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To understand a little about the feelings of the Puerto Rican across the sea, we contacted Jonathan (Jon) Marcantoni, a young Puerto Rican writer living in San Antonio, Texas and member of that diaspora of which we speak a lot about and know very little of. He tells us:

When we speak of the diaspora, we are not speaking of a homogeneous group. The differences are not just ones of ideology or social class, they are also generational. I identify myself with those from the diaspora that support independence and do not recognize the authority of the United States government over Puerto Rico, but I do not think that is a fact that would surprise you. I could say the same thing about my attitude toward the Puerto Ricans in the island.

How do I feel to be part of the diaspora and not live in the island?

Well, that question is much more complex. The basic response is that I feel embarrassed for my family for choosing to abandon the island, but I feel worse because, personally, I have not been capable of changing that reality.

The reality of migration is that there are many risk involved. I have not found a financial situation that would give me the opportunity to migrate to Puerto Rico and with the worsening of the economy and basic services in the island, the possibility of returning is less. I have a family and my wife has a serious illness that is why I cannot put them in such a precarious situation. For now my hands are tied and I have to do the best with what I have. I live like a guess where ever I am. It is the pain of the exiled. We are away from home even when we are in our own house. I

know that not every Puerto Rican in the United States feels the same way; but I think they also wish for the same thing that I do: a Puerto Rico where we can bring up our families with the guarantee that they will have a good future.

I think that Puerto Ricans suffer from the lack of action and the fear that comes from the self-hate that we have been taught by the government and the school system for more than a century.

How can we contribute in such a society?

The diaspora can educate its own communities about our history and culture. There are many groups that suffer centuries without a country but they never forget their traditions. At least, we have a country, even if it's a colony. It is completely possible to continue to practice the traditions and to know our history. Another thing is that every time we find ourselves in positions of power or influence we should launch ourselves to the communities to create opportunities. In that way we fortify ourselves and we create a community where everybody is in solidarity with each other. And more than anything, we need to continue talking Spanish to our children and maintain a relationship with Puerto Rico. There shouldn't be any Puerto Rico that has not visited the island at least once in his/her life. With the personal patriotic experience love grows. We cannot talk about a Puerto Rican nation if we do not develop nationalism among our youth.

The majority of the Puerto Ricans I have met in the United States do not want to be a state. I have met more pro-independence or pro-sovereignty than for statehood. There are not many organizations in the country other than in the population centers such as New York or Chicago, and what I have seen of these organizations is that the great majority support independence. The support for Oscar, for example, is enormous. The ignorance about our history, culture and language grows with each generation and I am worried about the lack of respect that some of our youth here display toward our country. Assimilation is growing and with it, the support for independence worsens. There is still a lot of fear from the adults that independence will drive us to a dictatorship. This includes some that don't believe in our abilities, much less to govern ourselves. There is a sentiment among the activist groups that there is no hope because we do not have a great leader to unite the different sectors. They see us too disorganized. On the other hand, the people in the United States don't know anything about us and about our problems. We are ignored and despised by this country.

But who is Jon Marcantoni?

This young writer knowledgeable of the problems of our diaspora in the United States, because he has lived them since always, makes us participants of the hardships that he and the Boricua exile face in the belly of the beast. Despite being engrained in the country that fools the smartest, he knew to look south and to re-encounter himself with his country and in the literature.

Let's let his words be the ones that take us on this route of the writer in exile graduated from Tampa University in 2009 where he specialized in History and Latin American and Spanish Literature:

I am the son of parents born in San Juan. My parents moved to the United States at the end of the 70s and I was born in Philadelphia on June 6, 1984. I am the son of pro-statehood parents where assimilation was the way of life.

I spent many summers and vacations in the island, especially in Fajardo, where my grandparents lived. My grandparents taught me to appreciate and to love our country. One of the most important memories for me was the summer of 2000, when I saw from the balcony of my grandmother's house a march protesting the abuses in Vieques. From that experience, I wrote my first story about Puerto Rico.

