

That Special, Inevitable Mess. El Spirit Republic de Puerto Rico and the Decolonization of the Imaginary

Abstract: Recent scholars such as Yasmin Ramírez, Urayoán Noel, and Wilson Valentín-Escobar have argued for the importance of art in subverting U.S. narratives of citizenship and national identity with regards to the status of Puerto Rico – at times occupied land, a colony, or a U.S. state stripped of its democratic power. This article traces how Puerto Rican artists in New York created an imaginary nation whose members hold an imaginary citizenship that protects how Puerto Ricans identify their nationality beyond the century-old political battle over Puerto Rico's status as a commonwealth territory. I argue that through the lens of the multi-media, performance project El Embassy, artists and supporters actively promoted a claim to cultural citizenship through a process of decolonizing the imaginary. This surrealist project existed both in the shared, and individual, imaginaries of people and in the physical world they inhabited. This altogether messy approach to activism, the quest to decolonize the imaginary and claim cultural citizenship, deserves attention not only for its unique re-imagining of Puerto Rican citizenship, but also for its broader ideas about citizenship, identity, and nationhood.

Keywords: *citizenship, decolonization, national identity, New York City, Puerto Rican art, Puerto Rican identity*

I'm still in Puerto Rico
Only my body came
My strong spirit remains
Everything's still de same
(I truly believe
You can leave and still be
Where Mami met Papi)

(Pedro Pietri, "El Spanglish National Anthem")¹

Will we have the capacity to decolonize our imaginary, to take leave of the
colonial fog ... without relinquishing that special 'mess' that identifies us?

(Arcadio Díaz-Quinones, "La política del olvido")²

¹ Pedro Pietri, "El Spanglish National Anthem", 1993, Pedro Pietri Papers, Box 71, Folder 1, Centro Archives and Library, Center for Puerto Rican Studies, Hunter College, CUNY.

² Arcadio Díaz-Quinones, "La política del olvido", in *La memoria rota: Ensayos sobre cultura y política* (Río Piedras, Puerto Rico: Ediciones Huracán, 1993), 57.

At the dawn of the new millennium in 2001, the famous Nuyorican Poets Cafe in New York's Lower East Side (or Loisaida as its Puerto Rican residents christened it in the 1970s) hosted a strange event. The main hub for Puerto Rican and Latino culture – now the slam poetry headquarters of New York – hosted a benefit event for Dylcia Noemi Pagan, a member of the former paramilitary organization *Fuerzas Armadas de Liberación Nacional* or *FALN*. This Marxist-Leninist group, which used direct action to advocate for Puerto Rican independence, was responsible for over 120 bombings in the U.S. from 1974 to 1983.³ Pagan was sentenced to federal

³ Ronald Fernández, *Prisoners of Colonialism: The Struggle for Justice in Puerto Rico* (Monroe: Common Courage Press, 1994), 205.

⁴ John M. Broder, “12 Imprisoned Puerto Ricans Accept Clemency Conditions”, *New York Times*, September 8, 1999.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid. Giuliani was notoriously tough on terrorism both before and after the attacks on September 11, 2001.

⁸ Vagabond Beaumont, “From the Other Side of Between Two Worlds,” *nothingtobegainedhere*, March 2, 2015. <https://nothingtobegainedhere.wordpress.com/2015/03/02/from-the-other-side-of-between-two-worlds/>, accessed 12 December 2016.

⁹ “Dylcia Pagan Benefit”, Pedro Pietri Papers, Box 70, Folder 8, Centro Archives and Library, Center for Puerto Rican Studies, Hunter College, CUNY.

¹⁰ Carmen T. Whalen, “Colonialism, Citizenship, and the Making of the Puerto Rican Diaspora: An Introduction”, in Carmen Teresa Whalen and Víctor Vázquez-Hernández, eds., *The Puerto Rican Diaspora: Historical Perspectives* (Philadelphia: Temple U. P., 2005), 13.

¹¹ Adál Maldonado, Pedro Pietri, and Gloria Rodríguez to Raul Julia, Pedro Pietri Papers, Box 70, Folder 8, Centro Archives and Library, Center for Puerto Rican Studies, Hunter College, CUNY.

prison in 1981 on a 55-year charge, but she was released early on September 10, 1999 as part of a clemency offer by President Bill Clinton.⁴ According to the *New York Times*, “Mr. Clinton demanded as one of the conditions of their release that the jailed Puerto Ricans renounce the use of terrorism to achieve their aim of independence for the Caribbean commonwealth”.⁵ President Clinton’s decision did not go over very well with New York law enforcement, New York Democratic Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan, Mayor Rudolph W. Giuliani, or with his own wife, First Lady Hillary R. Clinton.⁶ Mayor Giuliani declared, “You can emotionally be on one side of the other of this issue ... but to say that it doesn’t raise some very serious and legitimate questions and now to see his own political allies and close associates abandoning him like a sinking ship, you wonder what’s going on here”.⁷ At the benefit event, former executive director of the Nuyorican Poets Cafe Carmen M. Pietri-Diaz, sister of poet Pedro Pietri and friend of Pagan, welcomed Pagan to a new cultural movement that would allow her to continue her fight for Puerto Rican independence via slightly different means.

To celebrate her release a couple of years earlier, Pagan was baptized with a poem by none other than Pedro Pietri, who wrote his famous poem “Puerto Rican Obituary” in Pagan’s apartment in the 1970s.⁸ Afterwards, Pagan was “issued her Baptism Certificate and Puerto Rican Passport [and] All others who wish to be baptized [were] asked to step forward and Rev. Pedro [said] a few words and [threw] some water on them”.⁹ Of course, there is no such thing as a Puerto Rican passport as Puerto Ricans were granted U.S. citizenship with the Jones-Shafroth Act in 1917. However, Puerto Ricans both on the island and in the U.S. have contested Puerto Rico’s limbo status as a commonwealth ever since the U.S. invaded the former Spanish colony in 1898 and seized control. As Carmen T. Whalen points out, the Jones Act provided *de jure* citizenship, but *de facto*, “Puerto Rico’s political status was not changed. Puerto Ricans were now U.S. citizens living in an ‘unincorporated territory’”.¹⁰ Like the strange passport Pagan received, the baptism certificate was issued by La Santa Church de La Madre of Los Tomates with its supposed spiritual leader Reverend Pedro Pietri. Still more curious, the event was co-organized by El Puerto Rican Embassy when there is no such entity as a Puerto Rican embassy. If the handing out of baptism certificates by the Holy Church of the Mother of Tomatoes and the issuing of Puerto Rican passports by a non-existent Puerto Rican embassy sound somewhat surreal, this is because it was designed this way.

