

Introduction

CEMENTING MODERNIZATION

*Soy el Desarrollo en carne viva
un discurso político sin saliva.*

*I am Development in the flesh,
a political discourse gone dry.*

Calle 13

*Rápidamente y bien
no puede ser
no puede ser sin redes
entre la fábrica y el hambre.*

*Rapidly and well
Cannot be,
Cannot be, without ties
Between the factory and hunger.*

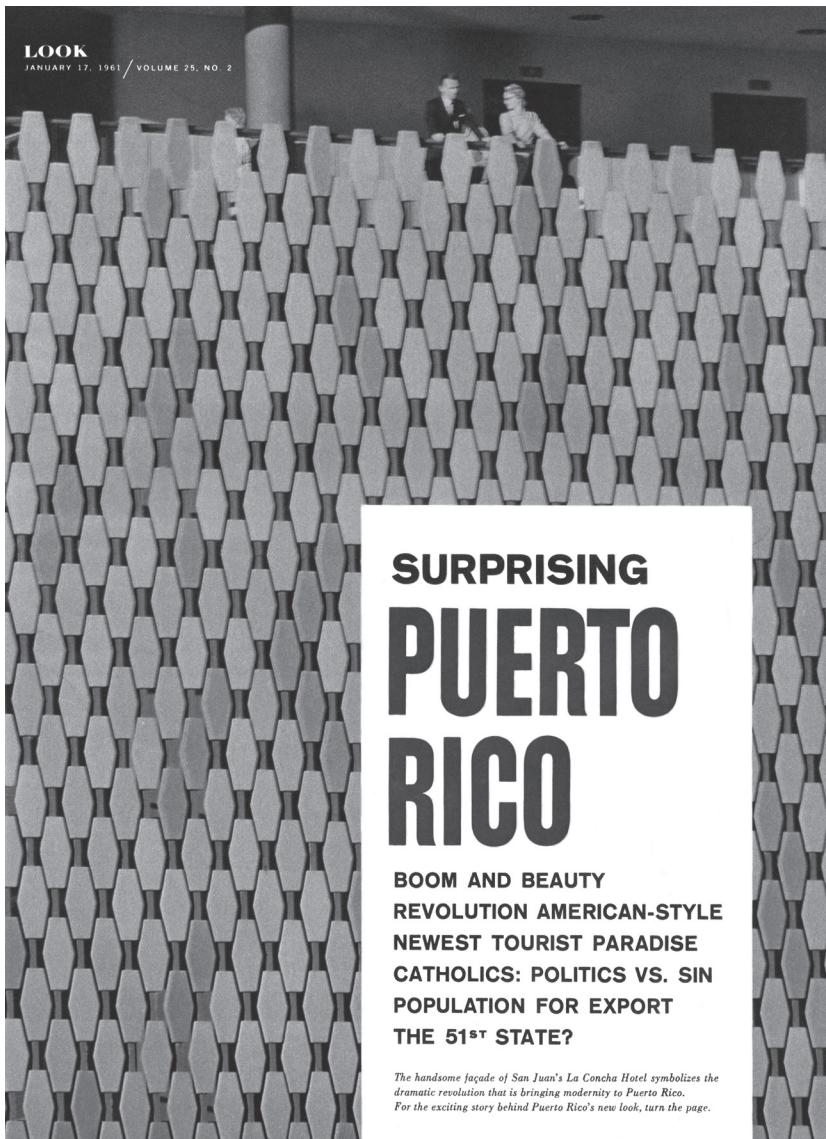
Rafael Acevedo, "Quién" (Who?)

AS A CLEAR INDICATION that the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico had achieved a level of development worth bragging about, on January 17, 1961, the American biweekly magazine *Look* published a cover story about the island. Entitled “Surprising Puerto Rico,” this twenty-three-page spread assured Cold War American readers that, for the most part, all was well in this territory of the United States.

Look was a popular large-format magazine that attracted a very general audience and, like *Life*, its main competitor, consisted of striking color and black-and-white photographs accompanied by short articles. The feature about the island focused on its recent modernization and the dramatic transformation that had been occurring under the recently established commonwealth and the administration of Luis Muñoz Marín, the first Puerto Rican governor elected by Puerto Ricans themselves. He was by then in his fourth term of office.

“Surprising Puerto Rico” displayed for its readers some very telling images of the island. Not surprisingly, the main focus was on tourism: the enticing cover showed a young, light-skinned woman on the beach at Luquillo, on the north-eastern coast of the island. She is looking up, with her eyes closed, and smiling, clearly enjoying the bright and warm sunlight that bathed her face (a sight that would have appealed to northern readers of that January issue). Similarly, the first photos inside showed images of newly constructed hotels, swimming pools with “local” girls, government-controlled gambling, and even a shot of Americans hiking through the rainforest.

Look’s choice of hotels was particularly interesting: all of them were done in high modernist architectural style. In fact, the first page of the article was a photograph of the thoroughly modernist La Concha Hotel, a building that had just opened in the tourist area of El Condado. The photograph, which covers the entire page, is stunning: it shows the façade of the hotel’s main building, cropped to show (and show off) its impressive *brise-soleil*—an exterior wall that allowed sunlight to partially penetrate into the hallways of the hotel without having direct sun heat up the area. This feature decorated the building with repetitive shapes of partially cut-out diamonds. To scale the massive detail, the top of the photograph had a proportionately minuscule couple, smartly dressed, enjoying the view from the hotel. This was tourism with an ultramodern touch.



First page of *Look* magazine's cover story, featuring the La Concha Hotel in San Juan. Photograph by Frank Bauman, courtesy of Marc Bauman.

But the feature mixed these appealing and touristy photos with images of another Puerto Rico: a helicopter putting the finishing touches on a power line in the mountainous interior of the island; a former US Marine, now an engineer, working at an oil refinery on the southern coast; a cement plant; new, sturdy, low-income housing made out of concrete; an air-conditioned factory full of diligently working Puerto Ricans. This was not only a tropical paradise but an industrialized, modernized, urbanized Puerto Rico. And this is, in part, what makes this *Look* issue so intriguing: it synthesized a number of key “looks” that were prevalent during the 1950s and early 1960s, those years of furious development in the island. This imagery presented Puerto Rico as a desirable tourist destination, as an appealing site for American economic investment, and as a modernized space that deserved a second look.

The various texts that accompanied these photographs did not stray from these “looks,” but they did add some important dimensions to the image of the island. The series of subtitles right under the title at the beginning of the piece summarized, in a neat list, the desires and fears, the aspirations and expectations of the United States for its territory:

- Boom and Beauty
- Revolution American-Style
- Newest Tourist Paradise
- Catholics: Politics vs. Sin
- Population for Export
- The 51st State? (21)

Here was a modernizing island that was revolutionizing itself without resorting to “communist” ideologies, a place that marketed itself as the latest tourist haven, with a booming economy to boot. But the list also pointed to issues that were continuing to disquiet some sectors of the United States: the incessant migration of Puerto Ricans to the mainland, the predominance of Roman Catholics on the island (John F. Kennedy had just been elected US president), along with the possibility of the island becoming the next state of the Union (Hawai’i and Alaska had become states just a couple of years earlier).

