The Diaspora Strikes Back

Caribeño Tales of Learning and Turning
By Juan Flores
New York: Routledge
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Discussant: Arcadio Díaz Quiñones (Princeton University)

In *The Diaspora Strikes Back*, ethnic- and cultural-studies scholar Juan Flores tackles the ongoing Puerto Rican and Caribbean diaspora process and how the experiences people have while living in the United States or abroad change and influence them. Flores also looks into the impact on their relationship with their home country, especially when they go back. He also touches on how those in the diaspora help alter the culture of the home country itself.

An example is how Nuyoricans have transformed Puerto Rico, introducing hip-hop and modern New York culture to the island. This is applicable to many other diaspora groups as well such as New York Dominicans bringing New York culture back to the Dominican Republic. This ongoing process is significant, global, and constantly evolving.
In a February 26, 2009 conversation at Centro led by scholar Arcadio Díaz Quiñones, Flores, an NYU professor, explained that at the heart of *The Diaspora Strikes Back* are the experiences of people who identify with a home country (whether they lived there or not) and return home and find something else, something different. Also, the people of the diaspora may feel alienated when they go back because the locals see them as different, creating a complicated and sometimes confusing relationship with the home culture.

“People live through this,” said Flores, a New Yorker who also experienced this when he returned to Puerto Rico.

Flores said his father didn’t go back to Puerto Rico for 70 years, and when “he went back, I took him there.” His father also found a very familiar, yet different place. People in different generations, Flores said, experience this collective cultural diasporic reality.

“It is not just like traveling somewhere else,” Flores said. “You are going back to the country that gives you your identity, your ancestral identity, but you are going back as a different person who has changed.” Meanwhile, the place has changed too. “Everything is the same, yet different,” he said. “During the process of telling, you learn.”

These experiences, he said, helps shape our identity as a process that is always changing and helps “turn things at an angle from where they’ve been.” It is also important to look at the diaspora experience in relation to class, economic and political power.

In his book, Flores conducted twenty-two interviews and converted them into short stories and changed people’s names. Still, he said, he remained true to the original words interviewees used. His strategy was to tell the stories of the older people first and then the younger ones to reflect how the experiences changed over time. The interviewees included people who visit their home country regularly, sometimes and those who have not returned home, but still have strong ties with their country.

For more information on the book visit Routledge's website at:
