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# Post-1898 Imaginative Geographies: Puerto Rican Migration in 1950s Film

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CYNTHIA TOLENTINO

Long regarded as an influential cultural text for Puerto Ricans, the 1961 film *West Side Story* is conventionally viewed as an immigrant story about Puerto Rican assimilation into 1950s United States mainstream society. The opening sequence evokes the island of Puerto Rico while also establishing the United States as its *mise-en-scène*, offering an aerial view of the island of Manhattan and gradually moving in to highlight the city's ports, highways, and bridges while also taking in its modern metropolitan sound of traffic and industry. Yet less than a decade earlier, such images of industrial modernity were frequently used to refer to Puerto Rico, which was undergoing an "economic miracle" brought about by Operation Bootstrap, the Puerto Rican government's development plan for transforming the island's agriculturally-based economy into a hub for manufacturing, oil refining, petrochemicals, and tourism. Between 1947 and 1951, the Puerto Rico Commonwealth government, as part of Operation Bootstrap, built a world-class port, highways and a communications system, public schools, a health care network, and an enormous tourist industry.

The curious presence/absence of Puerto Rico's economic boom in *West Side Story* echoes the general amnesia regarding the related shift in the colonial relationship between Puerto Rico and the United States, with the 1952 inauguration of the Estado Libre Asociado de Puerto Rico (Free Associated State of Puerto Rico), or its legal equivalent, the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico. Indeed, the film's well-known musical number "América" seems to "forget" Puerto Rico's industrialization as it works to define Puerto Rico and the United States as opposites, depicting Puerto Ricans as having fled a primitive tropical island besieged by hurricanes, overpopulation, and financial debt for a modern "America" characterized by expanding industry, skyscrapers, middle class housing, consumer credit, and modern commodities such as TVs and washing machines. In so doing, however, the scene incorporates Operation Bootstrap's rhetoric on controlling Puerto Rican population

growth as the key to the island's modernization and economic prosperity. The song's lyrics openly reference the migration of nearly one third of Puerto Rico's population, mostly working class and poor people, to the continental United States between 1940 and 1950. When Bernardo, the Puerto Rican Sharks gang leader, imagines the welcome that he would receive upon returning to the Island, his girlfriend Anita retorts, "Everyone there will have moved here." Obscured in the snappy exchange, however, is that the mass migration of Puerto Ricans was specifically figured as a critical component in Operation Bootstrap's plan to modernize Puerto Rico and establish its new position in the changing world economy, even as it was presented as only a solution to the island's alleged overpopulation problem.

More than once, *West Side Story* registers the confusion and forgetfulness surrounding Puerto Rico's status as a US territory. When Bernardo points out to Anita that "Puerto Rico is in America now," he calls attention to Puerto Rico's location "inside" the United States. Tempting as it is to treat his remark as merely a glib reminder of the unclear relationship between Puerto Rico and the United States, we need to remember that Puerto Rico has been under United States rule since 1898. Bernardo's "now" might thus be read as evoking a more recent shift in Puerto Rico's legal and political status from a US unincorporated territory to the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico in 1952, a change that laid the groundwork for the flow of Puerto Rican migrants from the island and the expansion of Puerto Rican communities in New York City as well as in new areas such as New Jersey, Connecticut, and Illinois.<sup>1</sup>

Different from Island films of the period, *West Side Story* figures Puerto Ricans as US Puerto Ricans, even as it ambivalently recovers the global context of postwar Puerto Rican migration through references to Operation Bootstrap's development approach. In addition to *West Side Story*, I examine the Hollywood movie *Sabrina* (1954) in conjunction with two Island films, the rural musical *El Otro Camino* (1955) and the small town melodrama *Maruja* (1958) to illustrate how popular films and musicals revisit Puerto Rican migration, defining it as a process of global significance that involves a reorganization of island resources and production towards Puerto Rico's incorporation into an emerging postwar global economy. Whether featuring Puerto Rico as a place or site for US investment or both, these movies refer to Puerto Rican migration in ways that open a discursive space from which to consider the development strategy of which it was a part.

Whereas *West Side Story* lovingly showcases the streets and stoops of New York City in order to situate Puerto Rican migration within US immigrant history, the Island film *El Otro Camino* unfolds at a rural coffee estate and in so doing, links Puerto Rican labor migration to a broader history of the reorganization of agricultural production in the United States and its colonies since the late nineteenth century. I also consider how *Sabrina* and *Maruja* incorporate an idealized European culture in their narratives about transnational elites, Puerto Rico's culture, and the Island's future. To stage the Island's transition from the post-1898 emphasis on sugar cane production to an emergent petrochemical industry in the 1950s, *Sabrina* presents a

merger/marriage between US and Puerto Rico elites that also engages a European cultural orientation; in *Maruja*, the idealization of Europe works to produce Puerto Rico as a translocal place while also refuting the shift in status to the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico as a move toward Anglophone culture and Americanization. Both films, I believe, stage Puerto Rico's modernization as hemispheric stories that culminate in European-style romance.

Looking at Puerto Rico cinema to find new modes of theorizing 1898 seems especially appropriate if we take into account the absence of visual representations of Puerto Rico in the US imperial photographic archive. In contrast to territories such as Cuba, Hawai'i, and the Philippines, Puerto Rico seems remarkably absent from the visual record of the events of 1898. Frances Negrón-Muntaner attributes this gap to the absence of Puerto Rico in early American cinema during the Spanish-American War period and running through the beginning of sound cinema and also to the rapid archiving of still photographs in the early twentieth century, as many in the United States chose to "forget" their Caribbean subjects.<sup>2</sup> To engage this gap in visual representations of Puerto Rico, the films in my study focus on the 1950s, as a highly publicized, yet forgotten period in Puerto Rico's history.

