

La gran fiesta: Reframing Puerto Rico's National Discourse Through Sound

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The 1980s marked the third decade of the inception of El Estado Libre Asociado of Puerto Rico. El Estado Libre Asociado, poorly translated in English to Commonwealth of Puerto Rico sealed the deal that confined Puerto Rico to the status of a perpetual colony of the United States. In the late 1940s, Luis Muñoz Marín, the founding father of this ambiguous political project, led the people of Puerto Rico to believe in the illusion that this "pact" or "marriage" with the new owners of the island would grant them a privilege that no other Latin American nation possessed. According to Muñoz Marín, this political experiment would provide all Puerto Ricans the opportunity to have the best of both worlds—maintaining Puerto Rico's cultural and national Spanish identity while having a strong economic bond with the world power of the United States. At that time, Muñoz-Marín's promise in his populist discourse of providing a welfare system that would create social equality and aid for the Puerto Ricans who lived in the rural sectors of the island, proved to be true. This promise materialized in the form of modernizing projects that took place in the island in the late 1940s and 1950s.

By the 1980s the illusion of progress that took place during the 1940s and 1950s in Puerto Rico was shattered by the metropolis' new neoliberal projects. This resulted in the dismantlement of the welfare system that helped boost Puerto Rico's economy in record time and contributed to the creation of the Puerto Rican middle class. Stricken by the high rates of criminality, unemployment, and social inequality, Puerto Rico's Estado Libre Asociado came under scrutiny and so did its founding father, Luis Muñoz Marín, who died in April of 1980. That same year, essayist José Luis González published his essay, *El país de cuatro pisos* (*The Four Storyed Country*) and in 1985, the Puerto Rican international film *La gran fiesta* was released. Both the essay, *El país de cuatro pisos* and the film *La gran fiesta* are a counter-discourse of the construction of Puerto Rico's cultural and national identity framed under the metaphor of *La gran familia puertorriqueña* (The Great Puerto Rican Family) and the inception of El Estado Libre Asociado.

Polifonía

In *El país de cuatro pisos*, José Luis González revises Puerto Rico's history. Throughout the essay, González challenges the Eurocentric construction of Puerto Rican national culture and identity. He resorts to the allegory of the "pisos" (floors) to illustrate the historical periods that have shaped Puerto Rico as a nation. The first floor, González explains, is "la seña de nuestra identidad caribeña/afroantillana" (González, 1980, p. 22). This alludes to the forced arrival of African slaves to provide slave labor in the island in the 17th century. The second floor refers to the European migration in the 19th century, which became the economic, cultural, and political elite or to borrow González's term "la élite extranjerizante" (pp. 22-25). The third floor comprises the period of the invasion of Puerto Rico by the United States (pp. 26-32). Finally, the fourth floor marks the evolution of Puerto Rico's national and cultural identity, which took place in the 1940s with the advent of late capitalism and the institution (imposition) of El Estado Libre Asociado (pp. 39-40). Puerto Rican motion picture *La gran fiesta*, released five years later, parodies the creation of this fourth floor through the element of melodrama.

La gran fiesta is considered the first Puerto Rican national film to reach an international audience. The film, directed by Puerto Rican film director Marcos Zurinaga and written with the collaboration of Puerto Rican writer Ana Lydia Vega, is a melodrama set in the 1940s during the peak of World War II. The narrative takes place in the Casino of Puerto Rico during the farewell party that marked the expropriation by the United States armed forces of this national and cultural emblem.¹ The film contains two storylines. The main storyline in the film is the love triangle between the protagonist, José Manuel (Daniel Lugo), Rita Inés (Laura Delano), and Raquel (Cordelia González). It is during this farewell party that José Manuel, the son of Manolo González, a Spanish businessman and prominent figure in the Puerto Rican bourgeoisie, announces the engagement to Rita Inés de la Torre (Laura Delano), the daughter of Miguel de la Torre, a wealthy landowner from the southern city of Ponce. The union between the two families promises to save the patriarch of the González family from bankruptcy and keep its social status. However, the economic future of the González family is jeopardized by Jose

¹ In his book *La breve historia del cine puertorriqueño* Kino García notes that: "*La gran fiesta* significó un gran logro en la cinematografía puertorriqueña y es por mucho la mejor cinta realizada durante el período moderno [del cine puertorriqueño] y la más ambiciosa de toda su historia. Sus realizadores, que trabajaban mayormente en el cine publicitario, le dieron un toque de vistosidad y brillo: el llamado "glamur" [...] La trama gira en torno a una imaginaria fiesta en el Casino de Puerto Rico, club exclusivo de la burguesía criolla. Con motivo del traspaso de su antiguo edificio a la marina de guerra de los Estados Unidos en 1942. Se simboliza la entrega de esa clase y su relación con el poder de la metrópolis aunque el elemento de la intriga política y sus contradicciones en el seno de esa burguesía son material para la historia, no puede catalogarse de cinta política la obra" (García 114).