El Embassy was a multi-media, interactive, performance, and art project created mainly by visual artist Adál Maldonado and poet Pedro Pietri in 1994 to form “a new Puerto Rican Art and Cultural movement”.¹¹ This article traces how El Embassy envisioned an imaginary nation whose members hold an imaginary citizenship that protects how Puerto Ricans identify their nationality beyond the century-old political battle over Puerto Rico’s status as a commonwealth territory. I argue that through the lens of El Embassy, which is based on the earlier concept El

Spirit Republic de Puerto Rico by former Young Lords member Eduardo ‘Eddie’ Figueroa, artists and supporters actively promoted a claim to cultural citizenship through a process of decolonizing the imaginary. This surrealist project existed both in the shared, and individual, imaginary of people and in the physical world they inhabit. This altogether messy approach to activism, the quest to decolonize the imaginary and claim cultural citizenship, deserves attention not only for its unique re-imagining of Puerto Rican citizenship, but also for its broader ideas about citizenship, identity, and nationhood. The guiding question of this article was articulated by Maldonado himself: “Is it possible to assume a national identity which has no citizenship privileges, as the country (El Spirit Republic de Puerto Rico) has no territories other than conceptual ones?”¹² As this article demonstrates, these artists needed to mess up the concept of citizenship and national identity because that was the only way to capture and confront the paradox that Pietri so eloquently captured in El Spanglish National Anthem, which was performed at many El Embassy events in the 1990s and 2000s: “I’m still in Puerto Rico/Only my body came/My strong spirit remains”.¹³

¹² Adál Maldonado, “El Passport”, *El Puerto Rican Embassy*, <http://www.visiondoble.net/losblueprintsforanation/el-passport>, accessed 19 December 2016.

¹³ Pietri, “El Spanglish National Anthem”.

Rather than being an isolated art project at the end of the 20th century, El Embassy promoted this claim to cultural citizenship as a culmination of decades-long community activism by Puerto Rican organizations in Loisaida. As opposed to the earliest Puerto Rican settlement in New York, El Barrio in Harlem, this particular neighborhood only became predominantly Puerto Rican in the wake of the post-World War II migration that attracted many Puerto Rican workers to the U.S. mainland in search for jobs. However, deindustrialization and white flight turned many urban neighborhoods into poor and neglected areas devastated by housing abandonment, gangs, and drug crime. Loisaida was no exception and its residents, largely Puerto Rican by the end of the 1960s, started to organize and deal with these issues head-on. It began with social service and anti-gang campaigns in the 1960s through groups such as the Real Great Society, but the spread of organized resistance through community institutions quickly spread through the neighborhood. Members of the Real Great Society founded Charas at the beginning of the 1970s to find alternative means of housing by working with architect Richard Buckminster Fuller. Another housing group, Adopt-a-Building, renovated and repaired the existing, largely abandoned, housing stock at the same time. Circumstances changed again in the 1980s when Reagan’s advancement of privatization in cities cut community funding initiatives and attracted private developers. As gentrification became a concern for Loisaida, community groups had to change tactics again and increasingly look to cultural projects and events as a way to fight the commercialization of Puerto Rican heritage and roots in their neighborhood and beyond. Throughout the decades, community groups have heavily relied upon occupying physical space to meet, strategize, or hold events. However, few groups managed to maintain the costs for buildings, made even more difficult in the 1980s era of advancing gentrification. Most groups either

¹⁴ Eddie Figueroa, cit. in Ed Morales, “Eddie Figueroa’s Spirit Republic Alternative to the Young Lords”, *EdMorales.net*, July 25, 2015.

¹⁵ Félix V. Matos Rodríguez, “Saving the Parcela: A Short History of Boston’s Puerto Rican Community,” in Carmen Teresa Whalen and Victor Vázquez-Hernández, eds., *The Puerto Rican Diaspora: Historical Perspectives* (Philadelphia: Temple U. P., 2005), 200-201.

¹⁶ “Don’t Waste Waste,” *Quality of Life in Loisaída*, June-July 1978, 6.

¹⁷ *Viva Loisaída*, directed by Marlis Momber (New York City, NY: Gruppe Dokumentation, 1978).

¹⁸ Carlos García, cit. in Josie Rolon, “Doing More with Less”, *WIN Magazine*, December 20, 1979, 13.

moved or simply disbanded. El Republic was different. Figueroa thought of El Republic as “a concept, it’s an idea, it’s not a physical location”.¹⁴ On a very pragmatic level, imagining El Republic as a non-physical space was a creative way to ensure its existence beyond the fragility of physical community institutions, which “have seen some of their most significant accomplishments undermined by federal and local government policies”, according to Félix V. Matos Rodríguez.¹⁵

Of course El Republic’s focus on decolonizing the imaginary had always been at the heart of earlier and more traditional community groups. In one example, a community recycling center that Charas helped built was praised as a place “where not only our garbage, but our spirit is recycled”.¹⁶ As part of a documentary on Loisaída, a resident said that a “dirty, unclean community is not only a physical condition, but it is a mental condition also because anything physical has to start first as a thought”.¹⁷ Decades-long community leader Carlos ‘Chino’ García put it most succinctly when he wrote that he “learned to be an artist – for the arts flourish here like a flower growing in between fence wire – beauty amongst the beast. It’s become a way of life – to be an artist is the ultimate goal, for in the back of our minds we know what it means. It’s an attempt to love, communicate, feel the spirit of the movement”.¹⁸ Whether they worked with gangs to provide them with a way to channel their work for the good of the community, painted murals across Loisaída walls to activate apathetic residents to participate, or created gardens out of dirty lots, Puerto Rican activist had always had their eyes set on decolonizing people’s spirits in all their efforts. In essence, El Republic was the next step in what was already a three-decades-long process of claiming cultural citizenship in this neighborhood – this stretches back to the first wave of Puerto Ricans who settled in El Barrio at the beginning of the 20th century and struggled to claim their rights as citizens.

The Path to Cultural Citizenship

In his seminal work *Imagined Communities* (1983), Benedict Anderson advanced our understanding of nationhood and nationalism by arguing that “all communities larger than primordial villages of face-to-face contact (and perhaps even these) are imagined”.¹⁹ Anderson speaks of an “imagined political community” within the framework of nationhood, but as Renato Rosaldo and William V. Flores have pointed out, Anderson “makes national communities appear static and independent from relations of inequality within the society in question. Second, he conceives of the national community as if there were a universal consensus among all citizens. He does not recognize the contestation and conflicts that animate a hegemonic process”.²⁰ Jorge Duany also complicates Anderson’s argument by pointing out that “the subjective sense of a separate nationality can thrive without the formal recognition of citizenship”.²¹ This applies to Puerto Ricans too, despite the *de jure* recognition of citizenship – especially for those living on the U.S.

¹⁹ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London, New York: Verso, 2006), 6.

²⁰ Renato Rosaldo and William V. Flores, “Identity, Conflict, and Evolving Latino Communities: Cultural Citizenship in San Jose, California,” in William V. Flores and Rina Benmayor, eds., *Latino Cultural Citizenship: Claiming Identity, Space, and Rights* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1997), 93.

