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Gendered Geographies in Puerto Rican Culture: Spaces, Sexualities, Solidarities

Description

This is a critical study of the construction of gendered spaces through feminine labor and capital in Puerto Rican literature and film (1950-2010). It analyzes gendered geographies and forms of emotional labor, and the possibility that they generate within the material and the symbolic spaces of the family house, the factory, the beauty salon and the brothel. It argues that by challenging traditional images of femininity texts by authors and film directors like Rosario Ferré, Carmen Lugo Filippi, Magali García Ramis, Mayra Santos-Febres, Sonia Fritz and Ana María García, among others, contest the official Puerto Rican cultural nationalist discourse on gender and nation, and propose alternatives to its spatial tropes through feminine labor and solidarities.

The book's theoretical framework encompasses recent feminist geographers' conceptualizations of the relationship between space and gender, patriarchy, knowledge, labor and the everyday. It engages with the work of Gillian Rose, Rosemary Hennessy, Doreen Massey, Patricia Hill Collins, and Katherine McKittrick, to argue that spaces are instrumental in resisting intersecting oppressions, in subverting traditional national models and in constructing alternative imaginaries. By introducing Caribbean cultural production and Latin American thought to the concerns of feminist and cultural geographers, it recasts their understanding of Puerto Rico as a neo-colonial space that urges a rethinking of gender in relation to the nation. [*From the Publisher*]

Keywords

puerto rico, gender geography, cultural geography, gender in Puerto Rico

Disciplines

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"Chapter 1: Introduction" is available by clicking the download button above.

CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Marina esbozó una sonrisa victoriosa. A paso firme, entró en el aposento de doña Georgina. Fumigó el cuarto con una aroma a melancolía desesperada (lo había recogido del cuerpo de su padre) que revolcó por sábanas y armarios. [. . .] El aposento de la patrona olía a recuerdo de sueños muertos que aceleraban las palpitaciones del corazón. La casa entera despedía aromas inconexos, desligados, lo que obligó a que nadie en el pueblo quisiera visitar a los Velázquez nunca más.

“Marina y su olor,” Mayra Santos-Febres

AT first sight, Mayra Santos-Febres’s story “Marina y su olor” is a fantastic narrative about a young woman who transforms emotions into scents, and emits them as a physical response to situations in her everyday life. On a metaphorical level, Marina’s talent gives her the ability to alter spaces (shops, family houses, city streets), to mark them, and to claim them as her own. It is through this fantastic gift that she attains the power to resist, subvert, and ultimately avenge racial, class and gender hierarchies that devalue her self and that deny her social agency. The image of a nation composed of the spaces appropriated and transformed by Marina’s body—the body of a working-class, Afro-Puerto Rican, independent woman in control of her own sexuality—no longer responds to the “modernist representations of the nation as a territorially grounded, linguistically uniform, racially exclusive, androcentric, and

heterosexual project" (Duany, "Rough Edges" 187), and instead inspires a powerful critique of that model.

Santos-Febres's story exemplifies one way in which Puerto Rican feminist writers strategically transform the spaces of the nation and set literary works in places not normally associated with the traditional cultural nationalist model of the nation, in order to question the cohesion and the uniformity of Puerto Rican national discourse. Among the spaces that have figured prominently in Puerto Rican literary production since the 1970s have been the house, the factory, the beauty salon, and the brothel, all acting as sites of negotiation of gender and sexuality in the island's modern urban environment.

Gender, sexuality and space have had a complex and often contradictory relationship with Puerto Rican cultural nationalist discourse and with the Estado Libre Asociado (ELA), Puerto Rico's Commonwealth status in relation to the United States. In the 1950s, ELA called upon women to support its community modernization and industrialization projects like Operation Bootstrap, and to conform to the patriarchal gender norms of the *gran familia puertorriqueña*, while systematically discouraging them from seeking leadership roles in the emerging national imaginary. In ELA's early decades women were mothers and workers, building the nation through productive and reproductive labor while suffering the effects of the "feminization of poverty."¹ The sexuality of black and working-class women was controlled through mass sterilizations and contraceptive experiments,² and they were expected to support the social project of their male counterparts through their labor and their sexuality.³ Their role had a prominent spatial dimension, as the domestic space

¹ For a theoretical discussion of the feminization of poverty in Puerto Rico and the diaspora, see Alice Colón Warren's articles in *The Commuter Nation: Perspectives on Puerto Rican Migration* (1994) and *Puerto Rican Women and Work: Bridges in Transnational Labor* (1996). Also, Colón Warren and Alegría Ortega on "Shattering the Illusion of Development: The Changing Status of Women and Challenges for the Feminist movement in Puerto Rico" (1998).

² For more on the forced sterilizations and the contraceptive experiments conducted on Puerto Rican women, see Margarita Ostolaza Bey's *Política Sexual en Puerto Rico* (1989), as well as Linda Gordon's *The Moral Property of Women: A History of Birth Control Politics* (2002). Ana María García's documentary film *La operación* also offers a timeline, in addition to numerous testimonials by women affected by these policies.

³ Most notably, DIVEDCO's films *Modesta*, *Doña Julia* and *El de los cabos blancos*, among others, praise women's support of the modernization project and condemn their occasional failure to understand and to uphold its principles.

remained the women's domain (hence the abundance of literary and cinematic texts set in rural and urban family homes).

The failure of Operation Bootstrap, and of some of ELA's founding concepts, resulted in a crisis that inspired feminist intellectuals and artists to rethink the principles of cultural nationalism and of its model of *puertorriqueñidad*. The feminism of the 1970s enabled more women to enter the salaried workforce, and to gain visibility in the public sphere.⁴ Together with this ongoing process of empowerment and participation, however, reports of femicides and domestic violence continue to appear daily in the island's main newspapers, depicting male privilege as a defining characteristic of the gendered experience of the nation.

In the realm of culture, the feminism of the 1970s used space as one of its main, albeit rarely analyzed, technologies of resistance. Influenced by the feminist and the civil rights movements, the Vietnam War protests, the Cuban Revolution and the Latin American Boom, the authors of the Generation of the 70s, to which many of the writers and film directors analyzed here belong, began to critique the roles imposed on women by patriarchy, colonialism and white privilege. Writers and film directors like Rosario Ferré, Magali García Ramis, Carmen Lugo Filippi, Sonia Fritz and Ana María García, among others, were among the first to strategically "misplace" their female characters from the domestic to a series of other spaces, and, from these spaces, to question the cohesion of the patriarchal national discourse.

This book is a critical study of the ways gendered spaces are constructed through feminine labor and capital in Puerto Rican literature and film (1950-2010). It analyzes gendered geographies and forms of emotional labor, and the spaces of possibility that they generate within the material and the symbolic spaces of the factory, the family house, the beauty salon and the brothel. My central argument is that, in the process of challenging traditional images of femininity, the protagonists of the texts that I analyze gender and queer the spaces that they inhabit, contesting the official Puerto Rican cultural

⁴ See, for example, the work of María del Carmen Baerga on women's work in the needlework industry in Puerto Rico, Carmen Teresa Whalen's work on Puerto Rican female workers in the years after World War II, as well as Mary Frances Gallart's work on the political empowerment of Puerto Rican women since the 1950s, the last two published in *Puerto Rican Women's History: New Perspectives*, eds. Félix Matos Rodríguez and Linda Delgado.

nationalist discourse on gender and nation, and proposing alternatives to its spatial tropes through feminine labor and solidarities.

By examining spatial tropes, the book reassesses women's attempts to reconfigure the relationship between nation, gender and sexuality in Puerto Rican literary and cinematic discourse. It engages the historiography on women's labor since the 19th century, and reflects on the critical work on the creative and political changes in contemporary women's literature. It analyzes the construction of the female body in a variety of contexts, from its negotiation of urban settings to its possibility as an instrument of resistance to patriarchy and colonialism, and as a technology of independence.

The book's main goal is to analyze how the gendered and sexual geographies produced by contemporary Puerto Rican authors critique the official cultural nationalist model that equates the nation with a great family, whose space par excellence is the family house. In my definition, gendered geographies are those gendered and sexual experiences that, through their intersection with hierarchies of race, class and capital, question the limits of official discourses on gender, space and nation, and deconstruct traditionally patriarchal spaces as spaces of feminine agency. By critically applying the work of feminist geographers like Doreen Massey, Nancy Duncan, Katherine McKittrick and Melissa M. Wright, I show how writers like Magali García Ramis, Rosario Ferré, Mayra Santos-Febres and Carmen Lugo Filippi, and film directors like Sonia Fritz and Ana María García, have been particularly effective in dismantling the discourse of gender and nation, and in proposing alternative tropes through the politics of space and labor. In the context of the limited critical literature on space in Puerto Rican cultural studies, I build on José Luis González's and on Juan Gelpí's work on the house as a symbol of the nation, and on Gelpí's analysis of the crisis of patriarchy and colonialism on the island.

