

Coming Home:  
US-Latinos on the Broadway Stage

A dissertation

submitted by

Colleen L. Rua

in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

*DRAMA*

Tufts University

*November 2011*

© 2011, Colleen L. Rua

ADVISER:

Dr. Barbara W. Grossman

### **Abstract**

The image of the Latino immigrant and the first-generation US-Latino on the American musical theatre stage is ever-evolving and is tied to issues of stereotyping, identity and cultural authenticity. This dissertation focuses on three Broadway musicals in order to explore the place and significance of the Latino character and culture with regard to the search for and construction of “home.” The representative musicals considered in this study are: *West Side Story* (1957) and its 2009 revival, *The Capeman* (1998), and *In the Heights* (2008). Through a thorough investigation of these musicals and their original Broadway productions, I examine the ways in which theatre artists have represented Latino identity and space and the impact of these representations on both Latino and non-Latino audiences. Over the past fifty years, the perspective of Latino home in the Broadway musical has shifted away from the idea of the “American Dream” and toward a self-constructed space that is a creation and reflection of bicultural identity.

After an introduction to the theoretical models referred to in this study and an overview of current issues relevant to the Latino in the United States, I outline the history of the Latino on the Broadway musical stage, paying special attention to the musicals of the World War II era. Chapters two, three and four each focus on a different method whereby the artists associated with the representative

musicals have treated Latino characters. These methods include: the use of Spanish language, memory and nostalgia, and the New York City barrio as setting. Through interviews, translating Spanish passages, analyzing lyrics and dialogue and considering choices made in performance, I demonstrate changes in character relationships, the assertion of power through language and education, the connections between cultural identity and memory and the idea of home as a public space.

## **Acknowledgments**

With deep gratitude to my adviser, Barbara Grossman, whose encouragement and support have allowed me to reach this goal. I also offer heartfelt thanks to the members of my committee: Claire Conceison, who has provided guidance, faith and laughter, both in and out of the classroom; Downing Cless, who has generously offered his time, advice and invaluable teaching opportunities; and Iani Moreno, for fostering my love of Latin-American language and culture. Many thanks to the families of Arlington Children's Theatre, especially Julie Nash and Quentin Miller whose words of wisdom I have carried with me. My colleagues Wen-ling Lin and Hesse Phillips accompanied me on the early part of this journey. Kyle Sircus generously allowed me to use his interview material and Ali Ewoldt shared her time and thoughts for which I am endlessly grateful. Thanks to my dear friends Nicole Imbraccio and Matt Lundeen for being in the trenches with me and to Brian Calvert for helping me down the homestretch. This dissertation is dedicated to my mother, Ellie Rua, and my father, Ken Rua, who have always believed in me.

## Table of Contents

Introduction

Page 1

Chapter One

Performative Bodies and Criminal Minds : The History of Latinos On Broadway

Page 32

Chapter Two

*El Poder y Educación: La Lengua Española*

Page 78

Chapter Three

Here and Now: Memory and Nostalgia in the Latino Musical

Page 139

Chapter Four

Living *el barrio* : New York City as Setting

Page 193

Conclusion

Page 253

Bibliography

Page 277

## Introduction

*"In the Heights is a classic American story. It's really a celebration of this neighborhood at the top of Manhattan. It's about these three generations trying to find home and what that means to them."*

(Lin-Manuel Miranda, composer and lyricist of *In the Heights*)

The above summary of *In the Heights*, the 2008 Tony Award winner for best musical, was provided by Miranda in an interview with documentary filmmaker Paul Bozymowski, who followed cast and crew for the five months leading up to opening night. In May 2009, PBS aired *In the Heights: Chasing Broadway Dreams*, documenting the eight-year journey in the making of a new musical; a new musical centered around a New York City *barrio*, largely inhabited by Latin American immigrants and first-generation US-Latinos. Only as recently as *In the Heights* has a major Broadway musical been written and composed by two US-Latinos, Miranda and book writer Quiara Alegría Hudes.<sup>1</sup> In addition to presenting stories of US-Latino/a characters, the new breed of US-Latino/a production incorporates Latin and Afro-Latin music styles and manipulates language most notably through the use of bilingualism as a means of infusing the production with US-Latino/a culture and challenging familiar depictions of the US-Latino/a.<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> A First-Generation American is commonly defined as an American born of immigrant parentage. I use it in this dissertation to refer to those Americans born in the United States, with parents born in any Latin American country.

<sup>2</sup> I use the term bilingualism here to refer to the use of two languages throughout one play/production. In the case of *In the Heights* and the other musicals I will discuss here, the two

In the same interview, Miranda goes on to describe his motivations for writing *In the Heights*,

...at first it was, 'I want to write the kind of musical I would want to be in.' I also saw *Rent* and it was the first time I had seen a musical that took place *now* and a light bulb really went off. 'You can write a musical about you; about your life!' There is a generation of us who were born somewhere else and moved here or their parents came from somewhere else, whether it's from Latin America or Russia or the West Indies and don't know where they belong and what they're supposed to navigate and what traditions do you take with you.

In their search for a geographic place and ideological space to call home, both the Latin American immigrant and first-generation US-Latino/a must grapple with issues of identity, authenticity and stereotyping. These themes are key to this discussion and are connected to a changing notion of home that is built upon the use of language, memory and urban setting. Much writing and research has been devoted to issues of US-Latino/a identity with regard to immigration and assimilation in non-musical plays written by Latin Americans and US-Latinos. Fewer scholars have studied the same themes in the Broadway musical. Through an examination of the place of the Latino/a on Broadway beginning in the early twentieth century and culminating with the 2009 revival of *West Side Story*, this study will show that the great American immigrant story, as far as US-Latinos are

concerned, is no longer about an attempt at assimilating into the existing American culture, but about reconciling native culture with American culture, and in doing so, creating a space that acknowledges both while transcending the status of “foster home.”

In the United States, the word “home” has often been associated with the term “American Dream.” This phrase conjures images of a two-story suburban dwelling, bordered by a white picket fence and a backyard. Endless cliches have shaped our idea of what home should mean. From “there's no place like home,” to “home is where the heart is,” each seems to suggest that our dwelling is a place that promises to satisfy all of our needs. Indeed, it is nearly impossible to divorce intellectual and emotional concepts of home. As scholar Theano S. Terkenli points out, “A symbol becomes a sign of a thing but also has feelings behind it, as in a house and a home. Home is a multidimensional and profoundly symbolic term that cannot be mapped as an exclusively spatial concept, but it can be depicted as one aspect of human emotional territory.”<sup>3</sup> Over time and across cultures, “home” has come to mean many different things. Terkenli points to the character for “family” in old Chinese, which translates into English as “people in house,” as an example of a culture which emphasizes the connection between home and family.<sup>4</sup> For individuals in both Eastern and Western cultures, the social aspect of home

---

<sup>3</sup> Theano S. Terkenli, “Home as a Region, *Geographical Review*, Vol 85, no. 3, (July 1995), 326.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.



and its association with the people/family who live there “becomes salient in the development of the idea of home by establishing a circle of social relations that validate an individual as a human being.”<sup>5</sup> This social component of home may be as specific as a particular dwelling which houses several family members, while for others, this term broadens to include multiple locations, multiple people and complex ideologies. Increasingly, the primacy of space as the main indicator of home is being usurped by home as “a state of being, constructed on the accumulation of personal habits, thoughts, or emotional patterns of the lifeworld.”<sup>6</sup> In particular, American society has seen a shift in the idea of home that moves away from the interior, domestic sphere and toward an increasingly public existence. This perspective also suggests that lifestyle, rather than location, is an indicator of increasingly individualized concepts of home.

Both individual and collective concepts of home are found on the Latino/a stage and these are connected to evolving attitudes toward public and private spaces as locations of home. Terkenli suggests that, “As the sense of a collective home is connected to the past and to the future, ethnicity and nationalism constitute powerful poles of attachment.”<sup>7</sup> Home as an ideological concept tied to ethnicity and nationalism is more specifically seen in these musicals through the

---

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Terkenli, 328.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

ways in which the US-Latino/a is given the agency that allows him/her to create such a space. A negotiation with the past through memory is essential to this creation, as are the acquisition of power through language, acts of resistance and the acknowledgment of physical space as not only a part of individual and community identity, but as an investment in the future.

The treatment of the US-Latino/a figure on stage is ever-evolving and various methods have been used to communicate an authentic idea of home. After providing a brief overview of the history of Latin American theatre in the United States, I discuss and analyze the use of these methods including Spanish/Spanglish lyrics and dialogue, scenes of memory and nostalgia, and of the New York City *barrio* as a setting. It is important first, however, to explain the terminology and theoretical models that will be used throughout this study.

There is an ongoing debate over the terminology used to designate those who hail from or who have roots in Latin America. Each designation is caught up in layers of signification, and the changing terminology suggests everything from heritage and traditions to gender and politics. Currently, there is debate over the use of the term “Hispanic” versus “Latino.” Some who argue against the term “Hispanic” do so because it implies a history of Spanish conquest and because it is sometimes used to refer to all countries of Central and South America as though they constitute one nation or one culture. Some who prefer “Latino,” rather than

Latin American, suggest that the term “American” is implied when using “Latino.” In order to best serve the readers of this study, I have opted to use the following designations: "Latin American" will refer to those (male and female) who reside in the countries of Central and South America and the Spanish-speaking Caribbean and to those who have immigrated to and settled in the United States; "US-Latino/a" will refer to first-generation Americans of Latin American origins with the “o/a” endings used to acknowledge both genders. When this term is pluralized, it will be used as “US-Latinos,” dropping the “os/as” ending for ease of reading. "Latinos" will be used to refer to both the immigrant group and first-generation groups together. More specific, geographically, ethnically or gender-relevant terms such as "Puerto Rican" or "Chicana" will be employed when necessary. The use of the hyphen to designate US-Latinos (and for sub-categories like Mexican-American) was developed by the United States Census Bureau. Current practice and stylistic guidelines suggest not using a hyphen with terms such as US-Latino. Some object to its usage since it implies that these individuals are “not American” or “not Latino.” Because this discussion considers the liminal status of the Latino/a, I have opted to use the hyphen. It functions only as a symbolic reminder to the reader that this is the location of the discussion. Spanish words and lyrics will appear in italics, unless they are proper names or appear in a quotation where they were originally not italicized.

This dissertation focuses on three Broadway musicals in order to explore the place and significance of the Latin American and US-Latino/a character and culture on stage with regard to a search for and construction of home. The representative musicals considered in this study are: *West Side Story* (1957) and its 2009 revival, *The Capeman* (1998), and *In the Heights* (2008).<sup>8</sup> Additional musicals and non-musical plays are used as points of reference and to provide examples and comparison where necessary. Through a thorough investigation of these musicals and their original Broadway productions, I plan to provide a new perspective by which future mainstream musical productions involving US-Latino/a identity may be viewed. This is a departure from earlier theoretical models, which focus on the immigrant assimilating to the American way of life. Una Chaudhuri's definition of the "geopathic figure" has, in the recent past, served as a popular framework used by many scholars to examine the complicated evolution of the immigrant or exile. Chaudhuri defines geopathology as "the characterization of place as problem" and the "geopathic figure" as the immigrant who must travel through a series of phases in order to assimilate to a new location and its culture.<sup>9</sup> For the protagonists in plays dealing with geopathology, the

---

<sup>8</sup> See Chapter One for summaries of these plays, where they are situated in their chronological context.

<sup>9</sup> Una Chaudhuri, *Staging Place: The Geography of Modern Drama*, (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1997), xii. It is interesting here to note that the term geopathology is otherwise defined by the Merriam-Webster Medical Dictionary as "a science that deals with the relation of geographic factors to peculiarities of specific diseases." By appropriating this word,

“construction of identity [is a] negotiation with the power of place.”<sup>10</sup> The "place" that holds power and serves as a "problem" in Chaudhuri's framework is the immigrant's destination country. In order to construct a new identity within the destination country, the immigrant must pass through three phases:

1. Rootlessness or Wandering: the immigrant/exile feels disconnected from his/her homeland.
2. Identity Confusion: the immigrant/exile must decide which aspects and traditions of his/her native culture to honor and which to reject. Conversely, s/he must decide which new ones to adopt or reject.
3. Departure or Homecoming: the immigrant/exile either rejects his/her adopted culture or assimilates to it.

There is ample evidence of Latin American and US-Latino/a characters on the Broadway stage who have passed through these phases. The discussion of the musicals undertaken here will show that this path may now be broadened. In addition, it will show that the place of power for the US-Latino/a is shifting from the destination country, to the space that s/he creates within that country that serves as their hybrid home. When considering not only the immigrant, but the first-generation US-Latino/a, we see that his/her journey may not result in departure or homecoming and that homecoming is not always tantamount to assimilation. Chaudhuri's foundation can be expanded to ask what becomes of the

---

Chaudhuri positions the immigrant as a diseased body, that must move through stages of illness in order to assimilate to a new "healthy" state, in which they have assimilated to the adopted culture of the destination country.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

US-Latino/a who does not deny the dominant culture or assimilate to it, but reconciles themselves somewhere in-between? Miranda asked himself the same question when he began working on *In the Heights*, " I spent most of my childhood wondering. That question of finding home is not only a geographical one but an emotional one of what does it mean to be Puerto Rican if you don't live in Puerto Rico or what does it mean to be Dominican if you don't live in the Dominican Republic?" Miranda's question is exemplary of the Latino/a figure's transitory state, both geographically/culturally and emotionally/psychologically.

In 1909 Arnold VanGennep defined "liminal" in reference to "in-between situations and conditions that are characterized by the dislocation of established structures, the reversal of hierarchies, and uncertainty regarding the continuity of tradition and future outcomes."<sup>11</sup> Later, theorist Victor Turner argued that the framework of liminality "served not only to identify the importance of in-between periods, but also to understand the human reactions to liminal experiences."<sup>12</sup> Confusion surrounding the continuity of tradition is a major theme that impacts the US-Latino/a stage figure. It is through resistance to established structures, most recently corporations that seek to displace Latino/a communities, whereby the US-Latino/a figure able to assert power over his/her

---

<sup>11</sup> Bjorn Thomassen, "The Uses and Meanings of Liminality," *International Political Anthropology* 2, no. 1 (2009), 10.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

liminality. Acts of resistance seen in these musicals range from violence to an attempt at creating a sense of Turner's "normative *communitas*" through which liminal communities develop their own internal structures.<sup>13</sup> These internal structures reflect an interstitial space in which hybrid identities are embraced. This idea of interstitial space was developed by Homi K. Bhabha who characterizes its function with his statement,

It is in the emergence of the interstices—the overlap and displacement of domains of difference—that the intersubjective and collective experiences of nationness, community interest, or cultural value are negotiated. . . . Terms of cultural engagement, whether antagonistic or affiliative, are produced performatively. The social articulation of difference, from the minority perspective, is a complex, on-going negotiation that seeks to authorize cultural hybridities that emerge in moments of historical transformation.<sup>14</sup>

In the musicals discussed here, we find Bhabha's collective experiences acted out and negotiated on stage where the liminal state of the US-Latino/a and the Latin American immigrant is reflected in all aspects of production. Through language, we find that codeswitching is an oral representation of the interstice. Memory serves as an interstitial space where both ideas and tangible objects allow the US-Latino/a figure to create and recreate ideas of home. The *barrio* is an interstice between Latin American countries and New York City. Historically, the status of

---

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, (New York: Routledge, 1994), 139.

the Latino/a on stage has been a performance of ethnicity, as Bhabha suggests. More recent musicals, like *In the Heights*, certainly tackle identity confusion, but place greater focus on the persistent liminal state of the Latino/a, rather than asserting a clear cut acceptance or rejection of location, culture and identity. The US-Latino/a's sense of interstitial existence, of belonging neither to a native or an adopted culture, or, conversely, belonging to both, prompts a need to find home. This has led theatre artists to a series of multi-layered, multicultural creations that give a new perspective of what home means for Latinos in the United States today.

Chaudhuri's model is presented as applicable to a general immigrant population. Working from this model, Maria-Tania Bandes-Becerra provides another set of phases more specific to the Latino/a immigrant in her dissertation *Becoming American: A Discovery of the Process of Immigrant Acclimatization as Seen in Hispanic/Latino Scripts* (2008). Bandes-Becerra applies assimilation theory to case studies of non-musical plays by Latino/a playwrights, a factor that will prove influential to my topic as well. Expanding on Chaudhuri's model, she proposes six steps of the immigrant into assimilation:

1. Clinging to the Familiar: A rejection of the dominant culture by way of clinging to language, culture, music, religion
2. Honeymoon: Immigrants are eager to please those of the dominant culture



3. Disillusionment: The immigrant displays frustration and hostility toward the dominant culture
4. Humor: Tolerance of the host culture
5. Home: The immigrant begins to think like members of the host culture.
6. Roots: The immigrant tries to regain what was lost in the home stage.<sup>15</sup>

Like Chaudhuri's model, Bandes-Becerra's is a reminder of the continued attempt to define the immigrant experience. While both models function well to articulate the challenges of assimilation, each presupposes that (1.) assimilation/negotiation of identity and place ends with the immigrant, neglecting first-generation Americans; (2.) the host or dominant culture always exists in opposition to the home culture, and the two cannot be linked, as in the case of the United States and Puerto Rico; and (3.) immigrants will never permanently return to their homeland, or will return only as an act of defeat, being unable to "fit" into the host culture. A preferred lifestyle for many immigrants today is one that includes the choices of repatriation or transnational flow between multiple locations, yet are not without their complications. In her book *Significant Other: Staging the American in China* (2004), Claire Conceison discusses the transnational circumstance of playwrights Sun Huizhu and Fei Chunfang, whose status in the United States changed from exile to immigrant and back to exile with

---

<sup>15</sup> Maria-Tania Bandes-Becerra, "Becoming American: A discovery of the process of immigrant acclimatization as seen in Hispanic/Latino scripts," (Wayne State University, 2008), 7-8.

their changing life circumstances. Conceison calls the discourse of immigration, “one of evolution, permanence, assimilation and unidirectional migration...,” and describes the discourse of exile as “immediate, alienating, and carr[y]ing the hope of being temporary.”<sup>16</sup> This distinction between the status of the immigrant and exile is of major importance to the study of the Latin American figure on the Broadway stage. The Latin American figure also shifts status, and in the musicals discussed here, the tension between permanent and temporary is great. Even more important is the consideration of how these definitions apply to the first-generation US-Latino/a. To this end, the questions I pose here are: Can the US-Latino/a figure ever go home/come home? Or is the US-Latino/a character meant to exist in a liminal space, both geographically and ideologically? What has home come to mean for the stage Latino/a? How does the use of language, memory and nostalgia and setting inform the US-Latino/a figure's construction of home? How is the idea of authenticity tied to the use of these methods on stage? In following their Broadway ancestors such as *Fiddler on the Roof*, which provided inspiration for *In the Heights*, are Latino/a characters simply taking their turn on Broadway in a recycled story of finding the American dream? How are all of these issues reflected in the current economic, political and social climate in America and attitudes toward immigration and the US-Latino/a population? These questions

---

<sup>16</sup> Claire Conceison, *Significant Other: Staging the American in China*. (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2004), 90.

lead me to propose a perspective which makes its goal the carving out of a geographic and ideological space called “home.”

Chapter One briefly chronicles the history of the Latino/a in American theatre, beginning with early California-based Chicano theatres and culminating in the 2009 Broadway revival of *West Side Story*. While the origins of Latino/a-produced and Spanish-speaking theatre in what is now the United States can be traced to Chicano performances of the late 1500s, it is a relatively young genre, since professional companies in California, Texas and Florida were not established until the mid-1800s. The first true flourishing of the Latino/a theatre occurred in the early twentieth century when New York City became the center of Spanish-speaking theatrical production. This was bolstered by booming immigration of the 1930s and 1940s, which brought increasing numbers of Puerto Rican and Cuban immigrants to New York City.<sup>17</sup> Since then, the city has remained a hub of Latino/a theatrical activity, musical and non-musical, performed in both Spanish and English languages. Included in Chapter One is an in-depth discussion of the image of the Latino/a that became prevalent after World War Two. An overview of this history is integral to an understanding of the image of the Latino/a on stage. Before delving into this chapter, however, it is important to first summarize the current discourse regarding the image of the

---

<sup>17</sup> Nicolas Kanellos, *Hispanic Theatre in the United States* (Huston: Arte Publico Press, 1984).

Latino/a in the United States.

Latinos share a history of occupation, invasion and colonization by the United States, thereby situating them as post-colonial subjects who migrate to the metropolises of the imperialist nation. At the turn of the twenty-first century, Latinos in America numbered 24 million, and were estimated to be the largest minority group in America by 2009.<sup>18</sup> Since the 2000 census, there has been a growing debate about Latinos' relationship to American identity. Current debates regarding Latino/a stereotyping revolve around the concept of "whitewashing," a term used by scholar Arlene Dávila in her book *Latino Spin: Whitewashing and the Politics of Race* (2008). She defines the term as the process by which an ethnic group (in this instance, Latinos) "becomes the new mainstream, either following a similar path to Euro-Americans, assimilating and becoming white or, even more optimistically, entirely transforming and expanding the meaning of what's considered mainstream."<sup>19</sup> Dávila's "becoming white" assumes the complete assimilation of Latinos into American culture, taking on English as their primary language, engaging in American traditions and contributing to the United States' economy. By doing so, Latinos become what Dávila refers to as "sanitized" and

---

<sup>18</sup> Felipe Korzenny and Betty Ann Korzenny, *Hispanic Marketing: A Critical Perspective*, (Burlington, Ma: Butterworth-Heinmann, 2005), xi.

<sup>19</sup> Arlene Dávila, *Latino Spin: Whitewashing and the Politics of Race*, (New York: NYU Press, 2008), 11.

"marketable."<sup>20</sup> This concept is one that has been investigated with regard to other immigrant groups in the United States as well. Perhaps most well-known is Noel Ignatiev's, *How the Irish Became White*.<sup>21</sup> The notion of "becoming white" has also been discussed in relation to Asian-Americans, by scholars like Min Zhou, who asks, "Are Asian Americans becoming white?," and argues, "Although Asian Americans as a group have attained career and financial success equated with being white, and although many have moved near to or even married whites, they still remain culturally distinct and suspect in a white society."<sup>22</sup> Dávila's argument maintains that the same is true for Latin Americans. These examples situate the whitewashing of ethnic groups in America as a cyclical process, one that seeks as its subject large populations of minority individuals in the United States at a particular moment in history. Ironically, these large populations are lauded for their successes in education and the workplace; characteristics that are viewed as appropriately "white," yet are seen as threatening to the dominant, white population. Most interesting to Dávila's discussion of whitewashing is her argument that whitewashing occurs amongst Latinos themselves and is complicated by the proximity of the United States to Latin America. Often Latinos are over-ethnicized or de-ethnicized in popular culture representations, including

---

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Noel Ignatiev, *How the Irish Became White*, (New York: Routledge, 1995). See also Karen Brodtkin's *How Jews Became White Folks and What that Means in America*, (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1998).

<sup>22</sup> Min Zhou, "Are Asian Americans Becoming White?" *Context*, 3: 1 (2004), 30.

on stage. The former approach leads to the Latino/a figure being stereotyped or pigeonholed, while the latter strips them of their identity and leaves them sparkling white, as Dávila suggests. Whitewashing can be found on the Latino/a stage from its arrival to New York City. As the Latino/a's place in American society has shifted, so have artistic reflections, and newer musicals, like *In the Heights*, attempt to challenge the concept of whitewashing.

In response to a 2004 report by the Puerto Rican Legal Defense Fund which indicated that 26 percent of all Puerto Ricans live in poverty, senior policy executive Angelo Falcón pointed to another statistic, showing that Puerto Ricans have a higher percentage of bachelor's degrees and managerial jobs than the US-Latino/a average.<sup>23</sup> The irony is that while some US-Latinos represent a growing middle class, some are poverty-stricken, and Latinos across the economic spectrum are saddled with the stereotype of "stealing" American jobs and welfare. Dávila attributes the focus on Puerto Ricans' accomplishments to an effort on the part of Latino/a leaders to control the image of the Latino/a in order to gain political legitimacy. In the 2004 census, Latinos who identified as whites were shown to have higher levels of education and income and lower rates of unemployment than those who identified as some other race.<sup>24</sup> This leads Dávila

---

<sup>23</sup> Angelo Falcón, *The Atlas of Stateside Puerto Ricans*, (The National Institute for Latino Policy, 2004). [http://www.lasculturas.com/aa/press\\_prldf\\_atlas04.htm](http://www.lasculturas.com/aa/press_prldf_atlas04.htm)

<sup>24</sup> Dávila, 14.

and others to the conclusion that the "spin" by those with an agenda has led to a whitewashing of Latinos by Latinos themselves.

Further complicating this issue is the perceived hierarchy amongst Latin American countries, particularly with regard to works of art and culture. The three-tiered hierarchy places Mexico, Argentina, Venezuela and Brazil at the top, followed by the Andean and Central American countries, with the Caribbean countries at the bottom. Those in the top tier reflect a greater European influence and are, presumably, more open to the artistic trends of Europe.<sup>25</sup> In a discussion of Puerto Rican visual artists, Dávila finds that "few US-based Puerto Ricans can achieve complete acceptance or recognition on the island, where they are considered only partially Puerto Rican at best."<sup>26</sup> Herein lies the biggest challenge for US-Latinos. They can easily lose legitimacy in either sphere. Straddling two or more cultures, they may identify with one over the other, or feel caught somewhere in between, wholly identifying with neither native or adopted culture.

The subject matter of *The Capeman*, the Spanish language adaptations in *West Side Story*, and the success of *In the Heights* may be attributed, in part, to a growing interest in all things Latino/a in the world of American entertainment and popular culture, as well as politics and economics. In the past fifteen years, beginning with the death of Tejana singer Selena Quintanilla-Perez, Latinos'

---

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 127.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 129.

growing impact on music, film and theatre signals their coming of age in America. From entertainers Jennifer Lopez and young Disney stars Selena Gomez and Sabrina Bryan to the first Latina United States Supreme Court Justice, Sonia Sotomayor, Latinos (and Latinas in particular) have become accepted by mainstream, white America. According to scholars like Guy Garcia, these artists are influencing and altering the composition of this mainstream population.

Everyone wants to be a Hispanic today, people are learning salsa, there's a hispanicization of American culture, look at the Latin Grammys! Glossy commercial images take center stage in the American media landscape, making it especially difficult to grapple with Latinos' differentiation in critical ways.  
<sup>27</sup>

Perhaps it is out of this seeming homogenization of the Latino/a culture that stage representations of the Latino/a have evolved to a current place where their differentiation may be examined.

It is nearly impossible to avoid issues surrounding language when dealing with the representation of the Latin American on the Broadway stage, and the role of the Spanish language is the subject of Chapter Two. A new and voracious interest in language and translation in the Broadway musical can be attributed to *In the Heights* and the 2009 revival of *West Side Story*. The main focus of the latter production's alterations is illustrative of the ideological battle between the

---

<sup>27</sup> Guy Garcia, *The New Mainstream: How the Multicultural Consumer is Transforming American Business*, (New York: Rayo, 2004), 9.



Latin American immigrant's simultaneous desire to assimilate to his/her adopted culture and need to cling to his/her native culture. Several scenes and two major musical numbers in *West Side Story* were re-written or fully translated into Spanish, with additional portions of scenes and lyrics translated as well. The result is that a familiar story is altered not only in words, but in message and ideology.

In spring 2010, however, much of the *West Side Story* book and score had reverted to its original text, and in this chapter I engage in an analysis of the additions and subsequent subtractions of the Spanish language. I question the aims of the use of bilingualism in each production, assessing what goals were reached, which attempts missed the mark and why. In addition, through close analysis of the translated passages, drawing on the work of translation theorists and performing my own translations of particular lyrics and dialogue, I seek to illuminate the ways in which translation and cultural transmission work together in the representative musicals to communicate the Latino/a immigrant's struggle, not only with a new language, but also a new culture and a changing relationship with his/her notions of home.<sup>28</sup> Language is the primary means by which culture is transmitted, and the degree to which this language is used or rejected reflects the acceptance, rejection, or reconciliation of one culture with another.

---

<sup>28</sup> Cultural transmission is the way in which a group of people learns and passes on information. Language, whether verbal or non-verbal, is the primary way through which cultural transmission takes place.

*In the Heights* revolutionized the Broadway musical by fully integrating Spanish, Spanglish and rap into the original production. It is no coincidence that Lin-Manuel Miranda contributed to the composition of the new Spanish lyrics in *West Side Story*. He was courted by the production's creative team after the success of *In the Heights* and what has been lauded as Miranda's ability to integrate two languages into his score in a way that seemed natural and easily accessible for a popular audience. In *The Capeman*, Spanish is used minimally, but in doing so, the writing team of Paul Simon and Derek Walcott sought to achieve goals that were subsequently realized in *In the Heights* and the revival of *West Side Story*.

The mixing of languages is just one example, but a prominent one, of how the ethnic immigrant straddles two cultures. Indeed part of living "on the border" or "on the hyphen," terms that have been used to designate various US-Latino/a groups living in the United States, requires bilingualism.<sup>29</sup> The instances in which the the Spanish language is incorporated into the Latino/a musical are carefully selected and revolve around *who* is speaking Spanish and *when* it is employed. In the context of this chapter, I identify and examine the various functions of the Spanish language in the representative musicals. They are: (1.) The use of

---

<sup>29</sup> "On the border" and "on the hyphen" are terms used to describe the liminal state of the US-Latino/a. "On the border" is more specifically used in reference to Mexican-Americans, and "Border Theatre" is a genre that takes Mexicans and Mexican-Americans as its subject. "On the hyphen" is more specifically used to denote Cuban-Americans. Living "on the hyphen" suggests that Cuban-Americans are neither wholly Cuban nor wholly American.

language to illustrate tension created by the liminal state of the immigrant or first-generation US-Latino/a and across generations; (2.) The use of translation and the Spanish language as a means of illustrating the constant renegotiation of space and identity that must be undertaken by the immigrant or first-generation US-Latino/a; and (3.) The use of language as a tool to simultaneously and deliberately alienate and appeal to an audience of both Latinos and non-Latinos. These points of discussion prompt me to address the following questions: Does the inclusion of bilingualism “solve” the problem of stereotyping? Conversely, does bilingualism alienate an audience and exacerbate these stereotypes? In the case of the *West Side Story* revival, is translating two songs and parts of a few scenes “enough” to be considered an acceptable representation of US-Latinos on stage? What part(s) of the Latino/a culture, community and identity are being communicated through the use of Spanish language dialogue and lyrics? How is a sense of “home” created or subverted through bilingualism?

Chapter Three is an exploration of the use of memory and nostalgia in the Broadway musical as a way to illustrate the Latino/a's process in negotiating a new geographical, mental and emotional space, away from his/her native land. Each of the musicals discussed here addresses memory and nostalgia through dialogue, lyrics and production elements, ranging from the subtle to the bold. Least prominent in *West Side Story* and used to a greater degree in the original

Broadway productions of *The Capeman* and *In the Heights*, memory and nostalgia function in various ways. From *West Side Story*'s sardonic characterization of Puerto Rico in "America," to *The Capeman*'s scenes of its title character's childhood in Puerto Rico, to *In the Heights*' multigenerational views of distant pasts in distant countries, each gives at least a glimpse of the home left behind and what a new home promises. In doing so, the audience experiences three types of relationships: between the Latino/a and his/her homeland, between various generations of Latinos and their homelands, and between the native land and the adopted land. In addition the relationship between actors and audience is impacted by memory and nostalgia, including through the productions' advertising and marketing campaigns.

There are three primary methods through which memory and nostalgia are communicated in the Broadway musicals discussed here. They are: flashback scenes where the audience experiences a character in their homeland; scenes of memory in which the "remembering character" is not in their homeland, but experiences an idealized version of the native country through a dream-like state; and dialogue, lyrics and dance which paint a picture of the native land and express the characters' feelings toward it. Each of these methods allows the audience to experience the native land through the eyes of a particular character. Rarely are these depictions objective. Rather, each memory is colored by the

present experience of the character in the United States, a factor that leads to a shift in perspective regarding what is considered “authentic” as these memories become a framework for the creation of an American home.

Also considered in this chapter are the distinctions between Latinos of various origins. Popularly represented in all of the musicals discussed here are those hailing from Puerto Rico, Cuba and the Dominican Republic. It is especially important that these characters are not lumped together in a discussion of memory and nostalgia, due to the varied relationships between these specific countries and the United States, and their presence on the greater world stage. As an example, one can look to scholar Gustavo Perez-Firmat, who, in reference to plays that specifically treat the Cuban-American experience, calls these memories "a Cuba of the mind, a fantasy island untouched by time and history."<sup>30</sup> The idea of home is an especially complicated one for islanders, like Cubans, Puerto Ricans and Dominicans, whose political history complicates their relationship with the United States, yet who often find themselves in the United States through exile or economic necessity. It is perhaps the extreme circumstances that bring them to the United States that imprint on their memories a nostalgic glow in which the past is idealized.

In opposition to this romanticized view of the homeland and the

---

<sup>30</sup> Gustavo Perez-Firmat, *Life on the Hyphen: The Cuban-American Way* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1994) 107.

immigrant is the essentializing idea that those from various countries share the same traits. Mike Nieves, deputy Chief of Staff at the New York City Council, shockingly characterized the changing demographic of US-Latinos in New York by declaring, "*Perfumados* (sweet-smelling ones) are in; *titeres* (thugs) holding a flag are totally out."<sup>31</sup> It is just this contrast that is met with resistance in the most recent Broadway musicals featuring Latino/a characters. Certainly the song "America" from Laurents and Sondheim's *West Side Story* is a metaphorical flag-waving, with both Puerto Rico and the United States alternately lauded and denounced through dialogue that focuses on the memory of a land far away. These metaphoric flags become literal in the staging of Simon and Walcott's *Capeman* and *In the Heights*, where Puerto Rican, Dominican and Cuban characters paint specific pictures of their native lands and how their experience differs from one another. Their memories allow for a simultaneous celebration of their cultural diversity and community solidarity. Contrary to Nieves' equating of displays of nationalism as synonymous with deviancy, these flags, objects of both national and neighborhood pride are flown by hard-working, law-abiding citizens; the very *perfumados* that Nieves sets in binary opposition to the *titeres*.

Chapter Four focuses on New York City as a geographical and ideological "foster home" for the stage Latino/a. In addition to appearing in each of the

---

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

musicals discussed here, the popular entry point for US-bound immigrants has provided a setting for a variety of plays and films focusing on specific ethnic groups. New York has also long been home to Latino/a-founded theatre companies. The first professional Latino theatre, the New York Hispanic Theatre, was created in 1954 and the city is currently home to the highest number of Latino/a theatre companies in the United States. The evolution of the Latino/a figure is directly related to this geographic space and to the means by which s/he ended up in this space including exile, immigration, and by birth to immigrant parents.

Consistent with the stereotypes that have often been associated with the stage and film Latino/a is the depiction of his/her geographic space. A ghetto-like area of crumbling architecture, graffiti and vacant storefronts is often the host to Latino/a characters. This image has been so often recycled that it has reached a metaphorical status, as depicted in several non-musical plays. In the representative musicals explored here, various views of the Latino/a neighborhood are displayed, showing perspectives ranging from New York as a surrogate Hell, to a minimalist and abstract *barrio*, to a realistic and celebrated neighborhood in need of care.

This chapter also examines the threat of gentrification to the *barrio*. The current tension surrounding the gentrification of East Harlem is represented by one recent development project. Urban Strategic Partners, a large developer,

proposed a reconstruction project that would include a Latino-themed "mini-city." This project and others like it in major cities throughout the United States with large Latino/a populations has had enough of an impact on changing the face of these neighborhoods that it is now being explored in media and popular culture, including the Broadway musical. A discussion of this phenomenon in Chapter Four will show the ways in which the artistic team of *In the Heights*, in particular, is attempting to use geographical space to create a sense of home and to explore what happens to Latino/a identity, culture and community when that space is threatened.

In order to consider whether or not the stage Latino/a has found home, one must consider the present discussion that revolves around ethnic theatre and more specifically, what the characteristics are that make a production Latino/a. In his introduction to *The State of Latino Theater in the United States*, Luis A. Ramos-García discusses the tension between the Latino/a and Anglo theatre:

Latino theater in the United States is still perceived by "mainstream Anglo-Saxon theater" as ascribing monothematically to the contextual immediacy and spatial-temporal confines of its origins. Evaluating Latino theatre's productions and reading its scripts would never be conceptualized in terms of 'transcendence' or even commercialization.<sup>32</sup>

Clearly, Ramos-García uses the term "commercialization" with a slightly negative

---

<sup>32</sup> Luis A. Ramos-Garcia, *The State of Latino Theatre in the United States*, (New York: Routledge, 2002), xxii.



connotation. Commercialization is of course, synonymous with the American musical, and along with it comes all of the positives and negatives associated with it. The former would include the outreach to a wider, "mainstream" audience and the economic benefits that this may reap. The whole experience of attending a Broadway musical as an "event" involves not only the increasing price of attendance, but potentially the purchase of merchandise related to the production (programs, cast recordings, t-shirts) and all of the elements that accompany a night out - clothing, food and drink. With economic stimulation often comes the promise of continued work for those artists associated with the ethnic musical and the hope that their messages, sent to shape an image, are received by a mainstream audience. Alternatively, the commercialization of the musical, especially one revolving around ethnic characters and themes, has gained a reputation of seeming simplicity, sentimentality and "whitewashing," in order to cater to the aforementioned expected audience of popular entertainment.

Despite Ramos-García's claim that Latino/a theatre is left "without any power to emulate...universal appeal," we must consider that the Broadway musical, unlike the regional Latino/a theatre, which caters to a very specific audience, has long-thrived on the idea of transcendence and universality, a characteristic that, along with location and flashy production elements, has kept Broadway open to a mainstream, popular audience, historically comprised of

white, upper-middle class patrons.<sup>33</sup> Furthermore, a hallmark of quality theatre is that it works on both the specific and universal levels. Those musicals that focus on a particular ethnic group function as a microcosm of the world at large. An example can be found in *Fiddler on the Roof*, the musical that *In the Heights* composer Lin-Manuel Miranda credits as one of his biggest influences, and as the model for *In the Heights*. When the "universal" musical takes as its subject a particular ethnic group (as with *Fiddler*) or groups (as with *Ragtime*, which incorporates the stories of Anglos, Jewish immigrants and Harlem-based African Americans), its creators and contributing artists must infuse their particular story with specific cultural elements while conveying a feeling of the universal, bridging the gap between the particular ethnic group represented on stage and its audience. The long life of *Fiddler*, the recent revival of *Ragtime* and the critical and popular success of *In the Heights* are indicators of progress in this area. Can it be that *In the Heights* has claimed the power of universal appeal with regard to Latino/a scripts that Ramos-García claims has been lost? Has it opened doors for the inclusion of Latino/a performance in mainstream theatre that is able to speak to both Latino/a and non-Latino/a audiences about both the universal human condition and that particular to the US-Latino/a, musically or otherwise?

Ramos-García goes on to say that,

---

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., xvii.

Mainstream productions of minority plays are a risky affair - not only financially for the producers, but also in terms of the representational power the works generate. Thus, mainstream theaters remain out of the business of producing Latino plays and will probably continue to do so, unless they are prepared to commit themselves and their artistic teams to the development of the familiarity necessary to achieve cultural competence.<sup>34</sup>

“Mainstream,” as it is used here, refers to commercial theatre, traditionally attended by largely middle-class, white audiences and most often created and produced by white artists. Indeed there has been a dearth of Latino/a plays in the mainstream theatre. Is it possible that the most mainstream of theatre, Broadway, has finally, with *In the Heights*, found a way to reduce the risks involved in producing Latino/a theatre?

In response to accusations that *Heights* lacks authenticity, Miranda says, quite simply, "I think it's accurate. But you know, it's a musical."<sup>35</sup> With this comment, Miranda seems to suggest that the conventions of musical theatre negate its ability to tell a realistic story in earnest. It is undeniable that the "feel good" experience provided to an audience by the classic American musical is incomparable, and is a goal of many artists and producers. In the case of *In the Heights*, uplifting moments in the production do not negate the challenging and timely issues that it addresses. One *Time* Magazine reviewer lauded the

---

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., xxiii.

<sup>35</sup> Melena Ryzik, "Heights Before Broadway," *New York Times*, ( March 24, 2008).

production as indicative of a new America: "*In the Heights* might even be regarded as the first musical of the Barack Obama era. It represents change on Broadway. It's a show full of hope. And it has its producers--and a lot of other people who want Broadway to reach out to new audiences with contemporary, heartfelt shows like these--crying 'Yes, we can.'"<sup>36</sup> Despite the fact that the conclusion of *In the Heights* can be perceived as almost too neatly completed, and the ending too happy, it would be nearly impossible for it to be written differently and not telegraph the perpetually downtrodden Latino/a who cannot rise above circumstance and is a burden to American society. *In the Heights*, taken along with *West Side Story* and *The Capeman*, illustrate not only these complications surrounding the staging of Latino/a life on stage, but are parts of an evolving perspective on cultural identity and the search for home.

---

<sup>36</sup> Richard Zoglin, "Life After Rent," *Time*, (February 28, 2008), 32.

## Chapter One

### *Performative Bodies and Criminal Minds: The History of Latinos on Broadway*

Theatre created by and for Spanish-speakers in what is now the United States can be traced back to Chicano theatre of the late 1500s.<sup>37</sup> Dance-drama of the American Indians and the imported religious theatre of Medieval Spain, primarily *autos sacramentales*, formed the foundation of what would become Latino/a theatre.<sup>38</sup> During the colonization of the land to the north of New Spain (Mexico), beginning with Juan de Oñate's 1598 expedition and naming of New Mexico, theatrical activity was a function of Catholic missionaries who sought to convert native peoples from their polytheistic, pagan religion. Following a similar course as the religious plays of Spain, the *autos sacramentales* of what would become the southwest United States quickly became secularized. In addition to these types of plays, Oñate's soldiers would enact the expulsion of the Moors and triumph of the Christians in Iberia as a way to boost morale among themselves. Religious and patriotic plays dominated Latino/a theatrical activity into the 17th

---

<sup>37</sup> “Chicano” is broadly defined as a Mexican-American or those with Amerindian roots it what has become the American southwest. Its usage has varied due to ethnic, political and social inferences of the term throughout its history. Chicano Theatre, with both words capitalized, refers to the 1965 movement beginning with El Teatro Campesino in California, discussed later in this chapter.

<sup>38</sup> An *auto sacramental* is a one-act religious play centering on the mystery of the Eucharist. Originating in Spain, the *auto sacramental* was hugely popular before and during the Spanish theatre's *Siglo de Oro* (Golden Age).

and 18th centuries.<sup>39</sup> In his article "Spanish-Language Theatre and Early Mexican Immigration," F. Arturo Rosales argues that various Mexican *colonias* had more in common with each other than not.<sup>40</sup> Their strongest common thread was that the Church and theatre were their two most important institutions. Most performers came from the middle class of the immigrant community.

As refugees in the United States they lost little time in recreating class distinctions. Some refugees were able to bring capital, other skills and, for those whose fortunes were lost, gracious speech and manners set them apart from their more working-class compatriots in the barrios. Within this framework, participation in artistic activity became an important vehicle for reasserting identity and image projection. For some, the events presented an opportunity for social mobility. In the unstable class structure of the barrios, young Mexicans from the *gente humilde* could rub shoulders with people who in Mexico would have been out of their social strata (*gente decente*).<sup>41</sup>

Because of their segregation from Anglo institutions, Mexican cultural identity had to be promoted within the barrios. The first marked change to the composition of Latino/a theatre in the United States did not occur until the 1800s.

During the mid-nineteenth century, itinerant players from Mexico began touring the southwest, performing vaudeville, melodrama and *zarzuela* in Los

---

<sup>39</sup> Kanellos, *Hispanic Theatre in the United States*.

<sup>40</sup> A *colonia* is much like a neighborhood or *barrio*.

<sup>41</sup> F. Arturo Rosales, *Chicano! The History of the Mexican American Civil Rights Movement* (Huston: University of Huston, 1996), 19. *Gente humilde* translates as "lower class," and *gente decente* as "upper class."

Angeles, San Francisco and San Diego.<sup>42</sup> It was not until the 1860s that a professional resident company was founded in San Francisco by Gerardo López del Castillo, a popular leading actor in Mexico. Castillo's company presented Spanish, Mexican and Cuban melodramas with the goal of preserving Mexican language and culture as Anglos continued their post-Gold Rush migration to the west. Of great significance is the fact that Castillo's company was involved in community affairs, producing multiple benefits for the Mexican community. This service to community and culture would become a defining characteristic of Hispanic theatre in the United States throughout its history. A dozen other companies joined Castillo's in performing wholesome entertainment for the entire Hispanic community, regardless of economic status. Texas became the next hub of Hispanic theatrical activity after the Mexican Revolution of 1910 forced the population of Mexico City northward, and by 1920, Texas and California provided the anchors for a touring train circuit of theatres.<sup>43</sup>

Two major factors led to the inception of Latino/a theatre in New York City, where the first New York based professional Hispanic theatre troupe, *La compañía del teatro español*, was founded in 1921.<sup>44</sup> Concurrent to the development of theatres in Texas, Cuban cigar magnates, in a showy display of

---

<sup>42</sup> A *zarzuela* is a Spanish musical play incorporating popular songs interspersed with dialogue. It originated as court entertainment in Spain.

<sup>43</sup> Kanellos, *Hispanic Theatre in the United States*.

<sup>44</sup> The lower-case spelling of this proper name is intentional in the Spanish language.

their wealth, opened five theatres in Tampa, where musical variety shows touring with companies from Spain and Cuba began their circuit, which brought them all the way to New York City. A second factor can be attributed to the economic devastation of the Great Depression, which prompted Hollywood producers to take over theatre houses for motion pictures. Chicano theatre in the Southwest essentially ended.<sup>45</sup> One option was for artists to move to New York City, where a growing community of Puerto Rican immigrants, who had been made United States citizens with the passing of the Jones Act in 1917, provided a ready-made audience for on stage Spanish-language performance.<sup>46</sup>

The Cuban *teatro bufo*, with characteristics of vaudeville and burlesque, became increasingly popular among newly arrived Cuban working-class audiences in New York City as well. Incorporating Afro-Cuban music and dance and using stock comic characters like *el negrito* (blackface), *el mulato* (mixed race) and *el gallego* (Galician, one from the Northwest of Spain, an area associated with ghosts and magic), these entertainments provided a precursor to the Latino/a musical that would address culture and stereotype. During the first half of the twentieth century, vaudeville was used to comment on political and social events and these vaudeville stages, according to historian Nicolas Kanellos,

---

<sup>45</sup> One exception was the *Teatro Hispano*, which was able to stay alive during the Depression through its service to the working-class community.

