

ナショナル・アイデンティティの変容と政治： シカゴ、プエルトリコ移民女性の証言

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Transformation of National Identity Living in the US: a Case Study of Puerto Rican Women in Chicago

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プエルトリコでは、女性問題解決に向けて女性たちが連帯することを最優先し、既成の政党政治の在り方に対し距離を置くようになった。このような勢力が、植民地に関する議論や政党政治の政策に大きく影響を与えた。しかし、米国本土におけるプエルトリコ女性においては、同様の政治的影響力を明確に見出すことはできない。しかし、マイノリティグループとして草の根運動のレベルで白人中心主義の政策や女性解放運動に異議を唱えている。また、プエルトリコとは異なる環境に生きるプエルトリコ人女性はそのナショナル・アイデンティティも現実に見合った多様なものに変容しており、それがこれまでのネーション、ステイト、アイデンティティの概念に新たな視点を提供している。

Prologue

I'm interested in investigating the empowerment of Hispanic women in politics and their influence on US feminism. Specifically I will analyze them in the context of the movement of minority women. Until now I have investigated what kind of political effect Puerto Rican women have in the US and how national identity has been treated in the discussion of Puerto Rican feminists living in the US.

I did research in Chicago in September 2002 on the Puerto Rican women there and I interviewed several people, both researchers and activists, listening to their opinions and analysis of the situation of Puerto Rican women. There were two interesting indications. One was that there was no discussion about national identity among the Puerto Rican women and the other was that they don't have a feminist movement in their community in Chicago. I will suggest

some possible reasons for the lack of national identity discussion and feminist movement in the Puerto Rican community in Chicago.

1. Female Puerto Rican migration in the US mainland

Puerto Rican migration to the US mainland started in the second half of the 19th century. Now 3 million Puerto Ricans live on the mainland. However, they are just becoming visible in US society along with the empowerment of Hispanics.

Female Puerto Rican migrants have played an important role in the Puerto Rican community. Women have supported their families by working, as well as struggling for welfare benefits and the right to bilingual education. Nevertheless, Puerto Rican women's influence has not been large in US politics on the national stage until now. Neither have they had a strong connection to politics on the island.

The reason that Puerto Rican women's influence has not

been large in US politics on the national stage is that it's difficult to view Puerto Ricans as a homogeneous group on the US mainland. We have to look at them in a different context. Puerto Rican people are spreading to all areas of the mainland, not only New York City, and they are not necessarily connecting with each other. Besides, more than half of them were born on the US mainland. Their identity is different depending on their generation. They have diverse identities and cannot be thought of as one simple homogeneous group.

And the reason they don't have a strong connection with the politics of the island is that they see it as a very different world, although they have started exchanges in the academic area etc. in the past three decades.

For all these reasons, analyzing the political influence of Puerto Rican women in US is not simple. However, the influence of Puerto Rican women is felt in grass roots movements and in women of color movements. They have also added their Latina perspective to the mainly white middle class American feminist movement, just as women from other parts of the developing world have. They consider the reality of women from various countries and various ethnicities. Therefore we can say they have contributed a new paradigm to US feminism².

However, researching the situation of Puerto Rican women in detail, I found different cases in Chicago that I did not expect. I could not find a strong feminist movement in the Puerto Rican community in Chicago because of some complicated reasons, especially political conflict, etc. It shows that in real life it's not so easy to unite women to get empowerment unlike what we expect from academic discussion. There is hard friction among them and many difficult circumstances to overcome.

2. Puerto Rican women in Chicago and their feeling toward the island

Gina Perez, who wrote about "Puertorriqueña: Stories of life in Chicago", had interviewed a lot of working class Puerto Rican women in Chicago. According to her research, Puerto Rican women fight to survive and utilize their kinship ties as an important strategy to look for a better life in US. Their island became just some ideal dreaming place or the home they missed. One interviewee said:

"... I went for one week before I got married ... One lousy week. The most terrible week. Puerto Rico is pretty for vacation right now. That's how I see it. I was bored whole week I was there... I cried. I used to cry myself to sleep because it was so BORING. I told my sister... my goal is for my kids to go to Puerto Rico next year... I want them to go to Puerto Rico so that they could say, 'Yeah, I went to Puerto Rico. I don't remember much, but I did go to Puerto Rico'³"

Gina Perez analyzed their feeling for the island and their national identity, pointing out:

"Interestingly, women were rarely interested in moving permanently to Puerto Rico -in part due to their own disappointing experiences there-although they encouraged their children to remain romantically and culturally connected to the island through their own stories and desire to take them there one day⁴."