The second main goal of the book is to engage the fields of Feminist Geography, Caribbean and Puerto Rican Studies in a productive conversation, and to show how feminine geographies and the cultural construction of space are indispensable for understanding gender and sexuality in the Caribbean. Until recent years, the discussion of space in Puerto Rico had focused primarily on the island and on its relationship to the United States, whether regarding Puerto Rico's political status, the economic and cultural interactions between the island and the mainland, or the politics of lan-

guage and identity, exemplified in the work of Jorge Duany and Juan Flores, among others. This book makes an original contribution to these debates, and opens a discussion on the intersections between material everyday spaces, gender, sexuality and national discourses.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT: GENDER, SEXUALITY, SPACE AND NATION

The gendered geographies that emerge from the literary and cinematic texts analyzed here are foregrounded by a specific historical, geographical and social setting, which they help construct, critique and rethink. Their context is framed by the establishment of the *Estado Libre Asociado* (Free Associated State, also known as the Commonwealth), Puerto Rico's political status in its colonial relation to the United States, and its assertion of cultural nationalism and the myth of the *gran familia puertorriqueña* (the Great Puerto Rican Family) as its dominant discourse.

Over the course of the 20th century, Puerto Rican national discourse has portrayed gender and sexuality in spatial terms. The writers of the generation of the 1930s did that by rearticulating earlier discussions of the origins and the constitution of the Puerto Rican nation that, in some instances, went back to the turn of the 19th century.⁵ In doing so, they engaged gender and sexuality for the purpose of reaffirming a masculine, heterosexual vision of the national imaginary. For most of them, the woman's role was domestic, a wife and a mother, whereas professional women were perceived as a threat to virility, the quality that these intellectuals saw as intrinsic to *la puertorriqueñidad*. Antonio S. Pedreira, the figure that best exemplified the masculine discourse on nation and gender in the 1930s, claimed that the most a woman could do for her nation was to be "la perfecta dueña de casa" (Pedreira 95), determining social and gender roles, and delimiting the space that a woman was to occupy.

The two decades following Pedreira's 1934 book were a time of profound political changes that set the stage for the redefinition of Puerto Rico's national identity in relation to the United States.

⁵ See Scarano, Francisco. "The Jíbaro Masquerade and the Subaltern Politics of Creole Identity Formation in Puerto Rico, 1745-1823." *The American Historical Review* 101.5 (Dec. 1996): 1398-1431.

The dilemma of independence vs. statehood, which had preoccupied intellectuals and politicians since the U.S. invasion of the island in 1898, was seemingly resolved with a third alternative that tried to accommodate the concerns of both sides of the political debate. Puerto Rico's status as Estado Libre Asociado was formalized on July 25, 1952 by Luis Muñoz Marín, the leader of the Popular Democratic Party (PPD, or Partido Popular Democrático) and the first elected governor of the island. The conditions that redefined Puerto Rico's relationship to the United States were an attempt to find a middle ground between independence and statehood, in a situation in which Puerto Rico had no independent government, while at the same time continued to identify as a nation separate from the metropolis. This accommodating arrangement was characterized by a series of contradictions:

Although Puerto Ricans elect a resident commissioner to Congress, they don't have their voting representatives or senators in Washington. Even though Puerto Ricans cannot vote for the president of the United States, they are bound to serve in the U.S. armed forces like any other citizens. While island residents do not pay federal taxes, they qualify for most federally funded programs, including nutritional assistance and welfare benefits. Such contradictory elements may well warrant the term 'postcolonial colony' to describe Puerto Rico's problematic relationship with the United States (Duany *The Puerto Rican Nation* 123).

The status of the Estado Libre Asociado was rationalized through discourses and practices of cultural, rather than constitutional nationalism, which the PPD proposed in order to reconcile Puerto Rico's national identity with its lack of political sovereignty. Supporters of cultural nationalism rely on a discourse of a common history, culture and language that make sovereignty unnecessary for the existence of the Puerto Rican nation, and reinforce "the spiritual autonomy of their nation by commemorating their heritage, celebrating their rituals, rescuing their traditions, and educating the people" (Duany *The Puerto Rican Nation* 123-4). Muñoz's cultural nationalism reconciled national identity with political dependence, and in so doing became a populist project that generated "mitos integradores para unas generaciones empeñadas en asumir de una vez por todas la modernidad [. . .] el desarrollo, la industrialización, la auto-determinación política respecto a los centros mundiales, la ar-

monía social y racial y la identidad nacional” (Álvarez-Curbelo, “El discurso” 16). These ideals were part of a populist discourse wherein “La mediación del líder carismático, la ilusión de participación y los mitos de una identidad colectiva compartida aseguraban, así, la paz y el orden nacional” (Rodríguez Castro 101), overlooking the fact that many of the conditions that enabled the construction of that national identity would only be possible by means of the legal power to pass laws, a power part of which Puerto Rico had to give up under the new colonial arrangement.

One of the central social pillars of cultural nationalism was the concept of *la gran familia puertorriqueña*, or the Great Puerto Rican Family. The concept was not a novelty in the social and political discourse of the middle decades of the 20th century. In fact, it dates back to the late 19th century, when it was first used as a resource in the discourse of liberal professionals and a significant faction of large landowners (*hacendados*) seeking political autonomy within the context of Spanish colonialism (Cubano-Iguina; Scarano, “Liberal Pacts”). Later, the trope was “activated as a strategic response to the economic and social displacement suffered by them after 1898, precisely as U.S. absentee capitalism began to buy and merchandize the sugar production process previously controlled by this sector” (Aparicio 5). The *hacendados* “summoned up the image of the patriarchal dynamics that structured the hacienda in the past [thus constructing] a homogenized discourse of unity, harmony, and most important, *convivencia*” (Aparicio 6). By proposing a schematic model of Puerto Rican society dominated by “Creole landowners as benevolent father figures and subsistence farmers as their grateful peons, [the concept] obscures important conflicts and tensions within nineteenth-century coffee and sugar plantations” (Duany, *The Puerto Rican Nation* 20). Following this trend, during the 1940s and 1950s the PPD appropriated the concept and transformed it into the founding myth of Puerto Rican cultural nationalism. With the help of The Institute for Puerto Rican Culture, *la gran familia puertorriqueña* became a model of national unity and cohesion that conveniently neglected to recognize and address racial, gender, class and other hierarchies in Puerto Rican society. As one example, following similar trends in much of Latin America (Miller 1-26), the Institute of Puerto Rican Culture “defined the essence of contemporary Puerto Rican culture as the harmonious integration of aboriginal, Spanish, and African traditions, prior to the U.S. invasion of the island”

(Duany, *The Puerto Rican Nation* 130), a model that excluded elements like the United States or the early Puerto Rican migration to the mainland. It is the spatial aspect of this notion of unity and cohesion, and its effort to maintain and disguise social hierarchies, that the authors and the film directors analyzed here rethink and challenge in their literary and cinematic texts.

In addition to the model of *la gran familia puertorriqueña*, another pillar of the Estado Libre Asociado was Operación Manos a la Obra, reframed as Operation Bootstrap for its audience of U.S. businessmen. An economic program instituted in the late 1940s, Operation Bootstrap,

relied on U.S. capital and markets. U.S. corporations borrowed money from the Commonwealth (which in turn sold bonds in the U.S. municipal funds markets) and invested in labor-intensive manufacturing. These factories bought raw materials from abroad, processed or assembled the products in Puerto Rico, and then sold their products in continental markets. Operations tended to be labor-intensive, paid significantly lower wages than those earned by U.S. workers, and enjoyed almost full tax exemptions (Meléndez 7).

An additional element of Operation Bootstrap was the silent, yet widespread facilitation of the emigration of Puerto Rico's "excess population" to the United States—workers unable to find employment on the island were encouraged to look for one in factories or farms on the mainland. This policy set the stage for the mass migration of Puerto Ricans to New York and later to other parts of the U.S. While at first Operation Bootstrap was highly successful in creating better-paying, more stable jobs than in seasonal agriculture, its success only lasted a few decades, until owners chose to make bigger profits by transferring their factories to locations in Latin America and Asia, where their production costs would be even lower. As a consequence, in the 1970s Puerto Rico's gross national product "declined sharply, the unemployment rate almost doubled, and income levels stagnated. Many factories closed their operations in Puerto Rico and moved to other low-wage countries" (Meléndez 7). The failure of Operation Bootstrap, and, many would argue, of some of the founding concepts of the Estado Libre Asociado, resulted in a crisis that inspired intellectuals, artists and

social critics to rethink the core principles of cultural nationalism and of its model of Puerto Rican national identity.

The context of Operation Bootstrap, the decades of the establishment of the *Estado Libre Asociado*, and, more broadly, the period that extends from the 1900s to the 1960s were marked by policies and regulations that subjected working-class, black and mixed-race women to forms of labor characterized by different modalities of disciplinary order and violence. Much of this labor exploitation was racialized and gendered, and occurred in the cigar-making and the needlework industries, along with the spaces that correspond to them: the factory, the garment shop, and the home as a work place.

The tobacco industry subjected women to forms of labor violence that was facilitated by the space of the cigar-making factory. There, women usually occupied “los escaños inferiores. [. . .] Los peores salarios y las más sórdidas condiciones de trabajo se daban en estas industrias” (Rivera Quintero 52). The large U.S.- and Puerto Rican-owned tobacco companies established wages and working conditions that were often detrimental to the women’s health and economic wellbeing, and exploitation continued in the smaller *chin-chales*, where women were consistently paid less than the leaf-strippers employed by foreign companies (Quintero-Rivera, “Socialist” 24). Similarly, in the needlework industry women had male supervisors (Dietz *Historia* 136), worked long hours and with little light (Boris 35). In the 1930s, protests like those organized in María Luisa Arcelay’s garment shop in Mayagüez were quickly thwarted by police. In response to such exploitative practices and instances of violence, women used a variety of personal, labor and spatial strategies that involved union organization, structural subversion, and, importantly, intellectual and artistic criticism, to challenge labor violence that sought to incorporate them in the national discourse of productivity without recognizing the value of their labor.

