

**The London School of Economics and Political Science**

**Constructing ‘the Other’, Practicing  
Resistance:**

**Public housing and community politics in  
Puerto Rico**

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**A thesis submitted to the Department of Sociology of the London  
School of Economics for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy,  
London, May 2010.**

## **Declaration**

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## **Abstract**

This thesis evaluates the colonial productions and contestations of Puerto Rican public housing and its residents as urban ‘others’. It combines a historical analysis of the political, spatial and material trajectory of the island’s projects with an ethnography of the resistances enacted by a group of residents- mainly women- from one such complex called ‘Las Gladiolas’ against an impending order of demolition and displacement.

I argue that while a context of socio-spatial exclusion and environmental determinism has pervaded the constructions of these postcolonial ‘projects’ in ways that have significantly discriminated against its residents, public housing has never been and can never be completed according to that limited governmental design- which today exists under the rubric of urban redevelopment- mainly because communities of solidarity, dissent and conflict emerge simultaneously with and against those formulations, taking on a life of their own in ways that collude with and escape rigid technocratic formulations of housing policy. The research presented emphasizes the symbolic struggle and material reality embedded in Las Gladiolas’s community politics which resists and disrupts a homogeneous vision of past, present and future urban space.

The historical analysis highlights the ways in which ‘othering’ was set in place within the colonial context of Puerto Rico’s urban development in a way which has allowed for the continued stigmatization of public housing projects and for the reproduction of residents’ disadvantage according to raced, gendered and classed discriminations. Those distinctions of difference also created the conditions for particular forms of resistance to emerge. The ethnographic data tells the story of how the political and physical enactment of the buildings’ deterioration intersected with residents’ informal, institutional and legal resistance to relocation. It shows how the contemporary production, experiences and contestations over public housing are not fixed, but multiple and highly ambiguous. The complex interplay that emerges between political, social and material elements demonstrates that the boundaries separating Las Gladiolas from its urban environ, and Puerto Rican housing agencies from the American ones, are in fact open and porous, fluctuating according to use, appropriations, and political and legal transformations.

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## **Acronyms**

ARUV	Administración de Renovación Urbana y Vivienda
AVP	Administración de Vivienda Pública
COPADIM	Proyecto Comunitario Para la Promoción y Apoyo del Desarrollo Integral de Menores
CRUV	Corporación de Renovación Urbana y Vivienda
ELA	Estado Libre Asociado
END	El Nuevo Día
FERA	Federal Emergency Relief Administration
HOPE IV	Housing Opportunities for People Everywhere Program
HUD	U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development
NCSDPH	National Commission on Severely Distressed Public Housing
PHA	Public Housing Administration
PRERA	Puerto Rico Emergency Relief Administration
PRPHA	Puerto Rico Public Housing Administration
PRRA	Puerto Rico Reconstruction Administration
UPR	University of Puerto Rico

## **Acknowledgements**

It is a pleasure to be able to thank the network of support- of both people and institutions- that enabled me to pursue my Ph.D. and complete this thesis. First and foremost, I want to thank my Supervisor, Dr. Suki Ali, whose intellectual and personal contributions and advice throughout the years have been of the essence in molding my development as an academic. I am also deeply grateful to my Second Supervisor, Dr. Ayona Datta, for providing guidance, critique and direction during this winding path. As intelligent, kind and strong women, both are excellent models for me to follow, and I am thankful for their contributions in what was sometimes a difficult process. I also wish to acknowledge Dr. Fran Tonkiss, whose initial encouragement of my work and passion for the LSE Cities Programme marked a definitive shift in my academic undertaking. That nurturing Centre proved to be an intellectual haven that garnered cross-UK and transatlantic friendships and working relationships. Specifically, I had the pleasure of working with a diverse and inspiring range of individuals as part of the NYLON cultural studies group and the 'Writing Cities' conferences. While too many to mention, their rigorous and creative thinking have been invaluable to my own.

I gratefully acknowledge the financial support given to me by the University of London's 'Central Research Fund', the London School of Economic's Postgraduate 'Research Studentship Scheme' and its 'In-Course Financial Support'. Most significantly, I am thankful for the Ingeborg Paulus Scholarship granted by the Sociology Department from 2006-2009, without which this work could not have been possible.

I wish to extend my heart-felt gratitude to a core group of friends and colleagues in Puerto Rico, London, and the United States and Europe (you know who you are) that engaged with my work, and its process, in various ways. I dedicate a special thanks to Cecilia Dinardi, Gwendolyn Beetham, and Vanesa Fernández for their help with final editing, and its inevitable emotional counterpart. I am still shocked by the patience of my friends and family, particularly my parents, in this long and often arduous process. Their kind encouragement, respect and love has undoubtedly been the rock that has held it all together.

Finally, I reserve the most loving thanks to my partner, Isaac Marrero, who has not only been a source of companionship since the beginning of the PhD, but perhaps more importantly for this project and my trajectory, has been a source of endless intellectual challenge and inspiration that I appreciate daily. Thank you.



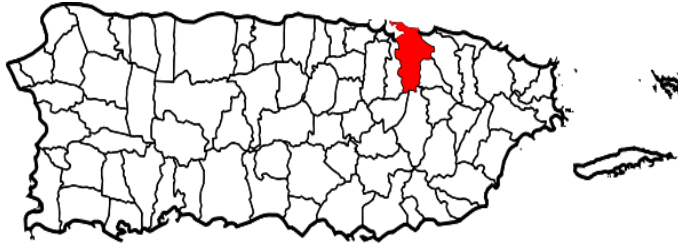


Figure A. Map of Puerto Rico, San Juan area in red.



Figure B. Map depicting Las Gladiolas in relation to Hato Rey, San Juan, Puerto Rico, and the world. Source: MASA.

## Introduction



Figure 1.1. Young residents gathered in Las Gladiolas central courtyard at dusk, after a rain-fall. April 2007. Source: Author.

‘The city, despite appearances, is an unsettled place.’  
Blomley (2004: 152)

Whether revered or reviled, public housing projects in the Caribbean island of Puerto Rico have always been sites filtering political debates and actions. As artefacts whose material production and maintenance depend on the island’s political and economic ties to the United States, they have been actively embedded in deliberations over cultural identity, national space and imagined futures. Specifically, public housings’ technologies of order, discipline and urban hygiene have served as devices that calibrate the nation’s uncertain path towards modernity and progress. As residential spaces that are now an integral and female-dominated part of the capital city of San Juan’s urban fabric, they have also inspired community making and harboured a range of resistances to authoritative directives that threaten to discriminate against residents. This thesis will examine the symbolic, political and material elements influencing these historical developments and playing a role today in one particular project’s (Las Gladiolas) battle against demolition. By analysing public housings’ production within the postcolonial nation *vis à vis* a conflict over displacement, my goal is to shed some light into the complex nature, contradictions, and possibilities of public housing politics within the current context of an aggressive neo-liberal urban renewal. At the same time, this work seeks to critically question and destabilize the dominant visions that proclaim high-rise public housing and its residents as failure. The following interrelated questions guided this exploration:

How were certain conditions of colonial difference historically produced, represented and contested in relation to the social, political and material levels of public housing?

And,

How have these conditions survived, changed or significantly departed in form when looked at through Las Gladiolas: its buildings, residents’ struggle, and the legal controversy surrounding its demolition?

Drawing on both archival and ethnographic research, the chapters that follow stress the temporal and spatial processes through which public housing has come about, tracing the productions (Chapter 3 and 4), multi-sited reassertions (Chapters 4 and 5) and varied challenges (Chapters 6 and 7) to a complex logic that has cast public housing as an urban ‘other’.

### **1.1. Las Gladiolas: local ‘paradox of invisibility’, global mechanisms of renewal**

In 2006, a group of residents from the Las Gladiolas *caserío* (the name typically given to public housing in P.R., often in derogatory terms) set an important precedent in the island’s political history by waging the first class-action lawsuit against both State (Puerto Rico Public Housing Agency – PRPHA) and Federal (Housing and Urban Renewal Agency- HUD) agencies in order to oppose the recently announced decision to implode their four towers. By including the American housing agency in their complaint, it made the links between their local battle and the nation’s wider status as an *Estado Libre Asociado* (Free Associated State) explicit. Often dubbed ‘the oldest colony in a postcolonial world’ (Dávila 1997: 2), this ‘halfway’ position between statehood and independence- granted in 1952 and called a ‘Commonwealth’- translates into American citizenship for all Puerto Ricans without the right to vote for the American president, and partial political autonomy through self-administration with an ultimate adherence to the U.S. federal machinery (judicial, monetary, political and tariff systems). As one of only a few places that was not granted a national state in the waves of decolonization, Puerto Rico’s coloniality is unique because of the global resonance of so many of its resulting characteristics. Specifically, it was the precursor to processes normally associated to globalization such as export-processing zones, tax-free havens, and the use of cheap contracted local labour for foreign manufacturers. It was also the place where women’s bodies were experimented on for the production of the contraceptive pill (Briggs *ibid.*; Colón-Warren and Alegría-Ortega 1998; Ostalaza Bey 1986). Moreover, it exemplifies many of the trends associated with globalization, expressing a fundamental hybridity in its racial categories; containing unseemly political associations in the context of imperialism; and having flexible and contradictory cultural, economic and political enactments between ‘nation’ and ‘identity’ (through, for instance, very open senses of language, geographical borders, literatures, etc.). Politically, debates over ‘the status question’ in both popular and informal circles is so widespread in the island and amongst its Diaspora population in the continental U.S. that it is denominated “the national sport”. Despite the divided sentiments which the political ‘status question’ arouses, the ‘colonial vestiges’ of that ‘nebulous and malleable’ status (Dietz 2003: 181) are no longer popular with any of the three main political parties (pro-Commonwealth, pro-Statehood and pro-Independence). Nowadays, it is most often agreed that this must be resolved

