

Dear all,

Within my field, Political Science, I usually consider myself as working in Political Theory, rather than doing more empirical or comparative work. This paper, however, responds to my personal interest in Puerto Rico and how its history is told. Like many others right now I have been moved to give special attention to the period of the 1930-1940s because of the important shifts and movements that appeared during that moment, processes that shaped the history of Puerto Rico for the rest of the century. It is probable that new changes to Puerto Rico's status will come soon, and I feel that more critical attention is needed to these other periods of change.

Thank you,

Francisco

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**Puerto Rican Nationalisms: a re-reading of the national, the popular, and their struggles on
the road to the foundation of the Commonwealth**

Francisco J. Fortuño Bernier

And Puerto Rico? My fevered island,
for you everything is over.
In the wasteland of a continent,
mournfully Puerto Rico
bleats like a stewed goat.

From *Prelude in Boricua*,
Luis Palés Matos, 1937¹

In his novel *Los derrotados* (1956), Puerto Rican writer and journalist César Andreu Iglesias describes the tragedy of the path taken by Puerto Rican militant nationalism, organized mainly around Pedro Albizu Campos' Partido Nacionalista (PNPR), after the failed Nationalist Revolt of Jayuya in 1950 and the foundation of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico in 1952.² Marcos Vega, Andreu Iglesias' nostalgic protagonist, is a man unable to reconcile with the changed world in which he finds himself after a stint in prison following his involvement in the 1950 uprising. "Los derrotados" means "the vanquished" or "the defeated": Marcos and his rag-tag group of melancholic militants confront a reality that has made them a strange object of times past embedded in a present that has no apparent use for them; a reality in which their dreams of

¹ I have modified the translation. Trans. by Julio Marzán, in ed. Cecilia Vucuña and Ernesto Livon-Grosman, *The Oxford Book of Latin American Poetry: a Bilingual Anthology* (Oxford UP, 2009), 196.

² César Andreu Iglesias (1915-1976) was a prominent journalist, political activist and union organizer. He was an active member of the Communist Party in the 1930s and participated in the founding of a number of significant left and radical publications, including the newspaper *Claridad*, Puerto Rico's longest running pro-independence (and originally socialist) publication.

revolutionary martyrdom no longer make sense. They plan and execute an abortive strike against the United States army, and end up dead or in jail. While Marcos and his group imagine themselves to be great patriotic heroes executing the cryptic orders of their leader, Albizu Campos, in reality they exist in an utter state of estrangement from the mass of the Puerto Rican people, completely disconnected and unable to understand how it was that their beloved nation embraced a project, the Commonwealth, which did not lead them to national sovereignty and moral regeneration. Notwithstanding his socialist-realist moralizing, the picture Andreu Iglesias describes is much more congruent with the reality of the outcome of Puerto Rican militant, or radical, nationalism than any uncritical consideration of that movement and its leader.

In his celebrated essay of politico-cultural analysis, "El país de cuatro pisos" ["The four story country"], José Luis González, elaborating on Antonio Gramsci's political concept of a national-popular culture, takes up a very important "nationalist" question in a decidedly non-nationalist way: "How do you think Puerto Rican culture has been affected by the North-American colonialist intervention and how do you see its [Puerto Rican culture's] contemporary development?"³ His interesting answer to that question takes him not to a description of the nature of Puerto Rico's (colonial) relationship to the United States, but, following Gramsci, to the consideration of Puerto Rico's internal divisions as a "nation." The question is shifted into a new, politically relevant, ground: the conflictive definition and redefinition of the Puerto Rican nation and its relationship to the state structures that operate within the island. In that sense, González points out the importance of class in relation to the nation as the modern definition of Puerto Rico as a nation came about during a period, the 1930s, which was witness not only to the

³ This and all further translations are mine.

rising ferment of nationalism amongst the island's elite intelligentsia, but also the most turbulent times in terms of class struggles and social unrest.

This defining conjuncture in Puerto Rican history presents a conundrum: how, within the course of less than two decades, a conception of the Puerto Rican nation which emerged from a weak local elite became accepted by the mass of the Puerto Rican people in such a way that this culture was linked to the popular element in a movement, populism, which was at the same time nationalist but did not propose to found a sovereign Puerto Rican nation-state. It did, however, have as its outcome the foundation of the Commonwealth; the establishment of a fixed and state-centered idea of national culture; the defeat of both radical nationalism and militant organized labor; the establishment of the hegemony of a single party, Partido Popular Democrático (PPD), for a quarter of a century; and the total transformation of Puerto Rican society through development programs, which included the massive migration of Puerto Ricans into the United States.

To approach an answer this question, it is necessary to look at how these two nationalist movements engaged and established links, successfully or not, to the mass of the population, specifically to the key sugar cane workers, in such ways that they articulated or not national-popular projects of politico-economic transformation. Theoretically, this approach attempts a combination of Antonio Gramsci's (and neo-Gramscian) analysis of the "national-popular" with a critical "old institutionalist" approach, drawing insights from "new institutionalism"—with special attention given to how the two terms, nation and popular can be defined with reference to social classes and their struggles. In order to apply this approach to the case of Puerto Rico, a critical consideration of contemporary debates in Puerto Rico over the centrality of the "status question"

and the categorization of nationalism is necessary in order to move away from a nationalistic reading of the political history of Puerto Rican nationalisms (and Puerto Rican history in general) and to provide an adequate definition of the problem posed by the Puerto Rican form of populism called “muñocismo.” Further, a narrative of the rise of two nationalist projects, Albizu Campos’s Partido Nacionalista (PNPR) and Muñoz Marín’s Partido Popular Democrático (PPD), is presented with specific attention given to their attempts at forming bonds and political linkages with popular elements as part of their national strategy. Finally, the conclusion considers the political implications of the re-reading I have proposed.

An “old” institutionalism approach

Rhodes (2006) has demonstrated that the development of a “new institutionalism” has obscured the existence of other traditions of political science which are not necessarily unfruitful pursuits. Rhodes presents “new institutionalism” as a continuation of one tradition in Anglo-Saxon, modernist-empiricism, which has never been without competition. I will thus consider two elements from the approaches developed in or after one of the competing traditions, the insights provided by the Marxist/post-Marxist analysis of discourse and those of what Rhodes terms “socialist” political science—which includes such diverse elements as Marxist state theory.

In a sense this paper is concerned with the same problem as Przeworski and Wallerstein (1982): the question, which seems to stem from a problem in Marxian consideration of the state, is how, in light of antagonistic interests between workers and capitalists, can a democratic state arise which may be described as constituting a “compromise” between these classes (215).

Although I do not subscribe to their attempt at formalization of class struggle positions, I will attempt to do the same thing by other means, explain why and how classes in struggle would end

up “choosing” the same path: the foundation of a state, in this case the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico.⁴

Following Barrington Moore (1966), then, my purpose could be said to look at the social origins of political institutions. Specifically, at their origins in political struggles over institutions, struggles which must be seen as organized around economic cleavages in society. As Peter Gourevitch (1998) explains, it is not enough to take Moore’s famous dictum of “no bourgeoisie, no democracy” as a principle to be applied to any situation. Instead, Gourevitch describes the “logic of Moore’s reasoning” as one that,

tells us to look for the axes of economic cleavage—the fault lines along which political life is organized—and then seek the conflict over political institutions to which the economic cleavages are linked. Groups fight over political institutions, Moore suggests, because the political institutions influence the outcomes of their struggles over economic issues. They want institutional change in order to attain broader goals (213).

In the context of Puerto Rico, the 1898 invasion by the United States led to the acceleration, if not creation, of industrial capitalism on the Island, organized around cane sugar production.⁵ It led, also, to the birth of a large industrial working class, whose political parties

⁴ Answering this question in the Puerto Rican case presents a difficulty even for scholars who have attempted to question the discursive hegemony of nationalism in the account of Puerto Rico’s history and to elaborate “nonessentialist treatment” of the question of Puerto Rico’s status. Such is the case with Ramón Grosfoguel, for whom the transformations of the period in question are explained merely by the rising “symbolic” importance of Puerto Rico, with “state military considerations” being the motor of change and the concessions (in terms of devolution of autonomic powers or material assistance) product of those considerations the main reason for “nationalism’s” (understood fundamentally as the pro-independence stance) historical unpopularity. See Ramón Grosfoguel “The Divorce of Nationalist Discourses from the Puerto Rican People: A Sociohistorical Perspective” in Frances Negrón-Muntaner and Ramón Grosfoguel, *Puerto Rico Jam* (Minnesota, 1997), 57-76.

⁵ The origins of industrial capitalism in Puerto Rico are not, as is commonly held, to be found in the 1940s programs of “industrialization”: rather, already in the late 19th century there was an incipient capitalist economy which was beginning to take an industrial form. It was, however, totally transformed by the United States invasion which would favor the development of agrarian industry on a scale Puerto Rico had never seen under Spanish rule. See Miles Galvin (1979) or James Dietz (1989). It is important to note, also, that although sugar production was dominant, it was not the only important economic area even within agriculture.

and unions both formed alliances and contended fiercely with the Puerto Rican elite, a class which came out of the old and decaying seigneurial elite of the Spanish “hacienda” (plantation) system which and that redefined itself in its political commitments after its ideological revival in the 1930s.

This way of looking at the social basis of politics, however, faces the ever-present danger of making an analytical category into a box into which reality must be fitted. This has been a classic problem for Marxist theory, specially around that very useful, yet highly problematic, pair of concepts: base and superstructure. Conscious of this difficulty, I follow literary critic Raymond Williams’ (1977) caution that these categories be taken not as fixed things, but as analytical metaphors which may even be useless at times. The important thing to look at is not what goes into which category, but what are the actual (political or economic) practices performed by actors, often in a contradictory way which does not lend itself to pinning down to a simplified base-superstructure “dialectic.” As Williams states,

It is only when we realize that “the base” to which it is habitual to refer variations, is itself a dynamic and contradictory process—the specific activities and modes of activity, over a range from association to antagonism, of real men and classes of men—that we can begin to free ourselves from the notion of an “area” or a “category” with certain fixed properties for deduction to the variable processes of a “superstructure.” The physical fixity of the terms exerts a constant pressure against just this realization (82).

The National and the Popular

Antonio Gramsci’s notion of culture points to its relation to both social classes and the concept of the nation. Commenting on the status of Italian cultural production in the early 1930s, he observed a debate over the inexistent national culture of Italy. Intellectuals at the time decried the lack of a properly Italian culture, and accused both publishers and the popular masses of

being guilty of disregarding national culture in favor of foreign influence. Gramsci asks a question that the Puerto Rican José Luis González would echo decades later:

What is the meaning of the fact that the Italian people prefer to read foreign writers? It means that they undergo the moral and intellectual hegemony of foreign intellectuals, that they feel more closely related to foreign intellectuals than to “domestic” ones, that there is no national intellectual and moral bloc, either hierarchical or, still less, egalitarian. The intellectuals do not come from the people, even if by accident some of them have origins among the people. They do not feel tied to them (rhetoric apart), they do not know and sense their needs, aspirations and feelings. In relation to the people, they are something detached, without formation, a caste and not an articulation with organic functions of the people themselves (Gramsci, 367).

Here Gramsci is introducing his concept of a national-popular culture, which is despite its name a thoroughly political concept. As can be seen, for him, the existence of a linkage between intellectuals and the mass of the nation’s people is not a foregone conclusion. Rather, the link has to be established in order for the culture to actually be national and popular: the word “nation,” Gramsci remarks, in languages such as French and German, also implies a or the “people” and so at the same time that it refers to a political entity it refers to the mass of the population. For Gramsci, then, the process of the people accepting the intellectual hegemony of a properly “national” or “domestic” intellectuality requires the establishment of links, which may be “hierarchical” or “egalitarian”: in other words, the substantive political projects of intellectuals will also be a variable besides their links to the masses, not reducible to the fact that they are linked or not to “the people” and thus not deducible from the formal structure of their discourse or political organizations.

As we shall see, the situation Gramsci is describing in Italy had very strong parallels in the intellectual-political atmosphere of Puerto Rico of the 1930s. During that time, modern Puerto Rican nationalism arose, but it did not immediately acquire a national-popular character,

i.e. it did not immediately representing a living ideology with a grasp on the popular mass and organizing them politically. In fact, when it did finally come to exist, it did so in a deeply contradictory way.

Ernesto Laclau's neo-Gramscian formalistic concept of populism is also pertinent. Laclau shifts the definition of populism from the particular contents of populist discourse to the way in which it articulates social differences into an equivalence, leading to a lesser concern towards how political practice "express" and a greater one towards how they "constitute" social agents (2005, 33). Laclau summarizes philosophically his concept of populism as "an ontological and not an ontic category - i.e. its meaning is not to be found in any political or ideological content entering into the description of the practices of any particular group, but in a particular mode of articulation of whatever social, political or ideological content" (34).

Furthermore, Laclau observes that "populist political discourse" stands in opposition to "institutionalist political discourse" (41-2)—giving populism, on his account, a necessary tendency towards an "anti-institutional character" (38). The reason for this opposition between institutional and populist politics is the way in which their discursive logics work: whereas institutionalist discourse responds to a "logic of difference," populism builds a "logic of equivalence" which is characteristic of the building of "hegemony" in Laclau's sense of "process by which a particular demand comes to represent an equivalential chain incommensurable with it(self)" (39). This process of making a particular demand which is itself an equivalence to all other demands is what leads to one of the most common traits of populism, its identification with the leader's name: "At the limit, this process reaches a point where the homogenizing function is carried out by a pure name: the name of the leader" (40).

The main problem with Laclau's notion of populism, something which he notes albeit as a positive thing, is that populism ends up being conflated with all politics: "If populism consists in postulating a radical alternative within the communitarian space, a choice at the crossroads on which the future of a given society hinges, does not populism become synonymous with politics? The answer can only be affirmative" (48). For all his concern for specificity, Laclau ends up in a redundant analysis, which does not do justice to his own definitions and the insights they provide. In that sense, Laclau's concepts can be used against his own purpose if the synonymous identification of politics with populism is rejected. For my present argument, the most interesting theoretical insight coming from Laclau's concept of populism is the dialectic that develops between the logic of institutionalist discourse and that of populist discourse. According to Laclau, this dialectic plays out in the direction of institutions once a movement has achieved a "populist rupture:"

The regime resulting from a populist rupture becomes progressively institutionalized, so that the differential logic starts prevailing again and the equivalential popular identity increasingly becomes an inoperative *langue de bois* [hollow and wooden language, pompous yet meaningless] governing less and less the actual workings of politics. Peronism, in Argentina, attempted to move from an initial politics of confrontation - whose popular subject was the *descamisado* (the equivalent of the *sans-culotte*) to an increasingly institutionalized discourse grounded in what was called "the organized community" (*la comunidad organizada*). We find another variant of this increasing asymmetry between actual demands and equivalential discourse in those cases in which the latter becomes the *langue de bois* of the state. We find in them that the increasing distance between actual social demands and dominant equivalential discourse frequently leads to the repression of the former and the violent imposition of the latter. Many African regimes, after the process of decolonization, followed this pattern (46-47).

Laclau's reference to Africa and post-decolonization finds confirmation in Mahmood Mamdani's (1996) description of the development of "actually existing civil society" in Africa during the struggle for and after the achievement of independence.

In Mamdani's account, African civil society, which for him should be observed empirically and not in an idealized form, passed through four moments: first, its total racial division before independence, a moment in which it was supported by the "colonial state as the protector of the society of the colons"; second, the expansion and creation of an indigenous civil society during the anti-colonial struggle; third, the immediate moment after independence, when the state was de-racialized, but civil society was not, displacing antagonism into civil society. The fourth moment, which is presently the most interesting, occurred in the context of programs for "Africanization" of civil society: a period during which, Mamdani argues, civil rights discourse was used to defend the old privileges of a racialized civil society, leading to the discourse of justice and nationalism becoming detached from the language of rights. In this context, what seemed to be developing in indigenous society as a product of the achievement of independence suddenly disappeared. Mamdani describes the process thus:

This is the moment of the collapse of an embryonic indigenous civil society, of trade unions and autonomous civil organizations, and its absorption into political society. It is the moment of the marriage between technicism and nationalism, of the proliferation of state nationalism in a context where the claims of the state—both developmentalist and equalizing—had a powerful resonance, particularly for the fast-expanding educated strata. It is the time when civil society based social movements became demobilized and political movements statized (Mamdani, 21).

Although Laclau and Mamdani are observing cases in which independence was achieved and Puerto Rico never achieved independence, I will attempt to show that on the question of a statization of civil society, the parallel to the African case is clear. As will be seen, in Puerto Rico's case, this was specially salient in the adaptation of labor union leadership to the emerging bureaucracy, a task which required joining "technicism and nationalism" and in the way in which national culture was increasingly institutionalized and defined by the state.

Paired with Gramsci's understanding of national-popular culture, it can be observed that in the foundation of a state in colonial/post-colonial context the existence or development of an organically existing civil society which is linked but not subsumed or absorbed by the state is a problem. I will attempt to apply this insight to the question of the divergent types of nationalism that arose in Puerto Rico in the 1930-40s, looking specifically at the most successful one, "muñocismo," or populist-nationalism, and the consequences its particular articulation of nationalism and populism had on the foundation of the Commonwealth.

Nationalism and Class

If, as Przeworski (1985) argues, social classes "are formed in the course of struggles," and, furthermore, "Classes are not prior to political and ideological practice. Any definition of people as workers—or individuals, Catholics, French-speakers, Southerners, and the like—is necessarily immanent to the practice of political forces engaged in struggles to maintain or in various ways alter the existing social relations," it follows that a consideration of the appearance of certain "definitions of people"—in this case, membership in Puerto Rico as a nation and a state—is an issue related to the question of the definition of a class: "the ideological struggle is a struggle about class before it is a struggle among classes" (69-70).

However, this is not to imply that the question of the relation of class and nation, especially as it has been treated within Marxist theory, is an easily solved one. "Nationalism has proved an uncomfortable *anomaly* for Marxist theory and, precisely for that reason, has been largely elided, rather than confronted" says Anderson (2006), remembering that the problem has puzzled socialist thought as far back as Marx and Engels' *Communist Manifesto*. Anderson's solution to this problem is convincing. Nationalism, he argues, must not be equated with

“liberalism” or “fascism,” that is, as “ideology,” nor must it be treated as pathological. Instead, it should be considered “anthropologically,” meaning that nationalism would find its definition in the same way as “kinship” and “religion,” that is in the way in which it refers to the construction or performance of what Anderson has famously called an “imagined community” which is “limited and sovereign” (5-6).