<sup>46</sup> Kanellos, *Hispanic Theatre in the United States*.



created "a chance of creating a national Hispanic theater with an already clear and sometimes not very subtle social, racial and cultural identity analysis."<sup>47</sup> For example, the *teatro bufo*, as it was performed in Cuba, with actors using blackface to play both *el negrito* and *el mulato*, was used to comment on the relationship between Spain and colonized Cuba. *Teatro bufo* was developed as part of Cuban national identity and commented on the racism that came with the arrival of imperial Spain. In bringing the *teatro bufo* to New York City, its artists accomplished two goals. First, immigrant and exiled Cuban audiences were kept aware of issues at home. Second, in viewing the *teatro bufo* in their new, adopted home, the same audience saw itself repositioned not as founders of a national theatrical tradition, but as an "Othered" population, now assuming the role of the *negrito* or *mulato* in New York City.<sup>48</sup>

By 1930, Cubans comprised 40 percent of the New York City population and were joined by a second influx of Puerto Ricans in the 1940s. Musical reviews were still most popular among new Puerto Rican immigrants, who had little to no previous experience with the theatre. Most audiences in Puerto Rico were comprised of middle-class intellectuals. The rural Puerto Rican immigrant

---

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 24. The vaudeville form saw a resurgence in US-Latino/a theatre in the 1980s and 1990s with the work of groups like El Teatro Campesino and performance artists such as Guillermo Gomez-Peña and Carmelita Tropicana.

<sup>48</sup> In his seminal work *Orientalism*, Edward Said defined the "Other" in the context of the East/West binary, in which anything that is not a part of the dominant culture (i.e., the West) is considered "other."

had no established theatrical tradition and this population tended toward the comic and upbeat musical review. They shied away from works that sought to dramatize their own struggles, with titles such as *De Puerto Rico a New York (From Puerto Rico to New York)* and *La perla de las Antillas. (The Pearl of the Antilles)*. The theatre was a place to escape from the challenges of making a new life in a new country, not a place to reflect on them. Yet these sketches and songs must certainly have prompted them to consider the ways in which a change in geography had shifted their own place within the hierarchy that was parodied on stage.<sup>49</sup>

While theatre created by Latin Americans has a long history, both in Latin America and the United States, it is only in the early twentieth century that we find significant representations of the Latin American in the Broadway musical. Despite the dearth of Latin American characters on the Broadway musical stage, their history is a complicated one that begins with the impetus for many changes, World War Two. In conflict with European nations, the United States was forced to take a new perspective on the mysterious lands south of the border.

By the time Franklin Roosevelt took office, war with the Axis powers was certain and the president looked to the south for a new ally. His solution was the

---

<sup>49</sup> Kanellos, *Hispanic Theater in the United States*. While my focus is on New York City, Jill Lane's book, *Blackface Cuba 1940-1895* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), is an excellent source for the history and racial considerations specific to the *teatro bufo* as performed in Cuba.

Good Neighbor Policy, which removed military intervention in Latin American affairs and turned toward garnering Latin American support peacefully. A major component of the Good Neighbor Policy was economic. Not only was the United States preparing for war, but the country was simultaneously emerging from the Depression. Tension between the United States and Europe would make trade agreements with Latin America essential. The American consumer needed to be convinced not only that the United States' involvement in the war was positive but that Latin America was a land of trustworthy friends.

One tactic employed to achieve this goal was to use popular entertainment as a propaganda tool. Producers were encouraged to cultivate Latin American stars. In 1939, Broadway producer Lee Schubert, inspired by the popularity of South American music in New York, sailed to Rio to scout singer and actress Carmen Miranda, the star who would come to be known as "The Lady in the Tutti-Frutti Hat." A recruit, rather than an immigrant, Carmen Miranda was as commodified as the bananas she helped to sell. Brought to the United States as a South American souvenir, Miranda retained all the appeal of a exotic bauble with none of the innate threat of the immigrant, formed by the shared border of the United States and Latin America. A cause of tension, such proximity rendered Latin American immigrants a danger to United States culture and economy.

Upon Miranda's arrival and simultaneous with the premiere of the groundbreaking *Porgy and Bess*, which featured an African American cast, Broadway finally saw the introduction of a new character in the 1930s, the Latina. From 1939 to 1943, "Brazilian Bombshell" Carmen Miranda appeared in two Broadway revues (*Streets of Paris* and *Sons O' Fun*) and eight Hollywood films, and was the highest-paid actress in the United States.<sup>50</sup> These productions coincided with the United States' involvement in World War Two and the Good Neighbor Policy. Cynthia Enloe argues, "Relations between governments depend not only on capital and weaponry, but also on the control of women as symbols [and] consumers."<sup>51</sup> In this way, Miranda became a symbol of government relations, which served the typical consumer, the American housewife, who purchased her tropical produce. Along the way, Miranda became a symbol of an American idea(1) of Latin America as a whole. This generic image of the Latina took various forms in Miranda's body. She was sexy; she was mysterious; she was a comedienne; she was an Earth Mother. These seemingly contradictory traits both tempered and tantalized the American fear of and appetite for things south-of-the-border. Miranda's image allowed Americans to see the world south of the United

---

<sup>50</sup> In 1961, Miranda received a posthumous star on the Walk of Fame in Hollywood.

<sup>51</sup> Cynthia Enloe, *Bananas, Beaches and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990), ix.

States as simultaneously safe, harmless and friendly to American consumers, yet a sexy and exciting place that now had a connection to their own lives.<sup>52</sup>

In the early part of her U.S. career, Miranda did not receive top billing, and in many cases her name was completely omitted from playbills or advertisements. As a songstress in her Broadway debut in *The Streets of Paris* (1939) she appeared on stage for only six minutes and her musical numbers were not listed in the program. However, reviewers took notice, and she was often remembered as a scene stealer. Brooks Atkinson called Miranda, “the most magnetic personality *The Streets of Paris* have to offer. [She] radiates heat that will tax the Broadhurst air-conditioning plant this summer.”<sup>53</sup> Following Miranda's Broadway debut, enthusiasm for musicals set south-of-the-border continued, beginning with Cole Porter's 1940 *Panama Hattie* and 1944 *Mexican Hayride*. *Panama Hattie* premiered at the 46th Street Theatre and featured Ethel Merman in the title role of a nightclub singer in Panama. In an attempt to win over her military fiance's daughter, she simultaneously foils a plot to blow up the Panama Canal. The song "Americans All Drink Coffee," was cut from the production before its premiere, but may have functioned either as earnest encouragement to an audience of American consumers, or a satiric look at the marketing of Central America to the

---

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Brooks Atkinson, “The Play ‘*The Streets of Paris*’ Moves to Broadway,” *New York Times*, (June 20, 1939), 29.

United States. *Mexican Hayride* featured a female bullfighter and two escaped convicts, who pose as tortilla vendors and mariachi players. Latin American Fever swept through Hollywood as well and had broad appeal with film adaptations of *Panama Hattie* and *Mexican Hayride* (featuring Abbott and Costello) as well as new films, many featuring Carmen Miranda, such as *Down Argentine Way* and *Weekend in Havana*. The entire American family was invited to explore Central and South America when Walt Disney premiered his 1944 film, *The Three Caballeros*. Integrating live-action and animation, the film featured a sombrero-clad Donald Duck, with new *amigos* Jose Carioca and Panchito Pistoles.<sup>54</sup> Music was composed by Manuel Esperón, who wrote the score for over five hundred Mexican movies during the Golden Age of Mexican Cinema.<sup>55</sup> After having seen Esperón's success in the Mexican film industry, Walt Disney called him personally to request his participation. Ironically, one of Esperon's most famous songs, "Ay Jalisco, No No Te Rajes," ("Jalisco [Mexico], Don't Back Down"), which tells the tale of the Mexican town defending itself from a United States invasion, provided the primary song for the soundtrack of a film which promoted friendship between the Americas. Several Latin American stars of the period appear in the film, including singers Aurora Miranda (sister of Carmen Miranda) and Dora Luz, as well as dancer Carmen Molina. Segments of the film are strung

---

<sup>54</sup> *Carioca* is a Portuguese diminutive given to those who hail from Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

<sup>55</sup> The Golden Age of Mexican Cinema is marked by the years 1935 to 1959.

together by the plot device of Donald Duck opening birthday gifts from his Latin American friends. The film takes the American viewer to visit Bahia, Uruguay and Acapulco, among others. Appealing to old and young alike, this cinematic "tour" of Latin America was family-friendly and presumably educational, making it, like *Miranda*, a safe way to experience the Latin American Other.<sup>56</sup>

Simultaneous with *Miranda*'s rise was that of Desi Arnaz. Unlike *Miranda*, whose family was poor, Arnaz's father was the patriarch of one of the wealthiest families in Cuba. During the Revolution led by Fulgencio Batista, Arnaz's father was jailed and his property confiscated.<sup>57</sup> Subsequently the family was exiled to Miami. There, the young Arnaz found himself performing in a rumba band, and subsequently, in New York City.<sup>58</sup> There, the creative team of Richard Rodgers and Lorenz Hart hired Arnaz to fill a role in *Too Many Girls*, a musical that also featured Arnaz's future wife and partner-in-comedy, Lucille Ball. Arnaz played Manuelito, in a minor role as an Argentine football player attending college in New Mexico. In his book *José Can You See? Latinos on and Off Broadway*, which is invaluable to this study, Alberto Sandoval-Sánchez points out that *Too Many Girls* is set in New Mexico, where with a set and costumes suggesting a

---

<sup>56</sup> Enloe, 1990.

<sup>57</sup> Desi Arnaz, *A Book* (New York: Buccaneer Books, 1994), 30.

<sup>58</sup> Rumba (from the Spanish *rumbo* meaning "spree") is a family of percussive rhythms, song and dance that originated in Cuba as a combination of music brought to the island from African slaves and Spanish colonizers. It became a part of popular music in Cuba in the 1930s and 1940s.

location that *might* be Mexican or *could* be Native American, "this space of otherness is a liminal zone where passion is set loose and morals relax."<sup>59</sup> As the twentieth century progressed, this liminal zone became even more important as settings were moved to New York City. With this change the Broadway musical began to investigate the interstitial space of the immigrant that went beyond geography and focused equally on their inner sense of liminality.

Arnaz's nationality is not essential to the plot, which sees several collegiate athletes vying for Ball's affections. However, Manuelito's nationality does serve two functions. On a practical level, it explains away Arnaz's thick accent. On a performative level, it once again allows for a display of sensual and exotic "Latin-ness," demonstrated in Arnaz's musical numbers, "She Could Shake Her Maracas," "Spic and Spanish" and "Babalú." Latino/a stereotypes are perpetuated in "She Could Shake Her Maracas," as Manuelito tells the story of hot-tempered Pepito and dim-witted Pepita, who fall in love and run away to Harlem, where they become foreigners who are further isolated when they find themselves in a neighborhood reserved for African American Others. Because Babalú is sung in Spanish, and is a prayer to the deity from which it takes its title, the song provides an element of the mysterious made safe, because it is performed

---

<sup>59</sup> Alberto Sandoval-Sánchez, *José Can You See? Latino/as on and Off Broadway* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1999), 46.



in a musical comedy meant to entertain.<sup>60</sup> According to Spanish American band leader Xavier Cugat, "Americans know nothing about Latin music. They neither understand nor feel it. So they have to be given more for the eyes than the ears. Eighty percent visual, the rest aural."<sup>61</sup> These musical numbers were performed with Puerto Rican actress Diosa Costello. Sandoval-Sánchez points to the Latin Lover stereotype as the root of Arnaz's success. "...passion made Arnaz a matinée idol on Broadway. Women went crazy for his good looks and sex appeal. Thus, Arnaz embodied a new Rudolph Valentino...That each played an Argentine made the connection more explicit."<sup>62</sup> By conflating Arnaz with the already popular Valentino, he took over a token role as Latin Lover.

These musicals and films are exemplary of what has become a major complication in the study of the Latino/a musical; it did not matter whether or not the actors were Latino/a, or how accurate the cultural references. Simply setting a musical over the border provided enough Latino/a flavor to an American audience that was looking for the fun and romance of an idealized place. In keeping the leading actors familiarly white, audience members did not have to think about race. Attending these musicals was like vacationing at a South American resort; the traveler is brought to an exotic place, but is isolated and kept "safe" from any

---

<sup>60</sup> Santería, a syncretic religion of the Caribbean, conflates Babalú Aye with Saint Lazarus, a figure that serves prominently in *The Capeman*.

<sup>61</sup> Sandoval-Sánchez, 48.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

authentic cultural interaction. Carmen Miranda was an exception to the standard but was "white enough," since her actual identity was nebulous. She was representative of somewhere exotic, but undefined. She was not Mexican, Argentinian or Venezuelan, but took roles as each of these nationalities, and beyond that, was intended to represent South America in its entirety, an impossible feat, given the wide range of cultural traditions found there. The irony of such productions is that, while they promoted the exoticism of Latin America, they had little to do with Latin Americans or their culture. Other musicals of this era that have prompted discussion of race and culture include *Carmen Jones* (1943), which featured an African American cast, and *South Pacific* (1949), whose Asian character, Bloody Mary, was not portrayed by an Asian actress until the musical's 2010 Broadway revival.

Carmen Miranda and her contemporaries started out as "specialty acts"; they were performers playing performers. These characters sang and danced as their occupation and had nicknames like "The Puerto Rican Pepperpot," (Olga San Juan) and "The Cuban Hurricane" (Marie Antoinette-Pons), suggesting sexiness, sassiness and strength. Since this was their place, as dictated by producers and audience, they had little choice but to play into the stereotype of the Latina as a performer. They fell into more specific categories, such as the "sexy" Latina, exemplified by Carmen Miranda's roles in *Down Argentine Way* and *Weekend in*

*Havana* in which she was flirtatious and sultry and as the "dim-witted" Latina, in *The Gang's All Here* in which she uses multiple mispronunciations and malapropisms. Rather than rejecting these stereotypes, it became necessary for those who wished to be a part of American entertainment to embrace them. Miranda was criticized in Brazil for giving in to American commercialism and projecting a negative image of her homeland. The assistant commercial attaché to the American Embassy in Buenos Aires spoke out against *Down Argentine Way*, "Carmen Miranda, a *Brazilian* star, sings in *Portuguese*, a *Tin Pan Alley* rumba which speaks of *tangos* and rumbas being played beneath a *pampa* moon."<sup>63</sup> Cuban reviewers were equally offended by *Weekend in Havana*, "Miranda stomps around, something imported from Rio that has a bit of Hawaiian mime...[she] does not dance anything Cuban."<sup>64</sup> Her response was a Portuguese song entitled "*Disseram que Voltei Americanizada*" ("They Say I've Come Back Americanized"), accompanied by a statement in which she expressed her own disappointment in American ignorance, "North Americans do not want to learn about other countries, especially their language. Yanquis expect us to learn their language instead."<sup>65</sup> Born in Portugal and raised in Rio de Janeiro, Miranda came to represent all of Spanish-speaking South America. Her crossover into film

---

<sup>63</sup> Martha Gil-Montero, *Brazilian Bombshell: The Biography of Carmen Miranda* (New York: Donald I. Fine, Inc., 1989), 97.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 124.

<sup>65</sup> Quoted in Shari Roberts, "The Lady in the Tutti-Frutti Hat: Carmen Miranda, A Spectacle of Ethnicity," *Cinema Journal*, No. 3, (Spring: 1993), 16.

allowed an even larger audience to experience the Latina in this way.<sup>66</sup> Of Portuguese descent, speaking Spanish and limited English, singing in Portuguese and outfitted as a Bahia (the name for both the location and resident of a northeastern Brazilian state, with a large African cultural influence), Miranda was not attached to any one place, but performed a *mélange* of "South American-ness" accepted and applauded by Americans. This, however, is to the benefit of the powers-that-be in the government and on Broadway. Paralleling Miranda's rootlessness is the musical revue itself, not grounded in a story, as is the integrated musical, but rather comprised of a combination of sketch and song.

As Latin American icons, Miranda and Arnaz were forced to objectify their own identities. They adapted elements of African culture, for example the rhythms of the samba and rumba, which made their way into Brazilian and Cuban popular culture, respectively, and (re)present them as what United States' audiences then identified as generally Latin American. Historically, racism has been an ongoing issue both in Brazil, where a large percentage of Afro-Brazilians are ghettoized in the *favelas* of Rio, and in Cuba, where Afro-Cubans are economically and politically disadvantaged.<sup>67</sup> Through performances like those of

---

<sup>66</sup> Performance art that parodies these stereotypes has been one genre in which Latinas in particular, have flourished. *Carmelita Tropicana*, the creation of Alina Troyano, is an exotic import, like the role that became synonymous with Carmen Miranda. By performing in this way, these artists reject these stereotypes.

<sup>67</sup> *Favelas* are shantytowns in Rio, and the word is synonymous with "slums."

Miranda and Arnaz, Sandoval-Sánchez finds that "a black physical body marked by race has no 'authentic representation' or voice in the sociocultural arena. Afro-Cuban and Afro-Brazilian representations are acceptable as long as the performers *perform* blackness."<sup>68</sup> The irony in Sandoval-Sánchez's statement is that the same becomes true for Latinos when their audience is comprised of the white, American social hegemony. Now accepting the samba and the rumba as representative of Latin America, these displays were acceptable as long as they were just that, displays of what was perceived to be authentically Latin American. The samba and rumba were performed at *carnaval* by the lower and disadvantaged classes of Bahia and Cuba. Eventually Miranda, Arnaz and others fed into performative stereotypes, going further to create bigger, more colorful, more heavily accented, more ridiculously dressed characters that would meet the expectations of the United States' desire for the performance silly/sexy/mysterious Latino/a. Because they became default cultural ambassadors for their countries, Miranda and Arnaz are perceived as representatives of what is authentically Brazilian or Cuban. Yet, both were well-aware that they were not being authentic, which Sandoval-Sánchez sees as a strategy by which both were able to hold on to their identities. "The spectacle and the vocal impersonation only perpetuated the notion of the racial

---

<sup>68</sup> Sandoval-Sánchez, 48.

'other' as performative."<sup>69</sup> To Sandoval-Sánchez, their use of exaggerated accents, for example, can be read as resistance. While this may be so, to an audience that has not experienced what is "authentically" Latino/a, and believes that what they see is a "true" cultural representation, does it matter whether or not it is? Who holds the power? The audience who watches their expected vision of Latin America dance before them? Or the performers who fool the audience? This ongoing negotiation continues on Broadway.

The only Broadway show of the era that relied on a Latin American creator was *Magdalena: A Musical Adventure* (1948), composed by Brazilian Heitor Villa-Lobos, who has been described as "the single most significant creative figure in 20th-century Brazilian art music."<sup>70</sup> Villa-Lobos abandoned his study of European music in favor of traditional indigenous Brazilian music, which encompasses Portuguese, African and Amerindian elements. He has become the best-known and most significant Latin American composer to date. *Magdalena, a Musical Adventure* centered around a group of indigenous Colombians working in the emerald mines under Spanish rule. The miners eventually orchestrate an uprising, revolting against poor working conditions. Complications surrounding religious conversion are explored in the subplot of an indigenous couple, Maria,

---

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Gerard Béhague, *Villa-Lobos: The Search for Brazil's Musical Soul*. (Austin: Institute of Latin American Studies, University of Texas at Austin, 1994), ix.

the chief of the tribe, who has converted to Christianity, and Pedro, who remains pagan. Contrary to the lighthearted *Mexican Hayride* and *Panama Hattie*, *Magdalena* sought to address more dramatic and culturally relevant subject matter and did so through an operatic musical style, rather than the whimsical ditties of the two former works. Despite the fact that *Magdalena*, which premiered at the Ziegfeld Theatre as the most expensive production on Broadway, had a certain degree of appeal due to Villa-Lobos' association with the project, it was a critical flop, with a "bizarre plot" and "awful book" cited as its major flaws.<sup>71</sup> However, it is more likely that the themes addressed and the artistic lens used produced a musical that was, perhaps, ahead of its time, and beyond what its audience was looking for. *Magdalena* was subsequently presented (and recorded) in concert at Lincoln Center in 1987. In March 2010, the musical was revived in Paris at the Théâtre du Châtelet. These more recent productions suggest that *Magdalena's* themes of labor exploitation and religious oppression remain relevant. The story has a universal appeal as told today, despite the culture it was intended to represent, whereas in its own time, its cultural foregrounding was off-putting.

After the exoticism of Carmen Miranda faded along with Roosevelt's Good Neighbor Policy, Broadway musicals continued to slot Latinos into the role of "performer" and added, along with it a "criminal," stereotype. This tradition

---

<sup>71</sup> *Time*, October 4, 1948.  
<http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,799264,00.html?promoid=googlep>.

carried over into film and television and has been met with increasing resistance as Latinos have developed a greater presence in American popular culture.

The 1950s and 1960s were a time of great growth for Latino/a theatre in New York City, both on and beyond Broadway. In 1954, the first self-sustaining professional Hispanic Theatre troupe, Nuevo Circulo Dramatico, with its own theatre, The New York Hispanic Theatre, was founded by Puerto Rican director René Marques and actress Miriam Colón. While classics like Calderon's *La Vida es Sueno* (*Life is a Dream*) were offered, most popular were comedies and melodramas. On Broadway, *Damn Yankees* (1955) did not travel to lands south of the equator, but maintained the stereotypically sexy allure of the Latina with the inclusion of Señorita Lolita Banana (Lola), a South American dancer, and sidekick to the Devil(ish) Applegate. Soon after, in 1956, the first play in English treating a Hispanic theme, *hijo de crianza, Me, Candido*<sup>72</sup> (*I, Candido, a Son of my Upbringing*) by Walter Anderson, premiered in New York.

No production, however, was quite as revolutionary in its inclusion of Latin American subject matter as Leonard Bernstein, Arthur Laurents and Stephen Sondheim's 1957 *West Side Story*, which, intentionally or not, brought to the foreground issues of immigration, racism and cultural identity in a changing United States, specifically in urban metropolises like New York City. A loose

---

<sup>72</sup> Title intentionally spelled with lower case.



adaptation of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, *West Side Story* focuses on rival teen gangs, the Puerto Rican Sharks and the American Jets. When the Jets' leader, Tony, falls for rival member Bernardo's sister, Maria, a violent rumble ends with the death of both young men. Unlike the largely lighthearted musical reviews that preceded it, *West Side Story* was set not in a faraway land of soft breezes and the sounds of mariachi, but in a tough New York City neighborhood. Also in a departure from earlier productions, *West Side Story* took a dramatic turn and featured a score and lyrics that emphasized the weight of its subject matter, best exemplified in the duet *A Boy Like That*, in which Anita warns Maria, "stick to your own kind."

What Carmen Miranda did to posit the Latina body as a performative figure, *West Side Story* matched. The musical offers two extremes of the performative Latina; the innocent virgin and the sassy spitfire. In the original Broadway production, Italian-American Carol Lawrence, who was born Carolina Maria Laraia, was cast as the pure Maria, while Chita Rivera, who is half Puerto Rican, was cast as the fiery Anita. It is during one of *West Side Story's* most well-known musical numbers, "America" that Rivera's performance of "Latin-ness" reaches its peak, beginning with the scene preceding the song. In this scene, Bernardo and Anita "perform" for their friends, with Bernardo assuming the role of an immigrant dreaming of an air-conditioned Cadillac, and Anita as the

American who tells the "spic" that he will go back to Puerto Rico in handcuffs. After the boys exit, Anita leads the girls in heavily accented song, in what is just as much a show for them as it is for the audience has a Spanish rhythm and, in the original stage production Spanish choreography comprised of flamenco-like movement accompanied by costumes that swish and sway. During the dance break, ad-libbed "*ai ai ais*" reinforce performative stereotypes associated with the Latin American.

In his analysis of "America" Sandoval-Sánchez argues that the song "America" is a "political campaign in favor of assimilation," claiming that

...although it is a Puerto Rican who sings it, the message is delivered by an assimilated American who despises her origin and prefers the comfort of the American way of life. The song's confrontation of identities takes place when the Puerto Ricans consciously take sides on issues of nationalist politics and assimilation.<sup>73</sup>

For Sandoval-Sánchez, the Sharks and their girls are divided, some nationalists and some assimilated. While this argument is valid, one can take another perspective when analyzing "America." The well-known lyrics state "Everything's free in America," alluding to the American dream of political and economic freedom that has long prompted immigration to the United States. Yet, this line is followed up with "For a small fee in America." This is a reminder that although

---

<sup>73</sup> Sandoval-Sánchez, 73.

America offers luxuries like cars, wire-spoked wheels and washing machines, the Sharks do not presently enjoy any of these items. While Anita quite bluntly degrades her homeland ("Puerto Rico, you ugly island/Island of tropic diseases"), her view of America is not as the antithesis of Puerto Rico. Rather, she reviews what America *should* be, and perhaps what she *hopes* it will be, but it has fallen short of expectations. This perspective is supported by dialogue in the preceding scene in which Anita takes on Bernardo's words, which she has heard time and again, "Here comes the whole commercial. The mother of Tony was born in Poland; the father still goes to night school. Tony was born in America, so that makes him an American. But us? Foreigners!" Anita does not refute Bernardo's claim, but uses her performance to reflect on her current home, somewhere in between Puerto Rico and the United States.

In her article *Feeling Pretty: West Side Story and Puerto Rican Identity Discourses* Frances Negrón-Muntaner argues that the film version of *West Side Story* "perseveres in a long tradition of representing Latinos as inherently musical and performative subjects, ready to wear their sexualized identity for a white audience at the drop of a hat." She elaborates,

Consistent with this history, the 'Puerto Rican music' found in *West Side Story* is an American-made fusion of a wide range of rhythms with no discernible or specific national origin. Latinos are doing exactly what they are expected to do, particularly at a time of significant racial and social unrest in the United

States: singing and dancing the night away.<sup>74</sup>

It is this performative legacy, inherited from the time of Carmen Miranda, paired with an unidentifiable musical background, rooted in no particular culture, that leaves Negrón-Muntaner down Una Chaudhuri's path of labeling the characters and the play itself, "rootless" or "wandering." Negrón-Muntaner's argument raises two other valid points. First, she offers a reminder that although *West Side Story* takes a very specific group, Puerto Ricans, as its subject matter, the music, dance and production elements are not particularly Puerto Rican. As they were twenty years earlier on Broadway, various pieces are combined to create a milieu that is acceptably "Latin American."

In addition, Negrón-Muntaner hints at Puerto Rico's unusual and very specific place in relationship to the United States, which should not be overlooked. Geographically, Puerto Rico is separated from the United States by 2,500 miles. The island is defined as a United States territory, not a state. Politically, Puerto Ricans may be ineligible to vote in presidential elections, yet their Head of State is the President of the United States. And so the geographic space occupied by *West Side Story's* characters, New York City, does not hold the same meaning for these characters, as it will in later productions like *In the Heights*, where and when the US-Latino/a population has founded its own places

---

<sup>74</sup> Frances Negrón-Muntaner, "Feeling Pretty: West Side Story and Puerto Rican Identity Discourses," *Social Text*, Vol. 18, no. 2, (2000), 87.

and spaces within their adopted country and city. Rather, the characters in *West Side Story* reflect the position of the US-Latino/a population of its time; caught in between, not completely belonging to Puerto Rico, since they no longer reside there, but not belonging completely to America either, since they are unassimilated and, in some cases, do not wish to assimilate. Puerto Ricans hover in liminality, not independent from the United States, but not a complete part of it either. Sandoval-Sánchez defines the position of Puerto Ricans as one that is at the "intersection of the 'Latin foreign other' and the 'Latin domestic and racial other.'"<sup>75</sup> In the collective American consciousness, by the time *West Side Story* debuted on Broadway, the image of the Puerto Rican, either as a colonized being kept safely on a far-away island or as the immigrant living right next door, was well-established. Puerto Ricans had already been United States citizens for forty years (and today, for nearly a century), but maintained their own national identity, defined by their Hispanic roots and language. Just as the musicals associated with the Good Neighbor Policy had formed an ideal image of the Latin American for an American audience, *West Side Story* would construct a new identity for Puerto Ricans in the United States, and by extension, for all US-Latinos.

Originally titled *East Side Story*, the project was proposed as a story of a Jewish girl who falls for an Italian Catholic boy on Manhattan's Lower East Side.

---

<sup>75</sup> Sandoval-Sánchez, 76.

Arthur Laurents recounts how the change was made, "Lenny [Leonard Bernstein] said, 'What about doing it about the Chicanos?' In New York we had the Puerto Ricans, and at that time the papers were full of stories about juvenile delinquents and gangs."<sup>76</sup> After running through a number of potential Others, and settling on Puerto Ricans, *West Side Story's* creators found a representative group to stand in as the racial Other in opposition to the Anglo American Jets. By casting Puerto Ricans in this role, the stereotypes of crime and poverty associated with immigrants were placed squarely on the shoulders of Puerto Rican youth. The beginnings of the proliferation of the popular culture stereotype of the Latino/a as a criminal can be found in *West Side Story*.

The Sharks, on a microcosmic level, are invaders of the Jets' space and, on a grander scale, are representative of Puerto Rican immigrants intruding on United States territory and way of life. The rumble that the Sharks and Jets engage in is more than territorial; it is a battle between rich and poor, white and non-white, who belongs and who does not. In attempting to find a sense of home, the Sharks are forced to fight for it, quite literally. While both the Sharks and the Jets are gang members who engage in criminal activity, (including murder) the focus of wrongdoing is placed heavily on the Sharks, both within the context of the script and in its staging. When Detective Shrank encounters the two gangs on the street,

---

<sup>76</sup> Quoted in Craig Zadan, *Sondheim & Co*, 2nd ed. (New York: Harper and Row, 1989), 15.

he orders the Sharks to leave, "Boy, what you Puerto Ricans have done to the neighborhood...All right, Bernardo, get your trash outta here." Contrarily, Shrank engages with the Jets taking an almost fatherly tone of "boys will be boys" and telling them that they simply have to put up with the Sharks. By sending the Sharks away and allowing the Jets to stay, the colonizer's power, represented by Shrank, is reconfirmed and the colonized kept subjugated. The Sharks are also tagged as serious criminals, whereas the Jets are simply delinquents. The most prominent example occurs when the Jets suspect that the Sharks "...might ask for blades, zip guns..." Compounding this image is a series of events: Bernardo kills Riff, Tony's attempts at peace are eschewed by the Sharks, and the Sharks are the first to arrive at the rumble. Despite the fact that Tony kills Bernardo, he too, dies at the hands of Chino, who is taken away by the police. The Sharks are seen in final retaliation and the only ones punished by the law by the time the curtain closes. The subsequent film version of *West Side Story* became so iconic that it has formed a familiar image of the Puerto Rican/Latino immigrant in the United States.

In 1960, the representative Latina on Broadway was *Bye Bye Birdie's* Rose Alvarez, with Chita Rivera taking on another spitfire role after starring as Anita in *West Side Story*. Rose, secretary and long-suffering girlfriend of Albert Peterson, was originally called Rose Grant in the 1960-61 production. When both Carol

Haney and Eydie Gorme turned down the role, it was offered to Chita Rivera, who accepted. The character's name was changed to Rose Alvarez and the eleventh-hour number, "Spanish Rose," was added to the score. While the characters in *West Side Story* face discrimination from a large group, Rose deals one-on-one with Albert's mother, Mae. In "Spanish Rose," Rose revels in a comic fantasy of how she might drive Mae out of her life by becoming "so Spanish it will make her sick." When pushed to her limit, Rose takes a turn performing the stereotypes expected of her; she will make tortillas, live in an adobe hut, wear a mantilla and click castanets. In addition, she dons a red dress with Spanish-style black lace, a departure from her more conservative secretarial garb. In this way, Rivera's costume becomes Rose's "Latina" costume. Like Miranda and Arnaz, Rose self-consciously performs her "Latin-ness." Unlike her predecessors, however, Rose has an audience that is in on the joke. While Rose is completely secure in her American identity, (she is from Allentown, PA, after all), Mae's perception is that Rose belongs south of the border. It is Mae who questions Rose's identity and American "authenticity." By lampooning Latina stereotypes, Rose is able to negate any power Mae's racism might have. "Spanish Rose" was eliminated in the 1963 film version of *Bye Bye Birdie* when Janet Leigh took on the role of Rose. As aforementioned, Rose took the surname Alvarez after a US-Latina actress assumed the role. Why was this name change necessary? And how important (or



unimportant) was Rose's character in order for her identity to be bandied about with each new incarnation of the production? A heated and already long-debated question, spearheaded by playwright August Wilson, is whether or not cross-cultural casting is acceptable on stage. How does this practice affect the Latino/a actor and audience? Is US-Latino/a representation altered? In the case of Rose Alvarez/Rose Grant, clearly it is, with an entire element of the character's identity erased from existence. The Roundabout Theatre Company revived the musical for a short run in the fall of 2009, nearly fifty years after its Broadway debut, featuring popular film actress Gina Gershon, with her character's name restored to Rose Alvarez.

In 1964 the New York Shakespeare Festival initiated Spanish-language plays off Broadway, beginning with an evening of Puerto Rican poetry. This was the same year that *Fiddler on the Roof* premiered, telling the story of a Jewish community. In 1965, *La jíbara (The Peasant Girl)*, composed by Bobbie Collazo premiered off- Broadway. Little information is available about this musical. However, it is significant because with *La jíbara* music re-entered the Spanish-language theatre, not as in a review, but in a fully integrated musical.<sup>77</sup> That year also saw the beginnings of El Teatro Campesino in California. Founded by Luis

---

<sup>77</sup> The integrated musical is defined as one in which the book, lyrics and score all grow from a central idea and contribute to the storyline. *Oklahoma!* (1943) is often credited as the first fully integrated American musical.

Valdez as part of a labor movement toward unionization, El Teatro Campesino presented dramatized versions of the social, political and cultural challenges facing the Chicano population. In an effort to persuade farm workers to strike, the *Teatro* performed sketches dealing with issues like unfair wages, racial discrimination and drug abuse. By 1969, the *Teatro* had moved beyond workers' union issues and expanded to deal with challenges facing the Chicano community as a whole.<sup>78</sup> Eventually, El Teatro Campesino expanded to include tours of Broadway.

In the 1970s the formation of the Nuyorican Poets Café gave Puerto Rican playwrights a place to voice their New York experience, primarily in English-language scripts. Poet's Café founder Miguel Piñero's *Short Eyes* (1974), relayed the story of his time in Sing-Sing prison and catapulted him to fame. Ivan Acosta's *El súper* (1979), told an autobiographical story of the frustrations of Cuban exiles in New York City. The subject matter of Nuyorican plays often includes prostitution, drugs, and life on the streets. On Broadway, the Latino/a population was represented by the iconic *Evita* and two Latino/a characters in *A Chorus Line* (1975), Diana Morales and Paul San Marco.<sup>79</sup> These three treatments of Latinos focus on the particular people, apart from their culture, but they carry the

---

<sup>78</sup> Currently, there are approximately 100 Chicano theatres coast-to-coast, most in the Southwest.

<sup>79</sup> Diana Morales was originally played by Priscilla Lopez, who went on to play Mrs. Rosario in the original Broadway cast of *In the Heights*. For this accomplishment, she received the honor of her portrait displayed in Sardi's restaurant in New York City. Lopez accepted the award "for my people."

performative legacy of the Latino/a and if not criminals in the manner of *West Side Story's* Sharks, they are deviant in some way.

In addition to contributing as a writer *A Chorus Line's* book, Nicholas Dante was featured on stage in the original production in the role of Paul. Like the Puerto Rican Dante, who was born Conrado Morales, Paul adopts an Italian stage name, but admits that his given name is Ephrain Ramirez. He does not wish to acknowledge his ethnicity, nor "perform" it in any way. On the only occasion when Paul's ethnicity is mentioned, he divorces himself from it and his family. "What do Puerto Ricans know about theatre?" His ethnicity is not the primary marker of his identity. Rather he focuses on his homosexuality and his life as a drag queen. Passing as an Italian means the erasure of his race, while passing as a woman is an act of courage, because of the discrimination he faces and of survival, because it supports him economically.

By contrast, Diana flaunts her ethnicity, "My name is Diana Morales. I didn't change it 'cause I figured ethnic was in." She is conscious of being the ethnic Other and how she is to represent that part of herself. When the director asks her what made her start dancing she replies, "Who knows? I have rhythm - I'm Puerto Rican. I always jumped around and danced." Morales simultaneously negates these stereotypes by embracing them and, like Carmen Miranda and Rose Alvarez, performs her ethnicity for her own gain.

Luis Valdez's 1979 *Zoot Suit*, produced by Teatro Campesino was billed as the first Hispanic musical ever to come to Broadway. The story was a melding of history and fiction, retelling the murder of a young Mexican American during the Zoot Suit Riots in which Mexican Americans were assaulted by United States servicemen stationed in Los Angeles in 1943. It was not well-received by audience and critics, who had a hard time relating to the political ideology set forth and the acting techniques, similar to Agosto Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed exercises. In a review in which he took words and phrases from a Spanish glossary published in the production's playbill, New York Magazine's John Simon said "I can describe the cheap set only as *Que Desmadre* (chaos), whereas the staging is as *pinche* (crappy) as the dramaturgy. The writing is mostly *pendejadas* (dumb). I myself could latch on to merely one line in all this *puro pedo* (nonsense, literally 'pure farts')." <sup>80</sup>

In the early 1980s, the little Latino/a theatre that was available was not well-attended. Scholar John C. Miller points to an emphasis on directorial concept over new works as the culprit. <sup>81</sup> Despite low attendance overall, the Latino/a theatre of the time did produce two musicals: *Carmencita*, an opera set in contemporary New York, and *Swallows*, a musical review centering on Cuban

---

<sup>80</sup> John Simon, "West Coast Story," *New York Magazine*, (April 9, 1979), 93.

<sup>81</sup> John Miller, *Images and Identities: the Puerto Rican in Two World Contexts* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, Inc., 1987), 245.

refugees. Neither of these made it to Broadway, nor did *Fame*, a based-on-the-film musical of that year which featured characters of multicultural backgrounds, book by José Fernandez, and performances first in Miami and then Off-Broadway.

The 1990s saw two attempts by Broadway artists at breaking new ground in terms of representations of Latinos, one successful and one futile. In 1996, *Rent* premiered on Broadway, following the sudden death of its composer and lyricist, Jonathan Larson. With an original cast of diverse young people, it appealed to a new audience and revitalized a sluggish Broadway. *Rent* revolutionized the Broadway stage with Larson's *La Bohème*-inspired look at the lives of New York City young people fighting against poverty, disease and discrimination. Its eight main characters were comprised of three Caucasians, three African Americans and two Latinos, and the ensemble included actors of a variety of nationalities and ethnicities.

Direct reference to any character's ethnicity is never made in *Rent*. However, Larson's characters reinforce the performative and criminal stereotypes associated with stage Latinos. Two of the leading characters, Angel Schunard (originated by Wilson Hermaine Heredia) and Mimi Marquez (originated by Daphne Ruben-Vega) carry traces of the past performative and criminal stage US-Latino/a into the 1990s. Both are presumed to be of Latin American heritage,

evidenced by the fact that they are played by US-Latino/a actors, their character names, their sometimes ad-libbed Spanish, and the song lyrics assigned to them, for example Mimi's "feels too damn much like home, where the Spanish babies cry." Both are performers in some way. Mimi is an exotic dancer and Angel plays a makeshift drum on the street. In addition, Angel spends most of his stage time in drag. While this is simply a part of his lifestyle, his costuming goes beyond basic female dress to a level of performative spectacle as he appears first in a sexy Mrs. Santa suit and later as James Bond's Pussy Galore. Only in the audience's initial introduction to Angel and in the moments preceding and including his death is he portrayed as wearing male clothing and without a wig. It is in these moments that he is serious and sincere, while when dressed as a woman, he often takes a comic turn.

Both Angel and Mimi live complex and layered identities. Angel is homosexual, a drag queen, has AIDS, is involved in an interracial relationship, and makes money by playing make-shift drums on the street and doing odd jobs. Mimi is an exotic dancer, drug-addict, also has AIDS, also is involved in an interracial relationship, and takes up a second interracial relationship during the course of the play. Neither of these characters is a criminal in the sense that they spend time in jail or are reprimanded for their actions by authorities, but Angel (however humorously) plots the death of an annoying dog and Mimi purchases

and uses illegal drugs. Both characters may be perceived as deviant to a dominant culture of wealthy white Americans. However, this is inconsequential to these characters, who, despite struggle, embrace their lives. Like *A Chorus Line's* Paul, Angel's choice to dress in drag is likely more central to his identity than his ethnicity. In Act II, Mimi gives up her lifestyle, and, despite the fact that she relapses and dies, the audience witness her revival and "rebirth."

Despite the fact that both characters voice their desire to escape from New York City, neither longs for an ancestral or distant home. Larson's choice to cast these two characters as US-Latino/a brings up complicated questions and varying perspectives. How much of Angel and Mimi's respective positions in life have to do with their lifestyles and how much can be attributed to their ethnicities? Mimi has been played both by Latina and African American actresses. The same is true for the character of Angel, who has been played by a variety of actors, some non-Latino. The production moves toward the incorporation of the Latino/a-influenced hip-hop/rap music, most obviously used in Angel's solo "Today 4 U." Larson does not specifically address ethnicity, but if all of the characters were Caucasian, the play would not work to show the struggle of the poverty-stricken. It would merely be a bunch of well-off white kids grousing about petty problems. Yet, why is it the US-Latino/a characters who live so-called deviant lifestyles? The leading African American characters are employed as a lawyer, a successful businessman,

and an MIT professor/computer genius. Was Larson attempting to illustrate that US-Latinos are America's most economically, politically and socially challenged minority? In this play, the US-Latino/a characters are on the lowest economic strata. And despite Arlene Dávila's argument that US-Latinos are the "new Middle Class" and "more American than Americans" at the time of *Rent's* debut, there was a more immediate need to put forth positive representations of African Americans and perhaps to raise awareness that a large number of US-Latinos were still struggling socioeconomically.

In 1998, As the Latino/a population continued to grow in the United States and to dominate the minority demographic in New York City, it seemed like the right time for a musical to once again focus on a Latin American protagonist and draw on traditional Latin and Afro-Latin music. That year, popular songwriter Paul Simon and Nobel Prize winner Derek Walcott collaborated to create *The Capeman*, a short lived musical that lasted for just sixty-eight performances at Broadway's Marquis Theatre. Simon, known for his experiments with world music and Walcott for his treatment of Caribbean subject matter, seemed a promising duo. With plot points reminiscent of *West Side Story*, *The Capeman* is based on the true story of Salvador Agrón, a Puerto Rican member of a New York City gang known as the Vampires. Agrón was accused of murdering two teens in a Hell's Kitchen park in 1959, and came to be known as "the Capeman" when he



began donning a black cape as he patrolled the streets with the Vampires.

Symbolically, it seems that the immigrant takes on a new identity, covering his foreignness. However, here again, we see the Latino/a taking on a costume, a character, performing. Agrón's dual status as immigrant and criminal are conflated, and so, by wearing a cape to engage in criminal activity, Agrón's performance becomes symbolic of his "Latin-ness" as well.

Beginning with his childhood in Puerto Rico and jumping to his time in New York, Agrón is the only character of the musicals discussed in this project that is seen in both his native and adopted lands, a technique that is used to mirror the aforementioned liminal status of the Puerto Rican immigrant. This dual setting allows the audience to move with Agrón through his search for home. In addition, the writing seems to suggest that had Agrón stayed in the Puerto Rican paradise of 1950s Mayaguez, he would never have become a criminal. The sixteen-year-old's death sentence was commuted by the governor of New York and supported by Eleanor Roosevelt, both of whom cited the poverty of his existence as cause of his criminal activity. Yet, just as prior creators have claimed that they are not speaking about Latinos, Simon claimed in one interview, "I set out to tell a story from everyone's point of view, not just Salvador Agrón. . . . This is no *West Side Story*. I'm trying to tell a story as accurately and fairly as I can. It doesn't really matter whether the protagonist is Puerto Rican. . . . it's not essential to the central

issue of redemption."<sup>82</sup> Despite Simon's protests, it is unavoidable that Agrón's Puerto Rican nationality is an essential part of his story.

*The Capeman* did little to advance the perception of the Broadway musical as a place to explore Latin music and characters. Reviews were poor. One claimed, "The problem is that no one has been able to find the visual and verbal equivalents to Mr. Simon's multilayered score. Everything in the music melts together; practically nothing that's said, done and shown on the stage seems to connect with anything else."<sup>83</sup> The musical was, however, noted for Simon's blend of gospel, doo-wop and Latin music. It also lent exposure to Latin American and US-Latino/a actors, the majority of whom were specifically Puerto Rican, as were the characters in the musical, and included popular singer Mark Anthony and film and television actor Rubén Blades. This choice was in reaction to the casting of a "universal Latino/a," from any Latin American country, sufficient to play a Puerto Rican as long as they spoke Spanish, which had been consistent with past practice. Negrón-Muntaner asks if the "failure of *Capeman* delay[ed] the success of a new Latin American themed musical."<sup>84</sup> This seems a large burden for one short-lived show to carry, yet the next US-Latino/a story of wild success on the musical stage

---

<sup>82</sup> Fernando González, "Capeman Album Includes Doo Wop, Country, Mambo," *Miami Herald*, 16 November 1997, 81.

<sup>83</sup> Ben Brantley, "The Lure of Gang Violence to a Latin Beat," *New York Times*, (January 30, 1998).

<sup>84</sup> Negrón-Muntaner, 100.

did not arrive until a decade later with *In the Heights*. Negrón-Muntaner's claim was made in 2000, before the contentious issue of Latin American immigration exploded and new discourse was taken up to examine the place of the Latino/a in America. It is more likely that political and social developments in a post-9/11 America spurred the more immediate opportunity for US-Latino/a representation on the stage.

A new focus on Latinos in the Broadway musical was not attempted until Lin-Manuel Miranda and Quiara Alegría Hudes penned *In the Heights*, which had its Broadway premiere in 2008. Unlike any treatment of the Latino/a population before it, *In the Heights* featured a cast of entirely Latino/a and African American characters. Narrated by Usnavi, who runs a local bodega, the play follows the Rosario family, whose daughter Nina has dropped out of Stanford; Vanessa, who hopes to get out of the neighborhood; and Abuela Claudia, who holds a winning lottery ticket, among others. Dealing with themes like interracial relationships, gentrification and reconciling a bicultural existence, *In the Heights* was a departure from earlier treatments of Latinos. "I wrote *In the Heights* to fix *The Capeman*," says Miranda, "Forty years after *West Side Story* and we're still knife-wielding gangsters." With such stereotypical depictions, he says, "*The Capeman* broke my heart."<sup>85</sup>

---

<sup>85</sup> "In the Heights, Chasing Broadway Dreams," PBS, May 27, 2009.

The de-emphasis of the criminal nature of the Latino/a in *In the Heights* may change the representation and perception of the Broadway Latino/a. As actor Robin DeJesus expresses with relief in *In the Heights: Chasing Broadway Dreams*, "Finally a role where I do not have to carry a gun, I am not in a gang I am not selling drugs. I am just a normal human being who happens to be Hispanic and who happens to live in this wonderful place called Washington Heights."<sup>86</sup> Indeed, the only crime committed in *In the Heights* a looting that occurs during a blackout. Two details about the looting are important: the looters are never seen and never identified. Not only are the characters on stage freed from any culpability and the expected stereotype of the Latino/a criminal, but the audience witnesses a community that is victimized and joins together to recover. In addition, because the looters are never identified, the audience has no evidence as to their ethnicity. Again, the focus is on the recovery and not the crime. The one character that engages in deviant behavior, Graffiti Pete, ultimately uses his crime of vandalism for good, when he spray paints the bodega grate with a mural of Abuela Claudia who has passed away. It is this symbol that finally pushes Usnavi to stay in Washington Heights and declare that it is his "home."