²¹ Jorge Duany, *The Puerto Rican Nation on the Move: Identities on the Island and in the United States* (Chapel Hill, NC; London: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 37.

mainland. The task of analyzing, nuancing, and conceptualizing Puerto Rican citizenship and national identity has been at the forefront of scholarship in Puerto Rican studies for decades.

Duany reminds us that “none of the traditional criteria for nationhood – a shared territory, language, economy, citizenship, or sovereignty – are fixed and immutable in Puerto Rico and its diaspora but are subject to constant fluctuation and intense debate”.²² Instead, he postulates the nation “as a translocal community based on a collective consciousness of a shared history, language, and culture”.²³ This translocality allows Duany to complicate questions of “citizenship, migration, and identity [which] acquire a sense of urgency seldom found in well-established nation-states that do not have to justify their existence or fight for their survival”.²⁴ As the 2005 case of Gregorio Igartúa-de la Rosa, et al. v. United States of America confirmed, Puerto Ricans are not able to vote in U.S. national elections, and the Puerto Rico Federal Relations Act of 1950, while enabling local government on the island, disqualified Puerto Rico’s representation in the U.S. Congress.²⁵ Clearly, citizenship status for Puerto Ricans is limited, which is why the island’s population voted in a referendum in 2012 on the question of their future political status. Two thirds of those who voted in the referendum favored full statehood within the U.S., while the rest favored sovereign free association.²⁶ For Juan Flores, the question of Puerto Rico’s political status is less about the specific form (sovereignty, statehood, increased autonomy), but rather about the overarching goal that all possible programs have in common: “decolonization – that is, the recognition of an ongoing condition of subordination and external tutelage and the need to put an end to it”.²⁷ Whether or not the U.S. will finally grant full statehood in the wake of the referendum results remains to be seen. Yet it is unlikely to radically change how Puerto Ricans, especially those with permanent residence on the mainland, will continue to challenge and complicate neatly-defined notions of citizenship and belonging that have been ascribed upon them from outside forces including academia, the media, and the government.

In the first half of the 20th century, “U.S. citizenship facilitated a migration freed from immigration barriers, which sparked both labor recruitment and social networks,” however the usefulness of U.S. citizenship, second-class or not, declined dramatically in the second half of the century.²⁸ Against the displacing forces of deindustrialization, gentrification, and neoliberalism, Puerto Ricans could no longer rely on labor from the largely industrial sector that had employed them earlier. This lack of economic opportunity shifted Puerto Ricans’ claims to citizenship increasingly towards the cultural and social arenas of community life, namely, social practices and artistic expression. As Rina Benmayor, Rosa M. Torruellas, and Ana L. Juarbe point out:

Historically, culture has been the site of strongest resistance and the indelible mark of nationhood. Cultural commitments become even stronger in the

²² Ibid., 3.

²³ Ibid., 4.

²⁴ Ibid., 16.

²⁵ United States Court of Appeals, First Circuit, Gregorio Igartúa, et al., Plaintiffs, Appellants, v. United States of America, et al., Defendants, Appellees, 417 F.3d 145 (en banc), No. 09-2186.

²⁶ Abby Ohlheiser, “Is Puerto Rico on Its Way to Becoming the 51st State? Possibly,” *Slate*, November 7, 2012. http://www.slate.com/blogs/the_slatest/2012/11/07/puerto_rico_statehood_referendum_2012_majority_support_of_status_change.html, accessed 12 December 2016.

²⁷ Juan Flores, *From Bomba to Hip-Hop: Puerto Rican Culture and Latino Identity* (New York: Columbia U. P., 2000), 35.

²⁸ Whalen, “Colonialism, Citizenship, and the Making of the Puerto Rican Diaspora”, 13.

context of a migration that has been disenfranchising and has imposed de-facto second-class status on a colonial people. Thus, the claim to cultural citizenship is an affirmation of a historical identity, a claim for social dignity, and a challenge to the exclusionary practices upon which legal and political citizenship have so long been based.²⁹

²⁹ Rina Benmayor, Rosa M. Torruellas, and Ana L. Juarbe, "Claiming Cultural Citizenship in East Harlem: 'Si Esto Puede Ayudar a la Comunidad Mía ...'", in William V. Flores and Rina Benmayor, eds., *Latino Cultural Citizenship: Claiming Identity, Space, and Rights* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1997).

³⁰ This article focuses on activism in the cultural arena rather than political activities by groups such as the Young Lords.

³¹ William V. Flores and Rina Benmayor, "Constructing Cultural Citizenship", in William V. Flores and Rina Benmayor, eds., *Latino Cultural Citizenship: Claiming Identity, Space, and Rights* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1997), 6.

³² IUP Cultural Studies Working Group, "Draft Concept Paper on Cultural Citizenship", unpublished working concept paper no. 2 (Stanford, CA: Center for Chicano Research, 1988), cit. in William Flores and Rina Benmayor, "Constructing Cultural Citizenship," 12.

³³ Rosaldo and William Flores, "Identity, Conflict, and Evolving Latino Communities", 57.

³⁴ Whalen, "Colonialism, Citizenship, and the Making", 41-42.

³⁵ Rosaldo and William Flores, "Identity, Conflict, and Evolving Latino Communities," 61.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Duany, *The Puerto Rican Nation*, 32.

This is not to say that community life and cultural celebrations had been unimportant before, quite the opposite. Still, as unemployment began to rise on both the mainland and the island, Puerto Ricans turned to cultural activism to resist their on-going status as lesser citizens.³⁰ Rosaldo coined the term 'cultural citizenship' to recognize how "Culture interprets and constructs citizenship, just as the activity of being citizens, in the broad sense of claiming membership in the society, affects how we view ourselves, even in communities that have been branded as second-class or 'illegal'".³¹ Going beyond legal questions of citizenship status, cultural citizenship describes an empowerment process "of constructing, establishing, and asserting human, social and cultural rights".³²

What seems quite broad simply refers to the basic right "to be different (in terms of race, ethnicity, or native language) with respect to the norms of the dominant national community, without compromising one's right to belong," as Rosaldo and William Flores write.³³ This right to belong, to be different, is played out chiefly in the daily life of isolated and dispersed communities and neighborhoods across the U.S., such as the Lower East Side in New York. Wherever Puerto Ricans settled, they have tried to adjust to their new surroundings as well as attempted to adjust their environments to their own needs.³⁴ This has historically been the catalyst for the involvement and creation of various community organizations to improve the lives of themselves and others. However, Puerto Rican communities "increasingly fail to fit the 'barrio' model of a bounded ethnically homogeneous space ... broken up by freeways, and dispersed in pockets throughout the city or even among cities".³⁵ So while communities are "essential foci for solidarity and for the struggle to claim and expand existing rights," the very definition of "community becomes a central research problem as one explores the networks of social relations that connect a series of dispersed points".³⁶ In this light, it is understandable why activists, residents, and artists needed to find alternative ways of building communities that support the ongoing fight for the right to be different, to belong. El Embassy, just as more traditional efforts to build a community by Puerto Ricans, was focused on "creatively blending cultural icons and symbolic repertoires of various origins".³⁷ However, by blending the material with the spiritual, the real and the imaginary, El Embassy strove for something more lasting than the fragility of community groups – to varying degrees of success.