What these conceptions of the problem of how class and nation are defined share is a concern for how ideological practices constitute this definition. Anderson is adamant that a community being imagined does not imply its falsity. The interesting thing is not that it has been imagined, but the imagining that has been done, how and by whom. In the same way, the concept of class formation implied by “the struggle about class” requires that the appearance of classes be not understood merely as a fact, but as a process in which the shape these will take are not presupposed but rather determined by political-economic developments in so far as these are the material conditions in which all human actors live.

In the Puerto Rico of the first half of the Twentieth Century, it is, strictly speaking, hard to define the class structure of the social formation as a binary, with a classical bourgeoisie on one side and a proletariat on the other. The working class did exist, or rather was in formation, as its creation as a large mass of wage workers (and unemployed would-be wage workers) was the product of the industrialization of the country for industrial agriculture, mainly sugar cane production. Politically and ideologically, the most prominent working class organization was the Partido Socialista, a contradictory political formation. Although it was at times internationalist in the Marxist sense and from it came out pro-independence currents, it was at all times an anti-nationalist party which viewed nationalism as a ploy by the Puerto Rican elite attempting to

dominate workers. The Partido Socialista's relationship to the US, moreover, was very complex, as it saw in the colonial relationship the most progressive force operating in Puerto Rico, but also the source of their immediate problems in everyday life: exploitation by US capitalist companies (Quintero, 1979).

On the other hand, it is harder to speak of a Puerto Rican bourgeoisie. This is not because they did not exist: even though the most powerful industrial force on the Island were US companies operating in Puerto Rico whose owners and top managers were not in Puerto Rico (absentee capitalists), by 1934 there were 30 Puerto Rican owned sugar cane companies which together produced as much as the 11 US companies operating in the island, and there was also probably a mercantile bourgeoisie composed of Puerto Ricans (Quintero, 1986, 88).⁶

However, the character of this emerging capitalist group was less defined in national and political terms than that of another group existing in Puerto Rican society: the remnants of the class of "hacendados," the elite of the seigneurial plantation economy which had existed in Puerto Rico until the late Nineteenth Century. After the destruction of the "hacienda" economy, this group had retained cohesion by adherence to a shared world-view characterized by the patriarchal belief in a "great Puerto Rican family" (product of once having been the hegemonic force in Puerto Rico just before the US invasion), shared political parties (the Partido Unión and its many transformations and splinters, such as the Partido Liberal), and by becoming a formidable group of educated professionals occupying key positions in urban centers and public education (Quintero, 1986, 153). It is thus to this group that I refer to as the elite, an intelligentsia that provided the leadership of almost all Puerto Rican parties—with the notable exception of the

⁶ Quintero defines this Puerto Rican bourgeoisie as a dependent and "anti-national" emerging class which politically operated as an appendix of US interests with no initiative of its own (1979, 22).

parties of labor, the Partido Socialista and the Communists. Most importantly, it was this elite that would put both the question of forming national identity (nationalism) and of social modernization (through populism, diversified industrialization, and migration) front and center by the late 1930s and early 1940s, culturally and politically.

Some insights from “new” institutionalism

As already mentioned regarding Przeworski, although I concentrate on a different approach than those prominent in contemporary comparative politics, the problems that will be considered have also been treated in that literature. The question of how to understand institutional choice and change features prominently as one of the main concerns of “new” institutionalism. Dealing with change, however, has often been problematic, as the usual perspective of dealing with “critical junctures” is treated as being causal: change occurs because there was a critical juncture (Cappadocia and Kelemen, 2007). The answer, instead, according to Cappadocia and Kelemen, is to look at critical moments as periods in which structuring rules and contextual determinants are “relaxed” and “contingency becomes paramount” (343). The range of possible choices seems to open up and short term choices have greater effects.

There remains a problem, however, because there “seems to be too much continuity through putative breakpoints in history, but also often too much change beneath the surface of apparently stable formal institutional arrangements” (Thelen, 2003, 211). This contradiction is underscored by the problem of the relation of structure to agents, for it is the very structural or institutional context which will be changed that has produced, over a longer period of time, the agents who will act in moments of rapid transformation.

As Mahoney and Thelen (2010) argue, considering institutions over long periods of time is a question that is usually addressed in terms of persistence of institutions, rather than change. However, they propose to look at the way in which gradual change occurs. From their discussion, what arises is the importance of observing how actors' relationship to context rules change over time, while at the same time those contexts shape who acts: "political context and institutional form" have the effect of "driving" changes because "they shape the type of dominant change agent that is likely to emerge and flourish in any specific institutional context" (15).

In the Puerto Rican case, attention to context and existing political institutions, then, should point out which political actors thrive in certain moments. Of special interest are change agents who represent insurrectionary and subversive types. Following Mahoney and Thelen, the difference between these two types of actors is that while both seek to change existing institutions, they have a different stance towards following existing rules: insurrectionaries disregard them, while subversives follow them in order to "layer" the existing rules with "amendments, revisions, or additions" that, over a relatively longer period will change them fundamentally (16-17). In that sense, the populist-nationalist PPD could be hypothesized to be a subversive agent engaged in layering once it came to share power, while the PNPR would be a insurrectionary agent.⁷ The question then would be how each type corresponded to the existing

⁷ The Partido Nacionalista called for an insurrection in 1950, but its tactics during the period under review here (1930s to the early 1940s) were not so much directly revolutionary (in the sense of organizing and calling for an insurrection) as violently confrontational. In that sense they may be called more correctly militant or radical-nationalists, rather than insurrectionary or revolutionary nationalists—although from the structure of their discourse, mythical-nationalists might make more sense.

context and institutional structure in such a way that they represented the most potentially successful change-agent type.

The question of a colonial state beyond or before the colonial question

In terms of what is called the “political status issue,” Puerto Rico ceased to be recognized by the United Nations as a non-self governing territory with the foundation of the Commonwealth in 1952. General Assembly Resolution 748 of 1953 gave its approval to the removal of Puerto Rico from the list of colonial territories, and recognized “that the people of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, by expressing their will in a free and democratic way, have achieved a new constitutional status”; opined that the Commonwealth was “established as a mutually agreed association”; and recognized that “when choosing their constitutional and international status, the people of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico have effectively exercised their right to self-determination.” The United Nations observed that with the promulgation of the 1952 Constitution, voted by Puerto Ricans and then approved by the United States Congress, “the people of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico have been invested with attributes of political sovereignty.”

The arrival of these “attributes of political sovereignty,” however, did not settle the question of the colonial status of Puerto Rico, as any summary glance at Puerto Rican politics during the rest of that century and into the present one shows. There exists a widely held consensus, even among the defenders of the Commonwealth status, that as a territory Puerto

Rico remains non-sovereign, although some hold that it is self-governing.⁸ It does nevertheless point to the importance of the eventful times that culminated in the 1952 proclamation of the Commonwealth, a defining event in Puerto Rican history: the foundation of a state which claims the representation of the Puerto Rican people, even though it is not a sovereign entity and it remains a possession, non-incorporated territory, of the United States. In a perhaps idiosyncratic way, Puerto Rico could be said to be a nation without a state and a state without a nation, as the modern notion of the nation-state as a sovereign territorial entity hardly applies to it.⁹

The divisiveness of the question of the political status of the Commonwealth is the overriding concern of Puerto Rican politics: it casts a very long shadow over politics and political analysis of the condition of Puerto Rico. Thus, it is hard to appraise the character of the Commonwealth and its creation in “scientific” or empirical terms as one would attempt to do with the development or emergence of any other state. A nationalistic reading of nationalism

⁸ A pro-statehood Puerto Rican legislator, hardly a radical anti-colonialist, has written recently: “Because of the uncertainty of what would happen to our Island and the restriction placed upon her by what can only be described as a ‘colonial government,’ Puerto Rico has not been able to promote itself, to use its resources to better the quality of life of its residents.” Jose Aponte Hernández, “It’s in Washington’s hands,” *The Hill*, March 30, 2015.

⁹ “The rejection of ‘the futile and narrow concept of Nation-State’ and the ‘unitary idea’ that considered ‘that the homeland [patria] and its separate independence [sic] were the same thing,’ performed a key role in the ‘Muñocista’ shift. Both concepts, according to Muñoz, constituted unconquerable obstacles for the modernization project proposed by PPD [...]. In its place, Muñocismo postulated that there could be a nation without national state and national culture without independence, even if the Island was integrated economically to the United States.” Carlos Pabón Ortega “De Albizu a Madonna” in *Nación Postmortem* (Callejón, 2002), 39. The citations within the quote are from Muñoz Marín himself.

imposes itself.¹⁰ Without a doubt the question of status is an important element in the story of the formation and subsequent development of the Commonwealth; however, it tends to function as a discursive obfuscation. As historian Carlos Pabón Ortega has observed, the question of political status is the “*black hole* that swallows all of the political and of politics in Puerto Rico” (2014, 75, English and italics in original).¹¹

The question of the emergence of the Commonwealth is thus presented in relation to the status question, in such a way that this becomes the only concern in elaborating a position. Nationalism, in a political sense, becomes wholly identified with pro-independence movements; whereas populism is seen as a pragmatic stratagem of the anti-independence autonomist movement. If this second movement is ever considered also as nationalist, it is in a “cultural” sense. The usual narrative about nationalism in Puerto Rico identifies, as here, nationalist discourse as dominant in Puerto Rican politics during the first half of the Twentieth Century. However, nationalism is allowed, as it were, to tell its own tale: it is support for independence that is privileged as the true marking of nationalism in any meaningful political sense. Thus what is usually found is a passage from political nationalism—with the Partido Nacionalista described, for example, as its “most radical political expressions”—into populism, identified with the shift in

¹⁰ In other words, nationalist lenses impede correct description of the empirical reality with astounding regularity, even in academic work. Thus, nationalism exerts a mythical influence upon analysis in the strict semiological sense of myth as a form of speech that is depoliticized by making the contingent appear eternal: “Myth does not deny things, on the contrary, its function is to talk about them; simply, it purifies them, it makes them innocent, it gives them a natural and eternal justification, it gives them a clarity which is not that of an explanation but that of a statement of fact. [...] it organizes a world which is without contradictions because it is without depth, a world wide open and wallowing in the evident, it establishes blissful clarity: things appear to mean something in themselves.” Roland Barthes “Myth Today” in *Mythologies* (1957), 143.