The desire to alter and/or abandon the image of the Latino/a caught up in a life of crime has been explicitly expressed by Latino/a audiences as well. Two

---

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

major Latino-owned, but American-investor-controlled Spanish-language networks, Univision and Telemundo, heard this from their viewers loud and clear. Their programming, which continued to promote the criminal Latino/a stereotype and centered on Caucasian protagonists, prompted debate and in 2006, the National Hispanic Media Coalition and the Free Press organized public hearings on media diversity. The hearings, held in New York City, instigated responses from both Latino/a and African American New Yorkers, who called for "no more blonde, blue-eyed heroines," and demanded more diverse programming with representations showing that "we're more than violence, drugs and poverty."<sup>87</sup>

While reviews of *In the Heights* were largely positive and focused on the rap and salsa flavored score, there were a few that questioned the relevance of the story:

The problem is that although the show is set in Washington Heights in 2008, the creators have sensibilities stuck in the 1950s. The issues and dilemmas facing the characters don't really match those of contemporary society. We're asked to wonder: Will Nina and Benny fall for each other? Will salon girl Vanessa (a sassy Karen Olivo) get an apartment downtown? Will Nina's parents sell their business so she can go to school? And, hey, who bought the winning lottery ticket at Usnavi's bodega? Not exactly earth-shattering issues facing the Latino/a community when immigration is in the news every day. The cast is sweeter than dollops of dulce de leche. What would have been really sweet: A show that had something to say that

---

<sup>87</sup> Dávila, 81.

resonated beyond the 181st St. subway stop.<sup>88</sup>

In addition to feeding into a stereotype (“the Latino/a cast as sweet as dollops of *dulce de leche*”), this reviewer overlooks both the impact of some of the themes, and the purposeful choice of the authors to subtly address larger issues and draw a relationship between the Anglo and Latino/a communities through common struggle. Miranda reveals his direct inspiration for making these connections, “The real genetic forefather for *Heights* is *Fiddler on the Roof*,” he says. “It was about a community coping with change and has change thrust upon it. We looked to *Fiddler* for our structure. We introduce our types with the song ‘In the Heights.’ They introduced theirs with ‘Tradition.’”<sup>89</sup> The reviewer questions the power of Nina and Benny's storyline. What he completely misses is that there is clear racial tension between the African American Benny and Nina's Puerto Rican father, Kevin. The reason for his disapproval of the relationship is articulated when Kevin shouts to Benny, “You'll never be one of us!” Vanessa's thoughts of moving out of the *barrio* and the Rosario's economic struggles are ones that are simultaneously universal and specific to an ethnic group of people whose home is at risk of being divided.

In the 2007-2008 season, eight major Broadway shows prominently

---

<sup>88</sup> Joe Dzaimianowicz, “With Shallow Story, Broadway's *In the Heights* Can't Soar,” *New York Daily News*, (March 10, 2008).

<sup>89</sup> “*In the Heights*: Chasing Broadway Dreams,” PBS, May 27, 2009.

featured Latinos, African Americans and Asian Americans including the musicals *In the Heights*, *Passing Strange*, and *South Pacific*. The Tony Awards that season were, for the first time, hosted by a woman of color, Whoopi Goldberg. Ten performers of color were nominated that evening as well. "It's absolutely true that there was a quota system, unexpressed,"<sup>90</sup> says veteran Broadway producer Liz McCann, who is white. But the 2007-08 season, she notes, reflects a critical mass in casting, and in the sheer number of productions predominantly featuring nonwhite actors. "Maybe now, just like things are in politics, things are beginning to change,"<sup>91</sup> says Broadway executive Cherine Anderson. Why things are changing, and why now, is up for debate. Journalist Teresa Wiltz believes the change is economic, "The browning of Broadway is because of the green. [Broadway producers] realized that if people saw themselves reflected on stage, they might be more likely to buy a ticket."<sup>92</sup> Says Broadway producer Keryl McCord, "That's a big difference. I think it is an evolution. I don't think we're going to go back from here. I think we're only going to go forward. The marketplace will dictate and the market is dictating. There is an audience for plays that focus on the black experience. And the Latino experience."<sup>93</sup>

In 2009, *West Side Story* returned to Broadway with a long-anticipated and

---

<sup>90</sup> Teresa Wiltz, "Broadway Recast!" *The Washington Post*, (June 15, 2008), C01.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

much-hyped revival. The twist? Spanish-language dialogue and lyrics translated from the original script and score by Lin-Manuel Miranda. With staging and choreography that remained similar or identical to its original Broadway production, the revival of *West Side Story* retained its performative Anita and Maria, and its criminal stereotypes. However, in 2009, it served an audience that encountered debates over Mexican/US immigration on a daily basis, complicating their perspective. With the addition of the Spanish language, the performance of "Latin-ness" was raised, while the intent may have been to give the production greater authenticity. However, the language changes does result in a change between character and audience relationships and a shift in power, discussed in Chapter Two of this study.

The Spanish Repertory Theatre of Tampa still produces Broadway musicals in translation and quite telling is that one of its most popular offerings continues to be the influential *Fiddler on the Roof*. New York is presently home to the highest number of Latino/a Theatre companies in the United States, including El Teatro Repertorio Español, Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre, INTAR (International Arts Relations) and Teatro 4.<sup>94</sup>

In his article, "The Multicultural Paradigm: An Open Letter to the Arts

---

<sup>94</sup> The first three of these theatres receive federal funding and have established training programs for actors, directors and writers. Teatro 4 is the leading producer of Hispanic leftist political theatre, and is the only theatre company located in Spanish Harlem. Teatro 4 does not receive federal funding.



Community," published in 1995, performance artist Guillermo Gomez-Pena declares,

what the world wants is a 'domesticated Latino' who can provide enlightenment without irritation, entertainment without confrontation. We must politely remind the art world that image is never a substitute for culture. Some frequent mistakes include homogenization, decontextualization, curatorial eclecticism, folklorization and exoticization.<sup>95</sup> These mythical views only help to perpetuate the colonizing notions toward the South as a wild and exotic preindustrial universe ever awaiting to be discovered, enjoyed, and purchased by the entrepreneurial eye of the North. The Latino/a boom is clearly a media-produced mirage: a marketing strategy designed with two objectives: to expand our consumer power and to offer exotica to the American middle class.<sup>96</sup>

In 2011, is this still what the American theatregoer is looking for? Do they expect to be entertained by a sassy Latina? To accuse a guilty Latino/a their or murderer? Do they hope to overlook ethnicity? Or get a taste that will satisfy any wonder about the Other? Or has this changed with the arrival of productions like *In the Heights*? Can favorable representations of US-Latinos influence the American response to immigration and US national identity? An overview of the Latin

---

<sup>95</sup> Homogenization lumps all Latinos together into one group, devoid of any specific national identity. Decontextualization "whitens" the Latino/a, by ignoring any ethnic differences. Curatorial eclecticism is the process by which it is acceptable to consider an artistic display "Latin American" so long as one or more pieces represented are created by a Latin American artist. Folklorization and exoticization are means of assigning primitive, tribal, exotic, etc. stereotypes to Latino/a "others."

<sup>96</sup> Guillermo Gomez-Pena, "The Multicultural Paradigm: An Open Letter to the National Arts Community," *Negotiating Performance: Gender, Sexuality and Theatricality in Latin/o America*, Diana Taylor and Juan Villegas, eds. (Duke University Press, 1994), 24-25.

American and US-Latino/a on the musical stage has shown a slow and steady build to a new, and still changing identity.

## Chapter Two

### El Poder y Educación: La Lengua Española<sup>97</sup>

*“Amá, at school, they think we are culturally deprived. How can you be culturally deprived with two languages? It's more like cultural overload to me.”*

(Edith Villareal, *My Visits with MGM*)

It is nearly impossible to avoid issues surrounding language when studying the representation of the Latin American on the United States stage. Inherent to the immigrant's culture is his/her language, and the degree to which this language is used or rejected reflects the acceptance, rejection, or reconciliation of one culture with another. When seeking to create a "home" in an adopted country, the immigrant does not suddenly abandon their own culture in favor of complete assimilation. Nor does the immigrant or first-generation-American seek a metamorphosis whose end result is the shedding of their "native cocoon" in order to take on the characteristics of what is "authentically American," processes suggested by the theories of Una Chaudhuri and Maria-Tania Bandes-Beccerra.<sup>98</sup> Rather, immigrants bring certain things with them to their new land. Just as one packs and carries his or her belongings from one home to another during a move, the immigrant creates home by packing their most

---

<sup>97</sup> "Power and Education: The Spanish Language." *Lengua* literally translates to "tongue," and I purposely chose this word to allude to the idea of the "Mother tongue" that is passed down.

<sup>98</sup> See the introduction to this study for an explanation of these theories.

important belongings: language and cultural traditions. The most essential is language, which provides a basis of communication, self-expression and connection to native culture. When an immigrant population disperses and the native language of their new geographic place is not their own, as with English in the United States, communication can become a struggle. This may lead to tension between the dominant and subjugated cultures. Members of the dominant culture may view new immigrants as unwilling to learn the dominant language. The immigrant may view the dominant population as insensitive to the fact that their language is an inherent part of their humanity. Access to native languages allows immigrant populations in the United States to create a functional community. Shared language allows for ease of communication within a geographic space that is populated by common-language speakers. By bringing language with them to the United States, the immigrant not only retains an essential part of their own culture, but carries with them the possibility of expanding the multicultural and multilingual face of America.

According to the United States Census Bureau, the Hispanic population in the United States as of July 1, 2009, was 48.4 million, or 16 percent of the nation's total population. In addition, Hispanics are the fastest-growing minority group in the United States, with an estimated 132.8 million Hispanic residents of the

United States expected by 2050.<sup>99</sup> While many immigrants to the United States choose to learn English, many also maintain consistent use of their native language with family, friends and their cultural community. A new analysis of six Pew Hispanic Center surveys conducted from 2000-2010 show that just 23 percent of Latino/a immigrants report being able to speak English very well. However, at the start of this study, 88 percent of their US-born adult children reported that they speak English very well. This number has increased to 94 percent.<sup>100</sup> As fluency in English increases, so does its regular use. For most immigrants, English is not the primary language they use at home or work, but for their children, it is. This means that currently, there are 35 million people in the United States who speak Spanish as their primary language, and more than half of this 35 million are considered to be fluent in English as well. Spanish is also the most commonly studied foreign language in the United States and it is increasingly becoming a part of daily American life, from lessons learned on *Sesame Street* to conversations held with bilingual neighbors and co-workers. Quiara Alegría Hudes, lyricist for *In the Heights* comments on the increasing use of Spanish in American culture:

Spanish is part of our culture now. Everyone may not

---

<sup>99</sup> “Social and Economic Characteristics of the Hispanic Population: 2009, United States Census Bureau. <http://www.census.gov/compendia/statab/2011/tables/11s0037.pdf>

<sup>100</sup> Shirin Hakimzadeh and D'Vera Cohn, Pew Hispanic Center, “English Usage Among Hispanics in the United States,” 2007.

be conversational, but people know the sounds in this country. Spanish and English sound natural together these days. And Spanish opens up more rhyming possibilities, which is nice in a musical. It is exciting for people unfamiliar with the language and a homecoming embrace of sorts for audiences who do speak Spanish.<sup>101</sup>

When considering the place of the Spanish language on Broadway today, it is important to investigate the ways in which it has been used in the past. The 1939 Rogers and Hart musical *Too Many Girls* provides a quintessential example. *Too Many Girls* marked Desi Arnaz's American stage debut. In this version, his character, Manuelito, is billed as a girl-crazy Argentinian. In the film version, he becomes a Cuban exchange student, sent to a college in California to act as one of four bodyguards to an American heiress, Consuelo Casey, played by Arnaz's future wife, Lucille Ball. In his analysis of the film adaptation, Gustavo Pérez Firmat calls the musical a "multicultural nightmare."<sup>102</sup> Alberto Sandoval-Sánchez goes further, calling it,

A case of blatant cultural appropriation and Latinization given that the final movie scene has been molded and accommodated for the entertainment and enjoyment of an Anglo-American audience. The lyrics have disappeared, thus erasing the Spanish language, which has been replaced by unintelligible sounds signaling generic ethnic otherness and cultural difference. Thus, Spanish language has been reduced to mere noise. The audience does not care about the

---

<sup>101</sup> Kyle Sircus interview with Quiara Alegría Hudes via email, August 16, 2010.

<sup>102</sup> Pérez-Firmat, 54.

verbal content; it prefers to enjoy the visual spectacle of difference and the primitive sound.<sup>103</sup>

The visual spectacle that Sandoval-Sánchez speaks of includes a cast full of dancers wearing oversized sombreros, ponchos and matador hats, tapping and clapping around an enormous bowl with an Aztec design. The obvious ethnic stereotypes presented here are problematic enough, but compounding this is the problem of language. Due to the misuse and erasure of the Spanish language in the celebratory final scene, the Latin American characters in *Too Many Girls* can never be “at home.”

Like Carmen Miranda, Arnaz spent his career performing the Anglo-American expectation of an “authentically” Latin American experience through a conglomeration of linguistics and visual cues. Here, in his role as Manuelito, Arnaz meets this expectation through the complete nullification of *any* real language. By forbidding Manuelito access to both Spanish and English, the film's creators and its audience dually forbid him from creating a home in the United States. Like Miranda, he is kept at a safe distance, and is merely a novelty, rather than a part of the community. The fact that Sandoval-Sánchez refers to “primitive noise,” is indicative of the belief that Latin Americans were uncivilized or animalistic; how could they not be with their incoherent babbling? Yet, a non-

---

<sup>103</sup> Alberto Sandoval-Sánchez and Nancy Saporta-Sternbach, "Re-visiting Chicana Cultural Icons: From Sor Juana to Frida," *The State of Latino Theatre in the United States*, (New York: Routledge, 2002), 47

Spanish speaking audience would be unaware that Arnaz was not really speaking Spanish. The musicality of the actual language was lost, and replaced by a mix of sounds that were then accepted Spanish, reinforcing the tribal or “tropicalized” stereotype of all things Latin American. To an uneducated, monolingual audience, the Spanish of the stage production and gibberish of the film were one in the same. In moving from the stage to film, the Spanish language became inconsequential to a mass audience. Because this is the final scene, the fact that Manuelito has spoken fluent English throughout does not matter; his last verbal moments reinforce his Otherness, and it is time for him to go home. As an exchange student, it is already implied that he is here for a limited time. America is not his home, and Americans need not worry. What is worrisome, however, is that reviews of the film called it a “faithful recreation” of the musical, one in which “no words have been changed.”<sup>104</sup> The simple fact that reviewers chose to overlook this, or publicists considered the language alteration negligible, is illustrative of the pure disregard for the Spanish language as a valid means of communication and self-expression. Its inclusion was to entertain and provide an allure of the exotic.

Arnaz's Latin American identity is further compromised in other ways. In the stage version, he is simply referred to by his first name, Manuelito, but in the

---

<sup>104</sup> Bosley Crowther , “‘Too Many Girls’ Makes an Appearance at Loew’s Criterion,” *New York Times*,( November 21, 1940), 43.



film he becomes Manuelito Lynch, implying an inexplicable Irish ancestry. It is true that millions of United States citizens have multicultural ancestry; however, giving Manuelito an Irish surname does not celebrate the idea of the American melting pot. Instead, this manipulation of language through naming functions in two ways which further alienate Arnaz from the American community around him. First, Arnaz is “made safe,” by promising the viewing audience a small bit of “whiteness.” However, this does not make Arnaz an acceptable American, only an acceptable visitor, because of his accent, dark hair and olive skin. Secondly, the addition of the Irish last name rips away half of his Cuban identity, implying that the character and the actor ought to somehow be ashamed of himself; his Latin American identity is only acceptable insofar as it is “balanced out” by Anglo ancestry. Ironically, the same name-identity manipulation applies to Ball's character, Consuelo Casey, the musical's leading lady. Consuelo, or Consuela, is a traditional and popular Spanish first name, meaning “consolation,” in reference to the Virgin Mary, who in Spanish and Latin American culture is sometimes referred to as *Nuestra Señora del Consuelo*, or Our Lady of Consolation. In the musical, Consuelo is only referred to as “Connie,” which is of Latin origin and ethnically neutral. The use of this diminutive essentially erases any suggestion of the character's Latina heritage and reinforces the Irishness hinted at by her red hair and pale skin. Although the two characters may share similar roots, Manuelito is

relegated to the category of Other since he does not meet the visual and aural expectations of an “authentic” American, in the ways that Ball does.

The English lyrics in *Too Many Girls* also reinforce Latin American stereotypes, including those directly related to language. In the Broadway production, Pepe, played by the Puerto Rican actress Diosa Costello (a frequent performer with Desi Arnaz, who later went on to be a replacement for *South Pacific's* Bloody Mary), sings “Spic and Spanish,” a title whose play on words incorporates a racial slur aimed at Latin Americans. For centuries, disparaging racial slurs have been used in conjunction with language. Specifically, such epithets were originally used in reference to an inability to speak a particular language. While “spic and span” has come to mean “clean” or “tidy” and is in fact the name of a cleaning product, there are several more disturbing theories as to the origins of this term. One, from the American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, cites “spic and span” as a term referring to mixed race couples, with one half of the couple African American and the other Latin American. Another more popular belief, and most relevant to this discussion, is that it derives from what became standard practice of naming immigrants or Others due to their inability to speak a particular language. This is seen in the terms “*gringo*” (Spanish for “Greek;” and originally used in Spain to refer to non-Spanish speakers) and “barbarian” (from the ancient Greek *barbaros* which, when

pronounced, literally sounds like babbling; referred to anyone who did not speak Greek).

In this production number, Pepe laments her status as a Spanish girl, all of whom are “simple and pure” and “watched day and night to be sure.” In the song's refrain, Pepe insists she is “All dressed up/Spic and Spanish/Got something I got to show...Haven't Got a Thing to Hide.” These last lyrics were accompanied by costuming and choreography that hinted at Pepe's sexual desires. In this song, Pepe simultaneously represents two extreme Latina stereotypes, the virgin and the spitfire, that would later be epitomized by Maria and Anita in *West Side Story*. Following this number, Pepe and Manuelito sing the duet “She Could Shake the Maracas.” Here, the duo relays the love story of Pepito and Pepita with the introductory lyrics, “Ev'ry Latin has a temper/Latins have no brain/And they quarrel as they walk in/Latin's Lover Lane.” Here, the two bilingual characters use English when denigrating the out-of-control and dim-witted Latin Americans, whose quarreling generates images of the couple babbling in Spanish. In the language native to their audience, Pepe and Manuelito disparage themselves, and therefore further alienate themselves from the Anglo American community.

Recently, an attempt has been made to remedy this cultural appropriation and Latinization in the American Broadway musical through the reintroduction of Spanish language on stage. Rather than erasing the Spanish language, present-day

composers and lyricists are seeking to revitalize it. In the 2009 revival of *West Side Story*, language became the main focus of the production's alterations and is illustrative of the ideological battle between assimilation and homecoming.

Several scenes and two major musical numbers were re-written or translated to include Spanish. While *West Side Story*, as a well-known Broadway commodity may have drawn much attention due to this translation project, credit for revolutionizing the way the Spanish language is used in the Broadway musical lies with *In the Heights*, which, a year earlier, fully integrated Spanish language into the production.

In *The Capeman*, a few Spanish lyrics and dialogue are sprinkled throughout the musical, and are not used as extensively as they are in *In the Heights* and the *West Side Story* revival. Yet, these are worth a brief mention for two reasons. First, *The Capeman* was the first attempt since the original *West Side Story* at a Broadway musical representation of the Latin American immigrant. Other musicals, like *Evita* and *Kiss of the Spiderwoman* revolved around Latin American characters, but were set in Argentina and an unnamed Latin American country, respectively. They did not focus on immigration or assimilation to an English-speaking country. Second, it was the first attempt since earlier stereotypical examples at using Spanish in a musical to relate a sense of authenticity. Here, Spanish dialogue is used to illustrate a relationship between

immigrant parent and child, “*Tengan cuidado con ese tipo/Ay verdad te digo/ese tipo es tan sucio* (Be careful with this kind/It's true I tell you/this kind is dirty”). It is also used as a way to evoke memories of the land they left, through the character of St. Lazarus, who speaks Spanish most often in the musical, and with greatest impact in his longing for Puerto Rico,

<i>Yo nací en Puerto Rico</i>	I was born in Puerto Rico
<i>Yo nací en Puerto Rico</i>	I was born in Puerto Rico
<i>Mi corazón es Puerto Rico</i>	My heart is Puerto Rico
<i>Mi alma es Puerto Rico</i>	My soul is Puerto Rico

The language was less of a concern for Paul Simon, who was more drawn to the musical styles promised by telling this tale. He admits that his inspiration came from the sense of exoticism that surrounded the Latin American culture in New York during his youth,

Writing songs in a 50s style was very appealing to me, and so was writing songs in a Latin style, which was a significant and sort of exotic New York subculture to me when I was growing up. Since I was working at the time with Brazilian drums and West African guitars, it wasn't too much of a leap to begin thinking about music from Puerto Rico.<sup>105</sup>

Considering composer Simon's familiarity with world music and playwright Derek Walcott's Caribbean background, it seems only natural that Spanish language would be included. In fact, one might have expected more. The lack of

---

<sup>105</sup> Mark Eliot, *Paul Simon: A Life*, (New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, 2010), 214.

language may have been just one reason why the production was seen as a flop.<sup>106</sup>

The instances in which the the Spanish language is incorporated into the Latino/a musical are carefully selected and revolve around *who* is speaking Spanish and *when* it is employed. For example, in the revival of *West Side Story*, Spanish is most often spoken when two or more Puerto Rican characters are alone together, while in *In the Heights* it is peppered throughout, as the entire cast is bilingual. In these two more recent musicals, language is used: first, to illustrate tension created by the liminal state of the immigrant or first-generation Latino/a and across generations, and second, as a tool to simultaneously alienate and appeal to an audience of both Latinos and non-Latinos. The process of translating *West Side Story* illustrates the constant renegotiation of space and identity that must be undertaken by the immigrant or first-generation Latino/a.

In studying any translation or foreign-language production, it is important to consider the position of the audience. While twentieth and twenty-first-century Broadway audiences have historically been composed of white, upper and middle class patrons, the audiences for *The Capeman*, *In the Heights* and the 2009 revival of *West Side Story* made a small change by drawing in some multicultural audiences, many of which included Spanish-speakers to a greater extent than had been represented in the past. According to "The Demographics of the Broadway

---

<sup>106</sup> See Ben Brantley's "The Lure of Gang Violence to a Latin Beat," *New York Times*, (January 30, 1998).

Audience 2009 - 2010," a report by The Broadway League, seven percent of the audience in the 2009-2010 season was Hispanic. Ultimately, only these bilingual audience members will understand the complete lyrics and dialogue presented in these musicals. Non-Spanish speakers who have great familiarity with one of these musicals will certainly be able to follow the story, but the nuances of particular Spanish words may alter meanings, as will be demonstrated later in this chapter. Ethnic immigrants and first-generation Americans do not belong to one culture or the other, but belong to both. Indeed part of living "on the border" or "on the hyphen," terms that have been used to designate various Latino/a groups living in the United States, requires bilingualism.<sup>107</sup> Yet, in viewing these productions, both bilingual and monolingual audience members find themselves situated in the place of the immigrant in different ways. Bilingual audience members assume the role of the bilingual immigrants or first-generation English speakers they see on stage, who are able to move fluidly between languages and cultures. Those who are not bilingual are then situated in a liminal space, able to comprehend some, but not all, of what is going on around them, like the immigrant who is in between geographical and ideological spaces. This unexpected shift in performer-audience relationship alienates the traditional

---

<sup>107</sup> Ovidi Carbonell, "Exoticism in Translation: Writing, Representation and the Colonial Context," *New Exoticisms: Changing Patterns in the Construction of Otherness*, Isabel Santaolalla, ed., (Editions Rodopi B.V., 2000), 76.

Broadway audience in the Brechtian manner, forcing them to consider the place of the immigrant represented onstage and in the seats next to them. Because the characters “live” on stage, they create their fictional home, and so, when the time is right, they invite the Anglo-American audience to their space.

Whether through translated lyrics or ones composed originally in Spanish, the creators of these productions offer a new perspective on the place of the Latino/a on stage, and the idea of the Latin American creating a home in the United States. The composers and lyricists of each these musicals admit to a different set of goals. Arthur Laurents deliberately attempted to create a new, more authentic *West Side Story*. Lin-Manuel Miranda and Quiara Alegría Hudes set out to tell a semi-autobiographical tale of a specific community and used Spanish in their organic and improvisatory creation. Paul Simon and Derek Walcott sought to communicate a true-story immigrant experience through a wide array of musical styles. While these goals lead to various functions of the Spanish language in each musical, an overarching goal of using native language is, at least to some extent, to present a certain degree of cultural authenticity.

The term “authenticity,” when used to refer to culture and traditions, is difficult to define. Many scholars have attempted to do so and there is ongoing debate about its meaning and usage.<sup>108</sup> The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines

---

<sup>108</sup> See Rustom Bharucha, *The Politics of Cultural Practice*, (Great Britain: The Athlone Press,



“authentic” as (1.) of undisputed origin and not a copy; genuine. (2.) made or done in the traditional or original way, or in a way that faithfully resembles an original. (3). based on facts; accurate or reliable. Various definitions of “cultural authenticity” have been used in an attempt to pinpoint what shared characteristics are genuine representations of, traditional to or accurately represent a particular nation or ethnic group. Rudine Sims Bishop believes that cultural authenticity cannot be defined but “you know it when you see it,” as an insider reading a book about your own culture.<sup>109</sup>

Bishop's “know it when you see it” definition can certainly apply to viewing a theatrical production. However she does not consider those readers or audience members who experience a work that is *not* about their own culture. Elizabeth Howard goes a step further, arguing that one must pay attention to the reader (or, for this purpose, audience) response. Yet, she attests that we know cultural authenticity is present because “we feel it, deep down, saying, 'Yes, that's how it is.'”<sup>110</sup> In this case, it is more likely that is “feeling” is attributed to what one *perceives* to be authentic. Finally, Kelly Short articulates that

---

2000); JL Jones, “The Role of Embodiment in Cultural Authenticity,” *Theatre Topics*, Vol. 12, No. 1, March 2002; Kevin Yelvington, *Producing Power: ethnicity, gender and class in a Caribbean workplace*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1995).

<sup>109</sup> Rudine Sims Bishop, “Reframing the Debate About Cultural Authenticity,” *Stories Matter: The Complexity of Cultural Authenticity in Children's Literature*. Eds. Dana Fox and Kelly Short. (National Council of of Teachers of English: Urbana, Illinois, 2003, 92.

<sup>110</sup> E.F. Howard, "Authentic Multicultural Literature for Children: An Author's Perspective." In Lindgren, M.V. (Ed.), *The Multicolored Mirror*, (Fort Atkinson, WI: Highsmith Press, 1991), 92.

The reader's sense of truth in how a specific cultural experience has been represented, particularly when the reader [audience member] is an insider to the culture portrayed in that book, is probably the most common understanding of cultural authenticity. The universal and specific come together to create a book in which "readers from the culture will *know* that it is true, will identify, and be affirmed, and readers from another culture will *feel* that it is true, will identify, and learn something of value about both similarities and differences among us."<sup>111</sup>

This is a lofty goal, considering that truth is subjective and cultural experience is as varied as the life experience of any individual. This evolving argument does not take into account the fact that audience members may not have inside knowledge necessary to accept a story or performance as a true representation of a particular cultural experience. Yet, this argument is useful, because it exemplifies the central problem inherent in attempting to pinpoint what is culturally authentic. The biggest problem lies with the question: What *is* authentic? What makes a theatrical experience truly Latino/a (or Asian, African, Irish, etc.)? Rather than dancing around a definition, it is more helpful to look at cultural authenticity on a case by case basis, especially when considering a living performance.

In her discussion of the Puerto Rican experience in Chicago, Ana Y. Ramos-Zayas reviews the complications surrounding cultural authenticity as it

---

<sup>111</sup> Kelly Short, "Reframing the Debate About Cultural Authenticity," *Stories Matter: The Complexity of Cultural Authenticity in Children's Literature*, Eds. Dana Fox and Kelly Short (National Council of of Teachers of English, Urbana, Illinois, 2003), 92.

applies specifically to Latin Americans who hail from one nation and find themselves in a new geographic space, either through immigration or displacement. Such immigrants often find themselves labeled as a new ethnic group; a subset of Latin Americans with no real home.

Rather than being simple labels, these terms point to the political contexts, economic motivations, and essentialist notions of authenticity of transnational migratory flows. They also suggest the migrants' subsequent "Americanization" and their revolving relationship with the national territories they have left behind. The creation of national subjects sustains hegemonic notions of "authenticity," that is, of gradations of cultural purity and means of distinguishing a "true" national from contaminating hybrids.<sup>112</sup>

The labels Ramos-Zayas refers to here include, for example, *tabaratos* (Venezuelan immigrants in Miami), *dominicayork* (Dominican immigrants in New York City) and *nuyoricans* (Puerto Rican immigrants in New York City). Such labels prevent these immigrants from being fully-accepted members of their adopted American cities, but simultaneously exclude them from being nationals as well. This implies that the children of these immigrants will find themselves even further entrenched in a battle to prove their cultural authenticity. If they are a hybrid of their parents' culture and their American geography, how can they be

---

<sup>112</sup> Ana Y. Ramos-Zayas, "Implicit Social Knowledge, Cultural Capital and 'Authenticity' Among Puerto Ricans in Chicago," *Latin American Perspectives*, Vol. 31, no. 5. (September 2004), 38. The "labels" which Dr. Ramos-Zayas refers to here include *tabaratos* (Venezuelan immigrants in Miami) and *dominicayork* (Dominicans in New York).

authentically anything? In the musicals discussed here, the use of language is one way whereby a sense of cultural authenticity is explored. By using an actual language native to the characters onstage, a musical's creators display, at least in part, some truth of that particular cultural experience. At the same time ideas of authenticity, Americanization and hybridization are challenged in these works.

When playwright Arthur Laurents decided to revive his 1957 classic, *West Side Story*, composed by Leonard Bernstein with lyrics by Stephen Sondheim, he made a deliberate attempt to bring a sense of cultural authenticity to the production. After expressing disappointment in the 1964 and 1980 revivals, Laurents yearned for a whole new production. Inspired by his late partner Tom Hatcher's handwritten translations of some *West Side Story* lyrics into Spanish, Laurents decided much of the dialogue would now be in the Sharks' native tongue. "The idea was to equalize the gangs," he explained in a *New York Times* interview, "by allowing the Sharks, who are supposed to be from Puerto Rico, their own language."<sup>113</sup> In the original production of *West Side Story*, the Puerto Rican characters were representative of the Latino/a immigrant looking for a place to fit in. By using language as an equalizing force between the two gangs, the Sharks become more grounded in their new geographic space. In addition to using Spanish language, the production's actors would be Latino/a.

---

<sup>113</sup> Jesse Green, "When You're a Shark, You're a Shark All the Way," *New York Magazine*, (March 15, 2009).

Coinciding with Laurents' decision to revive *West Side Story* was an eruption of excitement around Spanish and Latin American popular culture and entertainment. Laurents' producers, led by Jeffrey Seller, who had hits with *Rent* and *Avenue Q* before joining the *In the Heights* team, were savvy to capitalize on the Hispanophilia of the mid-2000s. The music industry was obsessed with Jennifer Lopez, Shakira and Ricky Martin, all of whom released Spanish-language albums, ushering their native tongue into mainstream American listening. The film industry recognized Spanish language movies like *Pan's Labyrinth* (2007) and those that focused on Latin American characters like *The Motorcycle Diaries* (2004) with Academy Awards for cinematography and music, respectively. It was not coincidental, then, that Laurents requested Lin-Manuel Miranda to complete the translations for the revival, considering the young composer had recently struck gold with the heavily-Spanish-laden *In the Heights*, which brought in a younger, hipper audience in droves. “Well, the Spanish in *West Side Story* was really Arthur Laurents' idea,” says Miranda, “and I was there to help him facilitate that by providing the translations.”<sup>114</sup> While Miranda humbly accepts his role as “mere translator” for *West Side Story*, he made a great contribution to the production and to the field of translation studies. In fact, what became a Spanish-language experiment is extremely useful to this study, as it allows for an in-depth

---

<sup>114</sup> Kyle Sircus interview with Lin-Manuel Miranda via email, July 28, 2010.

look at the translation process and its product. The translation process of *West Side Story*, unlike the original creation of Spanish-language lyrics in *In the Heights* means that decisions had to be made that *altered* preexisting meanings, rather than *creating* new ones.

As translator for *West Side Story*, Miranda took on a unique role. No matter which path s/he chooses, a translator straddles two cultures, walking a fine line between faithfulness to the text and freedom from it. In the thick of globalization, having a foot in each world becomes evermore important to the translator's process. Now the job is not only to translate, not only to capture the intent and style of the original, not even solely to transmit the source culture to a target audience, but to make *connections* between the source culture and the target culture. As a result, the translator marries two audiences: the source audience and the target audience who, speaking from the perspective of play translation, have both experienced the work, ideally in performance. The upshot of this connection is that the target audience may then view a translation as relevant to its own world. The commentary, criticism or celebration of the source culture becomes the commentary, criticism or celebration of the target culture. By forging these relationships, the translator provides a universal link between diverse communities and may simultaneously ease anxieties related to rapid globalization through preservation of local, regional and national language and traditions.

The translation process becomes even more complicated in the case of the *West Side Story* revival, due to the fact that here, the source audience and the target audience are one in the same. When translating, the source language is the language translated *from* and the target language is the language translated *into*. This assumes that the source audience speaks and understands the source language and the target audience speaks and understands the target language. However, when Spanish language dialogue and lyrics were added to *West Side Story*, the assumption was that while *some* audience members may speak and understand Spanish, the majority of the audience would follow the traditional mainstream Broadway composition of white, upper-middle class, English-speaking patrons. Therefore this translation was not performed with the native speaker in mind. Meaning changes from the source to the translation. The audience, whether Spanish-speaking or not, must perform a task of textual or contextual translation. If we use Ovidi Carbonell's definition of contextual translation, then there is a step in between these two modes, though, for those who cannot grasp the literal language, but must make an immediate translation of what is going on based on context.<sup>115</sup> The source culture may not make sense to the target audience. The Spanish additions and substitutions in the *West Side Story* revival functioned in several ways, and led to mixed results. First, the Spanish lyrics provide a new

---

<sup>115</sup> Ovidi Carbonell, "The Exotic Space of Cultural Translation," *Translation, Power, Subversion*, Román Álvarez and M. África Valdez, eds., (Philadelphia: Multilingual Matters, 1996), 85.

perspective on character development and motivations. Second, mirroring the use of song in musical theatre, Spanish is used to indicate places where extreme states of emotion are reached. Third, the Spanish language additions change the relationship between characters and audience. Fourth, Spanish language indicates authenticity.

The translated passages in *West Side Story* alter the characters and their motivations. This is most evident in the popular song “I Feel Pretty,” performed by Maria with the help of Anita and their friends. Originally composed with English lyrics, this song is both Maria's celebration of new found love and her friends' lamentation of her foolishness. By looking closely at the lyrics and their translations, one can more easily identify the function and impact of these changes. In the following examples, the original lyrics are listed in the left-hand column; the translated lyrics are in the center column and I have performed a literal translation of those lyrics which appear in the right-hand column in order to show the sometimes subtle, sometimes extreme, differences between them. Maria sings:

<i>I feel pretty</i>	<i>Hoy me siento tan hermosa</i>	<i>Today I feel so beautiful</i>
<i>Oh so pretty</i>	<i>Tan graciosa que puedo volar,</i>	<i>So graceful that I am able to fly,</i>
<i>I feel pretty and</i>		
<i>witty and bright</i>	<i>Y no hay diosa</i>	<i>And there is not a goddess</i>
<i>And I pity any girl</i>		
	<i>who isn't me tonight. En el mundo que me va alcanzar. In the world that can reach me.</i>	
<i>I feel charming</i>	<i>Hoy me siento encantadora</i>	<i>Today I feel enchanting</i>



<i>Oh so charming</i>	<i>Atrayente, atractiva sin par</i>	<i>Attractive, charming</i>
<i>It's alarming, how charming I feel</i>		<i>without compare</i>
<i>And so pretty</i>	<i>Y ahora</i>	<i>And now</i>
<i>That I hardly can</i>		
<i>believe I'm real</i>	<i>Ni una estrella me podrá opacar.</i>	<i>Not even a star will be able</i>
		<i>to outshine me.</i>
<i>See that pretty girl in that mirror there</i>		
	<i>¿Ves en el espejo que hermosa soy?</i>	<i>Have you ever seen in the</i>
		<i>mirror how beautiful I am?</i>
<i>Who can that attractive girl be?</i>	<i>¿Quién es esa bella mujer?</i>	<i>Who is that pretty girl?</i>
<i>Such a pretty face</i>	<i>Que bonita faz,</i>	<i>What a pretty face</i>
<i>Such a pretty dress</i>	<i>Que bonita atrás</i>	<i>What a pretty behind</i>
<i>Such a pretty smile</i>	<i>Que bonita forma de ser.</i>	<i>What a pretty shape.</i>
<i>Such a pretty me.</i>		

Perhaps most surprising when looking closely at the translation of “I Feel Pretty” is the verse in which Maria enumerates all the "pretty" things about her: her face, her dress, her smile, her whole self. In order to preserve the meter of the song in Spanish translation, Maria's "pretty" attributes are reduced to a list of three: *faz* (face), *atrás* (behind), *forma de ser* (shape), with *faz* and *atrás* also used to maintain the verse's rhyme. While preservation of rhyme and meter is an important pragmatic consideration when translating song lyrics, the meaning behind the specific words chosen alter Maria's character. The English lyrics focus on the innocent Maria's face and smile. When translated, the focus moves to her body, specifically her derriere. An equivalent to the line "such a pretty me," in which Maria celebrates herself as a complete woman is non-existent in the Spanish translation. In Spanish, *atrás* is a very proper-sounding way to denote the behind. It is not slang or vulgar, and is an appropriate choice for this production number. When sung in English, Maria fancies herself grown-up and her friends

turn toward the dramatic, playfully taunting her. Through the use of a more formal Spanish term, not only does Maria look hopefully toward adulthood; she is moving toward it in multiple ways.

The Spanish translation calls attention to the fact that Maria is changing in a way that is more pronounced than it is in the original English version. Love has made her less innocent. This song is performed prior to the scene in which Maria and Tony consummate their relationship. With a focus on the body, Maria becomes sexualized, and this song serves as her transition into womanhood. Because Maria represents the virginal Latina, in contrast to the hyper-sexualized Anita, it is expected that her innocence would remain throughout this musical number. With the assistance of Spanish language, Maria takes control of her sexuality and celebrates her body. In doing so, she takes control over a part of her life that has heretofore been dictated by her brother, Bernardo.

In the first two translated verses of “I Feel Pretty,” translator Miranda looks to the sky for metaphor. With the celestial goddesses and stars as her rivals, Maria is raised to an otherworldly level. No longer a mere mortal, Tony's love has raised her status and her stakes. With these new lyrics, Maria transcends her status as hopeful immigrant. She sees the love between her and Tony as something divine, something that can transcend the barriers that their cultures pose to their relationship. This seems in contrast to what Laurents describes as his choice to

make their relationship darker and more desolate, reflected in the mostly-bare stage. "The lovers understand that their dreams are futile in the face of larger forces."<sup>116</sup> However, through the use of the Spanish language, this divine relationship is poised for greater tragedy, and the lovers have farther to fall. In the Spanish, they do not see their dreams as futile, yet they are more tragically lost.

A defining trait of the Broadway musical is that characters burst into song when emotions and stakes have reached a point where this is their only means of expression. Switching from one language to another also occurs during moments of high emotion and in this way, the use of the Spanish language mirrors the function of song in the American musical. When the emotional charge behind characters' circumstances leave them with no other way to express themselves, they must find release through song, native language, or both. A mix of two languages can indicate either stress and confusion, or a comfort in successfully navigating two worlds. From a linguistic point of view, this codemixing or codeswitching relieves a tension or frustration that has been built up over the time in which a character's second language is spoken. Eduardo Cabrera credits codeswitching with offering the speaker "a very rich linguistic repertory, but it is also useful for reinforcing the social function the establishment of solidarity."<sup>117</sup>

---

<sup>116</sup> Jesse Green, "When You're a Shark, You're a Shark All the Way," *New York Magazine*, (March 15, 2009).

<sup>117</sup> Eduardo Cabrera, "The Encounter of Two Cultures in the Play *Doña Rosita's Jalapeno*

He quotes Dale Koike who says that, "the bilingual speaker is empowered by the freedom of choice between codes to express more explicitly those ideas which are more intimate to him or her."<sup>118</sup> In *Hispanic Marketing: A Cultural Perspective*, Felipe and Betty Korzenny contrast the "emotion-laden" Spanish language with the "functionally oriented" English language.<sup>119</sup> Arlene Dávila takes issue with this description, seeing it as bolstering the stereotype of the Latino/a as emotional and the Anglo as rational.<sup>120</sup> While the Spanish in recent musicals serves both function and emotion, Dávila's stereotype was certainly a staple of Spanish language musicals of Broadway's Golden Age.

A look back at *Too Many Girls* is a reminder of how this relationship between emotion and language worked on stage in the days of Miranda and Arnaz.

Miranda's and Arnaz's English was fractured and mangled whenever, in excitement, anger or frustration, they burst into a chain of incomprehensible noise. Such instances of verbal nonsense were overemphasized by their thick accents. These tongue twisters, plays on words, and linguistic anarchy were major components of their performances and critical to their efforts to please Anglo-American audiences.<sup>121</sup>

Sandoval-Sánchez' claim that thick accents catered to the audience's infatuation

---

*Kitchen.*" *The State of Latino Theatre in the United States* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 153.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

<sup>119</sup> Felipe and Betty Korzenny, 25.

<sup>120</sup> Dávila, 82.

<sup>121</sup> Sandoval-Sánchez, 48.

with the exotic Other has been consistently reinforced throughout twentieth-century popular culture. For example, Arnaz, who became synonymous with Ricky Ricardo, his “I Love Lucy” personality, would often erupt into fast and furious jumbles of Spanish when Lucy pushed him to his limit. In fact, these outbursts became a convention of the program, and were “funny” or “cute” to an Anglo-American audience. The overemotional, out-of-control Latino/a was humorous to the rational, put-together American. Over time, the Latino/a accent became less of a novelty and more of a black mark against the Latin American immigrant, especially when seeking employment in the United States. More recent playwrights have explored the effects of having an accent in America. A stark example of this is found in Leopoldo Hernández's *Martinez*, when job-hunting Manuel laments, “an accent is like an illness.”<sup>122</sup> Manuel's view of himself as diseased is consistent with Foucault's theories of language and power. “If you are not like everybody else, then you are abnormal, if you are abnormal, then you are sick. These three categories, not being like everybody else, not being normal and being sick are in fact very different but have been reduced to the same thing.”<sup>123</sup> For characters like Manuel and performers like Miranda and Arnaz, there was a loss of power inherent in their performances.

---

<sup>122</sup> Leopoldo Hernández, “Martínez” *Cuban American Theater*. (Houston: Arte Publico Press, 1991), 24.

<sup>123</sup> Roger Pol Droit, “Michel Foucault on the Role of Prisons,” *New York Times*, August 5, 1975, 26.

In the twenty-first-century revival of *West Side Story*, the opposite of early Latino/a musicals' "incomprehensible noise" is exemplified through attention to dialect and pronunciation. Accents now do not function not as generic examples of Latin-ness, as in *Too Many Girls*. Instead, particular accents associated with specific Spanish-speaking countries were employed. As actress Josefina Scaglione, a native Argentinian who played Maria in the Broadway revival, explains, "I speak Spanish, but I had to learn to speak it the way a Puerto Rican would speak it. So, for example, I say *shhevar*" (for the verb *llevar*, to take/to carry) and Puerto Ricans would say *jehvar*." <sup>124</sup> Ensuring that the correct accents were used was not only one way to communicate cultural authenticity, but it allowed the focus to shift away from accents and toward specific words used during heightened states of emotion, when one might access a native language over an adopted one.

In his analysis of *Doña Rosita's Jalapeño Kitchen* Eduardo Cabrera points out that, "Doña Rosita speaks Spanish "when she does a transition from one emotional state to the other. In this way, the protagonist enhances flexibility of expression and can exploit the social and psychological associations of both languages."<sup>125</sup> The strongest example of the way in which Spanish language

---

<sup>124</sup> Susan Stamberg, "A West Side Story With A Different Accent", National Public Radio, December 15, 2008.

<sup>125</sup> Cabrera, 73.

alterations to *West Side Story* lyrics were used to communicate extreme emotion is found through an examination and comparison of the two versions of “A Boy Like That.” In the following excerpt, the original lyrics appear in the left-hand column, revival lyrics in the center column and I have performed a literal translation from Spanish into the English that appears in the right-hand column.

<i>A Boy Like That</i>	<i>Un Hombre Asi</i>	<i>A Boy Like That</i>
<b>Anita</b>		
<i>A boy like that who'd kill your brother,</i>	<i>Ese cabrón mató a tu hermano.</i>	<i>That bastard killed your brother</i>
<i>Forget that boy and find another</i>	<i>Olvida a ese Americano.</i>	<i>Forget that American.</i>
<i>One of your own kind.</i>	<i>Piensa en los tuyos.</i>	<i>Think of your own.</i>
<i>Stick to your own kind!</i>	<i>Sólo en los tuyos.</i>	<i>Only of your own.</i>
<i>A boy that kills cannot love</i>	<i>Si mata no tiene amor.</i>	<i>If he kills he does not love</i>
<i>A boy that kills has no heart</i>	<i>Si mata no hay corazón.</i>	<i>If he kills he doesn't have a heart.</i>
<i>And he's the boy</i>	<i>Y ese ladrón,</i>	<i>And this criminal</i>
<i>Who gets your love</i>	<i>Y ese cabrón</i>	<i>And this bastard</i>
<i>And gets your heart</i>	<i>Le das tu amor.</i>	<i>You gave him your love.</i>
<i>Very smart, Maria, very smart!</i>	<i>¡Por favor, María, por favor!</i>	<i>Please, Maria, please!</i>
<i>A boy like that wants one thing only</i>	<i>Tú sabes bien que es lo que quiere.</i>	<i>You know well what he wants.</i>
<i>And when he's done,</i>		
<i>he'll leave you lonely</i>	<i>Y no le importa si te hiere.</i>	<i>And it is not important to him if he wounds you.</i>
<i>He'll murdered your love</i>	<i>Y desolada,</i>	<i>And devastated,</i>
<i>He murdered mine</i>	<i>Te encontrarás.</i>	<i>You will find yourself.</i>
<i>Just wait and see</i>	<i>Ya tu verás.</i>	<i>You will see at once.</i>
<i>Just wait Maria</i>	<i>Verás, María.</i>	<i>You will see, Maria.</i>
<i>Just wait and see!</i>	<i>Ya tu verás.</i>	<i>You will see at once.</i>

The most striking change in these lyrics is the use of “*ese cabrón*” in place of the phrase “a boy like that.” When translated back out of Spanish, the English equivalent of “*ese cabrón*” is “that bastard.” This is a stronger word choice, and

more accurately communicates Anita's disdain for Tony. He is no longer merely a "boy," but is dehumanized by the assignation of a derogatory term.<sup>126</sup> She later calls him a criminal, recalling his crime in a verse where, in the original English, the crime is not again mentioned. His status as a murderer and a criminal is brought up a third time when Anita uses the phrase "*si te hiere*" ("if he wounds you"). Again, in English, it is implied that Tony will use Maria for sex and leave her "lonely," whereas in the Spanish, she will be wounded, just like her brother. The Spanish lyrics allow the actress playing Anita to convey a growing sense of anger and sorrow.<sup>127</sup> Anita's desperation shows in her pleading with Maria in Spanish, as opposed to demanding, as she does in the English version. The use of the Spanish communicates something more visceral, passionate and guttural, as opposed to the English which does not fully grasp the sentiment. The absence of such passion through the English lyrics communicates the possibility that due to Anita's unfamiliarity with the English language, she is unable to find the appropriate words by which to communicate this passion. However, in her native language, she is given full access to her emotions.