Still, the first sentence that introduced the feature story gave the reader a sense of the uncontainable optimism—almost a sheer exhilaration—about Puerto Rico: “The long-time ‘poorhouse of the Caribbean’ is today a booming island in the sun. After 400 years as an under-the-heel colony, lovely, green Puerto Rico is attracting American factories and tourists and leaping into the modern world” (22). The sentence intimates many of the assumptions that had persisted in the United States’ view of the island, some of them since its incorporation in 1898. The colonial oppression referred to here was that of Spain, which had had control of the island from the time Columbus landed on it in 1493 until it was ceded to the United States after the Spanish-American War. The United States’ official rhetoric, since its military occupation, had historically contrasted Spain’s “despotic” rule with its own, which was always presented as benevolent and humane; as a matter of fact, in the official rhetoric the colonial rubric was always applied to Spanish domination, never to American rule. *Look* continued this gesture of presenting “lovely, green Puerto Rico” as an undoubtedly decolonized island, one where poverty was in the process of being eradicated and industrialization was well under way.

The cover story also signaled a dramatic change in the way Puerto Rico had been portrayed in American mass media. In fact, *Look*’s piece should be seen in contrast to an issue *Life* magazine had published about the island in the early 1940s. There, the island was portrayed as a lost case, overpopulated, filthy, and crammed with slums in its urban areas. This article is headed by a photograph of El Fanguito, an infamous slum that First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt had visited in the early 1930s and that had grown quite a bit by the time the *Life* photographer arrived on the island at the beginning of 1943. The article’s tone is the polar opposite from the feel of *Look*’s first sentence, quoted above: “The picture above and those on the following pages are a shocking disgrace to the U.S. They portray conditions in our island possession of Puerto Rico. . . . The face of Puerto Rico has always been dirty and its belly empty. There are few places in the world with slimier slums, more acute poverty, or a denser population” (“Puerto Rico: Senate Committee” 23). *Life* insisted on the embarrassment of possessing an island in such squalid conditions and saw no immediate way to solve its problems; *Look*, in contrast, persisted in an optimism that was willing to erase any problematic side effect of modernization. For instance, if, as mentioned above, one of the subtitles

on the first page of the feature story in *Look* revealed a certain anxiety toward Puerto Rican migration to the mainland, this might simply have been a journalistic ploy to lure the reader in, since the articles themselves presented the new residents as a welcome addition to the working-class population of the United States. *Look* even predicted that in the next fifteen years, the mayor of New York would be Puerto Rican (“Surprising Puerto Rico” 44).

It would be accurate to say that this optimism was partly due to the island government’s progressive policies; the magazine included a two-page spread on Gov. Luis Muñoz Marín and a section on Felisa Rincón de Gautier, the energetic woman who served as mayor of San Juan. But what actually seemed to be driving the exhilaration of *Look*’s rhetoric was the commonwealth’s embracing of the post–World War II reigning discourses of development: capitalist-driven industrialization, infrastructure-based modernization, and American-inspired social progress and urbanization. To be sure, Henry Luce, publisher of *Life*, always found every opportunity to criticize Pres. Franklin D. Roosevelt’s administration—and the 1943 article was no exception—but the almost two decades that separated the two articles had witnessed a transformation in world politics: *Look*’s optimism toward Puerto Rico was fed by the ideological scaffolding of the Cold War.

This optimistic view is clearest in the way *Look* frequently contrasted Puerto Rico with the island of Cuba, which had just ousted dictator Fulgencio Batista and where a group of young rebels, led by Fidel Castro, were making radical changes in Cuban society, including the nationalizing of several American companies.¹ Even though Castro had not yet declared himself a Marxist-Leninist at the time of the *Look* issue, the US government had already enacted a partial economic embargo against the island, and it regarded Castro’s government as dangerously close to practicing communism.

The near hysterics of the Cold War were plainly evident in some of *Look*’s captions—for example, “Pro-Castro propaganda is hidden in second-grade readers sold for use by pupils in Puerto Rican schools” (“Surprising Puerto Rico” 33)—but it is perhaps the use of the word *revolution* that most persuasively communicated the magazine’s eagerness to push for the commonwealth’s professed radical changes in the context of American anxieties toward left-wing social transformations. The island’s development and modernization were frequently labeled

“the Puerto Rican revolution,” and the section on Muñoz Marín was titled “The Practical Revolutionist” (30); elsewhere, the director of the economic development office, Teodoro Moscoso, was described as “the general of the revolution” (36). Even the dramatic image of the La Concha Hotel that opens the feature was captioned as symbolizing “the dramatic revolution that is bringing modernity to Puerto Rico” (21).² Needless to say, the magazine presented the island’s “[r]evolution American-[s]tyle” (22) as an alternative to communist revolution because it seemed, from the perspective of the Puerto Rican government and the United States, that the “poorhouse” was no more.

Inadvertently, though, a different and intriguing issue becomes evident as one goes through the photographs and the brief articles that compose *Look*'s feature story: the conundrum of the urban and the rural. In the typical gesture of mid-twentieth-century development, the focus on industrialized, modernized Puerto Rico implicitly called for the ineluctable urbanization of the island. When the rural was presented, it was because it had just been filled with newly built concrete homes. Nonurbanized spaces were presented as recreational spaces—like the spot where those American tourists were trekking the rainforest, for example, or even the beach on the magazine's cover. The agricultural was, not surprisingly, absent, though it was indirectly referred to in a breathtaking full-page photograph of a warehouse owned by the Serrallés family (a prestigious rum producer) showing a veritable mountain of sugar sacks about to be shipped to the United States. Clearly, as far as *Look* was concerned, Puerto Rico was a once-upon-a-time rural society, a status that authenticated the success of the modernization process. In Muñoz Marín's Puerto Rico—that modern “island in the sun” that the local government dubbed the “Showcase of the Caribbean”—it seemed that the countryside had decidedly yielded to all things urban.

FROM PEASANTS TO URBANITES

It would not be an exaggeration to say that Puerto Rico went from being a principally rural society to becoming an unavoidably urban one in a matter of fifteen years. Someone who was living in the countryside in 1948 could very possibly

have been living in some sort of urban space by 1964: either in a town or in the capital of San Juan, if they were not in a large city in the United States, in the Mid-Atlantic region, or in the Midwest. This brisk transformation from the late 1940s to the early 1960s is plainly evident in three speeches given by Luis Muñoz Marín throughout his sixteen years as governor of the island. These speeches not only document this transition but also reveal how the rural and the urban were perceived during these years and how that perception was enmeshed in the discourses of the time.

On February 23, 1949, in his inaugural speech as the first elected Puerto Rican governor of the island, Muñoz Marín envisioned the need for a certain balance toward the improvement of life: “La batalla para la vida buena no ha de tener todo su énfasis en la industrialización. Una parte ha de estar en la agricultura” (The battle for the good life can’t have all its emphasis in industrialization. A part of it has to be in agriculture) (“Mensaje” 439). The sentence is curious, because Muñoz Marín presented the island as a space of factories and fields, not one of cities and countryside. His language was thus unmistakably and irrevocably aligned with economics and development—the notion of the urban being somewhat superseded by industrialization, while the countryside was transfigured as agricultural. It was indeed the agricultural that ruled supreme as metaphor in this speech, as he spoke of the new era about to begin in Puerto Rico: “Me parece que podemos hacer una regla tan simple como la semilla y tan honda como el futuro que lleva dentro: que todas nuestras decisiones sean tomadas a base de conciencia, y de conciencia que busque siempre estar informada” (It seems to me that we can make a rule as simple as the seed and as deep as the future that it carries inside: may all our decisions be made based on insight, and on an insight that always aims to be informed) (“Mensaje” 436). With this image of the seed, the governor reaffirmed a connection with the rural population, as the island embarked on its rapid modernization.