El Embassy's Mission to Decolonize the Imaginary

On June 10, 1994, just a short walk from the Nuyorican Poets Cafe, the art gallery space Kenkeleba House – appropriately named for a West African plant that is believed to possess spiritual powers – issued a press release for an upcoming exhibition entitled “El Puerto Rican Embassy Show”.³⁸ This was the inaugural exhibition for Maldonado’s and Pietri’s amalgam of ideas and projects that would re-introduce the concept of El Republic and El Embassy after former Young Lords member Figueroa first conceptualized this “counterinstitutional and counterpolitical space ... a translocal and non-juridical utopian space that cut across the upheavals of colonialism and diaspora”.³⁹ From June 26 to July 30, thirty-one Puerto Rican artists, including Papo Colo, Marcos Dimas, Maria Dominguez, Pepón Osorio, and Juan Sánchez, exhibited their work at this Lower East Side location. Apart from the work of these artists, El Embassy appointed so-called “Ambassadors of the Arts”: Miguel Algarín (poetry), Miriam Colón (theatre), Willie Colón (music), Raúl Julia (film), Antonio Martorell (visual arts), Ed Morales (journalism), Marta Moreno Vega (culture), and Piri Thomas (letters).⁴⁰ Honoring those who had gone before them as artists, activists, and heroes, Maldonado and Pietri conceived of the “Hall of Fame of Deceased Diplomacy”, which was presented in honor of Julia de Burgos, Eddie Figueroa, Antonia López, José Ferrer, Miguel Piñero, and Bimbo Rivas. Of particular note are Figueroa, Piñero, and Rivas: Rivas was a Loaisaida playwright and the one who coined the term ‘Loisaida’ in the 1970s; Piñero was a poet and a co-founder of the Nuyorican Poets Cafe; Figueroa was the founder of the New Rican Village (1976) and El Republic; and de Burgos was a beloved Puerto Rican poet who served as Secretary General of the Daughters of Freedom (*Hijas de la Libertad*), the women’s branch of the Puerto Rican Nationalist Party (*Partido Nacionalista de Puerto Rico* or PNP).⁴¹ The memorialization of these figures symbolized the philosophy of El Republic as a space that cut across the geographical distance of Loaisaida and Puerto Rico. As with many future events of El Embassy, Pietri read out the manifesto while Maldonado issued his passports. This inaugural exhibition was only the first in a series of events and projects over the next decade that would re-conceptualize and expand upon El Republic as an active process of decolonizing Puerto Ricans’ imaginaries in an effort to claim cultural citizenship – a citizenship marked by a symbolic repertoire: the passport, the anthem, the baptism certificate, and the use of Spanglish as the official language of El Republic.

In Maldonado’s own words, this repertoire was “an attempt to reconstruct the memory of a lost tradition merged with elements found in a new environment”.⁴² To understand the need for this artistic approach to decolonizing one’s imaginary, it is important to first trace Maldonado’s conceptualization of the colonizing process that he and El Republic attempted to counteract:

³⁸ Kenkeleba House, “Press Release”, June 10, 1994, Pedro Pietri Papers, Box 71, Folder 1, Centro Archives and Library, Center for Puerto Rican Studies, Hunter College, CUNY.

³⁹ Urayoán Noel, “On Out of Focus Nuyoricans, Noricuas, and Performance Identities”, *Liminalities: A Journal of Performance Studies* 10, 3/4 (2014), 3.

⁴⁰ Kenkeleba House, “Press Release”.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Adál Maldonado, interview with Berta Jottar, CEPA Gallery, <http://www.old.cepagallery.org/exhibitions/Unlimited2/adal.html>, accessed 21 December 2016.

The idea is that we are fixed to a particular place in physical reality due to an assemblage point located somewhere on our bodies. This point where the cosmic energy cross each other is the Assemblage Point (According to indigenous peoples of New Mexico). Very much in the same way when taking a photograph an object or subject is in focus when the rays of light that bounce off the object being photographed cross each other when these light rays pass through the camera lens. This point where the light crosses each other in the camera lens is called the Focal Point. It is believed that when the Assemblage Point is moved or shifted from its place, either accidentally or by trauma, that the person is no longer in the present. That person may experience a psychological deconstruction that may appear to make him crazy to people in the physical reality when all that's happened is that his assemblage point has been shifted and he now may be experiencing life in another mental dimension. The account continues that men of knowledge or brujos of these New Mexico tribes were able to figure out how to purposely shift the Assemblage Point for the purpose of form changing and astral projecting empowering themselves in the process.⁴³

⁴³ Adál Maldonado, e-mail message to author, 14 January 2017.

Maldonado likely learned about the idea of an assemblage point from the book *The Fire From Within* (1984) by author Carlos Castaneda, who published over 28 million copies in 17 languages on his experiences with shamanism, which critics consider to be works of fiction rather than first-hand experiences.⁴⁴ No matter the legitimacy of Castaneda's work, Maldonado used the idea of the assemblage point to relate how colonizing forces "on the island caused a great psychological and emotional trauma that caused the Puerto Rican's assemblage point to shift".⁴⁵ Like the indigenous people of New Mexico, Maldonado was keenly aware that Puerto Ricans and the Puerto Rican diaspora "embraced their (out of focus) condition, and empowered themselves through their own creative intentions".⁴⁶ This psychological and emotional trauma is essentially the colonization of the imaginary – the effects that conquest, subordination, and colonization have on Puerto Ricans. It is exactly this trauma that the imaginary nation El Republic worked to visibilize and confront. All the artefacts and events were key to enabling citizens to rethink their own identities and decolonize their minds – to untangle oneself from the authoritarian power of the United States.

The insistence on the spirit, or the spiritual, in El Embassy's rhetoric had already been present in the rhetoric of earlier activist groups and goes back to Figueroa and the founding of the New Rican Village, which an attendee described as "a different conception of who we are as beings on this planet – beings that are part of nature, that are creators, that are *spiritual*".⁴⁷ As Ed Morales, the Ambassador of Journalism, recalls in a piece on El Republic, Figueroa "found a way to spark an eternal flame of *spiritual resistance*".⁴⁸ Figueroa himself said to Morales, the spiritual refers to:

the belief in magic, the belief in a multidimensional universe, the belief in

⁴⁴ Critics include the investigative reporter Richard de Mille as well as anthropologists who studied the Yaqui Indian culture that Castaneda claims to take his guidance from. See for example pages 24 to 25 in Jane Holden Kelley's book *Yaqui Women: Contemporary Life Histories* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1978).