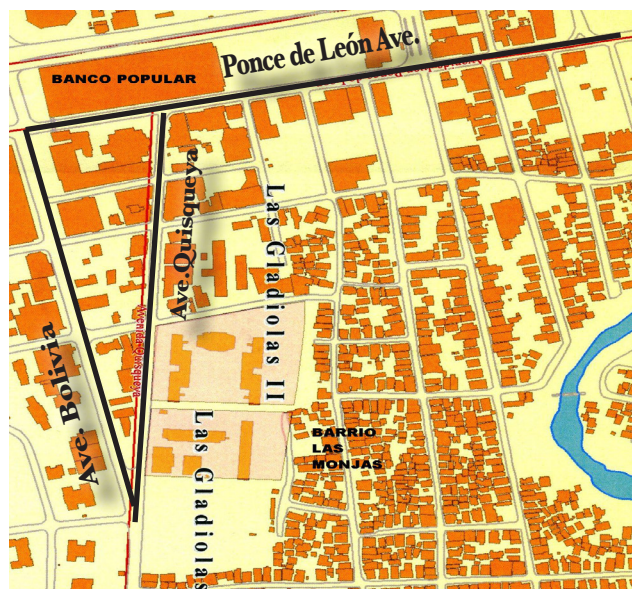
in some definitive way once and for all by either becoming the fifty-first state, or an independent nation. Nevertheless, the most recent referendum held on this topic suggested citizen uncertainty or unwillingness to make that choice, when faced with it.

The Gladiolas residents drew from the institutional particularities of this contentious 'status' in their 2006 class action lawsuit to claim that the neglectful maintenance of their living space, the order issued for demolition, and the pursuance of their relocation were not only unlawful, but also the responsibility of *both* the local and federal housing authorities. By insisting on such a co-authored negligence of their towers, the bureaucratic relationship between HUD and the PRPHA was surfaced, and the typically subsumed colonial boundaries that structure it, highlighted. When, for instance, HUD issued a legal motion for a quick 'summary' dismissal of the case, they had to confront their own limits within the Commonwealth formula and accept the local jurisdiction's autonomous decision to dismiss their request (Aponte Rosario et al. v. Acevedo-Vilá et al. 2007). Putting HUD and PRPHA on the same level of accountability also stressed the local administration's reliance on the federal one, pointing to the structural 'culture of dependency' (Dietz *ibid.*) that defines that relationship. Indeed, despite some financial and decision-making autonomy, the ultimate power over housing policies has always been and still remains in HUD's hands. Therefore, despite the institutional overtones of the lawsuit, it will have reminded local officials that as far as colonial productions of domination over the island go, in practice, 'the United States (allegedly) does not depend on Puerto Rico in the way that Puerto Rico depends on the United States' (Sullivan 2007: 298). In those uneven relationships, Puerto Rico and all of its institutional and social organizations are equally considered an underclass by the U.S. counterpart.

The lawsuit contained an unofficial claim that deterioration and demolition were being manipulated to force residents out of their homes, thereby making them victims of a larger process of urban gentrification. Considering that their tall buildings, ranging from fifteen to seventeen stories high each, lie only a short block away from the island's main corridor of banking and finance, this was not such an unfathomable contention. The Avenida Ponce de León, or *La Milla de Oro* (the Golden Mile), as it is more commonly known, has historically been a focal point of San Juan's financial district, Hato Rey, not only



because of the vehicular access and movement that it facilitates within the car-congested city, but also because of its role in the larger national program of ‘designing power and identity’ (Vale 1992). By housing the island’s largest banks, including the ‘Banco Popular’ which stands towering and wide symbolizing ‘...the optimism of bourgeois rationality...the uncomfortable spirit of financial and architectural modernity’ (Rodríguez Juliá 2005: 66)<sup>2</sup>, that Avenue has had, and continues to hold physical and symbolic centrality in the development of the city. It transmits the island’s desire for a Wall-Streetesque financial hub, while also anchoring a number of urban plans and projects in its vicinity, such as the 1960’s ‘Model City’ Program (to be discussed in Chapter 4), the construction of San Juan’s central bus station, and more recently, various large ‘tren urbano’ (urban train) stops.



**Figure 1.2. Northern Hato Rey. Las Gladiolas Diagram in relation to Ponce de León, Avenida Bolivia and Avenida Quisqueya.** Source: Departamento de Vivienda de Puerto Rico (DV). Sistema de Información Geográfica (SIG). Secretaría de Planificación Estratégica y Servicios Técnicos (SPES). 2007. *Author superimposed outlines.*

Over the past few years, development efforts have consolidated around the urban program known as ‘San Juan- Ciudad Mayor: Metropolis del Caribe’ (San Juan, Major City: Metropolis of the Caribbean), making Hato Rey’s financial district a site of major public and private reinvestment in the city centre through a blue-print of ‘mass-produced, mass-marketed and mass consumed’ (Davidson and Lees 2005: 1167) gentrification. Described locally with pride as ‘a Caribbean urban dream’ (Rivera Soto 2008)- a phrase whose very tone and composition emphasizes the regional and international significance

of pursuing such a modelled vision- the project has included, amongst other things: the development of a convention centre, a waterfront redevelopment project, the construction of sports complexes and entertainment arenas, the expansion of the ‘urban train’, and the ‘revitalization’ of the old cities of Santurce and Río Piedras (Oficina de Prensa 2005; Plan Rio 2010)<sup>3</sup>. Within the year I spent on the field, the sections of the Ponce de León Avenue which lie closest to Las Gladiolas changed its look and uses with the erection of a new Starbucks fitted with its distinctive green parasols on street level; a huge and exclusive multiplex ‘Fine Arts’ cinema (only the second in the island to feature international films); and some tall elaborate structures, acting as signs announcing that one was in ‘Hato Rey’ [Figures 1.3 and 1.4]. When I returned to London, construction in that major road continued steadily. Such shifts were similar to the kind of cultural gentrification that began in the late 1990’s in Old San Juan and parts of the workers’ district in Santurce (Santiago Valles 2005: 194). They were a stark contrast to what was happening just down the road- on the way to Las Gladiolas.



**Figure 1.3. The glitz of the financial district: On left, new Fine Arts Cinema and ‘Banco Popular’ are framed by groomed landscape. Source: Rashido.**

On the uppermost section of Bolivia Avenue, a perpendicular street to the Ponce de León which one must travel through to get to the Las Gladiolas towers, there are a number of expensive eating spots outlined by a row of short landscaped palm-trees which are visited by the bankers and executives working nearby [Figure 1.5]. But as one moves down that road, the seemingly con-

solidated world of that financial sector is quickly left behind and replaced by a landscape of what looks like unplanned messiness, with some nondescript private condominiums on one side, a large empty white building that used to house the *reggaetón* 'Lion Label' recording studio on the next corner, as well as a couple of abandoned lots filled with garbage and debris across the street. The rhythm, dynamics and uses of this lower end [Figures 1.6 and 1.7] will immediately strike the driver/traveller as different to those evidenced in the first block. In fact, San Juanero's know that if you continue going down the Bolivia Avenue- which then turns into Quisqueya Street, and eventually terminates on the Barbosa Avenue- that increasingly barren landscape is dominated by scattered cheap car mechanic shops, several inexpensive supermarkets, and some government buildings. It is, in other words, rarely visited or passed through unless necessary, or as a possible bypass of heavy traffic.

In referring to the neglected feel of that area, a friend recently characterized it as 'a trip back to the 80's'. This insightful and temporally-oriented observation undoubtedly arose from the contrast which that seemingly 'backwards' environment exhibits in relation to the flurry of forward-moving gentrification of the colliding financial district. Such an illusion of temporal fixity within this sector, south of the 'Golden Mile' and within which Las Gladiolas is immersed, is due to an entrenched form of urban poverty, where certain groups are structurally unable to engage with the many goods, services and political opportunities that the island's society and its technological developments are producing: 'poverty in the context of abundance... the negation of the kind of equality predicated in our society (Colón Reyes 2005). That symbolic urban frontier makes this reality that much more explicit in that it pits the successes and failures of a capitalist society one next to the other [Figure 1.6]. Given the kind of conflict the future of Las Gladiolas has produced, it would seem that the tension implied by the collision of those two contrasting worlds may have reached its limit.

Yet, while it is increasingly recognized that the division between wealth and poverty in Puerto Rico is growing at an accelerated pace, the spatial mechanisms through which this is made apparent, such as the ones described above and complained about by Gladiolas residents, are rarely appreciated and more frequently obfuscated by the scale and glitz of new and rapid urban development. The political manoeuvres supporting such changes, such as the



**Figure 1.4.** Panoramic shot of intersection of Bolivia and Ponce de León Avenues.  
Source: Rashido



**Figure 1.5.** Northern segment of Bolivia Ave. Behind palm trees on the right, one can find some exclusive eateries.  
Source: Andrea Bauzá.



