

Lawrence La Fountain-Stokes, *Queer Ricans: Cultures and Sexualities in the Diaspora* (Minneapolis, MN, and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), pp. xxvii + 242, \$22.50, pb.

*Queer Ricans* argues that 'sexuality is a key factor shaping and defining Puerto Rican migration to the United States' (p. ix), a factor as relevant as other socio-economic ones that have been privileged in the study of Puerto Rican migration by a nationalist, sexist or heterosexist academic establishment. La Fountain-Stokes illustrates, in five chapters, 'how attitudes toward stigmatized forms of same-sex sexuality and gender variance provoke and affect migration, and how artists, writers, filmmakers, dancers, choreographers, and performers have documented and discussed this fact' (p. ix). Such an ambitious undertaking could erroneously homogenise queer Puerto Rican migration to the United States. However, the author takes care to demonstrate how this experience is fragmented at a geographic (New York, New Jersey, Philadelphia, Chicago and San Francisco) and generational (first and second) level. The book's analysis is based on a range of multidisciplinary material, from canonical literary texts such as Luis Rafael Sánchez's short story '¡Jum!', from *En cuerpo de camisa*, and Manuel Ramos Otero's autobiographical writing, to contemporary, alternative forms of cultural expression such as Erika López's graphic narratives or the performances of Arthur Avilés.

The first chapter, 'The Persecution of Difference', argues that 'while Puerto Rican culture is based on quite rigid notions of appropriate behavior for men and women, it is also a flexible system that can allow for what would seem to be egregious contradictions' (p. 1). To explore this paradox, La Fountain-Stokes produces a critically responsible analysis of '¡Jum!', as he combines literary theory with contemporary criticism of the story, with a history of its reception and with contextual analyses of racial tensions in twentieth-century Puerto Rico, as exemplified in works by Isabelo Zenón Cruz and José Luis González. This versatile approach sets the methodology for the rest of *Queer Ricans*, allowing the author to illuminate textual and visual productions around what is, in some cases, a dearth of available literature. In the second chapter, for example, his close reading of short stories and poems by Manuel Ramos Otero shows how 'dislocation was an essential element that permitted the elaboration of his work and his comment on the homeland' (p. 20). The critic develops the interesting notion of 'autobiography-by-critical-projection, that is to say, a writing about the self that occurs simultaneously with the act of writing about (an)other' (p. 21), in order to avoid simply imposing Ramos Otero's life story onto his texts. The consciousness of difference that Ramos Otero develops as a migrant allows La Fountain-Stokes to reinforce this author's incipient canonicity, hinted at by other scholars such as Arnaldo Cruz Malavé and Juan Gelpí. Literary critics will most likely find this second chapter to be the book's most valuable: its vision, both synthetic and argumentative, grants Ramos Otero a privileged position not only with regard to other Puerto Rican writers, but also with regard to a queer Puerto Rican literary tradition, for which Ramos Otero appears as apotheosis.

It is perhaps telling that the book's two central chapters are devoted to the cultural production of Puerto Rican migrant women. The structural centrality underscores their importance, while the (apparent) relative imbalance between the discussion of male and female authors avoids giving the false impression that women have had equal access to employment and educational opportunity, or to migratory patterns, or to

literary canonicity; indeed, a section of chapter 3 discusses the ‘difficulties of being a diasporic Puerto Rican lesbian’ (p. 67). This chapter has a revelatory aspiration, whose crux lies in its analysis of *The Margarita Poems* (1987), by Luz María Umpierre. Through a reading that links Umpierre not only with contemporary feminist studies but also with the larger Hispanic literary tradition, and with a tradition of ‘queer (sex and gender radical) diasporic Puerto Rican poets . . .’ (p. 92), La Fountain-Stokes demonstrates that, despite her relative and undeserved obscurity, ‘Umpierre’s poetry and scholarship were fundamental to the growth and consolidation of U. S. Latina feminism’ (p. 65).

While the book’s first two chapters are argumentative, and the third is expository and revelatory, the fourth is as comparative as it is revelatory: it purports to ‘give us a privileged glimpse of more recent formations of queer Puerto Rican women’s diasporic culture making, and of the important differences that characterize it’ (p. 95). The chapter groups together – while taking their differences into account, particularly in relationship to feminist movements and Island politics – a triad of women who have made valuable contributions to different visual media: Frances Negrón-Muntaner, Rose Troche and Erika López. These comparisons make explicit one of *Queer Ricans*’s most valuable contributions, which is that ‘these women’s engagement with Philadelphia, New Jersey, Chicago, and California serves to decenter New York as the exclusive locus of diasporic Puerto Rican culture’ (p. 130).

In the fifth and final chapter, the critic returns to that locus by shifting the gaze away from textual productions of diasporic queer authors to analyse the performances of dancer/choreographer Arthur Avilés and performer/stand-up comedian Elizabeth Marrero, both of whom are based in New York. La Fountain-Stokes confesses that, because of its capacity to synthesise and refresh the arguments of *Queer Ricans*, the work of Avilés and Marrero ‘is the kind of artistic and community work that most appeals to me, and as such it makes a fitting conclusion to this book’ (p. 131). Sections such as ‘Toward a Theory of New York-Rican Cultural Consciousness’ and statements such as ‘many exciting things are happening in the South Bronx’ (p. 132) indicate that this chapter provides, in a way, an excuse to end the book openly by paying homage to the diversity, vibrancy and promise of queer communities of Puerto Ricans in the United States.

The success of *Queer Ricans* among reviewers in the United States signals the valuable contributions that it makes to several fields of study: Latino, Latina and Latin American studies; feminism, gender and sexuality studies; gay, lesbian and queer studies; literature and performance studies; and the study of ethnicity, race and migration. Along with these significant contributions, the book serves as an invitation for scholars to consider other transgender and gender-queer practices that La Fountain-Stokes himself has begun to explore in his latter work.

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Rafael de la Dehesa, *Queering the Public Sphere in Mexico and Brazil: Sexual Rights Movements in Emerging Democracies* (Durham, NC, and London: Duke University Press, 2010), pp. xvi + 300, £68.00, £16.99 pb.

*Queering the Public Sphere in Mexico and Brazil* is one of those books that rarely come along, because of the way it engages the reader and the thoroughness and respect with