By the inaugural speech of his second term, however, delivered on January 2, 1953, Muñoz Marín had little choice but to face the increasingly urban quality of the island. Still somewhat unwilling to let go of the countryside, he pointedly called for a certain rurality to deal with the seemingly inevitable urbanization of Puerto Rico: “Estamos inexorablemente disminuyendo el campo y agrandando las

ciudades. . . . No se puede preservar la manera rural en la vida urbana, pero será noble el esfuerzo de buscar en nuestra educación, en nuestro sentido de nosotros mismos, una manera de adaptar en alguna forma válida el buen saber del campo a la vida de nuestra industrialización en marcha. Veo éste como un objetivo digno en nuestro ideal cultural” (We are inexorably diminishing the countryside and enlarging the cities. . . . Rural ways cannot be preserved in urban living, but it is worth the attempt of searching for, in our education, in the sense of ourselves, a way of adopting in some valid way the good rural wisdom for our life under industrialization. I see this as a worthy objective in our cultural ideal) (qtd. in Sepúlveda Rivera 70). Since the rural space was now literally disappearing, Muñoz Marín could only resort to a call for the “good rural wisdom” as a sort of antidote to urban ways, as a way to preserve a “sense of ourselves.” Although industrialization is still referred to here, the economic development platform has now yielded to urban concerns, with a marked sense of loss for rural ways and the assumption that something positive, something “noble,” had been lost in the process.

By Muñoz Marín’s last address as governor, on February 11, 1964, the countryside was not part of his language anymore. As an image, it was totally gone: “Debemos derivar lo más aproximadamente posible la ciudad que le sirva al espíritu de Puerto Rico, ciudad de iniciativas arquitectónicas, de vecindarios que faciliten la buena relación humana, de rica producción industrial, de excelentes servicios de educación, cultura, reposo, comercio, vida social, actividad cívica y religiosa” (We should develop, as much as we possibly can, a city that can serve the spirit of Puerto Rico, a city of architectural initiatives, of neighborhoods that furnish good human relations, of rich industrial production, of excellent services in education, culture, leisure, commerce, social life, civic and religious action) (qtd. in Sepúlveda Rivera 70). At the end of his administration, Muñoz Marín continued to be concerned with quality of life, but it was now the quality of urban life. As Aníbal Sepúlveda Rivera accurately points out in his remarkable four-volume work *Puerto Rico urbano*, the governor who became the leader of Puerto Rico in 1948 by connecting with the peasantry was in 1964 not addressing that population anymore (77): his audience, the peoples of Puerto Rico, were now urbanites.³ And the so-called “spirit of Puerto Rico”—affected, absorbed, and transformed by the materiality of modernization—had ceased to be rural.

URBAN AND RURAL TENSIONS, FLOWS, ASSEMBLAGES

These transformational middle years of the twentieth century were without a doubt momentous for Puerto Rico. And to a certain extent what made this point in time so important (and the Muñoz Marín speeches are clear indicators of this importance) was its intricate connection to the semiotic power of the city and the countryside, the cultural and political appropriations of country folk and urbanites, and the transculturation of social practices linked to living, working, and playing in cities and towns and away from them.

To be sure, because of its focus on contextualized representational effects, this book limits itself to questions of the country and the city as images—indeed, as socially and culturally constructed images. But this constructedness does not mean (and should never mean) that these images are simply arbitrarily “made up.” As Nestor García Canclini and Rebecca Biron stress frequently in their work on urban imaginaries, the city is not simply an imagined place; it is also a material, real place, inserted into historical and social conditions. García Canclini asserts, “We should think about the city as simultaneously a place to inhabit and a place to be imagined. Cities are made of houses and parks, streets, highways, and traffic signals. But they are also made of images. These images include the maps that invent and give order to the city. But novels, songs, films, print media, radio, and television also imagine the sense of urban life” (43). There is, then, a rich materiality in both the city imagined and the city corporeal; as Biron clearly surmises, “the urban imaginary is both a real and a made-up projection” (“Introduction” 8), with effects on and consequences for how the city represents and is represented. The same argument on materiality, of course, can be made for the countryside and things rural.

But what exactly is regarded as urban or rural, what ideas are implicit in these concepts, what desires are inscribed in them, what effects these notions produce by being installed as a binary—even what to call their relationship—are issues complex and paradoxical, and fraught with unreliable foundational assumptions. These issues have occupied writers, artists, and scholars from multiple disciplines for quite some time—not only because the issues are not at all recent in

Western thought (we could go as far back as Virgil, Horace, and Theocritus, if not back to the epic of Gilgamesh), not only because they vary due to historical, geographical, and cultural specificities but also, and especially, because myriad modernization strategies and narratives have drastically transformed the geopolitical landscape of the globe.

I am not particularly interested in definitions that are grounded on the measurable material space of the rural and the urban, those classifications that take into account geographical area covered or population data, including the policy-friendly and intensely simplistic rural-urban continuum, which constructs a shades-of-gray scale while still maintaining a rigid, quantitatively based narrative about what constitutes the urban and the rural. But neither do I want to rely on those lingering notions that persist even today in establishing the urban and the rural as an essentializing binary: the city of progress and cosmopolitanism versus the backward, even retrograde rural; the immoral, polluted, alienating space of the urban versus the purifying, communal nature of the rural; even the urban as the place to escape the rural and vice versa.⁴ Counteracting this tendency to think of the two notions as Manichaean opposites, I am interested in the productive effect of interrogating and destabilizing this dichotomy.⁵

As many have pointed out, picturing the relation between the urban and the rural as a “divide” presupposes a neat demarcation line that, at least since the early twentieth century in Latin America, has unquestionably deteriorated—if it ever existed at all. In his studies of Mexico City, García Canclini has unpacked some of the assumptions that have been made about this divide. Not only does a clear demarcation between the two produce insufficient definitions, but “the distinction is limited to superficial traits” because it does not take into consideration “the structural differences [or] the similarities that sometimes arise between what happens in the city and what happens in the countryside or in small towns” (38). More specifically, the binary fails to account for the fact that the boundaries between the rural and the urban are unbelievably porous; as García Canclini correctly admits, “we often describe our Latin American cities as having been invaded by the countryside” (38).

Indeed, this permeable character partly derives from an incontrovertible issue of flow. One of the principal reasons (if not the only reason) for the difficulty of

fixing notions of the urban and the rural is that the phenomenon of migration—be it nomadic, permanent, diasporic, or circular—has persistently undermined such attempts, especially in those cases where urbanization and industrialization accelerated the phenomenon. Migration is an effect of modernization, but it is the effect of an image as well: the paradigmatic flow toward the city has frequently been the consequence of a certain representation of what the city depicts and signifies for those who do not live in it. Thus, the flow of migration ultimately does away with the possibility of a veritable “divide” between what is rural and what is urban because, many times, the countryside is already in the city.

The binary sometimes assumes a curious chronology: the rural is sequentially placed before the urban—even Raymond Williams’s required reading on the topic, *The Country and the City*, does not avoid this in its title. Some might object to what I am implying, but it seems to me that a faulty narrative has crystallized here, by granting the rural an originary place in regard to the urban, a relation that is irresolute at best, since (as it will be clear in this book) many ideas and images about the rural in fact originate in the urban space. But more importantly, the gesture pushes the rural dangerously close to a notion of the natural: if the urban has been represented and historicized as artificial and “built”—literally, human made—then to designate the rural as natural belies its historical and cultural configurations. The images of the rural must never be portrayed as natural: in more ways than one, the rural is also, like the urban, human made.