⁴⁵ Maldonado, e-mail message.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Interviewee, cit. in Marina Roseman, "The New Rican Village: Artists in Control of the Image-Making Machinery", *Latin American Music Review / Revista de Música Latinoamericana* 4, 1 (1983), 135. Emphasis added.

⁴⁸ Ed Morales, "Eddie Figueroa's Spirit Republic Alternative to the Young Lords", *EdMorales.net*, July 25, 2015. Emphasis added, <https://edmorales.net/2015/07/25/eddie-figueroas-spirit-republic-alternative-to-the-young-lords>, accessed 12 December 2016.

simultaneous eternal time, that what we're seeing is only part of what it is, and that this is inside of something else, and that the real mystery, the real point of all of this is the investigation, the navigation of the self, of the heart, the spirit, because that is where the truth is.⁴⁹

⁴⁹ Figueroa, cit. in Morales, "Eddie Figueroa's Spirit Republic".

Figueroa was concerned with identity, "Puerto Rican spiritual identity" to be precise.⁵⁰ For Figueroa, a second-generation Puerto Rican who grew up in the States, this simply meant "learning about my mother and my father and my people [and] being born again".⁵¹ The idea of being born again is, of course, spiritual in nature and tied to encountering Puerto Rico and one's own roots – both familial and ancestral. Pietri writes about this spiritual rebirth in *Out of Focus Nuyoricans* where he conceives of Puerto Rico as "an island where eternal life and reincarnation is possible and multiple personalities aren't considered mental illness but a gift from the gods who will never allow us to cease speaking in tongues to get a message across the centuries".⁵² As the imaginative poetics of Figueroa and Pietri demonstrate, spirituality for these artists was far from an easily-identifiable belief system that could be appropriated by outside forces – as was the case with physical spaces and the infiltration of the Young Lords by the FBI. On the contrary, (Puerto Rican) spirituality was conceived of as a metaphysical and messy philosophy that would allow for multiple identities, a complicating of national identity, and a lasting resistance to the dragging question of independence.

⁵⁰ Morales, "Eddie Figueroa's Spirit Republic".

⁵¹ Figueroa, cit. in Morales, "Eddie Figueroa's Spirit Republic".

⁵² Pedro Pietri, "Poem/Prologue", in *Out of Focus Nuyoricans* (Hollis: Puritan Press, 2004).

Both Figueroa and Pietri were members of the Young Lords until they realized that it quickly "became impossible for the YLP to deliver on the revolutionary issues put forth on its platform".⁵³ They started channeling their revolutionary spirit through cultural activism infused with clear political messages in the forms of poetry, music, and theater. Within the experimental atmosphere of the early incarnations of the New Rican Village and the Nuyorican Poets Café, Figueroa and Pietri "would use the Embassy as a means to produce and present Pedro's plays and poetry events where they would invite the other Nuyorican poets to perform their poetry".⁵⁴ However, Figueroa passed away before they had a chance to flesh out the project. When no one assumed responsibility for continuing the work on El Republic and El Embassy, Maldonado "approached Pedro and said to him that the Embassy project was too important to drop and that as [his] work as an artist dealt with the creation of imaginary worlds and alternative realities that [he] knew how to take the Embassy to its next level".⁵⁵ While Maldonado and Pietri had previously collaborated on a musical entitled *Mondo Mambo: A Mambo Rap Sodi* (1990), this marked the beginning of their collaboration on El Republic and El Embassy. Together they set out to "create the artefacts that would define a citizen of this imaginary country and in the process bring it to the world of hard objects".⁵⁶ Early on, the connection between the imaginary and the "world of hard objects" was a clear priority for Maldonado and Pietri who, according to Maldonado, shared "a kind of Dada Rican" sensibility with Pietri being the

⁵³ Maldonado, e-mail message.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

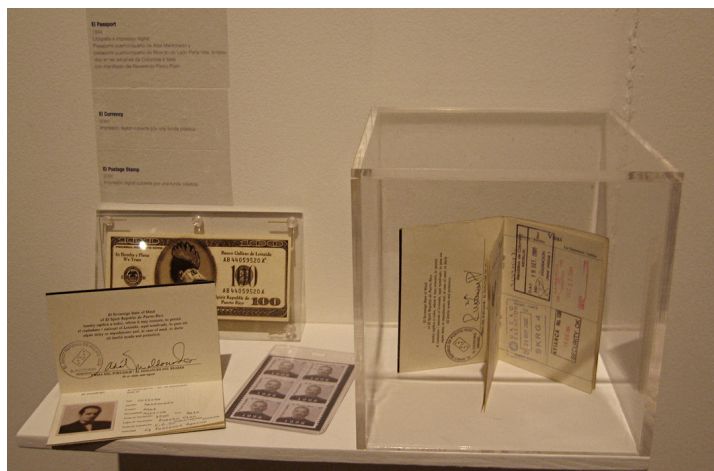
⁵⁷ Ibid. “Nuyoricana satirist” and Maldonado the “jíbaro existentialist”.⁵⁷

Unlike Figueroa’s idea of El Republic as a purely imaginary space, Maldonado, Pietri, and other artists shaped El Republic’s vision to sporadically tap in and out of the physical world of exhibitions, events, and material objects and actively promote the importance of decolonizing one’s imaginary as a means to claim cultural citizenship (see Figure 1). Initially, though, Figueroa and later Maldonado and Pietri tried to find physical spaces to permanently house the project, according to a letter by Maldonado: “Pedro and I envisioned securing a building which would serve as our Embassy and within this structure we could house a gallery, performance space, television broadcasting facilities, offices for the Embassy and a residence for visiting artists”.⁵⁸ Maldonado wanted to revive the New Rican Village and create a fully-fledged community center such as the Charas/El Bohío Community Center, which was the main multi-functional Puerto Rican community center in Loisaida in the 1980s and 1990s. Failing to find a physical location, a paradoxical idea that arguably works against the concept of an imaginary space, Maldonado and Pietri instead built a website at *ElPuertoRicanEmbassy.org* (1994) to serve “as a multimedia installation and archive of Maldonado and Pietri’s daring works”.⁵⁹ Unfortunately, a website requires maintenance; virtual space is not safe from being lost to obscurity when the domain rights are not continuously upheld or fees are not paid.⁶⁰ Neither the failure to find a permanent physical location nor the instability of a website undermines the core concept of El Republic as a community space that lived, lives, and hopefully continues to live in the minds of individuals who represent a collective that has been scattered geographically, yet united in a spirit of resistance. Making use of their symbolic repertoire to connect this world with El Republic was the ideal way to avoid losing the essence of El Republic through either obscure abstractedness or fragile physicality.