¹¹ It is not uncommon to find positions regarding status referred to as “ideologies” in the same way that liberalism or social democracy—or even right and left—would be used in most other contexts. Examples are not hard to find, for instance: “Underlying the three major ideologies - independence, autonomy and full annexation to the US - are conceptions about the culture of the territory” (Ramos, 63).

Partido Popular Democrático from a formal support of independence towards a reformist program contained within the boundaries of the US-Puerto Rico colonial relation—if PPD is described as nationalistic at all, it is only in a cultural and decidedly not political way, its populism described, for instance, as a “curious blend of principles that tried to transcend nationalism but maintained elements of the nationalist tradition.”¹² Cultural nationalism is thus opposed to political, or proper, nationalism.

Cultural Nationalism, a Political Question Not an Answer

By the 1930s, nationalism was the primary ideological phenomenon in Puerto Rico (Ferraó, 1993). Nevertheless, it was not a monolithic ideology, and it was to be given its most potent political form by the intervention of Luis Muñoz Marín, main protagonist of all politics in Puerto Rico from that decade until well into the 1970s. This is, however, far from being a non-contentious statement. In fact, whereas the characterization of Muñoz Marín and his party, Partido Popular Democrático (PPD), as nationalist in a cultural sense is not controversial, calling them politically nationalists is not so accepted. Ángel G. Quintero, for example, describes the “two nationalisms” which arose in the 1930s with clear disdain for Muñoz Marín—although not without a critical eye towards the problems of the militant tendency tendency of the radical-nationalism of Albizu Campos:

Militant nationalism [Albizu Campos] was the politics of the intransigent defense of a class that was seeing its way of life die; *bolero* nationalism [Quintero’s term for Muñoz Marín’s brand; bolero being a slow, usually sad song, the metaphor is meant to be read as

¹² These quotes, from an author who openly questions nationalism’s hold upon political discourse in Puerto Rico, are chosen to illustrate the pervasiveness of the notion that nationalism and populism are two diverging movements and, in the case of PPD, two contradictory moments. My counter-argument is that they are rather constitutive of each other. Mariano Negrón-Portillo “Puerto Rico: Surviving Colonialism and Nationalism” in Frances Negrón-Muntaner and Ramón Grossfogel, *Puerto Rico Jam* (Minnesota: 1997), 50-51.

a reference to melancholic alcoholism] was a stimulating or cathartic lamentation for those who, in their opposition to the debacle of plantation capitalism and the metropolitan politics in the country, began to aspire and lay the basis for a new possible class hegemony (Quintero, 1980, 81).

Quintero's categorization, then, does include both tendencies within nationalism, but denies the second kind a political character. It becomes rather a psychological comfort for the descendants of a bygone era, of a fallen class. Nevertheless, his description cannot obviate the evident: this "sad-song" nationalism Quintero cannot stand became the driver for a very successful political movement.

According to Pabón Ortega (2014), Muñoz Marín's main achievement was the transformation of nationalism from a political movement associated with the establishment of an independent nation-state for Puerto Ricans into the cultural-ideological basis of an autonomist state project that, basing itself upon the direct subvention provided by the United States government, would reject the call for a sovereign state.¹³ Pabón Ortega provides a rather

¹³ Ramos (2004) proposes a different criterion for differentiating between the two types of nationalism across all of contemporary Puerto Rican history. Following Ernest Gellner's distinction between ethnic and civic-territorial nationalism, Ramos proposes that the two nationalisms in Puerto Rico are: "an ethnic-based conception of the nation nourished by the cultural traits and the habits of social life of the territory; and an ideological standpoint that considered the metropolis to be the nation of which the territory was a component." Aaron Gamaliel Ramos, "Performing Identity: The Politics of Culture in Contemporary Puerto Rico" (*Pouvoirs dans le Caraïbe*, 14), 64.

However, this seems implausible, as it requires hammering the facts into the framework of status position as ideology: thus, Ramos says that "autonomistas" and "independentistas" (pro-autonomy and pro-independence) positions fall into the ethnic category and supporters for making Puerto Rico a state of the US into the civic-territorial one. However, this cannot account for important positions which were pro-statehood, on the left, and anti-nationalist, such as the Partido Socialista, for instance. It also does not take into account the historical impossibility of a civic-territorial nationalism towards the US appearing ex-nihilo: in Puerto Rican history, many pro-statehood politicians in the early years of US rule had been, under Spain, liberal separatists or autonomists (and supporters of anti-monarchic republicanism in Spain), yet are we to believe, under a categorization scheme such as Ramos', that they would have suddenly changed from ethnic nationalists to civic-territorial nationalists in 1898 by the mere fact of the change of sovereignty? For example the founder of the Partido Republicano, José Celso Barbosa, who had been until its founding member of the Partido Autonomista Ortodoxo [Orthodox or Pure Autonomist Party], a group that splintered out of Luis Muñoz Rivera's Partido Autonomista for considering to have compromised on its liberal ideals by forming a pact with Spanish monarchists.

controversial (given the debate's usual coordinates) yet very useful account of this cultural and political synthesis that emerged in the late 1930s and became the state ideology of the nascent Commonwealth; that is, the ideology of "muñocismo" (named after Muñoz Marín):

"Muñocismo" altered in a fundamental way the discourse of 'the national' and appropriated for itself the most precious symbols of nationalism, transforming them into emblems of the state in name of a policy of social consensus. It posited that it was possible to have a nation without nation-state and a national culture without independence, although the island was economically integrated to the United States. The Commonwealth, condensed into the equation "[Puerto Rican] Culture Institute + Federal Funds = the best of both worlds," would take care of making into a historical reality the reconceptualization of "the national question" elaborated by Muñoz Marín. In this way, "muñocista" discourse neutralized nationalism as a political movement centered on the constitution of a nation-state at the same time that it reclaimed it as state-culture. (32)

Present in this understanding of "muñocismo" is not only its populist-nationalist character, but also its subsequent transformation into a state ideology. As a movement, however, here "Muñocismo" is seen as a process of absorption of nationalist politics (specifically its symbols) into the cultural elements of a state project, enabling it to foil pro-independence dreams.

César Ayala and Rafael Bernabe (2011) use a variant of this notion as a framework to understand essayist Antonio S. Pedreira's work. Pedreira, whom they identify as laying the ideological groundwork for the programs Muñoz Marín's PPD would later undertake, was the foremost exponent of the Puerto Rican "Generación del 1930," a literary movement characterized by "the urgency with which it debated the question of Puerto Rican identity" (Ayala & Bernabe, 175). This urgent matter was defined or abbreviated into three questions, which appeared in the cultural journal *Índice*, headed by Pedreira, in 1929:

What are we? How are we?

1. Do you believe that our personality as a people is completely defined?
2. Does there exist a form of existence unmistakably and genuinely Puerto Rican?

3. Which are the defining signs of our collective character? (Cited in Ayala & Bernabe, 2011)

Ayala and Bernabe take these questions, and the general thrust of Pedreira's oeuvre, as conforming to the paradigmatic form of what John Hutchinson (1995) has called "cultural nationalism." This should be so because Pedreira's narrative, in a way that finds parallels in other members of the "Generación del 30" (some of them leaders of PPD), fits into Hutchinson's scheme of the periodization which characterizes cultural nationalism, as cultural nationalism usually contains mythical histories that "typically form a set of repetitive 'mythic' patterns, containing a migration story, a founding myth, a golden age of cultural splendor, a period of inner decay and a promise of regeneration" (Hutchinson, 123).

It is important to note that even if for Hutchinson cultural nationalism is not devoid of a political project congruent with modernization and the formation of a state, it is differentiated from "political nationalism": whereas "Political nationalists have as their objective the achievement of a representative national state that will guarantee to its members uniform citizenship rights," the political program of cultural nationalism is characterized by a discourse of moral regeneration, not state formation:

For a cultural nationalist [...], the state is regarded with suspicion as a product of conquest, and as imbued with an inherent bureaucratic drive that, exemplified in the cosmopolitan imperial state, seeks to impose a mechanical uniformity on living cultures. The glory of a country comes not from its political power but from the culture of its people and the contribution of its thinkers and educators to humanity.

The aim of cultural nationalists is rather the moral regeneration of the historic community or, in other words, the re-creation of their distinctive national civilization (Hutchinson, 124).