I am not advocating here for simply abandoning the terms. While it is crucial to destabilize them, it is also important not to dismiss them. If they have somewhat disappeared from recent scholarship in the humanities—possibly due to the clearly problematic nature of defining the rural and the urban usefully—the rural and the urban are too encroached culturally in many historical moments to simply set them aside, not only in Latin America and the Caribbean but globally speaking as well. Indeed, these are incredibly stubborn concepts, and the binary is still active today, replicating itself incessantly, from advertising to food labels, from environmental movements to movies, and it was very much alive in twentieth-century Latin America, when modernization strategies used and abused it. It is true that defining the city as what the countryside is not conveys some fundamental problems; however, it is undeniable that there are material and social

imaginary elements that have been, historically and culturally, attached to things urban and things rural. The danger is to ignore their contextual character and carelessly naturalize those features.

Arguably, one way to begin rethinking this relation is, following Biron, to reconfigure it as a tension, one that pushes and pulls at the naturalized notions historically mapped within the urban and the rural (“Marvel” 119). I remain quite compelled by this. Still, perhaps something more drastic needs to take place: a dismantling of sorts, a conceptual implosion that might potentially liquefy the persistent dichotomy.

A way to trigger this is to finally acknowledge that these two concepts are not exactly a binary. They are and always have been pure heterogeneity. The farm and the isolated hut, the forest and the ocean shore, the plantation and the forest preserve, the resort and the manicured state park relentlessly complicate the conception of the rural. A similar list could, of course, be summoned for the multiplicities of the urban. In addition, the supposed binary has privileged certain meanings over others for each category. The urban is almost always connected to the large city but seldom to the small town. The most common assumption of the rural is to think it agricultural, deemphasizing and almost thinking inconceivable the rurality, for example, of a beach or a rainforest.⁶

It seems to me much more fertile—if I may be allowed a traditionally rural metaphor!—not only to take up this multiplicity of rurals and urbans but to confront them in order to force the units to resist and elude clear and “useful” definitions, dismantling their essentialized boundaries and limiting equivalences. One suggestive way of reconfiguring these multiplicities could be to rethink them and partly reimagine them with a gesture drawn from the theoretical work of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari: to potentially conceive the rural and the urban as assemblages.

The assemblage, central to Deleuze and Guattari’s work in the monumen-tally difficult and infinitely thought-provoking *A Thousand Plateaus*, strikes at the core of the Western notion of a binary: instead of conceiving in twos, the French thinkers propose the notion of conceptualizing from a system of multiplicities. The assemblage is in fact composed of different fields of content—desires, enunciations, apparatuses—and these fields perennially intersect and interact. In an

assemblage, not simply “lines” but complexes of lines draw up and map out organizations that simultaneously fix and disperse, stratify and decodify, construct and dismantle (Patton 42). To use their well-known terminology, an assemblage reterritorializes and deterritorializes. In addition, as Teresa Rizzo explains, the assemblage needs to be imagined as a radically open system, “made up of connections between different bodies, discourses and institutions.” This open quality, she continues, suggests an incessant transformation that is intrinsic to it: “[a]n assemblage is never fixed because a change in the relationship between any of these bodies, discourses and institutions reverberates throughout the whole assemblage, and in so doing changes the nature of that assemblage” (8). To be sure, this seems to point to a potentially precarious instability in an assemblage, but this is ultimately advantageous, enabling even, because under this pressure the assemblage remains dynamic, susceptible, fluid, loose.

I do not intend with this theoretical appropriation to simply strip the case of Puerto Rico of specificity, contextuality, historicity. But conceptualizing the urban and the rural as Deleuze-Guattarian assemblages would bring to the fore the multivalent, paradoxical, and historically intricate uses of these terms in the context of Puerto Rico and twentieth-century Latin America. Since the middle years of the last century, which is the scope of this book, seem to have articulated the conundrum of the urban and the rural at the peak of its complexity and contradiction, the notion of the assemblage would facilitate the laying bare of the intricacies of these concepts as they were appropriated and capitalized through the transformative narrative of modernization on the island. Taking a close look at the historical context of these years is therefore necessary, for it will ground the notions of the rural and the urban within the material, social, economic, and political transformations of Puerto Rico.

IN THE AMERICAN CENTURY

Admittedly, the profound transformation of the island was hardly an isolated phenomenon; it has been the modernizing gesture the world over for the last two centuries. But if modernization in midcentury Puerto Rico—with its rapid

pace, fervent industrialization, far-reaching urbanization, and massive migrations to cities—was not, globally speaking, rare, the geopolitical situation of the island from the late 1940s to the early 1960s makes it a particularly rich and layered case study. Modernization occurred there, shaped by the reigning economic development discourses of the time, which were bolstered by the expansive, international economic boom that followed World War II. Developmentalism defined this era in Latin America and was, as Ramón Grosfoguel affirms, “a crucial constitutive element in the hegemony of the West” (329), especially of the United States. The universalist assumptions of development, in its attempt to materialize a notion of inevitable stages of progress to economically transform traditional societies into modern ones, were useful tools in the years of the Cold War, both to counteract so-called communist regimes and to establish the internationalization of capitalism (319). Puerto Rico was, without a doubt, part of that project, helping to fulfill the United States’ ideological messages of these years. Add to this the fact that the island was an unincorporated territory of the United States, lest we forget, right at the moment of African, Asian, and Caribbean decolonization.

In their history of Puerto Rico, César J. Ayala and Rafael Bernabe very accurately labeled the twentieth century in Puerto Rico the “American Century.”⁷ The island, which had been a Spanish colony for more than four centuries, was “acquired” by the United States during the Spanish-American War of 1898. Puerto Rico was, with the Philippines and Cuba, the United States’ first colonial venture—if we discount the expansion to the West as a colonial gesture—and in many ways it would define the relations of the North American nation with Latin America, as well as with Asia. Although it is sometimes slightly overstated, becoming an “unincorporated possession” of the United States radically changed for Puerto Rico the political, economic, and cultural debates throughout the twentieth century.⁸

After a short, strictly military administration, the Foraker Act of 1900 enacted some timid progress toward allowing Puerto Ricans to have some say, albeit incredibly limited, in government affairs: it allowed, for example, the creation of a legislative branch in which some of the members were required to have been born on the island (Scarano, *Puerto Rico* 656). In 1917 the Jones Act gave a bit

more political power to Puerto Ricans within the government structure; more importantly, it extended American citizenship to all Puerto Ricans (some would say it imposed citizenship on them). Citizenship complicated matters: here were nationals who, in their own island-territory, had little political power locally and none federally. And if there was any possibility of achieving independence from the United States, citizenship now made it close to impossible, at least through legal means. On paper, these might have looked like efforts toward that democracy on which the United States had built its global reputation—a democracy that initially excited some sectors of the island at the time of the invasion—but they were, in fact, nothing but minuscule, counterproductive gestures that further evinced the colonial nature of their relationship. The string of island governors during the first half of the century—a series of North Americans never elected but rather appointed by the president of the United States, some simply inefficient despite their good intentions, others catastrophically inept, a few honestly brutish—reinforced this imperial character.

The political status of the island became a central question, and the parties that were formed partly based their agendas on what they believed should be the proper and most advantageous relationship with the United States: either total annexation to the Union (becoming a state), total separation (becoming politically independent), or remaining in association with the States but in a way that would afford Puerto Ricans more egalitarian participation in matters of government, economics, and social justice. Many Puerto Ricans and a few political parties advocated for independence from the United States. The Nationalist Party, founded in 1922 and led by the charismatic Pedro Albizu Campos from 1930 on, was perhaps the loudest voice calling for total separation—but there were sizable groups advocating for the two other possibilities as well.

