

Subaltern Cosmopolitanism: Community and Transnational Mobility in Caribbean Postcolonial Feminist Writings

Jamil Khader

The question of home, and the rewriting of home and nation in the diaspora, is a fundamental topos in Puerto Rican women's writings. Writing in the context of more than a century of imperial relations, patriarchal nationalism, and circular migrancy between Puerto Rico and the United States, postcolonial feminist writers Aurora Levins Morales, Rosario Morales, and Esmeralda Santiago assert that women can never experience a genuine sense of home anywhere, neither in the metropolitan United States nor in the Caribbean.¹ They show that women remain alienated and estranged not only from their metropolitan homes, as a result of colonization and racism, but also from their originary Caribbean homes, as a result of nationalist ideologies, patriarchal oppression, poverty, and other personal traumatic experiences. Because Puerto Rican feminists are often relegated to an outside position in their nation as emblems of U.S. colonial hegemony, Levins Morales, Morales, and Santiago find it equally urgent to subject the Caribbean home to an internal critique that allows for rewriting home in the experiences of Caribbean women. In their anomalous positions as feminists, colonials, and second-class citizens, Levins Morales, Morales, and Santiago offer an alternative mode of reconnecting to and remembering home, what I call subaltern cosmopolitanism.² These writers balance their lack of a genuine sense of home as women, colonials, and second-class citizens in both insular and metropolitan spaces with strong concerns for the welfare of their colonized nation and with the search for new meanings of community that can reintegrate them within transnational and transethnic communities of struggle, rather than within the exclusive borders of Puerto Rican diaspora.

In what follows, I explore the articulation of this subaltern cosmopolitan perspective and the alternative ways home is rewritten in Aurora

Levins Morales and Rosario Morales's cross-generic text, *Getting Home Alive*, and in Esmeralda Santiago's two bildungsroman texts, *When I Was Puerto Rican* and *Almost a Woman*, and in her novel, *América's Dream*. From their different political positioning (Levins Morales and Morales as socialist feminists and Santiago as a critical multiculturalist), Levins Morales, Morales, and Santiago articulate this subaltern cosmopolitanism through four major strategies: First, they deploy the trope of the condition of homelessness in insular and metropolitan terrains alike. They depict their exclusion from *la gran familia puertorriqueña* (the great Puerto Rican family) by virtue of their gender and class identities and from the American nation by virtue of their racial Otherness and second-class citizenship. Second, they foreground their sense of homelessness by remapping their multidirectional movements within insular and metropolitan spaces and through international linkages. This allows them to redefine the traditional referents of insular and metropolitan identities without transcending their colonized nation or wishing it away. Third, they offer a postcolonial critique of U.S. imperial domination of Puerto Rico, expressing strong concerns for their colonized nation and its welfare. Santiago thus unravels the destructive effects of colonialism on the natives, while Levins Morales and Morales advocate self-determination for Vieques. And fourth, by disavowing the consolations of nostalgia to a mythic home, Levins Morales, Morales, and Santiago construct new topographies of agency and belonging for subaltern cosmopolitans, committing themselves to communities of struggle everywhere and fostering a transnational and transethnic politics of solidarity.³

In rewriting "home," Levins Morales, Morales, and Santiago turn the language of belonging to an originary home(land) into a condition of homelessness through their positions as women; poor, racial Others; and second-class citizens. Traditionally, the project of rewriting home in contemporary Caribbean women's writings has been confined to experiences of displacement and not belonging in the metropolitan, imperial home, where the diasporic female subject feels excluded by long histories of colonization, racial Othering, and xenophobia.⁴ The Caribbean home, in contrast, remains in these writings a mythical and overromanticized primordial site, where the Caribbean female subject is said to overcome the psychological scars of alienation in two related ways: by recuperating an originary ethnic identity (African roots) that reunites the subject with its authentic self, as posited in the influential philosophy of negritude and the Black Power movement in its different Caribbean incarnations; and by affirming their allegiance to a primordial homeland they can always return to, as postulated by teleological narratives of migration. For Levins Morales, Morales, and Santiago, however, there is no genuine sense of home even in the homeland. This internal

critique of Caribbean home is especially important for Puerto Rican feminists who are generally marginalized and devalued, in Margarita Fernandez Olmos's words, as "emblems of foreign intervention." In the context of more than a century of U.S. imperial hegemony in Puerto Rico, feminism has often been viewed as part of the legacy of Yankee imperialism. A few decades ago, in fact, the Puerto Rican playwright and nationalist René Marqués went so far as to state that "Puerto Rico was in danger of losing its cultural identity to a North American matriarchy."⁵

Remapping the idea of home in the diasporic imaginary is central to the corpus of Santiago's work. In her two fictionalized autobiographies, *When I Was Puerto Rican* and *Almost a Woman*, as well as her novel, *América's Dream*, Santiago decenters home at the intersection of gender, class, xenophobia and race, making it clear that, for underprivileged subaltern families like hers, home can never be a site of comfort and safety.⁶ The adverse circumstances of poverty, machismo, and personal trauma in Puerto Rico as well as racism and discrimination in the United States deprive her of a real sense of home in both insular and continental spaces. Santiago opens *When I Was Puerto Rican*, her fictionalized autobiography and the bildungsroman of a poor young girl called Negi, with a description of the miserable poverty in which her working-class family lived in the 1950s Puerto Rican countryside in the context of the (under)development program known as Operation Bootstrap. Their house was nothing but a "box squatting on low stilts" (12), that was crudely built from inappropriate materials and that, in the tropical weather of Puerto Rico, becomes like a furnace. Moreover, this house, which looked like "a giant version of the lard cans" (7), was always in danger of collapsing. The family was so poor that, when any repairs were to be done, the family had to live and sleep on the dirt floor, which meant that they had to compete for space with "snakes and scorpions [that] could crawl into the house from their holes in the ground" (7). Moreover, she realizes the extent of their deprivation and destitution when she compares her shack to other homes "with running water inside their houses, electric bulbs shining down from every room, curtains on the windows, and printed linoleum on the floors" (31).