Anita is also given stronger words with which to cut down Tony, a character who is usually viewed as generally likeable by the audience. In the

---

<sup>126</sup> The choice to use "bastard" in lieu of "boy" may also be reflective of the time in which the revival was translated.

<sup>127</sup> Actress Karen Olivo won a Tony award for her portrayal of Anita in this production.



Spanish version of this song, the title is never sung aloud, so it is somewhat curious that a literal translation of the title was not used. A literal translation of “A Boy Like That” would be “*Un Chico Así*”. Instead, it is “*Un Hombre Así*” or “A Man Like That.” Because the translated lyrics are included in the playbill, the audience is reminded that in this production, Tony, at least according to Anita, is a man. In making him a man, not a boy, Anita puts more responsibility on him for his very adult actions. Like Maria, who moves into adulthood with the assistance of the Spanish lyrics in “I Feel Pretty,” the language dictates Tony's status as adult as well.

The most interesting and successful choice that Laurents made when altering language comes at this moment. After Bernardo is killed, Anita no longer speaks English. By reverting to only Spanish, she shows her emotional state and simultaneously denies America. There will be no home there for her. In stark contrast to this is Maria's status at the production's end. She takes Chino's gun and threatens both gangs, declaring, “I can kill too, because I have hate!” She drops the gun and sinks to her knees as her head is shrouded with a widow's veil by one of the Sharks. Maria, who has transitioned into adulthood, is unable to bring herself to complete a rash act of violence. Despite her outburst, the audience realizes that the feud between the Jets and the Sharks ends here. Maria's transition into adulthood metaphorically represents her transition to a new home, one that is

in the United States, but which does not suggest complete assimilation to American life or a rejection of her Puerto Rican identity. Instead, through uniting members of the Jets and Sharks, who carry Tony's body from the stage, she represents the possibility of a life in which the Puerto Rican and American sides of herself will co-exist in this new space.

Lyrics sung by Anita and the Sharks in the *Tonight Quintet* have also been translated into Spanish, so that when all five parts are singing, it is at once a melding of languages and a rupture of sentiments. Again, original lyrics appear on the left, Spanish lyrics in the center and my literal translation on the right.

### **Tonight (Quintet)**

#### **Jets**

*The Jets are gonna have their day tonight*

#### **Sharks**

*The Sharks are gonna have their way Luchamos para ser la ley We are fighting to be the law  
Tonight Tonight. Tonight*

#### **Jets**

*The Puerto Ricans grumble*

*Fair fight*

*But if they start a rumble*

*We'll rumble them right*

#### **Sharks**

*We're gonna hand them a surprise tonight*

*Were gonna cut 'em down to size tonight Sigue peleando sí te caes, tonight Continue fighting  
until you fall  
tonight*

*We said, "O.K., no rumpus,  
No tricks."*

*Dijeron sin cuchillos  
Ayer,*

*They said without knives  
Last night,*

*But just in case they jump us,*

*Los Sharks y sus colmillos*

*The Sharks and their and  
their fangs*

*We're ready to mix  
Tonight.*

*Los van a correr,  
Tonight.*

*Are going to move,  
Tonight.*

**All**

<i>We're gonna rock it tonight,</i>	<i>Habrá un ataque tonight</i>	<i>There will be an attack tonight</i>
<i>We're gonna jazz it up and have us a ball!</i>	<i>Será con precisión de forma total.</i>	<i>It will be done with total precision.</i>
<i>They're gonna get it tonight; The more they turn it on the harder they'll fall!</i>	<i>La bronca empieza tonight</i>	<i>The row begins tonight</i>
	<i>Nos impondremos al momento final</i>	<i>We will defend ourselves to the final moment</i>

**Jets**

*Well they began it*

**Sharks**

	<i>¡Son los culpables!</i>	<i>They are the guilty ones!</i>
<i>And we're the ones who'll stop them Once and for all</i>	<i>Aquí será nuestro momento triunfal,</i>	<i>Here will be out triumphant moment,</i>
<i>Tonight.</i>	<i>Tonight.</i>	<i>Tonight.</i>

**Sharks**

<i>We're gonna rock it tonight!</i>	<i>Habrá un ataque tonight!</i>	<i>There will be an attack tonight!</i>
<i>They're gonna get it tonight, They began it, They began it, The began it. We'll stop 'em once and for all.</i>	<i>Los venceremos Lo empezaron Lo empezaron Lo empezaron Nos impondremos al final.</i>	<i>We will be victorious They started it They started it They started it We will defend ourselves to the end.</i>
<i>The Sharks are gonna have their way, The Sharks are gonna have their day, We're gonna rock it tonight.</i>	<i>Será el capítulo final De una Guerra sin igual Habrá un ataque tonight!</i>	<i>It will be the final chapter Of a war without compare There is going to be an attack tonight!</i>
<i>Tonight!</i>	<i>Tonight!</i>	<i>Tonight!</i>

The use of Spanish here functions to add to the tension between the Jets and the Sharks. By convention, the Sharks understand English, as throughout the production they have encounters with the Jets in which English is spoken. However, the Jets do not speak Spanish. Therefore, the Sharks are able to take power linguistically. Even though they don't speak Spanish, the Jets understand

what the Sharks think of them. Cody Green, who played Jets leader Riff in the Broadway revival, says the language barrier adds to the friction "If you don't understand what's being said, it gets a rise out of you," Green says. "It creates this tension between the two gangs. ... They don't speak the same language."<sup>128</sup> The audience then become witness to a verbal rumble, the physical manifestation of which happens through dance later in the production. Written in five parts, the simultaneous and contrapuntal singing between the Jets, Sharks, Anita, Tony and Maria set an aural battleground ablaze with sound, both familiar and unfamiliar to the audience. The Spanish here adds a layer of conflict which the audience receives through context.

As seen in the above analysis of "A Boy Like That," certain Spanish words and phrases heighten the impact of their meanings. In Spanish, the Sharks are "fighting to be the law," a threat whose successful completion will result in their claim to this space as their turf. On a larger scale this bit of street will be their new home, a Puerto Rican home, not an American one. While the English lyrics call for "no rumpus," the Spanish ones reference the use of weapons, reminding the Jets and audience alike that this is not child's play. Finally, while in English, blame is assigned through the phrase "they began it," in Spanish the Sharks repeatedly call the Jets "guilty," which raises the stakes for both gangs. "They

---

<sup>128</sup> Stamberg, 2008.

began it” sounds like something a child might say when accusing a playmate after getting in trouble, while “guilty” reinforces the image of the law that is set forth by the Sharks at the start of the song. As with the two songs already analyzed, the Spanish brings a more urgent and more adult atmosphere to the entire production.

Despite the fact that *West Side Story's* Spanish language usage seems to more fully capture the feelings of the characters and their status as insiders or outsiders, audience and critical reception to the lyrical changes were less than positive.<sup>129</sup> The revival of *West Side Story* played to audiences for a mere five months before another change was deemed necessary. Many of the English lyrics that had been translated into Spanish were reinstated, including the majority of those in “A Boy Like That” and, to a lesser extent, those in “I Feel Pretty.” If the intent of *West Side Story's* creators was to provide a more “authentic” Latino/a experience, why revert to the English lyrics? Laurents and some of the producers found that the Spanish lyrics were not resonating with audiences in the way they had hoped. *The* reasons for this change were enumerated by Arthur Laurents in an interview with the *New York Times*, “Audiences were getting the general idea of ‘A Boy Like That,’ but they weren’t getting hammered by it. The sheer power of ‘A boy like that who’d kill your brother’ has no real equivalent, and for people

---

<sup>129</sup> See Patrick Healy, “Some ‘*West Side*’ Lyrics Restored to English,” *New York Times*, August 26, 2009 and Josh Getlin, “*West Side Story* with a Spanish Accent,” *Los Angeles Times*, (March 18, 2009).

who don't understand Spanish, the impact was diluted.”<sup>130</sup> Producer Jeffrey Seller concurred. “Arthur and I went back to the show in midsummer to see how it was playing and we reached the conclusion that we could provide a bigger dramatic wallop if we incorporated more English back into ‘A Boy Like That,’ without gutting the integrity of the Spanish that carries the Sharks through the show.”<sup>131</sup> The irony in these statements is that the impact of the Spanish language, for those who understand, is far greater than the comparatively bland English lyrics. Furthermore, because these lyrics lend themselves to a more passionate performance, is the audience not able to relate to the characters' circumstances and universal emotion? Audience members were never formally surveyed to gauge their response to the Spanish lyrics. But Seller commented on post performance discussions with friends and audience members, admitting he was “surprised by how many people had never seen *West Side Story* onstage or its film version and lacked a strong grasp of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. It means we have to work a little bit harder in making sure people understand the show better.” It is difficult to reconcile this statement with *West Side Story*'s iconic status in the history of American musical theatre, film and popular culture. One possibility might be that for younger audiences, as first-time attendees, this version was for them, the original. Yet, would this younger audience not have been

---

<sup>130</sup> Healy, “Some ‘*West Side*’ Lyrics Restored to English.”

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*

exposed to *Romeo and Juliet* in the way that Seller suggests? *West Side Story* seems the ideal choice to experiment with translation. Because the musical is so well-known, it may be safely assumed that audience members are familiar with the story, and perhaps, many of the lyrics. Working under this assumption, the translation into Spanish should not cause a large disruption to an English-speaking audiences' understanding of the plot. Yet, it is this very familiarity that seems to have caused the problem. The complications with the *West Side Story* Spanish language experiment go beyond an uneducated audience.

It seems that the true misstep in the use of Spanish in *The West Side Story* revival is due to two factors. First, the immediacy of a live production does not allow for an in-depth examination of a translation in the way that a written translation affords a reader. Although translations were provided in the playbill, when viewing a production, it is distracting and not easy to read along during the performance. It may also be difficult to catch every word depending on a variety of factors including one's seat in the theatre, quality of the sound, vigorous dancing, and the like. With a text, a reader has more time to absorb the translation, and can re-visit the original or look at the two side-by-side. Second, *West Side Story's* iconic place in popular culture makes it difficult to view the production, with these changes, as a straightforward representation of the Latin American experience. The Spanish in *West Side Story* is being layered over preexisting and

well-known lyrics. Songs like "I Feel Pretty," have become standards and have been re-recorded by numerous artists outside the context of the musical. Therefore, those familiar with the English lyrics are able to understand, to some degree, the Spanish version of the song. Yet, they are reminded for the entirety of its performance, that the song has been altered, especially for non-Spanish speakers who must refer to translations provided in the playbill. First-time viewers of the musical, unfamiliar with the score, have a different experience, whereby this, for them, *is* original and must rely on context alone to help them through.

If a monolingual audience presumably could not grasp the impact of the Spanish lyrics in *West Side*, what explains the success of the Spanglish *In the Heights*? The use of the Spanish language in *In the Heights* versus the 2009 revival of *West Side Story* exemplifies organic use of language versus what I term an "overlay" of language. While *Heights* was written and first performed with original lyrics in both English and Spanish, the *West Side Story* revival set Spanish language on top of the English language, as if laying a piece of tracing paper over a drawing and adding elements that do not exist on the original in an attempt at improving it.

While in the past, characters like those in *West Side Story* (1957) spoke English with heavy, perhaps feigned accents, composer Lin-Manuel Miranda and



librettist Quiara Alegría Hudes preserve the culture of their creation through substantial use of the Spanish language. In addition, the staging of the original production of *In the Heights* employs cultural symbols, for example, national flags. This is a departure from props used in productions of the 1940s like the sombreros or oversized clay pot seen in *Too Many Girls*. The latter served as a visual ethnic joke; the sombreros and maracas were viewed as silly displays of a general “Latin-ness,” rather than an indication of cultural traditions or ideology. Instead, Puerto Rican, Dominican and Mexican flags are prominently displayed and the production is infused with Latin music and dance, as well as hip-hop and rap rhythms. Composer Lin-Manuel Miranda views language as a tool, one that he employed often while creating *In the Heights*

I think that we go to theater to experience things we've never experienced before. Language is just another texture at our disposal, as writers. We want to be transported. If we need to break into Swahili to do it, even better.<sup>132</sup>

Even in speaking about using language, Miranda's word choice prompts analysis. He speaks of being “transported,” a concept that is not new to theatergoers. However, this idea proves to be one central to *In the Heights*. Usnavi, Miranda's character and the narrator of the musical, begins his journey with a strong desire to “go home” to the Dominican Republic, where he was conceived, but not born

---

<sup>132</sup> Kyle Sircus interview with Lin-Manuel Miranda, July 28, 2010.

or raised. Throughout the production, he and the audience, are transported to various Latin American countries through language and visual cues. Finally, when Usnavi finds “home,” it is right where he is, in Washington Heights, New York City, USA. Perhaps it is fitting then that *In the Heights* is most successful at using Spanish language lyrics as a texture with which to create a home for its characters. Unlike the revival of *West Side Story*, *In the Heights* was originally created with Spanish lyrics and dialogue, thus eliminating preconceived ideas and knowledge of a past or popular production. Spanish language is first introduced in *In the Heights* as a way to define the characters' cultural space. Spanish is employed immediately, in the first few lines of the opening number, a rap by narrator Usnavi. A simple greeting, “*Como estas?*” (“How are you?”) and the answer “*como siempre*” (“same as always”), set the linguistic style of the show, one that will interweave Spanish, English and Spanglish. Usnavi lets the audience know right away that they are in for an evening of linguistic cultural acrobatics as he raps, “my syntax/Is highly complicated cuz I/Emigrated from the single/Greatest little place in the Caribbean/Dominican Republic.” When asked about the process of integrating Spanish into the score, Hudes explained, “The bilingual components evolved naturally and organically...Spanish is part of how we hear language. There are many sayings in Spanish that just seemed natural at a moment. Much of this came from instinct and "improvisation" rather than us deciding on an English

to Spanish ratio.”<sup>133</sup> *In the Heights* uses the Spanish language as a way to construct "home" in four different ways: (1.) by educating the audience, (2.) through the expression of extreme emotion, (3.) to draw in or alienate the audience as necessary and (4.) by honoring nationalities, generations and traditions.

Miranda educates his audience throughout *In the Heights* in order to draw them in and convey inside knowledge. Regardless of one's familiarity with the Latin American culture, "inside knowledge" is required to communicate the true meaning of and feeling behind specific words and phrases in a foreign language.<sup>134</sup> Translator Eugene Eoyang defines "inside knowledge" as one of "esoteric perspective through which one's familiarity with a culture is insufficient unless s/he partakes in it currently." Without Eoyang's "stereopic knowledge of three-dimensionality and depth," where content and context work together to create full knowledge, an audience will be left without the context with which to understand and accept a literal translation of particular phrases.<sup>135</sup> One way in which Miranda was able to educate his audience was through a method typical to translators of literature: the CSI.

In his article, "Culture-Specific Items in Translation," theorist Javier

---

<sup>133</sup> Kyle Sircus interview with Quiara Alegría Hudes, August 16, 2010.

<sup>134</sup> Eugene Eoyang, *The Transparent Eye* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1993), 139.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid.

Aixela defines culture specific items (CSIs) as “those textually actualized items whose function and connotations in a source text involve a translation problem ... whenever this problem is a product of the nonexistence of the referred item or of its different inter-textual status in the [target] culture system.”<sup>136</sup> For example, in Biblical translation, the use of the word “lamb” becomes problematic when working in the language of cultures where lambs do not exist or are not associated with qualities of innocence and helplessness. . Other CSIs often include names of places, historical figures and food items. He then outlines ways in which translators treat CSIs. These solutions fall into two categories: conservation and substitution. Methods of conservation include: repetition (repeating a CSI so that the reader/audience becomes familiar with it), linguistic translation (a straight translation of a word in one language to its equivalent in another language), extratextual gloss (footnotes, or in the case of *West Side Story*, translations included in the playbill) and intratextual gloss (a definition included when the CSI first appears in the text). Methods of substitution include: synonymy (using a synonym), universalization (using a word or brand name that is understood on a more global scale), deletion, and autonomous creation (making up a new, original word). Of the musicals discussed here, CSIs are most prevalent in *In the Heights*. Miranda most frequently uses conservation in order to facilitate an understanding

---

<sup>136</sup> Javier Aixela, “Culture-Specific Items in Translation,” *Translation, Power, Subversion, Román Álvarez and M. África Valdez, eds.*, (Philadelphia: Multilingual Matters, 1996), 58.

of culture-specific items among the audience. This decision is not unexpected coming from Miranda, who seeks to *conserve* Latin American culture throughout the production.

The standout example of conservation of a CSI is in the song “*Piragua*.” A *piragua* is a Puerto Rican frozen treat, shaped like a pyramid, made of shaved ice and covered with fruit-flavored syrup and sold by vendors called *piragueros*.<sup>137</sup> The closest match to the *piragua* in American culture is the snow cone. In the original Broadway production of *Heights*, the *piraguero* sings these lyrics as he pushes his cart along and attempts to sell his treats.

*Piragua, Piragua*  
 New block of ice, *Piragua*  
*Piragua, Piragua*  
 So sweet and nice, *Piragua*  
*Tengo de mango*  
*Tengo de parcha*  
*De pina y de fresa*  
*Tengo de china, de limon*

Visual cues, like the *piraguero*'s cart and his colorful treats, when mixed with sporadic English lyrics, allow the audience to learn what a *piragua* is, thereby inviting them into the Puerto Rican culture and educating them about its traditions. This short song functions as an invitation for the audience: come into this world and *learn* about it. In the past, such culturally specific items would have

---

<sup>137</sup> In most Spanish-speaking countries, a *piragua* is a small, flat-bottomed boat. The word is a combination of the Spanish words *piramide* (pyramid) and *agua* (water).

been used as a vehicle for audiences to observe from the outside and *laugh at*. The built-in educational aspect of *In the Heights* is an ingenious way to marry the characters and audience, and create an openness among cultures that allows this story of homecoming to work. As the song continues, the *piraguero* enumerates the flavors he has for sale: mango, *parcha* (passion fruit), *pina* (pineapple), *fresa* (strawberry), *china* (orange), and *limón* (lemon). While the traditional Spanish word for orange is *naranja*, here, the word *china* is used, which is specific to Puerto Rico. The specificity of this word further illustrates that the *piraguero* and the *piragua* are from Puerto Rico. While not every audience member may have this inside knowledge, author Miranda honors specific cultural traditions, a departure from musicals of the past in which actors performed unspecified "Latinness" on stage.

The acknowledgment of specific cultural and national elements continues through the incorporation of Spanish words whose meanings are divergent across borders. Just as American and British English share words with different meanings, particular words in Spanish have varied definitions in specific countries. Some examples include *china* ("orange" in Puerto Rico; "child" in Colombia) and *guagua* ("bus" in Puerto Rico; the sound a dog makes in Mexico). Conversely, different countries may have varying translations of the same English word. For example, "earrings" are *arretes* in the Dominican Republic, while in

Puerto Rico they are *pantallas*. Many Spanish words are already a part of American English vocabulary, for example, rodeo and patio. Some meanings change when words move from Spanish into English. For example, the Spanish *bonanza* translates to fair weather, while in English it refers to an increase in wealth or profit.

The most literal use of language education in *In the Heights* is found at the start of Act II. In the song "Sunrise," Nina conducts an impromptu Spanish lesson with her boyfriend, Benny. In this metaphorical "morning after" song, the *In the Heights* equivalent of *West Side Story*'s "A Place for Us," the couples' two languages become one. The song is very simply constructed. Nina offers up a word in Spanish, and Benny recites its English equivalent.

**Nina**

Are you ready to try again?

**Benny**

I think I'm ready

**Nina**

Okay, here we go. *Esquina*

**Benny**

Corner

**Nina**

*Tienda*

**Benny**

Store

**Nina**  
*Bombilla*

**Benny**  
Lightbulb

**Nina**  
You're sure?

**Benny**  
I'm sure

**Nina**  
3 out of 3, you did alright

**Benny**  
Teach me a little more

**Nina**  
*Calor*

**Benny**  
Heat

**Benny**  
*Anoche*

**Benny**  
Last night

**Nina**  
*Dolor*

**Benny**  
Pain

**Nina**  
*Llámame*



**Benny**  
Call me

**Nina**  
*Azul*

**Benny**  
Blue

**Nina**  
*Amame*

**Benny**  
Love me

**Nina**  
Perhaps I do...

**Benny**  
Well how do you say kiss me?

**Nina**  
*Bésame*

**Benny**  
And how do you say hold me?

**Nina**  
*Abrázame. Al amanacer. At sunrise.*

**Nina/Benny**  
Anything at all can happen  
Just before the sunrise.

The manipulation of language in this scene serves a dual purpose. First, it advances both the plot and the relationship between the two characters. Benny,

who has been working as a driver and dispatcher for Nina's father's taxi service, is an outsider both because he is the only African American in the neighborhood and because of his inability to speak Spanish. He needs this skill in order to communicate with the other drivers, which will advance his position with the company. By teaching him her native language, Nina creates an intimate connection with Benny and lets him into her world. In doing so, she simultaneously allows Benny the opportunity to get close to her father, who disapproves of their cross-cultural relationship. The second purpose of this scene is to educate English-speakers in the audience. In essence, the audience shares a role with Benny, learning words and phrases along with him.

Unlike *West Side Story*, where Spanish is the language of the outsider, or, at best, used as an equalizer, *In the Heights* privileges the Spanish language. In this scene, Nina holds the power as teacher, and so it is the Spanish language that is dominant here, and becomes the home language of its characters. The audience becomes student to the language, relying on the Spanish-speaking Nina to guide them through the story. Typically, an oral foreign language exam is structured so that the instructor offers an English word, and the student must recite its foreign-language equivalent, proving their ability to speak the foreign language. By inverting this process, Benny must demonstrate his ability to *understand* Spanish. To a greater degree, he must demonstrate an understanding of Nina's culture. This

is of particular importance to the plot of the musical, due to the fact that Benny, because of his race, is told by Nina's father Kevin, that he will “never be one of us.” Beyond a plot device, Benny's understanding of Spanish demonstrates his willingness to meld cultures, and serves as a conduit for the audience to do so as well.

Just as in *West Side Story*, characters in *In the Heights* access Spanish when pushed to extreme emotional states. When Kevin, owner of Rosario's Car and Limousine, learns that his daughter, Nina, has dropped out of college, he sings *Inútil*, which translates to “Useless.” The only way he can capture the true feeling of what it means to be useless is in his native language. Keeping within Miranda's educational framework, it is both repeated and translated within the context of the song as Kevin sings, “This isn't happening/*Inútil*/Useless/Just like my father was before me/*Inútil*/Useless.” He first sings the word in Spanish and then English. Right from the start the audience has learned a Spanish word, what it means, and what it means for this character in particular. The impact of his sentiment is made more forceful by the fact that *inútil* is the only Spanish word used in the song. As the only, and most important, Spanish word, it stands out, heightening the impact of its sound and meaning. As the song continues, Kevin sings his story of coming to America. The word *inútil* is then abandoned in favor of the English “useless.” This demonstrates Kevin's desire to assimilate and leave his *inútil* home and past

behind him. “Useless,” as the final word in the song, working in counterpoint to *inútil* as the second word in the song, illustrates the distance that separates him from his roots.

Connected to the use of Spanish language in these times of strong emotion is its use when religion and spirituality are invoked. A simple but striking example is found in *In the Heights*' great moment of sorrow following the passing of Abuela Claudia. Usnavi and Nina are joined by the entire community in singing “*Alabanza*.” They repeat the phrase “*Alabanza, alabanza Dona Claudia, Señor*” as they hold a touching candlelight vigil. Usnavi explains the meaning and significance of *alabanza*

*Alabanza* means to raise this thing to God's face and to sing  
 Quite literally "praise to this"  
 When she was here, the path was clear  
 And she was just here  
 She was just here...  
*Alabanza a Doña Claudia, Señor* (Praise to Claudia, God.)

Once again, in the most intimate of moments, the audience is invited into this world as they receive a Spanish lesson. Another example of linguistic expression tied to heightened emotion and spirituality is found in the joyful song “*Carnaval del Barrio*” (“Neighborhood Carnival”). While celebrating the Fourth of July and looking at flags from their respective countries, the Piragua Guy and Usnavi sing together:

*Me acuerdo de mi tierra...*

I remember my land

<i>Esa bonita bandera!</i>	That pretty flag!
<i>Contiene mi alma entera!</i>	Holds my entire soul
<i>Y cuando yo me muera,</i>	And when I die
<i>Entierrame en mi tierra!</i>	Bury me in my land!

For the *piraguero*, an immigrant to the United States, Spanish is used here as he remembers the land where he spoke his native language. In speaking of his land, he uses the language native to it, and ideologically reverts to his status as solely Puerto Rican. For Usnavi, an American who spends much of the production yearning to move to the Dominican Republic, he uses Spanish as he engages in a fantasy of “his land.” A bit of foreshadowing in these lyrics hint at Usnavi's ultimate discovery: his land is where he has been all along, so this song of homecoming is really an affirmation of his place through a language that uses to create this home.

Moments of somber emotion are not the only ones that see Spanish in *In the Heights*. Largely imbued with hip-hop and rap rhythms, wordplay is peppered throughout the score, something that appealed to Miranda and came easily to him because of the natural melding of Spanish and English. “We are writing the rules in terms of how Spanish and Hip-Hop can be incorporated into traditional musical theater storytelling. That second point was particularly exciting from a lyrical standpoint: We could rhyme Spanish with English, attack the language.”<sup>138</sup>

Vanessa and Daniela, two hairdressers who provide much of the show's comic

---

<sup>138</sup> Kyle Sircus interview with Lin-Manuel Miranda

relief sing “*No Me Diga*,” (“Don't Tell Me”) as they gossip about the sexual exploits of their neighbors. This Spanish phrase punctuates, or attacks, the end of each tale. Unlike the laughable Spanish in *Too Many Girls*, the audience is in on this conversation and shares in the gossip. Illustrating how Spanish reflects the creation of home, the girls engage in an activity that is secret, private, relegated to one's space. Wordplay is used again as Usnavi and Abuela Claudia relay the story of how he came to be named. Abuela Claudia sings,

Remember the story of your name  
 It was engraved on a passing ship on the day your family came  
 You father said "Usnavi"  
 That's what we'll name the baby

Usnavi responds:

It really said "US Navy," but hey  
 I worked with what they gave me okay

Not only does the story of Usnavi's name add a humorous moment to the production, it assists in situating Usnavi as an American, as the first two letters of his name are actually taken from the words United States.

It can be argued that *In the Heights* is actually a trilingual production, due to its frequent use of Spanglish. Puerto Rican linguist Salvador Tío coined the term Spanglish in the 1940s.<sup>139</sup> It has become familiar in the United States and indicates the simultaneous use of English and Spanish. Spanglish also takes the

---

<sup>139</sup> Tío also coined the term *ignañol* to refer to the use of English mixed with Spanish as used in Spanish speaking countries, but this term is not nearly as popular as “Spanglish.”

form of newly developed words and phrases that incorporate the two languages. Spanglish uses both phonetic and direct translation. Phonetic translation is the process by which words are invented in order to communicate a new idea or experience. These new words sound more similar to their English equivalents than they do to their Spanish pronunciations. The examples below illustrate phonetic translation in Spanglish:

Spanglish	English	Spanish
marqueta	market	<i>mercado</i>
rentar	rent	<i>alquilar</i>
troca	truck	<i>camion</i>

In *In the Heights*, Spanglish is found throughout the play, primarily through the mixing of English and Spanish words in the same sentence. For example, “I got cafe, but no *con leche*,” and in the song “*No Me Diga*,” in which the verses are in English and the chorus in Spanish.

Spanglish is commonplace amongst US-Latinos in large cities like New York and Chicago and in border states like Florida and California, its use is contested in smaller cities along the US-Mexican border. Some Mexican-Americans view those who use Spanglish as rejecting their heritage. There is even a term for such people; *pochos*, whose original meaning is “spoiled fruit.” The same term is used to refer to first-generation Mexican-Americans who speak poor

Spanish, reinforcing stereotypes on either side of the border. Does the use of Spanglish represent a corruption of Spanish or does its increased use ensure the preservation of culture that might otherwise be lost? For *In the Heights*, Spanglish is another linguistic tool used to assert power, reclaim agency and create home.

Miranda claims that “we really use the Spanish to isolate or unify the characters,”<sup>140</sup> and in doing so, he also isolates and unifies the audience, who are then able to identify with these characters.

He elaborates,

In “Breathe,” all of the neighbors singing to Nina in Spanish about their pride in her further serves to alienate her and separate her from the community. In Carnival, it comes out when the flags of their home countries come out, a unifying force despite the fact that they've all got different flags. Sunrise comes in the form of a Spanish lesson, that serves to bring our young lovers closer together.<sup>141</sup>

Miranda's claim that the Spanish in “Breathe” separates Nina from the community is worth investigating. During this song, Nina directly addresses the audience as she tries to build up the courage to tell her parents that she has dropped out of Stanford. She sings in English, her native language, but is accompanied by members of the community who sing to her in the style of a *bolero* song.<sup>142</sup> They sing “*Sigue andando el camino por toda su vida/Respira.*” (“Follow walking this

---

<sup>140</sup> Kyle Sircus interview with Lin-Manuel Miranda, July 28, 2010.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid.

<sup>142</sup> A *bolero* is a form of slow-tempoed Latin music.



path all of your life/Breathe”). Miranda claims that this further alienates Nina from her community. As a member of the third generation represented on stage, the Spanish sung by the older members of the community does illustrate a distance between Nina and her heritage. However, later in the play, Nina makes a point of mentioning how hard she worked to learn Spanish and wonders what life would be like if her parents had stayed in Puerto Rico with “my people.” This song is autobiographical, as it draws on Miranda's first-hand experience as the child of Latin American immigrants.

Every summer, my sister and I were sent back to my dad's hometown of Vega Alta, Puerto Rico...and learn Spanish the old fashioned way, sink or swim. My Spanish accent was bad enough for the kids in Vega Alta to call me “Gringo” and “Americano,” and exclude me from stickball games. I would spend hours on those porches, imagining what my life would be like if I had been born here. Would they let me play stickball? Would I be more Puerto Rican?<sup>143</sup>

This yearning for a sense of connection to heritage and a wholeness of self is demonstrated in Nina's character both in “Breathe” and throughout the production. Here, Miranda draws a deep connection between language and identity, one that he felt first-hand. He later goes on to remember spending many days with the grandmothers and grandfathers of the community, who would demonstrate great patience with him as he attempted to speak Spanish. It is this aspect of Miranda's

---

<sup>143</sup> Lin-Manuel Miranda, *In the Heights Study Guide*. Stage Notes (New York, NY. 2007).

childhood that is brought into “Breathe.” Although she is American and English is her first language, Nina does speak Spanish and so she understands the community as they sing. Rather than isolating her from the community, it seems that they encourage her and she feels a deep connection to them as she struggles with her confession.

The alienation that Nina experiences during “Breathe” works on another level for the audience. The non-Spanish speakers in the audience do not understand the community's encouraging words, but through context, can glean that they are supportive of Nina. It is this part of the audience, however, that is distanced or alienated from the inside knowledge of the Spanish-speaking community. For the Spanish speakers in the audience, they may be drawn in, and identify with the community. Older generations may identify with them as well, while younger people may identify with Nina. This elaborate drawing in and pushing away of the audience through language is an ingenious way in which Miranda keeps the audience's minds and emotions engaged. Hudes claims “if the Spanish ever became confusing or alienating to an English-speaking audience, our producers would let us know to scale back or where they got lost.”<sup>144</sup> It is just the right amount of distancing through language that serves the production.

Miranda's most successful use of Spanish language in order to

---

<sup>144</sup> Kyle Sircus interview with Quiara Alegria Hudes, August 16, 2010.

communicate a sense of home comes in *Heights'* Act II eleventh-hour production number, “*Carnaval del Barrio*.”<sup>145</sup> After a neighborhood-wide blackout followed by looting and confusion, the residents of Washington Heights celebrate the Fourth of July one day late. In a moment that is at once celebratory and poignant, the *Heights* ensemble carries or displays flags from their various countries in windows and across fire escapes. Up to this point, various nationalities have been mentioned: Usnavi is Dominican, Nina is Puerto Rican, Abuela Claudia is Cuban and members of the community are Mexican. These four nationalities make up the largest percentage of Latin Americans in the United States today.<sup>146</sup> The stage is set for a multicultural celebration of American independence. The majority of the song is the repetition of the simple Spanish phrase “*carnaval del barrio*,” while later, as the characters parade across the stage, they sing,

*Alza la bandera* (raise the flag)  
*La bandera Dominicana* (the Dominican flag)  
*Alza la bandera* (raise the flag)  
*La bandera Puertorriquena* (the Puerto Rican flag)  
*Alza la bandera* (Raise the flag)  
*La bandera Mejicana* (the Mexican flag)  
*Alza la bandera* (raise the flag)  
*La bandera Cubana* (the Cuban flag)

This song reinforces the notion of home by marrying the aural and visual aspects of the production. The first and most obvious indication that this is home is that

---

<sup>145</sup> This song actually happens relatively early in Act II, but is the biggest production number of the act, and the entire musical.

<sup>146</sup> US Census, 2009.

the setting for the show is a *barrio*, a neighborhood. Throughout the production characters move and dance throughout the space, illustrating their familiarity with the geography, the businesses and dwellings, and the people. In “*Carnaval del Barrio*,” by integrating a primary visual cue of nation and culture, a flag, and the primary language of the characters, Spanish, on the most patriotic of American holidays, the message is clear: “we *are* America.” The important element here is that in celebration of the Fourth of July, the Washington Heights residents do not wave American flags and sing in English. The use of the flags unifies the community as Latin Americans, yet honors the individuality of the particular nations represented. Instead, they bring out their own language and cultural traditions to honor their geographical and ideological home.

Generationally, the older characters in *In the Heights* sustain the use of Spanish, while the younger characters use Spanglish more freely, each reflecting an integral piece of their cultural identity. While the language of the older characters suggests, the past, where they *were*, the younger generation is caught in between, with one foot in where they (or their parents) *were*, and the other where they *are*. An example of the older generation's connection to the past was already seen in Kevin's song, “*Inútil*.” Later, Abuela Claudia, the eldest generation represented on stage, sings “*Paciencia y Fe*.” (“Patience and Faith”). This Spanish phrase is repeated and while Usnavi translates many Spanish terms for the

audience, she does not. As an immigrant and eldest character, she maintains the strongest connection to her roots, her past and her country, Cuba. This song, in fact, takes place in Abuela Claudia's memory, as she recalls her childhood and young adulthood in Cuba, before coming to the United States. Through this song, she unpacks her memories of Cuba and in doing so, finally creates a real home in the United States, one that is just as much Cuban as it is American.

Language in *In the Heights* keeps the audience and integral part of the production by drawing them in and alienating them as is necessary. The audience is invited into the *barrio*, but are not completely a part of it, when language alienates them. The bilingual audience is able to experience the full linguistic and semiotic meaning of the show, understanding both the textual and contextual transmission. What is different about *In the Heights* is that it is not a foreign text translated, but one that purposely mixes language.

In 2002, Marcos Martínez, in his discussion of Latino/a plays, remarked that “the assumption that writing for an Anglo audience solely in English will make the Latino/a experience marketable remains to be seen. Because of a linguistic ignorance...of certain producers, Latinos are defined as monolingual English speakers, rather than the bilingual community they actually represent.”<sup>147</sup> Not ten years later, it seems that some headway is being made in changing the

---

<sup>147</sup> Marcos Martinez, “US-Latino/a Theatre: Confronting the Issues,” *The State of Latino Theatre in the United States*, (New York: Routledge, 2002), 26.

attitudes of theatre-makers and audiences. Yes, the Broadway musical certainly draws in larger audiences and has the luxury of bigger budgets than non-musical plays. Yet, perhaps the success of projects like *In the Heights* and through what was learned in *West Side Story*'s experimentation will allow Latino/a playwrights to make bolder choices in using language to communicate with both monolingual and bilingual audiences.

Ovidi Carbonell discusses the ways in which strangeness and familiarization work together. Just as with Orientalism, where the Orient is created to coincide with European ideas about the Orient, the Latin American was created to coincide with American ideas of the Latin-American. In *In the Heights*, the Latin American is created by the Latin-American, rejecting this idea and re-creating a new sense of identity through language. Carbonell asks "To what extent are these peoples allowed to construct a selfhood devoid of Western assumptions and mythologies?"<sup>148</sup> Going further, one might ask, to what extent are these assumptions reinforced or refuted through theatrical performance? "These and many other commonplace problems...have, at their core a fundamental issue of the production and transmission of knowledge, of relocation and the unfolding of the borderlines of identity between selfhood and otherness." Here, Carbonell refers to Third-World, non-Western countries. However, the same renegotiation of the

---

<sup>148</sup> Carbonell, "Exoticism in Translation: Writing, Representation and the Colonial Context," 85.

borderlines of identity take place for those immigrants and first-generation Latin Americans living in the United States. When cultural transmission takes place, the linguistic and semiotic structures of the source and target cultures work together. Instead of textual translation, the first layer of translation, there is a contextual translation in which the "alien" culture is made to make sense to the target culture.

The evolution of the Spanish language in the Broadway musical reflects an evolution in attitudes toward the place of the Latin American immigrant. From the unintelligible noise of *Too Many Girls* to the translated lyrics of *West Side Story*, the original Spanish lyrics of *In the Heights* and the light touches of Spanish in *The Capeman*, a greater focus has been placed on the importance of language in creating a sense of home for the characters. By using language to create character, illustrate emotion, honor nations and generations and situate the audience in a place of learning, *In the Heights* has been most successful in doing so.

### Chapter Three

#### Here and Now: Memory and Nostalgia in the Latino Musical

In her article “Nostalgia in Cuban Theatre Across the Shores,” Patricia Gonzalez describes the Cuban experience as a “peculiar” one that has “created a parenthesis in time and space that nourishes the literary and theatrical production of those in exile.”<sup>149</sup> The parenthesis in time and space that Gonzalez speaks of is one that reflects the interstitial space of the exile or immigrant. It is one where memories of the past are reiterated on stage in a cathartic working out of the questions: “Who am I?” and “Where am I?” Cuban, Puerto Rican and other Latin American playwrights have a long history of addressing memory and nostalgia in non-musical plays and performance art. Like the playwrights themselves, their characters “did not realize that they were...carrying in their luggage an infinite number of memories.”<sup>150</sup> Through this metaphor of packing up one's cultural identity, Gonzalez reminds us that these memories are a large and integral part of how the Latino/a immigrant (re)creates home. The memories carried along with these individuals provide the foundation for a new geographic and ideological reality. Memories also provide an outlet whereby the immigrant may cope with

---

<sup>149</sup> Patricia Gonzalez, “Nostalgia in Cuban Theatre Across the Shores,” *The State of Latino Theatre in the United States*, (Routledge: New York, NY, 2002), 79.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid.



loss, whether it be the loss of a physical space, family and friends, or culture and traditions. The (re)creation of such memories on stage allows for an exploration of the past and the future, but most importantly, offers insight into how these memories inform the present.

Memory of a time gone by or a distant place can spark nostalgia, a yearning for the past, often associated with idealism and sentimentality. These characteristics have taken on negative connotations in the theatre, and the immigrant or exiled character may be viewed as detached from or in denial of the reality of the past. Eduardo Cabrera explains this phenomenon in his article, "The Encounter of Two Cultures," relying on Emilie Hicks' discussion of border writing. "When one leaves one's own country, the place of origin starts to be a mental representation in one's memory: the objects that reminded us of the past don't exist anymore. And the process of reterritorialization starts almost simultaneously; nostalgia begins to be experienced."<sup>151</sup> As memories fade, so do the meanings associated with them and the immigrant is left with a yearning for the simulacra of objects and ideas of the past, rather than the actual item or experience. However, nostalgia can also provide a space for collective memory that fosters a unification of dispersed people. Indeed, Gonzalez goes on to call

---

<sup>151</sup> Cabrera, 67.

nostalgia a “good virus” which has “no effective antibiotic.”<sup>152</sup> As a group, Latin American immigrants and first-generation US-Latinos pass on the virus of memory and nostalgia in order to create a new, living organism: home. In the musicals discussed here, attempts are made to (re)create home via memory and nostalgia. In *The Capeman* and *In the Heights*, memory and nostalgia are: (1.) connected to cultural authenticity; (2.) connected to identity; (3.) used to explore generational conflict and changes; and (4.) used to draw on the collective memory of audiences.

Memory and nostalgia have also been used in the Broadway musical both thematically and as a storytelling device. Examples include Stephen Sondheim and James Goldman's *Follies* and Jerry Bock and Sheldon Harnick's *Fiddler on the Roof*. It is in non-musical plays, particularly the genre of magic realism that the US-Latino/a immigrant narrative has been explored theatrically and we must look to these plays for insight into how and why memory and nostalgia are manipulated. In fact, both *The Capeman* and *In the Heights* share significant characteristics with non-musical Latin American plays that address similar themes.

The genre of magic realism in particular, has served as a vehicle by which memory has been manipulated in order to capture the identity confusion and

---

<sup>152</sup> Gonzalez, 80.

liminal state of the Latin American immigrant or exile. Magic realism is a genre found in literature and visual art and is frequently associated with Latin American works. It is defined by its use of supernatural or otherworldly occurrences within the context of realism. The most well-known theatrical example of magic realism in Latin American theatre is José Rivera's *Marisol*, in which an angel visits the title character, determined to incite the Apocalypse. Other examples include Milcha Sanchez-Scott's *Evening Star*, in which a white rose literally becomes the Virgin Mary and Dolores Prida's *Botánica* in which seeds from “the God tree” are used to create potions for healing and love. Other Latin American plays are written in what has been deemed a “Fornesian” style, denoting characteristics consistent with the work of Cuban playwright Maria Irene Fornés. This style includes conventions such as montage, multiple settings, fluidity of time, and short scenes. The Fornesian fluidity of time and location allows for easy manipulation of memory and nostalgia. In each of these plays, the Latin American immigrant or US-Latino/a grapples with memories of their homeland and attempt to either recreate a physical space reminiscent of that land (in the city, the garden, or a shop) or insert their memories and traditions into a new way of living. The above examples illustrate a strong tie between memory and religious symbolism, which will be discussed later in this chapter. It is no coincidence that the above mentioned playwrights are Puerto Rican and Cuban, respectively.

A common thread among many plays by Latin American authors, particularly those from Cuba and Puerto Rico is the idealized or distorted imagery of the immigrant's homeland. Virgil Suárez and Delia Poey have referred to memory and history as “unavoidable themes” in US-Cuban literature and describe the characters of these works as having

a sense of displacement, the persistence of memory...and the idealization of Cuba itself. A fractured relationship with American society illustrates an identity rooted in real and imagined personal recollections of the past. They nourish and justify their sense of self by frequent returns to symbolic and often mythical sites of memory.<sup>153</sup>

In many Latin American plays not limited to the Cuban experience alone, the symbols and myths that the immigrant integrates into American life result in the essentialization and tropicalization of the homeland. In Migdalia Cruz's *Miriam's Flowers*, Delfina's New York City apartment is the site of death and destruction, which is contrasted with her memories of happier times in Puerto Rico and the natural beauty of the island. However, her references to Puerto Rico include only music, food and wildlife.<sup>154</sup> Consequently, Puerto Rico becomes both essentialized and idealized in the same way that *West Side Story's* Rosalia reduces the island to a stereotype of “tropical breezes, always the pineapples growing,

---

<sup>153</sup> Virgil Suárez and Delia Poey, *Little Havana Blues: a Cuban-American Literature Anthology*, (Houston: Arte Público Press, 1996), 10.

<sup>154</sup> See Huerta's discussion of *Miriam's Flowers* in *Literary Cultures of Latin America* for further examples.

always the coffee blossoms blowing.” It is a place detached from reality, and one constructed in binary opposition to the United States, allowing Delfina to cope with her liminal state through rejection of her new space. In Cherrie Moraga's *Shadow of a Man*, Mexico appears only on a television screen in the form of a *telenovela* (soap opera). Here, Mexico is also distorted, and becomes the site of romance and adventure. Memory is selective and nostalgia does not allow characters like Delfina and Rosalia to confront harsher realities of the past. For Delfina, it is only after her family has been touched by tragedy that this changes. Late in the play, she makes a pigeon soup for its healing powers and recalls: “In Puerto Rico, we had to go to the mountains to catch them. Here, they come to you....Pigeons eat good in New York. They eat meat. In Puerto Rico, the pigeons eat vegetables, not enough fat on them to make a good sauce.”<sup>155</sup> According to Jorge Huerta, in this scene,

We have witnessed the dissolution of this family and as the tragic and inevitable conclusion approaches, the image of lean pigeons on the island of Puerto Rico contrasted with fatter, tastier pigeons on the island of Manhattan is almost a rejection of the paradise island-born *Caribeños* reflect.<sup>156</sup>

Huerta's argument supports the theories set forth by Una Chaudhuri and Maria-Tania Bandes-Becerra, discussed in the introduction to this study, that claim the

---

<sup>155</sup> Migdalia Cruz, *Miriam's Flowers*, New York: Theatre Communications Group, 1990. 82.

<sup>156</sup> Jorge Huerta, *Chicano Drama: Performance, Society and Myth*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000. 68.

immigrant either wholly assimilates into or wholly rejects their new geographic space. Through the rejection of the idealized Puerto Rico of her memory, Delfina presumably accepts the United States, despite its hardships. A recognition and admission of truth about the past force her to make a choice.

In *The Capeman* and *In the Heights*, immigrant and first-generation characters do not make such definitive choices. Rather, memory and nostalgia cause past and present, “here” and “there” to clash with each other in a complicated creation of home. In contrast to Delfina's pigeons are those that belong to *In the Heights'* Abuela Claudia. The staging of this song “*Paciencia y Fe*” is set around Abuela Claudia feeding pigeons in the street outside of her apartment building. She sings:

And as I fed these birds  
 My hands begin to shake  
 And as I say these words  
 My heart's about to break  
 And ay Mama  
 What do you do when your dreams come true?  
 I've spent my life inheriting dreams from you  
 What do I do with this winning ticket?  
 What can I do but pray?  
 I buy my loaf of bread  
 Continue with my day  
 And see you in my head  
 Imagining what you'd say  
 The birds, they fly away  
 Do they fly to La Vibora?  
 Alright, Mama, Okay.  
*Paciencia y fe!*

Unlike her, the birds of Abuela Claudia's childhood town of La Vibora are gifted with flight. They are able to move easily between geographic spaces, something Abuela Claudia cannot do. She struggles with what to do now that she holds a \$96,000 winning lottery ticket. After a lifetime of struggle, the possibility of financial freedom is too much for Abuela Claudia to handle. She had few dreams of her own, with a life formed by her mother's dreams for her. Imagining that the birds in New York fly to La Vibora is one way that Abuela Claudia maintains her connection to her homeland. With her mother as a constant presence, Abuela Claudia is able to stay connected to her Cuban roots, and to La Vibora. In contrast to Delfina's cooked pigeons in *Miriam's Flowers*, Abuela Claudia's birds of flight are representative not of a rejection of her homeland, but of her attempt to live in two worlds. In a sense, these birds carry her memories back and forth between the two lands and allow them to be recreated in the United States. The pigeons that Abuela Claudia feeds during this song are the reincarnation of her memories of the birds of La Vibora. They are the new "birds of home."