Polifonía

Manuel's love affair with Raquel. Raquel is portrayed as the prototype of the modern woman. She belongs to the cabinet of Puerto Rico's last governor appointed by the United States during the 1940s, Rexford Tugwell, and is portrayed as the mastermind behind many of the ideas to modernize the island's infrastructure. Raquel also embodies the prototype of the *femme fatale*. Jose Manuel, who is assigned to work with her in the development of public works infrastructure to modernize the island, falls in love with the duality between the strong independent woman and her sensuality. As the narrative of the film progresses, the trained viewer will identify both Rita Inés and Raquel as embodiments of the idealizations of Puerto Rico as a colony, a subject of desire.

In my view, the most striking and fascinating element of *La gran fiesta* is the use of sound and music. Throughout the film, diegetic sound and music are fundamental in the creation of a second narrative that acts as a historical revision and counter-discourse of Puerto Rico's inception of El Estado Libre Asociado as well as creation of its national and cultural identity. This second narrative is woven through the parodic element of melodrama. In his study on melodrama, Peter Brooks observes that "[t]he melodramatic mode in large measure exists to locate and to articulate the moral occult" (5). He further observes that melodramatic representations rely on document, vision, and sound (9). That which cannot be said is therefore represented in the form of metaphor through pantomime and sound (10). This is the case in *La gran fiesta*, where diegetic sound, music, and pantomime are metaphors that bring to light "the moral occult" behind the inception of a political status that has confined Puerto Rico to the status of a perpetual colony and the creation of a national culture that denies its African heritage.

In this essay, I will focus on the role of diegetic sound and music in *La gran fiesta's* filmic narrative. I argue that diegetic sound and music are melodramatic elements that give voice to a second narrative that acts as a parody and counter discourse of the foundation of El Estado Libre Asociado and Puerto Rico's national and cultural identity, thus aligning with José Luis González, *El país de cuatro pisos* (1980). It is important to note that while other academic works have focused on the connections of *La gran fiesta* to classic Hollywood cinema and noir films, little or no attention has been paid to the sonic aspect of this film. In conjunction to the framework provided by *El país de cuatro pisos*, I will also refer to Jesús Martín-Barbero, *Communication, Culture and Hegemony* (1993) and Mark Slobin's *Subcultural Sounds: Micromusics of the West* (1993). These two theoretical texts will help further expound on how diegetic sound and music in its function as parodic elements of melodrama places

Polifonía

Puerto Rico within the economic, political, and cultural global disjunctures that position Puerto Rico as a part of "la gran comunidad caribeña" (González 41).

In his response to the question "¿Cómo crees que ha sido afectada la cultura puertorriqueña por la intervención colonialista norteamericana y como ves su desarrollo actual?" rather than casting blame on the North American metropole, González scrutinizes the Puerto Rican elite. He asserts that the Puerto Rican elite mirrored racist prejudices through the construction of a national popular culture that held on to Jibarismo (González, 37), a romanticized version of the Hacienda economy and its ties to Spain to hold on to a nation-building project that never came to fruition. The racial prejudice of Jibarismo centers on the exclusion of the Afro-Antillean popular culture of the Puerto Rican lowlands (the coast) and its embrace of the popular culture of the Puerto Rican highlands (mountains), which is rooted in the folklore and popular tradition of Spain. Also, it is important to note, that the population of the Puerto Rican highlands was composed of a "campesinado blanco" (white peasantry) who were mainly foreigners—immigrants from Spain, Mallorca, and Corsica (21-37). Therefore, in the 20th century, the creation of Puerto Rico's popular culture during the foundation of the fourth floor, is the result of a desperate effort from the decadent Puerto Rican bourgeoisie (the children and grandchildren of the *hacendados*) to retain their hegemony (33). Martin Barbero observes that the attitude of the Puerto Rican elite was common throughout Latin America:

The new bourgeoisie profited from the old national project of the creoles, changing the meaning of this project even as they sought to carry it to completion. It was through a process of elaborating and moving ahead this national project that the creole classes took on attributes of national scope and became national themselves. 'This continuing prolonged enterprise of the creole class to construct the state and the nation came to be known as the national project'. The project failed in the 19th century, but the new project of constructing a modern nation was built upon the foundations of the old project and took on the same structure of the internal power relations. (Martin-Barbero 153).

In *La gran fiesta*, diegetic sound acts as pantomime. In the beginning of the film, the documentary narration of the voice of God, the sound of the typewriter in the space of the FBI headquarters, and the radio broadcast in the space of the González-López household are examples of diegetic sound that provide the background or a foundation for the events that will be represented in the farewell party of the Casino of Puerto Rico. These sonic devices are positioned within or give voice to the

Polifonía

discourse controlled by the island's superculture, dominated by the colonial government of the United States, and the Puerto Rican and Spanish elites. Ultimately, within the space of "el casino," the music that is performed by the orchestra in this symbolic social space works also as a parody and ultimately as counter-discourse to the foundation of what is known as *La gran familia puertorriqueña*, a Puerto Rican ruling class that sacrifices its ideology and comes together by sacrificing its ideals for the good of the nation.