Moving to Santurce, the mother and her children lived in a one-room wooden house that, despite the running water and electricity, was located near a trench that filled with sewage when it rained. They shared a bathroom with another family and managed to survive only on money orders and the packages of used clothes from relatives in New York. In Santurce, they settled in the infamous barrio of El Mangle, where their house was built over a black lagoon of sewage, turds, and refuse. The stench in El Mangle was omnipresent and repulsive to everybody, "But in El Mangle, we could not stay away from the stench. The air smelled like the brewery, and the water like human waste. Food did not taste good. The

smell lived inside us, and even though Mami used a lot of garlic and oregano when she cooked, it did not help. I could still taste shit when I ate" (137). Like other postcolonial writers, Santiago employs scatological tropes to criticize both the Commonwealth and U.S. federal governments for neglecting the living conditions of the subaltern underclass.⁷ As the living conditions of the subaltern become intertwined with waste and disposal, Santiago uses scatology to represent the colonial legacy of corruption, systemic exclusion, and oppression.

Santiago's alienation from home was exacerbated by her father's *machista* values, womanizing, and, consequently, the bickering and resentment between the parents. The Santiago family was a product of an informal consensual union. Although the mother kept insisting on regularizing their relationship, the father refused to marry. Furthermore, the father indulged, as Negi complains, in shameless habits and womanizing, which not only caused his wife and family a lot of suffering but also prevented him from providing for his family's needs. The father periodically leaves the house for days, abandoning the mother and leaving the children to starve and go barefoot, only to come back and demand that his wife serve him his dinner. Whenever he returns, therefore, they fight, with resentment and hatred. On these occasions, the mother usually decides to leave him, but she stays after he convinces her to forgive him.

The childhood experiences of Negi and her siblings were thus marked by personal trauma. Although autobiographies often attempt to recover the security of childhood in an ideal past, Santiago shows that such a fantasy cannot be achieved in the context of trauma, poverty, and deprivation. Negi describes her feelings under those traumatic circumstances as a desire to "disappear into my room the minute the air tensed [. . .] I wrapped myself in a thin sheet that did not silence their insults but made me invisible to the hate that clouded their eyes" (195). The mother, moreover, abused the children to release her own tension. Her unpredictable moods made Negi weep until her chest hurt, "each sob tearing off a layer of the comfort built from my parents' love" (16). Her trauma is captured in the image of a child "afraid to step into the room where I heard things breaking" (204) or "huddled in a corner" with "tears glistening the tips of [her] lashes" (207). Negi realizes that, for the underprivileged, there is neither childhood nor childhood security to recover. Santiago, in short, fails to feel at home on the island, and in *Almost a Woman*, she captures this haunting feeling of homelessness in the semantics of total alienation: "[Puerto Rico] was no longer familiar, nor beautiful, nor did it give a clue of who I'd been there, or who I might become wherever I was going next" (*Woman*, 2).

The erasure of Puerto Rico as a home-site is juxtaposed with the disavowal of continental United States as a safe home. Now it is race and second-class citizenship that exacerbate her condition of homelessness.

For Santiago, the metropolis is an inhospitable environment of bigoted social workers and teachers, brutal police, broken families, youth gangs, and crime culture. As a critical multiculturalist, Santiago is adamant about criticizing the paternalistic racist attitudes of her teachers and of the government officials' attitudes toward her mother and other *Boricua* (Puerto Rican) subalterns in the United States. On her first day of schooling in New York, Negi has to convince the school administrator, Mr. Grant, that even though she does not speak English fluently, she should not be kept one grade back. In *Almost a Woman*, furthermore, Santiago criticizes Mr. Grant and his ilk for taking low proficiency in English as the ideal indicator of low intelligence. But Negi keeps promising him she will "lern good" and finally makes a pact with him to go to the "eight gray six mons. Eef I no lern inglish, I go seven gray. Okay?" (*Woman*, 226). Although he grants her until Christmas to prove herself, Mr. Grant sends her to the learning disabled class, which was "the equivalent of seventh grade, perhaps even sixth or fifth" (*Woman*, 228). Like the educational system, the welfare system reflects the racist and xenophobic ideologies that intensify Santiago's sense of homelessness in the metropolitan United States. The welfare office crushes the spirit of the poor, dehumanizes and criminalizes them. When her mother is fired from work, Negi accompanies her to the welfare office to interpret for her. Noticing that these bigoted social workers mean only to humiliate her mother, Negi asserts that the United States can never be home, "always just the places I lived" (*Woman*, 2).

In *Getting Home Alive*, Aurora Levins Morales collaborates with her mother, Rosario Morales, on a postmodern cross-generic text, in which they, too, repudiate insular and metropolitan home-spaces, but for different reasons altogether.⁸ Rosario Morales was born in East Harlem in 1930 to Puerto Rican-Jewish migrants from Naranjito. She grew up in poverty in El Barrio, only to move out to go to college and marry a communist Ukrainian Jew from Brooklyn. Later they shuttled between Brooklyn, Indiera Baja in Puerto Rico, Chicago, and other metropolitan centers. Levins Morales was born in Indiera Baja and spent her childhood on the island before moving to Chicago at the age of thirteen. As they travel in different directions, Levins Morales and Morales cannot make the island into home because the island is familiar to them only in the semantics of tourism and gender oppression. They cannot reinvent the mainland as home either because their lives are marked by urban violence and its horrors.