Extending Paul Gilroy's concept of the Black Atlantic, Ramon Soto-Crespo conceptualizes the mass exodus of Puerto Ricans to the continental United States as the "mainland passage," a historical event that also generates a unique cultural formation with the capacity to unsettle the prevailing understandings of American, Caribbean, and Puerto Rican identities.<sup>3</sup> In contrast to Soto-Crespo's positioning of Puerto Rican migration as a critique of Puerto Rican identity discourses, I study how 1950s Hollywood and Island films offer imaginatively framed histories of Puerto Rico that propose geopolitical frameworks to make sense of Puerto Rican migration. By examining 1898 in conjunction with the 1950s, I also take a different approach than previous studies that have focused on the dual representations of Puerto Rico as simultaneously a black, poor, and backward outpost and a civilized, Hispanic, and assimilable territory generated by turn-of-the-century US colonial discourse.

To engage the new formation of the 1952 Puerto Rico Commonwealth and Operation Bootstrap's development strategy, the Hollywood and Island films in my study flashback to post-1898 events, figuring 1898 and 1952 as distinct yet interconnected moments in Puerto Rico's historiography. Instead of treating 1898 and 1952 as brief periods or insulated histories, the films present them as knowledge projects that help to rethink the dominant terms by which Puerto Rico has been rendered visible and intelligible.

### **Puerto Rico on the World Stage**

Many existing accounts of Puerto Rican migration center on personal migrant stories or sociological studies of migrant communities and migration patterns; this essay suggests that cinematic representations of 1950s Puerto Rico, at the moment of the

creation of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico and economic boom, are especially helpful in trying to apprehend Puerto Rico's complicated historiography. Conventional histories of Puerto Rico often read as following: Puerto Rico became a US territory at the end of the Spanish-American War in 1898, after having been a Spanish colony for more than four centuries. Through the Organic Act of 1900, also known as the Foraker Act, Puerto Rico had a civilian government with limited local representation. The Jones Act of 1917 conferred US citizenship to Puerto Ricans and increased Puerto Rican representation in the island's local government. In 1952, the formation of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico provided for further expansion of representative government in the form of an elected governorship and the ratification of a constitution.

As I will discuss in more detail later in the essay, 1898 is seen by many as a symbol of Puerto Rico's powerlessness in the face of imperial powers and subsequently, as the moment of its inscription into US nationalist histories. In contrast to 1898, the date 1952 signals the inauguration of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico and thus as the beginning of Puerto Rico's economic boom and Puerto Rico's new international visibility as an economic exemplar for developing nations. Under Luis Munoz Marin's leadership, Puerto Rico went through an intense period from 1940 to the mid-1960s of what was known as "industrialization by invitation," a tax exemption industrialization model that brought more than two thousand manufacturing industries, mostly from the United States, to the island, thereby rendering Puerto Rico an active agent of the process of modernization.<sup>4</sup>

Dubbed the "Bard of the Bootstrap," Luis Munoz Marin appeared on the cover of a 1958 *Time Magazine* special issue on democracy in Latin American nations, as part of a story on Operation Bootstrap's transformation of Puerto Rico from an "unsolvable problem" into a showcase of industrial progress for developing nations.<sup>5</sup> Noting that only fifteen years earlier, Puerto Rico had been labeled "The Stricken Land" by Puerto Rico's former New Deal oriented Governor Rexford Tugwell, the article reports that it is now regarded as an "economic miracle" and "orderly democracy" that was independent of US federal aid. Also highlighted in the article is how Puerto Rico's progress has inspired programs in nations including Ghana, Morocco, Thailand, and India, and is also regarded as a successful example of experimental colonial policy that is being watched by nations such as Algeria and Cyprus. Puerto Rico's new position on the world stage was facilitated in part by advertising guru David Ogilvy's campaign for the new Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, which featured the slogan "Now Puerto Rico Offers 100% Tax Exemption To New Industry."<sup>6</sup> To supplant the prevailing image of Puerto Rican poverty and criminality with the idea of an "island in renaissance," Ogilvy integrated photographs by the artist Elliott Erwitt into his print ad campaign and also created an arts festival centered around the Catalan cellist Pablo Casals, who had settled in Puerto Rico in 1956. Ogilvy's campaign cast Puerto Rico as an exotic and cultured place that was

easily accessible to US passport holders while also highlighting the island's burgeoning rum industry.

The existing scholarship on the economic, political, environmental and cultural impact of Operation Bootstrap for Puerto Ricans has done much to contradict one-sided views of development as “progress for all” by revealing its negative consequences for those who stayed on the island. With the influx of US companies to the island, Puerto Rican-owned factories were unable to compete and went out of business. Even as new US factories created almost forty thousand jobs during the program's first ten years, they were not sufficient in counteracting the rising job losses among Puerto Rican manufacturers, which were compounded by the rapid mechanization of agriculture and the flow of people to cities.

Whereas historians that include A.W. Maldonado have focused on Operation Bootstrap's major players—Teodora Moscoso and Luiz Munoz Marin—in order to assess the plan's successes and failures, economists such as James Dietz and sociologists such as Emilio Pantojas-Garcia have considered the specific stages of Operation Bootstrap's development strategy, noting the lack of planning for the domestic economy amidst the greater emphasis on attracting US investors.<sup>7</sup> Scholars such as Laura Briggs consider the specific form of domestic planning in Puerto Rico, by examining Operation Bootstrap's targeting of poor women in Puerto Rico. As Briggs demonstrates, the development plan incorporated an intensified rhetoric of overpopulation, which contributed to the transformation of Puerto Rico into a figurative social laboratory for US international development policy and into an actual laboratory for contraceptive research that included clinical trials for birth control pills as well as coerced sterilization for poor women who were left to work in the island factories alongside the massive out-migration of Puerto Rican men to the United States mainland.<sup>8</sup> From a different angle, literary and cultural scholars such as Rodriguez Juliá, Frances Aparicio, and Juan Flores have considered Operation Bootstrap as a catalyst for the formation of urban communities, noting how it shaped the development of a Puerto Rican popular culture.<sup>9</sup>

### **The “Immigrant” and the “Return Migrant”**

Whereas *West Side Story* centers on the Puerto Rican diaspora in the United States mainland in order to situate Puerto Ricans within US immigration history, Oscar Orzábal Quintana's *El Otro Camino* follows the return migrant through a narrative of the global restructuring of labor. Although return migration was not a large phenomenon until the 1960s and 1970s, the film proposes the return migrant as a cultural figure and vantage point for exploring changing social and economic relationship dynamics in the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico.

