrive alone with him. ] I got to a point where I said, "mom, I'm not gonna keep, you know, finding people to come with us. Pa'l carajo. [to hell with it.]" Because he had a car. I said, "pa'l carajo." An-- and I remember telling her, I got nasty. I told her, "mom, si en los primeros nueve meses, no... no tengo barriga, ["Mom, if in the first nine months I don't... don't have a (pregnant) belly,] they'll probably give me the benefit of the doubt another nine months. Second nine months, no-- no-- no salgo con barriga, pues soy machorra." [If I don't-- don't-- don't come out with a (pregnant) belly, well I'm 'machorra' (an old-timers' term for 'sterile')]*

The only point of difficulty that Yolanda describes perhaps best represents the point to which we keep returning: the stigma of language. She reflects on the implications of the English language for Nuyoricans. After many years, it is perhaps the only characteristic that remains prominent in her identity:

*Bueno, este, siempre el-- el asunto de.... de ser "nuyorican" siempre ha sido, ha estado presente. Este... y aparece en la ma-- la forma más... más peculiar, porque cuando uno habla otro idioma y otra persona no entiende... este... muchas personas piensan, pues, que, o estás diciendo algo despectivo de ellos, y se ponen bien paranoicos, este, y... y las veces que me he encontrado en situaciones donde estoy hablando inglés en Puerto Rico, pues, hay ciertas personas que se sienten como ofon-- ofendidos. Eso sí, lo he experimentado, y lo he experimentado a nivel profesional. Sabes, dentro de la universidad.*

*Well, the issue of... of being "Nuyorican" has always been, has been present. Uh... And it appears in the most... most peculiar form, because when you speak another language and another person doesn't understand, they get really paranoid and... and the times that I have found myself in situations where I am speaking English in Puerto Rico, well, there are certain people who feel like,*

*offended. That I have experienced, and I have experienced it at a professional level. You know, within the university.*

What Yolanda describes is perhaps more universal than being Nuyorican--being regarded with suspicion when speaking another language is experienced by people all over the world, where distrust surfaces when language distinguishes a speaker as an outsider. The stigma associated with English is particularly strong in Puerto Rico, and when it represents the double stigma of the battles over language and the cultural conflicts with Nuyoricans, it easily provokes resistance that can ostracize someone who appears as an outsider. While some cultural practices may adapt, language remains a clear characteristic of difference.

While some cultural aspects may evolve and adapt, some traits remain part of the individual regardless of the environment. Even after several decades of living on the island, Adriana admits that her attitudes and behavior still belie their New York origins. The assertive, driven character of culture in the United States often fails to align with the island culture, where gender norms still pose a challenge for an outspoken New Yorker like Adriana. "I will always be, *este, mys--* my daughter says that I'm more gringa than Puerto Rican," she says. Later she adds:

*Uh, why she says that I don't know. She goes, "mom, you should go back to the states." She goes, "tú eres más gringa que-- que puertorriqueña. [You are more gringa than Puerto Rican.] You don't fit in." You know, I fit in, I know, pero, she says that my attitudes-- my attitudes towards, eh, maybe sometimes towards men, the way they are here... my attitudes towards, este, she goes, she says, "mom, you don't realize this, sometimes you are a little, uh, you're not-- you don't-- you don't talk to people mm... beating around the bush like Puerto Ricans will." Or a lot of Hispanics. You don't go straight to the-- ella me dice, "tu hablas bien directo, [she says to me, "you speak very directly,] and some people that, you know, they-- they're-- they don't know how to take that." And-- and she says, "and you don't speak softly and timidly like some Puerto Rican women, buscandote la vuelta [beating around the bush], " she goes, " you use straight to the point," she goes,*

*"mom, I can understand you because, uh, I knew how-- I know how New Yorkers are. Because you're very New Yorker; you're very 'East Coast'" ella me dice [she tells me]. Pero... este, \_\_\_\_\_ you know, I probably have had trouble, you know, people are put off by that... este... I try to soften it. Este... and, you know, I can offer you, este, a point, and I'll insist on it, and that's not typical here, you know? If you're in the states, women are considered "bitches" if they, you know, defend themselves or whatever; imagine in a latino culture. You're even more of a bitch.*

Adriana also remarks on the ongoing nature of the disconnect between culture in New York and on the island. She describes the surprise of her cousins when “they do come to Puerto Rico, because they expect it to be nuyorican, and it's not nuyorican. It-- it's-- it's totally, you know, like they look-- they feel like they're going back to their parents' generation sometimes. Even though the people are young.” While the specifics evolve over time, the distinction between the culture of the New York *barrios* and that of the Caribbean island Puerto Rico remains a constant reality.