Figure 1.6. Above. Banco Popular, as seen from lower ends of Quisqueya Ave., in front of Las Gladiolas sidewalk. Source: Author.

Figure 1.7. Below. Southern segment of Bolivia Ave. Gladiolas tower behind gas station on left. Source: Author.

HUD-approved demolition of Las Gladiolas, get subsumed under the catch language of ‘deconcentrating’ urban poverty (Crump 2002). Most recently, HUD’s ‘Housing Opportunities for People Everywhere Program’ (HOPE VI)<sup>4</sup> program has been the local government’s most effective institutional arm facilitating the razing of old public housing for the subsequent introduction of market rents and tenant-based vouchers. This program was adopted in the early 1990’s as a way to transform ‘severely distressed’ public housing in the United States by altering their physical shape and deconcentrating poverty (National Commission on Severely Distressed Public Housing 1992). Its policies are founded upon a ‘binarised understanding of the relationship between technology and society in which technology was assumed to have a determining effect on quality of life’ (Jacobs et al. 2007: 7)- an ever-present trend in public housing’s development which will be looked at in more detail in the coming chapters. After its introduction at the national scale, a joint commission was set up between HUD and PRPHA in 1991 determining that, due to their generally rundown state and an institutional lack of funds to maintain upkeep, all the island’s tall public housing buildings should be demolished and replaced by new mixed-income ones, in scattered low-rises, commonly called ‘walk-up’ apartments<sup>5</sup>. Housing studies scholar John Flint (2002: 625) argues that environmental determinism and design interventions, as well as an emphasis on social mix all strategies and techniques used by public housing agencies to reconstruct their territories of governance and control targeted populations.

This proposed ‘fix’, which reduces the actual number of dwelling units, does not attend to the need for new ones. In San Juan alone, 52,000 housing units, (27% of the total 190,113) were needed in 2005 (Alameda Lozada and Rivera Galindo 2005). Beyond depleting the total stock of low-income housing (Vale 2002; Lees 2008: 2454), the policy is accompanied by a ‘welfare to work’ condition where a ‘Temporary Assistance for Needy Families’ (TANF) programme requires tenants to find work of 30 hours per week within two years of assistance (Wilén and Nayak 2006: 221); a proviso which pays little attention to single mothers who do not have access to child care and who, therefore, are unable to fulfil the criteria of ‘job-ready workers’ (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development and Office of Policy Development and Research 1999: 4). Therefore, while presumably based on equity principles, new modernising community designs are in fact traversed by a rhetoric of re-

form founded upon systemic forms of discriminations which end up justifying privatization and displacement (Smith 2006: 278). HOPE IV is specifically being used with the affluent and middle class aesthetics in mind as a device through which to transform urban space by refurbishing city centres, ‘cleaning out’ whatever remnants of pre-modern living may be left scattered around the corners and alleys of those centres (Hackworth 2002; 2007; Johnston, Poulsen and Forrest 2007; Walton and Wild 2007; Popkin, Buron et al. 2000). By peripheralizing and dispersing the poor, the interests of private industries, particularly construction and development ones, are being protected and urban social justice and a fair distribution of resources are adversely affected (Fainstein and Servon 2005; Zukin 1987). This process of dispossession is precisely what Gladiolas residents feared they were being subjected to, and were protesting against.

But beyond HOPE VI’s policy of demolition, Las Gladiolas also came to be impacted over the years by other acts that tacitly accumulated support for the new desired social mix, and the kinds of urban spaces associated with them. One was the widespread reporting of stories which attributed crime, deterioration and ‘rotting’ (Navarro 1994) to their high-rise structures and residents (to be discussed in Chapter 5-7). Urban scholar Lawrence Vale (2002) described a similar phenomenon in the United States, where negative media depictions reinforce the stigma of public housing projects as both person *and* place-based by sending messages based on societal prejudices rooted in racial, ethnic, class and gender biases which, in turn, link the environment and geographies of the buildings and neighbourhoods to residents themselves. But stigmas are not just significant in terms of their productions, they are also important in terms of their effects which can range from: undermining the confidence of residents; business becoming reluctant to locating near them; private sector services withdrawing from the area; and the quality of public services getting undermined (Hastings and Dean 2002: 172). Such connections are facilitated by the power of stereotypes, which Stuart Hall (1997: 257-59) has described as a ‘mechanism of exaggerated categorizations’:

‘[it] reduces, essentializes, naturalizes, and fixes difference...its practice of ‘closure’ or exclusion [...] symbolically fixes boundaries and excludes everything which does not belong. And [...] it tends to occur where there are gross inequalities of power [...] directed against the subordinate or excluded persons’.

As will be made clear through the thesis, both in Las Gladiolas and public housing in Puerto Rico more generally, essentialist stereotyped images have cast its residents alongside their residential buildings as aberrant socio-physicality, inherently faulty, responsible for their own physical exclusion and problems, and in need of management. Rooted on the naturalization and expulsion of difference, these socially divisive perceptions have come to be understood as accurate, rather than undeserved. In distinguishing between appropriate (middle class) and subordinate cultures, they have not only enabled public housings' symbolic and discursive exclusions (Quinones Rivera 2006: 168), but also political and physical ones. In the case of Las Gladiolas, for example, they have also served to depart the towers from people's own mental maps. While most people I asked seem to know 'of' Las Gladiolas ('wasn't that place really dangerous and demolished?'- was the usual remark), the mental 'click' about where it actually stood was only made once the nearby *Milla de Oro*, or the iconic 'Banco Popular' building were mentioned. Thus, despite Las Gladiolas's hyper-visible towers in terms of their size, central location, infamous reputation, and frequent media appearances, few people can actually pin-point where it is; creating what I would call a *paradox of invisibility*. Sedimented prejudices have directed gazes away from it, making it- quite literally- invisible or difficult to find. Such is the quiet but powerful hand of stereotypes which enable past, current, and future dispossessions (Blomley 2004: 34).

These discriminations and neo-liberal resurgence of middle-class, mixed-income 'city-living' as *the* idealized model to follow<sup>6</sup> are further backed by the intensified surveillance and policing of spaces such as Las Gladiolas (Lees 2008, 2004; Engle Merry 2001). Disciplinary spatial governmentalities have been described as 'middle-class revanchism' (Smith 1997: 139) 'wherein fear of the other justifies displacement and redevelopment, and the need for redevelopment [...] legitimizes the violence of displacement and marginalisation' (Kern 2010: 210). In Puerto Rico, ordering the social according to spatialized regulations and strategies filtered through a 'fear of the other' run deep in the island's history, stretching way beyond the latest planning strategies and into the physical and ideological production of the modern colonial State. The spatiality of the island's urban difference was cemented during the period of industrialization when masses of labouring poor were lured from rural areas



into the emerging city centre, fusing social, urban and building typologies<sup>7</sup>. These productions, to be analysed in Chapters 3-4, are today being reinforced through security interventions that meddle with public housing spaces and its residents to move them at will.

By way of example, as recently as February 16 2010, a raid on the Gladiolas towers which ‘brought sniff dogs’, ‘broke panels placed over dysfunctional elevators where children play’ and ‘broke fences’, was carried out as an official response to an alleged shoot-out that had occurred that very morning within the premises (Justicia Doll 2010). According to the leader of the resident association, Mirta Colón Pellecier, the shoot-out was used as yet another excuse and part of a devious ploy to scare residents out of their housing complex. The same day of the above-mentioned raid, the Police Superintendent José Figueroa Sancha publicly supported the invasion by quoting the ‘illegal takeover of apartments used to store weapons and *muertos*- which are blocks of drugs’ (Inter News Service 2010). Suggesting that residents manipulated the press for their own questionable ends, he added that an objection such as Mirta’s (the leader) was often made ‘to prevent police intervention’ and would not deter them from future operations. Supported by a 2.3 million-dollars granted by the island’s new government administration<sup>8</sup>, their resolve was not to be doubted (Díaz Alcaide 2010): Beyond the seven minor invasions carried out from January to February 2010 alone, a larger much more publicized stint had also been pursued earlier in December 2009 ‘to seize illegal occupiers and stop drug trafficking activity’ (Prensa Asociada 2009). This had also been highly criticized by residents for ‘physical and emotional intimidation’, and it prompted the recently consolidated island-wide ‘Coalición Cero Desalojo’ (Coalition Zero Displacement), made up of poor communities threatened by displacement, to issue a statement of solidarity with Las Gladiolas (Associated Press 2009). These so-called ‘rescue’ missions were, however, not new. Most famously, the 1990’s security policy *Mano Dura Contra el Crimen* (Stern Hand Against Crime) had legalized the use of the National Guard and State police for militarized crackdowns in housing developments and made the erection of border-walls and security outposts around all of the island’s projects compulsory (Chapter 5 will review its practices in more detail). Las Gladiolas, ‘long known for its shootouts and drive-in drug transactions, the place where even ambulance and fire-fighting crews refused to venture in’ (Navarro 1994), had been one of the principal urban public housing targets of that original policy.

Despite it being considered a failed security strategy, the brief episode above indicates a resurgence in the same.

Together with the other marginalizing trends of gentrification, these factors have all actively contributed to the Gladiolas buildings' advanced decay. It has also diminished the number of residents from an original 700 families to only 39. The few that remain continue to sternly resist and condemn their removal. Such unprecedented resistance has exceeded all expectations<sup>9</sup> and, four years on, after having had their case dismissed in 2008 by the local Court, their fate awaits its 'resolution' by a second, and now Federal Court of Appeals. At the same time, there has been a surge in civil society groups and alliances claiming their rights to the city. Like the leader and the Coalition quoted before, residents, activists and other supporters are contesting neo-liberal visions of urban renewal, highlighting their discriminatory mechanisms through their creative resistances, everyday practices, and emerging legal claims for rights. Given that these challenges are often and predominantly being waged by poor women (Colón Reyes 2005; Hernández Angueira 2005; Ríos González 2005), their voices will be more obviously featured in the forthcoming narrative. Their contestations demonstrate that the layering of material and representational processes is not (and has never been) a seamless or straightforward process of domination over urban 'others'; but a dynamic and gendered interaction.

The environment just described is, of course, not particular to Las Gladiolas nor Puerto Rico alone. As Kathie Newman and Elvin K. Wyly's (2006: 52) study of resistances to displacement in New York City have argued, 'gentrification is not a minor phenomenon that affects a few communities; it is evidence of vast urban restructuring'. Moreover, as Blomley (2004: 30) has contended, local forms of gentrification are part of an increasingly globalizing logic of urban governance in which city governments are encouraged 'to engage in more aggressive programs of place-making, positioning themselves as platforms in an emergent economy of flows'. Puerto Rico's strategies of socio-spatial containment, which seek to position the urban node of Hato Rey as an idealised city centre, are not outside this logic. In this sense, it is a place from where '...we can begin to address the manner in which the grand scheme is linked to the multiple realities of the everyday; the global revealed in the local' (Keith 1996: 138). I will therefore address the particularities of Las Gladiolas as 'minor' examples of the localized mechanisms through which a

global postcolonial logic is made palpable. Without trying to claim that ‘the metonymic powers of the local can alone render visible the nature of the whole’ (*ibid.*), I nevertheless stress the historical context and the socio-political trends of this colonially charged local space. Its embeddedness in an ongoing process of ‘creative destruction’ can elucidate the subtle but powerful links between various discriminations, spatial production, and contestations. David Harvey (1989) has similarly argued that focusing on the multiple layers and scales that may be involved in particular social processes like local grassroots movements can shed light on their politics transcend from the particular to a broader or more universal context.

In employing this more ‘minor’ focus of a multi-layered local process, I also hope to avert what I believe to be a dangerous line of scholarly research that, in wanting to generalize (or, homogenise) the experience of modern displacement, argues that gentrifying and non-gentrifying neighbourhoods are equally impacted by experiences of movement (Johnston et al. 2007); or, that relocation and its effects are somehow more ‘neutral’ than displacement (OTB Research Institute for the Built Environment 2010). If we look at the colonial displacement policies through the case study of Las Gladiolas (as public housing), and pay attention to residents’ attitudes and vulnerability in the face of relocation, these suggest that their experiences are far from neutral<sup>10</sup> and integrally influenced by compounded histories and layers of urban exclusion.

Therefore, as outlined in the opening section, this thesis is framed through a belief that to understand the mechanisms of ‘vast urban restructuring’, it is crucial that we first grasp the historical circumstances that made them so. Seen through this light, the community dispute advanced by the residents of Las Gladiolas to be detailed in Chapters 6-7 (themselves diverse and heterogeneous in social composition) highlights how it is not just a ‘minor phenomenon’, but a practice that is unsettling the common justifications made for displacement; reasons that have typically been underwritten by portrayals of residents and their space as essentially fearful, decayed and different. By disturbing that mainstream logic, their resistances are providing an alternative avenue through which to glimpse the lasting legacies and shifting terms of urban politics. They also underline the fault lines of a problematic colonial status.

## 1.2. Situating the production of colonial subjects, resistances and urban marginality

In tracing the history of public housing, Puerto Rican scholars have tended to look at their insertion into urban space as one of the many effects of the social, political and cultural overhaul that took place during the island's period of modernization from the 1930's onwards<sup>11</sup>. Kelvin A. Santiago-Valles's *Subject People and Colonial Discourses* (1994) stands out from within this rich body of work for the links he made between processes of colonialism, discourses, and micro/macro political developments and spatial change. His analysis presents the first fifty years of U.S. colonialism in Puerto Rico (1898-1947) as a process of social and urban spatial dichotomization produced through textual and cultural representations which projected the laboring poor ('native subordinates') as subjected, feminized and infantilized. He argues that, in their emerging 'author-functions', local government, economic and intellectual elites contributed to this elaboration of colonial domination by separating themselves as different from 'transgressive and allegedly backwards inhabitants' (241), stigmatizing the latter through raced, gendered and classed discourses that, in turn, had a definite impact on policy-making. This was the environment, to be explored in Chapters 3 and 4, within which the promotion of public housing as an answer to slums emerged. And this is precisely the nexus in which Jose Fusté's more recent work (2006; 2010) shares Santiago-Valles's concern for socio-spatial dichotomization.

Drawing on Lefebvre's (1991) spatial conceptualizations, Fusté follows the ways in which the discourses and racialized assumptions of certain 'subject people' became institutionalized through policies of public housing '(b)ordering', while reproducing the government's hegemonic benevolent housing policies (*ibid.*). *Borders*, he argued, were operationalized as either physical or imagined space, while bodies were spatially *ordered* by the dominant class of white Puerto Ricans of Iberian descent (called *Criollos*). This turned public housing into the 'permanent testament of the supposed "disordered" nature of working-class Puerto Ricans *vis-à-vis* those from the "ordered" strata of society' (2010: 46). While his look at how discourses of a specific urban artifact were dispersed into public imaginaries helped inform my analysis of how the physicality of public housing projects was always tied to the government's urban planning directives, as mediated by symbolic versions of progress and

carried out through both material and discursive practices of segregation, Fusté's genealogy admittedly does not explore the dynamics of resistance subsequently emerging due to those conditions in *caseríos* (2010: 42).

In that respect, Santiago-Valles had suggested that aspects of resistance are inseparable from the colonial discursive productions of 'subject people'. Indeed, he argues that the subjection of subaltern subjects by privileged 'natives' was never actually complete because the former continued to threaten colonial 'normalized knowledges and discursive practices' (Bhabha 1994: 126 cited in Santiago-Valles 1994: 241) by resisting dominant constructions through their actions and illegal popularities. In her analysis of the trajectories of American colonial education, Sharon Sullivan (2007) followed a similar line of inquiry and traced the discursive productions of Puerto Rican ignorance/knowledge, arguing that even though subjects' resistances to multiple forms of colonial oppression have been one of the fundamental sites where knowledge of 'the other' (as discredited, weak, etc.) has been manipulated and manufactured from above (i.e. for the United States), nevertheless, 'Puerto Rican resistance has not been totally co-opted by this colonialist process' (155). In other words, she also insists on the integral connections to be found between discursive forms of authority and subject resistances in the productions of knowledge. These critical intersections between the discursive legacies of colonialism, urban socio-spatial discriminations, and resistances will inform my own analysis of the multi-sited production of public housing, and Gladiolas residents' struggle.

Such links have more recently been addressed by a current strand of cultural studies – particularly strong in the mainland U.S.- which recognizes the kinds of non-traditional yet politicized actions emanating from public housing because of its social and geographical exclusions. Specifically, they concentrate on the links emerging between the everyday struggles of marginality in 'the ghetto' to the sub-cultural and popular production of the booming *reggaetón* (rap-style) musical genre (Negrón-Muntaner 2004; Rivera 1998; 1997; 1992-93, Rivera et al. 2009). As a form of resistance rooted in residents' identity as 'other' to the city, the lyrics of *reggaetón* have a decidedly raced and gendered urban spatial aesthetics attached to them<sup>12</sup> (Dinzey Flores 2009). Given the contradictions that can emerge when a genre, rooted in the experience of poverty, gains incredible fame- and riches- its lyrics are seen to be at once criti-

cal of the current socio-economic urban divisions *and* celebratory of the commercialized capitalist logic of a music industry that promotes said divisions. Despite this important angle of analysis for understanding different ways of inhabiting and protesting in the city, the actual lived aspects of community resistances within projects are less attended to in these studies.