The narrative structure of *La gran fiesta* thus follows the conventions of both classical melodrama and Latin American melodrama. To get a clearer view of how the melodramatic elements operate within the film we need to briefly outline the structure of the filmic narrative. In his study on melodrama, Peter Brooks observes that "[t]he melodramatic mode in large measure exist to locate and to articulate the moral occult" (5). He further observes that melodramatic representations rely on document, vision, and sound (9). That which cannot be said is therefore represented in the form of metaphor through pantomime and sound (10). This is the case in *La gran fiesta*, where diegetic sound, music and pantomime are metaphors that bring to light "the moral occult." In the structure of melodrama pantomime and sound replaced speech as result of repression during the 1600's (Martin Barbero 114). The performativity of repression, represented in melodrama using sound and pantomime is the perfect tool to represent Puerto Rico own colonial repression particularly during the time in which *La gran fiesta* is set, the 1940s. Secondly, it must be noted that the music that introduces the opening credits of the film, mimic the soundscape of a Latin American soap operas of the 1980's (*La gran fiesta*, 1985, 0:01-1:24). This leitmotif repeats throughout the film and sets the parodic tone of the film and lets the viewer know that the story that will be narrated is likened to a telenovela (soap opera). Furthermore, the telenovela music leitmotif positions Puerto Rico within the Latin American cultural flow.

With the parodic tone as framework, the beginning of the film mimics a documentary whose narrative positions Puerto Rico within the global and local historical landscape of the 1940s. Specifically, it frames the narrative in 1942, in an environment stricken by the war-time hysteria of World War II, where political corruption, hunger, misery, the fear of a Nazi invasion, and the political repression imposed by the United States in Puerto Rico were the daily bread of Puerto Ricans (1:24-1:57). As the narrator provides more details of the witch hunt against foreigners and Puerto Ricans who might be suspected of espionage or supporting other ideological groups contrary to the "American ideal of freedom and democracy," the lens of the camera moves into the FBI's local headquarters in San

Polifonía

Juan. In this space fully dominated by the colonial powers of the United States, the voice of God transitions to a third-person narrator whose voice is accompanied by the diegetic sound of the typewriter and the multiple ringing of telephones (2:16-2:43). In his description, this third-person narrator makes a list of the seized evidence of espionage in broken English, "Aquí está la evidencia de la lista que ocupamos. Nazi flag, series of Hitler and Mussolini photographs, ah... Spanish flag, [to indicate this information is being documented, we can hear that the sound of the typewriter silences the narrator], Nazi emblems, Tugway radio, machine gun, guns..." (2:16-2:38). As the narration progresses, we know that the attention is placed on Spanish nationals in Puerto Rico who have sought citizenship and are suspected to be active members of the Falange.² This piece of information is the transition to the spaces occupied by Manuel González, the owner of a warehouse of import and export of Spanish goods, and his household. He can be seen as a symbol of the patriarch of the Spanish colony in San Juan, the capital of the island, and the father of the protagonist, José Manuel.

In the warehouse, we are provided with three major pieces of information. First, the announcement of José Manuel's wedding that night at the farewell party in the casino of Puerto Rico. The last two important pieces of information are accompanied by the melody of the classical Spanish guitar and the repetition of the opening *telenovela* (soap-opera) melody that fuses with the drums of military tune. The Spanish guitar serves as theme music for Manolo's partner, Antonio, who as the tone of the music suggests, is torn about a decision he must make to avoid losing his American citizenship and risk deportation to Spain for fascist activities³ and that

² In the article "Espionaje y contra espionaje en Puerto Rico durante la Segunda Guerra Mundial", Gerardo Piñero Cádiz explains that "Los agentes gubernamentales o *G-Men*, el servicio de espionaje del Buró de Investigaciones Federales tenía como función principal atender los problemas de seguridad y las actividades anti-estadounidenses que pudieran operar en Puerto Rico y los Estados Unidos. Sobre el particular declaró el Presidente Franklin D. Roosevelt en mayo de 1940: 'Today 's threat to our national security is not a matter of military weapons alone. We know of new methods of attack. The Trojan Horse. The Fifth Column that betrays a nation unprepared for treachery. Spies, saboteurs, and traitors are the actors in this new tragedy'" (24).