### **Limitations**

The greatest limitation in this study is the scope of the participants. Obviously, a case study of two individuals falls far short of accurately representing the whole of the Nuyorican experience. I interviewed two individuals who were very similar demographically, but who likely represent a minority among Nuyoricans as a whole. Neither was ever a recipient of public assistance, which differentiates them from the significant number of Puerto Ricans who are among the poorest inhabitants of places like New York and Chicago. College graduates represent a minority in the United States as a whole, and the discrepancy is even greater among Hispanics. A graduate degree in Yolanda's case makes the situation even more unusual. Both of my participants also arrived in Puerto Rico with strong Spanish-language skills, and their experiences would likely differ from those of Nuyoricans with little or no knowledge of Spanish.

Another factor that could prove significant in the case of these participants is gender. Based on the discrepancy between gender norms in Puerto Rico and New York,

and between those of men and women in society in general, it is possible that a male's experience would be drastically different from that of my female participants. A male might also profess different attitudes or views regarding issues such as language and identity. Zentella (1990) reported that females generally tended to hold more conservative views in terms of language use and maintenance. It would be useful to compare the attitudes of men and women in a similar context.

## Chapter 5

### Conclusions and Directions for Future Research

While language certainly plays a role in how Nuyoricans and island native Puerto Ricans view themselves and each other, what is clear is that there are many other ways through which identity is constructed among these groups. Though their individual circumstances were very different, both participants reported many of the experiences common to returning Puerto Rican migrants. Yolanda was the only one who admitted to real difficulties with Spanish, but both cited occasions when language was a deciding factor in matters of inclusion, exclusion, acceptance or rejection. Ironically, language appeared as an inextricable factor in questions of identity, as much in the Puerto Rican as the Nuyorican identity. Spanish represents the definitive link to cultural and ethnic heritage, but having learned English in a native context undeniably distinguishes Nuyoricans from their island counterparts. Spanish is what differentiates them from the Anglo mainstream of North American culture, but English is what sets them apart, albeit subtly, from native island society.

What was also evident was that while language is central to questions of identity, culture was also of great importance. Everything from attitudes, behaviors, music, food, and family life played a part in forming the interviewees' sense of self. This lends some legitimacy to third, fourth, and fifth generation Puerto Rican migrants who, although they have lost the linguistic link, still feel connected to their origins. As Flores (1997) notes, the Nuyorican experience is not unique but rather paradigmatic, and similar scenarios can be found in communities of displaced peoples throughout the world. He argues that separation and displacement serve to strengthen collective identity, as members of diasporas value and hold tightly to their culture. Nuyoricans identify with Puerto Rican culture and also contribute diversity to the process of defining something as subjective and dynamic as identity.

In contrast with the importance placed on cultural practices and linguistic characteristics, aspects of identity such as race and nationality seemed of much less

importance in the participants' construction of their individual identities. Puerto Rico's political situation makes a claim to nationality somewhat irrelevant, and thus belonging to Puerto Rico as an entity becomes more geographical than political. In turn, the geographical boundaries are somewhat porous as a result of the political situation, as the *vaiivén* maintains the circular flow of people to and from the island, making it difficult to differentiate those from "here" or "there." As discussed in the review of literature, race, and its problematic companion, "ethnicity," are perhaps the least reliable characteristics and represent very little legitimate evidence of identity. Yolanda makes no mention of race at all, while Adriana considers it an anomaly in her nevertheless Puerto Rican identity.

While identity theorists may decry the use of essentialist categories, these interviews demonstrate that black-and white-dichotomies continue to represent a major part of how people view and understand themselves. The fluid nature of identity makes it nearly impossible to delineate in isolation, which creates the need for a context within which to define oneself. The fluid identity then adapts as necessary to situate the individual relative to the social, cultural, or geographic situation. Certain aspects of identity take on greater significance at times, and less importance in other moments. In New York City, Adriana and Yolanda's inclusion in the Puerto Rican collective was unquestioned, where language and cultural features united them in contrast with other well-defined groups and the non-Puerto Rican mainstream. In Puerto Rico, however, cultural elements faded in importance while the same linguistic characteristics acquired a new significance as their status was reversed. In both situations, it was contrast that provided the foundation on which to construct an identity, as an identifiable Other enabled an either-or comparison. Puerto Rican or not, Nuyorican or not, Spanish or English--such binary categories often served as the basis for the participants' identification of self and others, and were wholly dependent upon the context in which they applied. They were also the categories through which they were defined by others. At once objective and subjective, these characterizations embody the duality of the Nuyorican identity.