The literary and intellectual context during the years marked by the institutionalization of cultural nationalism and the *Estado Libre Asociado* in Puerto Rico was also a time of transitions between what cultural critics have more recently identified as two distinct generations of artists and authors—that of the 1950s and that of the 1970s, to which most of the writers analyzed in this book belong.

Among the most prominent writers of the *Generación del 50* were José Luis González, Pedro Juan Soto, Abelardo Díaz Alfaro,

Emilio Díaz Valcárcel and René Marqués—a group of storytellers and playwrights still dominated by male voices and by patriarchal approaches. Their work emerged out of multiple social transitions, “cambios provocados por el reformismo político y social del Partido Popular, la creación del Estado Libre Asociado, la industrialización de la isla, la ruina del sector agrícola, y la creciente anexión económica y agresión cultural norteamericana” (Acosta-Belén, “En torno” 220). While many of these authors were welcomed and incorporated in the institutionalization of the cultural nationalist model through their participation in initiatives like DIVEDCO,⁶ they also felt a profound concern for the society that, in their view, left behind the old values and principles. Among their main themes were “la ruralía desplazada y agonizante, el mundo enajenante que surge con la industrialización y urbanización de la isla, la emigración masiva de los puertorriqueños a los Estados Unidos y el creciente poder asimilista de los Estados Unidos” (Acosta-Belén, “En torno” 221).

During the 1950s, the traditional image of women in the Puerto Rican literary canon continued to be the result of patriarchal views of social relations,⁷ which sought to make women a productive instrument in the developing cultural nationalist project. In literary and cinematic discourse, the dominant cultural nationalist politics of gender often translated into situations in which a female character, often a young single woman or a wife, either assumes her reproductive role in the Puerto Rican nation, or betrays it, and is conse-

⁶ The purpose of La División de Educación de la Comunidad (The Division for Community Development), one of the most ambitious and successful projects of cultural nationalism, was to educate and integrate Puerto Ricans, especially those living in rural zones, into the national project. Starting in 1949 and into the 1970s, DIVEDCO, whose members included Jack Delano, Amílcar Tirado, Pedro Juan Soto, and René Marqués, among many others, produced over 112 short and feature films, most of them with unprofessional actors, addressing issues of community development and modernization. (“Retrospectiva,” *Fundación nacional para la cultural popular*). Together with films, the organization helped develop many other arts, like silk-screens, posters, music, and others. DIVEDCO is undoubtedly the project that has made the most important contribution to the development of Puerto Rican cinema in the 20th century, as it not only resulted in the production of a large body of cinematic work, but was also responsible for professional training of future filmmakers and for popularizing cinema on the island.

⁷ It is significant to point out that this occurred not only at the level of the text, but also of the author’s voice, as René Marqués’s 1959 anthology *Cuentos puertorriqueños de hoy*, for example, includes short stories by eight male writers (including the editor himself) and no female writers.

quently condemned and punished for it. It is during this period that René Marqués, one of the proclaimed patriarchs of Puerto Rican national literature, lamented women's increased social participation, expressing a preoccupation with "la docilidad del hombre—triste figura del ex-pater familias—ante el avance progresivo de la mujer en todas las esferas en que él era una vez—¡nostálgico pasado!—dueño y señor" (Marqués, *Puertorriqueño dócil*, 171). The women in Marqués's plays *La carreta* and *Los soles truncos* respond to this concern, personifying the loss of traditional patriarchal values. Juanita's prostitution and her claim that "no hay dinero sucio ni dinero limpio. Hay dinero" (Marqués *La carreta* 124) marks the loss not only of her honor, but also that of her family, and, by extension, of *la gran familia puertorriqueña*. Conversely, Inés, the protagonist of *Los soles truncos*, burns down the family house in an effort to preserve its spirit in time, projecting a desperation that reproduces the sentiments of her author's generation—a nostalgia for a lost colonial past and for its paternal figure.

Other literary and cinematic examples of this patriarchal approach can be found in "La cautiva" by Pedro Juan Soto and in Orzábal Quintana's film *Maruja*.⁸ Both texts have melodramatic elements and didactic purposes, depicting "unacceptable" female gender and sexual behaviors and locations in space, for which the protagonists are unequivocally punished. The young woman in Soto's short story is forced into exile because of her relationship with a married man, while Maruja's death is a symbolic reminder that transgression of gender norms, especially when accompanied by sexual liberation, has no place in the national imaginary.

The transition from this patriarchal depiction of gender and sexuality to the feminist standpoint of the writers and artists of the Generación del 70 was gradual and conditioned by a series of social and political processes that occurred in the 1950s and the 1960s, and to which Puerto Rican artists and authors responded:

Durante los años del 60 tuvieron lugar una serie de eventos históricos a nivel mundial que, junto a la realidad sociopolítica e histórica de Puerto Rico, contribuyeron a moldear la conciencia litera-

⁸ Orzábal Quintana is an Argentine director whose depiction of Puerto Rican female sexuality could raise questions about the perception of Caribbean women in the rest of Latin America and, in a sense, about Latin American "tropicalism."

ria de los jóvenes literatos de la Generación del 70, tales como la Revolución Cubana y su ideología socialista, las protestas en contra del reclutamiento militar obligatorio, la guerra de Vietnam, la denuncia de los hippies en contra de la injusticia social y de ideas arcaicas que dividen al género humano en jerarquías sociales, el resurgimiento del movimiento feminista y, en la literatura, la nueva revolución literaria hispanoamericana bautizada como el "Boom." Todos esos factores históricos, sociales y culturales contribuyeron [. . .] en moldear la conciencia intelectual y literaria de los escritores de la nueva literatura puertorriqueña (Palmer-López, "Rosario Ferré").

These factors inspired Puerto Rican authors and intellectuals to rethink cultural nationalism and to explore the hierarchies and axes of identity that affected their everyday life as women, Afro-Puerto Ricans, queer citizens, and members of the working class. As a consequence, topics like "la falsa moralidad burguesa [y] la crisis política y económica del Estado Libre Asociado," (Acosta-Belén, "En torno" 224) and "[el] feminismo, la negritud, y la homosexualidad" (226) started to dominate the literary, cinematic and artistic production. In contrast to the 1950s, women predominated in the Generación del 70, as now "Puerto Rican feminists, like feminists throughout the world, faced the critical challenge of articulating feminist concerns alongside issues of national liberation" (Meléndez 11)—a situation that was even more complex in Puerto Rico due to its relationship to the United States. Authors like Rosario Ferré, Carmen Lugo Filippi, and Manuel Ramos Otero, among others, belong to the group of artists of this generation that deemed it imperative to rethink the way in which the Puerto Rican official political discourse addressed the issues of gender and sexuality in relation to space and nation.

In more recent years, scholars of gender and sexuality like Lawrence La Fountain-Stokes, Arnaldo Cruz-Malavé, Jossianna Arroyo and Alberto Sandoval-Sánchez have problematized the patriarchal foundations of the Puerto Rican national model from the standpoint of sexuality and space, including spaces like the city and the plaza, and the spaces of film, theater, dance and performance. By looking at authors and texts that privilege queer issues, these authors emphasize the exclusions of the cultural nationalist canon, and bring forth some of the literary and cinematic voices that had previously been silenced.

FEMINIST GEOGRAPHIES, SPACE AND GENDER

My analysis of gendered geographies in Puerto Rican cultural production departs from traditional depictions of space as objective and immutable, and instead looks at it as contested, transformed by multiple axes of identity and impacted by both patriarchal structures of oppression and gender and sexual solidarities. I begin by asking, how do the female characters in literary and cinematic works negotiate patriarchal relations of power associated with the Puerto Rican nation in the gendered spaces of the factory, the house, the beauty salon and the brothel? How do women construct alternative national imaginaries in spaces that simultaneously resist and perpetuate patriarchy? How does gender intersect with race, sexuality and labor in these spaces to critique historically constructed notions of femininity associated with symbolic models of the nation? How does the relationship between gender and space in Puerto Rican cultural production enrich the literature on feminist geography and on the construction of space?

The relationship between space and gender is marked by a multiplicity of forces, which propel a constant negotiation of gendered constructions, associations and assumptions of space. Issues like knowledge, power, patriarchy, and rationality impact the ways in which people perceive their position in, interactions with, and relationship to space. To a great extent, that is due to the historical relationship between gender and the traditionally patriarchal field of geography, where "feminism has been consistently marginalized by mainstream geography. Feminism's concerns are never fully acknowledged by the geographical arguments with which it engages, and geography continues to virtually disregard feminist theory" (Rose 3). One of the main objectives of mapping literary and cinematic gendered geographies in this book is precisely to reconfigure the study of space and gender in Puerto Rican cultural production through a feminist critique, and to uncover the role that masculinity and patriarchal hegemony play in the intersection of knowledge, power and gender.