³ It must be noted that for the Puerto Rican viewer of the late 1980s, the involvement in Falangist activity of Spanish nationals and Puerto Ricans of the elite is a historical chapter not commonly known in the Puerto Rican collective memory. For the viewer this might seem a far-fetched fictional idea. Therefore, the use of the *telenovela* leitmotif serves as a device to weave this unknown chapter to the filmic narrative. The last American governor of Puerto Rico, Rexford Tugwell, mentions this forgotten chapter in his memoir *Stricken Land* (1946): "For those who were thus released from responsibility for disloyalty and assistance to violent reaction, even those who had sworn the oaths, were now required to make a surface change: they must not hang out Franco flags or publicly proclaim their adhesion to Falange. But they were in bad enough odor even to be driven underground; they made only a nominal secret of their affiliations [...] There is also no danger from them now. They are trying to prove their patriotism by buying lots of bonds, etc., etc., and acting as though Franco was a name they never heard before. I am of

implies the betrayal of his partner Manolo (*La gran fiesta*, 39:32-41:34; 44:46-45:06). As Antonio gets closer to Manolo's desk, there is a crescendo in the chord progression. When he sits in the chair that belongs to Manolo, to add to the dramatic pathos of the transgression Antonio is about to make, the music transitions to the *telenovela* melody (7:14-8:13). The melodramatic cue transitions to the drums and fanfare of a military espionage tune as Antonio plants the evidence that will frame Manolo as an active supporter of Franco and Falangist activity (8:13-9:05).

Bridging the local and the glocal: the radio as a transnational tool of political propaganda

Once again, diegetic sound is key to this polyphonic narrative. In the private space of the González-López household, the diegetic sound of the radio broadcast is a key element that provides more information on the historical narrative that is unknown or unfamiliar to the Puerto Rican audience of the 1980s. Furthermore, the diegetic sound of the radio is a device of vital importance that serves as a portal between the outside world (the glocal) and the inside (the local) world of the González-López household—the Puerto Rican bourgeoisie. The newsreels from the radio broadcast contextualize the series of events that will be performed in the farewell party/expropriation ritual of El Casino, and that will ultimately lead to the engagement of the protagonist, José Manuel (Manolo González's son) to Rita Inés, the daughter of Miguel de la Torre, one of the most prominent landowners of the city of Ponce. De la Torre is a political leading figure in the coalition against Governor Rexford Tugwell and, at the time, Senator Luis Muñoz Marín, a fervent ally of the United States colonial government.⁴ Lastly, and of importance, it must be noted that the voice of the radio broadcaster transits through the rooms of the González-López home placing a focus in the rooms inhabited by José Manuel and Manolo.

The first news bulletin announces the theme of the filmic narrative, *La gran fiesta* and the reason for this farewell party, which is heard in José Manuel's bedroom:

course prejudiced. It was the crowd, which was behind the opposition to me, and incidentally to you. I can be charitable too--except to those who fall in with them and help to play their game" (243; 610).

⁴ The coalition, according to Puerto Rican historian Francisco R. Scarano, established an electoral pact between the conservative party Union Republicana and the Socialist party during the 1930's. Scarano further explains that, [e]l lazo que unía a tan dispares colegas en la política", señala el estudioso Mathew, era la lealtad a los Estados Unidos y una oposición mancomunada al movimiento independentista" [...] la Unión Libre Republicana abogaba por la acción libre de la empresa privada; por los derechos de los patronos, y por el disfrute pleno de la propiedad, con la mínima intervención del gobierno" (Scarano qtd. López 71).

Polifonía

"Y esta noche, damas y caballeros, en El casino de Puerto Rico, la gran fiesta de despedida que cerrará las puertas del exclusivísimo club. El casino ha sido expropiado por el gobierno de los Estados Unidos, a propósitos de defensa nacional y se dedicará, exclusivamente al entretenimiento de las tropas militares" (9:08 - 9:27). As these words are uttered by the radio broadcaster, the camera takes a close-up on a framed photo of Rita Inés, José Manuel's fiancé to be and the bargaining chip that will seal the business deal between the two families. In this sequence, sound and image reveal that Rita Inés's character is an allegorical representation of the colony of Puerto Rico, while in the space inhabited by José Manuel, the radio broadcast also provides information of the latest developments in Puerto Rican politics—in particular, those involving the war against Governor Tugwell by the coalition.

The sound of the radio broadcast transitions to the space of Manolo's bedroom with a parodic commercial that promotes a magic remedy for incontinence. The camera makes a stop in Manolo's bedroom. In his bedroom, the radio broadcaster provides information that frames Manolo's conflict with the United States and insular government, such as evasion of taxes and faded information that talks about Francisco Franco's alliance with Hitler (10:32-13:30). Embedded in this sequence is also the direct allusion that the foundation of the Nationalist movement in Puerto Rico by its founder and leader Pedro Albizu Campo:

Señalando la falta de poderes del pueblo puertorriqueño e insistiendo en que la única solución a los problemas del país es la proclamación de la República, la dirección del partido nacionalista entregó hoy a la prensa, una copia de un extenso manifiesto firmada por su presidente el señor Julio de Santiago...
(10:33-10:47).