Both *West Side Story* and *El Otro Camino* incorporate stories of assimilation to theorize Puerto Rican migration. On one hand, *West Side Story* follows the initiation of Maria, newly arrived from the Island, into “life as a young lady in America” through

the controversy surrounding her romance with Tony, an “American” boy and former member of the Jets gang. To place Puerto Ricans within a US story of immigrant assimilation, the film features the rooftops and fire escapes of New York City apartment buildings in ways that simultaneously suggest a preoccupation with verticality, as a metaphor for the immigrant’s upward climb in the United States, and also with marginality, or racial exclusion. Indeed, key musical numbers “América” and “Tonight” take place, respectively, on a tenement rooftop and fire escape. Given these visual and narrative cues, it is easy to miss that Bernardo declares his desire to return to the Island (“I think I’ll go back to San Juan”), briefly voicing the possibility and desirability of a return migration. Yet, in the film and critical scholarship, this moment—and the migrant trajectory that it evokes—is overtaken by the sarcastic response of Anita and the Shark girls (“I know a boat you can get on. Bye bye!”), as well as the spectacular dance performance.

The story of assimilation in *El Otro Camino* focuses on the attempts of a return migrant, Alfonso, to adapt to Island life by negotiating the changing labor structure and management hierarchy at the coffee plantation. In contrast to *West Side Story*’s visual foregrounding of the US immigrant ladder, *El Otro Camino* uses roads as a metaphor for the spatialization of Puerto Rican historiography and memory. The opening montage shows diverging roads in Puerto Rico’s new landscape of industrial modernity and thus sets up “the other road” as a metaphor for the unclear destination of Puerto Rico’s industrial progress and shift to Commonwealth status. It begins with a close-up of a young man dressed in a suit and tie, smoking a cigarette as he gazes into the distance. Superimposed over this image is a smaller illustrated street sign that bears the film’s title “El Otro Camino” and points in two different directions. As the credits roll, the effects of Puerto Rico’s industrialization are revealed through images of a work crew pulling weeds as a police officer supervises them, rows of modern apartment buildings, circulating cars, a coastal highway, factories, and the US flag flying over a government building.

A black-and-white musical melodrama, *El Otro Camino* is considered a classic movie that was produced by the small Puerto Rican film industry during a time that many regard as the golden years of Latin American cinema. Frequently billed as a glimpse into the bucolic past of Puerto Rico’s countryside, *El Otro Camino* features folk music performances and the then-unknown Puerto Rican actors Rosaura Andreu as Doña Verónica, a widow and coffee plantation owner, Axel Anderson as Gabriel, Verónica’s son, and Victor Arrillaga as Alfonso, a stranger who comes to work at the plantation. According to film lore, the original print of *El Otro Camino* was lost following its 1955 premiere and found on a riverbank several years later. After being restored, it was made available to the public in 2004, after nearly half a century.

*West Side Story* and *El Otro Camino* outline different models of belonging to the Puerto Rico nation. *El Otro Camino* depicts belonging as premised on the cultivation of land, rather than an original claim to territory. When Doña Verónica is approached by a group of Puerto Rican pickers sent to the Island by the US Labor

Department, she tells them that she won't be able to pay United States wages. But the group leader shifts the focus from money, asserting himself and his crew as Islanders eager to drive the "New York cold from our [their] bones," or move beyond the residual memories of migrant life in the US mainland, by cultivating Island crops such as the malanga and sweet potato.

The films also propose different frameworks for Puerto Rican racialization: while *West Side Story* defines Puerto Ricans as immigrants of color with foreign accents, *El Otro Camino* depicts Puerto Ricans in colonial terms. When Doña Verónica asks which workers to assign to Alfonso, Francisco suggests putting him in charge of the "Americans," the US Labor Department pickers. However, Santiago quickly rejects the idea that they have assimilated, or adopted an "American" identity, emphasizing that they are racially marked as Puerto Ricans: "Drop that about the Americans . . . we still have the stain of ripe bananas all over us." By emphasizing the persistence of racist perceptions of Puerto Ricans as tropical primitives, he suggests that Puerto Rican racial identity is shaped by the specific labor migration that resulted from Operation Bootstrap as well as Puerto Rico's colonial relationship with the United States.

At the exact moment in which Puerto Rico's industrial progress was in the world spotlight, *El Otro Camino* turns its gaze to the Puerto Rican countryside. Most of the story takes place at a mountain coffee plantation during harvest time, and depicts the shifting workforce and relationships among the owners, managers, and workers on the plantation. *El Otro Camino* depicts the coffee plantation as a community-in-transition, and in so doing, offers a compelling exploration of the less visible and unintended effects of Operation Bootstrap while also trying to apprehend what it means for Puerto Rico to be a Commonwealth from a rural Island perspective.

Although Hollywood films such as *West Side Story* defined Puerto Rican migration as an urban problem of assimilation to American culture on the US mainland, *El Otro Camino* treats the question of how to integrate an increasing number of diverse migrants as an issue that impacts rural communities on the Island. The story of an individual migrant's return to Puerto Rico is introduced early in the film, as we follow the purposeful young man from the opening sequence into the Department of Justice building, where he makes inquiries about an "Alfonso Ruíz Montalbo" and learns of his emigration to the United States and tragic return to the Island after his wife dies in a car accident with the lover that she took up in his absence. The specter of Puerto Rican migrants returning to the island is registered through Alfonso's personal saga and as a collective labor migration through the arrival of a group of return migrants at the Island estate.