⁵⁸ Adál Maldonado to Alberto Cappas, Pedro Pietri Papers, Box 70, Folder 8, Centro Archives and Library, Center for Puerto Rican Studies, Hunter College, CUNY.

⁵⁹ Noel, “On *Out of Focus*”, 3.

⁶⁰ As of January 2017, the official website at *ElPuertoRicanEmbassy.org* is defunct and in its place the website *visiondoble.net* now hosts all the material that made up the original site.



⁶¹ Images of the exhibition entitled *Los Blueprints for a Nation* (Fig. 1 and Fig. 5) can be found at <http://www.visiondoble.net/losblueprintsforanation/los-blueprints-for-a-nation>, accessed 19 December 2016.

Fig. 1: Adál Maldonado, “Installation view of El Passport stamped on entering Colombia, Curacao, Paris and Milano,” 2000, *Los Blueprints for a Nation*, CEPA Gallery, Boston, NY. Courtesy of Adál Maldonado.⁶¹

Rather than anchoring El Embassy in a physical location, Maldonado and Pietri amassed a collection of material objects that travelled from location to location, wherever they hosted an event or exhibition. The events and exhibitions that Maldonado and Pietri organized as well as their work and the work of other artists were crucial to the expansion of El Republic from an idea into an interactive process that promoted cultural citizenship just as much as the work of the Young Lords, Charas, and Adopt-a-Building. As Urayoán Noel points out, “With its (mock) passports and anthem and blueprints, the Embassy project offers the paraphernalia of the nation-state seemingly as a parody of its hollowness, as if to underscore that it is *spirit* and not the accoutrements that vouchsafe the nation-state that animates this republic”.⁶² El Republic was brought to audiences through multi-media performance events at famous Loisaída and other New York venues such as the Nuyorican Poets Cafe, the Kenkeleba Gallery, Village Gate, Club Broadway, and El Museo del Barrio as well as excursions into galleries across the country – including the Austin Arts Center and Harvard University.⁶³ The nature and content of these events changed depending on which artists were in attendance and what Pietri and Maldonado were working on at the time because they continually re-imagined their own work within El Republic and El Embassy frameworks, which in turn re-conceptualized what El Republic meant to them. Consequently, they started with a peculiar object such as El Passport at their inaugural event and eventually exhibited Out of Focus Nuyoricans at Harvard University in 2004 and 2005.

⁶² Ibid., 6. Emphasis added.

⁶³ Some ephemera for selected events can be found in the Pedro Pietri Papers at Centro Archives and Library, Center for Puerto Rican Studies, Hunter College, CUNY.

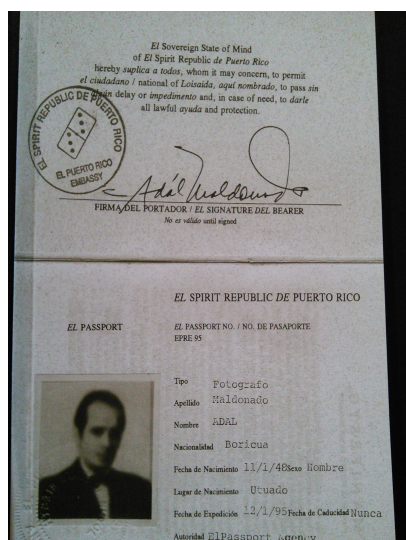


Fig. 2: Adál Maldonado, “El Passport (Adál Maldonado)”, 1995, Adál Maldonado Artist File, MoMA Queens Artist Files, New York. Courtesy of Adál Maldonado.



Fig. 3: Adál Maldonado, “El Passport (Luciana Alexandra)”, 2012, *Our America: The Latino Presence in American Art* (online exhibition), Smithsonian American Art Museum. Courtesy of Adál Maldonado.⁶⁴

⁶⁴ The *Our America* online exhibition is available at http://americanart.si.edu/exhibitions/online/our_america/reframing.cfm, accessed 12 December 2016.

⁶⁵James Estrin, “Puerto Rican Identity, In and Out of Focus”, *New York Times*, August 28, 2012. I was issued my own passport too when I contacted Maldonado in 2015.

While passports were initially issued to Puerto Rican artists and Ambassadors, over time El Republic evolved into a much more inclusive space that was “not limited to people of Puerto Rican descent. Anyone could participate. Anyone could become Nuyorican through a ‘baptism’ performed by Mr. Pietri who represented his own sect La Iglesia de la Madre de Los Tomatoes”.⁶⁵

This printed passport served multiple functions: its design resembles that of an actual passport, it is written in Spanglish, and its humorous tone parodies the legal rhetoric of a government-issued passport. However, the passport was more than just a witty and nicely-designed material object. It was created to be used, to be handed out, to be filled out. That is why it includes a section for border security stamps that daring citizens may want to fill out when they actually travel – if they could convince security officers to humor them. Finally, the personal information section allows passport holders to choose their own *nacionalidad*, including Boricua, Nuyorican, Mexijentirican, and Puertorriqueño (see Figures 2-4) – that inevitable mess of multiple identities

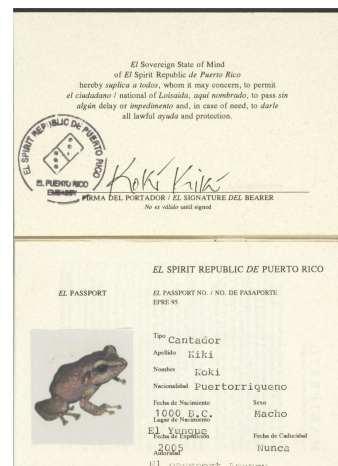


Fig. 4: Adál Maldonado, “El Passport (Koki Kiki)”, 2005, *Our America: The Latino Presence in American Art* (online exhibition), Smithsonian American Art Museum. Courtesy of Adál Maldonado.

Beyond the materiality of the object itself – and its functionality as an object to be *actively* used – the very act of issuing the passport as part of an event or exhibition helped to spread the word about El Republic and welcome new citizens to its imaginary territory. The passport was one of many important artefacts that yanks the imaginary republic into the physical world for a moment without endangering it in any way. As Jose Luis Falconi points out in *Out of Focus Nuyoricans*, a booklet based on the 2004/2005 Harvard exhibition, the galleries and events where Pietri and Maldonado exhibited their artefacts did not function as exact recreations “of the imaginary territory, but as [places] where imperfect memories

of it are gathered”.⁶⁶ The passport was ultimately a creative artefact that allowed each passport bearer to proclaim independence on their own terms; this was not a claim to political independence but rather an attempt to decolonize one’s imaginary by becoming part of what Noel calls “a new kind of affective, deterritorialized, self-created community”.⁶⁷ Pietri alludes to this in the manifesto printed in the actual passport: “the imagination has always been an independent country with a spontaneous sense of survival!”⁶⁸ Unlike the U.S. passport, this artefact bestowed a kind of cultural citizenship upon the passport holder and the loss of the artefact itself would in no way remove their status as citizens of this affective, self-proclaimed community. It is simply a representation, a material object that stands in for something much larger.