Presented in this way, the application of the cultural nationalism paradigm to the Puerto Rican literary movement in the 1930s might not be a stretch, but its extension to the political movement which drew on it for ideological grounding begs the question. It was, after all, the fiercely pro-independence nationalism of Pedro Albizu Campo's PNPR which embraced with much more force the mythical and regenerative construction of the nation, whereas Muñoz Marín's PPD, as a populist-pragmatic movement, purported a more rationalistic and development-centered conception of the formation of a state and its relation to the nation, as is evidenced by its compromise on the notion of a sovereign nation-state, i.e., its rejection of the status question in favor of an attention to the social question.¹⁴ In fact, as Ferrao shows, the nationalism of Albizu Campos and his main followers in the PNPR was the highest example of the overriding theme in Puerto Rican nationalism of the 1930s: a nostalgic harkening back to the times of Spain.

“We are once again in front of Granada” wrote Juan Antonio Corretjer, another leader of the PNPR, in reference to the imagined position of the Puerto Rican nation in front of the “invader”: the United States (cited in Ferrao, 1993). The analogy is to the so-called “Reconquista,” the war through which Spain was constituted as a nation and at the end of which the Arab people who had lived in the Iberian Peninsula for the previous seven centuries were deposed and expelled. What Ferrao shows is that this hispanic-loving position which found its highest expression in the PNPR served both as a golden age in the past and promise of the moral regeneration to come. The phenomenon of “hispanofilia” (literally “love for the Hispanic,” i.e.,

¹⁴ It is necessary to note, however, that all nationalism retains a mythical core based upon its supposed universality (the notion that it is “natural” that all people belong to a nation always). As Tom Nairn observes, “The universal folklore of nationalism is not entirely wrong. If it were, it would be unable to function as myth. [...] It is not nature. The point of the folklore is of course to suggest this: to award it a natural status, and hence a ‘health’ label, as if it were indeed a sort of adolescence of all societies, the road we have to trudge along between rural idiocy and ‘modernity’, industrialization (or whatever).” Tom Nairn “The Modern Janus,” in *The Break-Up of Britain*, 321.

the Spanish element) which was shared by all Puerto Rican nationalism of the 1930s appears to contrast paradoxically with the main form political nationalism had taken in the rest of Latin

America in the Nineteenth Century:

While in many countries of the Hispanic America a patriotic discourse had originated since the beginnings of the 19th century that emphasized the originality of the American peoples [...], and the sense of collectivity and necessity of rupture with Spain was strengthened, in Puerto Rico the intellectual elite, called to conceive an idea of the nation, adhered at the height of the 1930s to strong cultural and mental ties to Spain (Ferraó, 1993, 56-57).

However, to say that modern, or contemporary, Puerto Rican nationalism is a product of the 1930s and at the same time was intent on looking back should not be surprising. Nationalism's tendency to construct a past for itself at the same time as it is forward looking is well known. It is in that sense that nationalism has been called a "Modern Janus."¹⁵

To say that nationalism claimed its genetic origins in the Spanish past also recalls the question of how it related, historically, to that past. In fact, Benedict Anderson's account of the creole origins of nationalism in Spanish-America can be more or less also observed in the development of a Puerto Rican national consciousness among the creole elite in the Nineteenth Century. During that century, Anderson's observation about the relative "social thinness" of early Hispanic-American nationalisms holds strongly for the Puerto Rican case (63). When creole nationalists rebelled against Spain in 1868, for instance, this was put in evidence: the Republic proclaimed by the Revolution of Lares on September 23rd did not last more than two days.¹⁶

¹⁵ Nairn, 338.

¹⁶ By contrast, in October of the same year, Cuban nationalists launched a sister rebellion which led to the Ten Years war and was followed by two more wars, a period of separatist revolution and Spanish imperial counter-revolution that would only end after the Spanish-American War.

Furthermore, this is confirmation for Anderson's claim that "The world-historical era in which each nationalism is born probably has significant impact on its scope" (63). In that sense, Puerto Rican nationalism as it eventually appeared in the 1930s had to have as part of its political scope what Tom Nairn called "the necessary resort to populism." As Nairn observes, populism and nationalism went hand in hand because in the conditions of uneven development, elites could only find one resource to constitute their power, the people, and their recourse to the people was based on an immediately available (yet, following Anderson, imagined) shared community as an ethnic existence which could be called "nation":

Mobilization had to be in terms of what was there; and the whole point of the dilemma was that there was nothing there—none of the economic and political institutions of modernity now so needed. All that there was was the people and peculiarities of the region: its inherited *ethnos*, speech, folklore, skin-colour, and so on. Nationalism works through *differentiae* like those because it has to. **It is not necessarily democratic in outlook, but it is invariably populist.** People are what it has to go on. (Nairn, 327-328. Emphasis mine.)

As I take it, Nairn's point should be read as meaning that nationalism must "invariably" *resort* to populism if it is to constitute itself as what it sets out to be, politically and socially, rather than meaning that nationalism is, by the mere fact of its existence, populism. "Albuzismo" and "Muñocismo" did not *have to be* populist, but in the historical moment and social conditions which they appeared, their existence reverts the question of cultural nationalism back into the political, specifically into how a "national" relation towards the "popular" could be forged.

The origins of "muñocismo" or populist-nationalism

"God in Heaven, Roosevelt in the United States, and Muñoz Marín in Puerto Rico."

Proclamation by a Partido Popular lieutenant deifying his leaders¹⁷

¹⁷ Cited in Lewis, 1963, 147.

In fact, the Puerto Rican nationalists under Albizu Campos also conform, perhaps more strongly than any other political group at the time, to one of the paradigmatic characteristics of Hutchinson's cultural nationalism—its minority and intransigent character: “Unlike political nationalist movements, which may [...] transform themselves from elite urban-based to mass organizations by promising different groups the redress of grievances in a national state, cultural nationalism remains in 'normal' circumstances a small-scale movement that promotes progress-through communal self-help. [...] It generally remains a minority enthusiasm” (Hutchinson, 125). As we shall see, the populist movement headed by Muñoz Marín embodied the promise to the masses characteristic of political nationalism as defined by Hutchinson.¹⁸ Nevertheless, nationalism, not only restricted to the PNPR, in the 1930s was a minority phenomenon in another sense: it was the ideology of an elite class of intellectuals, not of the mass of Puerto Ricans.¹⁹

The differentiating element between these two nationalisms was not if they were nationalistic in a cultural or political way, but the way in which as movements and discourses—always emerging from minority elites—they established links towards the rest of the population. This was crucial for Gordon Lewis (1963), who identified PPD as the “first genuinely nationalist party” in Puerto Rico. For Lewis, this was not so due to PPD's cultural achievements or positions

¹⁸ It is interesting to note, also, that Hutchinson's theory of cultural nationalism is developed as a case study of Irish nationalism: Puerto Rican nationalism under Albizu Campos had a close relationship to Irish nationalism and its leader Éamon de Valera.

¹⁹ During the 1930s, the decade of the emergence of the paradigmatic form of modern nationalism in Puerto Rico, it is hard to overstate how much of an oligarchical elite the intelligentsia was. According to the 1935 Puerto Rico census, illiteracy was officially at 40%, and, out of a population of 1.72 million, there were only 913 persons with professions traditionally associated with intellectuals such as “lawyers, librarians, university professors, writers, and journalists” (Cited in Ferrao). In other words, less than 0.05% of the population. By comparison, the French aristocracy was proportionally three times larger at the time of the Revolution, at around 1.7% of the population. Moreover, as Ferrao points out many of these members of the island's elite were also distinct from the rest of the population in that they were descendants of very recent Spanish immigrants who came to the island in the later years of Spanish colonial rule.

regarding political status. It was, indeed, the fact that PPD was populist that, for Lewis, made it “genuinely nationalist,” for, in his opinion, “if the movement started as the defender of the ‘jíbaro’ [peasant]—as its emblem of the ‘pava,’ the peasant hat, indicates—it soon grew to embrace a whole cross-section of the society—cane cutter, dockworker, university teacher, professional man, Negro, and Hispanic white” (148).

Muñoz Marín’s relationship to his own class is also telling. He—as well as the rest of the intellectual leadership of his party—was hardly an outsider to the Puerto Rican elite: his father, Luis Muñoz Rivera, had been the foremost leader of Puerto Rican “autonomistas” under Spain, and was widely considered part of the pantheon of “próceres” or great men of the bygone past. Rather than being a mere epigone of elite classism, however, Muñoz Marín’s project transcended the traditional political boundaries of the party machines which had dominated Puerto Rican politics for four decades. He also presented a program of reform or revival for his own class, which hinged on transforming it from an aloof creole elite, which thought of itself in terms of a now long-gone seigneurial past, into a national class linked (through the PPD and the emerging developmentist state) to the mass of the population in order to further a far reaching program of political-economic reforms:

Like his father, [Muñoz Marín’s] versatile mind recoiled with impatience from the sterility of the “políticos” [derisive term used to refer to career politicians that dominated politics], their literary, archaic, and socially reactionary preoccupation with obsolete concepts. They lived, as it were, in some sort of hypnotic trance which prevented them from seeing things as they were. Lamentation for a dead past or, slightly better, academic argumentation over a dying present, deterred them from creative analysis of the future. They showed little interest in economics. They confounded literature with politics. If they had a sense of liberty, it was oligarchic and not democratic in character. The more extremist of them [presumably affiliated with Albizu Campos] committed the mistake of what Marx called “playing with revolution.” In retrospect, it is the supreme achievement

of Muñoz Rivera and Muñoz Marín to have pointed out at least one way out of the impasse thereby created (Lewis, 149).