The place and the people of Puerto Rico are alien to Morales, who finds herself relating to them only through the commodifying and exoticizing gaze of the tourist. Before visiting the island where she had lived for eleven years, however, Morales articulates her attachment to *Borinquen* (the Taino name for Puerto Rico) through a romantic and nostal-

gic language that celebrates the tropical texture of her identity. The shreds of childhood memories of her father telling her stories about the island and the numerous photographs that commemorate some of her early visits there provide the basis for this nostalgia for "a place [she] did not grow up in" (87). Her sense of elation at going home is evident in the beginning of the "Puerto Rico Journal" section of the book:

Home. I'm going home, I thought, and the happiness bubbled in me and spilled over. Home to the broad split leaves of the plantain and banana, the gawky palm, the feathery tree fern, to the red bell of the hibiscus and the yellow trumpets of the canarion, to the warm moist sweet smell of the air. (76)

Morales soon realizes, however, that her trips to Puerto Rico implicate her in the "touristic gaze," rendering the island completely alien and foreign. Her clumsy Spanish, the hostile landscape, and the efforts of others to reinvent her pure Puerto Rican identity for her leave her resentful of the place and its inhabitants. Thus, she writes, "But *this was never home!* We're staying at Samuel's apartment in the heart of the city, and I bounce around Santurce like a tourist. . . . It's a foreign city for me for all I lived eleven years in Puerto Rico" (76; my emphasis). These negative feelings alienate her and make her decide to leave: "I don't want to be here, I didn't. The roads feel dusty and unappetising, the country hostile to me, the social life *enredada* and constricting, and I want to escape to Cambridge" (80).

More importantly, Levins Morales and Morales, like Santiago, refuse to make Puerto Rico home because of gender oppression. For them, home signifies obedience to the Spanish cult of femininity, the internalization of the ideology of *marianismo*, which curtails women's self-fulfillment, their freedom to grow, and the courage to change things. *Marianismo*, named for the Virgin Mary, subordinates women by confining them to reproductive functions within the domestic sphere. Although it grants women some level of authority in the home, *marianismo* displaces women into symbols of men's honor and family name and legitimizes their resignation and endurance of suffering for the family. Alfredo Lopez, for instance, notes that the Puerto Rican woman was expected to "bite her lip, turn her face to the wall, and wipe her tears so as not to let her children know the secrets of manhood."⁹ Levins Morales, thus, criticizes gender-based repression, upon which a homogenized and androcentric image of home or nation is constructed. In her story of her grandmother, she states:

Now retired to Manolin's [her husband] dream of a little house in Puerto Rico with a yard and many plants to tend, she longs for New York or some other U.S. city where a woman can go out and about on her own, live among many voices speaking different languages, out of the stifling air of that house, that community, that family. (23)

Home, for Levins Morales and Morales, is built on the deprivation of women's freedom and autonomy as well as the repression of internal difference for the sake of a self-same homogeneity. As such, Morales ends her "Puerto Rican Journal" with a sense of relief about her trip back "home" to Cambridge, leaving behind a place of dependency and enslavement (82).

But going back to Cambridge will not fulfill her wish that the "[United States] is home now." In fact, the U.S. mainland becomes another site of homelessness, registered in the imagery of living under conditions of political emergency as racial Others and second-class citizens. The U.S. mainland is first rejected as a safe haven, for she always feels violated and endangered there:

I have run away from the persecution that is always around me.
It is always around me.
I am never safe,
never safe. (21)

To be in the continental, urban United States is to live under conditions of fear, anxiety, violence, homicide, and total annihilation, conditions that are not that different from living under the rule of oppressive political regimes. When she moves to Chicago, which she calls "a city of casual death" (22), Morales realizes the extent of death that sweeps everybody in the city, including the three Black youths they first encountered there and her own son. It is a place of siege and terror:

Chicago was a wasteland. Nowhere to walk that was safe. Killers and rapists everywhere. Police sirens. Ugly, angry looks. Bristling hostility. Worst of all, nowhere to walk. Nowhere to go if it was early morning and I had to get out. Nowhere to go in the late afternoon or in the gathering dusk that meant fireflies and moths at home. (22)

It comes as no surprise, then, that the two women compare the South Bronx to a "war zone," like Korea, where houses are razed or neglected (17). Furthermore, they deploy the image of the refugee to depict their urban sense of homelessness:

The road full of refugees on foot, their lives pushed wearily in front of them in baby carriages, in carts which they pull like horses. . . . A plane appears. Darts towards us. Scatter! Hide! Bullets rain down. Pull your head closer to the ground. A bomb leaves a hole where people and whole households in bags and carts were moving to safety. (18)

By the end of this comparison, the title of the book, "getting home alive," becomes an ironic reminder of the urgency of "getting out alive" (18). There is no homing in, or homecoming, for them, but a continuous sense of homelessness.

Like Santiago, furthermore, Levins Morales and Morales are reluctant to find a home in the United States because its racism and jingoism

turn Puerto Ricans, and all other minorities, into racial Others and second-class citizens. Homelessness is caused here by the pressures on Puerto Ricans to assimilate and acculturate. The discourse of jingoist assimilation assumes a necessary separation between the language of intimacy, their "mama language," and the language of public discourse, English. Although the moral republic demands they conceal their Spanish, Morales calls for the affirmation and recognition of Spanish and its Otherness in U.S. public discourse to abolish feelings of inferiority, cultural alienation, whitewashing, and shame that the acculturation discourse forces upon Latino/as. Morales writes:

But I'm sad, too. For the English language robbed of the beat your home talk could give it, the words you could lend, the accent, the music, the word-order reordering, the grammatical twist. I'm sad for you, too, for the shame with which you tore away—hide—a whole treasure box of other, mother, language. It's too rough-mannered, you say, too strong, too exotic, too untutored, too low class. (145)

Morales, moreover, records her feelings of horror and pain at hearing her speech patterns become Americanized. Like Santiago, she indicts the educational system for assimilating the Other to the U.S. worldview and accent. She writes:

I cried when I heard my voice on tape for the first time. My voice showed no signs of El Barrio, of the South Bronx. I had erased them, helped my teachers erase the signs that I had been a little girl from the tenements who could not speak a word of English. . . . (19)

This horrific feeling of assimilation gets translated in her dreams through a desire to pass, to pretend "to be white and blond and Aryan" (21). But this fantasy of passing, especially for her as the wife of a Jewish man, takes on the worst embodiment of racial superiority, ethnocentrism, and xenophobia: her identification with a Nazi storm trooper who is herding her relatives into a concentration camp. This intense identification with oppression and persecution leaves her with an image of spiritual dirtiness, corruption, and pollution.