The representation of Puerto Rico's countryside and rural migrants in *El Otro Camino* can also be compared to the negative portrayal of Puerto Rico's industrialization jíbaros in René Marqués's canonical play *La Carreta* (The Oxcart), which follows a Puerto Rican rural migrant family that moves from the countryside to San Juan and New York City, and eventually, returns to the Island. But where *La*



*Carreta* leaves the countryside for New York City and San Juan, *El Otro Camino* examines migrations to rural Puerto Rico, as a site under pressure to adapt to a new workforce and organizational structure. The film's figurations of rural Puerto Rico as a transitional space are closer to representations found in the discourse of 1950s cultural nationalism promoted by Luis Muñoz Marín and the Institute of Puerto Rican Culture, which drew upon idealized portrayals of the countryside and the jíbaro in order to project a local and international image of the new Commonwealth of Puerto Rico as symbolizing cultural autonomy in the form of a postcolonial compact with the United States, rather than an assimilationist move towards Americanization.<sup>10</sup>

In envisioning Operation Bootstrap's transformation of Puerto Rico from an agrarian economy to an industrialized society, Commonwealth governor Luis Muñoz Marín situated the jíbaro, the country peasant, as its privileged subject. Muñoz Marín believed that Puerto Rico had forsaken the mountain-dwelling jíbaro, who grew from the "most consistently unmixed body of Europeans on the island" and lived under impoverished conditions, and conceptualized the development plan as an opportunity to educate and train the jíbaro for jobs in government-supported programs.<sup>11</sup> For Muñoz Marín, developing a jíbaro-informed understanding of the island would demonstrate the need for a comprehensive revolution that was economic, political, and conceptual in scope.

Through stories about reorganization and restructuring, *West Side Story* and *El Otro Camino* engage broader discourses of US immigrant uplift, racial pathology, and gendered progress. In *West Side Story*, Tony's decision to "work for a living" by taking a job at Doc's candy store sets him on the path of immigrant uplift and apart from the pathologized Jets gang. In "Gee, Officer Krupke!," a song addressed to the beat cop who warns them against causing trouble, the white immigrant Jets members shrewdly assess the competing discourses of juvenile delinquency, racial pathology, and environment that are used to define them as criminals and a "social disease."

In contrast to *West Side Story*'s critique of social science discourses of race and progress, *El Otro Camino* stages the crisis of leadership and reorganization of labor production at the coffee farm as a metaphor for the changing colonial relationship between the United States and Puerto Rico under the Commonwealth agreement. Shortly after his arrival, Doña Verónica hires Alfonso to fill in for Francisco, the long-time foreman who drinks excessively and frequently skips work. Upon seeing Alfonso's success at managing a larger and more diverse work force, the foreman's daughter warns her father of the threat to his job: "There's a new foreman and he gets along with everyone." Through the introduction of Alfonso, a migrant who has gained cosmopolitan experience by moving around Puerto Rico and also working in the United States, as a solution to the coffee farm's management problem, the film suggests the emergence of a new style of leadership, defined as a break from the Island-bound jíbaro, represented by Francisco as inflexible and dysfunctional.

Instead of focusing on the historical contempt for the jíbaro as a symbol of Puerto Rico's backwardness and of what the migrant leaves behind in the process of becoming something else (modern, urban, American), *El Otro Camino* figures the jíbaro as a mobile figure. Here, the jíbaro takes the form of long-time plantation workers who negotiate the addition of new migrants and overseers at the coffee farm and are contrasted with the Puerto Rican pickers from the Labor Department, though they still locate themselves in Puerto Rico's soil. They are also distinguished from Alfonso, who is depicted as both a return migrant and multiple migrant at the beginning of the film; when the Department of Justice clerk relates Alfonso's personal geography in a way that takes inter-island migrations into account, rather than only the passage between the Island and US mainland: Alfonso was born in Ponce, educated in Mayagüez, and married in Río Piedras prior to his emigration to the United States and return to Puerto Rico.

Through the story of Alfonso's wife, who betrays him and dies while he is away in the United States, *El Otro Camino* references the impact of Operation Bootstrap's migrations, in which more men left the island to work in the continental United States. The return migrant's compatibility with Puerto Rico's new managerial structure is suggested through his collegiality with women workers, in contrast to Francisco's blatant sexism. In a key scene, a coffee picking competition becomes a battle of the sexes, as the men and women compete for a case of rum, with the sweeping up left to the loser. After placing Alfonso in charge of the women, as an attempt to humiliate him, Francisco encourages the men's team with macho slogans such as "Skirts can't beat pants!" and denigrating remarks that women are "better off in the kitchen." To illustrate the gendered change of regime, Alfonso presents the broom as a consolation prize to Francisco, whose daughter Miriam and Doña Verónica assume full leadership of the coffee plantation.

By using a coffee estate to explore the meanings of the 1952 Puerto Rico Commonwealth for rural Puerto Ricans, the film subtly references the aftermath of 1898, which is conventionally represented through the lens of government, with the establishment of a US colonial administration on the island, and in travel literature, as the shift from Spanish tyranny to American democracy.<sup>12</sup> The film suggests, however, that analyses of 1898 also need to consider the broad impact of the reorganization of Puerto Rico's agricultural production to prioritize the cultivation of sugar cane. In historical accounts of Puerto Rico, one of the key shifts in early twentieth-century Puerto Rico was the decline of the coffee industry and devaluation of coffee as a product in comparison to sugar. Though the coffee plantation setting of the film can easily be dismissed as merely coincidental and colorful, it actually links the less visible effects of 1898 with the consolidation of US control in Puerto Rico that also led to the prioritizing of certain island products and devaluation of others, and 1952, to the formation of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, the implementation of Operation Bootstrap and the emergence of a different relationship with the United States colonial overseers. Viewed this way, the figuration of the coffee estate in the film

resonates with the process of valuation/devaluation that is central to the writing of Puerto Rico's historiography.

### **Modernizing Puerto Rico in a Hemispheric Way**

In the Hollywood rendition of Operation Bootstrap, the industrialization of Puerto Rico holds out the possibility for the United States and Puerto Rico to combine new business networks with old colonies in ways that compel the advent of a socially enlightened age in which the chairman of the board can elope with the chauffeur's daughter. At the end of the 1954 film *Sabrina*, the heroine and hero (Linus Larrabee) kiss on a Paris-bound ship as the merger agreement between a Puerto Rico sugar baron and the Larrabee conglomerate is signed in New York City, and the senior Larrabee temporizes, "That's the century for you. Automobiles. Garages. Chauffeurs. Chauffeur's daughters!" By bringing together Puerto Rico raw materials, United States business acumen, and European cosmopolitanism in a narrative of sentimental modernization, the film imagines the global dynamics that will define the US dominated twentieth century, or what Henry Luce has called the American Century.<sup>13</sup>

By stressing and substituting economic and financial ties over historic and political ones, *Sabrina* depicts Puerto Rico in colonial terms, but not as a colony: it is a source of raw materials for US business and an impoverished island in need of US uplift. In doing so, the film incorporates an idealized notion of Europe as a critical site for the personal development of US subjects and the successful merger of US capital with Puerto Rico resources. As a result of her European education, Sabrina morphs from a US immigrant's daughter into a Parisian sophisticate. Her transformation serves as a catalyst for the domestication of the family playboy, who steps up to head the family business at the end of the film, and the workaholic industrialist, who falls in love with Sabrina, as a representative of a US grown, yet European styled and internationally-oriented perspective.