The eye matching of Manolo's pin of the Spanish Flag while the radio broadcaster announces the aforementioned words may allude to the alignment of Puerto Rico's Nationalist Party with Hispanismo as a symbol of national-cultural purity and an act of defiance against the United States. This is one of the myths criticized by José Luis González in *El país de cuatro pisos* (1980, pp. 17-18; 30-31).

Popular music and counter-discourse from within the social space of El Casino

El Casino de Puerto Rico symbolizes the social space of the Puerto Rican bourgeoisie. However, in the film we can observe that this space is also allegorical of the colonized Puerto Rican society. It is a space where the Puerto Rican bourgeoisie, the

Polifonía

foreign elite (from Spain represented in the character of Manolo González and other minor male characters), the colonial power represented by the United States Marine, and Afro-Puerto Ricans converge. In the scenes that take place in El Casino de Puerto Rico the music repertoire bridges the local, the glocal, and the global. The music genres are woven to tell the counter discursive narrative that challenge the hegemonic discourse of Puerto Rican national culture include Puerto Rican danza, bolero, Spanish paso doble, plena (Puerto Rican afro diasporic rhythm), jazz, and Scottish ballads. This palette of music genres portrays Puerto Rico not as culturally homogenous, but as a polyrhythmic and polyphonic⁵ culture, an inherent identity marker that makes Puerto Rico a Caribbean nation. While I will briefly talk about the role of danza and "Auld Lang Syne," the Scottish ballad that marks the expropriation of El Casino de Puerto Rico (the inception of El Estado Libre Asociado), I will place more emphasis on the role of bolero in this sonic narrative. As a transnational Afrodiasporic rhythm, bolero positions Puerto Rico as a transnational Caribbean nation.

The interaction of these rhythms that are in counterpoint come to life through the orchestra, which is positioned in the margins of the symbolic social space of this fourth floor in El Casino. It is important to note that the orchestra is composed of mulattos and black Puerto Ricans, which historically have been silenced by the racism and prejudices of the white Puerto Rican elite. The two singers who represent two of the most notorious voices of bolero in the 1940s and 1950s: José Luis Moneró and Ruth Fernández who are Afro-Puerto Rican. They give voice to a historical revision of the island's national culture that has been silenced in the form of popular songs that for the masses are meant to be danced at parties and traditional celebrations.

As the plot advances the action moves to the space of El Casino de Puerto Rico. This is the space or stage where the actual theatrical representation of melodrama will take place. Danza, a Puerto Rican creole form of waltz introduces the appearance of

⁵ In his compendium of music in the Spanish Caribbean, Robin Moore observes, "[m]ost scholars agree that Caribbean identity is neither European nor African but, rather, "in-between." Paul Gilroy (3) refers to it as a "stereophonic" region, in which African and European sensibilities have been fundamentally interpenetrated. In the same way, ethnographer, and author Fernando Ortíz (1947) referred to sugar and tobacco as metaphors for the European and African poles of Caribbean heritage, respectively, suggesting that local culture resulted from a complex "counterpoint" of both. Polyrythm is a dominant symbol for the Caribbean in the writings of Antonio Benitez-Rojo, who describes individual rhythms cut through by others and the composite in turn cut through by still others (1996,18)." Moore concludes that Benitez-Rojo's use of polyrythm to identify the Caribbean is "the most apt since it underscores the cultural complexities of the region as well as the impact external influences "whether from immigrant communities abroad or from entirely different groups." (Moore 19-20)

Polifonía

the Puerto Rican bourgeoisie in the space of El Casino. The musical arrangement of this creole genre is mainly composed of piano and the güiro (Puerto Rican percussion instrument of Arawakan/Taino origin). To create an effect of fanfare, we can hear the inclusion of brass instruments, such as trumpets, in the musical arrangements the Puerto Rican and foreign elite enter El Casino (13:44-15:40). As we hear the melody, the lens of the camera focuses on the guests of this party as well as the visual markers of their social class such as black shiny Packards (13:30-13:43). The circular movement of the fancy black Packard cars along with the almost playful fanfare marked by flute patterns adds an element of jest to the entrance of Puerto Rico's ruling class.

The music is interrupted to introduce the dialogue between Jose Manuel, the protagonist, and his friend Angel Luis. This dialogue introduces one of the first narrative layers of the melodrama: the love triangle between Jose Manuel, his fiancé Rita Inés and his lover, Raquel (15:35-15:51). The love triangle is allegorical to the creation of the current political status in Puerto Rico, El Estado Libre Asociado. The love affair between José Manuel, Rita Inés and Raquel is allegorical of the conflict that the founding father of El Estado Libre Asociado, Luis Muñoz Marín, had between his ideal of Puerto Rican independence and his later bargain to accept the pact of what is today known as the Estado Libre Asociado.