Moreover, while there has been an important and growing interest in subaltern cultures of resistance in Puerto Rico, I would argue that the continued focus on their larger relationship to nationalism and the status question have detracted scholars in the island from pausing to look more carefully at the complex grammar of public housing community struggles. One notable exception, quoted frequently throughout this thesis, is Zaire Dinzey Flores's (2007) work on the racial aspects and ideologies underpinning and reinforcing public housing's boundaries as a socio-physical fortification. Her study of the Southern city of Ponce's development in relation to race, public housing security policies, physical separation, and residents' relationship to those mechanisms provides an insightful sociological angle that is otherwise lacking in the existent literature of public housing – as an anchor between the past and present. While her analysis was not about resistances or community organizations *per se*, it did share methodological and thematic interests with my own, as she incorporated individual women's voices and their perceptions of public housing space as central towards understanding contemporary urban divisions and exclusions. Based on extensive interviews with mostly women from both public and gated suburban housing projects, her investigation asked questions about community segregation and racial discrimination. Indeed, her conclusion that despite historical government efforts otherwise, residents' are nevertheless resisting orders by **staying put and forging community**, strongly resonates with residents' resistances against relocation to be explored in Chapter 7. But because her interest was mainly on the urban divisions (real and perceptual) caused by the imposition of gates/borders during *Mano Dura*, there remains a space for investigating how a community struggle erupts from within and against those divisions, and how it is made manifest. That is, there are still significant gaps in approaching public housing as a place that reflects a historical concern for a national agenda of modernisation *and* a contemporary expression of urban gendered/raced/classed community resistances. Moreover, the way materiality is immersed in ideological spheres

and urban conflicts such as neo-liberal urban renewal struggles are seldom looked at in this dual temporal sense either.

Given the kind of focal schism evidenced in Puerto Rican studies of public housing which I have been describing, my work also came to be enriched by those which looked more closely at community movements. Liliana Cotto's (1993; 2007) empirical study of how grass-roots social movements, urban spatial developments, and politics merged in Puerto Rico to deepen the practices and discussion around 'the right to housing' was especially pertinent to my work. Like the historical and contemporary analyses mentioned before, she engaged extensively with how discourse (as found in newspapers and government documents) contributed to unequal structural circumstances, and similarly emphasizes the simultaneous processes of subordination and resistance that the afore-mentioned authors were keen to stress. But beyond mediatized discourses, her study combines an ethnographic concern for the resistances of 'subject people' and the lived mechanisms of emerging social movements. She argued that land rescue movements (*rescates*) from the 1970's (and their brief resurgence in the 1990's) destabilized the island's capitalist-colonial orders by creating a new civil society, thereby shifting political culture. They proved particularly instrumental in teaching current movements to use professional support; to combine institutional and non-institutional forms of protest; and to rely both on propaganda and external organizations such as the legal ones for help. Yet despite such contributions, they were also riddled with political and colonial contradictions. Specifically, as neoliberalism emerged, the State adopted the role of 'facilitator' of those movements (rather than its enemy), effectively controlling them from above by: promising rewards if votes were offered to particular political parties, using a corporate strategy of housing provision, and making the role of the functionary one of 'organizer', rather than intermediary of conflict. This '*Criollo* version of neoliberalism' (133-34) led to the demobilization of *rescates*, as they accepted their subordinate position of dependence to functionaries (assistentialism) and a belief in voting for rewards (a common Latin American phenomenon called 'clientilism') (Yúdice 2003). Cotto also often found women to be in leadership positions within the organization of the movement— a finding shared by Dolores Miranda (1994: 142) in her study of women's leadership roles during the 1980's and 90's in Puerto Rico's urban community movements that were concerned with issues ranging from the use of natural resources, environmentalist causes, health,

education and the right to housing. Both suggest that while the upsurge of social movements created a new space for women's leadership and civil society, this did not translate into a fundamental change in their traditional roles as workers and/or home-makers.

Together, these histories shed light onto how popular sectors created unconventional forms of 'doing politics' while- due to the rise of neo-liberalism and the continued colonial condition of the island- they also coexisted with patterns of dependency and lack of political autonomy (Cotto 1993: 129). *Rescate's* de-politicization is a particularly significant precedent to public housings' resistances because, as Cotto notes, it molded the way to how popular contestations today are defined more by the practical and limited interests attainable through legal mechanisms than by the desire to change institutional structures. The historical lens also shows how understanding the extent or limits of women's participation in these kinds of battles is inseparable from the wider context of both progressive struggle and traditional gender roles they are immersed in. Finally, it suggests that lived conflicts, such as Las Gladiolas's, may be understood not only by looking at large-scale political maneuvers, but by paying attention also to how residents manage to resist with, through, and despite such cooptation.

With this lens in focus, the ensuing analysis from Chapters 5-7 is also connected and concerned with problematizing any clear notion of community at two different levels: One draws on Lynn Staeheli's (2007: 7) notion that community 'is full of, and is constituted by, contradictions [that] operate simultaneously...[it] is the terrain that must be negotiated as particular constructions of citizenship are put forward, But it is not a settled terrain...'. In this sense, we will see how residents of Las Gladiolas expressed ambiguous attitudes towards the struggle against demolition and tended to act according to that ambivalence. At the second interconnected level, it looks at subjectivities, affect, and memories as crucial elements in the process of conflict, redefinitions of home, and urban renewal. Like Keith Jacobs (2002) argued, this angle helps to understand the way subjectivity affects housing, the relationships that are constituted through it, and how it impacts the negotiations of self and place. Both of these angles respond to calls from housing studies scholars for the need to conduct more holistic research about the experience of tenants and social exclusion (Arthurson and Jacobs 2003; 2004; Lawrence 2005



In Las Gladiolas, the complex context of loss did not characterize their opposition entirely as a social movement in the way Cotto's *rescates* were (nor in the way Castells (1990: 152-155) has defined collective consumption in his study of public housing) even though, as I completed fieldwork, it was beginning to conform to larger organized frameworks against island-wide displacement and challenges to the status quo, like the Coalition mentioned earlier. Thus, in order to more adequately address their ambiguous memories, associations and practices of the conflict, I often refer to *jaibería*. This cultural notion refers to practices performed by the most oppressed subjects of colonialism who 'articulate a critique within the terms of that society being critiqued' (Hutcheon 1988). That is, by pretending to be aligned with the imperial power (in this case, the U.S. and its local forms of power) while actively mitigating the negative effects of their political and economic exclusion, subjugated individuals of an unequal colonial society act based on forms of what Homi Bhabha (1994) called 'mimicry'<sup>13</sup>. Rather than being openly resistant *vis-à-vis* the colonial system, this more intricate 'politics of caution' (Negrón-Muntaner 2007) provides an avenue through which to extricate some benefit from an otherwise crushing structure of discriminatory power. In their introduction to *Beyond Nationalist and Colonialist Discourses: the 'jaiba' politics of the Puerto Rican ethno-nation* (1997), Ramón Grosfoguel and Frances Negrón Muntaner argue that the ambiguity and subversion which characterizes *jaibería* are seductive and powerful tools which can turn colonialist accusations of islanders' weakness on their head. Sullivan (2007) adds that,

While there are no guarantees that *jaiba* politics will be effective [...] its stealthy ambiguity enables it to use the tools, rhetoric and goals of domination, including those of ignorance/knowledge, against themselves. This is especially important when there is no viable position outside structures of domination from which to fight in' (*ibid.* 164).

Thus, in a paradox of sorts, *jaibería* is made both strong and weak through its ambiguous complicity with systems of domination that render it a tool that works for and against residents at the same time. Drawing on Bhabha's 'mimicry', Stephen Legg (2008) has further stressed that these ambivalences are not to be taken merely as textual, but based on a very particular colonial context and materiality<sup>14</sup>. In this sense, I seek to read residents' open and often shifting forms of resistance as grounded on the realistic historical, political and material environment of the conflict and colonial environment they

are immersed in. For instance, if we were to see the situation where women manipulate or use the welfare system as a social entitlement as a form of *jaibería*, their actions would be interpreted outside the more common logic which blames them for State-dependence, and could be recognized instead as an active gendered questioning of the impossibility of decent salaried jobs in a context where unemployment and poverty sit uncomfortably alongside a national hypocritical discourse of moral work ethics (López 1994: 129). As an analytic lens, *jaibería* expands some of the current limits for interpreting resistance.

Furthermore, in pursuing a study of the historical production of public housing *alongside* a look at Las Gladiolas as an object of conflict that involved multiple actors (like media, social organizations, NGO's, academic institutions, residents, activists, architects, buildings, and authorities), I looked beyond analyses of the local context and turned also to the contemporary legacies of some of the seminal work which emerged from the Chicago school of urban sociology, which was highly influential to productions of knowledge in the island as well. Scholars such as Allan H. Spear (1967), Louis Wirth (1928), and later Julius William Wilson (1987) established some of the earliest studies focusing on poverty and segregation- mainly racial- as found in 'inner' city neighbourhoods or communities. Those original sociological studies of urban subcultures and the effects of mobility in the city were profoundly marked by a commitment to analysing, in socio-spatial terms, the everyday struggle of those living amidst protracted urban exclusion (what today have been coined as 'urban geographies of exclusion' (Sibley 1995)). This strand of inquiry was extended by another sector of American urban theorists in the 1960's and 70's when massive shifts were beginning to take hold of urban landscapes, impacting poor people's daily lives through urban renewal programs, particularly in New York City. Then, the subject of public housing's exclusion was approached by looking more closely at the impact of design on urban integration and community conviviality, cohesion and isolation (Jacobs 1962, 1970; Newman 1972).