Based on Samuel A. Taylor's Broadway play *Sabrina Fair*, Billy Wilder's 1954 film *Sabrina* is conventionally viewed as an upstairs/downstairs story about the chauffeur's daughter who falls in love with two wealthy brothers. It is also, I believe, a narrative of modernization that can help us to understand the global vision at the center of Operation Bootstrap's development plan. *Sabrina* is the story of Sabrina Fairchild, played by Audrey Hepburn, the daughter of a Long Island chauffeur who is infatuated with her wealthy employer's youngest son, David Larrabee, played by William Holden, and is packed off to attend culinary school in Paris by her worried father. When Sabrina returns to Long Island two years later, grown-up and European chic, David pursues her, even after discovering that his older brother and director of the family's conglomerate Linus Larrabee, played by Humphrey Bogart, has arranged for him to marry Elizabeth Tyson, the daughter of a Puerto Rico sugar baron. Linus tries to avert potential disaster by courting Sabrina himself, but falls in love with her in the process. *Sabrina* was a critical and box office success, garnering six Academy

Award nominations including Best Director and Best Actress, and winning the award for best costume design. Although synopses of the film occasionally mention Puerto Rico as part of the marriage plot, its broader significance has gone unnoticed. Going even further, Sydney Pollack's 1995 remake of *Sabrina*, starring Harrison Ford and Julia Ormond, dispensed with the Puerto Rico reference altogether by replacing the sugar cane baron with an electronics mogul. On the other hand, Pollock's film seized upon and expanded the significance of Europe, setting a large portion of the story in the city of Paris.

Generally classified as a romantic comedy, *Sabrina* also belongs to the tradition of sentimental modernization, alongside musicals such as *The King and I* and *Flower Drum Song* and westerns such as *The Magnificent Seven* and *The Searchers*.<sup>14</sup> Vicente Rafael locates the political discourse of sentimental modernization in the conquest of the Philippines, with US colonialism taking the form of a feminized project of modernizing backward peoples by inculcating them with the habits and consciousness of middle-class domesticity.<sup>15</sup> Whereas frontier logic requires backward peoples to be exterminated through violence and war, sentimental modernization calls for their incorporation via processes of nurture and education; in this sense, ideological power is exercised through the higher power of love and benevolent tools of culture. *Sabrina* follows the logic of sentimental modernization, in the sense that the "problem" is not eliminated, but rather incorporated through love and tutelage. This dynamic of incorporation is staged in the film through Linus's discovery of his love for Sabrina and David's taking the reins of the family business empire out of brotherly love, but also through Sabrina's adoption of a cosmopolitan perspective in Paris, which sparks her transformation from American provincial to global citizen. From Paris, Sabrina writes to her father, "I have learnt how to live. . . . How to be in the world and of the world, and not just to stand aside and watch." Through Sabrina's Paris education, the film offers a different twist on the narrative of sentimental modernization by emphasizing the mobile spread of hemispheric influence over territorial occupation.

In contrast to the figuration of nineteenth-century Thailand as a foreign place under authoritarian rule in contemporaneous films such as *The King and I*, Puerto Rico, represented in *Sabrina* through a merger between a US manufacturing conglomerate and a Puerto Rico sugar cane corporation, is both familiar and accessible to US citizens. As I will show, *Sabrina* imagines US financial investment in Puerto Rico's industrialization as a move that will bring Puerto Ricans into step with post World War II world order and enable the United States to relinquish its elitism and exploitative brand of capitalism. To emphasize Puerto Rico's significance to the future prosperity of developing nations and the social well-being of the United States, the film explains how Puerto Rico agricultural production can be adapted to support the development of an indestructible sugar-based plastic, as a new material and industry for United States manufacturers. In confronting Linus about the arranged marriage to the sugar heiress, David incorporates Operation Bootstrap's

rhetoric of modernization, implicitly reaffirming the significance of US investment in Puerto Rico while explicitly presenting his domestic transformation as the key to modernization: “It’s all beginning to make sense. Mr. Tyson owns the sugar cane, you own the formula for the plastics, and I’m supposed to be offered up as a sacrifice on the altar of industrial progress!”

Much postwar middlebrow culture, including films such as *West Side Story* and *Blue Hawaii*, celebrated US capitalism and technological development as having the power to improve and broaden people’s lives; *Sabrina* suggests that this process is mutually beneficial for Puerto Rico and the United States. Linus’s business plan, called the “Puerto Rico Operation,” explicitly references Operation Bootstrap and frames it as a new opportunity for US industry. As he ironizes, this plan is less a profit-oriented strategy than a natural and benevolent “urge” that will improve the developing world: “A new product has been found, something of use to the world. A new industry moves into an undeveloped area. Factories go up, machines go in and you’re in business. It’s coincidental that people who’ve never seen a dime now have a dollar and barefooted kids wear shoes and have their faces washed. What’s wrong with an urge that gives people libraries, hospitals, baseball diamonds, and movies on a Saturday night?” Following this logic, US industry will not solve the poverty problem of developing nations purely by financial investment; rather, their inhabitants also need to be socially uplifted through the building of institutions and transmission of US culture. Articulating family duty as political obligation, David responds to Linus’s plan: “If I don’t marry Elizabeth, some kid’s going to be running around Puerto Rico barefoot with cavities in his teeth!”