Another interviewee made the same point:

"[I want to take my kids to Puerto Rico] to visit... I wouldn't want to live there... I guess I am more American, You know what I mean?... I can't live like that, you know... But I would like to take my kids there. That's why I got involved with the [a Puerto Rico cultural center]. I was so surprised because I learned so much about my culture I didn't know⁴."

I also noted the same sentiments expressed by a Puerto Rican woman I interviewed in Chicago in September 2002. She described what happened to her in Puerto Rico. She was a Latina Leadership Coordinator of the feminist group, "Latin Women in Action" in Chicago. She talked to me about her experience in the interview.

She had moved to Puerto Rico after marriage, but she shocked the neighbors by her attitudes as an American. She had bad relationships with her neighbors. The neighbors did not like what she did. But she got along well with her boss, who was an American, at her job in Puerto Rico. She recognized then that her culture was close to the American's. However, she feels that now her identity is a Latina working in a Latina feminist group.

Experiences like these have been discussed frequently among Puerto Ricans. The Puerto Rican writer Esmeralda Santiago, who wrote the book "When I was a Puerto Rican" and is a migrant from Puerto Rico, talked about her experience in an interview: "...I discovered that there are

degrees of Puerto Ricanness. And that in Puerto Rico the people couldn't tell me what a Puerto Rican was. They could tell me what a Puerto Rican was not, and I was one of those who wasn't... I feel Puerto Rican and if they can't accept it, they're going to have to deal with it, to deal with Puerto Rican that I am...⁶

We can see the identity dilemma of the Puerto Rican migrants. However, it does not only affect Hispanics, but happens to all immigrants. Immigrants have always kept aspects of their native culture. They are not like mainstream Americans. But living far from their country, their culture becomes different from the original one. They have a different social environment in the new place. At the same time their culture will be affected by the new place. Then when they go back to their original country they find they are different or Americanized. It has been repeated among many immigrant groups. They are living "in-between cultures" and in two cultures or not belonging to one culture.

The Latinos appear so different from other "Americans" preserving their culture and language. But their culture becomes different slightly from the original one in another social environment. In other words, they are creating something new. It seems that not only are they adding new culture to the US but also to the Spanish speaking people in the world.

From the previous interviewee's comments, we understand the reason that there is no discussion about national identity among Puerto Rican women. It's not so simple being a Puerto Rican. As mentioned above, Esmeralda Santiago asserted; "there are degrees of Puerto Ricanness". Also she answered the interviewer's question interestingly. The interviewer asked; "...Puerto Ricans keep on feeling Puerto Rican even if they are second-or third-generation immigrants; even if they no longer live in the ghetto or in New York or among other Puerto Ricans. Why is that?" She answered:

"...because we make a conscious choice to be Puerto Rican... I don't know of any Puerto Rican who wants to be American... even though we're American citizens, this has a different meaning to us than to Americans. I am technically, legally, American."⁷

As Esmeralda Santiago mentioned, being Puerto Rican was "a conscious choice". That is a personal consciousness

for them.

Immigrants who came to the US want to be Americans in many cases. However Puerto Ricans already have American citizenship. Their choice of being Puerto Rican is a deep conscious decision. It's so conscious and delicate that I feel uneasy about trying to decipher it. Once, when I was talking about nationalism with a Puerto Rican feminist in 2002, she instructed me not to confuse nationalism with one's national identity. She was born and grew up in New York. She was against nationalism and was working in transnational feminism. I mistakenly thought that it was not so important to be Puerto Rican for her. However, she indicated to me that discussing nationalism didn't mean dealing with one's national identity. From that conversation with her I recognized that issues of identity are intensely personal and we can't assign a certain identity to someone. Besides this, "there are degrees of Puerto Ricanness". We can understand one reason why there is no discussion about national identity among the Puerto Rican women, though it's important to consider and talk about it.