Amongst the collection of artefacts that Maldonado, Pietri, and other artists created in the 1990s and 2000s, El Anthem is best suited to explain how an imaginary space – promoting the project of a decolonized imaginary through real-life gatherings – can sustain the idea that Puerto Ricans “can be in two Islands at the same time”, as Pietri notes in the manifesto of the passport.⁶⁹ Based on and to the tune of the Puerto Rican love hymn to San Juan “En mi Viejo San Juan”, El Anthem was performed by Pietri from the very beginning of the resurrection of El Republic in 1994 to the last years leading up to Pietri’s death in 2004.⁷⁰ The first thing to note is the use of Spanglish as the choice for El Anthem. Riffing on the lack of opportunities in U.S. cities and Puerto Rico, Pietri writes in *Out of Focus Nuyoricans* that “the more you walked in the opposite direction of tropical dreams and urban ambitions the more difficult it became to talk in Spanish or English. So *Spanglish* came to the rescue and we became *Out of Focus Nuyoricans* which is the same as being and not being lost”.⁷¹ Fluently moving between and merging Spanish and English, Spanglish is a “‘breaking’ (into) each other”, as Juan Flores points out.⁷² He goes on to say that “Collective memory and identity find their appropriate articulation in this lively, ‘macaronic’ sensibility, where the mixed-code vernacular voice responds in both directions to the imposition of official, standard constructs of ‘the’ national language”.⁷³ So the use of Spanglish as the official language of El Republic and El Anthem was a means to allow notions of belonging to flow in both directions simultaneously as evident in the use of terms such as ‘Nuyorican’.

In El Anthem, the difficult situation for Puerto Ricans and their struggle to keep one foot firmly rooted in Puerto Rico comes through in verses such as: “We have been in limbo/(We’re in New York City)/And so/And so And so/Almost misplaced my soul/(Somewhere in New Jersey)”.⁷⁴ Here, New York is considered a temporary station, a limbo space, where Puerto Ricans struggle economically and never really left Puerto Rico in their hearts: “If I can’t fly I’ll swim/Straight from El Barrio/Back to Puerto Rico/(Island by the sun blessed/Island I never left)”.⁷⁵ The entire anthem serves to underpin the importance of not losing one’s Puerto Rican and Borinquen roots, urging to resist assimilation so as not to lose one’s

⁶⁶ Jose Luis Falconi, “Blurriness in Focus”, in *Out of Focus Nuyoricans* (Hollis: Puritan Press, 2004).

⁶⁷ Urayoán Noel, *In Visible Movement: Nuyorican Poetry from the Sixties to Slam* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2014), 70.

⁶⁸ Pedro Pietri, “Notes on El Puerto Rican Embassy”, 1994, Pedro Pietri Papers, Box 70, Folder 8, Centro Archives and Library, Center for Puerto Rican Studies, Hunter College, CUNY.

⁶⁹ Pietri, “Notes on El Puerto Rican Embassy”.

⁷⁰ Luckily, the records of the performances are not just kept on sheets of paper in institutional archives, but also collected and cut together by Maldonado in a video on his YouTube channel: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F82EmeLrrL4>, accessed 12 December 2016.

⁷¹ Pietri, “Poem/Prologue”.

⁷² Juan Flores, *From Bomba to Hip Hop*, 58.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Pietri, “El Spanglish National Anthem”.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

identity: “Some did assimilate/In de United States/They got rid of de accent/Tho whenever they spoke/That will always unmask them!/But de majority/Kept their identity/Never did lose their accent!/They were proud not ashamed/Of their

⁷⁶ Ibid. Boricua names”.⁷⁶ As video recordings of the performances prove, El Anthem was designed to be sung with an audience in mind. Pietri created this social performance to engage audience members who more often than not experienced the situations El Anthem describes and criticizes, such as the necessity for higher educational degrees to get jobs in a new service economy: “Many dropped out of school/Others went to college/Trying hard to get somewhere./In the land of da free/Where without a degree/You cannot collect welfare”. El Anthem drew on the experiences of Puerto Ricans in the United States – especially those living in big cities – and in doing so highlighted the importance of retaining and celebrating Puerto Rican tradition and culture off the island, including urban community gardens, the plena, and the mambo: “Las botanicas saved/Us from an early grave/All aspirin did wass kill jool/Muchas gracias Chango/La Plena y el

⁷⁷ Ibid. Mambo/For coming to the rescue!”⁷⁷ In Puerto Rico, *change* refers to someone who does nonsense, a joker. The anthem makes fun of Western medicine when the real medicine was spiritual in nature: Puerto Rican music and dance. The significance of spiritual health through social and cultural interaction with friends, family, and community is emphasized in another verse as well: “De hard time were plenty/De pockets stayed empty/But the soul nunca [never] dyyyyyy/And junto [together] we survived/And danced after we cried/Defending nuestro [our] pride”.⁷⁸ El Anthem was not simply a song that was performed for an audience; it was an important gesture in El Embassy’s symbolic repertoire. Its purpose was to solidify the use of Spanglish as a language of resistance for Puerto Ricans who speak “two languages simultaneously”.⁷⁹

⁷⁹ Austin Arts Center, “El Spanglish National Anthem,” 1998, Pedro Pietri Papers, Box 1, Folder 2, Centro Archives and Library, Center for Puerto Rican Studies, Hunter College, CUNY.

Conclusion

El Passport and El Anthem are just two artefacts of a much larger collection of objects, artworks, events, and exhibitions that served to manifest the imaginary space of El Republic as reality for Puerto Ricans, Latinos, and anyone else who chose to become a citizen of this nation. Scholars have dissected parts of Maldonado’s and Pietri’s contributions to El Republic and El Embassy, but the importance of the materialization of El Republic artefacts in real, physical places has been marginalized due to El Republic’s primary concept as an imaginary site of resistance.⁸⁰ However, using this symbolic repertoire, Maldonado and Pietri purposely yanked El Republic into existence for audiences across the U.S. for over a decade. This allowed them to actively push for a decolonization of the imaginary – a decolonization of the brain as one particular exhibition artwork demonstrates with terms and phrases such as “jump without moving an inch”, “create dissent”, and “make non-sense” (see Figure 5). Ultimately, El Embassy – brought to life

⁸⁰ See Noel’s piece on the *Out of Focus Nuyoricans* exhibition mentioned in this text as well as Wilson Valentin-Escobar’ *Bodega Surrealism: The Emergence of Latin@ Artists in New York City* (New York: New York U. P., forthcoming).