Beyond the concrete characteristics that are frequently used to construct a more concrete albeit superficial picture of identity, the participants' comments and experiences clearly indicated a number of less palpable factors that contributed to a deeper underlying sense of self. Adriana offered a lengthy list of characteristics that, if not stereotypical, were at least standard in her concept of a "Puerto Rican." She insisted, however, on her legitimacy, even while conceding that she did not conform to any of these aspects. She simply "knew;" she merely "was." Yolanda described the maternal appeal that the island held for her and the feeling of returning home every time she arrived. For her, it was an emotion and the sum of her experiences in Puerto Rico throughout her life. Both admit to feeling more Puerto Rican after many years of living on the island; merely permitting degrees of legitimacy calls into question the absolute nature of such an identity. Perhaps, then, the essence of *puertorriqueñidad* is as impossible to conclusively identify as it is to articulate.

In the future, it would be interesting to see how characteristics such as gender, education, and levels of bilingualism (relatively constant variables in this study), affected return migrants' experiences or perceptions of self. A contemporary counterpart to this study, involving interviews with recent migrants could provide continuity and perhaps reveal what aspects of the Nuyorican experience have changed over the last several decades. It would also be worthwhile to study current attitudes about language, identity, and belonging among Puerto Ricans on the island. As migration trends continue to be towards the mainland and statehood initiatives gain some popularity, we may find that distinctions become less pronounced or, alternatively, that nationalistic sentiment is galvanized against "contaminating" influences.

Identity, in the case of individuals who straddle cultures, contexts, and languages, can be a double sided coin where one can be either, both or neither. For Nuyoricans, language can be both a point of pride and a point of weakness. They may be Puerto Rican and Nuyorican, as Adriana commented, or somewhere in the middle. Ultimately, as Yolanda argues, there are aspects of identity that transcend matters of ethnicity, language, or national boundaries:

*El ser puertorriqueña, no ser puertorriqueña... hay personas que literalmente no pasan por eso. Pero hay personas que pues... Por alguna razón, este, eh... la tormenta, eh, las cosas que están alrededor... eh, y a veces uno se siente que no puede hacer nada por hacer ciertas cosas y todo esa tormenta se une, ¿verdad? Se une. Y-- y creo que se llama, pues un-- se puede decir que es una crisis, una crisis existencial que... que uno pasa. Y alguna gente pues terminan, tienen la suerte que se dan el lujo de tener un "nervous breakdown" que (laughs) ...pero otras personas, pues, este, no llegan a caer.*

*The being Puerto Rican, not being Puerto Rican... There are people that literally do not go through that. But there are people that, well... For some reason... the storm, the things that are around them... and sometimes one feels that she can do nothing because of doing certain things and all of that storm comes together, right? It comes together. And I think it's called, well, you could say that it's a crisis, an existential crisis that... that one goes through. And some people, well, they end up, they are lucky enough to have the luxury of having a "nervous breakdown"... but other people, well, they don't ever fall.*

And this is, in essence, the human experience: the battle struggle to discover identity and existence beyond boundaries and categories. It is the subjectivity of the individual and the forging of the precise and intricate self that results from the storm of existence.

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**Appendix**

## Appendix A: Interview Questions

*(The interviewer reserves the possibility of making minor modifications to the protocol during the course of the interview, such as asking followup questions or requesting clarification, elaboration, or descriptions.)*

¿Dónde naciste?

*Where were you born?*

¿Donde te criaste? ¿Dónde viviste, y de cuándo a cuándo?

*Where did you grow up? Where did you live, from when to when?*

¿Cómo fue el ambiente “lingüístico” en tu casa?

*What was your home language environment like?*

¿Te considerabas bilingüe? ¿Por qué (no)?

*Did you consider yourself to be bilingual? Why or why not?*

¿Cómo estimarías la proporción de inglés y español? (como porcentaje, por ejemplo)

*How would you estimate the balance of English and Spanish? (As a percent, for example)*

¿Usabas Español en situaciones fuera de la casa?

*Did you use Spanish in any contexts outside of the home?*

¿Puedes describir estas experiencias?

*Can you describe these experiences?*

Si no, ¿por qué no?

*If not, why not?*

¿Cómo te percibías o describías en aquellos tiempos?

*How did you perceive or describe yourself back then?*

¿Te sentías “puertorriqueño/a”?

*Did you feel “Puerto Rican”?*

¿Te hubieras descrito así o hubieras incluido “puertorriqueño/a” como parte de tu identidad?