3. The Unique Identity Living in the US Mainland Far from the Island

Previously-mentioned researcher Gina Perez reflects that she overestimated Puerto Rican sense of belonging to a transnational community in her initial questions to the interviewees and pointed out that Puerto Rican women in the US retained an original cultural identity in a globalizing world. She says:

"...`transnational migration` involves constant movement of people, ideas, technology and capital across borders. For the past decade, writers both inside and outside the academy have invoked the term `transnationalism` ... to explain these movements. And while this framework has helped to broaden scholars' knowledge of immigrants' experiences..., it can also distort our approach to migration research since it assumes that movement... is the primary way in which first and second generation migrants understand their lives⁷. "

We have to understand their lives as they are as well as understanding that they have emerged from actual circumstances of the globalized world. However, I was sometimes confused by what the interviewees explained to me about their identity as Puerto Rican and American.

For example, the interviewees who I met in Chicago identified with being Puerto Rican, though they were not anxious to go back to their island, Puerto Rico. It appeared to me that they were all right living in Chicago and willing to live there. However, it didn't define which national identity they had. One interviewee answered me that for her, Puerto Rico was her original country but she was busy in her place in Chicago. She was living there in Chicago and her family was there. Her life was totally there in Chicago. Not only working class women but also professionals who came from the island said the same thing. One professor said to me that she didn't think about going back to the island. She came to study but she married in the US mainland and had had children. Her family and life are in Chicago and her sisters also live in other parts of the US. She didn't feel any necessity to go back to the island. Listening to them, I could recognize that many Puerto Ricans had been settling there and taking root. Where they live and plan to live is different from who they are. Where and how they live is a question of survival. Who they are is a question of identity and culture. Their identity is uniquely connected to their situation in the US and has been formed by their society, history, and overall circumstances. People say the Puerto Ricans are people who are obsessed by the US existence. This special situation has caused Puerto Ricans to consider their culture, identity and the relationship between nation and territory keenly. However, this theme has become more widespread in these days of globalization, namely that people have started to move more easily across borders. Their complicated circumstances would make us to rethink the relationship between identity and territory.

Concerning the transnationalism of Puerto Rican women, one Puerto Rican academic pointed out that they united with the women of color movements and considered the reality of women from various countries and various ethnicities. Their struggle is different from the context of the island, although Puerto Ricans on the mainland and the island experience the same conditions as Puerto Ricans. As Hispanic women in the US, they experience poverty and treatment as second class citizens. But they have to live in the mainland among the other Americans. Their struggle for survival becomes one of many immigrant and minority groups struggles in US. It's not a specialized struggle of Puerto Ricans, though they have

their own circumstances and their own experiences based on their history. This reality has led to the cooperation with other Latinos for their mutual benefits.

Also one Puerto Rican women told me in Chicago that she grew up in a multiethnic area and she experienced different cultures with neighbors. She observed that Asian people emphasized educating their children and it appeared to be a cultural difference. She thought they succeeded because of that cultural trait. She wasn't brought up in a culture that emphasized education. However, she was trying to educate her children and grandchildren. I see these transnational circumstances occurred in multicultural situations. These circumstances exist in their daily life. Each ethnicity lives in their way, however living in the same space, side by side, they have to face other cultures in their daily life. They can't see transnationalism, but are living it. So they are maintaining their Puerto Ricaness but at the same time living far away from the island.

4. Political Issues and the Puerto Rican Community in Chicago

I noticed that in Chicago the pro-Puerto Rican independence movement had certain influence in the intellectual class and in their community. However, their tone was slightly different from the discussion about independence on the island. I attended some of their meetings in Chicago. They did not discuss the economic effects of independence on the people's lives but they had a tendency to emphasize the history of colonialism and the US invasion; the emotional part. On the island, on the other hand, the economic effect of independence or statehood was an important issue as well as the national dignity. However, Chicago Puerto Ricans' anxiousness for the island's independence arose from their circumstances and social position in the US society.

One Chicagoan who is pro-Puerto Rican independence explained to me that many working class Puerto Ricans who have come to work in Chicago suffered from discrimination. With those circumstances they became more sensitive about their identity as Puerto Ricans. That caused sympathy for the independence of the island. I could understand how important it was to have roots for them to keep their dignity while living in the US mainland. Even the significance of a

political point of view would change depending on their circumstances. That is to say, their hard circumstances have brought about feelings of sympathy for independence, which would confirm their dignity as Puerto Ricans, because they have suffered as "second-class citizens". That's how important talking about the island's independence is. As a matter of dignity they have a tendency not to talk about the economic effect but the immaterial part. What they want is different slightly on the island and in the US depending on their circumstances, although it's the same pro-Puerto Rican independence movement. That was what I understood from listening to them in Chicago.