Subaltern cosmopolitans rewrite home not only because of their sense of homelessness but also because of their multi-directional movements in both the United States and Puerto Rico as well as because of their international linkages beyond these borders. Santiago, Levins Morales, and Morales go beyond the traditional circular migrancy discourse, or the movement between Puerto Rico and the United States, to situate Caribbean subaltern cosmopolitans within broader transnational contexts that permit them both a sense of oppositionality and a sense of empowerment and agency. Theorists of circular migrancy, with its post-modern celebration of life in the air, have reinforced a postnationalist world order that prematurely articulates a desire to transcend the na-

tion and to root Puerto Rican cultural identities *ni de aquí, ni de allá* (neither here nor there). In "Traveling Cultures," for instance, James Clifford references circular migrancy between Puerto Rico and the U.S. mainland as the primary signifier for a metanarrative of rootless, interstitial existence. For him, the airbus that Puerto Ricans ride to cross *el charco*, or the pond (the Puerto Rican term for the Atlantic Ocean), has become a trope for living "more or less permanently in transit."¹⁰ Clifford claims, moreover, that this condition of constant displacement and de-territorialization reflects the growing significance of the interstices in the Puerto Rican experience. Rather than ask a Puerto Rican, "where are you from?" Clifford implies that it is more productive to ask her, "where are you between?" In an ironic twist, Clifford turns the circular migrancy of thousands of unskilled Puerto Rican laborers and their struggles for survival in both Puerto Rico and the metropolitan United States, into a site for the articulation of a postmodern location, extra-territorial and disembodied of any investment in the matrix of national and collective identities they inhabit. Because of the material histories of exclusion and repression that Puerto Rican feminists experience in both insular and metropolitan terrains, I am skeptical of idealized readings of such disembodied mobility. By having free access to the metropolitan United States, moreover, these mobile subjectivities and their rootless cosmopolitan trajectories serve as an alibi for U.S. global hegemony. Such a location of extraterritoriality and rootlessness celebrated by circular migrancy theorists is simply untenable for subaltern cosmopolitans.

In *When I Was Puerto Rican*, Santiago rewrites home by foregrounding her condition of homelessness through tropes of constant multi-directional traveling and sequential dislocations within both insular and metropolitan spaces. Because of their subaltern position, Negi's family has to shuttle back and forth between the impoverished San Juan barrio of Santurce and the other barrio of Macún, until her family relocates to Brooklyn. These labyrinthian moves and sequential disposessions are also central to the autobiographical sequel *Almost a Woman*, which Santiago begins with a depiction of her dispossession and travels inside both Puerto Rico and New York.

In the twenty-one years I lived with my mother, we moved at least twenty times. We stuffed our belongings into ragged suitcases, boxes with bold advertising on the sides, pillowcases, empty rice sacks, cracker tins that smelled of flour and yeast. . . . Once in New York, we moved from apartment to apartment, in search of heat, of fewer cockroaches, of more rooms, of quieter neighbors, of more privacy, of nearness to the subway or the relatives. (*Woman*, 1)

In contrast with the mother, who after years of "circling," decides to return to Macún, the barrio where they started their journey and where she believed "everyone knew each other and each other's business,"

Negi decides to move out of her mother's house and travel on her own inside the United States. Santiago commemorates this in her ironic translation of a Spanish rhyme, which she remembers from childhood: "*Martes, ni te cases ni te embarques, ni de tu familia te apartes.*" Rather than translate this as "On a Tuesday, don't get married, nor travel, nor your family leave," she playfully renders it as "On a misty Tuesday, I didn't marry, but I did travel, and I did leave my family" (*Woman*, 2). Thus she goes to Florida, where she begins her "own journey from one city to another" (*Woman*, 2). Her homelessness continues.

These feelings of homelessness through multidirectional and sequential travels inside the United States can be read as a metaphor for her resistance to Americanization. As a critical multiculturalist, Santiago closes both of her autobiographical texts with a sense of openness, incompleteness, and the impossibility of arrival. Doing so, she inverts what Edward Said calls the "voyage in," a narrative of the successful acculturation of immigrants to modernity and its promises.¹² For Santiago, despite acceptance to New York's prestigious Performing Arts High School and, later, to Harvard, the voyage is not completely in. Although she travels in pursuit of an education to improve her family's economic condition, she feels guilty that her mother's limited funds had to be spent on her, not on her numerous siblings. In *América's Dream*, furthermore, Santiago explicitly critiques the prospects of both the "voyage in" and the American Dream through the tragic history of América González, who fails to escape domestic abuse at home on Vieques even when she travels to Westchester County, New York, to work as a nanny and live-in housekeeper. In a permanent multilocational and sequential displacement, Santiago refuses to ground her character's identity in any home, neither insular nor metropolitan, opting instead to clear a space to redefine the traditional referents of Puerto Rican identity.