The success in the late 1930s of a newly formed party, the Partido Popular Democrático (PPD, or Popular Democratic Party), and the rise to power of its leader, Luis Muñoz Marín—first as senator and later as the first elected governor—would secure in 1952 what is to this day the official relationship with the United States: the so-called Estado Libre Asociado, literally, the Free Associated State. Originally Muñoz Marín and his party had independence as part of their platform, but they gradually moved away from this idea to advocate for a sort of

US-controlled sovereignty. The fact that Muñoz Marín remained as governor for four consecutive terms, between 1948 and 1964, assured the system's permanency.

It is important to point out that Muñoz Marín's government project benefited greatly from the historical moment in which it developed. Amid widespread global decolonization after World War II, the United States found itself in the rather awkward situation of being in possession of what could clearly be labeled a colony. Although American administrations at the time never used that word, both the federal government and the island's government were aware of the potential validity of the claim. The official translation into English of "Estado Libre Asociado de Puerto Rico" as the "Commonwealth of Puerto Rico" let slip the desire to conceal that colonial relationship.

Indeed, this form of government gave more political agency to Puerto Ricans on the island through democratic means. The commonwealth was backed by a constitution (approved by Congress though first drafted by Puerto Ricans themselves) that created a tripartite system, with elected officials, almost identical to the one in the United States. But the power of the US federal government over the island remained unchallenged: issues of "citizenship, immigration, coastwise shipping, commercial treaties and foreign relations, and all matters related to military activity, currency, and tariff policy" (Ayala and Bernabe 163) were not to be altered by the new government of the island. Congress and the federal courts still had unquestionable power. The colonial relation remained in place, regardless of the organizational changes in politics.⁹

To counter this conundrum, Muñoz Marín and his intelligentsia felt the need to find a way to forge a feeling of sovereignty within this clearly nonautonomous political status. Their strategic solution was to adopt a notion of cultural nationalism: the idea that Puerto Rican cultural identity was sufficient for creating a sense of independence from the United States. The strategy permitted, officially at least, sidestepping discussions of political nationalism, which would obviously have led to questions of sovereignty. To this day, cultural nationalism continues to be, in many ways, the reigning discourse of Puerto Ricans on the island and in the diaspora.¹⁰

But Puerto Rico's calling card during the middle years of the twentieth century was the unprecedented plunge into a gigantic process of modernization.

Under the leadership and encouragement of Muñoz Marín, a group of legislators, engineers, academics, business executives, and media practitioners embraced a project of development, urbanization, and industrialization that set into motion far-reaching changes in the island. These were the years of vast concrete construction, of Levittownesque subdivisions, of frequent and well-publicized factory openings, of road and highway construction, of televised culture. It is true that the 1940s had ushered in a series of government agencies established to manage and monitor the infrastructure of the island: a bus transport authority, a water distribution and sewage administration, a state-run power company offering hydroelectric energy, a communications bureau.¹¹ But with the consolidation of the commonwealth in the early 1950s, the rhetoric of progress became an all-too-real, day-to-day experience for Puerto Ricans.

Arcadio Díaz Quiñones, one of the most important thinkers concerned with the cultural effects of the commonwealth structure, paints a very accurate rendition of these times vis-à-vis modernization: “Todo parecía posible, nuevo, una frontera. Nos vacunaron, nos educaron, nos mudaron. El pasado era la miseria, otro mundo, otro siglo, otro planeta” (Everything seemed possible, new, a frontier. They vaccinated us, they educated us, they relocated us. The past was misery, another world, another century, another planet) (“La vida inclemente” 33). Change, newness, progress brought forth an ebullient optimism bordering on euphoria.

Not unlike the *Look* magazine issue discussed at the beginning of this chapter, there were numerous magazine and newspaper articles, newsreels, brochures, and posters, both in Spanish and in English, that disseminated and praised the “wonders” of the commonwealth. In fact, these were the years when Puerto Rico was displayed to the world as the “Showcase of the Caribbean,” a label that was used ad nauseam by government offices and commonwealth supporters to present the island as a successful, capitalist example of a developing nation in the Caribbean basin. With the flare characteristic of Cold War rhetoric, Muñoz Marín boasted in a 1956 speech, “[W]e have insisted in making Puerto Rico a training center for technical assistance, a laboratory for visitors from the New World and even Africa and Asia, so that they may see for themselves our unre-

lenting and peaceful war on colonialism, poverty, disease, ignorance, and hopelessness—carried out in terms of a deep sense of friendship, of brotherhood with the U.S.” (“America to Serve the World”). The voyeuristic ecstasy of capitalism transformed the island into a desirable political object to be gazed at; it was the Showcase of Development. And Muñoz’s language laid bare the contradictions of colonialism and capitalism in the face of modernization. Emilio Pantojas-García, in his work on the political economy of the island during the midcentury period, expresses it quite well: “The island was presented to the colonial and underdeveloped world as a successful example of a ‘pacific revolution,’ living proof of the ‘virtues’ and ‘benefits’ of capitalist development in close cooperation with the imperialist metropolises under new forms of colonial and neocolonial arrangements” (88).

But Díaz Quiñones’s quote astutely points to the discursive contradictions of progress as well: misery and illiteracy, hunger and illness were expediently erased from the present (though empirical evidence proved otherwise) and relegated to a newly constituted past, seemingly remote and incontrovertibly gone. The enthusiasm in the present existed to make the future possible, and the past was recalled to demonstrate the extraordinary present. The citizens of the commonwealth were necessarily educated, healthy, and clean. Never mind the critical housing problems in the city due to the rapid migration of rural subjects and the social disruption of urban communities that were massively displaced; never mind the social effects of the euphoria for factories and tourism; never mind the lack of efficient mass transit (the assumption being that all Puerto Rico needs is cars). This would be, fundamentally, the paradox of the commonwealth years: modernization, come hell or high water.

There was, of course, more to these years: the modernization paradox was made all the more complex by the relationship that the commonwealth, its supporters, and even some of its critics had with some elements of Puerto Rican rurality. This was particularly pertinent in the eventual consolidation of the rural as the location of a Puerto Ricanness that would become useful for the strategies surrounding cultural nationalism. Those first dozen years of the commonwealth could be summarized thus: concrete and countryside.

SIGNS OF THE TIMES

It could be argued that the navigations and contradictions of the period were neatly packaged in two ubiquitous official images, two branding visual icons, two veritable logos: on the one hand, the silhouetted profile of a *jibaro*—the name for a rural peasant on the island—wearing the traditional hat as the emblem for Muñoz Marín’s Popular Democratic Party; on the other, the image of a shirtless factory worker used by the Oficina de Fomento Económico, the commonwealth’s Industry and Economic Development Office. These images encompassed some of the official, government gestures: the adoption of the rural peasant to represent the national subject (and to speak on behalf of the island as a whole) and of the urban factory worker to represent industrialization and development. These emblems also illustrated the complexity of the rural and the urban—in its many configurations—during Puerto Rico’s process of modernization.



La pava, the original emblem of the Partido Popular Democrático.

Resembling an old fashioned cut-out, the silhouetted jíbaro was synecdochically called *la pava*, after the light-colored straw hat with upturned edges that once upon a time was worn by male peasants in many parts of the island. The image was adopted by Muñoz Marín's party for campaign purposes at the end of the 1930s, and it became the iconic identity card of the party—so much so that it was common to call it *el partido de la pava* (the party of the pava). As Nathaniel I. Córdova has explained, the choice was a stroke of genius: using a visual representation of the common peasant, of the “simple man” from the countryside, the Popular Democratic Party visually gave agency—electoral and political agency—to the rural subject through its emblem (175).