However, one researcher who is studying the Puerto Rican community told me that the particular circumstances of Chicago resulted in complicated consequences for the community. The pro-Puerto Rican independence people lead community activities: teaching Puerto Rican history and their culture, to have dignity as a Puerto Rican, etc. However, the US authority arrested community leaders related to the violent political action against the US government. After, they were freed by amnesty in the period of President Clinton. Most of them went back to the island. With the loss of the community activists, the community weakened.

At that moment, the researcher was on her way to investigate the details, so she didn't tell me her conclusion on it. She said that the case was so complicated that was difficult to find how to analyze. Nor at this moment could I research on that point in detail. It would be an interesting case and important point to know about the relation between the political issue and community activity. This case is one in which the political movement on the status of the island deeply affected the Puerto Rican community of the US mainland.

However, at the same time, they are affected by US society regarding their national identity. Living in the US mainland as US citizens, their experience that is different from the island has caused diversity of their identity. Some recognize themselves as almost Puerto Rican, others feel not so Puerto Rican, but more American. And it is affecting the politics of the island and their community's politics. Some Puerto Ricans in the US do not view the political status of the island as the most important factor in political

discussions. Others argue to accept the actual situation with the US opposing independence. With diverse identity as Puerto Ricans, contrasting opinions about the island's political situation have emerged among Puerto Ricans. This phenomenon is causing Puerto Ricans to take a more objective view of the island's political situation.

I suspect that women have this tendency to take a more objective view of the island's political situation than men, because women are often excluded from political power. The women are not so involved in political activities; that means the women are not involved in the partisanship, but they are more involved in the survival of life. So I suspect that women take a more objective view of political issues. However, I could not find prominent evidence at this moment, because some Puerto Rican men told me the same feelings; they feel that the island's political issues are far away from them living in the US.

Meanwhile, on the island, the women overcame partisanship to establish laws to benefit women. They have taken a more objective view of the island's political situation. Some women tried to exclude political partisanship from the women's movement to resolve the problems that women confront. The necessity of uniting made women be careful about partisanship on the island. The women in the US have many problems to survive daily life and live far from the island. Therefore I suspect that women on the mainland would have more an objective view of the island's political situation than women on the island or men in the US. However, I couldn't find that kind of phenomena in the US until now. The situation of the Puerto Rican women in the US is different from the island. Their circumstances are more complicated than on the island. They include not only gender issues but racism, ethnicity and class difference.

Last I will mention briefly the island's feminism on political issues, to rethink comparing the situation between women in the US and on the island.

5. The Meaning of Feminism in the Island, Puerto Rico

In Puerto Rico, feminism became active in the 70s. In 1971, the Committee of Civil Rights reported that sexual discrimination was not a serious problem in Puerto Rico and this caused crucial debate. The first "second wave" feminist group, MIA (Mujer Integrete Ahora), emerged from this

debate. Then, with this rise of new feminism, Puerto Rican Women's Association was organized in 1975 to consolidate women's power. But the organization was divided because of partisanship and ended after only 2 years. The MIA made sure to avoid partisanship from the beginning, but the MIA also ended finally because of partisanship. Puerto Rican feminists confronted the serious conflicts in Puerto Rican political parties that were divided on the issue of political status.

After this, in the 1980s Puerto Rican feminists came to concentrate on the particular interests of women, such as domestic violence or women's health. In the latter half of the 1980s, women's organizations cooperated and took action to establish a law against domestic violence, making it a criminal offense. During this process of struggle, various women's groups of differing interests and opinions came together and cooperated to achieve this special goal. These groups united to establish a new law against violence for women, cooperating with women officials, and they succeeded in getting it passed in 1989. Before this movement, the conflict concerning political status had affected the women's movement acutely. The partisanship was so serious that it was difficult to unite women on the fight for women's issues. However, this experience, uniting for a special issue, indicates the women's movement has started to overcome the partisanship that confused and divided it for a long time.