Idealistic treatment of the immigrant homeland is not limited to Latin American plays. *Fiddler on the Roof*, an inspiration for the creation of *In the Heights*, has been criticized for its nostalgic view of the shtetl. In his discussion, "Jewish Discourse and the Shtetl," Ben Cion Pinchuk declares that the problem with historiographical treatment of the shtetl. is that it "has been idealized, much

like the play *Fiddler on the Roof*, to represent people's nostalgia, not reality.”<sup>157</sup>

*Fiddler* can be credited with the popular perception of the shtetl and the early Jewish immigrant community in the same way that *West Side Story* can be credited with the popular perception of the *barrio* and early Latin American immigration. Visual images from these musicals have become surrogates for the actual location or experience. These images cannot be divorced from the catchy tunes and festive dancing that accompany them, perpetuating an idealized vision of the immigrant enclave among audiences, most of whom will never experience such communities firsthand. Therefore, memory is altered by nostalgia and new memories are made that perpetuate these idea(l)s. *In the Heights* has received similar criticism from reviewers who have perceived the production as too idealistic or sentimental, one going so far as to accuse the production of “drowning in treacly idealism.”<sup>158</sup> Despite these criticisms, it is important to note that both musicals (along with *West Side Story*) have found a place in the canon of American musical theatre, have received overwhelmingly positive reviews and audience reception. Both received Tony award for Best Musical, Best Score, Best Actor and Best Featured Actress, with both nominated in other categories as well. Most importantly, these musicals have provided a space for immigrant stories to

---

<sup>157</sup> Ben Cion Pinchuk, “Jewish Discourse and the Shtetl,” *Jewish History* 15, no. 2, (June 2001), 172.

<sup>158</sup> Joe Dzaimianowicz, “With Shallow Story, Broadway's *In the Heights* Can't Soar,” *New York Daily News*, (March 10, 2008.)



be told.

*In the Heights* may be viewed as “the Latino *Fiddler*” due to both its popularity and its themes of tradition and community. These themes serve an important purpose in the creation of home for the Latin American immigrant. For those who cannot return home, like Cuban-born exiles, there is the potential for the idealized place in their memory, “a Cuba invented as a remote paradise; a Cuba of the mind, a fantasy island untouched by time and history,”<sup>159</sup> to be recreated in a new geographic space. For others, like *In the Heights*' narrator Usnavi, his community is the source of surrogate memories. Like *Fiddler*'s Tevye, Usnavi “defends 'tradition' to his peers” and “is cloaked in nostalgia.”<sup>160</sup> Yet unlike Tevye, Usnavi has never experienced the homeland he longs for and is reliant on the memories of those who have give him an idealized view of the Dominican Republic.

### **Usnavi**

Yo! I know just where to go  
 There's a little beach named Playa Rincon  
 With no roads, you need a rowboat or motorbike  
 To reach this beach and it's a stone's throw from home  
 My folks' home  
 Before I was born  
 Before they passed on  
 And left me on my own, in New York, with the grocery store  
 They would talk about home I listened closely for the way they whispered to each other

---

<sup>159</sup> Perez-Firmat, 19.

<sup>160</sup> Pinchuk, 175.

'Bout the warmer winter weather  
Inseparable, they even got sick together  
But they never got better  
Passed away that December  
And left me with these memories like dyin' embers

Usnavi's repeated references to the beach are consistent with the idealized view of the islands in the examples of Latin American plays cited above, yet they are directly set against the harsher memories of his dying parents. Their whispers imply that they did not share their memories of the Dominican Republic openly, and so a constructed nostalgia coupled with his inability to get a sense of the real place due to the death of his parents leave Usnavi with no guarantees of home. It is only after the death of Abuela Claudia and the sharing of her memory with Nina and the rest of the community that he comes to the realization that he has used these surrogate memories and constructed nostalgia to create his own home, right where he is. "Abuela, I'm sorry/But I ain't goin' back because I'm telling your story!/I found my island/I've been on it this whole time/I'm home!" These final words in the production acknowledge that the home that Usnavi has been searching for is one that includes Abuela Claudia's memory and her *memories*. Usnavi's home is one in which his liminal state becomes a normative one, and a constant negotiation of his bicultural identity will be necessary. While it may seem an uncomfortable space to live in, for Usnavi, as for many US-Latinos, transculturation is a marker of success. Arturo Sandoval-Sánchez defines

transculturation as “a dialectical process that results from the constant interweaving and negotiation of a bilingual and bicultural reality. This process articulates and constructs a Latino/a hybrid identity that is not homogeneous, unitary, or universal, but rather is contradictory, ambivalent, porous and heterogeneous.”<sup>161</sup> Through its depiction of transculturalism as a problematic but necessary part of life for the US-Latino/a, *In the Heights* acknowledges and respects the US-Latino/a's border existence. Sandoval-Sanchez goes on to say, “Transnationalism occurs in the geopolitical space of *transfrontera*<sup>162</sup> the borderline in which peoples geopolitically forced to separate themselves now negotiate with one another and manufacture new relations, hybrid cultures, and multiple voiced aesthetics.”<sup>163</sup> While transnationalism as it applies to migration indicates the presence of multiple homelands, Sandoval-Sánchez's application of the term to Latin Americans looks to a very specific geographic and ideological point where the construction of homeland must occur. In *In the Heights*, not only does the space of the *barrio* function as a border space, it is a place where displaced peoples to create a home together; a theme that is explored in-depth in *In the Heights*. Transculturation and transnationalism share a relationship with cultural authenticity.

---

<sup>161</sup> Sandoval-Sánchez, 196.

<sup>162</sup> *Transfrontera* translates to “across a boundary.”

<sup>163</sup> Sandoval-Sánchez and Nancy Saporta Sternbach, 32.

In the case of the productions discussed here, memory and nostalgia are inextricably tied to ideas of cultural authenticity. As discussed earlier in this study, cultural authenticity is a problematic concept for theatre artists and audiences, who are increasingly searching for that which is culturally or ethnically “real.” Therefore, one can only explore these attempts on a case-by-case basis, especially in the case of Latin American themed works, where the definition of cultural authenticity is further complicated by the affiliation of Latin American individuals with a region, rather than a particular nation. In the introduction to their collection of essays, *Latino/a Popular Culture*, Mary Romero and Michelle Habell-Pallan argue against “the conception of Latinos as a monolithic cultural group sharing the same language, geographical space, and political struggles,” as well as “the conception that 'popular culture' refers to 'authentic culture of the people.’”<sup>164</sup> Because the blanket term “Latino” encompasses a myriad of nationalities, events that hold a particular meaning for one group, such as the Mexican-American War or the Bay of Pigs, do not hold the same significance for another group. The political and social relationships of particular national groups with the United States are just as varied. While Cubans are typically associated with the Republican Party, Mexicans and Chicanos are generally considered to be aligned with the Democratic Party. This is just one example of how Latinos are

---

<sup>164</sup> Mary Romero and Michelle Habell-Pallan, *Latino/a Popular Culture*, (New York: NYU Press, 2002), 3.

simultaneously unified and separated. This unique circumstance gives these individuals what I term an additional “layer of liminality.” Not only are Latin American immigrants and US-Latinos caught in-between their home culture and traditions and those of the United States, but they are often assumed to be “all the same” and are then caught between a regional identity and an national one. Attempts are made to remedy this situation by “People and artists marked as Latino [who] work against invented labels – redefining themselves, articulating histories, locating their specific place in the nation, and in the process redefine U.S. culture itself.”<sup>165</sup> The concept of cultural authenticity to the Latin American immigrant or US-Latino/a is so complicated, in fact, that scholar Tamara Underiner suggests using the Spanish term *actual* in place of “authentic.” “*Actual* communicates the tangibility of an object as it stands here and now.”<sup>166</sup> In this case, Underiner uses the term to refer to a prop satchel she procured for a production, which required a very specific look and feel. Underiner's model is beneficial as it prompts a shift in perspective surrounding notions of authenticity. In thinking of authenticity in the “here and now,” we acknowledge that there is no standard by which to measure authenticity, but that it is an evolving concept. Furthermore, this perspective allows us to draw a connection between memory

---

<sup>165</sup> Ibid.

<sup>166</sup> Tamara Underiner, “Opening the Shaman's Bag,” *The State of Latino Theatre in the United States*, (Routledge: New York, NY, 2002), 182.

and cultural authenticity in which memories are not left in the past, but are revived by the immigrant and US-Latino/a in the present as illustrated in the musicals discussed here. Each act of remembering creates a new experience and generates a set of thoughts and emotions that are, in some ways, connected to the past, but in other ways are influenced by the current moment and all that has happened between the time of the original memory and the present. Therefore, in using memory to reconstruct home, the Latino/a figure is creating a new experience and a new memory in the present moment.

Artists in the Latin American theatrical genre often refer to collective memory in order to achieve a sense of cultural authenticity. The Oxford English Dictionary defines collective memory as “the memory of a group of people, passed from one generation to the next.” The term is often used to refer specifically to a cultural group, whose share memories of their homeland and events surrounding their culture. However, memories fade, and as Arthur Neal states, “in the telling and retelling the stories of our past, the events in question become stereotyped and selectively distorted as they become embedded in our collective memory.”<sup>167</sup> Both *The Capeman* and *In the Heights* address issues of cultural authenticity by relying on collective memory to unify its audiences.

Musician and songwriter Paul Simon calls *The Capeman* “a memory play”

---

<sup>167</sup> Arthur Neal, *National Trauma and Collective Memory: Extraordinary Events in the American Experience* (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 2005), 34.

and it is structured as such, with flashbacks, shifts between time and place, and narration through direct address to the audience. While *The Capeman* is told from the point of view of the title character, it is not solely the individual whose memory is explored, as exemplified with *The Glass Menagerie's* Tom. Rather, the creators of *The Capeman* attempted to stage a collective memory. In doing so, the production did more for the audience in their search for home than it did for the characters on stage.

Memory played a role in the creation of *The Capeman* from its inception in 1989. Paul Simon recalled his childhood in New York City and remembered a 1959 news story splashed across the front pages of local papers for a week. In these articles was the “personification of juvenile delinquency and the breakdown of society as we were coming to the end of the Eisenhower era and right into the dawn of liberalism,” in the form of Salvador Agrón, the youngest person ever to be sentenced to the electric chair at age sixteen.<sup>168</sup> As Simon researched his topic, he drew on the memories of Agrón's sister, those who knew Agrón's family and Agrón's own journals, which recounted his experiences in several prison systems. At the time, Simon was recording “The Rhythm of the Saints” album in Brazil, and was interested in Latin American musical styles, which he sought to

---

<sup>168</sup> Agrón's death sentence was later commuted to life in prison by New York Governor Rockefeller. Agrón served 20 years in prison, escaping once during that time. He died of a heart attack in 1986, shortly after his release from prison.

incorporate into a through-composed version of Agrón's story. The epic nature of the story, which spans from the late 1940s in Puerto Rico through the 1980s in the United States allowed for a mixture of musical styles and “a wide geographic arc.”<sup>169</sup>

In interviews leading up to the premiere, Simon was especially proud to point to authenticity of casting, with Panamanian Rubén Blades, Nuyorican Marc Anthony and Puerto Rican pop star Ednita Nazario leading the ensemble. Furthermore, all Puerto Rican characters were played by Latinos, a casting practice unseen in *West Side Story*. At the time of its premiere in 1998, the Broadway world was still focused on “colorblind” or “nontraditional” casting practices in which ethnicity is not considered or actors in a minority ethnic group are cast where ethnicity is not essential to a role. Simon sought a certain cultural authenticity in finding actors that shared collective memory and cultural traditions with the characters they played. However, because Latin American actors had been underemployed, this casting opportunity was the equivalent of nontraditional casting.

The casting of Latin American actors in Latin American roles has become more and more popular. Most recently, the 2008 revival of *West Side Story* allowed its creators to boast about “authentic” casting. Ali Ewoldt, who plays

---

<sup>169</sup> *Charlie Rose: A conversation with musician Paul Simon*, NPR, June 28, 2007.



Maria in the 2011 touring production of *West Side Story* admits, “My agent said I should have an answer ready when casting asked about my ethnicity. I fall into the category of 'ambiguously ethnic' so I included Spanish...I'm half Filipino”<sup>170</sup>

Ewoldt's status as “ambiguously ethnic” makes her ambiguously authentic. Like the performative Latinas of the early twentieth century, she fits the ethnicity of the role just enough. Ewoldt credits this new hunger for “authentic” actors to current trends in film and television. Such casting practices are somewhat problematic in that while the intention may be to reach authenticity, it may be pushed to the extreme, and result in a reversal of status for Latino/a actors, who may find themselves segregated as they were in the early twentieth century. Tamara Underiner argues that “the various mechanisms of mainstream theatrical production continue to promote a mythical universalism that masks a different reality: that mainstream theatre is in fact the theatre of the particular, and particularly privileged, ethnic group.”<sup>171</sup> From this perspective, home cannot be created for the Latin American immigrant when they are represented by an Other. How can the memories and experience of the Other come close to approximating that which is “real?” Ironically, none of *The Capeman's* creators or artistic staff were Latino/a themselves, nor are the producers or staff of the current touring production of *West Side Story*. Yet, in attempting to create “authentic”

---

<sup>170</sup> Personal interview with Ali Ewoldt on June 29, 2011.

<sup>171</sup> Underiner, 183.

productions, both teams sought to connect to a particular community with shared cultural memories.

In *Coser y Cantar (To Sew and to Sing)*, Puerto Rican playwright Dolores Prida tells the story of one Latina immigrant living in a New York City apartment. She is represented by two actors, one known as “She,” who represents the woman's assimilating identity and “Ella,” who represents the connection to her Latin American culture. Like *She/Ella*, *The Capeman's* Salvador has a bifurcated identity. The title character is played by three actors, who represent him across four decades of his life. The older Sal, played in the original production by Rubén Blades, looks back upon his younger self, played by pop singer Marc Anthony. The youngest Sal, briefly seen at age seven, was played in the original production by Evan Jay Newman. On multiple occasions throughout the production, the two Salvadors sing together, uniting their identity. In the song, “I Was Born in Puerto Rico,” Sal/Salvador remembers his childhood on the island and his arrival in the United States. Moving between solo singing and sections of duet between the two actors, the song merges the memories of Sal/Salvador's recent and distant past. The adult Salvador, with the wisdom of experience, watches over young Sal, who is reckless and defiant. The older Salvador can hear the younger Sal singing, but Sal does not hear Salvador as he sings “No one knows you like I do/ Nobody can know your heart the way I do/ No one can testify to all that you've been

through/But I will.” However, this split identity does not result in a schizophrenic state as seen in *Coser y Cantar* and which is often associated with bifurcated identity in other works of literature. Rather, the older Salvador is gifted with hindsight as he remembers. The staging of the production allows Salvador to witness his own past. He is simultaneously a part of it and distant from it, like the Latin American immigrant who remembers the past and seeks to incorporate it into a new future. While memories often result in nostalgia and an idealized (re)creation of past events, hindsight allows Salvador to see the past as it was, seating him in the position of an outside observer.

In “*Adios Hermanos*,” Sal/Salvador remembers moving through several prison systems before being released. As the two men remember being arrested and moving from prison to prison within the United States, a chorus of women brings the focus back to Puerto Rico. They sing:

Angel of Mercy, people are suffering  
 All over the world  
 Spanish children are taught on their knees to believe  
 Angel of Mercy, people are suffering  
 All over the island tonight,  
 Mothers weep

Here, the memories of both Salvadors are joined and a complete timeline is created in which both Puerto Rico and the United States are acknowledged. The women point to the fact that Sal's suffering is mirrored in his homeland. He has not escaped it through migration and there is nothing he can do for those he left

behind. Yet, he is suffering in both locations. Metaphorically, a move to the mainland has not eased the suffering he experienced in Puerto Rico. In addition, the island suffers for the loss of its native people. Beyond that, the chorus of women reminds the audience that, as *West Side Story* clearly states, “Puerto Rico's in America.” Therefore the suffering that occurs in Puerto Rico *is* in the United States and the bifurcated subject of Sal/Salvador mirrors the dual identity of the United States/Puerto Rico. The relationship between the two is simultaneously that of the imperialist and the colonized, and that of one, unified, land.

Of the musicals discussed here, *The Capeman* is the only one which offers a dual setting of Puerto Rico and the United States. At the play's start, we see the youngest Salvador in his home town of Mayaguez, Puerto Rico, a mountain town on the west coast of the island. While the sets for *The Capeman* were minimal, the island was created through warm lighting and the silhouette of a palm-tree covered isle with mountains in the distance. By providing merely the suggestion of an island, the audience is easily brought to this geographic space; they automatically associate this suggestion with whatever an island means to them. The non-realistic treatment of the setting allows for a nostalgic and idealized view of this space for the audience as a whole. The Puerto Rican members of the audience are cued to remember their homeland; Latin American individuals from

other island locales receive the same cue and, due to the ambiguity of the setting, are transported to their homelands as well. First generation US-Latinos are given the suggestion of a place that they are expected to feel connected to, and non-Latino/a individuals are given a stereotype of an exotic vacationland. It is only as the music and lyrics begin that this idealized island image is shattered. Salvador begins his journey as a young boy in Mayaguez.

We saw the roofs as we came down  
 To the asylum for the poor.  
 The sugar cane whispered its prayers  
 And lay them on the sea.  
*El asilo de los pobres*  
 Is where our home will be.  
 Pray for us, Santa Maria  
 Pray with us, Salvador.

My mother, Esmeralda,  
 Worked in the kitchen as a maid  
 While I played games with the crazy ones  
 In the flamboyant's light and shade.

Set against the exotic and appealing image of the island silhouette are Salvador and his mother, who begin what will become a lifelong struggle. Appealing images of sugar cane and the flamboyant architecture are juxtaposed with those of the asylum for the poor and its inhabitants who struggle for sanity. In this way, *The Capeman* works against a completely idealized version of the homeland. Because the scene occurs in Puerto Rico, there is less reliance on a nostalgic reconstruction of the past. Instead, the audience witnesses a memory in real time,

as though they were present for the event, rather than hearing about it as they do from West Side Story's Consuela or *Miriam's Flowers'* Delfina. A recognition of Sal's harsh reality as a child leaves him no idealized home to escape to when tragedy strikes in America. The audience, having experienced a rupture in their collective memory set forth by the island setting, now share a place with Sal, lost between worlds, and unable to depend on vague memories for reassurance.

The focus on religion and spirituality seen in plays by Latin American playwrights is also found in *The Capeman* which relies heavily on both. In doing so, the creators of *The Capeman* sought another avenue whereby they could connect to audiences through collective memory. With common stories and shared traditions, religion is a point of communal connection, and one that provides a common foundation that many immigrants have relied upon when settling in the United States. While non-musical Latin American plays like Luis Valdez's *The Shrunken Head of Pancho Villa* and Tato Laviera's *Olé, Clemente*, focus on the collective memory of national heroes, *The Capeman* turns to the collective memory of a religious figure, namely, St. Lazarus.

Sometimes referred to as San Lazaro, St. Lazarus is a major figure in Cuban and Puerto Rican culture and religion. He is a representative of the melding of both the Catholic and Yoruba religions. Yoruba traditions originated in western Africa, and were carried to the Americas and the West Indies during the

slave trade. Yoruba, in addition to sharing elements with organized religion, also includes oral histories, myths, songs, and culture. Because storytelling is such an important part of the Yoruba tradition, it is a fitting element for a memory play like *The Capeman*. The branch of Yoruba that exists in Cuba and Puerto Rico is known as Santería. Santería merges Yoruba beliefs and traditions with those of Roman Catholicism. St. Lazarus is evoked to heal health problems (he is considered the Santería version of the Yoruba orisha, or deity, Babalú Aye, who is charged with the same task). There are two mentions of Lazarus in the Bible. One is a leper, healed by Jesus. The other is a beggar, who, in a parable told by Jesus, is sent to heaven after denied assistance by a wealthy man. The conflation of the Yoruba, Santería and Christian figures have become St. Lazarus as he is known in *The Capeman*.

Consistent references back to San Lazaro keep the audience anchored in this collective ancestral memory, and speak to New York City's largely Catholic, Latino/a community. After Sal's arrest, he spends many years in prison during which he is "reformed" and develops a new sense of spirituality. A dichotomy is structured through the introduction of St. Lazarus and Sal's stepfather. Sal's stepfather is a preacher in the Pentecostal Church, where the primary focus is on the end of the world. The stepfather's fire-and-brimstone attitude sits in direct contrast to St. Lazarus, who perpetuates hope and the memory of Puerto Rico. St.

Lazarus represents the island itself and he appears onstage frequently during Sal's times of emotional need. He is the last to sing in "I was born in Puerto Rico," remembering, "*Yo nací en Puerto Rico/Mi corazón es Puerto Rico/Mi alma es Puerto Rico* (I was born in Puerto Rico/My heart is Puerto Rico/My soul is Puerto Rico)." Later Sal sings, "I believe I'm in the power of Saint Lazarus. And he holds me in his sight. I believe he watches over us all." These lyrics illustrate St. Lazarus' two functions in the play. First, Sal and the audience are reminded that Puerto Rico and its traditions are omnipresent. Second, the Santería tradition of St. Lazarus, although, in part, originating in Catholicism, are seen in parallel to Sal's growing Christian-based spirituality. Through St. Lazarus' entrances and these lyrics, there is a confluence of memory, nostalgia and identity, whereby the merging of two cultures is illustrated, rather than the abandonment of one over the other. In this way, another brick is laid in the foundation of home that Sal seeks to find.

Yet Sal is immediately prevented from finding, creating or recreating home, as he is immediately scooped up by Hernandez, The Vampires gang leader known as "The Umbrella Man." Hernandez calls Sal a "*jíbaro*" (a peasant from the hills) and lures Sal in with "you want to fight for your people, don't you Sal?" Here, Hernandez appeals to Sal's own sense of nostalgia for Puerto Rico and his opportunity to find home ends there. Sal's subsequent imprisonment prevents him



from creating home as he has no physical, geographic space that is his own. His move from prison to prison (Agrón was transferred several times throughout his sentence, and after one successful escape attempt), mirrors his liminal state. He has memories but is unable to reconstruct them or find a place for them in the United States.

*The Capeman* uses other pre-modern references in “I Was Born in Puerto Rico.” Sal sings, “I was born in Puerto Rico/and my blood is Taino. Spanish Caribbean my soul.” Taino people were pre-Colombian inhabitants of the Bahamas, Cuba, Jamaica, Hispaniola, Cuba and Puerto Rico. This reference not only points to Sal's connection to a pre-modern identity, but evokes memories of times during which Tainos were forced into slavery and forced assimilation, drawing a parallel between Sal's current situation and that of his ancestors. Sal's connection to his Amerindian roots resurfaces late in the play when he forms a relationship with Wahzniak, a Native American woman with whom he corresponds through letters. The exploration of the Amerindian heritage of Latin American individuals was most famously demonstrated in the groundbreaking performance art piece *Two Undiscovered Amerindians Visit*, by Guillermo Gomez-Peña and Coco Fusco. In it, the two performance artists took the roles of “native savages,” locked in a cage and given modern objects, for example a radio, to explore. This was to the delight of audience members, some of whom believed

that they were actually native people untouched by modern society and put on display by researchers. Unlike this “experiment,” which pointed to stereotypes and racism, *The Capeman*'s reliance on pre-modern references encourages audiences to dig through their collective memory for something universal.

In several other Latin American plays, religious figures work deliberately against the protagonists. As aforementioned, the angels of *Marisol* incite the end of the world as Marisol flounders. In Rodrigo Duarte Clark's *Doña Rosita's Jalapeno Kitchen*, Saint Peter seeks to essentialize Rosita's identity. “We have piñatas at every party. And we teach the kids to sing 'de colores.’” And on Cinco de Mayo we serve enchiladas.”<sup>172</sup> An entire culture is represented through these few elements, and the offending stereotyper is the gatekeeper of Heaven. According to Eduardo Cabrera, in plays like these, “The icons of the Catholic religion are exposed...as allied with and supporters of the hegemonic culture and against the natural necessities of human beings.”<sup>173</sup> Unlike Marisol and Rosita, Salvador finds an ally in the pre-modern religious figure that represents his homeland.

When speaking specifically about *The Capeman*, investigations of collective memory and audience reception must apply primarily to Puerto Rican individuals. Sandoval-Sánchez argues that for *The Capeman* audiences, “the

---

<sup>172</sup> Rodrigo Duarte Clark, *Doña Rosita's Jalapeno Kitchen*.  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ja2DXRzDA88>.

<sup>173</sup> Cabrera, 72.

memory of *West Side Story* as resurrected,” in its reinforcement of Puerto Ricans as criminals and the island as a place of poverty and violence. The \$11 million dollar production was considered a flop and received scathing reviews from many critics, including Ben Brantley of the *New York Times* who claimed, “It would take a hard-core sadist to derive pleasure from the sad, benumbed spectacle that finally opened last night at the Marquis Theater.”<sup>174</sup> Sandoval-Sanchez and others saw the play as one that “[made] a spectacle of Agrón's life on Broadway. Simon exoticizes and glamorizes the history of Puerto Rican migration.”<sup>175</sup> Playwright Derek Walcott disagreed, “Glorifying some might say...perhaps examining. Macbeth had a life, for example.”<sup>176</sup> While Simon and Walcott's intentions may have been to illustrate the unjust treatment of the Latino/a immigrant by the United States legal system and society, complications arise when audience is presented with “one more Latino criminal.” Part of this is symptomatic of the time during which *The Capeman* was originally performed. On television and in films, Latinos often took the role of the thief, the rapist, or the murderer. When the production was revived in concert form in Central Park in summer 2010, reviews took on quite a different tone, with Brantley claiming, “in the park, as staged (and

---

<sup>174</sup> Ben Brantley, “The Lure of Gang Violence to a Latin Beat,” *New York Times*, January 30, 1998.

<sup>175</sup> Alberto Sandoval-Sánchez, “Paul Simon’s *The Capeman*: The Staging of Puerto Rican National Identity as Spectacle and Commodity on Broadway,” *Latino/a Popular Culture*, Michelle Habel-Pallán and Mary Romero, eds. New York: NYU Press, 2002), 139.

<sup>176</sup> *Charlie Rose: A conversation with musician Paul Simon*, NPR, June 28, 2007.

radically streamlined) by Diane Paulus, the show felt like an organic part of a New York tradition of tale-telling.” Brantley's new, more positive view of the show was primarily due to its setting. He ends the same review with the caveat, “This is not the place to reassess the autonomous strengths and weaknesses of “The Capeman” as a work of art.” With these words, Brantley seems to suggest that while Central Park and a streamlining of the script assisted the play, in its original form, its faults remained. One can't help but wonder if the park setting contributed to the same sense of natural idealism and nostalgia that is associated with the island of Puerto Rico that is seen in this and the other musicals discussed here, prompting a tourist-like fascination with the story.

While Agrón's guilt or innocence is still questionable, actual news footage integrated into the production shows him as callous and anti-America. (He famously declared, “my mother can watch me burn”). In choosing this particular story as the basis of his musical, Simon missed the fact that because of the non-fiction element of the production, this stereotype became difficult to avoid. Frances Negrón-Muntaner states, “*The Capeman* confirmed that Puerto Ricans are criminals, liberals are inept, and Latinos can very well play their own stereotypes in other people's childhood recollections.”<sup>177</sup>

Despite these criticisms, Puerto Rican critics embraced the story and

---

<sup>177</sup> Frances Negrón-Muntaner, “Barbie's Hair: Selling Out Puerto Rican Identity in the Global Market,” *Latino/a Popular Culture*, (New York: NYU Press, 2002), 151.

accused Broadway critics of racism. If critics and scholars have taken issue with the production's stereotypical treatment of the Latin-American, what was different for Puerto Rican audiences? Most clear is that the play finally brought these individuals to the theatre. Vidal points out, "It is not uncommon to find that Latino communities show little interest in the theatre created for them. Perhaps the real intention behind Latino theatrical activity is the need that migrating intellectuals have of finding some kind of identity and function in the midst of a cultural void and emptiness."<sup>178</sup> For these critics and the actors involved, *The Capeman*, in terms of authenticity, was the antithesis to *West Side Story*. Latino audiences had long awaited the rewriting of *West Side Story* and Puerto Ricans were now featured prominently on Broadway, the New York City marker of artistic excellence. *The Capeman* saw a reversal of the expectations of Latino audiences. They came to the theatre in droves. While *West Side Story* was a work of fiction that was primarily cast with Anglo actors and relied on traditional American musical styles, *The Capeman* was based on a true story, featured a cast of Latino/a actors and employed the rhythms of salsa, *danza*, *aguinaldo*, *bomba* and *plena*. "This is the first ever authentic Puerto Rican theatrical work, since *West Side Story* was not boricua in its nature."<sup>179</sup> The term *boricua* (also used in the various

---

<sup>178</sup> Hernan Vidal, "The Geopolitics of 'Latino' Theatre in the United States." *The State of Latino Theatre in the United States*, (New York: Roulledge, ), 208.

<sup>179</sup> Ileana Cidoncha, "Requiem para una campeon," *El Nuevo Dia*, (March 27, 1998.).

forms *Boriquén*, *Borinquén*, or *Borinqueneño*) is a term often used to identify oneself as Puerto Rican. The term originates with the Taino Amerindians of the island. *Boriken* was the Taino name for the island before the arrival of the Spanish. Therefore, the use of the term *boricua* honors those indigenous to the island and its descendants. For Latino audiences the production was an “authentic” representation of their experiences. Sandoval-Sánchez, who attended multiple performances remembers

At the end of each performance, with a raving standing ovation and a spirit of celebration, Latinos confirmed their affinity, solidarity, pride and Latinidad. They were making history. Each time a cultural icon was exhibited, or a Spanish word was said, or any recognizable melody or beat was played, the Puerto Rican audience could not control their euphoria and true passionate response.<sup>180</sup>

While Sandoval-Sánchez finds fault with the meanings made by *The Capeman* audiences, these audiences were receptive to the production because for them, it represented “us.” This portion of the audience was unified through their collective memory.

In her article “Opening the Shaman's bag: Latino Theatre, Mixed Audiences and Tourist Logic,” Tamara Underiner discusses props as icons of culture that are used to provoke memory through their indication of authenticity.

---

<sup>180</sup> Sandoval-Sánchez, “Paul Simon’s *The Capeman*: The Staging of Puerto Rican National Identity as Spectacle and Commodity on Broadway,” 152.

In speaking specifically about a prop satchel she created for a production of *The True History of Coca Cola*, she notes that the prop was chosen for its “nostalgic rusticity.” The rusticity of the satchel suggested a pre-modern world, as seen in the inclusion of St. Lazarus and references to Sal's Amerindian roots in *The Capeman*. The goal of this prop was to speak specifically to Latino/a individuals in the audience. What about the non-Latino audiences? How do such elements work for them? Underiner argues, “Certain familiar cultural and racial expectations do come into play when such works are performed for mixed audiences. These expectations are often circumscribed by an inherently contradictory 'tourist logic' that itself organizes knowledge of the world among western, leisured classes.”<sup>181</sup> Underiner compares theatergoers to tourists, using Dean McCannell's work on tourist theory which posits that, “We have no other way of understanding the world other than seeing it as a series of cultural spectacles. Some view the touristic relationship as ...a form of imperialism fueled by a modernist nostalgia for lost times or simpler ways, the return home characterized by stories told and trophies displayed.”<sup>182</sup> This empowers the audience, who must now make meanings from the consumption of these spectacles, which become their souvenirs of a cultural experience. This was the case for the mixed audiences of *The Capeman*, and was reflected as well in its

---

<sup>181</sup> Underiner, 187.

<sup>182</sup> Ibid.

marketing campaign. Advertising constructs, prepares and reinforces the tourist gaze, which sees everything on stage as

not only a sign of itself but its ideal state as well. Any Latino character in a play becomes overdetermined by the spectator's expectation that he or she signifies Latinness. Any staging or 'reproduction' of Latino/a life helps to create a Benjaminian 'aura' of such life, especially for non-Latinos, thereby whetting a desire to experience the 'true original' of that life for themselves.<sup>183</sup>

Perhaps even more fascinating than the production itself was *The Capeman's* advertising campaign. Even before playing to audiences at The Marquis Theatre, the publicity team behind *The Capeman* relied on the memory and nostalgia of its target demographic, as the production was heavily advertised in the *barrios* of New York City, aimed at a potential US-Latino audience. The print advertising for the production featured a red, white and blue *casita*. A *casita* is a small house, usually made of wood, painted bright colors and set in the countryside of Puerto Rico. It is associated with poverty and is immediately identifiable as such to Puerto Rican individuals. In the advertisement, the *casita* did not have a front door. In its place was a black and white photograph of a young boy presumably taken in the 1950s. Sandoval-Sánchez credits this advertisement as one which “awoke feelings of nationalism and home(land) sickness since the picture of the boy evoked memories and marked in black and white with an aura of nostalgia the

---

<sup>183</sup> Ibid.



pivotal era of the Puerto Rican diaspora.”<sup>184</sup>

For non-Latino audiences this image did not evoke the same feeling as it did for Latino audiences, nor did it hold the same weight for them. While Simon and Walcott's status likely drew mainstream audiences to the theatre, the image of the boy and the *casita* likely brought many Latinos to the theatre. When they arrived at the Marquis Theatre on January 29, 1998, they were greeted by a red, white and blue curtain designed to resemble the Puerto Rican flag. Arturo Sandoval-Sánchez argues that the reproduction of the Puerto Rican flag at the premiere of *The Capeman* “provided a space of/for identification in such a persuasive manner that attending the musical validated Puerto Rican national identity.”<sup>185</sup> Indeed, never before had New York audiences been comprised of so many Latino/a, specifically Puerto Rican, individuals. Never before had they walked into a theatre to find their nation's flag the centerpiece of the production. This immediate visual connection to Puerto Rico certainly evoked both pride and nostalgia. It was a “welcome home” to those who had not been represented in this way since the time of Puerto Rico's annexation. The tradition of welcoming the audience with flag-bearing continued in 2008 with *In the Heights*. In the opening number, the entire community sings, “In the heights/I hang my flag up on

---

<sup>184</sup> Arturo Sandoval-Sánchez, Paul Simon's *The Capeman*: The Staging of Puerto Rican National Identity as Spectacle and Commodity on Broadway, 152.

<sup>185</sup> Ibid.

display/It reminds that I came from miles away,” and the US-Latino/a characters add, “My family came from miles away.” Both productions successfully used cultural icons to speak to the collective memory of its audiences. Both allowed for a negotiation of biculturalism to take place at the first point of interaction with the audience. Each Latin American audience member experienced the planting of their homeland flag on American theatrical soil, an act which recreates the native home in an adopted space.

For the non-Latino/a members of the audience, Simon and Walcott are still able to play to a sense nostalgia for the 1950s. The disturbing tale features doo-wop music and pop ballads along with characters like the Teen Idol, who sings “Carlos and Yolanda/ Dancing in the hallway/To an old melody/Spanish eyes and soft brown curls/My love, my love/Come to me,” accompanied by cooing pony-tailed girls. As his song progresses, Sal takes over singing from the Teen Idol and in effect takes on the role of the Teen Idol himself, flirting with the girls, who then become Puerto Rican and ask “will I be your wife?” By seating Sal in the role of the Teen Idol and fluidly changing the girls' identity from Anglo to Puerto Rican, Simon is able to include the non-Latino/a portion of the audience in the memory of an idealized time gone by. In fact, it was musical moments like these that provided the few positive mainstream reviews of the production such as, “Intricately weaving Latin American rhythms and inflections with the doo-wop

harmonies in vogue in the 1950s, these songs have a contemplative, sensuous elegance all their own and remain a pleasure to listen to.”<sup>186</sup>

In the song, “Sunday Afternoon,” Sal’s mother, Esmeralda, remembers Puerto Rico. Her

memories are sparked by the style of music that Simon employs here, specifically the *aguinaldo*.

Salvador, the afternoon sunlight is folding around us,  
The dishes are done,  
The buildings here, tall as our mountains  
Slice through the windows and cut off the sun.  
On such days I find I am longing for Puerto Rico  
Though I never would return 'til you are free  
But when I hear the *aguinaldo* my heart's a little lighter  
And we dance together Aurea and me

The *Aguinaldo* is a folk genre of Christmas music, and is popular in Puerto Rico, as well as Venezuela and Trinidad and Tobago. *Aguinaldo* are performed like Christmas carols, with groups of carolers, or *parrandas*, moving from house to house during the Christmas season, delivering this musical “gift” to friends and neighbors. The traditional instruments associated with the *aguinaldo* are the *bordonua* (bass guitar), *tiple* (a small guitar), *cuatro* (lute), *guiro* (a percussion instrument that produces a ratchet-like sound) and *maracas*. Today, the guitar and brass instruments are used. In *The Capeman*, Simon relies on the traditional *aguinaldo* instruments to create a sense of nostalgia in the theatre and in the minds

---

<sup>186</sup> Ben Brantley, “The Lure of Gang Violence to a Latin Beat,” *New York Times*, January 30, 1998.

of the audience. A tradition brought to Latin-America by Spanish colonizers, the *aguinaldo* is gradually being lost in Puerto Rico. This is of particular importance, as it lets us know that Esmeralda must be remembering a time from her youth and it illustrates yet another site of loss of culture and tradition for the Latin American immigrant. Eventually, the *aguinaldo* will be only a memory, another vague representation of home. Later in the play, after his release from a twenty-year prison sentence, Sal receives a letter from his mother. He encourages her to return to Mayaguez and appeals to her sense of nostalgia for the *aguinaldo*. “You say the *aguinaldo* makes you dream of home/Where once we strolled the beach at El Malecon/Go back don't you worry, I am your grown-up son.” More than lyrics, music, especially a traditional tune, can and does evoke memories.

Salsa music is another style Simon uses to capture an “authentic” sense of Puerto Rico. Salsa is traditionally considered a mix of Cuban musical forms and a name not given to Cuban-derived genres until the 1970s. Salsa as a popular independent genre was developed in New York City throughout the 1960s and 1970s by Cuban and Puerto Rican immigrants.<sup>187</sup> Again, Simon uses traditional instruments like the bongos, conga, trumpet, trombone and saxophone. Because *The Capeman* is set at the time during which salsa was emerging as a new form, Simon again capitalizes on the memories of Latino/a individuals who were present

---

<sup>187</sup> Lise Waxer, *The City of Musical Memory*, (Middletown, Conn: Wesleyan University Press, 2002).

for this exciting time when their culture became part of their new home. Since adopted by countless contemporary artists and expanding to a popular form of dance, the salsa is one example of how memory and nostalgia allow the immigrant to create home. Pioneers of salsa, most notably Willie Colon, traveled between the United States and Puerto Rico collecting influences from both and incorporating them into a new style of music. Salsa music expanded back to Puerto Rico, completing a circle of home whereby a Puerto Rican-created genre was then exported to Puerto Rico. Salsa is now one of the most popular musical genres in the world and salsa singers are international celebrities, affirming that this Latin American genre has been assimilated into various cultures.

In “Nostalgia Across Cuban Shores,” Patricia Gonzalez speaks specifically about Latino/a playwrights of the “1.5 generation,” those who immigrate to a new country during their early teens and who access both cultures when addressing biculturalism. They are characterized as bringing characteristics with them from their home country, but continuing to assimilate into their new country. Therefore, their identity is a combination of new and old culture and traditions. “The representatives of the 1.5 generation...move between the tropical worlds they remember and the new North American ethics and social code of conduct that their elders ignore.”<sup>188</sup>

---

<sup>188</sup> Gonzalez, 82.

This term is most often associated with Cubans due to the fact that a large number of exiled Cubans came to the United States during their teen years, displaced by the Castro regime. The first wave, from 1959-62, saw the departure of upper and middle class Cubans to the United States following the rise of Fidel Castro. The second wave, from 1965-1974 was characterized by “freedom flights,” which were organized departure programs administered by the Cuban and United States governments. These “freedom flights” allowed working class Cubans to come to the United States. According to the Pew Hispanic Center, the United States has been more welcoming to Cubans than other Latin American immigrants, evidenced by the fact that almost all Cuban migrants have been granted immediate full legal status under the attorney general's special parole power. This puts them on the path to United States citizenship. Under current US policy, Cuban migrants apprehended at sea are returned to Cuba while those who are able to reach U.S. soil are allowed to stay.<sup>189</sup> Generally speaking, Cubans are the oldest of the Latin American immigrant populations in the United States. They also hold the highest percentage of US citizenship among all foreign-born immigrants to the United States. The Pew Hispanic Center’s 2006 National Survey of Latinos asked respondents whether they consider the United States or their country of origin to be their real homeland. More than half of Cubans said

---

<sup>189</sup> Hakimzadeh, Shirin and D’Vera Cohn, 2007.

they considered the U.S. their “real” homeland. Cubans have a higher percentage of wealth, education and home-ownership than other Latin Americans in the United States.<sup>190</sup> Although sharing the characteristic of leaving their native country as teens, members of the 1.5 generation identify with these home countries in varying degrees. They are often bilingual and studies have shown that due to the age at which they immigrated, 1.5 individuals find it easier to assimilate to society than their elders.<sup>191</sup>

The creators of *In the Heights*, Lin-Manuel Miranda and Quiara Alegría Hudes, are not members of the 1.5 generation, but some of their characters are. In *In the Heights*, three generations of characters are represented on stage. The eldest of these is represented by Abuela Claudia, who is caretaker to Usnavi, and takes on the role of grandmother to the neighborhood. Abuela Claudia is not Usnavi's biological grandmother, but rather what we would call a nanny. Miranda and Hudes certainly could have made the character a biological grandmother, but by doing the opposite they accomplish two things.<sup>192</sup> First, they illustrate the immigrant reconstructing home through the creation of an adopted family. Second, they show the immigrant creating home through shared experience, traditions and language. While Abuela Claudia immigrated to the United States in

---

<sup>190</sup> Ibid.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid.

<sup>192</sup> It should be noted here that the character of Abuela Claudia was inspired, in part, by a nanny who helped raise Lin-Manuel Miranda.

1943, prior to the first wave of exile prompted by the rise of Castro, she is still considered a 1.5 individual due to her age at the time of her immigration. At that time, Fulgencio Batista was the President and dictator and was supported by the United States until the time of the end of the Cuban Revolution in 1959 when he was overthrown.

In her solo number, "*Paciencia y Fe*," Abuela Claudia immediately creates a connection between her two lands through memory as she sings, "It was hotter at home in La Vibora/The Washington Heights of Havana/A crowded city of faces the same as mine." By referring to her childhood village as "The Washington Heights of Havana," she fuses the two, and these homes become one. She goes on to compare the two locations as she sings, "A crowded city of faces the same as mine." The double meaning found here brings forth issues of identity. In Cuba, the dark-skinned faces of La Vibora were the same as hers. In Washington Heights, a Latin American neighborhood, she sees these same types of faces, although they hail from various Latin American countries. Yet, Washington Heights in an enclave surrounded by the larger city where she comes face to face with those who are unlike her. There is a pushing and pulling of the universal versus the particular here, as Abuela Claudia must negotiate her bicultural identity as she becomes grouped together with those whose national experiences may differ greatly from her own.



Unlike Latin American plays in which a complete assimilation or rejection is achieved, Abuela Claudia's memory does not allow her to fall into completely an idealized nostalgia for her homeland, nor does it leave her with a completely negative view of her past. The juxtaposition of her visual memory with her words clearly show a more complicated relationship to the Cuba she left behind as well as the United States where she arrived. Hunger and poverty dominate Abuela Claudia's first memories of Cuba. She speaks of La Vibora, which, today, is the most populated barrio of Havana. As she recalls her youth in Cuba, the ensemble dances, wearing costumes indicative both of the time period and of a tropical climate; the women are in short polka-dotted dresses with their hair tied in bandanas and the men are in short-sleeves. In bright colors, these costumes are in contrast to the brown tones of the New York City costumes seen later, visually signifying that Cuba is a vivid, living memory, while her memories of New York are more like a faded postcard of a time gone by.

But ain't no food in La Vibora  
 I remember nights, anger in the streets, hunger at the windows  
 Women folding clothes, playing with my friends in the summer rain  
 Mama needs a job, Mama says we're poor, one day you say, "*Vamos a Nueva York*"  
 And Nueva York was far, but Nueva York had work, and so we came  
 And now I'm wide awake  
 A million years too late

As she migrated from Puerto Rico to New York, Abuela Claudia simultaneously experienced a dream and a nightmare. She feels as though she has wasted time

and now that she has an opportunity presented to her by the lottery winnings, it is too late to make life better for her mother or for herself.

Unlike *The Capeman's* Sal, Abuela Claudia initially receives a warm welcome when she arrives

in the United States, despite the stark contrast in climate.

Fresh off the boat in America  
 Freezing in early December  
 A crowded city in 1943  
 Learning the ropes in America  
 En *español* I remember  
 Dancing with Mayor LaGuardia  
 All of society welcoming Mami and me! Ha!

As she sings the verse above, Abuela Claudia is surrounded by dancers clad in stylish 1940s hats and overcoats in a color palette that suggests a sepia-toned photo. As Abuela Claudia remembers her arrival in New York, she is pulled into a dance with an actor representing the Mayor and receives smiles from the spinning, whirling dancers. This idealized arrival is soon cut short by the voices of Abuela Claudia's new employers. As immediately as the New Yorkers embrace her, they suddenly stop, surrounding her in a tight circle and become her employers, demanding, "You better clean this mess/You better learn ingles/You better not be late/You better pull your weight/Are you better off when you were with the birds of La Vibora?" All the while Abuela Claudia repeats, "*Paciencia y Fe*" as she covers her ears and tries to block out these bad memories. She continues,

Sharing double beds  
 trying to catch a break  
 struggling with English  
 Listening to friends  
 finally got a job working as a maid  
 So we cleaned some homes, polishing with pride  
 scrubbing the whole of the upper east side  
 The days into weeks, the weeks into years, and here I stayed.

In this verse, Abuela Claudia seems to suggest that she intended to return to Cuba, and before she knew it, time had passed, and there she was, still in New York.

Ultimately, the ensemble is transformed back into her fellow immigrant New Yorkers, who encourage her, repeating “*Paciencia y Fe.*”

The 1.5 generation is often credited with having “the capacity to select worlds at will.” In Abuela Claudia's case, she does not have the ability to select her world. The major obstacle to her doing so is the fact that she spent most of her life in economic hardship. Once they arrived in New York, she and her mother lived by the wishes of their employers and not by their own desires. Many Cubans, having fled in last-minute, middle-of-the-night trips, have carried only their memories with them and while Abuela Claudia unpacks these memories in hopes of finding an answer, she is unable to completely reconcile her two distinct cultural experiences. However, these memories have allowed her to create an iteration of Cuba in New York.