Disavowing any sense of home, Santiago interrogates the traditional signifiers of Puerto Rican identity and home. Precisely for this disavowal, however, insular critics have dismissed Santiago as an assimilationist. The nativist reception of Santiago's first autobiographical text glosses over the title's urgent call to all Puerto Ricans to reconsider the referent of *Puertorriqueñidad* (Puertoricanness) in its contingency and instability. The title, *When I Was Puerto Rican*, challenges the insular national imaginary because of her use of the adverb "when," indicating an earlier time. It was construed as a perfidious recognition of the irrevocable "pastness" of Puerto Rican identity, its dissolution and apocalyptic end.¹² However, the title effectively underscores the inevitable impact that multidirectional displacement has on the relevance of such concepts as home (Puerto Rico), identity (*Boricua*), and culture (Spanish). For Santiago, rethinking home and the nation in Puerto Rico is linked to the critique of the traditional image of the *jibaros*, the highland subsistence

peasants, who for many nationalists constitute authentic Puerto Ricans. Santiago interrupts the dominant representation of the *jibaros*, who were elevated from the status of mythologized farmers to national icons in the elitist national discourse, but who are still, as the mother tells Negi, "mocked for their unsophisticated customs and peculiar dialect" (*Puerto Rican*, 12). Negi feels deep affection for these mythic farmers and tries to imitate them, to the total dismay of her mother. Negi could never be a *jibara*. Rethinking the nation, Santiago shows, must involve the transformations that the island has been going through during a century of U.S. imperial domination and global capitalism. In one interview with Carmen Hernández, Santiago said, "If I'm not Puerto Rican enough [as Puerto Ricans on the island say about mainland Puerto Ricans] and in my eyes Puerto Rico is not Puerto Rican the way it was Puerto Rican before [because of rapid encroachment of mass commodity culture and global capitalism on the island], then what is Puerto Rican and what am I doing here?"¹³ In *Almost a Woman*, Santiago highlights this irony in the incident where Jaime, an actor and a Puerto Rican cultural nationalist, accuses Negi of being a copout for her devotion to East Indian dance. Santiago retorts:

I saw his point but that didn't make me want to rush down to the nearest community center to dance the plena. Why should I be less Puerto Rican if I danced Bharata Natyam? Were ballet dancers on the island less Puerto Rican because their art originated in France? What about pianists who performed Beethoven? Or people who read Nietzsche? (*Woman*, 286-87)

As she displaces and reinterprets the traditional symbols of *Puertorriqueñidad*, rejects originary identities, and remaps home, Santiago remains loyal to her nation and concerned about its political future.

Extending the borders of the multidirectional displacement seen in Santiago's work, Levins Morales and Morales rewrite home and create a sense of homelessness by stressing international linkages and hemispheric connections. For Levins Morales and Morales, histories of travel back and forth between insular and metropolitan spaces are not adequate to capture the thick narrative of transnational experiences within which they are located. As they recreate "layer upon layer of travel and leaving behind, an overlay of landscapes" (26), Levins Morales and Morales assert the primacy of tropes of travel and displacement that integrate them within different international communities in the Caribbean, Latin America, Africa, North America, Europe, and the Middle East. These tropes include routes, borderlands, roads, paths, crossroads, refugees, immigrants, trains, ports, docks, and ships. For example, they call themselves children of "many diaspora[s], born into this continent at the crossroads" (212), thus opening up a radical global framework of overlapping spaces that conjoins the Antilles, the United States, Latin America, Europe, Africa, and Israel/Palestine in a singular spatio-tem-

poral matrix. This transnational imaginary evolves in their memory from the overlap of Jewish- and African-victim diasporas, as seen in the invocation of histories of slavery, the Middle Passage, Ellis island, the concentration camps, and the Holocaust. These transnational experiences constitute not only networks of kinship (European immigrants), discrepant cultural heritages (African, North American, European, Middle Eastern), and competing racial ancestries (Taino, Afro-Caribbean, whiteness, Jewishness) but also ideological positioning that identifies them with U.S. and Third World feminism, especially the work of the Chicana feminist Gloria Anzaldúa, and with international revolutionary politics around the world.

The tropes of constant multidirectional and sequential travel in Santiago and the transnational linkages in Levins Morales and Morales are central to the internal critique they launch against the official narrative of the nation, especially the two main images of the island nation at the heart of Puerto Rican nationalist discourse. A very popular image of the island derives from the work of Antonio Pedreira, which represents Puerto Rico as an insularity—a closure upon itself, a space of stability and sameness existing not only in isolation from but also in resistance to the outside (colonial) world. Moreover, Levins Morales, Morales, and Santiago interrogate the other popular image of Puerto Rico in nationalist discourse, namely, the myth of the nation as the source of wholeness, plenitude, and regeneration. In the work of the nationalist playwright René Marqués, for example, the nation is seen as an immutable cultural essence with a fixed national center, and the natives are promised redemption as long as they remain rooted in the land close to that center. Those who abandon the red earth of the homeland, however, lose whatever dignity, or *la mancha del plátano* (the mark of tropical origin), they had. In contrast, subaltern cosmopolitans implicitly align themselves with those Caribbean intellectuals, like Edouard Glissant, who represent the islands of the Antilles as an "opening out"; they reject the manichean logic of colonialist discourse for the *intercultural* and relational reasoning of postcoloniality.¹⁴

As they rewrite home through tropes of homelessness, multilocational displacement, and international networks, subaltern cosmopolitans insist, nonetheless, on articulating their concerns for their nation through a postcolonial critique of U.S. imperial domination of Puerto Rico. Santiago, Levins Morales, and Morales do not situate histories of displacement and travel in Puerto Rico in the context of personal preferences and decisions, but in political and economic structures. Hence, this postcolonial critique does not prematurely celebrate the end of colonialism, as if an unequivocal rupture with colonialism can be meaningfully maintained under contemporary conditions of globalization; it seeks to dismantle colonialism while articulating new social agendas.

The discrepancies and clashes between their subject positions as women and colonials, on the one hand, and as second-class citizens of an unfulfilled democratic dream, on the other, generate a firm sense of belonging to the national community and to the fight for social justice for Puerto Rico.