The creation of El Estado Libre Asociado has been the source of divergent and controversial views within Puerto Rican society, especially in academic and political sectors. For those who support Puerto Rican independence and the statehood of Puerto Rico, the creation of the Estado Libre Asociado has been labeled as an act of treason. For those who supported the populist discourse of Luis Muñoz Marín and still support the decaying status quo, the decision of its founding father (Muñoz Marín) is considered an act of sacrifice and patriotism. These sentiments of treason and sacrifice are central to the structure of melodrama (Martin Barbero 117).

I want to briefly pay particular attention to the aspects of treason and sacrifice in relation to the character of José Manuel and Rita Inés. Martín Barbero explains that "central to the dramatic structure of melodrama is the network of connections found in four principal types of characters" (117). These are the traitor, the victim, the champion for justice, and the fool (117-118). Throughout the film we can say that the character of José Manuel wears both the mask of the traitor and the mask of the champion of justice. This portrayal aligns with the aforementioned views of Luis Muñoz Marín, the founding father of El Estado Libre Asociado. The character of Rita Inés can be identified as the melodramatic victim. Martín Barbero observes that

Polifonía

"sociologically, the victim is a princess who is not recognized as such. She comes from above but has been debased, humiliated and treated unjustly." (p. 117) Barbero further states that the victim, which he identifies as a woman, has been condemned to lose her identity and suffer unjustly (p117). However, by some miraculous intervention she is redeemed and rescued (117). This description likens Rita Inés' representation in the film, who, in her princess-like pink dress, is portrayed at first glance, as a gullible and fragile woman who has fallen prey to José Manuel's betrayal. As the narrative of the film progresses, we can see that Rita Inés is also rescued by her aggressor, who becomes a champion of justice by sacrificing his ideal of true love by marrying Rita Inés for his family's namesake. As Lizely López observes in her analysis of the female characters in *La gran fiesta*:

La figura de la mujer en la narrativa de La gran fiesta posibilita las conexiones alegóricas entre Puerto Rico, la cultura y la modernidad. La imagen de la mujer también posibilita la representación de los diferentes alter-egos de la tierra colonizada: la mujer traumada, la mujer codiciada y la mujer inhibida. Mediante la deconstrucción de la narrativa fílmica de La gran fiesta, los personajes de Rita Inés de La Torre, Raquel Acosta y Mari Tere González encajan con el prototipo de estos alter-egos (98).⁶ A través de la narrativa, estas tres mujeres se mueven entre dos espacios: la casa de la familia González-López y el Casino de Puerto Rico (22).

This suggests that Rita Inés's characterization aligns with the allegorical representation of the woman as colonized land who is coveted, victimized, and exploited. In the film we clearly see that Rita Inés has a hidden past that her parents, in particular her mother, Doña Tula, wishes to hide with her wedding to José Manuel. As Lizely López states this is a clear sign of a trauma from the past, which in Puerto Rico's political context can be connected to the island's colonial condition (López, 2014, pp. 22-23). In the film we can observe that a traumatized Rita Inés is not only betrayed by her husband-to-be/protector, she is also betrayed by her parents who support the marriage to protect their social standing as lead members of the decaying ruling hacendado class in Puerto Rico who has sided with the new metropole, as seen by Don Miguel de la Torre's interaction with Judge Cropper. The story of Rita Inés's betrayal, which is also allegorical of Puerto Rico's betrayal by its elite in the mid-20th century, is narrated by three bolero pieces, "Mi loca tentación,"

⁶ En su artículo "Deconstrucción del discurso populista: el nuevo imaginario neonacional en el filme *La gran fiesta*" Magdalena López, señala lo siguiente: "Personajes y situaciones alegorizan los conflictos políticos, económicos y sociales que posteriormente se resolverán en el Estado Libre Asociado (ELA) de 1952" (López 98).

Polifonía

"No me mires así" and "Sin Bandera." The selection of boleros for this sonic narrative were written by three of the most important Puerto Rican composers of Puerto Rico's national cultural canon: Francisco "Paquito" López Vidal, Pedro Flores, and Roberto Cole. "Mi Loca tentación" and "No me mires así," are authored by Francisco "Paquito" Vidal López. Vidal's two songs narrate José Manuel's love affair with Raquel and his betrayal of Rita Inés. During the performance of these two pieces whose main themes are of desire and betrayal we cannot avoid noticing the emphasis that the lights and the camera lens place the alto and baritone saxophones.