The growing disquiet over the failures of modernity which were becoming apparent in families' new forms of violence, interpersonal conflict, crumbling relationships, and lack of identity due to a loss of traditional (and by extension better) culture and values, are perhaps best exemplified by Oscar Lewis' (1966) 'La Vida' – an ethnography of a Puerto Rican slum called 'La Perla'

(the Pearl). That study represented a foreign social scientific and masculine concern over a kind of poverty that claimed women's patterns of behaviour to be pathological- linking them to prostitution, health and poverty (Briggs 2002; Seda Bonilla 1969). In Chapter 4, we will see how this was in fact a legacy of links which had earlier been naturalized between slum space and moral character. At around the same time that Lewis's 'La Vida' was being widely read, Anthropologist Helen Icken Safa's (2000, 1995, 1964) studied the local impact of metropolitan growth on families, households, and community, being carefully attentive to the gendered dynamics in the same. Akin to Jane Jacob's community-oriented writings on 'perpetual slums' (1962: 291), her focus on relocation to public housing criticized the way in which the displacement of a once existent 'egalitarian ethic' (Safa 1975) from slums often led by women, created dependent communities controlled by the norms and institutions of the larger society in public housing, thereby limiting the economic and political rights of groups, and contributing to its failure as a communal project of human connection<sup>15</sup>. This dependence on the State is what Cotto referred to as 'assistentialism'.

Finally, in wanting to address those earlier concerns with the proliferation of the problems associated to urban inequality, and with the processes impacting the physical and social fabric of urban space, I also draw conceptually from critical urban and architectural scholar Dolores Hayden. She has argued that 'the politics of place construction' (1995)- with politics broadly understood as social issues, spatial design, technical mechanisms and political processes- hide the apparatus that renders many of the urban spatial landscapes we come to know as either 'natural' or pre-given, and that we should therefore endeavour to surface its otherwise occult face. Her notion of 'technical mechanisms' is in some respects comparable to Jacobs et al.'s (2007: 10) work (inspired by the analytic and methodological approach of 'Actor Network Theory'<sup>16</sup>) on 'socio-technical assemblages', where the latter is described as: '...a dispersed space that incorporates a number of locations where action takes place, knowledge is produced and visions dreamed, as well as artefacts, inscriptions and standards, human participants and materials' (12). In their study of 'the birth and death' of the Red Road high-rise project in Glasgow, the authors made the case that by focusing on the trajectory of an artefact like public housing, 'one comes to understand that context (those who make the machine) and content (what is inside the machine) cannot be distinguished; that they are part of the

socio-technical ‘coevolution’ of the world’ (*ibid.*). In a similar sense, and with a view towards the role of experience and imagination in built environment research, Jacobs’s (2002: 104) call for an urban ‘poetics of imagination’ arguing that, in order to ‘challenge complacency and stimulate new ideas’ there needs to be more significance placed on human encounters with physical environment.

Thus, Jacobs, Hayden’s and Jacobs et. al’s approaches all emphasize urban phenomena as multi-layered processes made of human elements and literal matter. Taking cue from their insights, I unpack public housing as a highly produced and contested artefact. On the one hand, I trace its hegemonic portrayals and productions as urban otherness by critically questioning the ideologies embedded in the discourses that mediated its ‘politics’, representations, and physical developments. On the other, without departing from a vision that considers human actors to be integral coproducers of urban artefacts and the historical socio-spatial landscapes they are immersed in, I look for moments and spaces in which the materiality and objects of public housing have operated as actors in their own right; how the buildings themselves act as historical registers in current debates over space (Rossi and Eisenman 1982; Weizman 2007).

Given my simultaneous concern with how the social can be read historically in the archives, ‘forensically’ (Weizman 2010) through spatial/material landscapes, and ethnographically through local community struggles<sup>17</sup>, in the following section I will introduce the reader to the urban frontier of Las Gladiolas by briefly describing my entry into it. Having already outlined the larger process of the district’s gentrification, I believe that visualizing the details of the towers’ spatial inequalities along a personal appreciation of its streetscape provides a *grounding* way to begin to critically interrogate why that area- and Las Gladiolas- has come to look and feel that way it does. This is my first step in rendering its boundaries visible, and thereby questioning the politics of its place construction.

### **1.3. Discovering and crossing the unfixed boundaries of public housing**

‘Spatially, the order of things is never more clearly revealed that through disruption’  
(Keith: 145).

#### **Crossing unfixed boundaries**

During my first phone conversation with Teresa, a young social worker known to have strong and useful links with Las Gladiolas due to her work with a project sponsored by the University of Puerto Rico (UPR) called COPADIM (Communitarian Project for the Promotion and Support of Minor’s Integral Development), she was immediately taken by what I stated to be my project (‘an investigation about women in Las Gladiolas and the conflict’). She offered to help in whatever way possible, and asked me to come over to her office located just down the road from Las Gladiolas that same afternoon or the next day so we could talk before introducing me to some of these women she ‘knew well’. Her enthusiasm felt like a god-send. Except for some preliminary readings of newspaper articles and broad comments made by the lawyers of the case who I had recently met, I knew very little about what was actually happening within Las Gladiolas, let alone how women were actually involved in the process. Thus, the prospect of ‘entering’ without some close connection was discouraging, to say the least. Moreover, I had been warned by many, including those first contacts, of the purported danger of going there without someone from ‘the inside’.

Teresa recommended that, on that first visit, I park my car inside the open-air parking lot of Gladiolas II [Figure 1.8], as it was a ‘safer option’ (implying potential car-theft) than leaving it outside somewhere along Quisqueya Street and that, from there, I should walk to her offices a bit further down the road. She explained that even though the guardhouse blocking the entrance to the towers was manned, both entry-ways were ‘open’ to the ins-and-outs of vehicular traffic, suggesting that I should drive in confidently, without stopping my car to announce myself to them. However, since those openings were replete with potholes, I should drive in slowly and carefully, making sure not to pop a tire or damage my car. Feeling anxious, nervous and excited about my literal entrance into what so many perceived as a forbidden zone of San Juan, I did

as indicated, wore covered shoes ('because there are all sorts of weird things laying around'), and stepped out of my cold, air-conditioned capsule to feel the ever-surprising punch of Caribbean heat. I walked confidently by the two police-men standing idly within their cool, air-conditioned outpost, through the same gates I had just crossed with my car, and back onto Quisqueya Street. Already, I was drenched in sweat. Having dyed my hair from blonde back to my natural brown the week before as a way to tone down what I knew- as an islander who grew up there- to be my visible white privilege, I still felt somewhat 'outside' myself and, paradoxically, unnatural. Furthermore, while I had attempted to balance a 'laid-back' look with one of a 'professional researcher' by wearing a short-sleeved cotton shirt with jeans instead of my usual summer skirts or dresses, the heat made the effort feel that much more excessive and contrived. Not even the weather allowed me to forget that I was, in so many ways, 'faking it'.

I took a right and walked down a long block that consisted (on my direct right-hand side) of short cement wall (1.7 meters) painted in blue along its upper edges and columns and in orange in all the space in-between [Figure 1.9]. It had a series of small red square holes at eye-level, just large enough so that one could peek through them and look into the space that lay directly in front of Tower 300. I saw patches of unkempt grass on the ground and pathways that led into and around the towers. Something about this very first impression of the wall's newly-painted, almost painfully-bright shades of colour set against the grimy-looking building behind it gave me the immediate (and perhaps anti-intuitive) sense that it was not 'outside' the parameters of Las Gladiolas or even 'dividing' it from the street, but rather that it was an integral part of its whole; that both the wall and the buildings, despite what seemed like an odd and artificial juxtaposition, were perhaps coupled from their very inception. It may have been because the pairing of old cement and bright fresh paint is, in fact, one of the most common and familiar urban features scattered all over San Juan (Sepúlveda 1997; Vivoni Farage 1998). I would later learn that some of the community members themselves had been the ones that painted that border-wall anew with paint bought from a supplier friend of an ex-resident that offered them '*pintura buena- de la Glidden*' (good paint, the 'Glidden' one) for a bargain price. According to Teresa, it was an act that meant to,



Figure 1.8. Entrance. Gladiolas II, courtyard, parking lot and Tower 301. Source: Author.



Figure 1.9. Walls. Gladiolas I and II; Towers A, B and 301. as seen from Quisqueya Ave. Source: Author

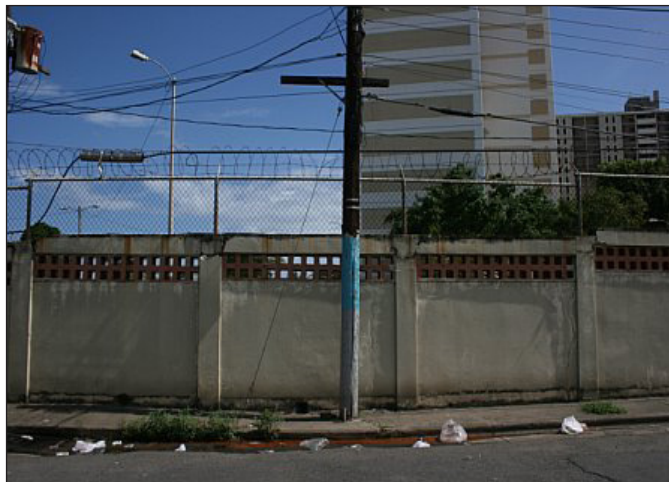


Figure 1.10. Walk. Perimeter wall as seen from Chile St. Gladiolas behind. Source: Author

‘...answer to the deterioration and intentional dismantling... to give incentives such as painting to the community, especially children, to care about their own living space’ (Teresa, interview, 2006).