again by Maldonado and Pietri – was a temporary project for a collective of Puerto Rican artists, all of whom have since moved on to other ventures or passed away into the spiritual world of El Republic. Nevertheless, its physical and material representations in the form of passports and other objects ensured that a new generation would hear and learn about El Republic’s vision to “make non-sense” of Puerto Rico’s ongoing struggles.⁸¹ If “a key element of cultural citizenship is the process of ‘affirmation,’ as the community itself defines its interests, its binding solidarities, its boundaries, its own space, and its membership,” then El Republic was only able to claim this right for its citizenry by building and nurturing an affective community of resident dissidents – as Maldonado calls himself in the booklet *Out of Focus Nuyoricans*.⁸²

⁸¹ The legacy of El Republic continues to be a presence for Puerto Rican activists as evidenced by a 2015 New York exhibition on the Young Lords, which includes exhibition space for the work of Figueroa, Pietri, and Maldonado. Connie Kargbo, “Puerto Rican radical group Young Lords retake NYC in museum exhibit”, *PBS Newshour*, September 19, 2015, <http://www.pbs.org/newshour/art/puerto-rican-radical-group-young-lords-retake-new-york-city-multi-museum-exhibit>, accessed 19 December 2016.

⁸² IUP Cultural Studies Working Group, “Draft Concept Paper”, cit. in William Flores and Benmayor, “Constructing Cultural Citizenship”, 13.

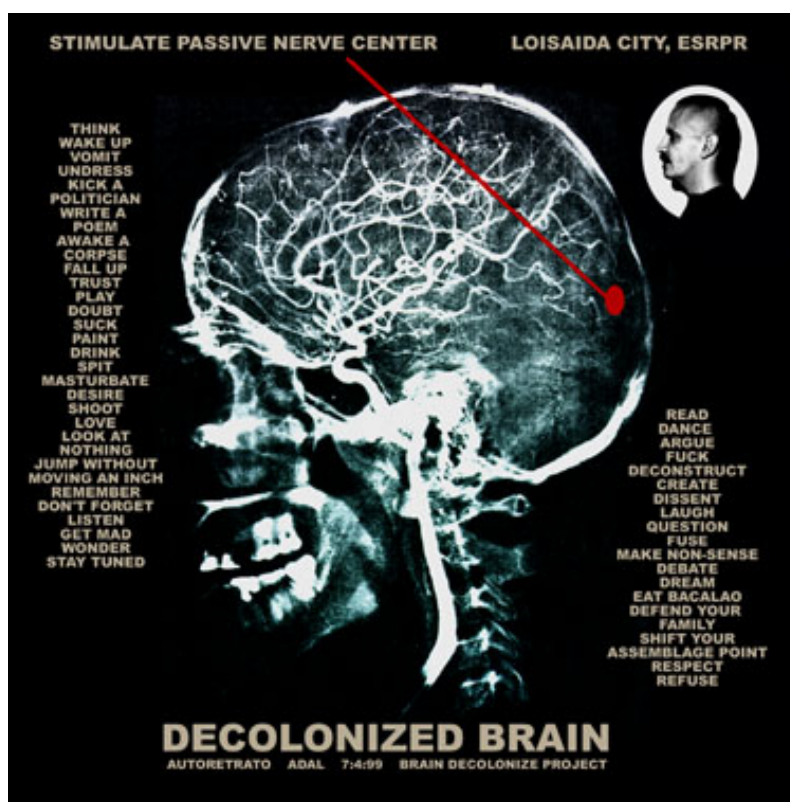


Fig. 5: Adál Maldonado, “La Decolonized Brain,” 2000, *Los Blueprints for a Nation*, CEPA Gallery, Boston, NY. Courtesy of Adál Maldonado.

This article began with Dylcia Pagan and her release from prison in September 1999 on the condition that she would renounce terrorist activities in her pursuit for Puerto Rican independence. Just a few weeks after Pagan left federal prison, Giuliani began a vicious battle with the Brooklyn Museum of Art “over an exhibition that includes a painting of the Virgin Mary on a canvas adorned with elephant dung,” according to the *New York Times*.⁸³ Playing the role of amateur art critic, Giuliani asked for offensive works to be removed and declined weekly

⁸³ David Barstow, “Giuliani Is Ordered to Halt Attacks Against Museum”, *New York Times*, November 2, 1999.

payments to the institutions when the museum refused to censor their exhibition. Within just two months, Giuliani started and lost his little battle over free expression. As Judge Nina Gershon of the United States District Court in Brooklyn declared in her decision: “There is no federal constitutional issue more grave ... than the effort by government officials to censor works of expression and to threaten the vitality of a major cultural institution as punishment for failing to abide by governmental demands for orthodoxy”.⁸⁴ This was only the beginning for Giuliani, however, as he clearly disagreed with the judge’s decision and announced

⁸⁵ Albor Ruiz, “Rudy on Art: It’s Theater of the Absurd”, *New York Daily News*, April 2, 2001.

⁸⁴ Ibid. a so-called “‘decency’ committee” or “art police” in 2001.⁸⁵ The committee’s mission was simple: “To follow Giuliani’s ideas on what is acceptable artwork at city-supported institutions. No more exhibitions like ‘Sensation’ or ‘Yo Mama’s Last Supper,’ both of which offended Giuliani’s sensibilities and made him rant and rave against the Brooklyn Museum of Art”.⁸⁶ The Pagan benefit in 2001 was partially a response to the art police, as notes on the evening’s program show: Maldonado screened his short film *Delito Cha Cha Cha* at the benefit “because it deals with the arrest of a woman for the crime of dancing the cha cha cha in a totalitarian state where any form of entertainments is forbidden”.⁸⁷ The film connected Pagan’s imprisonment for fighting her war against the imperial U.S. with Pagan’s new direction in art as her weapon of choice in the struggle for Puerto Rican independence. Giuliani’s coincidental intersections with Pagan’s causes – symbolically represented through this particular benefit – exemplify the larger story of how the U.S. has treated Puerto Rico and Puerto Rican independence movements in the past and how Puerto Ricans have continued to innovate on ways to keep resisting top-down notions of Puerto Rican (national) identity and citizenship. Maldonado asked whether it was possible to assume a national identity without citizenship privileges and, as this article has shown, a largely conceptual El Republic in conjunction with an activist El Embassy provided the ideas and tools to claim a cultural citizenship that defies and disables the legal limits of a U.S. citizenship in the minds and hearts of Puerto Ricans. Without a doubt, Puerto Ricans have no intention to relinquish “that special ‘mess’” that identifies them –

⁸⁷ “Dylcia Pagan Benefit”. The full version of *Delito Cha Cha Cha* can be found on Adál Maldonado’s YouTube channel: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sidhTjoqYvY>, accessed 12 December 2016.

⁸⁸ Díaz-Quinones, “La política del olvido”, 57.

historically, culturally, politically.⁸⁸