The leadership of the PPD came out of the elite, they were all members of the intelligentsia who had debated throughout the 1930s about the “crisis of national identity.” Their main leader, Luis Muñoz Marín, was regarded as a poet-politician, but the literary and cultural pedigree of the leadership extended further than him. There is no other way of describing this group but as nationalists.

Social and Political Failures and Successes of Puerto Rican Nationalisms

Economic Background

Out of a population of roughly 1.7 million, agricultural workers represented the overwhelming majority of the population of Puerto Rico in the 1930s. These were, however, not peasants, but rather an industrial working class employed primarily in the cane fields. In 1930, agricultural workers comprised 52.4% of total employment; and in 1940, 44.9%. In all, in 1930, the industrial working class, not restricted to agriculture, was composed of 374,857 persons, or 74.5% of all employed persons. Agriculture not only employed the largest amount of people in any industrial sector, it also represented the largest share of national income, at 49% in 1929, 43.3% in 1934, and 30% in 1939 (see Figure 1). The next and only comparable economic sector, both in terms of employment and share of national income, would be the growing government. In fact, by 1939, government had overtaken agriculture as a share of national income; however, it employed only 3.7% of the workforce. The economy itself was being statized.

Figure 1: Economic Sector by Percent Share of National Income in Puerto Rico, 1929, 1934, and 1939

Economic Sector	1929	1934	1939
Agriculture	49.4	43.3	30.1
Manufacture	9.1	7.3	7.1
Services	5.7	9.2	10.7
Government	14.2	20.7	32.1
Other	21.6	19.5	20.0
Source: Dietz, 156			

These social and economic factors suggest, following Gourevitch's insight on Moore, that the most important economic cleavage over which political contests and conflict would arise was that pertaining to the sugar cane industry. In fact, all Puerto Rican politics in the 1930s would constantly refer back to the problem of sugar, sometimes in a quite violent way, and even when it did not appear to do so directly.

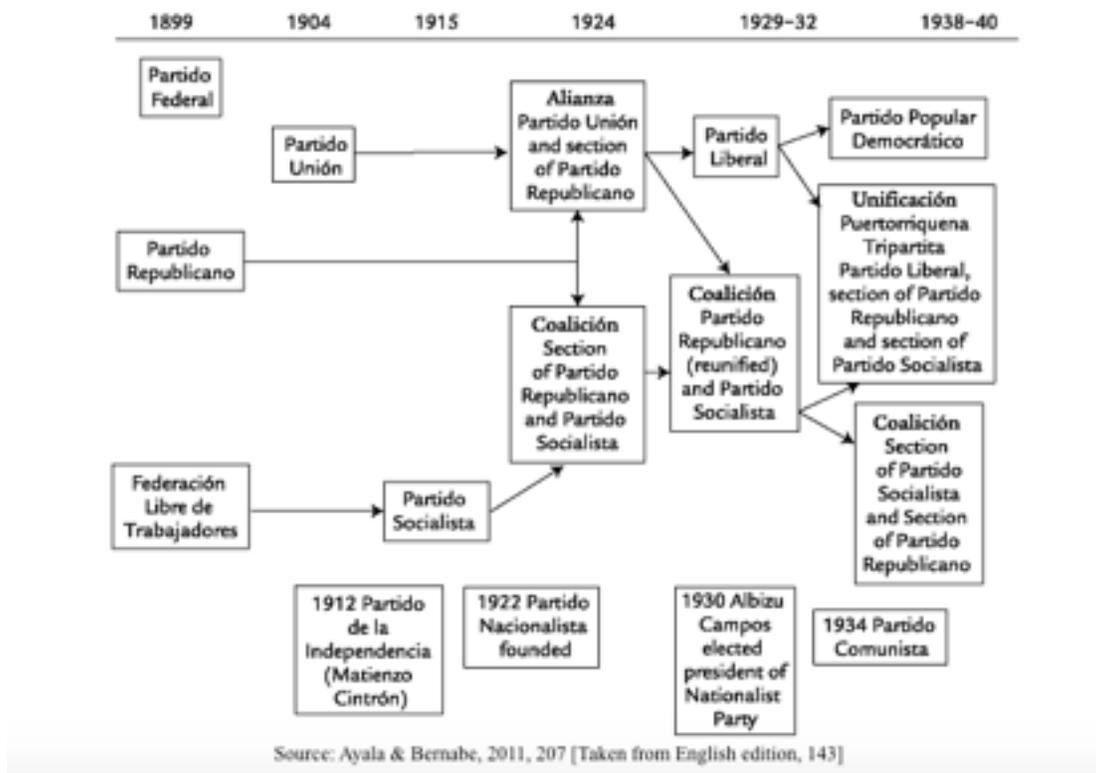
Political Background

Far from being a simple history, the developments of political parties and movements in the first half of the Twentieth Century in Puerto Rico is a chaotic and complicated process. I have included a chart (Figure 2) appearing in Ayala and Bernabe because although my argument is not so much about political parties as it is about the relation of labor struggles to political institutions and movements, this diagram should help in providing clarity to the sometimes hard to follow developments of political organizations I describe in this paper.

At the beginning of the decade, the dominant political coalition, the *Coalición*, composed of the Partido Unión Republicana (PUR) and the Partido Socialista (PS) was very clearly related to the sugar cane industry: the PUR being widely held to be headed by members of the Puerto

Rican elite and bourgeoisie directly allied to the large sugar corporations, and the PS—who despite their name were not a radical party—nominally representing the working class, with a strong base in cane sugar workers.

Figure 2: Political Parties in Puerto Rico, 1899-1940



Although at the margins at the outset of the decade, the PNPR would go on to play a key role by the mid-1930s. In spite of this party not being related to the sugar industry, the most important political conjuncture it faced would be directly related to it: the sugar cane workers’ strike of January 1934. The outcome of the PNPR’s actions during that conjuncture demonstrates the difference in the political character of their nationalism, that is, their failure to become a national-popular force.

The other opposition force that was never able to become a leading force through most of the 1930s was the Partido Liberal (PL). It was a party composed of the liberal and intellectual

wing of the descendants of the old Puerto Rican creole elite accustomed to the politics of a dying era. Riddled with internal and generational conflict, it was a party quite incapable of mounting a serious challenge to the Coalición. It might seem surprising, then, that it was from this political formation that the elements of the most successful and powerful political movement in the history of Puerto Rico should come out. However, it was from the PL that the PPD emerged. But first, cane sugar would have to deal the final blow to the old way of doing politics in Puerto Rico and seal the fate of the other strand of Puerto Rican nationalism.

Political and Class Struggles during Early US Colonial Rule

The first twenty years after the US invasion have been described as an “open war” between organized labor and capitalists (González, 1957). During this time, the colonial government concentrated its repression on the old creole elite who had briefly acquired hegemony in the island in the last years of Spanish rule, giving rise to new political groupings (Quintero, 1986). The emerging working class, however, developed a different attitude and relationship towards the US presence on the island, seeing in it a useful crutch that would support them against the power of their bosses. Nevertheless, as Miles Galvin explains, workers were not the only ones to look towards the north with hope of redress:

The conflicting classes began to see in the sometimes pluralistic, sometimes unitary Colossus of the North the potential champion of their respective aspirations. The suddenly expansive Puerto Rican entrepreneurs were suspicious and fearful of the extension of American civil liberties, but were avidly interested in the US market and consequent commercial opportunities. The representatives of the new wage-earning class, who were becoming conscious of the terrible implications of a laissez-faire economy for the sellers of surplus labor, were principally interested in the US system as constituting an erratic but occasionally serviceable court of appeals for civil injustice, and as a means of restricting the freedom of enterprise in exploiting labor (Galvin 54-55).

Thus, during the first three decades of Puerto Rico under the American flag, that mass of the workers and their political representatives had to navigate not the bureaucracy of a local state but the favors of the federal government.²⁰ A telling example is found in 1921, when shipping workers menaced a strike after salaries were reduced 40%: instead of going on strike, labor leaders mobilized stateside support from the AFL to lobby Washington agencies into pressuring the shipping companies to negotiate (with the US-appointed governor, sidestepping the unions per request of the companies) a 10% wage increase (González, 1957, 460). In fact, the inability to pursue collective bargaining and the difficulty of constant striking led labor leaders to a privilege political, that is an electoral, strategy and thus to concentrate their efforts in the PS.

The strategy was initially successful. By the 1924 elections, the socialists represented the largest single party. The predominance of unskilled labor, moreover, made political organizing an acceptable strategy even to the stateside AFL leadership, which was otherwise opposed to political organizing by working class organizations: as Galvin explains, in the face of curtailed collective bargaining rights and with the “working class at a terrible disadvantage in an economic struggle because of unlimited supply of unskilled, easily replaceable labor,” the rational course of action was to bank on labor’s ability to mobilize superior numbers in electoral contests (65). This strategy, however, would prove to be at once the most effective and damning for the labor party, as it led to the formation of a coalition with the PUR party, which represented cane sugar industrial interests, that while putting them in power from 1924 to 1940 would undermine PS’s credibility and ability to lead the working class, creating a political crisis and opening the doors

²⁰ Teresita Levy, Presentation at panel “Citizenship and Empire: The Impact on the Jones Act in Puerto Rico,” (Center for Latin American, Caribbean & Latino Studies, The Graduate Center CUNY, March 9, 2015).

for new leadership to acquire hegemony. The question of who would lead, however, was not settled—and with the demise of the PS, labor’s political participation would never again be led by an independent leadership emerging from the working class, but by leaders of other classes.