Much of the struggle over the construction of meaning occurs in everyday spaces previously neglected in traditional geography's urge to describe, document and map territories through a masculine gaze and claimed rationality. In contrast, the everyday spaces

that women inhabit in the context of the social limitations and the patriarchal pressures to which they are subject construct alternative, gendered geographies. On the one hand, these everyday geographies are "bound into the power structures which limit and confine women, [becoming] the arena through which patriarchy is (re)created—and contested" (Rose 17). On the other, they are the spaces of possibility, of subversion and of solidarity along gender, sexual, racial and class lines. In this sense, the urge to study "everyday spaces" is not only feminist geographers' call to critique patriarchy, but can also be understood as a call to uncover the ways in which women use certain spaces to turn patriarchy upon itself, and to exercise agency in the creation of different relations of power in spaces that they make inaccessible to patriarchal order. In numerous ways, the house, the factory, the beauty salon and the brothel, as represented by Puerto Rican writers and film directors, become such spaces of resistance and creative feminist agency.

The gendered geographies that emerge from the texts that I study consist of everyday spaces but also of bodies—bodies both feminine and masculine, bodies that blur and question fixed definitions of gender, bodies that emerge "as a site of struggle" (Rose 29) and which, "far from being natural, [. . .] are 'maps of power and identity'; or, rather, maps of the relation between power and identity" (Rose 32). Since it is bodies that occupy spaces and since it is bodies that experience spaces, the body becomes a fundamental analytical concept for the study of space. Again, the body, embodiment and corporeal experiences are among the most frequent and important issues for Puerto Rican feminist authors, and their representations of the experience of the factory, the house, the beauty salon and the brothel benefit from an understanding of the experience of space as material and gendered.

This line of analysis of gender and space in Puerto Rican cultural production allows me to read "space" and "place" not as static or isolated concepts, but as traversed and negotiated by forces that operate in the society of which the particular space is part. Any space—landscapes, homes, workplaces—is subject to transformation:

The identities of place are always unfixed, contested and multiple. And the particularity of any place is, in these terms, constructed not by placing boundaries around it and defining its identity through counterposition to the other which lies beyond,

but precisely (in part) through the specificity of the mix of links and interconnections to that 'beyond'. Places viewed this way are open and porous. (Massey 5).

The idea that no space can be analyzed independently of the spaces that surround it and with which it interacts through both social forces and material players (people, goods, money) is fundamental in the analysis of gendered geographies in this study. Even though they are seemingly contained, clearly defined and isolated on multiple levels, in reality, they are subject to relations of power that come from the outside and that permeate them.

Looking at space as contested and transformable makes it possible to reconsider the traditionally perceived stability of some of the dichotomies associated with the spatial analysis of gender. Perhaps the most commonly accepted one is the notion that public space belonged to men and that women occupied domestic, private places, the epitome of which was the home. This dichotomy had the effect of defining acceptable and unacceptable spaces for women, and intentionally limited their ability to step out of the home: "The attempt to confine women to the domestic sphere was both a specifically spatial control and, through that, a social control on identity" (Massey 179). In the case of Latin America, since the period of post-independence, "Women were especially crucial to the imagined community as mothers of the new men and as guardians of private life, which from Independence onward was increasingly seen as shelter from political turmoil" (Franco 81). Motherhood was seen as women's "natural" role, and a "justification for women's confinement to the home; it explains why they cannot be admitted to serious study of abstract questions, to university or Church careers, and why their intellectual development must remain strictly limited" (Massey 86). This analysis goes beyond just rethinking the meaning of public and private, and suggests the larger implications of the binary understanding of gendered space—implications in terms of mobility, knowledge and power, and the construction of national models. Along these lines, the gendered geographies mapped in this study uncover multiple struggles over public and private spaces, from some female characters' need to justify their presence in the street, in the cinema of the 1950s, to others' reconfiguration of the space of the beauty salon as a site of

female solidarity (and not simply the reproduction of feminine beauty standards) through salaried and emotional labor.

Seeing space as unfixed disrupts another dichotomy of gender, that of men's vs. women's work, or what is considered labor, with all the implications that this notion carries for women's social and economic independence. Feminist geography has uncovered multiple ways in which social structures of oppression like patriarchy and capital have made it so that going to work outside the home contributes less to women's liberation than is to be expected in some cases. Among the employers' tactics to keep women's wages low are "establish[ing] the men's job as skilled and the women's as less so" (Massey 203), even when the tasks performed by both genders are similar. Such gendered devaluation of women's labor occurs in the cases of women working in agriculture or factories, and inevitably has economic implications for the reproduction of patriarchy. In the case of the Caribbean, even though since the 1930s women have played a progressively larger role in the economic sustenance of the family, patriarchy and capital continue to reproduce the image of the male authority figure. Since women perform both productive and reproductive labor, their "salaries are deemed supplementary to the primary male breadwinner" (Safa *The Myth* 37), an attitude that maintains patriarchal relations of power even as women gain advances in both the private and the public spheres. Even when women have gained more equal rights and status in the domestic sphere (demanding that boyfriends and husbands share domestic tasks, for example), "they have made much less progress at the level of the state or the political process" (Safa *The Myth* 88). In the workplace, "gender subordination is reinforced by the paternalistic treatment of women by male managers and male union leaders, who tend to dismiss women workers who complain" (Safa *The Myth* 95), while, in the wider social sphere, women's "optimism is giving way to pessimism as they see progress becoming more difficult and fear that the future may not hold the same promises for their children that they once envisaged" (Safa *The Myth* 95). This analysis extends beyond the space of the house, to encompass that of the workplace and the nation, demonstrating that, in the Caribbean case (and in Puerto Rico in particular), as in Massey's analysis in the UK, employment outside the home has not always resulted in the expected recognition of the value of women's work or of their contributions to multiple levels and spheres of society.

Such analyses suggest the need to examine critically the extent to which Puerto Rican cultural production offers a vision of the house, the beauty salon, the factory and the brothel, as well as of the labor performed in these spaces, as sites of female agency and liberation, on the one hand, or of the reproduction of patriarchal order and gender norms, on the other. They call for the implementation of strategies to challenge the continued attempts to marginalize feminist geographic knowledge. Among these strategies, proposed by feminist geographers, are Chela Sandoval's "oppositional consciousness" (Rose 12) and the capacity for a "strategic mobility" through which one can adapt, resist and challenge "the shifting structures of capitalism, masculinism, racism, and so on" (Rose 13). The emphasis here is not only on the need to resist patriarchal structures of oppression, but also to recognize that these structures have multiple sources, which cannot be fought in isolation. One always needs to be ready to shift positions in order to confront a repressive practice that might come from different directions and through different social processes.

Oppositional consciousness and strategic mobility can also be used as technologies for confronting the structures of gender oppression from which this discourse of binaries emerges, such as the connections between patriarchy and capitalism, and their discourse of gender and space that reproduces a system of gender oppression: "over time, women in big cities were less and less easy to contain in heterosexuality and in the domestic sphere (and here of course capitalism and patriarchy have had an uneasy relationship), as metropolitan life itself seemed to throw up [. . .] a threat to patriarchal control" (Massey 180). This represents an uneasiness with women's newly-found capacity to overtly cross spatial borders ("going out," often to work) that had previously been rigid and inviolable limits (which, in the case of Puerto Rico, might help to explain why some of the earliest salaried employment of women in the early 20th century was piece work that they could do at home and which subcontractors even came to collect). While in this case capital and patriarchy are allied, sometimes they act in opposition to each other, not necessarily for the benefit of women's liberation or agency, but as two different, yet complementary structures of oppression. It is important to note that, even though capitalism was one of the factors that foregrounded women's ability to cross spatial borders, and thus challenged a basic patriarchal mechanism of control, it con-

structed yet another structure of oppression in that it refused to recognize the value of women's work inside and outside the home as equal to that of men.

My analysis of Puerto Rican cultural production takes a materialist feminist approach that has proven useful in analyzing the relationship between gender, sexuality and space. The concept of materialist feminism emerged in the 1980s as a response to Marxist feminism's rigid adherence to categories of class as analytical and political frameworks for feminist liberation. In contrast to Marxist feminism, which urged women to devote their political efforts to class struggle as the only medium of feminist liberation, materialist feminism acknowledges the significance of women's material conditions, but only as they relate to multiple other axes of identity and structures of oppression. Thus, women are not only defined by their productive and reproductive roles, but also by their race, ethnicity, sexuality, and by the variety of social structures that oppress and control their multiple identities—from capital to patriarchy, racism and homophobia.

One of the principal concerns of materialist feminism is who it speaks for. Who creates the knowledge, from what standpoint and in what historical context? How are relations of power, associated with multiple feminist identities, implicated in the creation of knowledge and in its feminist and political potential? And, for the purposes of this study, how does materiality—one's material, contextual, historical conditions, beyond the singular issue of social class—affect the cultural construction of space and its feminist liberational potential, as well as its capacity to reproduce structures of oppression?

The question of space is essential to materialist feminism, since material conditions are associated with spaces that provide the matrix for the production of historical and ideological discourses. Materialist feminism "allows us to see workplace and home, suburb and ghetto, colony and metropolis as specific and interrelated sites of exploitation" (Hennessy 31). Seen from a materialist feminist point of view, a place like the island of Puerto Rico, conceptualized through the multiple spaces that comprise it, emphasizes the interrelation of spaces with structures of oppression like patriarchy (in the home, the workplace and the suburbs, for instance), capital (in the intersection of colony, metropolis and capitalist production and reproduction that occurs in the home and in the workplace), or racism (the construction of images of suburbs vs. *caseríos*, with the

corresponding socially sanctioned class and racial images of the people that live in each space). The spaces analyzed in this book can be seen not only as workplaces, and consequently as sites of production, but also as located in a city or a suburb, and always on an island that remains under neocolonial control.

