



# Escritoras puertorriqueñas en el siglo XXI: creación y crítica

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## Nemir Matos Cintrón

[de *Aliens in NYC*]

### La Vereda Tropical

Facing the Hudson river... blaring music...merengazo, oozing  
 from apartment buildings in the Upper West Side  
 of another island called Manhattan.  
 Scoring Mangú con queso , soft mashed plantain  
 in La Vereda Tropical  
 not a country trail but a little restaurant  
 on 168 & Broadway in Quisqueya Heights.  
 Old photographs hanging from the walls,  
 a faded tropical landscape behind a couple holding hands,  
 eyes squinting from the blinding sun of  
 La República Dominicana,  
 campesino country music from a Quisqueya left behind  
 bachata melodies flooding senses with tropical nostalgia  
 of love forlorn and forgotten by a true vereda tropical,  
 a distant country trail still damp with memories  
 of love and betrayal  
 now made songs and old pictures  
 covered with New York grime and dusty  
 grease from Queso frito.  
 There is no Trujillo here in Quisqueya Heights  
 It's another civil war  
 distant from the one left at home after 1961.  
 it's only Cadenú counting his drug money  
 a stack of twenties under the counter top  
 while he talks about the benefits of working out.  
 Only crack, crack, crack cocaine  
 dictates the traffic in the alleys,  
 it's *crack, crack, crack* cocaine and sleepy Heroin trying to forget  
 a far off boat cracking under a tropical moon  
 cracking before reaching sister shore of Puerto Rico  
 never reaching New York City.  
 But no, there is no Trujillo here or Balaguer, never been  
 no dictator ever in Quisqueya Heights  
 save Envíos Nacionales, sending money to return  
 to the newfound democracy of Dominican Republic of today  
 to return someday to be somebody but nobody  
 for the smell of the Bodega, a pungent smell of onions  
 rotting under the summer heat of New York City  
 passes on in the handshake of the Bodeguero trying to pass  
 for paisano..middle class..upon return  
 back in that other island of Quisqueya  
 far beyond Quisqueya Heights.

### Haitian Market Under the Snow

Ma Tine folds and unfolds her humanity  
 red turban nesting her black head  
 folds of blackness are her arms folded under the falling snow  
 Ma Tine peddles peanuts, cinnamon, nutmeg  
 and herbs unknown  
 to simple eyes  
 accustomed to buy McCormick Spices  
 on a shelf in the supermarket...  
 Who are her real clients?  
 Jamaican cooks and Puerto Rican doñas  
 who really know how to cook jerk chicken and *arroz con dulce*?  
 Metropolitan hougans casting a spell...?  
*Dieu qui decide*  
 Ma Tine folds and unfolds her humanity  
 red turban nesting her black head  
 her eyes gazing through the snow  
 as if waiting for the Lwa, or the Laplas:  
 the restless messenger of the Ougan  
 to buy from her the serpent oil  
 for Damballah, the spirit of change...  
 and here they come...  
 coiling and recoiling...  
 swirls of snow forming *veves* on the sidewalk:  
 ritual drawings of the lwas  
*Papa Legba, ouvri bayé por nou*  
 sings Ma Tine in rapture  
 unfolding her blackness under the white snow  
 forgetting for a moment where she is at  
 looking at the landscape of her mind...back in Haiti  
 sitting in the Iron Market...the Mache Fé...  
 side by side the peanut brittle vendor  
*Praline...Praline...*  
*Papa Legba, ouvri bayee por nou*  
 asking to the Lwa to open the roads  
 that never-ending road back home to the Rada  
 nation of spirits.

### Marcelino No Bread No Wine

Manicured lawns of Long Island northern shore,  
 a true postcard  
 of the American Dream.  
 Gold Coast east of New York City  
 home to the Morgan's, the Woolworth's and the Pratt's  
 the "true Americans";

a postcard  
 now soiled with walking graffiti: pedestrians in Suburbia  
 disturbing the symmetry of landscapes  
 designed by Italians  
 but tendered by Salvadorian, Ecuadorian  
 and Nicaraguan domestics  
 toiling by day  
 hiding under tarps at night.  
 Marcelino sin pan ni vino  
 Marcelino no bread, no wine  
 a man curled up like a baby under the freeway of Glenn Cove.

Open spaces, single-family homes:  
 bedroom communities of yesteryear,  
 squeaky cleaned today by Salvadorian, Ecuadorian  
 and Nicaraguan domestics  
 scrubbing by day  
 but listening at night  
 to the wailing sound of a man crying like an abandoned baby  
 they cannot nurse to sleep under the freeway of Glenn Cove.  
 Marcelino sin pan ni vino  
 Marcelino no bread, no wine.

Manicured lawns of Long Island northern shore,  
 a graying postcard  
 of the American Dream.  
 bedroom communities of yesteryear,  
 now empty nests as Baby Boom turned Baby Bust.  
 Seniors fed and Depend changed  
 By Salvadorian, Ecuadorian and Nicaraguan home attendants  
 who could not keep alive a man dying like an oversized baby  
 under the freeway at Glenn Cove.  
 Marcelino sin pan ni vino,  
 Marcelino no bread, no wine.  
 'cause in the Gold Coast east of New York City  
 home of the Morgans, the Woolworth's and the Pratt's,  
 the "true Americans";  
 nobody according to the sound bite of his brother on TV  
 nobody here on Earth but only in heaven  
 could take good care of him  
 where he lays safe and nested in the arms of God.

[Based on a true story of Salvadorian worker Marcelino. 1997]