Arcadio, one of the leaders, was even more emphatic in this assertion.

‘This paint is our product. What do we want to tell them with it? That we can do it. They should stop giving residents so much *mantengo* and allow the community to take some responsibilities...We can enable this ourselves’ (Arcadio, interview, 2007).

Clearly, taking control of the maintenance of that cement border-wall surrounding the perimeter of the complex and dividing it from the street had a meaning that transcended its strictly physical form. Its deterioration was a personal, community and political matter.

When I reached the end of the block, I looked right onto Chile Street and noticed that the careful paint-job characterizing the front had suddenly come to an end [Figure 1.10]. This street provides an ancillary connection to the poor community (*barriada*<sup>22</sup>) of houses called ‘Las Monjas’ (The Nuns), which I was later told by some residents is where some of their family members lived. A social worker also told me that, historically, ‘Las Monjas’ had rejected Las Gladiolas as a neighbour because of its public housing status and that, despite their own poverty, they considered their own forms of sociality as superior to those from the towers. It was something that had apparently been addressed later in workshops held between the leaders of the two communities for mediating their conflict. Back where I was standing, all I could see was a wall that hugged that side of the street in musty greyish tone of old cement, with black mouldy streaks - probably from the rain- stretching down from its top into the square peep-holes below. While this change of scenery felt slightly sinister, there was greater consistency in terms of colour palette and structural decay. There were also an extra few meters of fence and barb-wire added directly to the top of that wall (presumably there for security purposes). Like in the frontal one, electricity cables loomed above, only now they ran dangerously close to the barb-wire below. I noticed a pile of broken cardboard boxes and some small white and black trash bags stacked carelessly on the sidewalk. Looking ahead and directly across from that sombrely grey wall, I could clearly make out a light yellow, institutional-looking building a few more



meters down Chile Street. It was the *Emilio del Toro* elementary school which most Gladiolas children attended and which Teresa had told me to look out for, as it would mean I was almost there. I crossed and continued walking half a block along Quisqueya Street until I reached COPADIM's new temporary shelter: a large, bright yellow, two-storey house that serves as 'headquarters' to *Iniciativa Comunitaria* (Community Initiative- IC), an island wide community-oriented organization that provides services such as rehabilitation, social reinsertion and training programs for prostitutes, drug-addicts, and the homeless. Taking into consideration its physical proximity to Las Gladiolas and the support provided over the years to many of its residents, Dr. Vargas Vidot (IC's president) had kindly offered COPADIM that shared work-space soon after they had been denied contract-renewal of their offices in the premises of Las Gladiolas by the Housing Authority. Like the residents of the towers, COPADIM too had undergone displacement; one which struck at the very heart of the community's social fabric by impacting the crucial work carried out with its children. Theirs had been the last of an enforced exodus of whatever social services- like the 'Head Start' program- existed inside the towers.

I rang the orange-lit doorbell placed beside the front door, which was covered in protective security- bars. Once buzzed inside, I announced myself to a woman who sat behind a crystal barrier- like bank-tellers- and was asked to sit in a waiting area while someone came for me. In no time at all, I was ushered in by Laura (Teresa's colleague). We walked down a short corridor of both open and shut doors. At the end of that hallway, inside their office-space, the intimacy was palpable. There was an informal, family-like feeling to the setting: a small round table in the middle of a small and (typically) excessively cold office, featuring the loud, distinctive hum of a cheap, but powerful air conditioner. It was lunch time: people came in and out, the smell of Puerto-Rican lunch (meat, fried something or other, and rice and beans) bought from a nearby *cafetería* travelled through the air-con vents and filled the space with what I can only describe as rich olfactory delights that made my stomach rumble with a familiar pleasure only greasy foods can produce in a Caribbean sensibility; calls were re-directed elsewhere; a forty-something year-old woman who had recently turned-secretary for some of IC's work commented and interrupted our conversation in a friendly and intermitted manner; and, as I diligently (but sheepishly) opened my new 'note-taking' pad, I realized that saying 'no' to their insistency that I try a bit of their *macarrones con pollo* (maca-

ronis with chicken) may be appearing rude. Therefore, I reluctantly revealed my very un-Puerto Rican vegetarianism to them. As usual, chuckles and comments of disbelief followed. In that meeting, where a strong relationship of respect and ‘confidence’ began, she introduced me to a resident and mother who happened to be in the offices. That young woman, who lived alone with the five children she brought up in Las Gladiolas later walked me back to my car. As we strolled calmly back the same road described, she lamented the state of the towers, the departure of friends and neighbours through relocation, and expressed anxiety over the potential loss of her life-long home. After meeting them, the focus of my investigation- which had been broadly designed around women’s lives in public housing- was quickly narrowing to a focus on their relationships to what was clearly an important struggle over the potential loss of their homes.

While the movement I witnessed of cars and bodies around the premises was not bustling by any stretch of the imagination, it was not stagnant either. In what could be described as typical scenes of vibrant city centres, I saw homeless vagabonds, drug-addicts, street beggars and poor dishevelled individuals- the quintessential ‘others’ of urban life- wandering about the streets with no clear path. I also saw school children, young adults, and elderly individuals walking in and out of the towers’ entrance. I witnessed bankers and executives in suits stopping at the gas station for a fill-up. Students and children got in and out of cars to buy something at the same gas shop or in the *panadería* across the street. Workers in different kinds of uniforms walked to the bus stops along that street, or into the Ponce de León to grab a train. Women residents shuffled along on foot with children and grocery bags, or on their own going to work; disrupting the typical cultural accusation made against them that they are lazy dependant or unruly ‘welfare mothers’. Yet, while the movement of these bodies ‘spilled over’ beyond what would otherwise seem to be their circumscribed place, they also tended to keep to the imaginary boundaries that define social positions and relationships based on race, gender, and class. In America, spatial segregation is often explained in relation to a black versus white racial ordering of society. In Puerto Rico, however, racial discrimination operates based on a different logic (to be discussed in Chapter 3), where race combines with class disadvantage, culture and language to reproduce segregating class positions and interactions (Dinzey Flores 2005). Therefore, the poor women or men crossing the gas station did not mingle with the suited

men filling up their expensive vehicles. And while executives of all colours could visit their expensive restaurants freely; residents, especially young dark males, can move around those same tree-lined streets, but under constant police intimidation and camera surveillance, as well as under the pressures of limited financial resources and employment opportunities.

Feminist scholars have long argued that when space is found, used, occupied or transformed through everyday activities, of the kind I am describing here, boundaries become ambiguous and permeable, permitting the transgression of bodies from one category to another in a way that indicates the inherently political nature of the divide and the ample possibilities that exist for both politicizing and transforming through practices of disruption (Ahrentzen 2003; Rendell et al. 1999). Some argue that the literal and metaphorical space of boundaries is where inclusion and exclusion, belonging and otherness, us and them, meet *and* contest as ‘...part of the discursive materiality of power relations’ (Brah 2003). Terms such as ‘leaky bodies’(Shildrick 1997), ‘boundaries’ (Anzaldúa 1987), ‘border thinking’ (Mignolo 2000), ‘Diaspora’ (Biemann 2000; Brah 2003) and ‘margins’ (hooks 1990, 1997); have all been used as tools to avoid the essentializing tendencies of colonial discourses and practices that divide space into highly binarised senses. These openings further relate to the way human and cultural geographers have variedly conceptualized public and private spheres, or realms. Staeheli (1996), for instance, argues that these categories are entirely permeable and that boundaries between public and private are only produced contextually, as process<sup>22</sup>.

The distinctions of difference so evident and crucial to the definition, conflict, and transformations of this urban node can therefore be understood as a site of productive and even political change. In a recent analysis of urban divides and ‘the right to the city’, Tom Agnotti (2009) argued that differences are not a ‘bad’ thing in and of themselves. Instead, he added, the true problem of divisions is the inequality they may create:

‘Division is a problem when it is exclusionary, when cities are divided up into an “undivided” city that is comprehensively and rationally planned. Solutions...are geared towards ideals of homogeneity, harmony and consensus...The ideal vision...of an “undivided city”...that conceals difference, evades participatory democracy, and is used to foster development in the interests of the powerful’ (*ibid.*, 3).

The way urban space has been divided in Puerto Rico, and the social interactions that have resulted from such historical divisions are central to the proximity and/or distancing of the Gladiolas community from mainstream society. It helps to explain the paradox of invisibility described earlier. What I want to suggest to the reader through the striking socio-spatial contrast that lies between the deteriorated vertical enormity of Las Gladiolas and the banking high-rises down the road in the ‘Golden Mile’ (differences that, in Agnotti’s terms, urban gentrification seek to ‘homogenise’ and ‘conceal’) is that the very existence (and persistence) of this urban edge, replete with markers of difference, makes the symbols and materiality of borders not just an enforcer of inequality, but also a powerful, malleable and unbounded configuration of possibility. As a living transgression of space historically produced as marginal, the uses and practices taking place within and around Las Gladiolas have defied newly imposed orders of control, containment, and displacement; filling it instead with the relentless affirmation of variety and difference. The ‘disruption’ caused by their four towers is therefore a place from where its opposite forms of desired ‘order’ can and should be read (Ketih, *ibid.*).