Departing from the emphasis on US benefit to Puerto Rico in *Sabrina*, *Maruja* depicts Puerto Rico as a European-oriented Hispanic Island while also suggesting that the US relationship with Puerto Rico is culturally unimportant. However, *Maruja* also places a Paris-educated subject at the center of its vision of the future and closes with the image of a ship bound for France, as Angel, a young man whose family belongs to the Creole elite society on the Island, reconciles with his Island girlfriend before returning to his medical studies in Paris. In contrast to the open-ended voyage to Paris at the end of *Sabrina*, the France-bound ship in *Maruja* is clearly slated to return to the island, bearing cosmopolitan knowledge acquired through Angel’s education. By writing in Angel’s eventual return to the Island, the scene reinforces the historic orientation of Puerto Rico elites toward Europe in a way that is distinct from the desire to become European while also situating the island of Puerto Rico as the stage for the future. Significantly, Angel’s travels are paralleled with those of Jean, the Frenchman from Martinique; yet, where Angel is clearly slated to return home to the island at the end of the film, Jean’s itinerary remains unclear since he returns to Martinique, remarking that he expects to travel to France eventually. As a Frenchman with Spanish heritage who is visiting Puerto Rico from the French colony of Martinique, Jean symbolizes the history of European colonialism in the Caribbean as well as its uncertain future.

In addition to positioning Puerto Rico in relation to regional and imperial frameworks, *Maruja* references Puerto Rico's history as part of the Spanish empire. When Don Porfirio takes Jean on a tour of the town, he emphasizes that all the buildings were constructed during the Spanish reign and describes them as typical examples of Hispano-American architecture. At the same time that he locates Puerto Rico within Spanish imperial history, he also situates it within a cultural tradition of Spanish-American civilization. In return, Jean's appreciation of Puerto Rico's Spanish colonial architecture emphasizes the buildings' similarity to those found in Cuba and Dominica and thus positions Puerto Rico in a related, but distinctly regional and colonial framework, as part of the Spanish empire in the Caribbean.

Like Orzabal Quintana's earlier film *El Otro Camino*, *Maruja* is considered a canonical work of Puerto Rico cinema and is also the first island production to become a box office hit. Starring important actors in Puerto Rico's television and cinema history, such as Marta Romero in the title role and Axel Anderson as Jean, the film also features music drawn from a critical period in the development of a distinctively Puerto Rican style, including selections by Bobby Capó and live performances by Rafael Cortijo and Ismael Rivera. The story focuses on the town beauty, called Maruja, whose flirtations and love affairs incite passion and resentment amongst the townspeople. At the beginning of the film, Maruja is having an affair with Don Teófilo, the town mayor, but she quickly transfers her affections to his twenty-one year old son, Angel, who has recently returned to the island for vacation from his medical studies in Paris and is in a relationship with Lisa, a young woman from a prominent local family. The last part of the film revolves around the town patron saint's day fair and the investigation of Maruja's death.

If *Maruja* and *Sabrina* converge over their engagement of Parisian and European culture, they also employ different strategies to locate Puerto Rico within global frameworks. While *Sabrina* uses a narrative of sentimental modernization in order to foreground the importance of US hemispheric influence rather than territorial occupation in Puerto Rico, *Maruja* uses a small town setting to portray Puerto Rico as a translocal space. Produced at the same time that Puerto Rico's "economic miracle" occupied the world stage, it would be easy to assume that the small town setting of the film *Maruja* was intended as a window into Puerto Rico's provincial past. Whereas *El Otro Camino* uses the coffee estate setting to examine the effects of less visible Puerto Rican migrations, *Maruja* figures the small town as a microcosm of Puerto Rico. In contrast to stereotypical conceptions of the small town as an inaccessible and quaint place, the film portrays the small town as a translocal community that is defined through its networks and linkages between places.<sup>16</sup> Extending Arjun Appadurai's argument that human movement in the context of the crisis of the nation-state fuels the emergence of translocalities, I see the small town in *Maruja* as emerging through the disjunctures of territory and political affiliation produced by Puerto Rican migration and the new Commonwealth of Puerto Rico.<sup>17</sup>

In fictional narratives, the small town is often located outside of real time and space, as a place where one can escape the negative effects of industrial capitalism and global forces. As part of this narrative, the protagonist develops valuable skills and broader perspective through encounters and experiences in the small town community. In *Maruja*, the story takes shape through a set of arrivals and departures that also situate Puerto Rico in multiple geographical and historical frameworks. The train station, for example, functions as both a cultural crossroads for local elites, France's imperial subjects including the Paris-educated Puerto Rican and the Martinique Frenchman, as well as North American "guests." Here, Don Teófilo and Doña Provi chat with Don Porfirio, whose former classmate is coming to visit from Martinique, as they wait for their medical student son from Paris. Doña Provi also exchanges greetings with a woman who is eagerly awaiting the arrival of a United States women's league president, Mrs. Newcombe. The scene thus situates Puerto Rico within spatial and temporal frameworks—as a Caribbean region and European colony like Martinique, as having a tradition of Puerto Rican elite men traveling to France for education, and experiencing new forms of US colonial power and ideologies in Puerto Rico through tourism and feminism.<sup>18</sup>

*Maruja* emphasizes Puerto Rico's cultural ties with Europe while simultaneously figuring the US relationship with Puerto Rico as a marginal presence that is of little significance to Island elites. Significantly, the United States is represented through the ridiculous figure of Mrs. Newcombe, portrayed largely as a tourist photographing the patron saint's day fair festivities, playing fair games with the locals, and modeling a folkloric dress that she regards as Puerto Rico's typical costume and plans to distribute to the jíbaros. Members of the town's bourgeoisie exchange amused looks upon meeting Mrs. Newcombe, yet her protected status as a white North American woman on the island is conveyed by the social recognition that she receives as an "honored guest." To further drive home the idea that Puerto Rico is a Hispanic culture not moving towards Americanization, the film offers scenes in which the town mayor describes English as a language of little importance and that also pokes fun at locals who repeat Mrs. Newcombe's signature Spanglish phrase "Ay, qué nice!"