For many of the characters in the texts that I study, the experience of gender and space goes beyond the creation of an alternative, oppositional discourse. They call for the active, palpable transformation of their material conditions, taking "the feminist standpoint not as an experiential ground of knowledge but as a critical practice" (Hennessy xvii), and insisting on a "commitment to the possibility of transformative social change" (Hennessy 35). This change has to emerge as a reaction to the multiple structures of oppression, out of the multiple axes of identity that define women in contemporary Puerto Rican society, and through alliances across perceived borders of identity and politics.

What is appealing in this conceptualization of feminist agency in relation to the analysis of the spaces of the factory, the house, the beauty salon and the brothel in Puerto Rican literature and film is the possibility of constructing gendered geographies at the intersection of multiple axes of identity and structures of oppression. What seems restrictive is the limited engagement with race. Race, especially as it relates to gender, sexuality and national identity, is a fundamental issue in the texts analyzed here, and its significance calls for a need to expand the theoretical conception of materialist feminism to include a broader understanding of the significance of race in women's material conditions and political agency.

Even more importantly, the call for transformative political agency grounded in women's material conditions provides a template for understanding the power of the solidarity and the alliances created among women in the four spaces studied here, spaces that in some ways are still permeated by patriarchal structures of oppression, by racism and homophobia, but which in other ways provide a spatial opening for the production of liberating feminist discourses.

SPACE, SEXUALITY AND CITIZENSHIP

As race, class and gender are fundamental for understanding the social tensions and the constant negotiations of power in differ-

ent spaces, so is sexuality, specifically as it relates to questions of desire and consumption. The intersection of sexuality and space poses important questions like: How does space define and delimit sexual citizenship, and how does sexuality redefine different spaces? In what ways does consumption enable or delimit sexual citizenship? How does sexuality interact with class, race and gender to transform spaces often identified as heterosexual and heterosexist? What does the study of desire contribute to the understanding of the relationship between sexuality and space? How do the issues of sexuality and desire redefine the gendered spaces of the house, the factory, the beauty salon and the brothel?

The gendered geographies that I map out in this book are sites of the intersection of sexuality and space, power and resistance. Many of texts that I study recognize that "the lesbian body configures a particular spatiality" (Binnie, et.al. xiii) and pay particular attention to the "issue of the visibility of lesbian bodies, and the exclusions, inclusions, and politics of lesbian identities in the city" (Peace 30). While sexuality continues to be mostly absent from the study of space in Puerto Rico, some of the texts that I discuss do address the relationship between material and symbolic spaces (the street, the beauty salon) and homosexuality, especially in relation to issues of sexual citizenship and homosexual desire.

The preoccupation with sexual citizenship in Puerto Rico and beyond stems from the assumed normative heterosexuality of most urban (public and private) spaces, and from the calls, sometimes subtle, sometimes prominent, to examine critically that heteronormativity. The assumed heteronormativity is profoundly enmeshed with the "control over the way that space is produced [which] is fundamental to the heterosexuals' ability to reproduce their hegemony" (Valentine 154). This control might be exercised and imposed overtly, through legislature prohibiting "public displays of intimacy between gay men" (Binnie 196) or covertly, through a conscious silencing of the issue of sex and sexuality, a case documented in beauty salons in the UK: "Heterosexuality operates as a default position, presumed and uncommented upon. Only when discussing male clients in the salon, or the treatments accessed by male-to-female transsexuals, was the all-encompassing heterosexuality of the salon ever breached" (Black 98). The normativity of heterosexuality impacts the social construction of spaces, including those of beauty salons, even when these spaces might be perceived

as having (and might indeed have) liberating potential in terms of gender, race and other axes of identity.

One of the responses to the dominant heteronormativity of urban and national spaces is consumption, as an instrument of resistance, as a claim to inclusion, and often as a call for a transformation of the relationship between space and sexuality. While conscious of the larger context of capital and commodification, critics have noted the ways in which consumption still acts as an instrument of power for those who are marginalized because their sexuality does not conform to the commonly accepted heterosexuality of the modern city: "Could one reason why so many queers enjoy going shopping so much (if and when we can afford to do so) is because shopping offers us the opportunity to assert at least some kind of power? Is it an effect of our not having power in other arenas, specifically in the realm of social rights?" (Binnie 187). Spaces of inclusion like Old Compton Street in London are evidence of how consumer power not only enables, but also limits visibility and sexual citizenship: "among those excluded from Soho (and therefore less visible) are people who cannot afford the prices of food and drink or are unwilling to pay the pink premium" (Binnie 198). Consequently, sexual citizenship is made possible, but also limited by consumer power and the capacity to participate in the reproduction of capital-enabled spaces.

Similarly, consumption can provide lesbian women access, even if only to a limited and specifically designated and identified number of spaces: "The 'ready-made' understandings are that lesbians (and others) can buy their way into designated places in which their identity either may be or is proclaimed: lesbian discos, clubs, saunas, restaurants, cafés, bed and breakfast houses, motels, sports clubs. By 'being there,' they can 'be'" (Peace 47). By guaranteeing herself access in this way, "S/he who appears to have the capacity to consume can equally take on the appearance of the citizen. The consumer is the citizen-subject of the city par excellence" (Peace 51), in those settings in which these spaces do exist. This argument critiques not only the assumed heterosexuality of social space and its "performative nature" (Valentine 154), but also the traditional model of the ideal citizen: white, male and heterosexual. This critique is indeed fundamental to the analysis of the space of the beauty salon, for example, in which the rigidity of the heterosexual order is challenged on a daily basis by the intimate nature of the

interactions between female stylists and clients. While some of the stories represent that intimacy as a basis of female alliances and solidarity, others suggest that factors like desire and the need to find ways of transgressing socio-sexual norms might be behind some of the exchanges that occur between the female protagonists.

SPACE AND GENDER: PUERTO RICO AND BEYOND

At times implicitly, and at times explicitly and directly, Puerto Rican gendered geographies dialogue with the broader work of Caribbean and African American thinkers of race, gender, labor, citizenship, agency and the erotic. The relationships that develop in the spaces that I study point to the interrelatedness of issues like third world women's work, erotic agency and citizenship; solidarity, family and community; and sexuality and the national imaginary, as experienced by women in different "Third World" locations.

The gendered geographies that Puerto Rican women and queer authors reveal in the texts that I analyze redefine the relationship between family, community, and the spatial imaginary of the nation. In Puerto Rican literary criticism that redefinition was inspired by Juan Gelpí's critique of the family as a national metaphor and of the family house as its symbolic space. Gelpí's criticism, however, has broader implications for questions like: Are there tropes, spatial or otherwise, that can represent more faithfully the differences, the conflicts and the negotiations of race, class and gender in the problematic Puerto Rican "national family"? What are the alternatives to the national family that emerge from the Puerto Rican literary and cinematic texts of recent decades, and how do they redefine the notion of community? How do gender, sexuality and community intersect to redraw the gendered geographies of power, domination, resistance and agency in Puerto Rican literature and film?

The gendered maps of power and agency that emerge from these Puerto Rican texts respond to the need, voiced by both Caribbean and African American critics, to "broaden and redefine what we mean by family" (Lorde 21) and to think creatively about how to "organize around [. . .] differences, neither denying them not blowing them up out of proportion" (Lorde 25). Along with their differences (occupational, in "Pilar, tus rizos;" racial and class-based, in "Cuando las mujeres quieren a los hombres;" genera-

tional, in "Hebra rota"), the female characters of these texts also recognize their "common context of struggles within specific exploitative structures and systems" (Mohanty 7), a recognition that inspires them to seek new alliances and solidarities. Through such alliances, "third world women are making connections between the forces of domination which affect their lives daily and are actively participating in the creation of a movement committed to radical social and political transformation at all levels" (Torres 275). The alliances develop in different spaces—national, diasporic, transnational, material and symbolic—responding to contexts in which the "workplace" has "migrated in search of cheap labor, and the nation-state is no longer an appropriate socioeconomic unit of analysis (Mohanty 2)—or, at the very least, not the only one. This realization requires a cross-national and a cross-cultural analysis of gender, labor and solidarity. While most of the authors that I study here situate their characters in spaces "contained" in the Puerto Rican nation—from the home to the workplace and to the city street—others, like Mayra Santos-Febres and Luisa Capetillo, position them in the diaspora or in a constant state of transit. What they all have in common is that all of them work towards the creation of female solidarities in the face of patriarchal, heterosexist and oppressive contexts, transforming the spaces that they inhabit from sites of marginalization and voicelessness to places of potential, of feminine agency and of transformative power.