In non-musical Latin American plays like Eduardo Machado's *Broken Eggs*, Dolores Prida's *Coser y Cantar (To Sew and To Sing)*, and Jose Rivera's

*Marisol*, characters who are unable to cope with their in-between state either escape or act out destructively. Rosalina Perales provides a relevant articulation of this condition in his discussion of *Marisol*, stating that Rivera, “enunciates what could be defined as a living discourse of failure staged by out of place bilingual and bicultural characters, incapable of creating new cultural spaces in which to articulate their hybridity and accommodation to their Anglo Saxon surroundings.”<sup>193</sup> Sal Agrón is the quintessential example of this condition, as his inability to create a cultural space that will function as a permanent home leads to multiple failures, which, in turn, prevent him from creating home. He is caught in a seemingly unbreakable cycle of destruction and is unable to negotiate his biculturalism. Ben Brantley calls Sal's character “a blank, passive figure; a tabula rasa scrawled upon by bad karma and a bad society.”<sup>194</sup> For Brantley and others, Sal's rebellion as a coping mechanism was not clear or convincing because of the character's cold criminality.

In *In the Heights*, rebellion takes a different form from that illustrated in *The Capeman*, one that departs from the stereotype of the Latino as a criminal. Nina's rebellion takes the form of her dropping out of Stanford. Sonny's rebellion is speaking out against the establishment, and Pete's worst offense is graffiti,

---

<sup>193</sup> Rosalina Perales, “Theory, Text and Interpretation: Approaching José Rivera's *Marisol*.” In *The State of Latino Theatre in the United States*, (New York: Routledge, 2002), 172.

<sup>194</sup> Ben Brantley, “The Lure of Gang Violence to a Latin Beat,” *New York Times*, January 30, 1998.

which, by the end of the production, moves from a misdemeanor at worst, to a work of art. These characters, not immigrants themselves, but first-generation US-Latinos, are still in between cultures yet do not engage in the criminally destructive behaviors long associated with the depiction of Latin Americans on stage and screen. While *The Capeman* fed into the idea of Latino as criminal by virtue of its non-fictive subject matter, *In the Heights* presents characters that are more universal, and have more in common with their audience, whether Latino or non-Latino. One way in which this is achieved is through multi-generational relationships between characters.

Like Manuel Martin's *Union City Thanksgiving* or Eduardo Machado's *Broken Eggs*, *In the Heights* brings to life three generations of characters who “personify various age groups, political ideologies, and degrees of transculturation.”<sup>195</sup> In *Broken Eggs*, the elder, exiled characters speak of the Cuba they left behind, saying, “We *had* to come here, but they *wanted* to.”<sup>196</sup> The younger generation begs the elders not to speak of Cuba, while the younger characters in *In the Heights* long for their ancestral homes and seek out memories and stories from their elders. Machado satirizes the older generation that desires to return home, while the elder generation of *In the Heights*, as represented by

---

<sup>195</sup> Elsa M. Gilmore, “Transculturation and its Discontents,” *The State of Latino Theatre in the United States*, (Routledge: New York, NY, 2002), 95.

<sup>196</sup> Eduardo Machado, *Broken Eggs*, In *On New Ground*. (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 1986), 14.

Kevin, had a strong desire to leave their homeland and start a new life in the United States. Mimi in *Broken Eggs* and Rigo in *Shadow of a Man* reject their heritage in favor of the United States and call themselves “American,” much as Anita does in *West Side Story*. Disconnected from their heritage, Mimi and Rigo are only able to take a “trip” to Puerto Rico by taking Valium while listening to a Spanish song. This drug-induced attempt at reaching home is futile because rather than accessing Puerto Rico through lasting memory, their visit lasts only as long as their high. In addition, they turn to drugs out of desperation and hopelessness, all while reinforcing stereotypes of Latinos as drug users. By contrast *In the Heights* ends on a positive note with Usnavi declaring “I’m home!”

While the elder generation of *In the Heights* remembers the past, some members of the younger generation seek to incorporate that past into their future. For some, like Vanessa, that means moving out of the *barrio*. “And one day, I’m hoppin’ that elevated train and I’m ridin’ away / And one day, I’m hoppin’ in a limousine and I’m ridin’ away / I look up and think about the years gone by/But one day I’m walking to JFK and I’m gonna fly!” As Vanessa dreams of moving out of the *barrio*, she rues the past and shows only her commitment to her goal. Where “home” will be is not clear; she may walk, ride or fly, but she is determined to leave and create a new life with a clean slate. In this way, Vanessa represents the first-generation US-Latino/a who is disconnected from the

homeland and who is free of nostalgia. Usnavi recognizes this as he sings, “I’m runnin’ to make it home/And home’s what Vanessa’s runnin’ away from!” Usnavi is determined to move as well, but his destination is clear: the Dominican Republic.

A third illustration of the identity confusion that exists for the first-generation US-Latino/a is found in the character of Nina, who is ambivalent about where she belongs. This ambivalence posits Nina as the US-Latino/a for whom the expectation of what she should be as “an American” does not match her own expectations of what she should be as “a Latina.” She makes multiple attempts to reconcile these parts of herself. When she first arrives home, she remembers,

As the radio plays old forgotten boleros  
 I think of the days when this city was mine  
 I remember the praise  
*Ay, te adoro, te quiero*  
 The neighborhood waved, and said  
 Nina, be brave, and you're gonna be fine  
 And maybe it's me,  
 But it all seems like lifetimes ago.  
 So what do I say to these faces that I used to know?  
 "Hey, I'm home?"

Here, it is the *bolero*, a traditional Spanish-language ballad that prompts her to remember the last time she was in her neighborhood. Throughout the production, Nina's singing is frequently accompanied by a bolero singer, reminding her (and the audience) that she is caught on the hyphen of her US-Latina status. For example, when sharing an intimate moment with Benny, the Bolero Singer croons,

“No te vayas (Don't go away)/Si me dejas (if you leave me)/Si te alejas de mi (if you move away from me)/ Seguiras en mis recuerdos (Keep me in your memories)/Para siempre (For always).” On one level, this is an articulation of Benny's inner thoughts, who, at that moment, reminds her “everything is easier when you're home.” On another level, it is Nina's heritage, her roots, which call out to her not to be abandoned. Benny's claim that she is home battles against the Bolero Singer's reminder that home is in a far off place. Later, at the height of frustration, Nina wonders,

When I was younger I'd imagine what would happen if my parents had stayed in  
Puerto Rico  
Who would I be if I had never seen Manhattan  
If I lived in Puerto Rico with my people?  
My people...  
I feel like all my life I've tried to find the answer  
Working harder, learning Spanish, learning all I can  
I thought I might find the answers out at Stanford  
But I'd stare out at the sea  
Thinking, Where am I supposed to be?

The geographic distance between Nina and the *barrio* compounds her identity confusion. When she wonders if she should say “hey, I'm home,” the meaning goes beyond an acknowledgment of being home from school. Instead she asks on a grander scale, “am I home? Is this my home? Is this *barrio*, a place where the memories and culture of my parents and those have been reconstructed, the true site of my identity?” For first-generationers, like Nina, the homeland increasingly becomes “a creation of the imagination, a fictional space pieced together from



recollections, fading photographs, and family anecdotes.” Unlike Usnavi, who presumably has always been bilingual since he was raised by Abuela Claudia, Nina must learn her parents' native language through formal education. Not only does this imply that her parents' priority was for Nina to be first and foremost American, but that Nina makes a deliberate choice to be(come) Puerto Rican. This desire to become Latina allows her to manipulate family memories into the Puerto Rican home and identity that she longs for. The Puerto Rico of Nina's mind is changed after Abuela Claudia's death, however, and is articulated in a scene during which she and Usnavi revisit old photographs.

**Nina**

In this album there's a picture  
 Of Abuela in Havana  
 She is holding a rag doll  
 Unsmiling, black and white  
 I wonder what she's thinking  
 Does she know that she'll be leaving  
 For the city on a cold dark night?  
 And on the day they ran  
 Did she dream of endless summer?  
 Did her mother have a plan?  
 Or did they just go?  
 Did somebody sit her down and say,  
 "Claudia, get ready,  
 To leave behind everything you know."  
 Everything I know  
 What do I know?  
 In this folder there's a picture  
 Of my high school graduation  
 With a program, mint condition  
 And a star beside my name  
 Here's a picture of my parents

As I left for California  
 Hold tight, Abuela, if you're up there  
 I'll make you proud of everything I know  
 Thank you, for everything I know

The idealized notion of the homeland that Nina held onto for so long paralyzed her and left her unable to make a decision about school. In doing so, she does not allow herself to create a home, but longs only for an ancestral one with which she has no experience. Her isolation and loss is balanced by a new hope for her future as she finally recognizes that the homeland does not guarantee “home” and finds that her story mirrors Abuela Claudia's in some way. Her isolation and loss, as well as that of the other characters mentioned, is balanced by the connections created between them.

In *Union City Thanksgiving*, Aleida's granddaughter Nidia shares commonalities with her grandmother that transcend chronology and geography. Grandmother and granddaughter both experience loss from expatriation and personal challenges and gains related to immigration/exile. Each recognizes her own life story in the other. While Nina is not Abuela Claudia's biological granddaughter, she functions as such in *In the Heights*. Like Nidia, Nina is unable to visit the past of her father or Abuela Claudia firsthand. For first-generation US-Latinos,

they have no authentic sites of memory from which they can derive nourishment and self-affirmation. For them [Cuba] is always the 'alla,' the elsewhere. Their

attempts to understand and define their own identity must rely on borrowed recollections or on formal notions of history. The uniform outcome is a transcultural balance sheet in which exclusion and loss far outweigh inclusion and gain. Their predicament is aggravated by the fact that the present does not offer them many options for transcultural gain. For them, withdrawal is the only option.<sup>197</sup>

In some ways, *In the Heights* supports and challenges this notion simultaneously in Nina, who attributes her losses having lost a sense of her culture without an “authentic” experience of it. However, her withdrawal (literally from college and metaphorically from expectations of what she should represent culturally) are articulated differently from the characters in *Union City Thanksgiving*. There, Aurelito turns to drinking and crime, in a demonstration of destructive behavior similar to the state of *The Capeman's* Sal. While Sal's situation is hopeless, notwithstanding the fact that he finds redemption, for Nina, it is hopeful. Unlike Sal who dies before he can fulfill his dreams, Nina's future goals are intact.

The relationship of memory to multi-generational characters found in *In the Heights* can be compared to the transcultural nature of the intergenerational relationships found in *Union City Thanksgiving*. In it, Spanish-born grandmother Aleida makes a new life in Cuba. She grows a grapevine, which, along with the sour fruit it bears, represents the ups and downs of her new life. Successful reproduction of the vine and her Cuban-born children is indicative of the positive

---

<sup>197</sup> Gilmore, 97.

results of her immigration, while the reading of a letter announcing the death of her sister-in-law in Spain points to the loss of her homeland and her ties to it. In *In the Heights*, Abuela Claudia's gains and losses are tied to her winning lottery ticket. Having no children, her biological legacy ends with her. What she does with her winnings will determine the ways in which her memory is able to live on. The end of her biological lineage represents a personal loss, which, in turn, becomes a loss for the entire community when she dies. However, in an ending that offers hope and new possibilities, Abuela Claudia leaves her legacy, her winnings, to Usnavi and Sonny, who provide the financial assistance Nina needs to return to Stanford.

As memories are enacted on stage, productions themselves become collective memories for those who witness them. Arturo Sandoval-Sánchez and Nancy Saporta-Sternbach call Latin American playwrights “historians,” who “unravel their ethnic and national histories as imagined worlds for the stage.”<sup>198</sup> For Latino/a theatergoers in particular, “the act of reproduction produces a new reality in this bilingual, bicultural, community; this community memory has now been transculturated.”<sup>199</sup> For some Latin American playwrights, the goal of addressing memory and nostalgia has been to recreate a homeland of the past and illustrate a rejection of that land or a rejection of the United States as an adopted

---

<sup>198</sup> Sandoval-Sánchez and Nancy Saporta-Sternbach, 32.

<sup>199</sup> Ibid.

one for the Latino/a. For the creators of *The Capeman* and *In the Heights*, attempts at evoking memory or prompting nostalgia may or may not have been successful in creating an “authentic” cultural experience. However, because of their ability to provoke thoughts of times and places past, these productions illustrate the ways in which the Latino/a immigrant and first-generation US-Latino/a may (re)create home in a new space, or support the Latino/a audience member in doing so.

Revisiting the past allows the immigrant to adopt and integrate traditions and moments from their homeland into their new setting. Through the use of cultural iconography, exploration of identity, multi-generational relationships, and collective memory, the creators of both *The Capeman* and *In the Heights* have attempted to address the complicated “Who am I?” and “where am I?” questions that are sparked for the Latin American immigrant and the first-generation US-Latino/a, both on stage and in the audience.

## Chapter Four

### Living *el barrio*: New York City as Setting

New York City, the popular entry point for United States-bound immigrants has also provided a setting for a variety of plays and films focusing on specific ethnic groups. From *West Side Story*'s treatment of New York City's streets to *Ragtime*'s tale of immigration and cross-cultural relationships, New York has been a place where what is found on stage can also be found just outside the theatre doors. Yet, for the Latino/a community in particular, telling these stories can be complicated. The evolution of the Latino/a figure on stage is directly related to their geographic space, often the *barrios* of New York City. While attempting to depict and address real life concerns of those in the *barrio*, there is the danger of creating and/or perpetuating stereotypes. The image of the Latino/a of the *barrio*, especially the *barrios* of New York City, is often saturated with negative stereotypes. Living in these economically depressed areas are characters whose lives are blighted by violence, drugs, teen pregnancy and other social maladies.

In *West Side Story*, *The Capeman* and *In the Heights*, New York City functions as a geographical and ideological "foster home" for the stage Latino/a who has immigrated to the United States. This may provide comfort for immigrants like *The Capeman*'s Esmeralda who sings to herself in the song

“Sunday Afternoon,” “The barrio's boundaries are our own little nation.” For first-generation US-Latinos on stage, New York City may be their original home, but the *barrio* may also function as a surrogate cultural homeland or a transitional space that mirrors their inner state. To some extent, *West Side Story* and *The Capeman* have reinforced *barrio* stereotypes, while *In the Heights* has attempted to refute, reconsider or reverse these images of the inner-city Latino/a space. In addition, *In the Heights* addresses the current crisis of the impact of gentrification on urban Latino/a neighborhoods.

Eduardo Cabrera explores the urban *barrio* (and the impact of gentrification, which will be discussed later in this chapter) in his analysis of Rodrigo Duarte Clark's *Doña Rosita's Jalapeño Kitchen*. The one-woman border play has been performed in cities in the Southwestern United States as well as across the United States-Mexican border. While it is set in the *barrio* of Salsipuedes, Mexico, south of Tijuana, the depiction of the threat of gentrification is relevant here, and can be compared to similar conditions in the *barrio* of New York City. In the play, the title character holds a "last supper" for her restaurant, which is soon to be closed and razed to make way for a shopping center. As she contemplates her future, Rosita dreams of Heaven, where she finds St. Peter, who promises piñatas and enchiladas, and Hell, where she finds fattening Mexican delicacies and Carlos Santana's music. St. Peter describes this Latino Hell as a

typical Latin barrio in the United States, with "Crowded neighborhoods, poor air quality, high unemployment and very little art."<sup>200</sup> This commentary on New York City life is a warning to those like Rosita, small business owners on the border, whose only option when displaced from their own country may be to relocate to a *barrio* in the United States.

A similar depiction of the *barrio* as Hell is found in the apocalyptic world of José Rivera's *Marisol*. In a post-millennial New York City, apples and coffee are extinct, rainwater is toxic, buildings are reduced to piles of rubble and the moon has disappeared. The government has plans to drop insecticide on the overpopulated city, the sky is no longer blue and the plague has returned, killing many of Marisol's closest friends. Marisol, a twenty-six-year-old Latina resident of the Bronx, laments a New York City that is slowly becoming a desolate wasteland. The physical landscape is reflective of both the internal and external factors that drive Marisol to join a rebellion of angels leading to her martyrdom.

The physical destruction of the city is a direct result of political and economic circumstances which affect the marginalized population of the Latino *barrio*. In a world in which nature has no rules, Lenny, the mentally disturbed and homeless brother of Marisol's best friend, becomes pregnant. He blames the New York social structure for the deaths of children. "The city knows how we live.

---

<sup>200</sup> Clark, *Doña Rosita's Jalapeno Kitchen*



These are babies born on the street. Little girls of the twilight hours who never felt warm blankets around their bodies. Never drank their mothers' holy milk. Little boys born with coke in their blood. This is where babies who die on the street are taken to rest.”<sup>201</sup> By the play’s ending, Manhattan, Brooklyn, and Staten Island have become “a surreal battleground in which hate crimes and humiliations are routinely inflicted on the disenfranchised.”<sup>202</sup> The prominent theme of homelessness in relationship to the destruction of the city reflects Rivera's stance against plans to criminalize homelessness in New York City in the 1980's. In his article “Toward a Rhetoric of Sociospatial Theatre,” J. Chris Westgate comments on Rivera's use of space in order to challenge this plan, led by then-Mayor Ed Koch.

Instead of neutral and therefore insignificant or natural and thus unalterable, urban space becomes central to the battle for identity politics and social justice in 1980s New York City. In short, *Marisol* stages a defamiliarization of space, geography, and landscape, thereby challenging audiences to reconsider their perceptions of New York City—a challenge demanded by sceneography and storyline.<sup>203</sup>

Westgate terms *Marisol*'s use of urban space as “sociospatial theatre.” The creative team of *In the Heights* similarly challenges its audiences to reconsider their

---

<sup>201</sup> José Rivera, *Marisol*. In *Marisol and Other Plays*. (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 1997), 61.

<sup>202</sup> Huerta, “Representations of 'Home' in Three US Latino Plays.” Presented at the Latin American Theatre Today Conference, University of Kansas. March 29 – April 1, 2000.

<sup>203</sup> Westgate, 21.

perceptions of New York City's urban landscape. However, instead of battling for social justice in the face of government discrimination, *In the Heights* stages two days in the life of a community as they navigate the challenges and joys of daily life in a very specific New York City neighborhood. Therefore, while the sociospatial theatre of *Marisol* defamiliarizes a space, the sociospatial theatre of *In the Heights* seeks to familiarize its space for its audience. On a larger scale, this familiarization contributes to the overall distancing and drawing in of the audience which allows the creators and actors of *In the Heights* to communicate life in a bicultural community.

This study is not one centrally concerned with the relationship of urban space to ecology, but one theorist's framework is useful as we continue to use *Marisol* as a way to investigate the relationship of Latino/a characters to their geographic space. Deep ecologist Joanna Macy is convinced that in the new millennium, humans are feeling a profound despair, due to the slow destruction of our planet.<sup>204</sup> Deep ecologists hold the philosophy that all organisms are interdependent and that all beings hold an inherent worth. Macy sees four ways in which people on spiritual paths look at the world. These four perspectives work well with *Marisol*, but can also be applied to the way the immigrant views New York City, as illustrated in the three model musicals discussed here. Macy's

---

<sup>204</sup> Joanna Macy, *World as Lover, World as Self*. California: Parallax Press, 2007.

perspectives include: first, the world as a battlefield. In *Marisol*, New York City becomes a literal battlefield as God and angels engage in warfare. For the Jets and Sharks of *West Side Story* and The Vampires of *The Capeman*, the city streets also become battlefields. Next, the world as a trap. In *Marisol*, Lenny makes multiple attempts at running away. In *The Capeman*, Salvador is imprisoned in New York City, and upon his release, seeks to escape the trap of the city by heading to the Southwestern desert. Third, the world as a lover. *Marisol's* Man with Scar Tissue is representative of this perspective, as he maintains hope in the face of adversity. This is true of many of *In the Heights'* characters, but especially Usnavi, who perseveres and ultimately declares his love for Washington Heights in the production's finale. Finally, the world as self. While *Marisol* sacrifices herself and becomes one with the Earth, Usnavi becomes a part of his New York City landscape when he accepts it as his home. This is not tantamount to Usnavi assimilating to United States' culture, nor is it the equivalent a rejection of his ethnicity. On the contrary, his proclamation of acceptance of his geographic space is an indication of his newfound awareness of the ongoing negotiation that must occur as he navigates a bicultural life as a Dominican-American.

Complicating the idea of the Latino/a space in New York City (and other metropolises across the United States) is a recent concern acted out both on and off stage: the displacement of culture through gentrification. In the 1920s,

Frederick Thrasher defined an interstitial area (what would later be referred to as a ghetto) as “typified by deterioration, shifting population and cultural isolation.”<sup>205</sup>

In the United States, such areas have become home for a variety of ethnic communities. As the threat of gentrification creeps ever-closer, things are changing for their residents. Small businesses are being displaced by larger corporations, rents are on the rise and the cultural components of the *barrio* are disappearing. The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines gentrification as “the process of renewal and rebuilding accompanying the influx of middle-class or affluent people into deteriorating areas that often displaces poorer residents.” The term was coined in 1964 by Ruth Glass, who spoke specifically of London, but noted that, “Once this process starts in a district it goes on rapidly until all or most of the original working class occupiers are displaced and the whole social character of the district is changed.”<sup>206</sup> The major downside to gentrification is this displacement of families and individuals, many of whom are immigrants or first-generation Americans living in neighborhoods with those of similar ethnic, religious and social backgrounds. The process of gentrification often involves not only a restructuring of residential areas, but plans for commercial and recreational development.

---

<sup>205</sup> Frederic M. Thrasher. "Social Attitudes of Superior Boys in an Interstitial Community, *Social Attitudes*, K. Young, ed. (New York: Henry Holt, 1931), 262.

<sup>206</sup> Ruth Glass (1964). *London: aspects of change*, (London: MacGibbon & Kee )

The gentrification of Harlem was studied in 1986 by Richard Schaffer and Neil Smith, who hypothesized about the future of the area. Shaffer and Smith refer to places most often associated with gentrification (those just outside a central business district) as “zones of transition.”<sup>207</sup> These zones of transition are mirrored by the individuals who live there: most often immigrants, and first and second-generation Americans, who live in a transitory state without a clear plan of when their transition will be complete. The Sharks, Anita and Maria in *West Side Story* and Sal in *The Capeman* are representatives of these “zones of transition,” and the production elements for the original productions of these musicals reflect them. Policymakers have seen gentrification as an answer to the “urban problem,” one that it is a “triumph that can potentially bring higher property tax returns and thereby enhance the economic vigor of the city.”<sup>208</sup> Here, the term “urban problem,” refers to the violence, drugs and other unfortunate factors that occur in economically depressed areas, but is also clearly code for “the ethnic problem,” which reinforces criminal and violent stereotypes associated with immigration and cultural communities in the United States.

Shaffer and Smith also investigated what happens to the communities that are displaced by gentrification and articulated “the fear of gentrification in target

---

<sup>207</sup> Richard Schaffer and Neil Smith, “The Gentrification of Harlem?,” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, Vol. 76, No. 3 (September, 1986), 350.

<sup>208</sup> Schaffer and Smith, 349.

neighborhoods is certainly widely reported and in areas where the process has begun, everyone has a story about old families and friends next door who were moved out.”<sup>209</sup> It is important to note that Shaffer and Smith use “who were moved out,” and not “who moved out,” implying forced removal from one’s home, primarily through economic circumstances and commercial development associated with gentrification. In addition, we must remember that the gentrification affects not only the community, but the individual. When ethnic communities challenge gentrification projects, they may be seen solely as representatives of their cultural community and their individual goals overlooked. As Shaffer and Smith state, “‘The city’ is not an undifferentiated pool of abstractly equal individuals but rather comprises a stratified population whose experience of gentrification is highly differentiated. Some gain and some lose.”<sup>210</sup> *In the Heights* tells some of these stories, and rather than generalizing all of its Latino/a characters as one group that loses or one that gains, it presents individuals who are affected in various ways. Daniela is unable to afford her shop, and so she is forced out. Abuela Claudia wins the lottery and is able to invest her winnings in improving the community. Usnavi spends much of the play planning to leave the *barrio*, but ultimately decides to stay and is determined to keep his bodega running, despite the changes around him.

---

<sup>209</sup> Ibid.

<sup>210</sup> Ibid.

The gentrification of East Harlem, also known as Spanish Harlem, or *El Barrio*, is an ongoing, if not well-publicized, battle for its residents. Over the past decade, the area has taken on a new moniker, "SpaHa," which uses the first letters of Spanish Harlem and conjures an image of a place one might go for a healing getaway of hot tubs and manicures. This reflects the changing landscape of New York City's largely Latino/a upper-Manhattan neighborhoods as small, family-run businesses move out and high-end shops move in. In 2006, residents of *El Barrio* successfully halted progress on the "Uptown N.Y. Project," which proposed a six-acre reconstruction stretching from 125th Street to 127th Street and from 2nd Avenue to 3rd Avenue.<sup>211</sup> The plan was to develop the area with high-end retail stores, high-rise housing, and an underground bus depot. In an attempt to garner the good wishes of the local community, the developer, Urban Strategic Partners, proposed to include a Latino-themed "mini-city," with performance venues, recording studios and other areas for entertainment. This part of the project, termed *Ciudad de Sueños* (City of Dreams), was to include a Times Square-like center and a series of high-priced brownstones. The scope of the project was huge, both in physical scale, and in dedication of economic and human resources. The major concerns of this and other gentrification projects include the impact on local businesses, the cultural community, affordable housing and environmental factors.

---

<sup>211</sup> Dávila, *Latino Spin: Public Image and the Whitewashing of Race*.

Arlene Dávila argues that the plans for a Latino-themed cultural component in the Uptown New York Project reflected a need for “public acquiescence” for the project and were put in place to create “the perception of community involvement, consultation, and openness” that “fostered a veil of inclusivity...[and] inevitability.”<sup>212</sup> By enticing the local Latino/a community with shops, services and events that promised to embrace their culture, Urban Strategic Partners confirmed their place as the dominant force in this micro-colonization of a cultural space. The residents of East Harlem became subjugated to the desires of the developer by being led into a sense of false security and the notion that this project would be beneficial for them. Plans for the “*Ciudad de Sueños*” caused increased tension between Latino/a and African American residents, with the latter feeling that they were being “erased” from the East Harlem landscape. Ultimately, both communities protested the idea, on the grounds that their cultures would be lost, subjugated to the desires of wealthy, white developers.<sup>213</sup>

Dávila adds that, “One of the most intriguing aspects of gentrification is how communities' opposition to development is oftentimes tamed by the inclusion of cultural initiatives that allege to be representative of these very same communities.”<sup>214</sup> This was especially true for the *Ciudad de Sueños* project. The

---

<sup>212</sup> Dávila, 98.

<sup>213</sup> Ibid.

<sup>214</sup> Dávila, 99.



Latin Media and Entertainment Commission was instituted to oversee and advise this part of the project. Members of the Commission included popular singer and actress Jennifer Lopez, salsa musician Willie Colon and actor Antonio Banderas. Community members became concerned that initiatives to improve the area and fund local projects were set aside while the Commission planned high-profile events like the Latino Alternative Music Conference and the Fiesta Cup Soccer Game. Afro-Latina Daphne Ruben-Vega, originator of the role of Mimi in *Rent*, summed up community response to the project, stating, "They mean well, but the concept didn't originate with the Latino/a community of *El Barrio*; the people involved don't necessarily live there."<sup>215</sup> By looking toward high-profile events with international interest, like those mentioned above, Mayor Bloomberg and Urban Strategic Partners blatantly ignored the needs and desires of those living in the community and instead focused on further stimulating the economy of the new area and bolstering its slick image. In addition, it seems they sought to capitalize on the popularity of all things Latin-American, seeking authentic dining, entertainment or sport experiences, but not necessarily for Latino/a consumers.

By excluding the area's residents from the planning process, Urban Strategic Partners, in effect, announced the inevitable displacement of area residents. However, In May 2006, the Bloomberg Administration "quietly halted

---

<sup>215</sup> Dávila, 104.

plans for the project, bowing to pressure from Manhattan Borough President Scott Stringer, City Councilwoman Melissa Mark Viverito (D-East Harlem) and Community Board 11,” a board created to represent the interests of the residents of the area.<sup>216</sup> Urban Strategic Partners has since re-applied to go forward with the project, and other proposals have been under consideration as well. In contrast to the development project are smaller but successful organizations that seek to maintain the culture and support the artistic development of the area, including Washington Heights, which provides the setting for *In the Heights*. One such organization is the Northern Manhattan Arts Alliance, which awarded \$50,000 in grants to arts organizations and artists of Washington Heights.

In stark contrast to this theme park “Latino Adventureland” proposed by Urban Strategic Partners are the *casitas* of many Puerto Rican barrios, represented in the advertising for *The Capeman*. These shack-like, stilted structures, often with vegetable gardens beneath are found in poverty-stricken neighborhoods of the Caribbean. Recreations of *casitas* can be found in Latino/a *barrios* across the United States. By re-appropriating the *casita*, the Latino/a community is able to honor and remember their homeland, recreate a sense of home that is connected to memory and nostalgia, and most importantly, alter the identity of that space.

Scholar Luis Aponte-Pares calls this re-creation "an imagined community, one

---

<sup>216</sup> Bob Kappstatter, “Uptown’ plan down and out. Foes sink huge E. Harlem project.” *New York Daily News*. (May 3, 2006).

that recaptures a memory of home."<sup>217</sup> Only rural images of Puerto Rico, like that of the *casita*, are seen on stage in *The Capeman*. Living as a *jíbaro* (peasant) and sent to the asylum for the poor, Salvador Agrón lives a simple existence. Since it is structured as a memory play, these images are seen only after Salvador has moved to the New York City *barrio*. Images like the *casita* then function as a reminder to Salvador of the suffering of those left behind. The reconstruction of the *casita* in urban areas is a part of the immigrant's devotion to the island. This is consistent with Aponte-Pares' argument that, "Barrio residents invoke rural images and narratives as coded interpretations of the reality of poverty and marginalization that their own poor and working-class relatives experience on the island."<sup>218</sup> In *The Capeman*, Sal's life as a *jíbaro* is re-articulated in a new form in New York City. Transplanted to an urban setting, he is no better off than he was in Puerto Rico. The promise of the American Dream that lured his mother to the United States is broken. In addition, the prophecy of the Santero, who assures Sal's mother that a life in the United States will only lead to tragedy, comes true. Sal cannot escape his fate, despite the fact that he migrates to the United States. It is, in fact, this choice to immigrate that introduces Sal to a world of violence and imprisonment, proving that, for him, the American Dream can never be reached.

---

<sup>217</sup> Aponte-Pares, Luis. "What's Yellow and White and Has Land All Around It?" *The Latino Studies Reader*, (United Kingdom: Blackwell Publishing, 1998), 274.

<sup>218</sup> *Ibid.*

Furthermore, not only are his mother's goals for Sal unattainable, but he has no chance at creating an American home that meets his own needs or desires.

The artistic team of *In the Heights*, in particular, has attempted to use a realistic geographical space to create a sense of home and to explore what happens to Latino/a identity, culture and community when that space is threatened. In an interview with *In the Heights*' Lin-Manuel Miranda, Melena Ryzik briefly mentions the gentrification of Washington Heights as she sets the scene for meeting the production's composer and lyricist.

He had hoped to swing by the Hillside Diner, at 181st Street and Fort Washington Avenue, for the neighborhood's best cup of coffee. But like most of the area, the diner was undergoing an upscale shift. 'Coming Soon -- Hudson View Restaurant,' a sign proclaimed. The inevitable creep of gentrification -- the fliers for yoga and Pilates studios, the apartments renting for \$2,200 a month, the Starbucks and wine bars -- is notably not a part of "*In the Heights*," whose characters are mostly strivers.<sup>219</sup>

Ryzik has clearly missed the mark with her assessment of *In the Heights* by claiming that the threat of gentrification is absent from the musical. On the contrary, gentrification is a looming presence over the entire play. The “strivers” that Ryzik speaks of - Usnavi, Sonny and Vanessa - are all impacted by the changing landscape of their environment. The infiltration of upscale building

---

<sup>219</sup> Melena Ryzik, “Heights Before Broadway,” *The New York Times*, (March 14, 2008). <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/03/14/theater/14heig.html?scp=3&sq=Puerto+Rico&st=nyt>

projects threatens to disperse the members of this family, and the community is at risk of losing its cultural customs that are kept alive because they live in close proximity to each other. A fear of losing everything, including family, reaches its tense height in the following exchange between Nina, her parents, Benny, Vanessa and Usnavi:

**Kevin**

I sold Rosario's. You're going back to Stanford.

**Camila**

Kevin, this had better be a joke.

**Kevin**

Uptown Investment takes over in two weeks.

**Camila**

Uptown? *Ay dios mio*, they offered us nothing!

**Kevin**

It was enough, *mi vida*.

**Nina**

Wait. Dad, I'm finding a job. I have an appointment to visit CUNY on Monday!

**Kevin**

What, so you end up just another girl stuck in *el barrio*?

**Vanessa**

Why you gotta look at me when you say that?

**Benny**

Hold up, did I just lose my job?

**Camila**

No, you didn't. I do the payroll, the banking, your chaotic paperwork. We worked twenty years to

build this company. I worked!

**Kevin**

For what, Cami? Twenty years for what?

**Nina**

What about your employees?

**Benny**

You can't just kick us to the curb.

**Usnavi**

Your drivers are half my customers.

**Kevin**

I'm not a welfare office! Family comes first, above everything.

**Benny**

The day you hired me you said I was family.

**Kevin**

That's business. This is my daughter.

**Camila**

You are all my family, and you have my word: we are not selling Rosario's.

**Kevin**

I'm making the damn deal!

**Camila**

This is our business.

**Kevin**

It was in my name!

**Camila**

Dinner's over. (She exits.)

This exchange illustrates the far-reaching affects of gentrification. Not only does

the threat of the Uptown Investment takeover all but ensure the loss of the family business, but it will negatively impact Usnavi's business as well. It strains relationships between partners, parents and child, boss and employee.

Furthermore, Nina's attempts to offset the economic impact on her parents with her intention of transferring to the City University prompt panic from her father, who sees a future with her stuck in Washington Heights and shame from Vanessa, who is in that very situation.

Usnavi and the community lament circumstances like these in the production's opening number, also called *In the Heights*. "I'm getting tested/ times are tough on this bodega/two months ago somebody bought Ortega's/Our neighbors started packin' up and pickin' up/And ever since the rents went up/It's gotten mad expensive/But we live with just enough." The placement of this verse in the opening number makes an undeniable statement contrary to Ryzik's observation. The threat of gentrification is real and its effects are being felt. Those who cannot afford escalating rents are forced to move as small businesses struggle to stay afloat.

The forces of those behind gentrification projects are treated differently in *In the Heights* than they are in noon-musical Latino/a plays. In *Doña Rosita's Jalapeño Kitchen*, actress Ruby Nilda moves between roles as Rosita and the real estate developer (among others) as she relates her direct dealings with those who

wish to purchase her property. Similarly to *The Capeman's* bifurcated Sal/Salvador character, Rosita's multiple identities reflect her internal struggle as she attempts to make the right decision. In *In the Heights*, developers or real estate agents are never seen on stage and there is no indication that there has been any interaction between such people and the characters on stage. In this way, gentrification is depicted as a more insidious beast whose encroachment may be a gradual process rather than a sudden one. Projects like the one proposed by Urban Strategic Planners are not depicted on stage as one-time occurrences that force the community to take a stand. Instead, the community, as Sonny repeats in the Act I finale, "Blackout," is "powerless."

The threat of displacement for the characters of *In the Heights* is not one that they can rise up and join forces against. Instead, bit by bit, neighborhood businesses are being replaced. The Rosarios sell their car and limosine service and high rents force Daniela to vacate her salon and head to the Bronx. There is little the community can do in the face of gradual displacement.

While *Doña Rosita's Jalapeno Kitchen* includes the character Caliche, a member of the community who has joined the developers as a multiple-business owner, *In the Heights* does not have a representative of the economically dominant class. This reinforces the aim of the production's creators to illustrate a united community. Since economic disparity amongst the community is not a



factor in the play, Usnavi's status as narrator gives a sense that he is a spokesperson for the community and each time they join him in a chorus, their unity is confirmed. In his analysis of *Doña Rosita's Jalapeno Kitchen*, Jorge Huerta sees Clark's illustration of Caliche as representative of the "insensitive attitude of the economically successful toward the less fortunate."<sup>220</sup> Such people are termed "*vendidos*" or "sell-outs," while those who have dreams of moving to the suburbs are termed "*las gordinflonas*."<sup>221</sup> A hint of Doña Rosita's *gordinflona*, Conchita, who dreams of moving to the suburbs can be found in Heights' Vanessa, who dreams of moving to Manhattan. When *In the Heights*' Abuela Claudia wins the lottery, she gives two-thirds of it to Usnavi and Sonny and in doing so, she represents a character distinctly different from Caliche. Rather than perpetuating a stereotype of the *vendido* who is quick to make money and leave the *barrio*, Abuela Claudia invests in the future of the *barrio*. Here, the creators of *In the Heights* reject the notion of Latino/a inter-community conflict. In addition they create a new idea of what success means to residents of the *barrio*. It is not solely "getting out."

In her definition of the characteristics of border writing, Emilie Hicks says that, "the space in which the actions take place achieves a double signification: the *barrio*, extension of the Chicano family (a true community of customs and ideals),

---

<sup>220</sup> Huerta, *Chicano Theater: Themes and Forms*. (Arizona, Bilingual Review Press, 1982), 82.

<sup>221</sup> *Ibid.*

and the border, a place of multiple conflicts."<sup>222</sup> Although New York City is not on the United States-Mexican border, its representation in *West Side Story* and *The Capeman* mirrors this double-signification. The characters in *West Side Story* represent both literal and ideological families. Maria and Bernardo are brother and sister, and Anita, Bernardo's girlfriend, looks over Maria as would an older sister. As gangs, the Jets and Sharks represent two distinct families. Riff reminds us in "The Jets Song," "When you're a Jet/If the spit hits the fan/You got brothers around/You're a family man."

The idea of a gang as a central community for the Latino/a immigrant in New York City is also illustrated in *The Capeman*. Puerto Rico and New York City are equally hellish for *The Capeman's* Sal. When Marc Anthony first appears as Sal in New York City, he sings the doo-wop song "Satin Summer Nights," giving a nostalgic feel to his new home. "This is the island of Nueva York. We'll go through the projects, make out on the roof, count the stars like silver studs on my motorcycle boots." The chorus of girls that join him for this verse are Puerto Rican as well, and throughout the song they dream of what promises New York holds for them. This hope soon changes to fear as Sal sings, "afraid to leave the projects/to cross into another neighborhood/The *blancos* and the nigger gangs/Well, they'd kill you if they could." In a vulnerable state having

---

<sup>222</sup> Emilie Hicks. *Border Writing: The Multidimensional Text*, (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 38.

experienced the culture shock of moving from a rural island town to New York City, Sal is a perfect target for Hernandez, also known as “The Umbrella Man,” leader of the Vampires street gang. Hernandez all but demands that Sal join the gang. He presents gang membership as Sal's only option, and assures him a miserable existence otherwise. He, too, reinforces the link between membership in the gang and membership in a family as he sings “you want to fight for your people, don’t you, Sal?” and “We stand for the neighborhood.” Here, *The Capeman* goes a step further than *West Side Story* in strengthening ties between family, culture and location. With references to “your people” and “the neighborhood,” Hernandez seats the New York City *barrio* as not only the geographic space where Sal now resides, but as a surrogate Puerto Rico, a place that is exclusive to their culture, and one that must be defended as such. As part of the Vampires family, Sal will be a representative of his neighborhood; a protector of the landscape. The streets of New York City become tangible manifestations of the Vampires.

In the doo-wop infused song, “Dance to the Dream,” a young couple, Carlos and Yolanda sing, “There are lawns and flowers on a Westchester Street/Maples that sound like the River/A place for our children that’s restful and sweet/I promise you one day we’ll live there.” This articulation of the American Dream is tied up in geography and occurs before Sal is thrust into an American

Nightmare. We later learn that Carlos is himself a member of The Vampires. The fact that he is the one singing this song makes the loss of this dream all the more real and more devastating.

Gang membership in *West Side Story* is portrayed differently from gang membership in *The Capeman*, as indicated through the music and lyrics associated with each. Although the productions are set in the same time period, *The Capeman* was written forty years later, and its tone is much darker and harsher. In “The Jets Song,” Action, Baby John, A-rab, Action and Big Deal sing,

When you're a Jet  
 You're the top cat in town  
 You're the gold medal kid  
 With the heavyweight crown!

When you're a Jet  
 You're the swingin'est thing  
 Little boy, you're a man  
 Little man, you're a king!

The Jets are in gear,  
 Our cylinders are clickin'!  
 The Sharks'll steer clear  
 'Cause ev'ry Puerto Rican's a lousy chicken!

Despite the fact that these lyrics are sung by gang members who engage in violence so fierce that it leads to murder, there is a lightheartedness to these words. However, these words are sung before the deaths of Riff, Bernardo and Tony, and it can be presumed that tensions between the Jets and Sharks have never before escalated to violence of this magnitude. Instead, gang membership is

associated with looking good, standing proud, and garnering the envy and attention of others in the neighborhood. In contrast are the lyrics given to the Vampires, who sing about their experience and illustrate life in the *barrio* with the following:

Frenchy Cordero goes down to Hell's Kitchen  
 To sell the Irish some weed  
 So this Paddy Boy's mother on the stoop starts bitchin'  
 'Bout spics is a mongrel breed  
 Now here comes her son  
 He looks like a ton of corned beef  
 Floating in beer  
 He says  
 'Fucking Puerto Rican dope-dealing punk  
 Get your shit-brown ass out of here.'  
 We stand for the neighborhood.  
 So the shanty-town Irish they kicked his ass good.  
 Fractured his collar bone  
*Coño*, all I was thinking is, 'What home of the brave?  
 This is a fucking war zone.'

There is no lightheartedness to life with the Vampires. Their New York is one in which drugs, violence and racism are an every day part of life. Survival is a daily struggle. Their rumbles are not arranged as they are between the Jets and the Sharks. They must be ready to rumble at any moment. *The Capeman* gives a voice to the Latino gang members in a way that *West Side Story* does not. The Shark men do not have a title song, as the Jets do. This results in the Sharks being further Othered by the audience. Yet, in giving the Vampires a voice, Paul Simon simultaneously others them as well, and perpetuates violent stereotypes of the

barrio.

The Shark women have a different set of stereotypes and attitudes toward their urban landscape to contend with. The imagery created by the Anita and the Sharks as they sing “America” is largely industrial, and sits in direct opposition to the natural landscape associated with Puerto Rico that is articulated by the innocent Rosalia. Not only is America painted as a more civilized place, in Puerto Rico American conveniences simply will not work. Anita refutes Rosalia's every attempt to integrate American conveniences into Puerto Rican life in the following exchange:

**Rosalia**

I'll drive a Buick to San Juan

**Anita**

If there's a road you can drive on

**Rosalia**

I'll give my cousins a free ride

**Anita**

How you get all of them inside.

**Rosalia**

I'll bring a t.v. To San Juan

**Anita**

If there's a channel to turn on

**Rosalia**

I'll bring a new washing machine

**Anita**

What have they got there to keep clean.

And later, all sing:

I like to be in America!  
 O.K. by me in America!  
 Ev'rything free in America  
 For a small fee in America!

Automobile in America,  
 Chromium steel in America,  
 Wire-spoke wheel in America,  
 Very big deal in America!

I like the shores of America!  
 Comfort is yours in America!  
 Knobs on the doors in America,  
 Wall-to-wall floors in America!

Two stereotypes of Puerto Rico are reinforced in this song. First, Rosalia reinforces the idealized view of the island with her descriptions, “Puerto Rico you lovely island/Island of tropical breezes/Always the pineapples growing/Always the coffee blossoms blowing.” Anita refutes Rosalia's view of Puerto Rico, but reinforces another stereotype of the island as an uncivilized, tribal space filled with poverty, violence and natural disaster as she counters, “Puerto Rico you ugly island/Island of tropic diseases/Always the hurricanes blowing/Always the population growing/And the money owing/and the babies crying/And the bullets flying.” Subsequently, for everything that is mentioned as an American convenience, it is simultaneously implied that all that is American is not Puerto Rican, and therefore America is inherently better in every way. Knobs on doors

and wall-to-wall floors are apparently not typical in Puerto Rico. A tongue in cheek exaggeration to be sure, but with her words, Anita reinforces an image of Puerto Rico as unworthy of human habitation. Yet, she has an awareness that America is not what she expected. The suggestion that everything in America is free “for a small fee” implies the Shark's recognition that their status hinders their chance at being economically successful. In this way, Anita in particular demonstrates the antithesis to Maria's naivete in her attitudes toward New York. It is interesting to note here, however, that in the revival production of *West Side Story* (and in its touring production), Maria's character is given the same awareness. When Lieutenant Shrank questions Maria about the rumble that is to occur between the Jets and the Sharks, he relates a rumor of tension around her dancing with a boy. When he asks her who the boy was, she answers, “another from my country.” When Shrank persists, she answers defiantly, “José!” This defiant delivery, as played both by Josefina Scaglione and Ali Ewoldt in the revival, indicates a self-awareness of the stereotypical image that Shrank and the other adults have of the Sharks. This scene occurs in Maria's bedroom, and her defensiveness is natural as Shrank has infiltrated her space, and by extension, the Shark's space.

*In the Heights* also focuses on family and community, but moves away from the model of gang as family and toward cultural community as family. *In the*



*Heights'* geography is also reflective of ideology, but in a way that is distinctly different from the two earlier musicals. The first hint of this change is that the ensemble of *In the Heights* is always referred to in the script and playbill, as well as on stage, as “the Community.” This simple designation changes these members of the cast from background singers and dancers to essential characters who tie together space, ideas and ideals. The core nuclear family in *In the Heights* is represented by the Rosarios: Kevin, Camila, and their daughter Nina. Extended family is represented by Usnavi and his cousin Sonny, who own and operate the neighborhood bodega. As Usnavi introduces the characters, it is clear that even those who are not blood-related are indeed a family. He sings, “That was Abuela, she's not really my abuela/But she practically raised me/This corner is her *escuela*.” Abuela Claudia is a grandmother-figure not only to Usnavi, but to the entire community. Identification of self in the context of the barrio family is also addressed, most prominently in “*Carnaval del Barrio*,” as Carla sings, “Ummm.../My mom is Dominican-Cuban/My dad is from Chile and P.R, which means/I'm Chile-...Dominica-Rican!/But I always say I'm from Queens! Here, Carla rejects the stereotype of the immigrant caught in identity confusion and instead celebrates her status as living a “border existence,” while acknowledging that she is a part of a transnational community.

In *West Side Story* and *The Capeman*, the characters' physical space must

be protected from rival gangs and their turf marked by acts of violence. The multiple conflicts that occur in these *barrios* include crime, violence and racial tension. The double signification of Emilie Hicks' border families holds true here, where in order to be a part of the family, one must engage in these conflicts. *In the Heights'* Washington Heights must be protected from gentrification and displacement, and its streets and corners are marked with symbols of a variety of cultures, most prominently with the flags of Puerto Rico, Cuba, Mexico and the Dominican Republic.

The use of such cultural symbols onstage reflects an ongoing struggle in ideology between Puerto Rican islanders and Puerto Rican mainlanders (those who now live in the United States). In her case-study of Puerto Rican immigrants living in Chicago, Ana Ramos-Zayas discussed tension between the two groups regarding authenticity.