Santiago offers a postcolonial critique of U.S. imperialism in her focus on the U.S. ideology of assimilation, modernization, and progress. Here Santiago's political perspective expands the scope of her critical multiculturalism to an ideological position at the intersection of gender, class, race, and nation. With her young and inquisitive mind, Negi observes humorous anomalies about her English classes, the U.S. experts who visit the island to civilize its inhabitants, and the natives' reactions to things American. She mocks the colonial imposition of English on the local populace through a hilarious description of English pedagogy in schools. In, "The American Invasion of Macún," for example, Santiago transcribes from that naive child's perspective, the colonial efforts to Americanize Puerto Ricans through the teaching of English and through the imposition of U.S. values, attitudes, and beliefs:

Are ju slippin? Are ju slippin?
 Bruder John, Bruder John.
 Mornin bel sar rin ging.
 Mornin be sar rin ging.
 Deen deen don. Deen deen don.

This comic representation of the English class parodies the coercive pressures of the U.S. colonial structures to Americanize the local populace, to make them, as Nancy Morris states, "Americans in spirit, American in hope, American in sentiment."¹⁵ In her conversation with her father about the imperialist gringos, Negi comes to understand that Americans are called imperialists because "they want to change our country and our culture to be like theirs." Negi then decides that she is "not going to learn English so [she will] not become American" (*Puerto Rican*, 73).

Santiago articulates a subaltern women's satiric perspective on modernization and progress as well as on U.S. imperialism. Her character Doña Lola, a shrewd and witty old woman, sees beyond the promises of capitalism and the socio-economic programs (Operation Bootstrap) that were rapidly changing life on the island. Doña Lola distrusts the *Americanos* and their efforts to turn Puerto Rico into a consumerist, modernized society. She realizes that U.S. entrepreneurialism will eventually lead to gentrification. She assures Negi that if Nelson Rockefeller (a symbol of U.S. capitalism and control over the international division of labor) builds a hotel on their *finca*, they will not be able to live there anymore.

The subaltern women's ability to decenter imperialism is also evident

in Santiago's humorous representation of the U.S. experts. These colonial officials came to teach local women about nutrition and dental hygiene, in order to make Puerto Rican children "grow up as tall and strong as Dick, Jane, and Sally, the *Americanitos* in our primers" (*Puerto Rican*, 64). In response, the women mock the large visual aids the experts bring with them and their ornate and technical Spanish. Moreover, the women mock the experts' ignorance of the quotidian pressures in their lives. To the laughter of the other women, one woman ridicules the huge, ugly models of teeth with pink gums and giant toothbrush of the U.S. hygiene lesson, while another makes it clear that "if [she had] to spend that much time on [her] teeth, [she] won't get anything done in the house" (*Puerto Rican*, 65).

After this lesson, the experts lecture the women about proper nutrition, with the help of a colorful chart of the major food groups. The nutrition consultant speaks a "heavily accented, hard to understand Castilian Spanish," to tell the women to consume diverse North American foods, ignoring the local staples of rice, beans, salted codfish, and plantains. The shrewd Doña Lola, thus, remarks to the experts that "none of the fruits or vegetables on your chart grow in Puerto Rico" (*Puerto Rican*, 66). The subaltern can speak, but the ignorant and paternalistic colonial experts cannot hear her.

Levins Morales and Morales criticize patriarchal U.S. global power not only within insular borders but also within wider global contexts. They denounce the U.S. colonial control of the Puerto Rican island of Vieques, which the U.S. navy has appropriated for military uses. The perpetual movement of military vehicles and equipment is seen as a shameless spectacle of power. Levins Morales and Morales link the ordeal of their friend Angel, a political prisoner and activist, with the ordeal of Vieques itself. Like Vieques, Angel is physically abused by U.S. naval officers. The U.S. navy confiscates lands and makes it obvious that the U.S. government and military complex own "your lives" (73). Levins Morales and Morales deploy tropes of rape and masculinity to describe the (neo)imperial penetration of Puerto Rican land and people who resist the yankee conquerors: "Ships, jets, tanks, trucks, bombs and bombs and bombs. The noise cracks the walls of the houses. Even the sea dawn of the Caribbean is shell-blasted. This is an island the U.S. navy wanted for target practice" (72). In Vieques, the U.S. navy tries to show off its supreme global power in endless mock invasions, which Levins Morales and Morales call "dress rehearsal for murder" (73). The only way out, they suggest, is for the navy to leave Vieques.

This feminist postcolonial critique of U.S. imperial hegemony is, moreover, intertwined with a critique of the patriarchal imperialist subtext of ethnographic practices, ecocide, and violations of animal rights. Rosario Morales holds "man the scientist, *white* man the scientist, white

ruling class man the scientist, the entrepreneur, the corporation president" (68; emphasis in original) responsible for ecocide. Connecting U.S. imperialism, racism, and ecocide to the aggressive masculine desire to control nature and all those who are different, especially women and racial Others, Levins Morales and Morales integrate concerns for their nation with concern for the welfare of other oppressed groups and abused creatures.

Led by this care for the welfare of the Other, Santiago, Levins Morales, and Morales call for a politics of transethnic and transnational solidarity, grounded in conscious alliance and affinity rather than identical histories, desires, or locations. They aspire to act in solidarity with oppressed minorities against the legacies of segregation and identity politics within the borders of the United States and with oppressed communities of refugees, forced exiles, and revolutionaries across the globe. By forging these transnational and transethnic bonds, subaltern cosmopolitans reconfigure the diaspora and uncouple it from originary home and identity. They attempt to de-essentialize the representations of identity, home, and culture that underpin traditional theories of exile in the Caribbean. However, they resist postmodern theories of the diaspora, like those of Paul Gilroy, in which the diaspora reconfigures identity in fractal and chaotic formations by "transcend[ing] both the structures of the nation state and the constraints of ethnicity and national particularity." Such theories fail to disarticulate themselves from racial and originary identities and end up reinscribing the ethnic foundations—that is, the blackness—of the African diaspora. Floya Anthias correctly points out that such a concept of diaspora deploys "a notion of ethnicity which privileges the point of origin in constructing identity and solidarity." These theories thus obliterate inscriptions of difference and possibilities for transethnic politics of solidarity within and across nations. As Anthias writes, "To claim *transnational* bonds for the African diaspora may function to politically weaken *transethnic* bonds with other groups sharing a more local or national context of contestation and struggle."¹⁶