Also this process made it clear that the established political parties' policies were not responding to women's issues. When I interviewed the ex-MIA member in Puerto Rico in 1998, she said that she realized that the Independence Party, which was considered liberal, was part of the men's world and the men had united for their benefits against women's liberation. So she said that she took the side of hoping for the island's independence; however, she recognized the importance of uniting women rather than dividing them, depending on the political issues. This shows that she put importance on women's issues rather than national political issue of the island at this writing. We can observe that this tendency is still continuing. For example, one woman has criticized a researcher's analysis about the movement against the US military base in Vieques at one section of Conference of Puerto Rican Studies Association I

was attending in 2000 at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. She pointed out that the political parties and intellectuals were analyzing the US colonialism issue without including women, and thus they have little understanding of the women's different points of view.

These are interesting phenomena that women have started to express disapproval with the way of political thinking established by men. We know these women are not rejecting any resolution about Puerto Rico's colonial status, but they protest the political ignorance of the women's existence in society and the political regime. This means women are demanding to reconstruct political discourse, offering another point of view. And women have started to think differently on the colonial issue of Puerto Rico. They have noticed that the conflict of the colonial issue has obstructed the uniting of women to resolve their problems. So the women have started to see the colonial issue differently. This seems like it is causing different attitudes toward the colonial issue among feminists about the national identity. This is interesting. It means that Puerto Rican women's experience is affecting their national identity and political structure.

6. Conclusion

On the island, the women started to keep their distance from the political issue of the island when they united on the women's issues. This has caused the established parties to rethink their politics and also has accelerated the argument objectively about the island political status. At this time, criticism against the status quo had spread and the notion of a Puerto Rican "nation-state" was being considered as just one of various opinions. As we saw previously, in the 70's partisanship seriously affected the women's movement, but as a consequence of the women's effort to avoid partisanship, the women's movement has affected the established political parties and political thinking lately.

In the meanwhile, the political influence of Puerto Rican women in US is not simple. However, the influence of Puerto Rican women is felt in grass roots movements and in women of color movements. They have also added their Latina perspective to the mainly white middle class American feminist movement. They consider the reality of women from various countries and various ethnicities. Their

influence on politics is not like the island one, because of the different circumstances. Nor is it clearly the influence on the island politics.

I have understood the difference of the women's movement on the island and in the US. Both are causing a new paradigm in politics, though they have different aspects. They have proposed different viewpoints to the mainstream's concept in each circumstance. Their movement is growing rapidly in the group of minorities of a sovereign nation and on feminism at the outskirts of a sovereign nation.

Meanwhile, the case of Chicago teaches us that it's not easy to develop community power around a political issue with complicated circumstances and problems. There are difficulties to developing political power in real life depending on the circumstances of the case, though we can find an empowerment of Puerto Rican women and their influence on politics as a whole.

Also many people indicated to me the struggle against the US military exercise on the island of Vieques, was a transnational movement, and there people struggled and united without boundaries on the island and the US. It would be a new and interesting case to research.

More deep research will be necessary. It will contribute to the examination of the relationship between gender, nationalism and politics. This research is a case study about feminism in a society where there is "unfinished" de-colonization, and it would contribute to form a theory about the relationship between gender and nationalism. It especially has a possibility of proposing a different theory not falling into the theory of developed Western countries versus developing countries, because Puerto Ricans have a special condition of being US citizens. Also Hispanic members and women's empowerment is an important and particular factor in understanding US society. Struggling to survive, Puerto Rican women have their own experience. They contribute to US politics and also to Puerto Rican politics. I hope to have more deep conclusions as I continue researching and getting more data.

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- 2 See Shigaki, Yoshiko, "EL papel de las migrantes puertorriqueñas en el feminismo estadounidense", *Language and Culture*, No.5, Center for Language and Culture Education and Research, Iwate Prefectural University, 2003.
- 3 Pérez, Gina, "Puertorriqueñas: Stories of Life in Chicago", Center for Latino Research, *Dialogo: Special Issue on Latinas*, winter/spring 2002 No.6, DePaul University, Chicago, USA, p.20.
- 4 Ibid., p.20.
- 5 Ibid., p.20.
- 6 Hernández, Carmen Dolores, *Puerto Rican Voices in English: interviews with writers*, Praeger Publishers, USA, 1997, p.164-165.
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- 8 Pérez, Gina, p.165-166.
- 9 See SHIGAKI, Yoshiko, (in Japanese) "The History of Puerto Rican Community in the United States and Identity", *Bulletin of the Faculty of Social Welfare*, Vol.3, No.2, March, 2001 Iwate Prefectural University, pp.23-32.

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