In contrast to the economic relationship presented in *Sabrina*, the US relationship with Puerto Rico is traceable in less sensational forms in *Maruja*, especially in scenes that feature the newly expanded local government on the island, as a symbol of Puerto Rico's Commonwealth status. At the train station, Angel greets his father, the town's Mayor, by referring to him as a prospective governor, a position that was formerly appointed by the United States government in Washington D.C. and became a locally elected position under the 1952 Commonwealth compact. The film also stresses the higher authority of local government over the Catholic Church by calling attention to parish head Father Justino's financial dependence on the municipal commission led by the Mayor. After *Maruja* is found dead on a local beach, the newly expanded island government comes

to town in the form of the District Attorney, who is also the Mayor's brother-in-law. The District Attorney, representing the new Commonwealth government, intervenes in a manner that is both reassuring to the elite townspeople and intrusive in a way that affirms his higher rank and power over financial transactions. In promising the Mayor that the murder investigation will not reveal compromising information about Maruja's sexual liaisons with prominent men, he also assumes financial oversight of the matter by dictating the amount of the bribe that will be paid by Maruja's former lovers to Lorenzo in return for his silence. Acting under the auspices of the United States government, the District Attorney's intervention serves as an extension of US oversight over Puerto Rico's economic and financial affairs, including authority over tariffs and the regulation of currency.

### **Where 1952 Meets 1898**

The 1950s films in my study do not merely provide new information on a forgotten historical period in Puerto Rico. Rather, they also offer a set of narratives about the processes of negotiating Puerto Rico's location in relation to migration, industrialization and the shift to Puerto Rico's Commonwealth status, defined as global phenomena. What remains compelling is the way that their negotiations consistently involve a rethinking of the institutionalized meanings of 1898 in discourses of Puerto Rico historiography and US empire. As *Sabrina* attempts to rewrite the turn of the century colonial relationship between Puerto Rico and the United States through an integrated narrative of sentimental modernization, *Maruja* brings into focus the disjuncture among territory, affiliation, and citizenship that emerges through Puerto Rican cultural identifications with Europe and the mid-twentieth century creation of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico. Taking a different approach, *El Otro Camino* reinvents the jíbaro as a Puerto Rican migrant worker, an intersectional figure that connects the post-1898 reorganization of Puerto Rico agrarian economy and the 1950s development of Puerto Rico's industrial economy.

Taking issue with 1898 has served as an important critical vantage point and catalyst for an outpouring of scholarship, contributing to the emergence of new theoretical frameworks and approaches in the study of US empire in the process. Some scholars charged that the emphasis on 1898 has led to US expansionist perceptions of the Spanish-American War and to the writing of insulated histories of the US colonies. In a journal issue devoted to issues in teaching about 1898, Oscar Campomanes has argued that treating 1898 as the onset of US empire has obscured the nature of US imperialism, defining the colonization of territories such as the Philippines and Puerto Rico as aberrations and not part of a longer, ongoing pattern of US state expansion.<sup>19</sup> Studies by scholars that include Noenoe Silva and Ada Ferrer productively demonstrated how the emphasis on 1898 has reinforced US expansionist perspectives of the Spanish-American War, in ways that have encouraged assumptions that colonization was unopposed and obscured Native and



Islander resistance to Spanish and US imperialism.<sup>20</sup> In this body of scholarship, 1898 symbolizes the loss of an autonomous state, the moment at which Puerto Rico, the Philippine Islands, and Guam briefly attained their autonomy from Spain only to find themselves almost immediately under US control. As an example of one response to the uncritical recovery of 1898, Luis Francía and Angel Velasco Shaw have attempted to displace 1898 by instead highlighting 1899, as marking the beginning of Philippine-American War, in order to draw Filipino resistance to US imperialism into visibility.<sup>21</sup>

The 1950s films in my study propose innovative ways of interpreting 1952 and, in the process, revise dominant conceptions of 1898 as rooted in nation-centered, governmental, and legal accounts of history. To apprehend the ways that they weave between historical moments requires a shift in focus from identifying empire to examining its locations, metaphoric reach, and audience, but also a recognition of historical referents that take the form of what Ann Stoler describes as an “alternating density and absence.”<sup>22</sup> Elaborating on Stoler’s claim that the recognition of an “alternating density and absence” constitutes a valuable analytical mode in analyses of empire, Victor Bascara contends that “strategic instability” creates the conditions under which new histories can be brought into view.<sup>23</sup> Noting the “zigzag structure” of recent histories of the United States and the Philippines, the tendency to weave in and out of historical moments and textual forms, Bascara finds that it reveals the instability of both temporality and textuality. Such instability, he explains, encourages readers to question the conventional authority accorded to linear historical narratives and archival materials.

This notion of strategic instability is helpful for understanding how the films in my study call for the development of new analytical frameworks. By treating the events of 1952 and 1898 as discrete, yet interconnected moments, the films challenge the notion that they can be insulated from each other or only positioned as counterpoints. If the establishing shots of New York City skyscrapers and highway traffic in *West Side Story* also compel a remembering of Puerto Rico’s mid-twentieth century economic boom, then perhaps *El Otro Camino* offers a glimpse of what the intersection between 1898 and 1952 might look like. In a pivotal scene, Gabriel asks how Alfonso arrived at the coffee estate in the first place. Alfonso responds, however, by putting the idea of the road itself into question: “This road,” he says, “It almost isn’t one.” So imagined, the 1950s coffee estate, as a vestige of Puerto Rico’s agricultural shift away from coffee and towards sugar production, cannot be accessed through the dominant and highly visible routes. Instead of merely showing us an aborted history, a road not taken, *El Otro Camiño* alludes to the assumptions and conditions that allowed the coffee estate—and the knowledge that it generates—to become lost and hidden from view. By animating connections between previously insulated histories of the turn of the century and the 1950s, the film demonstrates how apprehending a complex history of Puerto Rico might take place through the unstable ground of representation.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Puerto Rican migration to New York City is only the largest and best-known migration. Here, it is important to remember that there were previous migrations of Puerto Ricans, primarily as farm labor, to the United States areas of Hawaii, Arizona, and California during the early twentieth century. For one example of work that considers understudied Puerto Rican diaspora formations, see the *Centro Journal* special issue on Puerto Ricans in Central Florida, edited by Jorge Duany and Patricia Silver. *Centro Journal*, 22, 1 (Spring 2010).

<sup>2</sup> Frances Negrón-Muntaner perceptively notes this gap in visual representations of Puerto Rico as part of her explanation for West Side Story's formative influence. "Feeling Pretty: West Side Story and Puerto Rican Identity Discourses." *Social Text* 63, 18, 2 (Summer 2000): 83–106, 85.