Like Anthias, the feminist Caribbean writers discussed here attack the divisive legacies of ethnic absolutism and identity politics underpinning the ideology of multiculturalism in the United States, and call for a politics of solidarity among U.S. ethnic minorities that go beyond ethnicity. Santiago addresses this critique indirectly, where Negi seems to be aware of the need to transform the existing relations between groups in the United States. Santiago deplores the ethnicized youth gang culture in her neighborhood as part of the Anglo establishment's policy of divide-and-rule. Instead of working in coalition and solidarity, Italians, Latinos, Blacks, and Puerto/Nuyoricans practice the politics of identity, segregation, and exclusion. Santiago laments that

The Italians all sat together on one side of the cafeteria, the blacks on another. The two groups hated each other more than they hated Puerto Ricans. At least once a week there was a fight between an Italian and a *moreno*, either in the bathroom, in the school yard, or in an abandoned lot near the school, a no-man's land that divided their neighborhoods and kept them apart on weekends. (*Puerto Rican*, 229)

As a critical multiculturalist, Santiago deplors the reification of difference in a multicultural United States, calling instead for a politics that can mobilize apparently disparate ethnic groups in solidarity to transform the social order and its public sphere.

In contrast to the young Negi's limited vision of solidarity within U.S. borders, Levins Morales and Morales call for a transnational politics of solidarity as politicized women who are active in different circles for different causes. In their diverse political commitments, Levins Morales and Morales are ideologically positioned across various political discourses and social practices, such as socialist feminism, international revolutionary politics, and U.S./Third World feminism. They identify themselves with communists (not necessarily with members of the Communist Party but with militants), revolutionary *compañeros*, freedom fighters, advocates for indigenous rights, victims of military regimes in Latin America, Palestinian refugees, political prisoners, postcolonial feminists, and ecofeminists. *Getting Home Alive* thus reverberates revolutionary elán. This politics of solidarity promises that the underdogs will continue to fight back together until one day they "destroy their [imperialist and capitalist] armies and topple their governments" (69).

They address the importance of nonessentialist solidarity. For them, the politics of solidarity indicates, "knowing the future is long and wide, with room for everyone on earth to enter" (153). This politics is characterized not only by openness and optimism but also by its dialogic nature. "Solidarity," they add, "is a two-way street, fires burning at both ends, and the only well at the middle" (153). In contrast to insurgent movements organized around essentialist identities, Levins Morales and Morales maintain that the self-appointed heroes of identity politics abuse the sanctity of solidarity and revolution. In particular, they critique the sexist underpinning of traditional revolutionary politics, by which Third World male revolutionaries exploit the compassion of others, especially white women who are fascinated with the romantic image of liberation. For them, these revolutionaries are nothing but philanderers, parasites, and exploiters, who thrive on the guilt that terrorizes these privileged women.

Levins Morales and Morales's strongest act of solidarity here, however, is reserved for the Palestinians. As Jewish women, socialist feminists, and revolutionaries, Levins Morales and Morales urge Israel to drop its "besieged mentality" and consider instead the politics of soli-

parity with the Palestinians and the Arab world in general, to bring an end to the vicious cycle of war and atrocities in the Middle East. They locate their critique of Israel as "a fortress-state of Jews," in Psalm 137, which seems to legitimate the reproduction of xenophobia, pure identities, and the elimination of the Other. As they rewrite the Bible, they deconstruct the manichean self/other division of the world that informs the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. They thus endorse the Palestinians as their people in a shared history of dispossession, conquest, pillage, and displacement. Palestinians and Jews are alike, and any race for victimization is futile. The alternative for both Palestinians and Jews would be to reinscribe the narratives of suffering into scripts of emancipation through visions of freedom and coalition:

In the midst of gunfire and slaughter and anguish to imagine a peace built on kinship, on true alliance, side by side, for each other and for our selves. I know I have dreamt this dream: Jews and Arabs moving in unison, dispossessing the warriors, building new villages on the sites of the old, changing the face of the land, the shape of history, the look of the future. (208)

Reimagining Israel and Palestine as a transnational space, Levins Morales and Morales forge a transnational politics of solidarity in their abrogation of the ethnic subtext underpinning diasporic identity formations. Rather than valorize transnational Jewish bonds, they celebrate transethnic solidarities that can transform the future of human relations in this world.

In this article, I have tried to show how Esmeralda Santiago, Aurora Levins Morales, and Rosario Morales reformulate the relationship between gender, nation, ethnicity, and the diaspora through their new subaltern cosmopolitan locations. Traditional and postmodern discourses of the diaspora seem inadequate to capture the complexity of these writers' experiences as colonials, second-class citizens, and feminists who are marginalized in their national communities. Santiago, Levins Morales, and Morales thus demonstrate that it is possible to uncouple common notions of the diaspora from its inherent valorization of attachments to originary identities, traditional gender roles, and a primordial home(land), and remap the traditional referents of nation and diaspora in terms of language (Spanish, English, and "Spanglish"), geography (Puerto Rico, the Caribbean, the United States, and Latin America), and race (indigenous, mestizo, blackness, and whiteness), from within transnational, transethnic, and cross-gender networks of solidarity, while also expressing strong concerns for the welfare and future of their colonized nation.