The Turbulent 1930s and Radical-Nationalism’s Social and Political Defeat

The economic crisis of the 1930s in Puerto Rico was not caused by the Great Depression but by the contradictions in the development of capitalism in Puerto Rico—in any case, the depression only “made manifest” the existing conditions, rather than inventing them (Dietz, 154). The Depression did however, create the stage which the PNPR would use to become a nationally significant political force. As living conditions deteriorated and strike action increased, Alizu Campos’ nationalists were a force that have been described, although not necessarily convincingly, as the only “alternative way of life” to the situation (Quintero, 1979). Whether they actually represented a viable alternative or not is irrelevant, for they did become a political force. The question was if they represented an agent adequate to constructing the crucial national-popular link with the radicalized popular mass which would have allowed the PNPR to carry out the project of political independence.

By the mid-1930s, a shift in Puerto Rican politics crystallized. In 1930, Pedro Albizu Campos had become leader of the PNPR, emerging as the most combative opponent to the American presence in Puerto Rico. Under Albizu Campos, the PNPR had increasing presence as a militant opposition to US colonialism, although they were unable to prosper electorally, abandoning electoral politics altogether by 1936 after their failures in the 1932 elections.²¹ At the

²¹ At the height of their electoral power in 1932, the PNPR candidate with most votes, Albizu Campos, garnered 11,882 for the post of senator at large. This represented less than half of the next closest candidate, the novelist Francisco M. Zeno of the PUR and less than an eighth of the leading candidate, Bolívar Pagán, a socialist, who won his seat with 88,503 votes (Nolla-Acosta, 2013).

same time as the PNPR rose in public prominence if not electorally, the old political establishment ossified: on the one hand, the PL was mired in generational infighting; and, perhaps more importantly, on the other hand, the coalition between the PS and the PUR (a veritably political Frankenstein) which had dominated politics until then was becoming sclerotic.

In 1934, the political consequences of this situation would come to the fore during the cane sugar workers strike of January-February of that year.²² Up until then, worker's ability to bargain for their economic demands had been highly restricted: each "zafra" (yearly cane harvest), the workers had to renegotiate precarious accords with little guarantee that they would be held up. The main union, the Federación Libre (FLT) associated with the PS, had been unable to secure bargaining in this key economic area, fueling growing discontent among workers with the union and the party. Economic conditions were generally desperate and strikes were not limited to the cane sugar industry: there were 85 strikes in all industrial sectors from July to December 1933. Cane sugar workers, the keystone of the economy, began their largest strike in the east of the island in late December 1933.

This initial strike led to negotiations. By January 5, 1934, an agreement had been reached between the government, the companies, and the FLT. This agreement was not, however, negotiated with the striking workers, as many of them were not even represented by the union. Although it was the first time an industry-wide labor agreement was reached, when workers were presented with the accord in whose negotiation they had not taken part and that was perceived as not meeting their demands—for example, it retained 12-hour work shifts for mill workers and

²² The following account is based on Dietz, 181-188.

established minimum salaries which were actually lower than existing salaries—they swiftly rejected it and went back on strike, shutting down more than half of the industry.

Having broken with the existing union and, by extension, with the party, the strikers sought allies in the rising radical-nationalists. Albizu Campos was contacted and his Nacionalistas began an island-wide campaign of solidarity with the strikers, speaking publicly in their favor throughout urban centers and providing what organizational guidance they could. They were, however, completely unsuccessful and by mid-February the strike had been defeated everywhere. Not even the “treasonous” agreement of early January was implemented. The workers had lost, yet they had dealt the old PS and its organizations a death blow. It was, at the same time, the highpoint of the P NPR, who were nevertheless unable to capitalize on their success: 1934 was the climax of their political prominence (Silén, 1976).

It was also the beginning of their end as a potentially national-popular force, as they were completely unable to transform their collaboration with workers during the strike into an effective political bloc. The nationalists privileged a mythical and martyrdom-based strategy, increasingly confrontational: they retreated from electoral politics in 1936 and were to suffer cycles of increased confrontation and repression. By the late 1930s all of their leadership was imprisoned, they had suffered massacres at hands of the Insular Police, and whatever abortive attempts at organizing the mass of the population they had attempted had failed. This last failure was so complete that Juan Antonio Corretjer was to describe it in no uncertain terms: “Corretjer [...] recalls that during the islandwide sugar strike of 1934, the workers who had become disillusioned with their own leadership, appealed for outside help, but the Nationalist Party was unable to produce a single *independentista* [he meant member of the P NPR] capable of

organizing and technically advising workers” (Galvin, 99). Radical-nationalism was unable to succeed in its attempt to become a national and popular force capable of leading Puerto Rico and constituting it as a sovereign nation-state.

The Rise of Populist-Nationalism and the “Institutionalist Interregnum”

By the early to mid-1930s, then, all Puerto Rican political institutions from the parties to the colonial state apparatus had stagnated, specially in their ability to respond to the concrete and decreasing living conditions of the people: “Not only the FLT and the Socialist Party, but all the institutions existent in Puerto Rico about the time Franklin D. Roosevelt came to power in the United States, had become unsalvageably unresponsive to the great mass of the population” (Galvin, 90). The reference to Roosevelt is important, as the New Deal would play an increasingly important role in Puerto Rican politics.

It did not, however, do so immediately: Puerto Rico’s US appointed governors during the early and mid-1930s proved to be quite incompetent in taking advantage of New Deal programs. This situation led to the first link between the future leadership of the Commonwealth and progressive federal administrators: during a visit to the island by Eleanor Roosevelt and federal policymakers, Puerto Ricans Luis Muñoz Marín and Carlos Chardón, president of the University of Puerto Rico, met not only the first lady, but most importantly the man who would be their key contact in the future transformation of Puerto Rico: Rexford G. Tugwell.

From those early meetings in the mid-1930s came out the first proposal of a broad modernization plan for Puerto Rico: the so-called Plan Chardón, written by Chardón for the Puerto Rican Policy Commission, an entity created by President Franklin D. Roosevelt at the behest of Tugwell and James A. Dickey, the director for Puerto Rico of the implementation of the

Agricultural Adjustment Act. Tellingly, this commission's meetings were not held in Puerto Rico for fear of undue involvement of politicians beholden to capitalist interests, but rather in Washington. And, most importantly, they recognized Luis Muñoz Marín as a key political leader for the first time: although he was not a member, he was allowed participation in all meetings. Out of them came the plans that would shape the transformation of Puerto Rico under Muñoz Marín and Tugwell's leadership in the 1940s. But before that was possible, something had to change in Puerto Rico's political scene.

Muñoz Marín and the group which was coalescing around him found that their participation in the implementation of the New Deal programs gave them an avenue to sidestep the existing political system and begin implementing reforms which seemed impossible due to the dual problem of political stagnation of existing parties and inactions by the colonial administrators (Villaronga, 2010, 178). In these projects elaborated in conjunction with the New Deal policymakers, they saw a viable development possibility to get out of the crisis of the 1930s. The question was how to lead politically in their implementation, as the political system was still controlled by an old regime, debilitated and moribund, but still in power.

The answer was the construction of a nationalist and populist movement around the figure of Luis Muñoz Marín. As a party, it was founded in 1938 with the name of Partido Popular Democrático, but its origins dated from before that. Its origins can be traced Muñoz Marín and his circle's efforts since their days inside the PL, from which they were kicked out on charges of factionalism.

Apart from the figure of the "caudillo" that Muñoz Marín would be made into, the emerging populist movement had other mechanisms to link itself with the people it sought to

represent: mainly, two newspapers, *La Democracia* and *El Batey*. *La Democracia* was one of Puerto Rico's oldest newspapers, founded by Muñoz Marín's father and a key organ for the diffusion of his program and ideas among the Puerto Rican elite and upper classes. *El Batey*, however, was a new project created in the run-off towards the 1940 elections, envisioned as a device for communicating to the masses. Its style and character were decidedly popular, designed to enable a didactic and dialogic political practice: "*El Batey* proclaimed that the PPD was 'the party of the people' and that there is no other 'salvation' in Puerto Rico than to establish a 'government of the people' free of big interests. For the PPD to achieve this goal, *El Batey* said that 'it is necessary for the people to understand all of its problems'" (Villaronga, 2010, 191). The paper, moreover, was purposefully dialogic and shaped around the "caudillo": most of what it published was in the form of letters from followers to the leader together with Muñoz Marín's answers.

On the campaign trail, Muñoz Marín made himself into a true populist leader with whom the nation and the popular classes could identify themselves. His campaign was "unorthodox" for the time, and it took him not only to give speeches in urban centers (as, for example, Albizu Campos had done in support of the striking cane sugar workers) but also to rural areas, and it usually involved the leader sitting down for dinner or conversation with common men and women in the afternoon:

with rigged-out sound cars in the fashion of Huey Long, Muñoz campaigned throughout the length and breadth and in each tiny hamlet and *barrio* of the island. It was a campaign of informal conversation, with very little of the empty rhetoric that so often persuaded other politicians to mistake oratory for thought. It used a simply worded catechism to drive home its message (Lewis, 147).