The saxophone, in addition to adding a dark tone color that connects to González's counter-discourse that Puerto Rico is inherently Afro-Caribbean, might refer to the existent connection between this instrument and Francisco "Paquito" López Vidal. In *The Saxophone in Puerto Rico: History*, Marcos David Colón-Martín observes that Francisco "Paquito" López Vidal, "became a prominent 20th-century popular music performer and composer in Puerto Rico... He served as one of the pioneers in exposing and introducing the baritone saxophone within the popular music scene on the island" (Colón Martín 26). Colón Martín also explains that the introduction of the saxophone in Puerto Rico was also facilitated through the [experimental] social and economic reforms that the United States government implemented in the island during the first half of the 20th century that impacted the education of music and the rise of bands (26-27). A connection with the modernization process mentioned by Colón-Martín and that took place specifically during the 1940s is represented in a flashback that José Manuel has while dancing with Rita Inés to the bolero "Mi loca tentación" (*La gran fiesta* 23:26). During the protagonist's flashback, the bolero fades and fuses an army fife and drum with the classic telenovela instrumental, which is the leitmotif of the story. In this flashback we can observe how both the bolero's theme "Mi loca tentación" blends with the melodramatic fanfare to illustrate the scheming behind closed doors of these experimental economic and modernizing plans that, as the music foretells, were doomed to fail.

The third bolero that seals the love triangle story is "Olvidame," composed by Puerto Rican composer Roberto Cole. Within Puerto Rico's national cultural canon, Roberto Cole is credited with the composition of patriotic bolero songs that idealize or portray a romanticized vision of Puerto Rico as an object of desire or unrequited love⁷ (López Ortíz <https://prpop.org/biografias/roberto-cole/>). The sequence

⁷ Roberto Cole is described as a revered composer and musician whose "legado abarca una amplia gama de ritmos antillanos...se le venera como una de las figuras representativas de la música romántica nacional" (López Ortíz, Fundación para la Cultura Popular). It is ironic to note that Cole's father was a communications specialist under the command of General Nelson Miles during the invasion of Puerto

Polifonía

marked by this bolero narrates the moment in which José Manuel has to part from what he believes is his ideal woman, Raquel. This is parallel to the decision that was imposed upon Luis Muñoz Marín, the founding father of El Estado Libre Asociado to abandon his ideal of Puerto Rico's independence/autonomy. Furthermore, this sequence shows that José Manuel's/Luis Muñoz Marín's decision favored the Puerto Rican and foreign elites. This is clearly seen as the lens of the camera and the music work to create a counter-point effect that shows all the characters in close-up shots. These close-up shots focus on Doña Tula (conservative pro-statehood); Manolo, José Manuel's father (foreign Spanish and commercial elite); Angel Luis and Mari Tere (the pro-independence elite); and lastly, Don Miguel who represents the decaying hacendado elite. The verses that frame this scenario are:

*¡Olvídame!
Yo se bien que no puedes,
no puedes quererme, ¡olvídame!
Aléjate,
No le digas a nadie,
que tu me quisiste, y te adoré (1:26:51-1:27:25)*

The close-up of the members of the Puerto Rican ruling class is followed by a close-up shot of violin, trumpet, and oboe solos, which act as interlocutors that represent the people of Puerto Rico who are ethnically Afro-Caribbean, as the chosen instruments and the color of their faces clearly indicate. The solo performances of these instruments resort to what seems to mimic a call-and-response method. As the violin solo starts with a mournful tone that resembles a high-pitched cry, the lens of the camera turns to the trumpet. The trumpet in a fanfarelike manner introduces the oboe who responds with an instrumental representation of the verses mentioned above, which implores the lover to leave and forget him/her. However, these instruments, which can be considered as the speakers of the people of a Caribbean nation, omit the word "te adoré," which is in the last line of this verse of the bolero. The response of these members of the orchestra who represent the creators of the island's popular culture can be read as a clear rejection to the imposition of a national culture that has rejected working class Puerto Ricans and Puerto Ricans of color. It is also a response that condemns what will happen once José Manuel talks to Don Miguel.

Rico on July 25, 1898. Despite the determination of Cole's father to preserve a fully American home through Cole's mother, who was a Puerto Rican teacher native of the southern city of Ponce, Cole and his three brothers became patriotic contributors to Puerto Rico's national Spanish-Antillean popular culture (López Ortiz).

Polifonía

The end of this sequence shows José Manuel approaching very slowly toward Don Miguel among the sea of people who are dancing to the tune of the bolero. The couples that inundate the dance floor are pressed against each other. They sway very slowly to the melancholic rhythm of the bolero that culminates with the words:

*Promete me, que aunque vivas muy lejos
siquiera mis besos recordarás.
qué yo viviré soñando con tus besos
y esos ojos que jamás besaré (1:27:35 - 1:28:14).*

As the song ends José Manuel finally approaches Don Miguel. We can infer that José Manuel tells Don Miguel that he will follow through with his engagement to Rita Inés. As Don Miguel walks away, José Manuel is left in the dance floor as the people who were dancing and the by-standers who were listening to the song clap enthusiastically, a sign of approval by the elite.