NOTES

1. Since Puerto Rico was ceded to the United States from Spain in the Treaty of Paris on August 12, 1898, it has occupied an anomalous and anachronistic colonial position as an "unincorporated territory" in the U.S. political and cultural unconscious. It is still considered *in* but not *of* the U.S. federal union. The 1917 Foraker Act granted Puerto Ricans U.S. citizenship and freedom of movement in the United States. Not until 1952, when the Free Association State, or Commonwealth, was created, were Puerto Ricans allowed to be self-governing in their internal affairs. By 1990, 44 percent of all Puerto Rican descendants lived in continental United States. On Puerto Rico's colonial dilemma, see Edwin Meléndez and Edgardo Meléndez, ed., *The Colonial Dilemma: Critical Perspectives on Contemporary Puerto Rico* (Boston: South End Press, 1993), and Frances Negrón-Muntaner and Ramón Grosfoguel, ed., *Puerto Rican Jam: Essays on Culture and Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997).
2. I deploy the term "subaltern cosmopolitanism" to invoke not only the marginalization of these writers as feminists, colonials, and second-class citizens, but also their non-traditional forms of committed and politicized cosmopolitan experiences. Subalternity here denotes both a peripheral subject position (see Ranjit Guha, ed., *Subaltern Studies* 1 [1982]: vii) and a political perspective (see Veena Das, "Subaltern as Perspective," *Subaltern Studies* 6 [1989]: 310-24). My understanding of cosmopolitanism builds on recent work in cultural and literary studies; see, in particular, Pheng Cheah and Bruce Robbins, ed., *Cosmopolitanism: Feeling and Thinking beyond the Nation* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998).
3. The strategy of transnational solidarities in these works partakes of the recent efforts of feminists to engage contradictory discursive and material conditions in various geopolitical locations. See Chandra Mohanty, "Cartographies of Struggle: Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism," in *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism*, ed. Chandra Mohanty, Ann Russo, and Lourdes Torres (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), 1-47; Gayatri Spivak, *Outside in the Teaching Machine* (New York: Routledge, 1993); Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan, ed., *Scattered Hegemonies: Postmodernity and Transnational Feminist Practices* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994); and Susan Stanford Friedman, *Mappings: Feminism and the Cultural Geographies of Encounter* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998). Unlike forms of global feminism that reduce the wide range of daily oppressions women confront throughout the world to patriarchal oppression only, this type of transnational feminism enables feminists in different locations to promote the politics of transnational and transethnic solidarity beyond an exclusive focus on gender.
4. See, for example, Carole Boyce Davies, *Black Women, Writing, and Identity: Migrations of the Subject* (New York: Routledge, 1994); Avtar Brah, *Cartographies of the Diaspora* (New York: Routledge, 1996); and Myriam Chancy, *Searching for Safe Spaces: Afro-Caribbean Women Writers in Exile* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1997).
5. Margarita Fernandez Olmos, quoted in Suzanne Bost, "Transgressing Borders: Puerto Rican and Latina Mestizaje," *MELUS* 25 (summer 2000): 191; René Marqués, quoted in Diana Velez, "Cultural Constructions of Women by Contemporary Puerto Rican Women Authors," in *The Psychosocial Development of Puerto Rican Women*, ed. Cynthia Coll and Maria Mattei (New York: Praeger, 1989), 31-59.
6. Esmeralda Santiago, *When I Was Puerto Rican* (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1993); *Almost a Woman* (New York: Vintage, 1998); and *América's Dream* (New York: HarperCollins, 1996). Further references to these texts are cited parenthetically.
7. Achille Mbembe, in "The Banality of Power and the Aesthetics of Vulgarly in the Postcolony," trans. Janet Roitman, *Public Culture* 4 (spring 1992): 1-30, argues that the deployment of scatology in postcolonial cultures and literatures is "the imagery and efficacy of postcolonial relations of power."

8. Aurora Levins Morales and Rosario Morales, *Getting Home Alive* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Firebrand Books, 1986). This collaborative text is also postmodern in its interrogation of co-authorship. Levins Morales and Morales are acknowledged in the table of contents as the single authors of alternating chapters, a distinction they try to maintain visually by using different typefaces in the text. Nonetheless, these typefaces are so similar, making it very hard to distinguish their voices in the text itself. Hence, even when one author is identified, this analysis takes the text as an act of collaboration between them. All other references to this text are cited parenthetically.
9. Alfredo Lopez, *The Puerto Rican Papers: Notes on the Re-Emergence of a Nation* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1973), 200.
10. James Clifford, "Traveling Cultures," in *Cultural Studies*, ed. Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson, and Paula Treichler (New York: Routledge, 1992), 109. See also, Carlos Torres, Hugo Vecchini, and William Burgos, ed., *The Commuter Nation: Perspectives on Puerto Rican Migration* (Rio Piedras, P.R.: Editorial La Universidad de Puerto Rico, 1994), and Jorge Duany, "Nation on the Move: The Construction of Cultural Identities in Puerto Rico and the Diaspora," *American Ethnologist* 27 (February 2000): 5-30.
11. Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Viking, 1993).
12. Maribel Ortiz-Marquez, "From Third World Politics to First World Practices: Contemporary Latina Writers in the United States," in *Interventions: Feminist Dialogues on Third World Women's Literature and Film*, ed. Bishnupriya Gosh and Brinda Bose (New York: Garland, 1996), 226-44.
13. Carmen Dolores Hernández, *Puerto Rican Voices in English* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 1997), 165.
14. On Antonio Pedreira's *Insularismo*, see Juan Flores, *Divided Borders* (Houston: Arte Publico, 1994), 13-60; René Marqués, *The Oxcart (La Carreta)*, trans. Charles Pilditch (New York: Scribner, 1969); Edouard Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse: Selected Essays*, trans. Michael Dash (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1989).
15. Nancy Morris, *Puerto Rico: Culture, Politics and Identity* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 1995), 149.
16. Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), 19; Floya Anthias, "Evaluating Diaspora: Beyond Ethnicity?" *Sociology* 32 (August 1998): 558, 575.