In terms of political language, the rise of PPD's populist discourse refashioned the vocabulary of politics in Puerto Rico by a dialogue created between its campaigning leader's pronouncements and popular social forces avid for reform (Villaronga, 2010). In fact, PPD benefited from a tacit alliance with other rising popular forces during the period. In the wake of the cane sugar strike of 1934, two organizations had emerged that further altered the political scene: the Communist Party and the Central General de Trabajadores (CGT), eventually affiliated to the stateside Congress of Industrial Organizations. As Villaronga shows, these two organizations would prove crucial in contributing to push the discourse of politics towards populism and social reform, allowing PPD's message to penetrate fully into the popular masses.

And it was not only PPD's outward discourse that was geared towards the creation of a "people." In terms of practice, its leadership was extremely active. From the emergence of the party in 1938 onwards, it attempted to portray itself as a champion of the people—and it developed clear and close alliances with working class organizations. Not only were the party's newspapers used to promote and support workers in their struggles, but Muñoz Marín himself became a known figure amongst the workers. Although he was never a union organizer, he did participate directly in many unions' congresses, and personally oversaw legal aid to striking workers. This was the case with transportation workers, the unemployed, and most importantly dockworkers—in whose case Muñoz Marín actively participated in their 1939 strike, picketing, declaring his willingness to be arrested, and defending two arrested workers in court, presenting their acquittal as a victory for PPD.

"Before long," Villaronga states, "muñocismo meant an advocacy for reform to overcome the worst socioeconomic and political grievances of Puerto Ricans. It also entailed the

incorporation of popular groups as part of the island's political arena and a degree of accountability from political leaders" (193). As it has been shown, the other personalized political stance during the period, "albuzismo," provides an important contrast to what "muñocismo" became: whereas the name of Albizu Campos came to be identified with his minority party and his particular confrontational style of nationalism, Muñoz Marín came to be identified as a leader of the people in whose name it was possible to create a link between the national and the popular. The party was not only "genuinely nationalistic" but also genuinely popular, at least for the time being.

In 1940, the PPD swept the legislative elections, making Muñoz Marín president of the Senate, and thus the highest ranking Puerto Rican politician on the Island. Then, a final piece fell in place: Tugwell came to Puerto Rico to preside over the University, but was soon thereafter named governor, becoming the last non-Puerto Rican to occupy the post. The stage was set for the implementation of the development projects envisioned before—a process that would still take many shifts and turns, but which would end in the foundation of the Commonwealth as a legal synthesis of these changes in 1952. This period, from 1940 to 1946, has been called the "institutional interregnum," a moment during which the state, exemplified by the Muñoz Marín-Tugwell alliance,²³ and drawing its force from the populist hegemony which Partido Popular Democrático held, led development independently:

²³ This effective alliance was not perceived as such by Tugwell. However liberal, Tugwell was never free of treating Puerto Ricans in a paternalistic and colonial manner, albeit one which prided itself in being "enlightened." Gordon Lewis describes how Tugwell seems even to have perceived his relation towards Muñoz Marín, regarded by Puerto Ricans as the main protagonist of the transformations Puerto Rico endured after the 1940s, in this light: "There is throughout [Tugwell's memoir of his time as Governor of Puerto Rico] a tone of calm condescension to the 'Popular' leader, who is seen as the unstable and erratic poet-politician irritatingly refusing to yield to the American political scientist's more mature wisdom" (160).

Tugwell was governor of Puerto Rico for five years, from 1941 to 1946. His government effort, although formally an imperial administration, could be categorized as an institutionalist interregnum preceded by the “sovereignty” of the sugar-producing enclave and succeeded by the “sovereignty” of the manufacturing enclave. It was a brief political moment in which not only were numerous organizations and institutions oriented towards public service created, but also, an instant in which the government of Puerto Rico was able to liberate itself from the chains imposed by private interests and not be reduced to a mere “facilitating” agent for gestating private enterprises’ earnings (Catalá, 62).

During this “institutionalist” period in which the state had some measure of independence from large economic interests, it also developed a contradictory relationship with labor organizations, specifically those operating in the key economic sector. Workers had reorganized from the ashes of the FLT, and created the CGT union in 1940. In 1942, conflict in the cane sugar industry found the workers striking again, but this time they were not only better organized, but their leadership had also established close ties with PPD: the strike was resolved not in confrontation with police or the companies, but by direct intervention of Muñoz Marín and Tugwell, who enacted minimum wage regulations that could be applied retroactively (Galvin, 96). In 1943, again cane sugar workers would strike, and this time Muñoz Marín would take an even more personal role in their victory, securing their right to strike by immediately passing a law to prohibit seizing of union assets (the law was passed at a midnight session in which striking workers had appeared to demand help).

Aftermath: Towards the “Ideological Shift” in PPD and the road to 1952

It will be clear by now that PPD was able to triumph where other political agents of the era were not. Its ability to establish links with political support bases both “above” and “below” gave them the material resources and mass support required to engage in a program of economic transformation of the island. The projects conceived in New Deal think-tanks at the middle of the

1930s would go on to be implemented in the 1940s—diversifying the industrial economy beyond cane sugar, building the state’s bureaucracy, and engaging in massive infrastructure projects built by government owned instrumentalities.

Nevertheless, these development projects entered into contradiction with the populist character of the movement that had taken PPD to power. The dialectic between populist movement and institutionalization of power came into play. On the labor front, this was clear. By the mid-1940s, CGT was no longer to be tolerated as an independent organization (it had been successfully independent because it was led primarily by Communist Party cadre). Slowly, the leadership was replaced by technocratic-minded officials, more adept at navigating the emerging bureaucracy (Galvin, 1979).

In 1945, Muñoz Marín, now firmly in power, moved against his one-time allies in the labor movement. The government demanded cooperation, and when it did not get it, the union was harassed and forced into a split, with a PPD-affiliated leadership taking over the largest groups. By the late 1940s, the labor movement’s leadership was not only bureaucratized but completely subordinated to PPD and Muñoz Marín: he presented himself as the only champion workers needed, integrating interest mediation in a corporatist yet personalized way into the emerging state’s structure—in which he always held nearly uncontested hegemony after Tugwell’s departure in 1946, and especially after he became the first elected governor in 1948.

Further on, PPD would abandon the “institutionalist” program and engage in making Puerto Rico a manufacturing enclave. This is what has been called the “ideological shift” to the right in its policy (Quintero, 1980). If the populist movement of the late 1930s and early 1940s gave it the mass support that would form the basis of PPD power for decades to come, it was this

shift that set the immediate conditions for the creation of the Commonwealth in the form it took in 1952. In terms of nationalism as a cultural expression, the road was set for its integration into the state also: the Institute of Culture would be a strong component of the new Commonwealth. Politically, PPD had found an institutional translation of their popular reform projects which could be equated with the formation a nation.

Conclusion

In the contrast between nationalisms I have drawn, it may appear as if Muñoz Marín's nationalism was able to overcome the limitations Albizu Campos' never surpassed by being a more pragmatic and less mythological political movement and discourse. There is an element of truth to this, but it is not altogether a true picture. "We represent today clarity before obscurity, and we should not permit the obscurity to tinge the clear light we uphold" was the answer Muñoz Marín gave a worker in the pages of *El Batey* regarding what his party sought.²⁴ Myth was not exclusive to one brand of nationalism—Vicente Géigel Polanco (1942), Muñoz Marín's right-hand man for most of the 1930s and 1940s, for instance, wrote in this same vein when talking about the identification between the leader and the "awakening of a people" as an epochal shift in Puerto Rican people. In fact, the very question he posed, denotes the nationalistic character of the enterprise I have called populist-nationalism: "Puerto Rico: ¿people or multitude?"

Yet there are differences not only in how the discourses of these nationalisms were articulated, but in how they were put into practice. It was not so much that the PNPR were an elitist group as that they were unable, discursively and in practice, to link themselves with the mass of the population. Once the old regime could no longer defend itself but through force, the

²⁴ Cited in Villaronga, 192.

radical-nationalists offered only force: in any naked and direct confrontation between two armed vanguards, the better armed is sure to win.

It is true that the populists, on the other hand, avoided confrontation and thus direct repression. But this cannot be regarded as their decisive stroke. It was rather their ability to construct a link, a living bridge, between the popular mass and the national leadership that enabled them to lead. And in time, to found a state, which although not sovereign, was presented as the institutional representative of the Puerto Rican people, that is, the nation. Yet, in doing so, in institutionalizing and building a state, populism became corporatism and the effervescence of the 1930s and early 1940s became the defeats and passivity of the late 1940s and 1950s that so frustrated the remnants of Albizu Campos' nationalists.

I do not wish, however, to make this into a story of two competing nationalisms without taking into account that the paths taken by the leadership of two parties cannot substitute for the political history of a people. The history of Puerto Rico is not the story of nationalism. My perspective is democratic. In spite of this, it is hard to deny that the popular mass had a crucial role in a project that did not necessarily equate with the extent of the transformations they might have desired or imagined. They pushed and lent their considerable forces to a nationalist project which absorbed their interests, translating their energies poorly into the structure of a state: the culmination of the populist-nationalist project was at the same time the death of the transformative intentions of the national-popular bloc. The state that came out of it all, the sovereignty-less Commonwealth, was its necessary limit—and as it turned out, a very restricted and restrictive limit.

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