<sup>3</sup> Ramón E. Soto-Crespo, *Mainland Passage: The Cultural Anomaly of Puerto Rico* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009).

<sup>4</sup> On Operation Bootstrap's tax exemption strategy, see Juan Gonzalez, *Harvest of Empire: A History of Latinos in America* (New York: Viking Press, 2000). 248–58. See also Soto-Crespo, *Mainland Passage*, 72–73.

<sup>5</sup> "The Bard of the Bootstrap." *Time*, June 23, 1958, 30–38. Muñoz Marín was featured on the cover of an earlier issue of *Time*, in a story that focused on his idealistic political vision. See "Man of the People." *Time*, May 2, 1949, 33–36.

<sup>6</sup> In interviews, David Ogilvy recovered his ad campaign for the Commonwealth for Puerto Rico, which he and many others saw as changing the image of a country and bringing investors to end Puerto Rican poverty as his proudest achievement. See Denis Higgins, *The Art of Writing Advertising: Conversations with Masters of Craft* (New York: McGraw Hill, 2003). The ad campaign was recently revived by the Puerto Rico Tourism Company (PRTC) in 2009, featuring new photographs by Elliott Erwitt and foregrounding his artistic vision of Puerto Rico's islands. Stuart Elliott, "Puerto Rico Revives a 50 Year Old Campaign." *The New York Times* 3 December 2009.

<sup>7</sup> James L. Dietz, *Puerto Rico: Negotiating Development and Change* (Boulder and London: Lynne Rienner, 2003); Emilio Pantojas-García, *Development Strategies as Ideology: Puerto Rico's Export-Led Industrialization Experience* (Boulder and London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1990).

<sup>8</sup> Laura Briggs, *Reproducing Empire: Race, Sex, Science, and U.S. Imperialism in Puerto Rico* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2002).

<sup>9</sup> Juan Flores describes the effects of Operation Bootstrap as a catalyst for Puerto Rico urban popular culture in his introduction to Edgardo Rodríguez Juliá's novel *Cortijo's Wake/El Entierro De Cortijo* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004). Frances R. Aparicio also mentions this connection in her book *Listening to Salsa: Gender, Latin Popular Music, and Puerto Rican Cultures* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1998). See also, Pedro Rivera's and Susan Zeig's documentary film *Pleña canto y trabajo = Pleña is Work, Pleña is Song* (New York: The Cinema Guild, 1991).

<sup>10</sup> For a fascinating account of 1950s cultural nationalism, see Jorge Duany's chapter "A Postcolonial Colony? The Rise of Cultural Nationalism in Puerto Rico during the 1950s" in *The Puerto Rican Nation on the Move* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 2002). 122–36.

<sup>11</sup> Soto-Crespo discusses Munoz Marin's political vision in *Mainland Passage*; 61. For a longer historical account, see A.W. Maldonado, *Teodoro Moscoso and Puerto Rico's Operation Bootstrap* (Gainesville, Florida: University Press of Florida, 1997).

<sup>12</sup> For an example of representations of Puerto Rico as a colony in transition from Spanish tyranny to US democracy in late nineteenth-century US travel literature, see *Our Islands and Their Peoples: As Seen with Camera and Pencil*, ed. William S. Bryan (St. Louis, MO: N.D Thompson Publishing Company, 1899).

<sup>13</sup> In an earlier piece, I analyze Henry Luce's concept of the American Century as a global discourse that works through the articulation of a mobile Filipino colonial workforce. See Chapter 3 "Training for the American Century: Professional Filipinos in Carlos Bulosan's *America is in the Heart*" in *America's Experts: Race and the Fictions of Sociology* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 49–68.

<sup>14</sup> I am indebted to Christina Klein's analysis of sentimental modernization; see her chapter "Musicals and Modernization: The King and I." in *Cold War Orientalism: Asia and the Middlebrow Imagination* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 191–222.

<sup>15</sup> Vicente L. Rafael, "Colonial Domesticity: White Women and United States Rule in the Philippines." *American Literature* 67 (1995): 639–66.

<sup>16</sup> As a translocal space, the small town in *Maruja* can be distinguished from the frontier, as a space grounded within a US expansionist perspective. It more closely resembles Mary Louise Pratt's concept of the contact zone, as a space where subjects conventionally disconnected by geographical distance and historiographical disjunctures

now intersect. In contrast to Pratt's theorization, however, my goal is to foreground the small town's dynamics as global phenomena rather than focusing on the interactive and improvisational dimensions of colonial encounters that are suppressed and sidelined in accounts of "conquest and domination." Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (New York and London: Routledge, 1992), 6–7.

<sup>17</sup> Arjun Appadurai, "Sovereignty Without Territoriality: Notes for a Postnational Geography." *The Anthropology of Space and Place: Locating Culture*. Eds. Setha M. Low, Denise Lawrence-Zuniga (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2003), 337–47.

<sup>18</sup> The train station scenes in *Maruja* bring to mind what Raymond Williams identifies as a "knowable community" in the novels of Jane Austen, a community that appears "wholly known" and transparent in the novel, but that is representative of a select social class as an actual community. See *The Country and the City* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), 166.

<sup>19</sup> Oscar V. Campomanes, "1898 and the Nature of the New Empire." *Radical History Review*, 73 (1999): 130–46.

<sup>20</sup> Noenoe Silva, *Aloha Betrayed: Native Hawaiian Resistance to American Colonialism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004) and Ada Ferrer, *Insurgent Cuba: Race, Nation, and Revolution* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999).

<sup>21</sup> Luis H. Francia and Angel Velasco Shaw, eds. *Vestiges of War: The Philippine American War and Aftermath of an Imperial Dream, 1899–1999* (New York: New York University Press, 2002).

<sup>22</sup> Ann Laura Stoler, "On Degrees of Imperial Sovereignty." *Public Culture* 18, 1 (2006): 125–46. The quotation is from page 127.

<sup>23</sup> Victor Bascara, "zigging and zagging across temporal and textual realms: On Writing Histories of the Philippines in American Studies." *American Quarterly* 59, 4 (December 2007): 1247–55.