The Puerto Rican gendered geographies that I map out also imply a reformulation of the relationship between women's work, agency and citizenship. Instead of using traditionally understood political agency to carve out for themselves a space in the national imaginary, the protagonists of some of these texts employ "the erotic [which] offers a well of replenishing and provocative force to the woman who does not fear its revelation, not succumb to the belief that sensation is enough" (Lorde 2). What Mimi Sheller, following Audre Lorde's ideas has termed "erotic agency" (Sheller 6) often emerges through women's labor—productive, reproductive, but most of all emotional labor, usually unpaid and often devalued work that women are expected to do by virtue of being women. The importance of understanding "how enslaved women and their descendants used sex with each other to effect a different kind of autonomy, [and] how same-sex eroticism enters into the history of sexual labor in the Caribbean as a practice by which women take control of

their sexuality as a resource they share with each other" (Tinsley 20) lies in the need to see spaces of coercion also as spaces of resistance, agency and alliance. Because in the Caribbean these spaces of violence, control and coercion have often been spaces of (feminine) labor, it is important to uncover strategies like the implementation of emotional labor and of erotic agency as ways in which women resisted domination and transformed the spaces that they inhabit.

In their attempts to break out of the restraints of gender norms and expectations, some of protagonists of the Puerto Rican texts that I study use their emotional labor to offer and to receive support and advice, or to strategize and to effectuate change "in the face of a racist, patriarchal and anti-erotic society" (Lorde 8). By gendering and queering spaces like the beauty salon, the family house or the brothel—spaces of female relationships and of women's work—Santos-Febres's, Luisa Capetillo's and Rosaio Ferré's characters invest them with new political meanings, redrawing the maps of their nation and of their communities by claiming more equal and more just spaces for themselves and for other women.

The gendered geographies of Puerto Rican cultural production respond, on the one hand, to these agencies and solidarities, and on the other, to the urgency to fight the conspicuous absence of queer subjects and the "invisibility of Caribbean lesbians in scholarship and art" (King 191) that Rosamond King and others have critiqued. They also respond to the need to recover representations of different sexualities in relation to national discourses and imaginings. All too frequently this intersection between sexuality and the nation has been a violent one, particularly in the case of Caribbean and diasporic subjects who "have a history of being misrecognized and maligned" (King 193). In the case of Puerto Rico and its diaspora, "Homosexuality, and especially gay liberation, has at times been seen as imported or inflated by virtue of the island's colonial relationship with the United States" (La Fountain-Stokes xviii), and national discourse has construed "nonnormative sexual orientation as a form of deviant behavior against which the national population needs protection" (La Fountain-Stokes *Queer Ricans* xvii). Similarly, for a long time the official discourse of the Cuban Revolution maintained a patriarchal and heterosexist image that marginalized "other" sexualities. Instead of erasing nonnormative sexualities from the Cuban national imaginary, this discourse inscribed them "by negation, in the prescriptive models of the national Cuban nar-

native" (Bejel xiv), carving for homosexuality a space from which it "continually threatens to destabilize those [national] romances" (Bejel xvi).

The exclusion of "other" sexualities from Caribbean national discourses has resulted in subversive and creative strategies, not only of inclusion, but also, and more importantly, of a reformulation of the idea of national belonging. In Trinidadian cultural production, erotic geographies and "new queer cartographies" (Tinsley 25) enable authors to redeploy oppressive tropes and to "imagine a landscape belonging to Caribbean women and Caribbean women belonging to each other" (Tinsley 2), ultimately effectuating a "poetics and politics of decolonization" (2). In the face of official exclusion and invisibility, women employ eroticism and desire to redefine their relationship to each other, to the nation and to the colonial context that subjects them to multiple levels of oppression, physical and sexual violence, heterosexist norms, social limitations and expectations. While the spaces that they occupy are different from the spaces inhabited by the female and queer Puerto Rican characters in my study—Tinsley looks at rivers, trees, open natural landscapes, while this book focuses on what are understood to be more urban places like factories, beauty salons and brothels—both Puerto Rican and Trinidadian women use space, and the queering of space, as a strategy to resist marginalization and oppression imposed by limited definitions of the nation in their specific contexts. Through their emotional labor, characters like Lidia, the protagonist of *Felices días, tío Sergio* or Milagros and Marina, in "Milagros, calle Mercurio," reveal how sexuality, desire and eroticism become the driving forces behind their coming to consciousness and strategies for liberation.

THE SYMBOLIC SPACES OF PUERTO RICAN CULTURAL PRODUCTION

Recent studies on the relationship between space and race, class and gender in Puerto Rico demonstrate that over the course of the 20th century, everyday spaces on the island have become progressively more fragmented, controlled and alienated from each other, as a result of structures of power and of social hierarchies that segregate people, locating them in places that they deem "appropriate" for their perceived racial, class and gender identities. While for a long

time "The city [was] considered to be a place where heterogeneous individuals come naturally into contact, in neighborhoods, parks, workplaces, transportation systems, shops, libraries, and streets" (Dinzey-Flores 146), in recent decades urban centers like San Juan and Ponce have, in the words of sociologist Zaire Dinzey-Flores, become "gated cities" (147). In them, public areas have been traversed by walls and sectioned off by gates that keep people in or out:

In private communities, gating arranged by insiders keeps others out; in public housing, gates are controlled by outsiders to gain protection for themselves from those inside. In locking themselves in, the privileged lock undesirables out. Gates for the poor reverse this order; they shut undesirables in. In both, the gates are erected in the interest of an upper class and, in modern cities, of the primarily white (Dinzey-Flores 10).

In these controlled-access communities, yet again space becomes political, as it begins to denote in ever more obvious ways differences of race, class, and gender relations and expectations.

This fragmentation of the city impacts the social construction of the space of the house, as well as the construction of gender in relation to domestic and to public spaces in the city: "The gates of Puerto Rico have re-created and reinforced a gendered geography; in the city, there is a spatial sorting of men by degree of privilege. The elite gated communities along with sanctioned city spaces like the social clubs, like suburbs within a city, have become the site of a cloistered womanhood" that look for "a refuge from the open spaces of the dangerous city" within the gated communities (Dinzey-Flores 130). This segmentation constructs and reinforces two basic types of femininity—on the one hand, it defines a white, middle-class femininity defined by honor and propriety, which reproduces the patriarchal system of gendered public and private spaces, and is kept behind the gates. On the other hand, in opposition to this model, it constructs a transgressive femininity that is associated with blackness and with a "disobedient" or "undisciplined" sexuality that stands outside the walls of the model communities, or within those of the public housing projects. In this way, Dinzey-Flores demonstrates how "The house, not the city, becomes the locus of social life and the family, the central unit" (27), as cities become segmented and communities become more exclusive and exclusionary.

The geographies that emerge out of contemporary Puerto Rican literary and cinematic texts are multifaceted and respond to these complex social, political and cultural realities of the island. In contrast to early 20th century work that identified the nation with *el campo*, or the rural areas,⁹ recently authors have shifted their gaze to modern, urban settings and to the multiplicity of conflicts that they reveal. In their work, ELA is a “paradoxically entrenched and ambiguous political status [that] has produced a uniquely experienced sense of space and place” (Dowdy 41). In texts like “Letra para salsa y tres soneos por encargo” and *Felices días, tío Sergio* authors of the Generation of the 70s like Ana Lydia Vega and Magali García Ramis, have explored the relationship between gender, sexuality and the city, while their contemporaries like Wilfredo Mattos Cintrón have critiqued hierarchies of race, class, masculinity and the law in detective novels that situate an Afro-Puerto Rican working class detective¹⁰ at the center of the narrative and of the city of San Juan. These urban geographies of gender, race and class often intersect with questions of migration, which became even more relevant in the aftermath of Operation Bootstrap.

Mapping the new geographies of migration in what Duany has called “the Puerto Rican nation on the move” has required that authors situate their texts between the proverbial “acá” and “allá,” the island and the metropolis, and in spaces of transit like the airport and the airplane. Set on an airplane headed to New York, Luis Rafael Sánchez’s “La guagua aérea,” one of the iconic representations of the Puerto Rican migratory experience, problematizes the question of space, by exploring “the tensions and negotiation of cultural space that springs forth from the comings and goings of Puerto Rican migrants to New York City. Through the metaphor of the “flying bus,” Sánchez captures the duality, hybridity, and fluidity of US-Puerto Rican identity in the microcosm of an airline flight between New York and Puerto Rico” (Barreneche 15). While Sánchez’s text offers a comical, yet compassionate look at the variety of migrants, *El beso que me diste* (both the novel and Sonia

⁹ One of the iconic representations of *el campo* as the quintessential *puerto-riqueñidad* is Ramón Frade’s 1905 painting “El pan nuestro,” which depicts a jíbaro carrying a bunch of plantains.

¹⁰ Wilfredo Mattos Cintrón’s detective Isabelo Andújar has protagonized several novels, among which are *Desamores*, *La puerta de San Juan* and *Las dos muertes de Catalino Ríos*.

Fritz's cinematic adaptation) uses the space of the airport to explore the implications of Puerto Rico's political status, and depicts the trope of the crumbling family to critique the hypocrisy of cultural nationalism. Another, more recent representation of the space of the airport and the airplane explores a different kind of migration, the trans-Caribbean movement of people and capital in Mayra Santos-Febres's novel *Sirena Selena vestida de pena*. In that book, protagonized by two transvestite characters, the transgression of spaces is intertwined with the transgression of bodies (Haesendonck 79), and "el cuerpo del travesti [se convierte en] una máquina de transgresiones del espacio" (88), bridging the space between Caribbean islands. These representations suggest the multiple recent uses of the airport and the airplane as spaces of transit that destabilize the traditional depiction of the Puerto Rican nation.