Actually, I am studying for my masters in Tiffin University with a major in Humanities. In 2012, I founded, with Zachary Oliver, the editorial, Aignos Publishing. It was conceptualized as a home for literature that broke the rules and presented perspectives that the literary world and the media ignored. That is to say, we wanted to give a voice to those without voices. We have published fifteen novels. In 2014, we will publish four books in Spanish: *Las aventuras surreales de Dr. Mingus* by

Ricardo Félix Rodríguez,

El camino de regreso

by Maricruz Acuña,

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by the Puerto Rican Germán William Cabassa Barber, that is already out up, ten are Latin American and four (Theresa Varela, Manuel Meléndez, myself and Germán) are Puerto Rican.

Novels with a purpose



I am also dedicated to the writing of books that shade light on the social problems that Puerto Ricans and the world prefer to ignore in order to create dialogue and initiate the change in the minds of the people. For that reason, I wrote *Traveler's Rest* and *El festejo de San Sebastián*, known in English as

The Feast of San Sebastian. Traveler' Rest

tells the story of a drug addict, Tony, in a Puerto Rican family. We start with the story of his grandmother, who abandoned her home town for the security of the United States, and his pro-independence brother exiled to Cuba, where he spends his time telling the stories of his youth and trying to reach peace for his sins.

The Feast of San Sebastian

is the story of the treatment of people in Puerto Rico, the political corruption and the status of the island. The novel is based on a study

The treatment of people in Puerto Rico: A challenge to invisibility

by César A. Rey Hernández and on the scandals of the ex-superintendent of Police José Figueroa Sancha. I decide to tell this story to reveal the challenges and the possibilities of our society. I wanted to demonstrate how with united action we would be able to improve our future. That our problems do not stem from a lack of willingness, nor talent, nor intelligence, but from lack of belief in ourselves. We have accepted for too long the idea of our inferiority, even though that in reality it's a myth.

New pathways

At the same time, I have decided that my next novel, *Kings of 7th Avenue*, will be the last one with Aignos and the last one that I will write in English. When

The Feast of San Sabastian

was translated, I met Julia de la Rúa and her Araña Editorial with whom I initiated conversations and a new path, this time in my own language. I cannot communicate with the Latin American community, if I do not write in our language. I want to be a voice for my people and I cannot do that while I use the language of the enemy.

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Retratos

my first novel in Spanish. The topic of

Retratos

is the role of art under a totalitarian government. We will see the life's of the two Mexican muralists Diego Rivera and David Siqueiros and their relationship with other artist and with the revolutionary movements, together with details and events in history of various Latin American countries. Then I'll write a Puerto Rican myth that will be focused on a family divided by political ideology and religion. The last novel of this series feature a fictional version of Cerro Maravilla case.

“Those who live in the island are fortunate”

The hardest thing for me is this state of exile. Being so far from my country hurts me profoundly. One of the reasons why I am abandoning literature in English is to be more intimate with my roots.

The novel is the most intense expression of the soul and the most complex in script. To write novels in our language could give me a piece of Puerto Rico. Even though we practice our traditions, listen to the music and eat “criollo” food, there is no substitute for the land, the beaches, the rivers, the mountains, the laughter, the voices, the sounds and the odors of Puerto Rico. Those that live in the island are fortunate, really. Life is hard but the country is yours. I live in the United States but I do not live inside of it.

We conclude the interview and his last phrase resounds in my mind: *I live in the United States*

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It is the voice of the Puerto Rican diaspora. The one that with its feet on another land crosses the rivers and reaches the ports of a Puerto Rico free and sovereign to which they desire to return. It is a commitment for all of us the prompt return home of so many Boricuas like Jon, who struggle without rest for the Country that they dream of and create day by day.

Translated by Carmen I. Borges / MINH Communications

Jon Marcantoni: Writer in the Boricua diaspora,
Vilma Soto Bermudez/ MINH Communications

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