The emblem, of course, also reinforced the party's populist agenda. As the historian Silvia Álvarez Curbelo has explained, twentieth-century populism emerged in Latin America as a response to a series of crises: a political crisis connected to the oligarchy, an economic crisis of capitalism (especially between the world wars), and a social crisis stemming from a call for agency in the working classes and the peasantry (14). Populism, through a series of consolidating narratives, tried, and in some cases managed, to dismantle politico-economic and social contradictions to create a new symbolic and discursive order, one that would create an effective and galvanizing, albeit problematic, national project (16, 18). The character of populism in Puerto Rico had additional particularities, though, especially because of its colonial status. To sidestep more problematic terms like “nation” or “state,” the Popular Democratic Party's preferred phrase at the time was *el pueblo de Puerto Rico* (the people of Puerto Rico). Implying in Spanish both nation and people, the word *pueblo* was quite the magical word, the balm that helped the party soothingly sweep away questions of sovereignty while mythographically integrating the island's amalgam of race and class into a populist community.¹² And that *pueblo*, in party rhetoric, was unmistakably jíbaro. But, as many scholars have pointed out, the jíbaro had been recuperated by certain scholars and by the cultural elite of the island as a symbol of authenticity in the face of the American cultural influence that had been increasing since 1898; thus, by appropriating the jíbaro, Muñoz Marín's party managed with one masterful stroke to unite the disenfranchised peasantry with those elite subjects who had felt economically displaced by American corporations.¹³

Muñoz Marín's political appropriation of the rural subject did not end with the emblem of the party. In a deliberate act of rhetorical and performative cross-dressing, he presented himself as a jíbaro. A campaign postcard the party printed up in the 1940s (Córdova 170) shows Muñoz Marín leaning against a palm tree while pensively looking off into the distance; in the upper left corner of the card, curiously resembling a religious ex-voto, there is a ghostlike image of a jíbaro wearing the pava and leaning on his horse. The card's composition is such that it implicitly suggests that the politician is thinking of the rural subject. But what is curious here is that one seems to be the replica of the other: the body pose of Muñoz Marín and the jíbaro are almost exactly alike.

This transfiguration did not limit itself to the visual realm. Perhaps the most effective way in which Muñoz Marín achieved it was through his speeches and conversations with the people of the island—in straightforward, simple language. The jíbaro Taso Zayas, the ethnographic subject in Sidney Mintz's influential book *Worker in the Cane*, explains the stark contrast of Muñoz Marín's language with that of other politicians of the time:

Before, at political meetings the leaders would hold forth, and it was truly eloquent oratory, truly lovely. But what we heard we did not understand—oration about the mists, the seas, the fishes, and great things. Then, when Muñoz Marín came, he didn't come speaking that way. He came speaking of the rural worker, of the cane, and of things that were easier to understand. And the people could go along with him, understanding and changing. And so they learned to trade the mists and the sea for the plantain trees and for the land they were going to get if they gave the Popular party their votes. (187)¹⁴

If perhaps Muñoz Marín's appropriation was not precisely a "jíbaro masquerade," as the historian Francisco Scarano described politicians on the island during the early 1800s, there was perhaps a sense in all this that the traditional politician had, snakelike, shed his skin.¹⁵

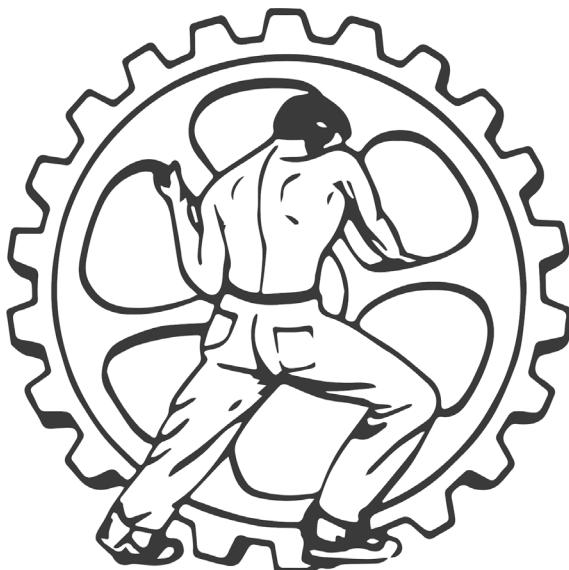
The emblem of the party was usually accompanied by the post-zapatista slogan "Pan, Tierra, Libertad" (bread, land, liberty).¹⁶ Bookended by the eradication of hunger and the promise of freedom, the slogan suggested that the land did indeed

have a central focus in the project of the PPD, especially in its first years—there had been attempts at limiting landownership by large corporations, especially American sugar companies, albeit with meager success. The party's emblem was thus invested in the rural subject and the rural space: the land in the slogan, needless to say, never referred to the urbanite, who didn't need it, but to the men (and only by extension, women) of the countryside. Nevertheless, with the wave of industrialization and the installation of the commonwealth in the 1940s and 1950s, the concept became more of a symbolic gesture attached to the jíbaro and less a project in itself.¹⁷

HANDS ON THE WHEELS OF PROGRESS

The modernization frenzy that defined the 1940s and 1950s had one important visual tag: all around the island, billboards were posted marking the site of yet another industrial or construction feat by the government's economic and industrial development agency, the Compañía de Fomento Industrial. These billboards always prominently displayed Fomento's logo: a shirtless man, with powerful, muscled back and arms, wearing pants and boots and turning a gigantic cogwheel with his bare hands. If the silhouetted pava was designed as a static portrait (and a slightly antiquated one), the “man from Fomento,” as he was generally called, was active, agile, strong, and mega masculine; if the jíbaro of the party's emblem was only a head in profile, a man passively posing, here we had a full-bodied man in action. The body posture resembled a bas-relief, but he was strategically facing away, no doubt to portray him as an everyman and to exempt him from any sign connected to race or ethnicity; he was squarely portrayed as a universalized, modern, albeit male, working citizen.¹⁸

The Compañía de Fomento Industrial was the agency that would take charge of Muñoz Marín's industrialization project. Created in 1942, it immediately began to open government-funded factories, such as bottle factories and cement plants, though these were not very successful (Picó 262). Soon after World War II, Fomento was totally reorganized: the state factories were sold to the private sector and the agency's principal goal became to attract foreign (read, US)



Emblem of the Compañía de Fomento Industrial

corporations to establish manufacturing plants that would produce material for export (Pantojas-García 62). The postwar global economic expansion made this strategy quite successful, and the industrialization of the island took off at an unprecedented rate.

It is important to point out that Fomento's industrialization project was contingent on the island's relationship to the United States: Muñoz Marín and his cadre believed "access to the North American market was the key for Puerto Rico's future development" (Ayala and Bernabe 189). Industrial investment in a colonial space was, needless to say, quite advantageous to the United States:

A common currency (the U.S. dollar) and the absence of federal taxes; the availability of abundant cheap labor with a low degree of unionization (or with unions controlled by the government or U.S. unions); the free trade between Puerto Rico and the United States that made the island an ideal location for companies interested in producing for the U.S. market; and "political stability," which meant

that the presence of U.S. military bases in Puerto Rico and the very fact that the only army in Puerto Rico was the U.S. Army was the ultimate guarantee against any political upheavals that might threaten U.S. interests. (Pantojas-García 72)

Fomento was also the principal driver of the development discourses that were taking hold in the United States' relations with Latin America, a strategy in which modernization necessarily meant that economic growth could succeed only through industrialization. The "man from Fomento" became the persistent visual reminder of the government's development project: to push the island away from its "third-worldness," or as Grosfoguel has described it, "the solution to backwardness . . . is to develop, to catch up with the West" (330). And the man behind Fomento, Teodoro Moscoso, its first director, was soon regarded in the United States as a masterful spokesperson for development: his stature was confirmed in 1961, when President Kennedy hired him to lead the newly created Alliance for Progress.