The elite maintains the right to decide not only which elements of Puerto Rican folklore are considered authenticated but also how the representation of these folkloric expressions functions to demonstrate one's authenticity. For instance, waving and wearing the Puerto Rican flag, listening to salsa music with barrio themes, attending Puerto Rican Day parades, exalting images of the jibaro, Taino, or Afro-Caribbean *vejigante*, and other folkloric displays of Puerto Ricanness are evidence of cultural authenticity among Puerto Ricans in the diaspora. Ironically, it is precisely the folklorization of such symbols and the preservation of real or symbolic places common to the creation of a popular nationalism in the Puerto

Rican diaspora that is used by Chicago islanders as "evidence" of barrio residents' lack of cultural authenticity.<sup>223</sup>

Ramos-Zayas goes on to make a bold statement in declaring that one of her subjects, Hilda,

has become ...a migrant...who appears inseparable from being 'poor and starving' or 'living off welfare.' In the collective imaginary, this type of migrant is someone who left the island escaping poverty to settle in the New York Puerto Rican barrios, someone whose patriotic love was always tempting him to return, someone who attempted to achieve the American Dream provided that it would enable him to buy a parcel of land and return to his beloved island, and, ultimately, someone who died poor and in "exile" on the streets of Spanish Harlem.<sup>224</sup>

Ramos-Zayas claims that this image of the migrant is what transforms him/her into the other for non-immigrants in the United States. Hilda, a resident of the Chicago barrio, recognizes that she and others are marginalized by this view of the Latino/a immigrant. She refutes this by arguing, "I didn't arrive here poor and starving. There [in Puerto Rico] I was better off than here. I've never lived off welfare. There are Puerto Ricans here who live proud of themselves. They live well, have good houses. They're not all professionals, but people who have businesses and like to live well."<sup>225</sup> A similar reversal of expectation is found in

---

<sup>223</sup> Ana Ramos-Zayas, 37.

<sup>224</sup> Ibid, 38.

<sup>225</sup> Ibid.

Cherrie Moraga's *Shadow of a Man*, as Hortensia laments the fact that in Mexico, one could hire a maid, while in the United States, Latinas are destined to be maids themselves. This destiny proves true for *In the Heights*' Abuela Claudia who becomes a maid, along with her mother, after immigrating to the United States. However, as the eldest of the generations represented in this musical, her status is consistent with the time period in which she arrived in the United States. In addition, Abuela Claudia did not come from a wealthy family in Cuba; their immigration was economically motivated. Other major characters in the play include small business owners like the Rosarios, Usnavi and Angela. Their economic status in the neighborhood enables them to resist being Othered by the audience to some extent.

The idea of the Latino/a Other is not solely reserved for non-Latinos, however. Another subject in Ramos-Zayas' study, Ruben Rivera, comments on what he sees as exaggerated displays of Puerto Rican-ness by the island's elite, "I know I am Puerto Rican. I don't have to be talking about it every second. Puerto Ricans here have to be saying that they are Puerto Rican, displaying flags, all that. I know who I am."<sup>226</sup> These contrasting views of the Puerto Rican in New York are similarly articulated on stage in *The Capeman* and *In the Heights*. While Rivera seems to take offense to what he sees as showy cultural displays, *In the*

---

<sup>226</sup> Ibid.

*Heights* embraces these displays and, because it is a musical, the extravagance of such displays is welcomed and encouraged by the audience. While the Latino/a immigrant may feel conflicted in the message sent through their own cultural displays, on stage, as with *In the Heights*, they are given permission to proclaim their cultural pride. In *The Capeman*, Sal's memory often brings him back to Puerto Rico, and he sings about the landscape and cultural elements like the island's music and island spirituality unabashedly. The subjects of Ramos-Zayas' study may accuse Usnavi and Sal of being inauthentic, because through their actions, they, in effect, recreate an ideal of the islands, rather than drawing on that which is authentic. Furthermore, Santos suggests that the barrio "become[s] Puerto Rico, the nation, while the island remains a fragmented, incomprehensible Other."<sup>227</sup> Santos claims that some college students from the barrio try to camouflage their ethnicity while at school. The opposite of this occurs in *In the Heights* as Nina wonders what life would have been like if her family had stayed in Puerto Rico. She speaks proudly of how hard she worked to learn Spanish and is openly proud of her culture and envious of what she perceives to be a better life in Puerto Rico. Throughout Santos' interviews with Puerto Rican immigrants in Chicago,

an image that constantly surfaced in interviews and casual conversations with college students was that

---

<sup>227</sup> Ibid.

of the ideal Puerto Rican woman from the island, invariably described as very fair-skinned or fashionably tanned with shoulder-length straight black hair (pageboy style) and a coy hyper feminine and even infantile voice as opposed to the more boisterous, street-smart, and explicitly sensualized/sexualized Puerto Rican women from the mainland.<sup>228</sup>

This dichotomy is reflected in *In the Heights* with Nina and Vanessa and in *West Side Story* with Maria and Anita. Each younger girl seen as innocent and childlike, while Vanessa and Anita are celebrated for their sensuality, sexuality, and sassiness. There is a constant flux of who and what is considered dominant and subaltern in the construction of authenticity on the mainland and on the island.

Santos' argument relies on Nestor Garcia-Canclini's theory of "converting yourself into what you are."<sup>229</sup> Here, Garcia-Canclini explains this concept as one in which the immigrant becomes a member of the hegemonic group. However, this concept works quite differently in *In the Heights*, *The Capeman* and *West Side Story*. *The Capeman's* Sal, undergoes a double conversion, first converting to a criminal and then experiencing a redemptive conversion. Any attempt at becoming a part of the hegemonic culture is thwarted, and by the time Sal finds spiritual redemption, he has no desire to become a part of that group. In *West Side*

---

<sup>228</sup> Ibid.

<sup>229</sup> Néstor Garcia-Canclini, *Hybrid Cultures: Strategies for Entering and Leaving Modernity*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), 135.

*Story* Maria makes a conscious decision to convert to the hegemonic group with her declaration, “I am an American girl now.” *In the Heights*' Usnavi converts to “what he is:” a New Yorker, having realized that this was his home all along. The biggest change that occurs for Usnavi is that he learns along the way not to completely assimilate, but to find home: a place that belongs to him and is of his own construction. His desire to go back to the Dominican Republic was built on the idea of converting himself into who he thought he was supposed to be (a symptom he shares with Nina), rather than who he truly is.

In Cruz's *Miriam's Flowers*, the title character's mother, Delfina, tells her, “the only place you should be scared of is outside – on the street.” For her, New York City is terrifying, due to the fact that her young son was hit by a train and killed. Indeed, this image of the New York City street as a place of danger for the Latino/a immigrant is reinforced in *West Side Story* and *The Capeman*. The sets of *West Side Story*, both the original and the 2009 revival, are minimalist and consist of only the essential elements necessary to suggest a depressed area of New York City: fire escapes, a bridge, and the suggestion of crumbling buildings. Scenes in the domestic sphere include the bridal shop, Maria's bedroom and Doc's soda shop, which contain realistic furniture, but again, only the necessities. The original renderings for the 2009 revival by James Youmans included a backdrop of constellations and Zodiac signs, presumably to suggest the star-crossed

relationship between Tony and Maria, whose fate, like that of Romeo and Juliet, is sealed.

In *West Side Story*, the scenes that happen on the city street include face-offs between the Jets and the Sharks, run-ins with Officer Krupke and Detective Shrank, and the rumble, which ends in the deaths of both Riff and Bernardo. Safer scenes occur in the domestic sphere of the bridal shop, Maria's bedroom and her fire escape. The interior scenes in both *Miriam's Flowers* and *West Side Story* provide a means of escape for the characters. The bedroom and the bridal shop could be anywhere; they could be back at home home in Puerto Rico. In addition, the bridal shop and the bedroom are Maria's spaces, and therefore, "Shark" territory, while the only remaining interior space, Doc's drugstore, is Jets territory and home to the scene of the attempted rape of Anita. Therefore, it is only in their own cultural space that the Sharks, including the women, are, in any way, safe.

The fire escape, an image iconic to the New York City landscape serves a function beyond the practical in each of these productions. During their song, "At Sunrise," Nina and Benny stand on his fire escape as she gives him a Spanish lesson. Later, Nina remembers the many hours she would spend on the fire escape, dreaming, as she confesses to Benny, "I used to think we lived at the top of the world/When the world was just a subway street map/And the 1 slash 9 climbed a dotted line to my place/ I used to think the Bronx was a place in the sky/When the



world was just a subway map/And my thoughts took shape/On that fire escape.”

In the absence of a spot created by nature, the fire escape is the urban equivalent of the beach, a tree bough, a grassy hill or some other place where one may seek solace. The height of the fire escape allows Nina a simultaneous connection to the cityscape that she can now view beyond her neighborhood and to the same sky that blankets her ancestral Puerto Rico. Both *In the Heights*' Nina and Benny and *West Side Story*'s Maria and Tony convene on fire escapes after evenings of lovemaking. Both couples suffer the disapproval of the young girl's parents and the fire escape serves as their special hideaway. The fire escape also serves as a “border space” in which danger is present; Nina and Benny or Maria and Tony could get caught meeting secretly; yet, in some ways, it is a safe haven for each couple. On the fire escape “there's a place for us.” *West Side Story*'s “The Somewhere Ballet,” which, in the original and revival productions, is staged in an empty space, provides an escape from both gang turfs and from the border space of the fire escape. Representing a clean slate, this ideological space is free from geographic attachment, allowing the Sharks and Jets to interact freely and peaceably.

There is little to no safe place in *The Capeman*. Scenes of Puerto Rico involve the abusive punishment of young Sal by the Sisters of the Poor and the fearful predictions of the Santero. Those in New York City are either on the

streets where gang violence occurs or in various prisons. An interior scene that takes place in a clothing shop is the site of theft and where Sal takes on his alias as The Capeman. A scene in his New York City apartment involves a confrontation between Sal and his abusive stepfather.

The set for *In the Heights* is realistic, and seeks to replicate a neighborhood at the 181<sup>st</sup> Metro stop. Consistent with the architecture of Washington Heights, the set includes a flight of stairs leading from the main part of the stage to a small area above. The steep hills of Washington Heights have led to a number of these “step streets,” with steps and elevators allowing access to upper parts of the street. Beyond the steps is a silhouette of the George Washington Bridge, lights twinkling. The four primary structures on stage are the Rosario’s Car and Limousine Service, an apartment building stoop (home to Abuela Claudia), Usnavi’s bodega and the beauty salon where Angela, Daniela and Vanessa work. While *In the Heights* is the only musical set specifically in Washington Heights, this *barrio* can function as a representative of many largely Latino/a-populated areas of northern Manhattan.

In *In the Heights*, a large portion of the play takes place outside, with several scenes occurring in the Rosario's Car and Limousine Service, Usnavi's bodega, Angela's hair salon and a nightclub. The set is constructed, however, so that the audience always sees the exterior of the entire neighborhood while these

interior scenes occur. For scenes in the hair salon, chairs are moved out of the shop for ease of viewing, and it is conventionally accepted that the audience is looking inside the shop. Aside from this practical consideration, the audience views the interior and exterior of the shop simultaneously and is constantly reminded that the shop is a part of this neighborhood. The staging of the play allows for constant activity in the *barrio*, and director Thomas Kail and choreographer Andy Blankenbuehler have cleverly inserted mini-scenes of members of the community passing through, sometimes chatting, sometimes dancing, further familiarizing the space for the audience. Beyond familiarizing the space for the audience, the production's creative team has created a safe urban space and a very public space in which personal information is shared among the community. Long associated with the ghetto stereotype and having finally extricated themselves from a reputation synonymous with drugs and violence, Washington Heights is represented as a safe community. The streets are not a danger zone constantly threatened by gang violence.

The Washington Heights area has suffered a long history of a bad reputation perpetuated by crime and violence of the 1980s. The residents of Washington Heights were long-considered victims of a “culture of poverty, [mired] in a self-perpetuating cycle of poverty.”<sup>230</sup> A brief history of the area is

---

<sup>230</sup> Mayra Santos, “Puerto Rican Underground,” *Centro* 8, no. 1 (1996), 221.

necessary to understand Washington Heights' place as a Latino/a *barrio*.

Washington Heights is the highest point on Manhattan, and is bordered to the north by Inwood, to the south by 155<sup>th</sup> Street (Harlem), to the East by the Harlem River and to the West by the Hudson River, and is about thirty blocks long. *In the Heights* is autobiographical and it should be noted that its creator, Lin-Manuel Miranda grew up in Inwood which shares demographic, sociocultural and economic characteristics with Washington Heights. The history of immigration to Washington Heights began with the Irish in the early 1900s, followed by European Jews who fled Europe in the 1930s and 1940s, Greeks in the 1950s and 1960s, and most recently, Dominicans, Puerto Ricans and other Latin American individuals, who became the largest population in Washington Heights by the 1980s and 1990s.<sup>231</sup>

In an article published in 1969, David Wallace reported a series of facts and figures related to the population of Washington Heights, New York, from a survey that was administered from November 1960 to April 1961. In his report, "A Few Facts About the Residents of Washington Heights," Wallace calls the area of Upper Manhattan "scarcely... a community."<sup>232</sup> He cites overcrowding and many single-person households as two prohibitive factors to community building

---

<sup>231</sup> David Wallace, "A Few Facts About the Residents of Washington Heights," *The Milbank Memorial Fund Quarterly* Vol. 47, No. 1, Part 2: The Washington Heights Master Sample Survey (Jan., 1969).

<sup>232</sup> *Ibid.*

as well as the ethnic composition of the neighborhood, which is outlined in his study. At the time of the survey, African American and Caucasian individuals comprised the largest population of the area, with Puerto Ricans making up the lowest percentage and other Latin American individuals lumped into a category of “All Other” ethnicities. The newest residents to the area were young Puerto Ricans, pointing to the fact that the early 1960s was a time of increased immigration from Puerto Rico to New York City. Wallace attributed the increasing population of Jewish individuals in the northern part of Washington Heights to the fact that they were being displaced by Puerto Ricans. In addition, Puerto Ricans were cited as being at the low end of the economic scale and as having the largest families. This study, conducted fifty years ago, produces two insights. It is relevant here, because both *West Side Story* and *The Capeman* are set during this time period. Wallace does not define what he means by “community” in his assessment, but, if we consider community to be a collective of like-minded people, and, for purposes of these musicals, one that is ethnically or culturally similar, we might question why there was a lack of community in Washington Heights at the time of his study. At the time, Latin Americans arriving to the New York City area were laying the foundation for the *barrios* that would become their communities. Upon their arrival they did not necessarily have a pre-established community to welcome them. For the teen immigrants, especially boys, gang

membership was one way to ensure preservation of language and culture, as well as protection from members of other ethnic gangs, and especially from exclusively white ones. The Vampires' Hernandez sings about this as he outlines the various rivals that the gang must contend with on the street, “The Chaplins and the Golden Guineas/The Redwings and the Crowns/The Mighty Mau Maus/those Shines from Brooklyn/They want to cut the Vampires down/The Savage Skulls, the Fordham Baldies/They treat you like you're piss.” Ironically, as gang members, the home that they have created for themselves on the streets of New York is one full of violence and conflict. Fifty years later, at the time of *In the Heights*, more community-based programs are available to assist immigrants and to prevent young people from following the path of Sal or the Sharks. Theirs is a new story, one in which the neighborhood is a home of comfort, rather than conflict. In some ways this mirrors the liminal state of the immigrant who must work out the inner struggle of fitting in, finding language and navigating a new geographic and ideological landscape.

From the early to mid 1980s, Washington Heights was considered the largest drug distribution center in the Northeastern United States. Washington Heights' most infamous criminal, Santiago Luis Polanco Rodriguez, better known as Yayo, is considered the first, and most wealthy, mass-marketer of crack cocaine

in the United States.<sup>233</sup> During the time of Yayo, homelessness in Washington Heights, and in New York City generally, was rampant. Housing projects provided little by way of safety or security and were termed “Crack Cities.” After the murder of police officer Michael John Buczek in 1988, police presence increased and the crime rate has lowered steadily over the past two decades. *In the Heights* seeks to reverse the image of Washington Heights, and that of Latinos, associated with crime and violence of the 1980s.

These tumultuous times did produce a positive result: it led to the creation of a theatre by and for the disenfranchised of the New York City *barrios*. “As a colonized people, Puerto Ricans have only recently wrested their image-making away from Hollywood and Madison Avenue.”<sup>234</sup> This statement, made by Carlos Caron in a 1979 interview with Latino playwright Miguel Piñero, was made in response to the theatrical revolution that occurred for Latinos with the work of The Nuyoricans. The Nuyoricans began their work with Piñero's early play *Sideshow* (1974), which was billed as “a child's walk through an urban ghetto.” It was cast with a group of former criminals-turned-actors known first as The Family, and then as The Nuyoricans. The Nuyoricans and other socio-political theatre troupes drew on the work of Agosto Boal and his Theatre of the Oppressed

---

<sup>233</sup> Lubasch, Arnold H. “US Breaks up Major Crack Ring in New York,” *The New York Times*.(July 31, 1987), 1.

<sup>234</sup> Carlos Morton, “Nuyorican Theatre,” *The Drama Review* 20, no.1 (1976), 46.

to tell the raw stories of their daily existence. Their plays are characterized as “violent, profane, and spiked with many references to drugs, prostitution and other types of crime. They are also about revolution.”<sup>235</sup> Piñero's plays and those of his fellow Nuyorican writers also addressed the state of *barrio* life for the Latina. “The barrio piles sexist images and racist nightmares, as well as tons of economic exploitation upon the Latina - until she is buried with oppression.”<sup>236</sup> The Nuyoricans' plays include *Hoe Stroll*, the story of three Latina prostitutes working in New York City and *Lonely Lives*, which tells the story of three runaway boys who rob their families' homes after living in an abandoned building. Ironically, Piñero's plays were written for *barrio* audiences, but broached topics that were considered too racy for the traditionally conservative Latino/a community. Drugs, rape and abortion, although realities in their neighborhoods were not to be displayed on stage. In her analysis of Puerto Rican communities in Chicago, Ana Ramos-Zayas reinforces models of immigration set forth by Una Chaudhuri and Maria-Tania Bades-Becerra when she says, “Puerto Rican migrants have been constructed as the Other of the Puerto Rican nation, even though the pro-Commonwealth government has labeled them 'migrant citizens.' The so-called Nuyoricans either have an identity crisis or have assimilated into U.S. culture.”<sup>237</sup>

---

<sup>235</sup> Ibid.

<sup>236</sup> Ibid.

<sup>237</sup> Ramos-Zayas, 42.



The very fact that the term “Nuyorican” is a hybrid of the terms “New Yorker” and “Puerto Rican,” indicates that these individuals do not wholly assimilate. In addition, the term Nuyorican does not reflect an identity crisis; rather it is a term used proudly to communicate one's bicultural status, as well as a political position, as demonstrated by Piñero and his work. Carlos Morton, who interviewed Piñero says, “The Nuyorican scene is a street scene, a theatre of the *barrio*. Its ghetto artists paint the dialectics of survival.”<sup>238</sup> This theatre was created at a time when violence and drugs were an everyday fact in the *barrio*, and an enormous problem for New York City.

While conditions like these do exist in the *barrio*, and were particularly nightmarish during the 1970s and 1980s, a new image of the Latino/a *barrio* in New York City must be presented to reflect both the positives and negatives of living there today. *In the Heights* is the first to attempt this in musical form.

Lights up on Washington Heights, up at the break of day  
 I wake up and I got this little punk I gotta chase away  
 Pop the grate at the crack of dawn, sing  
 While I wipe down the awning  
 Hey y'all good morning

These are the first words spoken/rapped in *In the Heights*. Usnavi, the narrator, introduces the neighborhood, its places and its people. Even without a visual image to accompany these lyrics, the feeling of the location is clear: the setting is

---

<sup>238</sup> Ibid.

urban and run-down. Usnavi's shop is protected by a grate, common to many local shops in New York City. Its necessity is evidenced by the fact that Usnavi needs to shoo away a miscreant on the stoop. We will later learn that this is Graffiti Pete, the sole visible representative of any kind of mischievous behavior in the neighborhood. We never see the vandals who Graffiti Pete reports are on their way to the bodega during the blackout at the end of Act I. This choice holds great significance when we consider *In the Heights'* attempt to reconstruct the image of the Latino/a *barrio*. The choice to not show these vandals does several things for the musical's pursuit in battling stereotypes. First, because they are never seen, the audience does not receive reinforcement of the stereotype of Latinos as criminals. Second, the vandals are not a part of the community represented here, so the suggestion of inter-community violence associated with Hicks' definition of border theatre, is also avoided. Finally, because they are never seen, the vandalism is seen as an anomaly, an occurrence that happens during the unique but desperate situation of the blackout, and not every day. The in-the-margin presence of the vandals does reinforce that, in desperate times, these outside factors can and will threaten the community. Therefore, the creators of *In the Heights* do not deny that such issues exist; instead they are presented as an outside force affecting the neighborhood, not one that happens within their community.

Unfortunately, the reputation of Washington Heights continues to suffer.

As recently as April, 2011, the New York City Health Department released information about rat infestation in the area. These findings were reported to the masses by the *New York Daily News* with the headline “Washington Heights Unofficially Crowned New York’s Rat Capital by City Health Department.” The infestation was attributed to factors such as dense parks for breeding, buildings in disrepair and trash being thrown out the window. Community officials cited budget cuts as the main factor, since many pest control workers have been laid off since the cuts.<sup>239</sup> Despite the creep of gentrification and attempts to give the area an upscale facelift, residents with blue-collar jobs, like the aforementioned pest control workers, many of them Latino, suffer economically. As a result, they become associated with marks against the area's reputation. East Harlem is also credited with having the highest national rate of childhood asthma, another problem caused by environmental issues that were, in turn, created by socioeconomic disenfranchisement.

The early 2000s saw the beginnings of gentrification of the Washington Heights area, in the face of violence related to illegal drug activity. During that time, many Dominicans, formerly the largest population in Washington Heights, moved to the Bronx. Latin Americans are still the largest population in the area, with more Mexicans and Ecuadorians moving in after a large number of

---

<sup>239</sup> Heidi Evans, “Washington Heights Unofficially Crowned New York's Rat Capital,” *New York Daily News*, (April 9, 2011).

Dominicans moved out. Dominicans still make up 73 percent of the population of Washington Heights. The area is sometimes called “Quisqueya Heights,” referring to the municipality in the Dominican Republic with the same name. This reflects the fact that the majority of the businesses in the area are Dominican-owned, and Dominicans still maintain the largest population of the area. The strong connection of Washington Heights to the Dominican Republic is also reflected in the cult status associated with American Airlines flight 587, which makes a frequent trip from New York to the Dominican Republic. After the crash of September, 2001 (unrelated to the events of September 11, 2001), memorials sprang up across Washington Heights. The connection maintained between Washington Heights and the Dominican Republic through this flight and the migration of Dominicans to the Bronx is seen in *In the Heights*' character, Vanessa. With big dreams of leaving Washington Heights, Vanessa fantasizes of getting on a plane to a faraway place. Throughout the song “It Won't Be Long Now,” she sings, “one day/I'm hopping that elevated train/And I'm riding away...one day/I'm hoppin' in a limousine/And I'm riding away,” and in her final verse,

The neighborhood salon is the place I am working for the moment  
 As I cut their hair, ladies talk and share-  
 Every day, who's doing who and why  
 The neighborhood salon doesn't pay me what I wanna be making but I don't mind  
 As I sweep the curb I can hear those turbo engines blazing a trail through the sky  
 I look up and think about the years gone by

But one day I'm walking to JFK and I'm gonna fly!  
 It won't be long now  
 Any day

Ultimately, Vanessa decides to move to the Bronx, along with Daniela, Carla and the beauty shop they all work in. While her dreams take her to a far away place, perhaps to the Dominican home of her ancestors, she ends up a mere train ride away. Washington Heights' local Bishop Gerard Walsh once stated that residents of Washington Heights “hopefully leave the neighborhood.”<sup>240</sup> Bishop Walsh's motivations behind this statement were related to the high crime and violence of the 1980s. Vanessa, however, seeks to leave the *barrio* in search of something she has not yet found; something she is unable to articulate. She is not pushed out by crime or violence, but has dreams of a future beyond her neighborhood, one that is shared by many young people globally, regardless of culture or ethnicity.

Sprinkled throughout *In the Heights* are references to specific areas and landmarks of New York City. Early on in the play, Benny, who works as a driver for Rosario's Car and Limosuine Service, is given the opportunity to work a shift as a dispatcher. In the song Benny's Dispatch,” he takes the microphone and raps,

Okay, we got traffic on the west side  
 Get off at 79th and take the left side  
 Of Riverside Drive and ya might slide  
 West End's ya best best friend if you catch the lights  
 And don't take Deegan  
 Manny Ramirez is in town this weekend

---

<sup>240</sup> Gary Young, “Flight to the Death,” *The Guardian*, November 11, 2006.

There's a traffic accident I have to mention  
 At the intersection of 10th ave and the Jacob Javitz Convention Center  
 And check it, don't get stuck in the rubber-neckin on 192nd  
 There's a double-decker bus wreck

Benny's city-specific references are an homage to the delights and frustrations that are distinctly New

York City. Continuing on this theme is Vanessa, who sings, "The elevated train by my window doesn't

faze me anymore." For local New York audiences, this familiarizes the

Washington Heights space presented before them, as Benny and Vanessa build a

connection between their neighborhood and the rest of Manhattan through

references to the literal roads and bridges that link the two. These audiences are

likely to share these characters' frustrations with New York City traffic and

accidents. For tourist audiences, there may be delight in getting a taste of what is,

for them, authentically New York, or more generally "big city." These lyrics set

the scene, but more importantly, welcome the audience to the neighborhood.

This "welcome to the city" sits in opposition to the losses articulated in *The Capeman* and for one character in *In the Heights*. The mother of one of The Capeman's victims expresses her anger by accusing Latino/a immigrants of changing New York City for the worse. She sings, "You Spanish people, you come to this country/Nothing here changes your lives/Ungrateful immigrants asking for pity/When all of your answers are knives/This city makes a cartoon of crime."

Referring to Esmeralda as "Spanish" indicates the ignorance and intolerance of

middle-class white Americans, who, in the 1950s and 1960s felt that they were being displaced by immigration and their cities overrun by an immigrant criminal element. Her accusation that government officials did not take *The Capeman's* crimes seriously is illustrative of ongoing political battles in New York City and the United States as a whole surrounding immigration, the economy, homelessness and urban crime. The mother of *The Capeman's* victim grieves not only the loss of her son, but what she perceives to be the loss of her city.

*In the Heights'* Abuela Claudia also expresses sadness over the loss of physical space in "*Paciencia y Fe.*" Here though, instead of mourning the loss of her city, as the immigrant, she mourns what the city cannot replicate, seeing the stars in Cuba, "Ay, Mama, so many stars in Cuba/En Nueva York we can't see beyond our streetlights/To reach the roof you gotta bribe the super/Ain't no Cassiopeia in Washington Heights." The bright lights of New York cannot compare with the clear, starlit sky of Cuba.

*In the Heights'* greatest service to the Latino/a community may be its attempt to reverse the stereotypes associated with the New York City *barrio*. One such stereotype is associated with rap, which is used throughout the production, primarily by Usnavi. A genre of music with Afro-Latino origins, rap has often been linked negatively with imagery of African American and Latino/a youth in the United States. This holds true for Puerto Rico and other nations in the

Caribbean as well. Mayra Santos remarks, “where once it was the *cocolos* (salsa lovers) who were regarded as the biggest delinquents in Puerto Rico and the ones who deployed discourses of "Latinidad" and "blackness" there, now it is the rappers who create a new identity designated with the epithet of "the race.”<sup>241</sup>

Despite the fact that the rap genre has roots in Puerto Rico, the upper middle class of the island more popularly listen to rock music, which is just one point of contention between islanders and mainlanders who are engaged in a constant discourse regarding authenticity, each seeing the other as alternately Americanized or as having created an idea(l) of what is authentically Puerto Rican; one that does not match their own traditions and practices. In another reversal of stereotype, Usnavi's rapping in *In the Heights* is not associated with his race, but is used in several instances to illustrate various facets of his character. His rap sequences alternately illustrate his quick wit, his nervousness when with Vanessa, his storytelling abilities, and the urgency he feels in times of desperation, for example, during the blackout. The audience's ears become accustomed to the rap rhythm and Usnavi's style of narration as he introduces the neighborhood and raps,

Now you're prob'ly thinkin  
 "I'm up on shit's creek  
 I never been north of 96th street"  
 Well you must take the A train  
 Even farther than Harlem  
 To norther Manhattan and maintain

---

<sup>241</sup> Santos, 36.



Get off at 181st and take the escalator  
 I hope your writing this down I'm gonna test you later  
 I'm getting tested times are tough on this bodega  
 Two months ago somebody bought Ortega's  
 Our neighborhood started packin up and pickin up  
 And ever since the rents went up  
 It's gotten mad expensive  
 But we live with just enough

### **Community**

In the heights  
 I flip my lights and start my day  
 There are fights  
 (Girls) And endless debts  
 (Boys) And bills to pay

Here, Usnavi uses humor to acknowledge the fact that: (1.) his audience is expected to be largely white and middle-class, (2.) they may be uncomfortable or unsettled by his rap style of delivery and (3.) they may share the negative image of the Latino/a *barrio* as perpetuated by film and television. Usnavi also reveals the exact location of his neighborhood. A look at a Google street map of the area today tells a gentrified story. A Starbucks and a Pilates Studio now grace the corners of 181<sup>st</sup> Street and Broadway. While the “fights” referred to here may initially conjure images of the gang fights associated with *West Side Story* and *The Capeman*, it is more likely that the tension is between customers, bosses, and the struggle to make ends meet. Vanessa presents an example of this as she attempts to convince a potential landlord that she will come through with the rent, singing, “Mr. Johnson, I got the security deposit/It's locked in a box in the bottom of my

closet/It's not reflected in my bank statement/But I've been savin' to make a down payment and pay rent/No, no, I won't let you down.”

*In the Heights* also seeks to work against institutionalized ethnic discrimination. Philippe Bourgeois’ study of the “culture of resistance” in Spanish Harlem in the 1980s focused on the ways in which the immigrant and first-generation reaction to outside racism and oppression resulted in an increase in crime, addiction and inter-community violence. On the other hand, *In the Heights* illustrates low or non-existent rates of crime, addiction and violence. Bourgeois’ study characterizes young Puerto Rican boys working in bodegas as feeling depressed and oppressed in their “least desirable jobs in the nation,”<sup>242</sup> which leads them to lives of illegal activities and crime. Both Usnavi and Sonny exhibit a life to the contrary. Although both have bigger dreams for themselves, neither is in a desperate economic or social situation in their current situation, nor does their current position incite them to violent or criminal behavior. In this way, these characters have more of a universal connection to the young person in a temporary job in which many, not just Puerto Rican, find themselves. Usnavi is well-liked among the community and provides not only goods and supplies, but advice to those who visit the bodega.

Claude McKay, the African American poet and member of the Harlem

---

<sup>242</sup> Philippe Bourgeois, *In Search of Respect: Selling Crack in El Barrio*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.

Renaissance, specifically identified Harlem as his American home and contrasted it with greater New York City, which he viewed as a symbol of America as oppressor. His 1922 poem, *The White City*, McKay calls New York “the white world's hell” and admits his “life-long hate” for the city.<sup>243</sup> A similar view of New York is communicated by the Sharks and the Vampires, who do not find respite in the *barrio* as McKay does in Harlem. While *In the Heights'* Sonny does not express hatred for New York City beyond the *barrio*, he speaks out against government and economic oppression while maintaining his affinity for his neighborhood. In this way, his experience more closely resembles that of McKay. Sonny's act of resistance is as the mouthpiece for change. While he does feel the pressures of political, economic and social oppression and racism, he uses his voice, not violence, to incite change. Rather than acting out in violent ways, Sonny is a speechmaker, and uses the *barrio* as a place to rehearse for his future as an activist or politician. In “96,000,” he commands his audience on and beyond the stage with the following:

Yo!  
 with 96,000, I'd finally fix housing  
 give the *barrio* computers and wireless web browsing  
 Your kids are living without a good education<sup>244</sup> change the station,  
 teach them about gentrification, the rent is escalating  
 the rich are penetrating

---

<sup>243</sup> Sidney Bremer, “Home in Harlem, New York: Lessons from the Harlem Renaissance Writers.” *PMLA* 105, no.1 (Jan.,1990), 54.

<sup>244</sup> Intentionally misspelled.

We pay our corporations  
 when we should be demonstrating  
 What about immigration?  
 Racism in this nation's gone  
 from latent to blatant!  
 I'll cash my ticket and picket  
 Invest in protest  
 never lose my focus till the  
 city takes notice  
 and you know this, man!  
 I'll never sleep  
 Because the ghetto has a  
 Million promises for me to  
 keep!

Sonny's concerns reach beyond the *barrio* to the national scale. He is aware of the threat of gentrification, the racist attitudes inherent in the United States' government policies toward immigration, and economic circumstances that result in the substandard (mis)education of the youth of the *barrio*. Sonny's response to all of these concerns is to recognize that he has a personal responsibility to his neighborhood and its community.

Bourgeois claims that the young Puerto Ricans of his study “seduced by the wealth and power associated with illegal work. Yet, they too seek the ‘American Dream.’”<sup>245</sup> Their attempts to reach the wealth associated with the American Dream are through selling drugs, theft and robbery. This attempt at having a piece of the materialism of the American Dream is also found in *The Capeman*, when Sal and the Vampires shoplift clothing from a local store. The

---

<sup>245</sup> Bourgeois, *In Search of Respect: Selling Crack in El Barrio*.

garments they steal are high-priced suits and ties; pieces that give them status and make them look wealthy. What differs between Sal and the subjects of Borgeois' study is that ultimately, Sal and the Vampires do not share a desire for the American Dream. Nor do the characters in *In the Heights*. They do not seek an American dream, but a realization of their own individual and community goals that are constructed by their hybrid experiences.

In *In the Heights*, some residents of Washington Heights do share a desire to leave the *barrio*. In fact, at the start of the play, Usnavi is insistent on relocating to the Dominican Republic, his parents' homeland. Nina does leave the *barrio* for college, but returns for the summer afraid to reveal that she has dropped out of school. "I am the one who made it out....How do I tell them why/ I'm coming back home/With my eyes on the horizon/Just me and the GWB, asking 'Gee, Nina, what'll you be?'" Nina's reference to the George Washington Bridge illustrates her attachment to New York City more specifically, to her Washington Heights neighborhood, where the bridge provides a backdrop to daily life. For others, like Vanessa, this bridge is a constant reminder of what lies on the other side, and the desire to get out of the *barrio*. In some ways, Nina's move to California is a failed attempt at leaving home, and this mirrors the transition for the Latino/a immigrant who dreams of a better life in a new geographic location, but is disappointed upon arrival. This is clearly articulated in *The Capeman*, but is also present in *In the*

*Heights* in the form of Abuela Claudia, who relates the struggles she faced when she arrived in the United States in “*Paciencia y Fe*.” Nina's regret over dropping out of school and her hesitance to share her plight with family and neighbors illustrates the pressure that she faces as a first-generation American. She is expected to achieve the American Dream and demonstrate success greater than that of her parents. Just as they left Puerto Rico, she is expected to move beyond the *barrio*.

In his study of immigration in New York, “A Sense of Place: The Politics of Immigration and the Symbolic Construction of Identity in Southern California and the New York Metropolitan Area,” Kevin Keogan refers to the “immigrant as victim narrative in the New York metropolitan area.”<sup>246</sup> Many stage Latinos have themselves been part of this victim narrative. *West Side Story*'s Bernardo, Anita and Maria are all victims of violence. *The Capeman*'s Sal is a victim of his own fate and the New York prison system. Keogan also views the immigrant experience in New York City as an inclusive one in which non-immigrants are able to understand the “immigrant as us' model in which generations are connected by a collective immigrant-ethnic struggle and in a location in which ethnicity is celebrated in various forms (parades, festivals, etc.) and immigration

---

<sup>246</sup> Kevin Keogan, A Sense of Place: The Politics of Immigration and the Symbolic Construction of Identity in Southern California and the New York Metropolitan Area,” 246.

celebrated through landmarks, like the Statue of Liberty.”<sup>247</sup> California provides a contrary, exclusive model, where the past is one associated with migration within the United States, from east to west, and where non-immigrants do not have the same connection to the past and symbols of immigration that are in New York City. *In the Heights* provides an example of “the immigrant as us” model. The ethnic celebrations that Keogan refers to are played out on stage in *Carnaval de Barrio*. Lin-Manuel Miranda claims that during the blackout the attempt at creating a carnival atmosphere is strained and this isolates the characters from the rest of the city. This serves as a metaphor for the Washington Heights' community who are isolated from the rest of New York City both physically, by the George Washington Bridge, and culturally, as their community is almost exclusively Latino/a. Yet, despite the urgency of the blackout which leaves many of the characters lost and confused, this production number includes the entire community who assist each other, reinforcing the “immigrant as us” model. Therefore, the audience is able to view the characters as a part of the bigger world and not as isolated to the *barrio*. It is after this incident that Usnavi comes to the realization that their time together is nearing an end. This motivates him to change his thinking about the immigrant as victim. He sings:

Yes!  
Maybe you're right, Sonny.

---

<sup>247</sup> Ibid, 229.

Call in the coroners  
 Maybe we're powerless, a corner full of foreigners.  
 Maybe this neighborhood's changing forever  
 Maybe tonight is our last night together, however!  
 How do you wanna face it?  
 Do you wanna waste it, when the end is so close you can taste it?  
 Y'all could cry with your head in the sand  
 I'm gonna fly this flag that I got in my hand!

Usnavi struggles with the impending gentrification of Washington Heights, and the internal knowledge that he plans to leave New York City for the Dominican Republic. By turning the desperate situation of the blackout into a celebration, Usnavi refuses to be a victim. He finally rejects the notion that he and the others are powerless, a stand that is made firm at the end of the play when Usnavi decides to stay in Washington Heights and keep the bodega running.

In his article "Representations of Home in Three Latin American Plays," Jorge Huerta considers Cherrie Moraga's *Shadow of a Man*, Migdalia Cruz's *Miriam's Flowers* and Eduardo Machado's *Broken Eggs* as evocative of each playwright's cultural community: Chicana, Nuyorican and Cuban, respectively.<sup>248</sup> Regarding these labels of identification, scholar Earl Shorris claims, "there are no Latinos, only diverse people struggling to remain who they are while becoming someone else."<sup>249</sup> Huerta concurs and adds that in these plays, the characters, who have distorted images of their homeland, live a border existence. Similarly, Lin-

---

<sup>248</sup> Huerta, 2000.

<sup>249</sup> Earl Shorris, *Latinos*, (New York: Avon, 1992), 12.



Manuel Miranda and Quiara Alegría Hudes have created a play that is evocative of their cultural community. While non-Latino/a creators are behind *West Side Story* and *The Capeman*, they too create physical spaces that are representations of the internal struggles of their characters. In each, the New York City *barrio* provides the geographic space for Shorris' inferred metamorphosis to occur, and for the border existence of these characters to be confronted.

### Conclusion

In the West and in particular the United States, home is defined in relationship to geographic or physical space and, as scholar Thenao Terkenli points out, “place exists at different scales: a favorite chair in a crowded household, a backyard, a trailer camp, a plot of land, or a country of birth. The earth itself is a collection of homes, the ultimate home itself, because it fulfills the need for refuge, for a frame of reference, and for a context of self-identification.”<sup>250</sup> In the Latino/a musical the connection between self-identification and home is made through the passing of memories and traditions and the assertion of power through language. The physical space occupied by these characters takes on complex meanings that move beyond the borders of the *barrio*. *In the Heights* in particular allows for a new perspective on the formation of home for the first-generation US-Latino/a. It is significant that this comes at a time when Latin American immigration to the United States is a point of controversy and when Latino/a immigrants and first-generation US-Latinos are forced to question where and what home is.

In “Home in Harlem, New York: Lessons from the Harlem Renaissance Writers,” Bremer cautions,

America's mainstream culture has long lodged home  
in the mythic permanency of a rural cottage...tended

---

<sup>250</sup> Terkenli, 325.

by a purely white, motherly wife. It is an unrealistic, even dangerously deceptive image. If we are to feel at home in our changing urban world, we need images of home that are more fitting to our experience. We need specifically urban images of home to be able to see ourselves at home with – even at odds with – our own experience, with others, and with our dreams in cities.<sup>251</sup>

Bremer looks to the writers of the Harlem Renaissance for examples of what he sees as a necessary shift in the concept of home, specifically an urban home which is represented in all three musicals. His examples include W.E.B. DuBois, Zora Neale Hurston and Langston Hughes, all of whom hailed from America's large cities and despite their connection to Harlem were “an extremely mobile crew, who felt joined, not estranged, by their wanderings because they were part of the great migration of black people to the urban Northeast.”<sup>252</sup> These writers challenged the American idea of rural nostalgia, which had been tainted by slavery. The musicals discussed here provide images of an urban landscape that communicate cultural experiences that diverge from the image of the American dream. These urban settings and the characters that inhabit them share characteristics with the writers of the Harlem Renaissance. For these writers, Harlem was a home that reflected a lifestyle and a state of mind. Latin Americans were also part of large waves of migration to the Northeast and US-Latino/a

---

<sup>251</sup> Ibid.

<sup>252</sup> Ibid.

*barrios*, some of which have shared Harlem's streets with African American neighborhoods, also function as sites of collective cultural ideology. Bremer claims that these writers saw Harlem as their “home away from home,” and as a “symbolic home,” in which “there is a strong tension between hope and oppression.”<sup>253</sup> For the characters of *West Side Story* and *The Capeman*, the *barrio* is less of a “home away from home,” but, in both cases, is the site of both hope and oppression. The *barrio* as a symbolic home in *In the Heights* allows for a greater sense of hope, one that works to mitigate oppressive forces.

Bremer goes on to equate Harlem's streets with the concept of home, because, he says, they “provide life-giving essentials.”<sup>254</sup> He cites these essentials as sex, food and breath. This concept certainly moves away from the symbol of home as dwelling structure, but it instead situates the concept of home as solely a site of basic survival. In *West Side Story* and *The Capeman*, the urban landscape becomes a literal site of survival. Finally, Bremer acknowledges that “aesthetic and linguistic practices...bring together diverse populations in...a public home, a space of intimacy in the public sphere that challenges historical concepts of private and public.”<sup>255</sup> This concept of home is one that seems more appropriate to where the Latino/a musical is headed.

---

<sup>253</sup> Bremer, 51.

<sup>254</sup> Bremer, 50.

<sup>255</sup> Bremer, 51.

The Latino/a home on the Broadway stage has arrived at a point in which the interior, domestic setting is set aside in favor of an exterior home, and one in which merges the individual and the community, space and ideology. The public home is the one in which intimate moments take place, secrets revealed and dreams shared. *In the Heights* shows that increasingly, home is becoming a more public space. This is not surprising since globalization, advances in communications technology and social networking, while increasing connections, make lives less private. In the United States, each moment of daily life, from the mundane to the exciting or tragic, may be shared, aired and “tweeted” to both friends and strangers. Such technology also impacts memory, and there is less reliance on mind to recreate memories. Any moment can be documented in photos or on film. Yet, the public home that *In the Heights* creates maintains an intimacy that is disappearing as life becomes more public. In *In the Heights* specifically, we find the “repetition [which] is an essential element in the transformation of place into home.”<sup>256</sup> The repetition of language and memory in the form of daily visits to Usnavi's bodega are part of the daily routine that makes Washington Heights home. There is a constant transfer of information, but a reliance on in-person connections between individuals that makes their public spaces home.

One element that makes *In the Heights* revolutionary is that it is the first

---

<sup>256</sup> Terkenli, 326.

musical to take the first-generation US-Latino/a as its subject. Multiple reviewers of the production refer to its “theme of assimilation.”<sup>257</sup> *In the Heights* is not about assimilation, rather it is about a recreation or reconstruction of home, both geographically and ideologically, that allows the first-generation US-Latino/a to carve out his/her own place in American society on and off stage. For the US-Latino/a immigrant, the burden placed upon him/her is the process of assimilation. Part of this is the dominant, white culture's expectation that the immigrant will take on the pursuit of the American dream and that the immigrant's concept of home will mirror its own. The Latino/a immigrant on the Broadway musical stage has engaged in assimilation attempts that have ended in tragedy. *The Capeman's* Sal and *West Side Story's* Sharks are unable to assimilate, leading to violence, prison and death. In order for members of the next generation to avoid the same fate without compromising their identity, they must create a home. As we have seen with various characters in *In the Heights*, the first-generation US-Latino/a cannot begin to reconcile a bicultural identity with the knowledge that s/he exists in what only amounts to a foster home. The first-generation US-Latino/a cannot thrive in a surrogate home, so they must create an authentic one. What we learn from the Latino/a musicals discussed here is that the burden carried by the first-generation US-Latino/a is creation; the creation of a home concept that

---

<sup>257</sup> See Kate Taylor, “Breaking Cultural Barriers,” *The New York Sun*, January 19, 2007 and Monica Mullin, “*In the Heights*,” *The National Review*, July 25, 2008 for examples.

incorporates his/her unique status as a bicultural, bilingual individual with ties to multiple locations and communities.

Terkenli claims that “when most exiled adults remember where they came from, they remember their homeland, not the domestic hearth or the family residence.”<sup>258</sup> As we have seen in each of the musicals discussed here, the focus of memory is placed on nation or town, rather than a specific dwelling in the domestic sphere. Rosalia and Anita weigh the pros and cons of Puerto Rico's climate and streets, Sal recollects the island's natural elements and Abuela Claudia's fondest memory is away from her house, feeding pigeons on the plaza. Furthermore, the memories revisited in these musicals which more closely incorporate the idea of a domestic residence are not positive ones. Sal's residence in Puerto Rico was the asylum for the poor, where he was abused. *In the Heights'* Kevin refers to his family farm, which was the site of conflict with his father. These memories are shared in private moments with the audience, not between characters. Therefore, largely positive memories are passed to members of the first-generation and it is these memories that become the foundation for the US-Latino/a's idea or ideal of what their home should be. Terkenli goes on to say

If felt positively as part of growth, rootedness carries the potential to enlarge personal being by making individuals aware of their own identity through an expanded appreciation of local customs and traditions

---

<sup>258</sup> Terkenli, 329.

and of the possibilities that arise from extending their life circumstances to the past and to the future. Thus culture is created and provides guiding principles for the continued existence and identity formation of the community. In this sense cultural rootedness is directly related to the creation of a collective home.<sup>259</sup>

Terkenli's assessment is aimed specifically at the immigrant or exile, but it is useful here as it may be applied to the first-generation American. A sense of rootedness for the first-generation US-Latino/a as we have seen in these musicals implies not only a connection to ancestral roots, but the desire to secure a connection to their own geographic space and cultural (or bicultural) identity. This sense of rootedness is supported through the incorporation of traditions, as we have seen in *In the Heights*' "*Carnaval del Barrio*." Participation in such traditions certainly fosters a sense of a collective home, as Terkenli states. As aforementioned in this study, the Latino/a has been the victim of stereotypes associated with the collective community, whereby this community is tribalized. Arlene Dávila claims that Latinos are "regularly characterized as holding 'communal values'...that represent Latinos as more spontaneous, affectionate, relaxed about time, spiritual. Anglos, who are their constant reference, in contrast, are said to see themselves as individuals, and to rely on themselves and

---

<sup>259</sup> Terkenli, 330.



institutions, rather than on family.”<sup>260</sup> Dávila's assessment presupposes that the former characteristics are negative and the latter positive, given that in the United States, we live in a society in which individualism is synonymous with strength and success, while a reliance on a community or spirituality is seen as weak or debilitating. Productions like *West Side Story* and *The Capeman* have perhaps reinforced these negative connotations since the core families represented in these musicals are gangs. *In the Heights* seeks to change this perception of Latino/a culture, and communicates community and spirituality as positive characteristics that are also signs of strength and success. The community becomes integral to the survival of the individual, and the perpetuation of cultural rootedness does not solely benefit the community, but the individual. Terkenli points out, “As contemporary humans realize that they belong to an interconnected and interdependent world, they turn to their ethnos, their region, their community, or their ancestral place to secure their distinctiveness.”<sup>261</sup> This point is also reinforced in *In the Heights*, primarily through Usnavi's negotiation, reconstruction and ultimate recognition of his home. Usnavi's connection to his ethnicity and ancestral home are not attempts to disconnect from his American identity, but rather a means through which he seeks to find his Dominican-American identity.