The farewell party or expropriation of the cultural center of Puerto Rico's elite, a night of fanfare, persecution, and betrayal is sealed with the announcement of Rita Inés and José Manuel's marriage. The announcement is marked by a fanfare of the traditional wedding march "Here Comes the Bride" from Wagner's opera *Lohengrin*. It is worth noting that ironically, like in *Lohengrin*, this wedding march foreshadows an ill-fated marriage (Fisher p.30). Although this is not a comparative analysis between *La gran fiesta* and Wagner's *Lohengrin*, it is noteworthy to highlight the parallel between Burton Fisher's observations on this Wagnerian opera with the character of José Manuel, the hero/villain of this Puerto Rican melodrama and the discourse behind the creation of Puerto Rico's national culture:

Wagner's nationalism and anti-Prussianism are reflected in Lohengrin through the character of King Henry the Fowler, the King of Saxony. King Henry in Lohengrin embodies the dream of 19th century German unification: he is presented as a ruler who travels the length and breadth of German-speaking lands promoting national unity, and resists and confronts the threatening Hungarians in the east. The characterization of King Henry in Lohegrin is allegorical: he represents 19th century nationalist dreams for German unification, as well as liberation from Prussian tyranny and oppression" (20-21).

This idea resonates with the portrayal of *La gran fiesta's* protagonist, José Manuel, whose characterization represents the trajectory of the founding father of El Estado

Polifonía

Libre Asociado Luis Muñoz Marín. Like the historical character that inspired *Lohegrin*, Muñoz Marín was a supporter of a socialist populism that sought to free Puerto Rico from the colonial rule of the United States (López p. 10-11 *Hibridez e Identidad...*). With the slogan "Pan, Tierra y Libertad" (Bread, Land and Freedom), Muñoz-Marín traveled to the highlands of Puerto Rico to reach out to the population of rural Puerto Rico, who was mostly illiterate. El Vate (The Bard) as he was called, talked to farmer workers and "campesinos" about the plan of the Popular Democratic Party to free them from hunger and return what was rightfully theirs but had been stolen by new land laws (La Ley de 400 Acres) imposed by the American colonial government. Muñoz Marín used a simple language, drank coffee or rum with the workers and campesinos, and resorted to the radio to spread his socialist/populist ideology. Even as he was forced to reject his ties to the Partido Autonomista, the political party who supported Puerto Rico's autonomy⁸ from the United States to later embrace the "ill-fated marriage" that is known as El Estado Libre Asociado, he attained the category of a national hero who sacrificed his ideals for the good of the nation in Puerto Rico's historical canon. This is the historical scenario that is represented in the love triangle between José Manuel, Raquel, and Rita Inés.

After the Wagnerian nuptial march that has become transnationalized to the Puerto Rican soundscape through the fusion of brass fanfare and Puerto Rican folkloric music led by the güiro and other percussion instruments, the lens of the camera shifts to the billiard room where Judge Cropper is playing pool. Cropper is advised that it is the time for the ceremony of "el traspaso" (the expropriation of El Casino de Puerto Rico. Once Cropper is on the stage, as the ballad plays, Dr. Gandía, one of the hosts of El Casino, reads what seems to be a historical summary of the contribution of El Casino de Puerto Rico since 1917. This description is historically relevant, as 1917 is the date in which Puerto Ricans were granted American citizenship and the Jones Act⁹ was passed. Lastly, the assertion of Dr. Gandía of a "gran familia puertorriqueña" who have come together for their "noble ideals" and

⁸ In a speech Muñoz Marín gave in 1939 he clearly revealed the following regarding the current colonial government in Puerto Rico: Las reformas al régimen colonial, no creo que puedan conducir a ningún bien permanente para Puerto Rico. El régimen colonial es una enfermedad grave y mortal para la dignidad y el sistema económico de nuestro pueblo...Las enfermedades, o se curan o matan. No se reforman o liberalizan...Tanto los partidarios de la estadidad como los partidarios de la independencia deben de saber que cualquier reforma inútil al régimen servirá para retrasar la conquista de su ideal, sea éste la independencia o sea este la estadidad... [Por ello] Nuestro pueblo debe decir firmemente que no cree en reformas a la enfermedad colonial que lo está matando (Zapata Oliveras pp. 96 qtd. López 11).

⁹ The Jones Act has served to thwart Puerto Rico's economic independence. It forbids Puerto Rico to trade with other nations without the intervention of the United States.

Polifonía

have given up their sacred space of cultural gathering, is an acknowledgment of the elites' desperation to save their hegemony under a colonial regime.

Slobin observes that "the entire distribution of music" and other diegetic sounds provides the framework for an "ethnographic structure" that implicitly questions (Slobin, *Steiner Superculture* 21), the inception of the superculture's discourse. It can be agreed that this is the case in *La gran fiesta*. In this film sound has been intentionally employed to challenge the construction of Puerto Rico's national culture and by default El Estado Libre Asociado, a foundational fiction that historically has proven to be a farce, a melodrama.

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