A space that complements these geographies of transit is the motel, in which both people and relationships become elusive. As the setting of *Cualquier miércoles soy tuya*, another novel by Santos-Febres, the motel becomes the site of elicited deals, spying and suspicions, while at the same time, as Guillermo Irizarry has noted, the underground capital and the unsanctioned exchange of capital "mark[s] the limits of state institutional administration" (Lambright and Guerrero xxiii), proposing a critique of the state's inefficiency in fulfilling its own promise of modernization and development.

In addition to being a space of transit, the motel belongs to another category of spaces that can be seen as marginal in the city, like housing projects, decrepit apartments and the back rooms of restaurants. These spaces compose an often invisible urban geography that comprises a multitude of identities, conflicts and negotiations of class, race, gender and sexuality. Like Mattos Cintrón's novels, Marta Aponte Alsina's novella *Fúgate* and stories like "Tu flor te delata" rely on Gabriel Marte, a detective that does not conform to the traditional model of masculinity and power, to uncover both the humanity and the violence that plagues spaces like San Juan's housing projects. Gabriel Marte's detours into fantasy are another technology of critique of the "real" society in which he lives, of the space of the nation along with the inefficiency of its government.

This invisible geography of marginalized subjects is also composed of the back rooms of restaurants inhabited by undocumented, smuggled and abused immigrants in Manolo Núñez Negrón's *Barrachina*. At first sight, the underground world that the novel re-

veals is comparable to Santos-Febres's *Cualquier miércoles soy tuya*, but it gradually emerges as more ruthless and fatal than her character Dama Solitaria. The only way for Núñez Negrón's protagonist to emerge from the shadows of the service rooms is to embrace the violence that keeps him a modern-day slave of his captors, and to turn it into an instrument of liberation. The concluding scene of *Barrachina* thus becomes a critique of the law and of the omnipresence of corruption, human trafficking and labor exploitation, along with the invisibility of its victims.

The spaces that I study in this book—the factory, the house, the beauty salon and the brothel—are not necessarily marginal spaces, and at first sight, they may appear rather unrelated. However, a closer look reveals a number of parallelisms between them. First, the four spaces are connected through women's labor, whether salaried or unpaid, skilled or unskilled, productive or reproductive, domestic or in the workplace. The gendered geographies that emerge from this set of texts are defined by women's emotional labor, which politicizes and transforms them. In areas in which global capital tends to create what Melissa M. Wright has called “disposable women,” and in certain cases expects them to perform unpaid, emotional labor by virtue of their gender, the female protagonists create solidarities and alliances to resist the patriarchal norms that exploit their work. Early texts, like the 1959 film *Maruja*, use female labor and idleness to condemn models of gender and sexuality that do not conform to ELA's traditional norms. In some texts, women's work is used to reproduce cultural nationalism, as in José Artemio Torres's documentary *Luchando por la vida: las despalladoras de tabaco y su mundo*, in Efraín López Neris's *Life of Sin*, or in Jacobo Morales's *Dios los cría*. In others, women's labor is subversive, constitutive of a different set of social and gender relations. This is the case of Luisa Capetillo's writings, of Rosario Ferré's depiction of Isabel la Negra, and of the intersection between emotional and physical beauty services in Carmen Lugo Filippi's “Milagros, calle Mercurio.”

Second, along with the theme of women's labor, these spaces enable different connections between gender, sexuality and the Puerto Rican cultural nationalist discourse. Some of these connections are established through patriarchal relations of power (the family house), others through consumption and services (the beauty salon and the brothel), or through a discourse of rights, whether ex-

pllicit, as in the factory, or implicit, as in that of citizenship and female emancipation in the house or in the salon.

Finally, these spaces represent a series of configurations of alternative families and relationships between women, centered on different possibilities for alliances. Some of these relationships are based on power and domination, as those between Isabel and her servants in *The House on the Lagoon*, or between Isabel la Negra and the women that work in her brothel in Manuel Ramos Otero's short story "La última plena que bailó Luberza." Others enable the construction of solidarity and resistance, even as they remain mediated through the exchange of services, as in "Milagros, calle Mercurio," or they are only tentative, like the relationship between Doña Kety and Yetsaida in "Hebra rota." Simultaneously, some of them are effectuated through maternal figures or through a broader political dedication to a combination of causes, as in Luisa Capetillo's and Dominga de la Cruz's struggle for women's and workers' rights.

What these geographies reveal are the complex ways in which gender and sexuality are constructed in everyday spaces, through the negotiations between patriarchy and space. The construction of feminist agency in these four spaces is only possible if, as feminist geographers have argued, spaces are understood not as static, but as flexible, malleable, and always in transformation. The agency that the female characters claim enables the analysis of space in these terms, and consequently, the understanding of national discourse and identity as a dynamic process redefined by feminine geographies.

PUERTO RICAN CINEMA AND NATIONAL DISCOURSE: INDUSTRY AND CRITICISM

Part of my purpose in this book is to examine the representation of gender and space in Puerto Rican film in order to call critical attention to the Puerto Rican film industry and to the still limited scholarship produced about the island's cinema. I analyze film not in addition to a literary corpus, but as a vibrant, integral part of Puerto Rican cultural production. As such, it has contributed in unique ways to the discursive constructions of gendered labor, female sexuality, everyday spaces, and national belonging on the island.

Puerto Rican film criticism gained momentum in the 1990s, thanks to a small number of film critics and historians like Kino

García, Luis Trelles Plazaola, and María Cristina Rodríguez, inspired by a revival of the Puerto Rican film industry made possible in part by governmental policies that expanded the possibilities of funding for domestic projects in the second half of the 1980s.¹¹ These critics' exploration of the Puerto Rican film history, of the representation of the island in foreign cinematic productions, as well as their copious reviews of foreign and domestic films, festival events and retrospectives, form the foundations of a body of literature for the study of Puerto Rican cinema. Similarly, the publication of book-length historical overviews, journal articles, catalogues and festival booklets during the same period offers an important contribution to the study of the Puerto Rican film industry.

The first comprehensive history of Puerto Rican cinema was written by Joaquín "Kino" García in 1989. Even though the overview it offers is quite brief, it remains the only history of the Puerto Rican film industry. Kino García's other valuable book, *Cine puertorriqueño: Filmografía, fuentes y referencias* (1997) is a national filmography of sorts, providing production, distribution and exhibition information, and offering stills and brief summaries of hundreds of Puerto Rican films from different genres and periods. The filmography begins with Rafael Colorado's long-lost 1912 documentary pieces (García 1-6), and ends in the 1990s, when films like *La guagua aérea* and *Linda Sara* signified a hope for a revival of Puerto Rican film (García 88-89).

García's work has benefited from that of film scholars like Luis Trelles Plazaola, arguably the most prolific of the film historians concerned with the development of cinema in and beyond Puerto Rico. Trelles's early work focuses on the study of female directors, and has resulted in two important volumes: *Cine y mujer en América Latina: directoras de largometrajes* (1991) and *Nostalgias y rebeldías: Cinco directoras latinoamericanas de cine en Europa* (1992). In his 1996 book *Imágenes cambiantes: Descubrimiento, conquista y colonización de la América Hispana vista por el cine de ficción y largometraje* he analyzes the colonial discourses of dozens of films

¹¹ The 1985 Ley de Sociedades Especiales provided economic incentives for private investment in the island's film industry and encouraged the participation of Puerto Rican banks through credits and other incentives. Similarly, the 1994 creation of the Fondo de Cine de Puerto Rico became one of the most important initiatives for financial support for the production of feature films on the island (Trelles Plazaola *Ante el lente* 99-100).

from Spain, Argentina, Mexico, Cuba, Perú, Venezuela, Great Britain, France and Germany, pointing to the ways that historical contexts and colonial experiences influence the cinematographic representation of the past. Whereas, due to a lack of Puerto Rican films dealing with the subject of colonization,¹² no island productions were included in this book, in *Ante el lente extranjero: Puerto Rico visto por los cineastas de afuera* (2000) Trelles Plazaola exclusively addresses the representation of Puerto Rico. The book is divided in four parts, which chronologically study the representation of the island, whether as a setting or as used as a shooting location without being identified as Puerto Rico, in foreign and domestic films made with foreign capital or crew. The value of the book lies not only in its elucidating analysis of films that use Puerto Rico as part of the plot or as a location, but also in that, by providing a chronological overview of foreign film industries' presence on the island, he also addresses and critiques the United States and the Puerto Rican governments' lack of consistent and cohesive policies promoting the development of a Puerto Rican national film industry. This situation has led to the need to make co-productions with foreign capital, in which Puerto Rican writers, directors and actors have little control over the way that the island and its population are portrayed. He points out that "con demasiada frecuencia, Puerto Rico sigue siendo un lugar fácilmente intercambiable y su verdadera identidad, tan definida, antigua y caracterizada, se pierde para el cine" (Trelles, *Ante el lente*, 102). Even though at first sight these words reiterate the image of a cohesive Puerto Rican identity, they also critique the island's exploitation by foreign filmmakers who tend to use it only as an exotic exterior or as a generic "Latin American" setting.