Moscoso, an integral member of Muñoz Marín's intelligentsia, was acutely aware of how industrialization would be a major factor in changing the image of Puerto Rico in the world. The logo was only the tip of his iceberg. As A. W. Maldonado has stressed in his monograph on Moscoso, during his tenure with Fomento the director was responsible for the favorable nine-page spread on the island that *Life* magazine published in 1949; it prominently featured the agency. In the mid-1950s, Moscoso actually hired David Ogilvy—considered by many the father of modern advertising in the United States—to develop an image campaign for Puerto Rico. Moscoso even tried to change the lyrics of *West Side Story*'s "America"—especially the line "Puerto Rico, you ugly island" (Maldonado, *Teodoro Moscoso* 103). Under Moscoso, "public relations, media relations, image-building . . . moved to the heart of the Fomento program" (106). Fomento was an industrialization agency whose approach was decidedly focused on marketing.

This orientation is best exemplified in Moscoso's involvement in the strengthening of the tourism industry, an economy that depended on a positive, inviting, and attractive image of Puerto Rico. Right after the end of World War II, Fomento became intimately involved in the establishment of the first Hilton hotel outside the continental United States (Bolívar Fresneda 74). The Caribe Hilton opened

its doors in 1949 with great fanfare, as a symbol of a new chapter in the island's tourism push.¹⁹ Tourism, as Dennis Merrill has meticulously demonstrated, was also an integral part of the development project in Puerto Rico. "Scratch a tourist," Moscoso liked to say, "and you'll find an investor underneath" (qtd. in Merrill 191). In a very real way, the development and tourism gazes, which I would argue guided and steered many actions of the commonwealth in its first years, were ideologically the same, and Fomento officials were intensely aware of this.

If one examines the two icons as a pair, the pava and the man from Fomento sum up the double gesture of the commonwealth: a conscious effort to uphold tradition through the appropriation of the rural subject as the citizen of the new government configuration, as well as the embrace of progress based on the American model of modernization embodied in development strategies. The official discourses, then, imagined a new Puerto Rico through a *homo ruralis* (the jíbaro) and a *homo economicus* of sorts (the Fomento man), though not, curiously enough, through a *homo urbanus*. Not surprisingly, they were both exclusively male subjects. But as different as they were, one located in the countryside, the other emblematically housed in the factory, these two signs of the times—in a sleight of hand typical of modernization—ultimately referred to one and the same citizen: the commonwealth's inherent narrative was to persuade that peasant wearing the pava to migrate to the cities to become a worker helping to turn that cog in one of the newly established factories. Thus, what could make this brand-spanking-new Puerto Rico was, simply and unequivocally, migration. Human flow would become essential to the machinations of the commonwealth.

A MATTER OF OPERATIONS

Puerto Rico's midcentury transformation had a bit more marketing attached to it. In line with the rhetoric of modernization, and with a touch of militaristic language—these were, after all, the first years of the Cold War—Muñoz Marín and his administration promoted and sponsored their programs under the rubric of three “operations”: Operation Bootstrap, Operation Commonwealth, and Operation Serenity.

Operation Bootstrap was the call for the island's industrialization and, with it, the development of an infrastructure that would make it possible. Fomento, needless to say, was the office that principally spearheaded this operation. Its name uncovers a strategic move: while "bootstrapping" in English implies a self-sustaining effort, the name of this industrialization effort in Spanish, Operación Manos a la Obra (literally, "hands to work"), had a slightly more cooperative sense to it, almost approaching community building. Thus, for the English-speaking audience the program comfortably allied itself with a very American work ethic; in Spanish, the operation referred to a more populist sensibility. Subtle differences aside, Operation Bootstrap had one objective: "to abolish poverty and rapidly increase the existing standard of life" (Moscoso 163), as Moscoso unilaterally declared in a speech from the 1960s. They were words that smack of the developmentalist agenda of the time.

Muñoz Marín's administration correctly realized that there needed to be, in tandem with industrialization, a political and legislative transformation in the island's government that would tweak the relationship with the United States without severing those ties. This was the objective of Operation Commonwealth—in Spanish, Operación Estado Libre Asociado—and the 1952 constitution legitimized those changes. The refurbished government could then present itself as wiping the slate clean in regard to US relations and then legislating locally for the transformation of the island.

If the industrial and political "operations" were to be expected under development discourses, the launching of something like Operation Serenity was, truth be told, quite remarkable. Here was an official recognition that with modernization—intense modernization—drastic social changes were bound to happen and would thus transform and even unsettle the members of that society, along with the spaces they inhabited. Operation Serenity was the attempt to manage and adjust the "spirit" of the times to acclimate island citizens to the changes that were occurring all around them. In short, Operation Serenity aimed for the formation of a national personality that would protect and safeguard Puerto Ricans from the unavoidable metamorphoses of the island.

In speeches and letters throughout the 1950s and 1960s, Luis Muñoz Marín incessantly promoted and refined this idea of a "serene" transformation. (It is

even evident in his speeches quoted at the beginning of this chapter.) The idea was officially introduced in his commencement speech at Harvard University on June 16, 1955. From the inception of Operation Serenity, Muñoz Marín recognized that it was intimately connected to the economic changes that were happening at the time: “We might say that [Operation Serenity] aims to give some kind of effective command to the human spirit over the economic process” (5). This is key: Muñoz Marín included this operation in an attempt to assure the predominance of citizens over economics. What would this look like? If I may use Muñoz Marín’s favored word, what kind of “civilization” would it be? The governor ventures an image in that same speech at Harvard: “a society in which Operation Serenity had been successful would use its economic power increasingly for the extension of freedom, of knowledge, and of the understanding [*sic*] imagination rather than for a rapid multiplication of goods, in hot pursuit of a still more vertiginous multiplication of wants” (5).

Indeed, Serenity was opposed to rampant consumerism and the unruly and excessive accumulation of wealth (A. Dávila, *Sponsored Identities* 41), but the operation also seemed to position itself away from radical notions of change. The name itself promulgated a sense of an unruffled and centered attitude toward modernization: serenity rather than violence, reform rather than revolution. With the nationalist uprising of 1950 and the several violent acts committed in Puerto Rico and the United States by the Nationalist Party overshadowing his administration and projects, Muñoz Marín’s Operation Serenity summoned Puerto Ricans to face modernization without the use of impatient force, to adjust to changes, and to reject militant behavior. Indeed, this operation could be seen as one clear, strategic way in which the commonwealth distanced itself from the Nationalist Party.

Ultimately, what Governor Muñoz Marín and Operation Serenity were proposing was a transformation beyond the political and the economic: a transformation, in fact, in the realm of culture in order to prepare the island’s citizens for the bright, modernized future ahead. But there was more, much more to it than that. Culture would be a fundamental issue for Puerto Rico and Puerto Ricans, for the government, and for those who had issues with it, and it was the battle-

ground for several heated debates throughout the development, installation, and governing of the commonwealth. Culture was the word.