*Would you have described yourself that way or even included your identity?*

De sí, ¿qué características te “dieron derecho” a tal título?

*If so, what characteristics do you think qualified you as a Puerto Rican?*

¿Consideras que lenguaje es parte de ser puertorriqueño?

*Do you consider language to be part of what it means to be Puerto Rican?*

¿En qué medida te sentías diferente de tus compañeros?

*To what extent did you feel different from your peers?*

¿Tienes alguna memoria de haberte percatado de esto para ese entonces?

¿Cuándo?

*Do you remember becoming aware of being different in a particular moment?*

*When?*

¿Cuándo te mudaste para Puerto Rico?

*When did you move to Puerto Rico?*

¿Para qué fuiste? (Mudaste con la familia, para estudiar, para trabajar....)

*Why did you move? (Moving with family, to study, to work, etc.)*

¿Por qué fuiste a Puerto Rico en vez de otro lugar?

*Why did you go to Puerto Rico instead of somewhere else?*

¿Cómo fue tu experiencia inicial?

*What was your initial experience like?*

¿Cuánto tiempo habías ya pasado allí? (Viajando, visitando familia, etc.)

*How much time had you previously spent there? (Visiting family, traveling, etc.)*

¿Tuviste problemas con integrarte o asimilarte?

*Did you have difficulties integrating or assimilating?*

¿Por qué crees que fue así?

*Why do you think this was the case?*

¿Tuviste alguna dificultad de lenguaje?

*Did you have any difficulties with the language?*

¿Hubo variaciones de cultura, actitudes, apariencia que te diferenciaron de los demás?

*Were there any differences in culture, attitudes, or appearance that set you apart?*

Si no, por qué crees que fue así?

*If not, why do you think this was?*

¿Por qué te quedaste?

*Why did you decide to stay in Puerto Rico?*

¿Cómo te describirías ahora con respecto a la identidad?

*How would you describe yourself now in terms of identity?*

¿En qué medida crees que cambió tu sentido de identidad como resultado de tus experiencias?

*To what extent do you feel your sense of identity changed as a result of your experiences?*

¿Te sientes más puertorriqueño/a ahora?

*Do you feel more Puerto Rican now?*

¿Cómo es tu estado lingüístico ahora?

*What is your language situation like now?*

¿Todavía/ahora te consideras bilingüe? (Si no, ¿por qué no?)

*Do you still/now consider yourself bilingual? (If not, why not?)*

¿Ha cambiado el equilibrio de tu bilingüismo?

*Has the balance of your bilingualism changed?*

¿Hay todavía aspectos del lenguaje que te causen dificultades?

*Are there still areas of the language you have problems with?*

## Appendix B: List of codes

Color	Category	Code	Description
Blue	National Identity	NID	Commentary related to Puerto Rican national identity, references to national identity
Magenta	Ethnic Identity	EID	Commentary related to ethnic identity, in and out of Puerto Rico
Green	Cultural Identity	CID	References to customs and culture
Yellow	Linguistic Identity: General	LID	Characteristics of the language of a particular group; also the linguistic characteristics of an individual: ability, status, etc.
Dirty Yellow	Linguistic Identity: Individual (Problems/deficiencies)		Individual language characteristics per participants. Notable issues with language or perceptions that contributed to experiences
Orange	Language and Identity (Negotiation) Acts of Identity	LIDN LIDA	Language and language use as identifiers; language choice; language (discourse) that serves to identify the speaker with a particular group or under a particular label
Pale Orange	Labels	LILA	Use of labels to identify or differentiate groups
Aqua Blue	Others and Otherness	OT	Situations of contrast with an Other; identification through an Other
Purple	Membership	MEM	Claims of membership in a given group, community, demographic; statements that demonstrate a belief that the speaker was part of a given group
Light Purple	Discrimination	DISC INEX	Experiences with discrimination or exclusion based on aspects of group identity; excluding or including; "ingroup" vs "outgroup" experiences
Pale Blue	Inclusion/Exclusion		Statements that seem significant but don't fit in any of the above categories... General statements/claims about identity

### **Vita**

Rachel Denton was born in Memphis Tennessee. After graduating from high school she began studies at Maryville College in Art and Psychology. A study abroad program in Puerto Rico and a passion for Spanish let to her remaining on the island and ultimately receiving a Bachelor of Arts degree in Studio Art from the University of Puerto Rico in 2012. She was accepted into the Spanish graduate program at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, where she was awarded a graduate teaching assistantship. Rachel graduated with a Master of Arts in Spanish in August of 2014. She hopes to continue her education in a PhD program, focusing on the learning processes and social contexts of language.