Ironically, Banco Popular's *Idilio Tropical*, an edited collection of essays on Puerto Rican cinema whose title references the island's tropical location, does much to dispel the image of Puerto Rico as an exotic site. Puerto Rico emerges as a place with a developing film industry and talented professionals skilled at scriptwriting, editing, directing and acting. The collection's introduction addresses the social impact of cinema since its inception, considers

¹² This was true until the 2006 release of *El cimarrón* (dir. Iván Daniel Ortiz), the first Puerto Rican film set in the Spanish colonial period, and the first to emphasize its historical significance. It uses the conventions of melodrama and romance to address issues of race, power, slavery and revolt.

the ways in which it enriched the discourse of modernity and progress, and rethinks the symbolic significance of the space of movie theaters:

Las salas de cine transformaron la fisonomía de las ciudades en Puerto Rico. Se convirtieron en espacios de modernidad que rivalizaban con las sedes públicas tradicionales: las plazas, las iglesias y los teatros. En las próximas décadas [post-WWI] los edificios para cine presentaron propuestas arquitectónicas novedosas que se alienaron junto a las vetustas construcciones del centro de ciudades y pueblos. La presencia del cine dinamizó los barrios urbanos y modificó las rutinas de todos (Álvarez Curbelo, "Pasión" 3).

This cultural impact is only one of the themes discussed in the seven essays that compose the collection, which addresses issues previously neglected in Puerto Rican film history and criticism, such as the tradition of animation and experimental cinema.

Idilio Tropical is exemplary of another type of resource that documents the developing film industry in Puerto Rico, namely collections on different aspects of Puerto Rican cinema, in the absence of monographs on specific topics, beyond historical overviews like those of García and Trelles. Another such project is Raul Ríos Díaz's and Francisco González's *Dominio de la imagen: hacia una industria de cine en Puerto Rico* (2000). The editors begin with the premise that much remains to be done in order for a mature Puerto Rican film industry to exist, and ask, "¿Qué hace falta para hacer realidad la gran ilusión de una industria de cine puertorriqueña?" (Ríos Díaz 7). The book compiles interviews with directors, distributors and producers, and gradually constructs an image of the realities and the problems that the Puerto Rican film industry faces in its struggle to expand. A project that uses a similar interview approach and that addresses some of the same issues in the case of Puerto Rican filmmakers in the United States is Ana María García's *Made in the U.S.A.*

One of the figures that have contributed much to the collection and preservation of Puerto Rican cinema on the island is scriptwriter, director and actor Roberto Ramos-Perea. The National Theater and Cinema Archive (Archivo nacional de teatro y cine), which he chairs, contains the most significant collection of Puerto Rican films, plays and literature on film and theater. In addition, the Archive's *Bulletin*, whose publication he also supervises, has sys-

tematically featured articles on Puerto Rican cinema, from historical documents such as early film announcements (*Boletín* No. 1) to artist filmographies and film criticism (*Boletín* No. 3).

Other contributions to the literature on Puerto Rican cinema include collections and catalogues like that of the Archive of the Moving Image (El archivo de imágenes en movimiento), the catalogue and screening schedule of the CineSanJuan Festival, or the publication of the script of Jacobo Morales's celebrated film *Linda Sara*, which includes the director's production diary, which provides insights into the process and the difficulties of being a film director in Puerto Rico, from casting to the limited funding that obliged him to complete the film in 25 days (Morales 24).

The historiography of Latin American cinema hardly ever puts Puerto Rico on the cinematographic map. Michael Martin's *New Latin American Cinema* is the collection that has devoted the most attention to Puerto Rican film, as in Frances Negrón-Muntaner's unique exploration of women's film and video production on the island. In contrast, other important books like Deborah Shaw's *Contemporary Latin American Cinema: Breaking into the Global Market* focuses on Mexico, Cuba and Brazil, while *Magical Reels*, one of the canonical books on Latin American cinema, discusses Puerto Rico only briefly, recognizing that the island "has witnessed the growth of a sophisticated film culture in recent years, escaping from the stereotypes imposed by US cinema of the 1920s which projected the island as a site of tropical romance" (King 228). The Puerto Rican film industry is grouped together with Central American film, in a final chapter that seems to encompass "the others," the countries and regions whose film industries do not merit independent sections of the book. In the case of Puerto Rico, the two main feature films that emerged after the 1970s trend towards a "critical, national, documentary movement" (King 230), *Isabel la Negra* (1979) and *Dios los cría* (1980) are discussed briefly in a single paragraph, pointing out the lack of commercial success of the former and barely noting the release of the latter: "Jacobo Morales's *Dios los cría* (*God Makes Them*, 1980) was much more assured, offering five vignettes of middle-class Puerto Rican life, receiving widespread critical acclaim" (King 230). This is only one example of the invisibility of Puerto Rican cinema, and even of acclaimed directors like Jacobo Morales, Ana María García or Sonia Fritz. Even though Puerto Rican cinema has much in common with the development

of the cinematic industry in other Caribbean and Latin American countries, and in spite of the fact that since the 1950s it has systematically addressed social and cultural issues ranging from community formation and modernization¹³ to the legacy of slavery and colonization, studies of Latin American cinema outside Puerto Rico tend to acknowledge its existence only briefly, and, with few exceptions,¹⁴ rarely embark on thematic or stylistic explorations of Puerto Rican film. The chapters that follow intend to help fill that gap by addressing the issues of space, gender and nation in a variety of fiction, documentary and short films that offer critical perspectives on the power relations that construct the Puerto Rican national imaginary.

CHAPTER OUTLINE

The book takes as a starting point the spatial aspect of the *gran familia puertorriqueña*, that of the family house dominated by a father figure that maintains the traditional patriarchal order in the symbolic national family. Chapter 2, "Building the Nation: Women's Productive and Reproductive Labor in the Factory," analyzes the intersection between space, gender and sexuality in texts that precede the cultural nationalist project of the 1940s and the 1950s, anticipating some of the criticism that inspired the authors studied in subsequent chapters. Responding to a socio-economic reality in which, from the 1910s to the 1940s, the cigar-making factory and the needlework workshop were the main spaces of occupation for women outside the home, this chapter examines the complex and contradictory roles that the factory has played in the construction of Puerto Rican national identity in relation to gender, sexuality, race and class. It studies texts in which the factory is an instrument of official discourse, and others, in which it is a space of opposition from which Puerto Rican working women have staged a resistance to exclusionary practices and discourses. Luisa Capetillo's work as a reader and union organizer in tobacco factories, and two documentary films—*Luchando por la vida*, about female tobacco leaf stemmers and

¹³ See Jack Delano in *Idilio Tropical* and Rafael Cabrera Collazo, "La DIVEDCO y el cine en el Puerto Rico de los cincuenta."

¹⁴ See for example Catherine Benamou's analysis of *La Gran Fiesta* in *Cineaste* 16.4 (1988): 47-50.

La operación, about women's productive labor and reproductive rights—frame the analysis of gender and sexuality in the factory.

Chapter 3, titled “Rethinking *la gran familia puertorriqueña* in the Family House,” critically analyzes the space of the family house dominated by a father figure that maintains the traditional patriarchal order in the symbolic national family. It examines how, through alliances and through the politicization of space, Puerto Rican writers and film directors subvert the association of the family house with Puerto Rican national discourses and propose alternatives to the familiar patriarchal national imaginary. It focuses on the alternative families that dominate novels like Ferré's *The House on the Lagoon* and García Ramis's *Felices días, tío Sergio*, as well as films like Orzábal Quintana's *Maruja*, Morales's *Dios los cría*, and Paco López's video to Rubén Blades's song “Ligia Elena.”

In Chapter 4, “Gendering and Queering the Beauty Salon,” my focus shifts to the subversive potential of a uniquely “feminine” space. It argues that the interplay between performativity, desire and the gaze genders and queers the beauty salon, constructing female solidarities that challenge the patriarchal order of Puerto Rican cultural nationalist discourse. Two short stories by Lugo Filippi, the story “Hebra rota” by Mayra Santos-Febres, and Fritz's eponymous film are the matrix for the analysis of the ways in which the gendering and the queering of the space of the beauty salon disrupts cultural nationalist ideas of heteronormativity and cohesion, to propose alternative family configurations.

Chapter 5, “Locating Power on the Margins: Gender and Sexuality in the Brothel,” demonstrates how the patriarchal figure is de-centered by that of the Afro-Puerto Rican prostitute Isabel la Negra, who transforms the space of the brothel into an alternative community, challenging previous representations not only of gender and sexuality, but also of racial and class identities. The texts discussed in this chapter—Ferré's “Cuando las mujeres quieren a los hombres,” Ramos Otero's “La última plena que bailó Luberza,” López Neris's film *Life of Sin*, and Santos-Febres's novel *Nuestra Señora de la Noche*—reveal Isabel as a figure that inverts gender and sexual hierarchies, exposes the contradictions of the model of the *gran familia puertorriqueña* and reconfigures of the idea of the national family through the space of the brothel.

The book's conclusion synthesizes my analysis of Puerto Rican gendered geographies and of the complex ways in which gender

and sexuality are continuously negotiated in everyday spaces, through creative feminist agencies and coalitions.

The next chapter analyzes a series of texts whose purpose is to construct, contest or rethink the gendered geographies of national identity from the space of the factory, a space that has had a long, complex and often contradictory relationship to gender and sexuality, labor and national discourses.