CEMENTING CULTURE

As mentioned earlier, Muñoz Marín's party and government embraced a discourse of cultural nationalism to skirt questions of sovereignty. First and foremost, he needed to step away from the sticky notion of nation, which for many contained in its core ideas the status of an independent state; he achieved this sidestepping strategy in part by addressing the island as *el pueblo de Puerto Rico*. But the people of this pueblo required the consolidation of a generalized culture, a national culture, to make cultural nationalism work. In countless ways, what we now call Puerto Rican culture, what Puerto Ricans both in the United States and on the island today regard and boast as national culture, began to solidify and crystallize during this period.

These were years of beginnings and inaugurations. After finally putting an end to having English as the official language of instruction in 1948, the school system would become one of the most important venues for the teaching and learning of Puerto Rican culture. There was also unprecedented legislation for the creation of government spaces directly involved in the promotion and sponsorship of culture. In 1949, Luis Muñoz Marín himself created the División de Educación de la Comunidad (Division of Community Education); although fundamentally an adult education program to create civically engaged citizens who would be informed about the possibilities of transformation in a modernizing state, the division—through dozens of films, booklets, and posters—elusively filmed and printed an entire arsenal of Puerto Rican images and sounds, effectively inscribing a national culture for viewers and readers. In 1955, under the leadership of the anthropologist Ricardo Alegria, the Institute of Puerto Rican Culture was established; its charge was, in the words of the law that created it, “to conserve, promote, enrich and disseminate the cultural values of the *pueblo de Puerto Rico* and bring about their broadest and most

profound knowledge and appreciation” (qtd. in A. Dávila, *Sponsored Identities* 39). The institute organized exhibitions, concerts, workshops, conferences, festivals, and competitions; it was in charge of “the study and restoration of the historic, architectural, and cultural patrimony of Puerto Rico . . . and was made responsible for conducting archaeological, folkloric, and historical research” (61). (The Institute of Puerto Rican Culture is still active today.) Along with these more official changes, there was also the arrival of television in 1954, which would quickly mediate culture through music and comedy programming, just as radio had done since its arrival on the island in the 1920s. Also, and no less important, a group of writers and visual artists, from inside and outside the government, would respond in a variety of ways to the establishment of that national culture.

Of course, the various important attempts by the commonwealth to cement a shared set of practices, symbols, subjectivities, texts, histories, and the like were aiming for a particular Puerto Rican culture. And herein lies part of the distinctive conundrum of the island: in a period in which several configurations of the rural were rapidly yielding to the modernizing urban, the scaffolding for the development of national culture was based on a simplified and idealized—I would even say dehistoricized—notion of the rural.

That cultural configuration was not something originally imagined and brought forth by Muñoz Marín and his intelligentsia.²⁰ As many scholars have noted, the commonwealth’s ideological gesture toward national culture took shape during the culturalist debates of the 1930s. To counter what seemed like the inevitable Americanization of the island, intellectual leaders of the period, some of them academics working at the University of Puerto Rico, began to forge a cultural identity for Puerto Ricans from what they considered the most salient features of their culture. Their slightly homogenized concoction placed the Spanish language at the core, undoubtedly to challenge the United States’ cultural invasion but also because of these intellectuals’ class and racial alignment with Hispanic (read, Spanish) culture. One of the consequences of this position was the tendency, as Jorge Duany encapsulates it, “to idealize the preindustrial rural past under Spanish rule and to demonize U.S. industrial capitalism in the

twentieth century” (19). Thus, rurality gradually became a defining space for Puerto Rican culture, and the jíbaros, with all their paraphernalia, including the land itself, were reappropriated as iconic national cultural signs.

Highly influenced by this template, the Muñoz Marín government and some academic circles proceeded to put forward a more official narrative of the island’s culture. The Hispanic heritage continued to be a prominent source, though Alegría and the Institute of Puerto Rican Culture, recognizing the multicultural nature of the island, promoted what the *reggaetón* artist Tego Calderón would later call the “racial trilogy” (“Loíza”): the argument that a composite of Spanish, African, and indigenous elements constituted the historical foundation of contemporary Puerto Rican culture. These elements had already been slowly acknowledged and validated by artists and writers, in poetry, painting, fiction, music, essay, drama, and dance, throughout the first half of the twentieth century. In the culturalist discussions of the 1930s, this hybridity had been perceived, with few exceptions, as a cause for alarm: a prominent figure like Antonio S. Pedreira, hispanophilic and negrophobic, believed this racial mixture was responsible for the supposedly vacillating and insecure character of Puerto Ricans (Duany 22). His attitude was not taken up by the Institute of Puerto Rican Culture, but the institute’s officializing task, as might have been expected, involved a serious prioritization job in which cultural features were ranked, underscored, or disregarded, achieving what Arlene Dávila has described as “the unequal valorization of . . . racial components under the trope of racial mixture” (69). For instance, the Catholic tradition of the Spaniards was deemed essential, while any African elements of religiosity were summarily discarded as not authentically Puerto Rican. The African heritage—almost always described generically as such, without a recognition of the staggering cultural diversity of that continent—was limited, for the most part, to its connections to colonial slavery and (sometimes reluctantly) the music tradition. The indigenous element was specifically identified as Taíno; officially regarded as extinct, Taínos were useful due to their “symbolic malleability,” meaning that they could safely become the ancestral Puerto Ricans, the community that connected contemporary subjects to the island itself (70). The jíbaro, though

paradoxically rendered as the alleged product of this naturalized ancestry, was refurbished—whitened and de-Africanized, permanently locked in rurality, claimed as the bedrock of true folklore—to become the proof of the predominant Hispanic heritage of the island (72–73). The overhauled jíbaro could now be appropriated as the central figure of this national culture.

The “racial” triad, and the prominence of the jíbaro as quintessentially Puerto Rican, albeit with some tweaking through the decades, has been incredibly resilient and remains today a key discourse, not only in official spaces, like the public school system and cultural centers, but in the popular social imaginary of the island as well, in advertising and on television programming, on and off the island. Even so, it has been hotly debated. Indeed, the Institute of Puerto Rican Culture quickly became a *de facto* cultural gatekeeper on the island in the 1950s, but various artistic, literary, and media figures and organizations were quick to challenge, critique, or altogether reject the establishment and dissemination of this version of national culture.

Because of these struggles about culture under a ferocious regimen of modernization and within a neocolonial experience, I would venture to say that the middle years of the twentieth century in Puerto Rico were not only foundational, as I hope I have demonstrated in this introduction, but conjunctural. I borrow that term from the work of Lawrence Grossberg, who is taking it up from an extensive bibliography in cultural studies. “A *conjuncture*,” he writes, “is a description of a social formation as fractured and conflictual, along multiple axes, planes, and scales, constantly in search of temporary balances or structural stabilities through a variety of practices and processes of struggle and negotiation” (40–41). This is precisely what occurred in the curious case of Puerto Rico from the 1940s to the early 1960s around the negotiations of culture and the machinations of cultural nationalism: a multilayered tug-of-war. Grossberg thinks of the *conjuncture* as a moment of crisis and risk, of possibility and transformation as well, of regulation and of contestation, all characterized by “a condensation of contradictions” (40). These contradictions in Puerto Rico, I want to argue, were entangled in the dilemmas and paradoxes of the rural and the urban. The imagery, the practices, the identities attached to

the diverse configurations of culture during these years revealed the tensions triggered by the discourses and representations surrounding the city and the countryside with all their political, economic, social, and cultural implications in a modernizing state. This book is an intervention into this fascinating conjuncture.