---

<sup>260</sup> Dávila, 84.

<sup>261</sup> Terkenli, 330.

From as early as the 1600s in the Mexican *colonias* of the southwest, culture had to be promoted within the barrio. Theatre of the barrio at that time was one that incorporated plays from Mexico, Cuba and Spain in order to maintain language and traditions. These plays simultaneously encouraged shared traditions while acknowledging unique national characteristics. When the United States developed a fascination with the exotic Latin-America at the time of the Good Neighbor Policy, both shared and varied traditions of Latin-America were taken out of the barrio and reconstructed to suit the needs of white theatre artists, filmmakers and audiences. By reappropriating cultural symbols and traditions, these artists essentially created an idea of what home meant for the Latino/a in the eyes of a white audience. Subsequently, a similarly fabricated notion of what was authentically Latin American led to a series of stereotyped performances and the forced objectification of actor's own identities. Performers like Carmen Miranda and Desi Arnaz were left "homeless," associated with either multiple geographic locations or no particular location. Latin American performers became ghettoized in the minds of an audience, set in a place reserved for Others. Ethnic theatre provides a spectacle-within-a-spectacle. In this instance, Latino/a performers, while presenting the spectacle of theatre, become a spectacle of their ethnicity. Whether or not they chose to do so, this spectacle forces them to communicate their geographic, ideological and cultural experience to some degree.

*In the Heights* constitutes a return to the *colonia*, a focus on the neighborhood as the location of identity formation and the celebration of shared and varied traditions. Its characters create home by imbuing geography with ideology. The *barrio* once again becomes the site of the promotion of Latin American culture by artists who share this culture and language. This musical provides a homecoming not only for the characters on stage, but for the Latin American performer, who has long been housed in an idea of home built for them, rather than a self-created one. By inviting mainstream audiences back into their geographic space, Latin American artists reclaim their power of self-identification. In addition, they are able to educate their audiences, thereby making them a part of the *barrio* experience. The characters here are able to reclaim agency lost when Latin American performers were reduced to mere symbols in a way that *West Side Story* and *The Capeman* were not able to do, due to their subject matter and the time during which they were originally performed.

*In the Heights* opens a new dialogue about authenticity, one that is tied to the concept of home. I was surprised to find that there is such controversy surrounding the use of cultural symbols and demonstrations of pride by first-generation Latin Americans, and accusations of “whitewashing” amongst various Latino/a communities. Is the use of cultural symbols such as the displays of various flags in *The Capeman* and *In the Heights* misappropriated? Does their use,

both on and off stage, which may be considered “inauthentic” by others who hail from Latin American countries make them any less relevant to those who use them? Ultimately, the characters in *In the Heights* discover what home means to them by the incorporation of both tangible elements from their ancestral lands and the symbols, traditions and ideology that have been passed down to them. While the incorporation of these elements does not necessarily replicate an ancestral home, their integration into life in the United States results in a space that is authentically home for those particular characters.

Eduardo Cabrera claims that the first-generation US-Latino/a can only withdraw and that exclusion and loss far outweigh transcultural gain.<sup>262</sup> I disagree. While language provides the foundation for home, memories and nostalgia create its frame. After translating memories into actual or nostalgic experiences, the immigrant passes them along to the next generation, as they did with language. These second-hand memories assist the first-generation US-Latino/a in their construction of home. For example, the immigrant may pass along a memory of their former house, and the first-generation US-Latino/a decides to build one like it. Photographs might aid in a replica of that house, but it can never be the exact same house. From memory alone, the house may be bigger or smaller, brighter or darker, or have a number of other attributes that may or may not have actually

---

262 Cabrera, “The Encounter of Two Cultures,” 97.

existed in the original house. Yet, it is this recreation from a mix of memory and nostalgia that becomes a new creation and a starting point for a new set of experiences. This continual reshaping of memory and traditions will eventually lead to a loss of originality, as it does in most cultural traditions, but it also leads to the gain of passing on culture and marking it in new ways. As residents of a relatively young country, it can be easy to forget that culture is a living thing that is constantly changing. Traditions are not necessarily practiced today as they were in their original forms. Does that make them any less authentic? What we call an authentic American Thanksgiving dinner has been shown to be inconsistent with what occurred at the First Thanksgiving. Yet, Americans are happy to celebrate traditions as we have come to know them. The use of or longing for what is potentially simulacra of an actual item or experience is not wholly negative; it requires a shift in perspective. Expectations of authenticity often hold more weight than what meaning the item or experience holds.

Dávila claims that US-Latinos are “becoming white” by taking on English as their primary language, and by engaging in American traditions and rituals, which, in turn, makes them “sanitized” and “marketable.”<sup>263</sup> It may be argued that the popularity and marketability of *In the Heights* renders it a product of whitewashing and sanitization. Indeed, there are ways in which the musical fits

---

<sup>263</sup> Dávila, 1.

into the traditional idea of the American mainstream. Its success led to Tony award wins and nominations, the casting of popular actor-singers Corbin Bleu and Jordin Sparks in major roles, the creation of an *In the Heights* study guide for teachers and students, and Lin-Manuel Miranda's subsequent appearances on popular television programs *House* and *Modern Family*. However, if not completely successful in doing so, we cannot negate that *In the Heights* challenges the idea of whitewashing. The production's creators and characters deliberately mix language, music and traditions, to create an authentic hybrid experience. Rather than sanitizing the US-Latino/a, *In the Heights* brings the audience into their world. They become the new mainstream by transforming and expanding the meaning of what is considered mainstream. The incorporation of Spanish language and cultural symbols on stage as they are used in *In the Heights* further reinforces the need to celebrate culture, rather than whitewash it. Just as Usnavi uses the tools passed to him to redefine himself, *In the Heights* has redefined what it means for the US-Latino/a to come home.

This prompts another look at the theories of Una Chaudhuri and Maria-Tania Bandes-Becerra, whose definitions may be broadened to address the changing face of the US-Latino/a on stage. Chaudhuri's definition of departure is associated with a rejection of the dominant culture, while homecoming is associated with assimilation. Projects like *In the Heights* allow for an expansion of

the concept of homecoming, one that is not necessarily synonymous with assimilation. The characters of *In the Heights* do not honor or reject specific traditions, but reincorporate them into a new environment. Bandes-Becerra claims that the immigrant initially rejects the dominant culture by “clinging to language, culture, music or religion.”<sup>264</sup> This is true for *West Side Story* and *The Capeman*, where we see Anita making definitive choices about when to speak Spanish, or find St. Lazarus ever-present in Sal's life. Yet, in *In the Heights*, a mix of languages, musical forms and cultural traditions is a part of daily life.

These theories presently constructed to illustrate assimilation ending with the immigrant, or more accurately, the negotiation of American identity ending with the immigrant. *In the Heights'* characters are not on a search for the American Dream. Instead, each is on the search for an individual dream. Rather than passing through a series of phases as suggested by Chaudhuri and Bandes-Becerra, the first-generation US-Latino/a is at the receiving end of these processes. The immigrant figure assists in the creation of the authentically first-generation space by providing the elements necessary to construct these spaces. Using the language, memories and traditions passed to them and through the use of cultural symbols, the first-generation US-Latino/a creates a home that is authentic to their own experience.

---

<sup>264</sup> Bandes-Becerra, 7.

It cannot be overlooked that *In the Heights* was created by two Latinos, while *West Side Story* and *The Capeman* were not. This does not suggest that this musical automatically becomes more authentic than the others, only that these creators are able to tell a story that comes from personal experience, rather than one that is fictional or partially documentary. Quite simply, Lin-Manuel Miranda and Quiara Alegría Hudes know what it is to be first-generation US-Latinos living in the barrios of Manhattan and Philadelphia. While they do not claim to communicate *the* authentic Latino/a experience, they communicate *an* authentic Latino/a experience and one that is personally authentic.

The importance of delineating an authentic experience from a personally authentic experience is seen in audience reception of *The Capeman*. Although considered a flop by critical standards, it appealed to a Latino audience's sense of home, not in the least because it had been forty years since Latinos were explored in the American musical. Its use of cultural symbols, namely the Puerto Rican flag and the *casita*, was a first for Puerto Rican and Latino audiences. Yet, some scholars, like Sandoval-Sánchez, view their use as manipulative and question whether these audiences were involved in self-objectification by welcoming them.<sup>265</sup> Do these scholars take away power from this audience by suggesting so? If these audiences found a connection to the characters, story, or production

---

<sup>265</sup> See Sandoval-Sánchez' "Paul Simon's *The Capeman*," *Latino/a Popular Culture*, (New York: NYU Press, 2002.)



elements, is this not a marker of some success? For this audience, attendance at the production was a homecoming.

The revival of *West Side Story* shows a different result in an attempt at authenticity. Is *West Side Story's* incorporation of Spanish language enough to create an authentically Latin American story? The use of Spanish language alone does not solve the problem of stereotyping. In the case of the *West Side Story* revival it may have exacerbated stereotypes and alienated audiences, prompting its creators to return portions of the script and score to the original English. These audiences may have been lacking the necessary assistance to fully understand each moment of the production. Perhaps the inclusion of translations in a more obvious way would have helped. For example, supertitles were used for Chinese to English translations in *Thoroughly Modern Millie*. Yet, this may have been distracting as well. By contrast, the audiences of *In the Heights* are actively engaged in learning Spanish as the production goes on and are also assisted through the use of Spanglish. Here, the audience feels a part of the experience, yet relinquishes power to the actors, who are there not only to entertain, but to teach. While the use of language in the *West Side Story* revival is fascinating and further exploration can certainly be found in more translation work, I do not believe *West Side Story's* creators reached their goal of communicating an authentic Latino/a experience. First, the Latino/a experience has changed over time. The political,

social and economic atmosphere at the time was not the same as it is today, despite the fact that immigration remains controversial. Second, since language was the only alteration made to the production, it seemed out of place and jarring for an audience. The placement of a current fascination over a classic tale resulted in a postmodern pastiche whose incongruous parts did not add up to a comprehensible whole. The successful and truly wonderful part of the use of Spanish language in *West Side Story* is that it changes the characters and their relationships in a way that makes their stories fresh.

A study of trends in Spanish dialects in New York City points toward the future formation of a new, uniquely New York Spanish dialect, due, in large part, to the increasingly common use of Spanglish.<sup>266</sup> In *In the Heights*, the use of Spanglish functions as a third language. The creation and use of this language renders these characters the originators of this oral communication and that origin a site of power. They thereby create a home that is a site of comfort and understanding. It also allows these multilingual characters to move freely across their “border identity.” The official communication of their geographic place is then imbued with the oral and aural codes created by them; therefore language becomes synonymous with homecoming. Through the use of this language, a connection to native culture is maintained as well as a connection across

---

<sup>266</sup> The Washington Post, Harvard University and the Henry J. Kaiser Foundation, May 2000.

generations. The creation of a distinct language mirrors the creation of home for the first-generation US-Latino/a. What the revival of *West Side Story* and *In the Heights* demonstrate is that the use of native language can be both liberating and powerful.

There are several areas of this study that provide a starting point for future research. *In the Heights* is the first Broadway musical to explore hip-hop culture in-depth. This genre is tied directly to language and as Lin-Manuel Miranda notes, much of the musical's score is written in “the forceful, poetic and sometimes brutal language of the street: rap,”<sup>267</sup> which is an essential part of hip-hop. Rap, as we know it today, was born in New York City in the 1970's when djs would isolate the percussion sections of disco songs and talk over them. Eventually, these words became rhyming, rhythmic phrases. Two other elements of the hip-hop movement include graffiti art and break dancing, both of which are prominently featured in *In the Heights*. The genres of hip-hop and salsa (also used in the score and choreography of *In the Heights* as well as *The Capeman*) share a unique characteristic in their use of language. In her article Talking Trash: Performing home and anti-home in Austin's salsa culture,” Deborah Kapchan defines “trash talk” as a colloquial designation for gossip, a genre that relies on

---

<sup>267</sup> *In the Heights Study Guide.*

secrets as well as on the absence of the person under discussion.”<sup>268</sup> She goes on to argue that “different aesthetic systems employed at the club (music, dance, gesture) co-occur with language to produce a sense of belonging” and credits salsa music with “provid[ing] a kind of sonic homing device that has brought different groups together.” Trash talk is also found in hip-hop culture. In the rap genre, it is common practice for rappers to engage in a continuing dialogue of trash talk, disparaging each other over the course of several songs or albums. Trash talk can take the form of friendly teasing or a power struggle. In *In the Heights*, we see bits of friendly sparring in the form of trash talk between Usnavi, Benny and Sonny. Kapchan concludes that, “speech genres, like trash talk, are essentially performances that not only describe a world, but create it.”<sup>269</sup> As we have seen in this study, language is a major contributor to the creation of the world and the home of the characters in *In the Heights*. While not a part of the hip-hop genre, language as used in the revival of *West Side Story* also works to create a new world through similar power relations.

The hip-hop genre of music has been a part of American culture for nearly forty years, and does not seem to be a passing fad. Now that *In the Heights* has given hip-hop a place on the Broadway stage, it will be interesting to see if

---

<sup>268</sup> Deborah Kapchan, “Trash Talk: Performing home and anti-home in Austin's salsa culture,” *American Ethnologist*, Vol. 33, Issue 3, (2006), 361.

<sup>269</sup> *Ibid.*

Broadway productions will continue to incorporate the genre. Thusfar, it seems that the rock musical has continued to dominate the boards as crossover hits like *American Idiot*, *Spring Awakening* and *Passing Strange* bring younger, mainstream radio audiences to the theatre. However, *In the Heights* may have opened the door for the stories and music of the golden age of hip-hop to make their way to Broadway. In August, 2011, it was announced that Rev. Joseph Simmons, Darryl McDaniels and the estate of Jason Mizell, better known as Run-DMC, one of the most significant and influential rap/hip-hop groups of all time, are working on a musical of the group's rise to fame, with their sights set on the Great White Way.<sup>270</sup> Crossing over from urban airwaves to the suburbs of white America by collaborating with such bands as Aerosmith, Run-DMC was the first rap group of the hip-hop era to achieve notoriety on mainstream radio. If successful, this musical will be groundbreaking in bringing new audiences to Broadway. Hip-hop artists are also finding work behind the scenes on Broadway. In June, 2011, it was announced that pop/hip-hop songstress Alicia Keys will take a role of producer on a new, non-musical play, *The Stick Fly*. The success of *In the Heights* is also allowing US-Latino/a artists to continue to explore their American experience. Qiara Alegria Hudes' two newest plays are *Barrio Grrl*<sup>271</sup>, a

---

<sup>270</sup> Fiona Guest, "King Of Broadway: DMC Announces Plans For Run DMC Stage Show," *Yo!MTV Raps Magazine*, August 1, 2011.

<sup>271</sup> Intentionally misspelled.

children's musical, and *26 Miles*, which tells the story of a mother's kidnapping of her Cuban-Jewish daughter and their drive across the United States.<sup>272</sup>

Additional points of research where this study may lead include a more specific focus on the Latina character and artist, as well as bicultural theatre in Puerto Rico. With characters like Maria and Anita, Esmeralda, and Vanessa and Nina, these musicals discussed here offer a starting point for further study on the theatrical life of the US-Latina. Quiara Alegria Hudes herself provides an interesting subject for further research on bicultural US-Latina artists and Puerto Rican theatre. Born to a Jewish mother and a Puerto Rican father, she was raised in West Philadelphia, another area with a large number of Latino/a residents, many living in the *barrio*. I was surprised to discover that Puerto Rico has a large Jewish community; the largest in the Caribbean and that one of Puerto Rico's most popular and influential salsa orchestras, La Selecta, was formed in 1970 by Raphy Leavitt. In 2005, the Senate of Puerto Rico approved Resolution 1480, which recognized the contributions of Jewish citizens to Puerto Rican life and the friendship between Puerto Rico and Israel. The musicals discussed here, their use of the salsa genre, and connections to Puerto Rico may provide a starting point for

---

<sup>272</sup> While Hudes' popularity among mainstream audiences came with *In the Heights*, she did achieve success with her two previous plays. *Yemama's Belly* won the Kennedy Center Latina Playwriting Award and *Elliot: A Soldier's Fugue* received outstanding reviews from *The New York Times*. She has also written a children's book about living in the *barrio*, *Welcome to My Neighborhood* and her current play, *Water by the Spoonful* opens at Hartford Stage Company in October, 2011.

an investigation into these areas.

Finally, it would be fruitful to continue researching the connections between the musicals discussed here and non-musical plays that focus on the Latino/a, including those that take place beyond the Caribbean and Mexico. While many deal distinctly with political situations in those particular countries, like Ariel Dorfman's Argentine-themed *Death and the Maiden*, others, like Egon Wolff's *Flores de Papel* and *Niñamadre* also look at life in a barrio, particularly in Chile. After translating one of Wolff's plays, I think it would be interesting to expand my research of translation and the use of Spanish and English in multilingual plays.

It is difficult to strike an appropriate balance when portraying cultural identity onstage. Artists have been criticized for essentializing Latino/a culture, for presenting inauthentic images of Latinos, or for erasing ethnicity altogether. It seems that a rethinking of our idea of "home" is called for in order to communicate Latino/a identity in the United States on the Broadway stage. Has a solution been found to breaking the stereotypes associated with Latinos? Are we seeing a turn toward productions that communicate real-life experience? Is the answer found employing Latino/a artists in all aspects of production, to ensure some sense of authenticity? Or is a renegotiation of what we consider to be authentic required in order to shift perspective? I believe that the latter is so, and

that this shift lies in the concept of home. Through language, memory and nostalgia, and geographic space, we find that the onstage home of the Latino/a takes on new meaning. It is the search for this home that communicates Latino/a identity in a way that allows for theatre artists and audiences to more effectively share cultural experience than has been seen in the past.

In assuming the roles handed to them by Anglo creators and reinforced by largely white audiences, characters in *West Side Story* were “others.” In *The Capeman*, for Latino audiences characters were “us,” while for white audiences, they remained Others. Has *In the Heights* created a musical where the characters are “us” for both Latino and non-Latino audiences? Rather than presenting the New York City barrio as a place reserved for “others,” *In the Heights* invites people into this world. These characters and the actors who portray them have moved from symbolic specialty acts of the 1930s and 1940s to real people with individual stories. Although many of the characters in *In the Heights* stay in the barrio, all move on in some way, and they are able to do so through the home space that they have carved out for themselves. Lin-Manuel Miranda fittingly rapped his acceptance speech for Best Score at the 2008 Tony Awards, “I know I wrote a little show about home/Look, Mr. Sondheim I made a hat /where there never was a hat/Its a Latin hat at that/I want to thank all my Latino people/this is for AbueloWisín/ and for Puerto Rico.” And with that, he pulled a handkerchief



from his pocket, designed as a small Puerto Rican flag, and waved it. Whether or not *In the Heights* will be remembered as “the great Latino musical” remains to be seen. However, it has, for now, given the US-Latino/a an opportunity to find “home” on Broadway.

## Bibliography

### Books and Articles

- Aixela, Javier. "Culture-Specific Items in Translation." In *Translation, Power, Subversion*. Edited by Román Álvarez and M. África Valdez. Philadelphia: Multilingual Matters, 1996.
- Albuquerque, Severino Joao Medeiros. *Violent Acts: A Study of Contemporary Latin American Theatre*. Ohio: Wayne State University Press, 1991.
- Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities, Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism*. London: Verso, 1991.
- Aponte-Pares, Luis. "What's Yellow and White and Has Land All Around It?" In *The Latino Studies Reader*. Edited by Antonia Darder and Rodolfo D. Torres. Malden, Ma: Blackwell Publishing, 1998.
- Arnaz, Desi. *A Book*. New York: Buccaneer Books, 1994.
- Arrizón, Alicia and Lillian Manzor. *Latinas On Stage: Practice and Theory*. California: 3<sup>rd</sup> Woman Press, 2000.
- Béhague, Gerard. *Villa-Lobos: The Search for Brazil's Musical Soul*. Austin: Institute of Latin American Studies, University of Texas at Austin, 1994.
- Bhabha, Homi. "The Third Space." In *Identity, Community, Culture Difference*. Edited by J. Rutherford. London: Lawrence & Wishart Ltd., 1990.
- . *The Location of Culture*. London: New York: Routledge, 1994.
- Bharucha, Rustom. *The Politics of Cultural Practice: Thinking through Theatre in an Age of Globalization*. Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 2000.
- Black, George. *The Good Neighbor: How the U.S. Wrote the History of Central America and the Caribbean*. New York: Pantheon, 1988
- Bonilla, Frank and Ricardo Campos. "A Wealth of Poor: Puerto Ricans in the New Economic Order." *Daedalus* 110, (1981), 133-176.

- Bush Jones, John. *Our Musicals Ourselves: A Social History of the American Musical Theatre*. Waltham, MA: Brandeis University Press, 2003.
- Bourgeois, Philippe. *In Search of Respect: Selling Crack in El Barrio*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.
- Bray, David. "Economic Development: The Middle Class and the International Migration in the Dominican Republic." *International Migration Review* 18, no. 2. (1984), 217-236.
- Bremer, Sidney. "Home in Harlem, New York: Lessons from the Harlem Renaissance Writers." *PMLA* 105, no.1 (Jan.,1990), 47-56
- Brewer, Diane. "West Side Silence: Producing West Side Story with Deaf and Hearing Actors." *Theatre Topics* 12, no. 1 (March 2002), 17-34.
- Brodkin, Karen. *How Jews Became White Folks and What that Means in America*. New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1998.
- Cabrera, Eduardo. "The Encounter of Two Cultures in the Play *Doña Rosita's Jalapeno Kitchen*." In *The Sate of Latino Theatre in the United States*. Edited by Luis A. Ramos-García. New York: Routledge, 2002.
- Carbonell, Ovidi. "The Exotic Space of Cultural Translation." In *Translation, Power, Subversion*. Edited by Román Álvarez and M. África Valdez. Philadelphia: Multilingual Matters, 1996.
- . "Exoticism in Translation: Writing, Representation and the Colonial Context." In *New Exoticisms: Changing Patterns in the Construction of Otherness*. Edited by Isabel Santaolalla. Amsterdam: Editions Rodopi B.V., 2000.
- Chaudhuri, Una. *Staging Place: The Geography of Modern Drama*. Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1997.
- Chávez, Denise and Linda Feyder. *Shattering the Myth: Plays by Hispanic Women*. Houston: Arte Público Press, 1992.
- Cion Pinchuk, Ben. "Jewish Discourse and the Shtetl." *Jewish History* 15, no. 2 (June 2001), 169-179.

- Colon, Jesus. *A Puerto Rican in New York and Other Sketches*. New York: International Publishers, 1982.
- Conceison, Claire. *Significant Other: Staging the American in China*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2004.
- Darder, Antonia and Rodolfo D. Torres. *The Latino Studies Reader: Culture, Economy, Society*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 1998.
- Dávila, Arlene. *Latino Spin: Public Image and the Whitewashing of Race*. New York: New York University Press, 2008.
- Delgado, Maria M. "From the U.K.: A European Perspective on Latino Theatre." In *Out of the Fringe*. Edited by Caridad Svich and Maria Teresa Marrero. New York: Theatre Communications Group, 2000.
- Del Sarto, Ana. Alicia Ríos and Abril Trigo, eds. *The Latin American Cultural Studies Reader*. North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2004.
- Eliot, Mark. *Paul Simon: A Life*. New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, 2010.
- Enloe, Cynthia. *Bananas, Beaches and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics*. Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990.
- Eoyang, Eugene. *The Transparent Eye*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1993.
- Foucault, Michel. *Language, Counter Memory, Practice*. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1980.
- Freire-Medeiros, Bianca. "Hollywood Musicals and the Invention of Rio De Janeiro, 1933-1953." *Cinema Journal* 41, no. 4 (2002), 52-67.
- Garcia, Guy. *The New Mainstream: How the Multicultural Consumer is Transforming American Business*. New York: Rayo, 2004.
- Garcia-Canclini, Néstor. *Hybrid Cultures: Strategies for Entering and Leaving Modernity*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995.

- Gil-Montero, Martha. *Brazilian Bombshell: The Biography of Carmen Miranda*. New York: Donald I. Fine, Inc., 1989.
- Gilmore, Elsa M. "Transculturation and its Discontents." In *The State of Latino Theatre in the United States*. Edited by Luis A. Ramos-García. New York: Routledge, 2002.
- Glass, Ruth. *London: aspects of change*. London: MacGibbon & Kee, 1964.
- Gomez-Pena, Guillermo. "The Multicultural Paradigm: An Open Letter to the National Arts Community." In *Negotiating Performance: Gender, Sexuality and Theatricality in Latin/o America*. Edited by Diana Taylor and Juan Villegas. North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1994.
- Gonzalez, Patricia, "Nostalgia in Cuban Theatre Across the Shores." In *The State of Latino Theatre in the United States*, Edited by Luis A. Ramos-García. New York: Routledge, 2002.
- Grasmuck, Sherri and Patricia Pessar. *Between Two Islands: Dominican International Migration*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991.
- Griffin, Sean. "The Gang's All Here: Generic versus Racial Integration in the 1940s Musical" *Cinema Journal* 42, no. 1 (Fall 2002), 21-45.
- Hadley-Garcia, George. *Hispanic Hollywood*. New York: Citadel Press, 1990.
- Hicks, Emilie. *Border Writing: The Multidimensional Text*. Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1991.
- Hischak, Thomas. *The Oxford Companion to the American Musical*. New York: Oxford University Press USA, 2008.
- Huerta, Jorge. *Chicano Theatre: Themes and Forms*. Arizona: Bilingual Review Press 1982.
- . *Chicano Drama: Performance, Society and Myth*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000.
- Howard, E.F. "Authentic Multicultural Literature for Children: An Author's

- Perspective." In *The Multicolored Mirror*. Edited by M.V. Lindgren. Fort Atkinson, WI: Highsmith Press, 1991.
- Ignatiev, Noel. *How the Irish Became White*. New York: Routledge, 1995.
- Jones, JL. "The Role of Embodiment in Cultural Authenticity." *Theatre Topics* 12, no. 1 (March 2002), 1-15.
- Kanellos, Nicolas. *Hispanic Theatre in the United States*. Huston: Arte Publico Press, 1984.
- . *A Chronology of Hispanic-American History*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995.
- Kapchan, Deborah. "Trash Talk: Performing home and anti-home in Austin's salsa culture." *American Ethnologist* 33, no.3, (2006), 361-377.
- Kevin Keogan, "A Sense of Place: The Politics of Immigration and the Symbolic Construction of Identity in Southern California and the New York Metropolitan Area," *Sociological Forum* 17, no. 2 (June, 2002), 223-253.
- Knapp, Raymond. *The American Musical and the Formation of National Identity*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2006.
- . *The American Musical and the Performance of Personal Identity*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2009.
- Korzenny, Felipe and Betty Ann Korzenny. *Hispanic Marketing: A Critical Perspective*. Burlington, Ma: Butterworth-Heinmann, 2005.
- Lane, Jill. *Blackface Cuba 1940-1895*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005.
- Macy, Joanna. *World as Lover, World as Self*. California: Parallax Press, 2007.
- Maldonado-Denis, Manuel. *Puerto Rico y Estados Unidos: Emigracion y Colonialismo*. Mexico: Siglo XXI, 1976.
- Marranca, Bonnie and Gautam Dasgupta. *Interculturalism and Performance*. New York: PAJ Publications, 2001.

- Marrero, Maria Teresa. "Out of the Fringe? Out of the Closet: Latina/Latino Theatre and Performance in the 1990s." *The Drama Review* 44, no. 3 (Fall, 2000). 131-153.
- . "Manifestations of Desires." In *Out of the Fringe*. Edited by Caridad Svich and Maria Teresa Marrero. New York: Theatre Communications Group, 2000.
- Martínez, Marcos. "US-Latino/a Theatre: Confronting the Issues," *The State of Latino Theatre in the United States*. Edited by Luis A. Ramos-García. New York: Routledge, 2002.
- Miller, John. *Images and Identities: the Puerto Rican in Two World Contexts*. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, Inc., 1987.
- Miller, Scott. *Strike Up the Band: A New History of Musical Theatre*. New Hampshire: Heinemann Drama, 2007
- Morton, Carlos. "Nuyorican Theatre," *The Drama Review* 20, no.1 (1976), 43-49.
- Neal, Arthur. *National Trauma and Collective Memory: Extraordinary Events in the American Experience*. New York: M.E. Sharpe, 2005.
- Negrón-Muntaner, Frances. "Feeling Pretty: West Side Story and Puerto Rican Identity Discourses." *Social Text* 18, no. 2 (2000), 83-106.
- . "Barbie's Hair: Selling Out Puerto Rican Identity in the Global Market," In *Latino/a Popular Culture*. New York: NYU Press, 2002.
- Paredes, Deborah. "Remembering Selena, Re-Membering 'Latinidad'" *Theatre Journal* 54, no.1 (Mar. 2002), 63-84.
- Perales, Rosalina. "Theory, Text and Interpretation: Approaching José Rivera's *Marisol*." In *The State of Latino Theatre in the United States*. Edited by Luis A. Ramos-García. New York: Routledge, 2002.
- Perez-Firmat, Gustavo. *Life on the Hyphen: The Cuban-American Way* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1994) 107.

- Pianca, Marina. "Postcolonial Discourse in Latin American Theatre" *Theatre Journal* 41, no. 4 (Dec., 1989), 515-523.
- Puga, Ana Elena. *Memory, Allegory, and Testimony in South American Theater: Upstaging Dictatorship*. New York: Routledge. T&F Books US, 2009.
- Ramirez, Elizabeth. *Chicanas/Latinas in American Theatre: A History of Performance*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000.
- Ramos-Garcia, Luis A. *The State of Latino/a Theatre in the United States*. New York: Routledge, 2002.
- Ramos-Zayas, Ana Y. "Implicit Social Knowledge, Cultural Capital and 'Authenticity' Among Puerto Ricans in Chicago," *Latin American Perspectives*, Vol. 31, no. 5. (September 2004), 34-56.
- Roberts, John Storm. *The Latin Tinge: The Impact of Latin American Music on the United States*. New York: Oxford University Press USA, 1979.
- Roberts, Shari. "The Lady in the Tutti-Frutti Hat: Carmen Miranda, a Spectacle of Ethnicity." *Cinema Journal* Vol. No. 3, 1993, pp. 3-23
- Roman, David. *Performance in America: Contemporary US Culture and the Performing Arts*. North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2005
- Romero, Mary and Michelle Habell-Pallan, *Latino/a Popular Culture*. New York: NYU Press, 2002.
- Rosales, F. Arturo. *Chicano! The History of the Mexican American Civil Rights Movement*. Houston: University of Houston, 1996.
- Rossini, Jon D. *Contemporary Latina/o Theater: Wrighting Ethnicity (Theater in the Americas)*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2008.
- Safran, William. *Language, Ethnic Identity and the State*. London: Routledge, 2005.
- Said, Edward. *Orientalism*. London: Vintage, 1979.
- . *Culture and Imperialism*. London: Vintage, 1994.



- Sanchez-Korrol, Virginia. *From Colonia to Community: The History of Puerto Ricans in New York City*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994.
- Sandoval-Sánchez, Alberto. *José Can You See? Latino/as on and Off Broadway*. Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1999.
- . "Re-visiting Chicana Cultural Icons: From Sor Juana to Frida," In *The State of Latino Theatre in the United States*. New York: Routledge, 2002.
- . "Paul Simon's *The Capeman*: The Staging of Puerto Rican National Identity as Spectacle and Commodity on Broadway," In *Latino/a Popular Culture*. Edited by Michelle Habell-Pallán and Mary Romero. New York: NYU Press, 2002.
- Santos, Mayra. "Puerto Rican Underground," *Centro* 8, no. 1 (1996), 219-231.
- Schaffer, Richard and Neil Smith. "The Gentrification of Harlem?," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 76, no. 3 (September, 1986), 347-365.
- Shorris, Earl. *Latinos: A Biography of the People*. New York: Avon, 1992.
- Short, Kelly. "Reframing the Debate About Cultural Authenticity," In *Stories Matter: The Complexity of Cultural Authenticity in Children's Literature*, Edited by Dana Fox and Kathy Short. Urbana, Illinois: National Council of Teachers of English, 2003.
- Sims Bishop, Rudine. "Reframing the Debate About Cultural Authenticity," In *Stories Matter: The Complexity of Cultural Authenticity in Children's Literature*. Edited by Dana Fox and Kelly Short. Urbana, Illinois: National Council of Teachers of English, 2003.
- Smith, Susan. *The Musical: Race, Gender and Performance*. London: Wallflower Press, 2005.
- Stempel, Larry. "The Musical Play Expands" *American Music*, (Summer 1992), 136-169.
- Sturman, Janet L. "Zarzuela Productions in New York," *Yearbook for Traditional*

Music 18, (1986) 103-113.

Svich, Caridad. "Out of the Fringe: In Defense of Beauty." In *Out of the Fringe*. Edited by Caridad Svich and Maria Teresa Marrero. New York: Theatre Communications Group, 2000.

Suárez, Virgil and Delia Poey. *Little Havana Blues: a Cuban-American Literature Anthology*. Houston: Arte Público Press, 1996.

Terkenli, Theano S. "Home as a Region," *Geographical Review* 85, no. 3 (July, 1995).

Thomassen, Bjorn. *The Uses and Meanings of Liminality.* *International Political Anthropology* 2, no. 1 (2009), 5-28.

Thrasher, Frederic M. "Social Attitudes of Superior Boys in an Interstitial Community." *Social Attitudes*. Edited by K. Young. New York: Henry Holt, 1931.

Underiner, Tamara. "Opening the Shaman's Bag," In *The State of Latino Theatre in the United States*, Edited by Luis A. Ramos-García. Routledge: New York, NY, 2002.

Vidal, Hernan. "The Geopolitics of 'Latino' Theatre in the United States." In *The State of Latino Theatre in the United States*, Edited by Luis A. Ramos-García. Routledge: New York, NY, 2002.

Villegas, Juan. "Historicizing Latin American Theatre" *Theatre Journal* 41, no. 4 (Dec., 1989), 505-514.

Waxer, Lise. *The City of Musical Memory*. Middletown, Conn: Wesleyan University Press, 2002.

Westgate, J. Chris. "Towards a Rhetoric of Sociospatial Theatre," *Theatre Journal* 59, no.1 (March 2007) 21-37.

Yelvington, Kevin. *Producing Power: ethnicity, gender and class in a Caribbean workplace*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1995.

Zadan, Craig. *Sondheim & Co*, 2nd ed. New York: Harper and Row, 1989.

Zukin, Sharon. "Postmodern Urban Landscapes: Mapping Culture and Power," in *Modernity and Identity*. Edited by Scott Lash and Jonathan Friedman. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1992.

### Unpublished Works

Bandes-Becerra, Maria-Tania. *Becoming American: A Discovery of the Process of Immigrant Acclimitization as Seen in Hispanic/Latino Scripts*. Wayne State University, 2008.

Huerta, Jorge. "Representations of 'Home' in Three US Latino Plays." Presented at the Latin American Theatre Today Conference, University of Kansas. March 29 – April 1, 2000.

MacCarthy, Henry W. *Cuban Zarzuela and the (neo)Colonial Imagination: A Subaltern Historiography of Music Theater in the Caribbean*. Ohio University, 2007.

Wells, Elizabeth Anne. *West Side Story: Changing Perspectives on an American Musical*. The University of Rochester, Eastman School of Music, 2004

### Newspapers and Magazines

Atkinson, Brooks. "The Play 'The Streets of Paris' Moves to Broadway." *New York Times*. June 20, 1939, 29.

Brantley, Ben. "The Lure of Gang Violence to a Latin Beat." *New York Times*. January 30, 1998, 1.

---. "Capeman Outdoors Starring the City." *New York Times*. August 17, 2010. <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/08/18/theater/18capeman.html>

Cidoncha, Ileana. "Requiem para una campeon." *El Nuevo Dia*. March 27, 1998.

Crowther, Bosley. "'Too Many Girls' Makes an Appearance at Loew's Criterion." *New York Times*. November 21, 1940, 43.

Droit, Roger. "Michel Foucault on the Role of Prisons." *New York Times*, August 5, 1975, 26.

- Dzaimianowicz, Joe. "With Shallow Story, Broadway's *In the Heights* Can't Soar," *New York Daily News*. March 10, 2008.  
[http://articles.nydailynews.com/2008-03-10/entertainment/17893191\\_1\\_lin-manuel-miranda-happy-endings-karen-olivo](http://articles.nydailynews.com/2008-03-10/entertainment/17893191_1_lin-manuel-miranda-happy-endings-karen-olivo)
- Evans, Heidi. "Washington Heights Unofficially Crowned New York's Rat Capital," *New York Daily News*. April 9, 2011.  
[http://articles.nydailynews.com/2011-04-07/local/29408498\\_1\\_rats-health-department-property-owners](http://articles.nydailynews.com/2011-04-07/local/29408498_1_rats-health-department-property-owners)
- Getlin, Josh. "West Side Story with a Spanish Accent." *Los Angeles Times*. March 18, 2009. <http://www.latimes.com/entertainment/news/arts/la-et-west-side-story18-2009mar18,0,1293564.story>
- González, Fernando. "Capeman Album Includes Doo Wop, Country, Mambo." *Miami Herald*. November 16, 1997, 81.
- Green, Jesse. "When You're a Shark, You're a Shark All the Way." *New York Magazine*. March 15, 2009
- Guest, Fiona. "King Of Broadway: DMC Announces Plans For Run DMC Stage Show." *Yo!MTV Raps Magazine*. August 1, 2011.  
[http://www.yoraps.com/news1.php?subaction=showfull&id=1312187978&archive=&start\\_from=&ucat=1](http://www.yoraps.com/news1.php?subaction=showfull&id=1312187978&archive=&start_from=&ucat=1)
- Healy, Patrick. "Some 'West Side' Lyrics Restored to English." *New York Times*. August 26, 2009.
- Kappstatter, Bob. "Uptown' plan down and out. Foes sink huge E. Harlem project." *New York Daily News*. May 3, 2006.
- Lubasch, Arnold H. "US Breaks up Major Crack Ring in New York." *The New York Times*. July 31, 1987, 1.
- Mullin, Monica. "In the Heights." *The National Review*. July 25, 2008.
- Review of *Magdalena*. "The Theatre: Four of a Kind." *Time*, October 4, 1948.  
<http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,799264,00.html?>

promoid=googlep

- Robb, J. Cooper. "Lacking in Latino theaters: Philly's Latino population is under-represented on local stages." *Philadelphia Weekly*. March 7, 2010.  
<http://www.philadelphiaweekly.com/arts-and-culture/stage/Lacking-in-Latino-theaters.html#ixzz1X1DRz9LF>
- Ryzik, Melena. "Heights Before Broadway." *New York Times*. March 24, 2008.  
<http://www.nytimes.com/2008/03/14/theater/14heig.html?scp=3&sq=Puerto+Rico&st=nyt>
- Simon, John. "West Coast Story." *New York Magazine*. April 9, 1979, 93.
- Taylor, Kate. "Breaking Cultural Barriers." *The New York Sun*. January 19, 2007, B2.
- Wiltz, Teresa. "Broadway Recast!" *The Washington Post*. June 15, 2008, C01.
- Young, Gary. "Flight to the death." *The Guardian*. November 11, 2006.
- Zoglin, Richard. "Life After Rent," *Time*, February 28, 2008, 27-32.

### **Plays, Scripts and Scores**

- Bernstein, Leonard and Stephen Sondheim. *West Side Story*. Score. New York : Jalni Publications, 1994. New York Public Library for the Performing Arts at Lincoln Center.
- Clark, Rodrigo Duarte. *Doña Rosita's Jalapeno Kitchen*. Unpublished Play. Performances may be viewed at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ja2DXRzDA88>.
- Cruz, Migdalia. *Miriam's Flowers*. New York: Theatre Communications Group, 1990.
- Hernández, Leopoldo. Martínez. "Martínez" *Cuban American Theater*. Houston: Arte Publico Press, 1991.
- Larson, Jonathan. *Rent*. Score. Milwaukee, WI: Hal Leonard, 1996. New York Public Library for the Performing Arts at Lincoln Center.

Laurents, Arthur and Stephen Sondheim. *West Side Story*. Script/Libretto. Music Theatre International.

Machado, Eduardo. *Broken Eggs*. In *On New Ground*. New York: Theatre Communications Group, 1986.

Martín, Manuel. *Union City Thanksgiving*. In *Anthology of Cuban Theater*. Madrid, Spain: Department of Cultural Affairs, 1992.

Miranda, Lin-Manuel. *In the Heights*. Score. WI: Hal Leonard, c. 2008. New York Public Library for the Performing Arts at Lincoln Center.

Morruga, Cherrie. *Shadow of A Man*. In *Heroes, Saints and Other Plays*. Albuquerque: West End Press, 1994.

Prida, Dolores. *Botánica*. In *Beautiful Señoritas and Other Plays*. Houston: Arte Público Press, 1991.

---. *Coser y Cantar*. In *Beautiful Señoritas and Other Plays*. Houston: Arte Público Press, 1991.

Rivera, José. *Marisol*. In *Marisol and Other Plays*. New York: Theatre Communications Group, 1997.

Simon, Paul. *The Capeman*. Typescript. New York Public Library for the Performing Arts at Lincoln Center.

### **Films/Television**

*A Chorus Line* DVD. Directed by Richard Attenborough. MGM, 1985.

*Bye Bye Birdie*. (1963 film version) DVD. Directed by George Sidney. Sony Pictures, 1999.

*Bye Bye Birdie*. (made for television) DVD. Directed by Gene Saks. Allumination, 1995.

*The Capeman*. VHS. Directed by Brian Campbell. Plenaro Productions, 1998.

Theatre on Film and Tape Archive, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts at Lincoln Center.

*Carmen Miranda: Bananas is My Business.* Video. Directed by Helena Solberg. Chanel Four Films, 1995.

*Charlie Rose with Paul Simon, Derek Walcott & Mark Morris; James Lapine, Wendy Kesselman, Natalie Portman & Linda Lavin* (January 2, 1998) Charlie Rose, PBS, 2006.

*Down Argentine Way.* DVD. Directed by Irving Cummings. Twentieth Century Fox, 1940.

*The Gang's All Here.* DVD. Directed by Busby Berkeley. Twentieth Century Fox, 1943.

*In the Heights.* VHS. Directed by Thomas Kail. 2007. Theatre on Film and Tape Archive, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts at Lincoln Center.

*In the Heights: Chasing Broadway Dreams.* Television Broadcast. Directed by Paul Bozymowski. PBS, Aired May 27, 2009.

*The Making of West Side Story.* DVD. Directed by Christopher Swann. Deutsche Grammophon, 2005.

*Panama Hattie.* VHS. Directed by Norman Z. McLeod, Roy Del Ruth and Vincente Minelli. MGM Studios, 1998.

*Rent.* DVD. Directed by Chris Columbus. Sony Pictures, 2005.

*Rent Filmed Live on Broadway.* DVD. Directed by Michael John Warren. Sony Pictures, 2008.

*The Three Caballeros.* DVD. Directed by Norman Ferguson. Walt Disney Video, 2000.

*Too Many Girls.* DVD. Directed by George Abbott. Warner Home Video, 2006.

*Washington Heights.* DVD. Directed by Alfredo De Villa. Lions Gate, 2003.

*Weekend in Havana*. DVD. Directed by Walter Lang. Twentieth Century Fox, 1941.

*West Side Story*. (1961 film version) DVD. Directed by Jerome Robbins and Robert Wise, MGM Studios, 2003.

*West Side Story* (excerpts). VHS: rehearsals in March 1995. New York Public Library for the Performing Arts at Lincoln Center

*West Side Story*. VHS orchestra dress rehearsal. May 18, 1995. New York Public Library for the Performing Arts at Lincoln Center

### **Audio/Radio Recordings**

*A Chorus Line* (Original Broadway Cast Recording) CD. Masterworks, 2009.

*Bye Bye Birdie* (1960 Original Broadway Cast) CD. Sony, 2000.

*Carmen Miranda: Brazilian Bombshell 25 Hits* (1939-1947). CD. ASV Living Era, 1998.

*The Capeman* (1997 Concept Cast Album) CD. Warner Bros., 1997.

*In the Heights* (Original Broadway Cast Recording). CD. Ghostlight, 2008.

*Rent* (1996 Original Broadway Cast). CD. Dreamworks, 1996.

Stamberg, Susan. "A West Side Story With A Different Accent," National Public Radio. Aired December 15, 2008.

*Villa-Lobos: Magdalena – A Musical Adventure*. (1989 Concert Recording) CD. CBS, 1989.

*West Side Story* (1957 Original Broadway Cast). CD. Sony, 1998.

### **Productions Viewed**

*Bye Bye Birdie*. Henry Miller's Theatre, New York. Attended November 27, 2009.

*In the Heights*. Richard Rodgers Theatre, New York. Attended March 24, 2009



and April 12, 2010.

*Rent*. Nederlander Theatre, New York. Attended 1996.

*Rent*. Schubert Theatre, Boston. Attended 1996.

*West Side Story*. Palace Theatre, New York. Attended March 25, 2009.

*West Side Story*. Colonial Theatre, Boston. Attended June 28, 2011.

### **Interviews**

Ali Ewoldt. Interview by Colleen Rua. Boston, Ma. June 22, 2011.

Quiara Alegría Hudes. Personal email to Kyle Sircus, August 16, 2010.

Lin-Manuel Miranda. Personal email to Kyle Sircus, July 28, 2010.

### **Statistical Reports**

Falcón, Angelo. *The Atlas of Stateside Puerto Ricans*, (The National Institute for Latino Policy, 2004). <https://secure.logmein.com/f?TG..q0OSiXC1GztrucCV4hC8yVp6SwYGFdvwXJQ3YRE>

Hakimzadeh, Shirin and D'Vera Cohn, Pew Hispanic Center, "English Usage Among Hispanics in the United States," 2007.  
<http://pewhispanic.org/files/reports/82.pdf>

National Survey on Latinos in America. The Washington Post, Harvard University and the Henry J. Kaiser Foundation, May 2000.

Wallace, David. "A Few Facts About the Residents of Washington Heights," *The Milbank Memorial Fund Quarterly* Vol. 47, No. 1, Part 2: The Washington Heights Master Sample Survey (Jan., 1969).

United States Census Bureau. "Social and Economic Characteristics of the Hispanic Population: 2009."  
<http://www.census.gov/compendia/statab/2011/tables/11s0037.pdf>

**Programs and Clippings**

*The Capeman*. Clippings and Programs. 1998. New York Public Library for the Performing Arts at Lincoln Center.

*In the Heights*. Clippings and Programs. 2008. New York Public Library for the Performing Arts at Lincoln Center.

Lin-Manuel Miranda, *In the Heights Study Guide*. NY: Stage Notes. 2007.

*West Side Story*. Clippings and Programs. 1957. New York Public Library for the Performing Arts at Lincoln Center.