This thesis hopes to contribute to a growing body of work that takes the role of public housing in Puerto Rican history and contemporary social, cultural and political life seriously. It focuses on how deeply rooted histories of exclusion of the ‘other’ have had very real legacies manifesting themselves in socio-spatial, material and political mechanisms. It will be drawing on visual representations, political and media discourses, the building’s materiality, and respondents’ voices to critically interrogate and expose the interactions between the physical and symbolic in producing and contesting historical urban artefacts like public housing. By paying particular attention to the gendered dimension embedded in the conflict and the multidimensionality through which ‘othering’ occurs, it also seeks to be more attuned to women’s experiences and resistances of such exclusions. By juxtaposing an ethnographic study of that community battle to a historical investigation of public housing’s (post)colonial development, we can begin to unravel some of the discursive, representational, material, and political expressions of urban renewal today.

Individually, each of the chapters to follow will contribute a distinctive piece of knowledge to this story I am telling. Yet while their foci are distinct, they form part of the same complex ‘world’, governed by a similar underlying con-

cern for questions about the productions of difference and struggles against oppression in a contemporary colonial city. In the next chapter, I take a necessary pause to describe how the main conceptual frameworks and methodological tools of this project took shape and were employed.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> I take this phrase from Larry Vale's study (1992) of the politics and power of some post-colonial Capitol architecture and construction, which I find relevant to the local significance of this financial institution/building. Chapter 4 gives a more detailed analysis of what the national program for progress and modernity was about and how architecture and construction of various scales were both integral to it.

<sup>2</sup> Promotional material for these projects can be found in the following links:  
for the 'Ciudad Mayor' project, see <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=98we1bOctDw&feature=related> ;  
for the Convention Centre web-site see <http://www.prconvention.com/>;  
for the Waterfront Redevelopment: <http://colliersgds.com/CaseStudy.aspx?ID=1>;  
for the Natatorium: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xtxL7uJTWBk>;  
and for Río 2012: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o5bKLy8gjzs>.

<sup>3</sup> Originally called the Urban Revitalization Demonstration Program (URD) in the 1980's, HOPE IV was transformed in the 1990's, when it determined that 8% of all American public housing units (86,000) were severely distressed and therefore fit for demolition (Popkin, Buron et al. 2000: 913). As its name suggests, the 'Home Ownership and Opportunity for People Everywhere' policies intend to provide that quintessential 'American Dream' through a variety of other housing programs offered by HUD.

<sup>4</sup> According to the 'Glossary of HOPE VI Terms' (2001), Mixed-Income Development is: 'A mixed-finance housing development that includes a combination of public housing and non-public housing units. 'Walk-ups' are extremely popular in new, large-scale development constructions around the island- both for the middle and lower classes. They are low-density (260 max. of families) apartment buildings a few stories high that have no elevators. This fact is very significant to the new Las Gladiolas being proposed, as the maintenance and service of their four elevators has been one of the centrally debated elements of the struggle (Chapters 6-7).

<sup>5</sup> In much the same way that today poverty, fear and displacement are discursively interlinked to produce the effects of urban renewal (Davis 1990; Marcus 2005).

<sup>6</sup> Aldo Rossi (1982: 23) claimed 'that the history of architecture and built urban artifacts is always the history of the architecture of the ruling classes'.

<sup>7</sup> On November 4, 2008, the pro-statehood and Republican Party candidate Luis Fortuño was elected as Governor of the Commonwealth island. His administration has been highly criticized for laying off up to 20,000 government employees (this sector constitutes 25% of all employment in the island), suspending their right to collective negotiation when doing so, and closing or privatizing at least 40 public agencies due to a severe fiscal crisis.

<sup>8</sup> As early as 2000, the governor at the time had been expressing an interest in its demolition; and, since 2003, the Director of the PRPHA was ensuring Puerto Ricans, through the media, that Las Gladiola's demolition was imminent.

<sup>9</sup> Two recent local stories that generated short-lived public debates in Puerto Rico over the nature of development and displacement of the poor are worth mentioning here. The first followed an announcement by the Caribbean Business newspaper (2009) stating that '...a group of private investors and developers is drawing up a plan to replace the Caribbean's largest public housing project with the region's biggest amusement park'. Evading the fact that this would require the displacement of 20,000 people from the largest public housing project of the island (the Luis Llorens Torres project), the 'General Contractors Association'

(AGC) argued that the plan was part of a continued social program meant to improve 'those families lives', as one of the bright examples of new public-private partnerships (Berríos Pérez 2009: 12). The second, now famously called the 'such is life' fiasco, followed the release of a video shot during a consultation meeting with some members of a community of the eastern sea-side municipality of Ceiba, where a private developer hired by the government announced the forthcoming construction of a high-end shopping mall, resort and waterfront development in land adjacent to their homes, which is also a former American military-base. He described individuals who resisted the costly and exclusionary plans as having an inferiority complex that they needed to 'get over' seeing as not everyone was as naturally 'fortunate' as the rich were; i.e., 'such is life'. He advised them to continue playing 'La Loto' (the lottery) to see if one day they too could participate in the luxury lifestyle that this project aimed to deliver to rich American tourists. The fact that, in announcing both of these developments, relocation and exclusion was framed as an altruistic feasibility suggests to us the kind of deeply-inscribed cultural prejudices that lie behind these decisions and how the mechanisms of gentrification can be working to further isolate the urban poor in both symbolic and physical ways.

<sup>10</sup> Broadly speaking, the interests tend to revolved around: the links forged by the intersections between capitalist industrial development (Dietz 2003; Grosfoguel 1992, 2003; Scarano 1998), colonial cultural politics (Benítez Nazario 2001; Curet 1986; Meléndez and Meléndez 1993; Negrón-Muntaner and Grosfoguel 1997), social structures (Baralt 1981; Santiago-Marazzi 1983/4; Santiago-Valles 1994; Sued Badillo and López Cantos 1986), and urban spatial or architectural change in the island (Dinzey-Flores 2007; Grosfoguel 1992; Quintero Rivera 2003; Rodríguez 1998; Santiago-Valles 1994; Sepúlveda Rivera 2004; Vivoni Farage and Álvarez Curbelo 1998). Other post-feminist orientations about how gender and women are various interpolated into these aforementioned structures have ranged from an interest in: women's access to political power (Fernós López-Cepero 2003; Frambes-Buxeda et al. 2002; 2005); proletarianization (Colón-Warren 1997; Colón-Warren 2003; Ortiz 1996); population control measures such as migration policies, contraception and Diaspora movements (Briggs 2002; Grosfoguel 1992; Ostalaza Bey 1986-87; Santiago-Valles 2005); as well the impact of gendered ideologies on suburban mobility and home-ownership (Caplow et al. 1964; Cotto Morales 2007; Safa 1975); traditional family or domestic/reproductive roles (Pérez-Hernanz 1988-89; Safa 1964; Santiago-Marazzi 1983/4; Vázquez 1993-1994; Vicente 2003). A particularly prolific field of investigation revolves around the new family forms and household relations/roles that emerged as a result of urbanism, such as the rise in women heads of smaller households. But there is also scholarly attention paid to the inclusion of women in the formulation of State policy, the welfare State and development initiatives (Alegría Ortega 2003; Fernández 1990; Fernós López-Cepero 2003); and in the emergence of both nationalism and feminisms (Briggs 2002).

<sup>11</sup> Zaire Zenit Dinze Flores (2008: 39) argues that reggaetón's journey 'cannot be disconnected from the context of the city [...] their lyrics reflect Puerto Rico's urban landscape and reference the spatial geography and everyday city life of the island [...] (its) spaces reveal a preoccupation with being authentically and genuinely urban'.

<sup>12</sup> In *Of Mimicry and Man: the ambivalence of colonial discourse* (1994: 130), Homi Bhabha argues that: 'mimicry rearticulates presence in terms of its "otherness", that which it disavows'.

<sup>13</sup> Quoting Katharyne Mitchell's work (1997), Legg (2008: 39) argues that she 'was right to question the whereabouts of Bhabha's "in-between spaces" and to promote the study of the economies, histories, and geographies of hybridity and ambivalence'.

<sup>14</sup> While back then there was an authentic concern for the people undergoing such changes, the 'assistentialist' or 'welfare' state continued to grow well into the 1990's when there was a critical turn towards the privatization of many public sector services such as public housing.

Over this time, there was also a dramatic shift in the attitude towards assistance in public housing- now understood disdainfully in a similar way to that depicted by Dave Clements (2009) in relation to UK's council estates: i.e., a 'vile underclass bashing' of what is considered to be a 'culture of dependency'.

<sup>15</sup> As the foremost proponent of ANT, Bruno Latour (2005:16) has argued that it is a method through which to 'reassemble the social': to reconfigure the complex associations that make up the social - by 'following the work done to stabilize the controversies' that emerge in relation to a particular domain. Not dissimilar from Hayden's articulations about the politics of place construction, ANT is about making visible all those links – human or material- which constructs the social world.

<sup>16</sup> This thesis draws particularly from (and will variously integrate insights) urban ethnographies like Sudhir Venkatesh's (2000) study of the infamous high-rise Robert Taylor homes of Chicago; Donna M. Goldstein's (2003) insightful take on 'laughter' in the context of race, class, violence and sexuality in Río de Janeiro's power discordances; and Mary Patillo's (2007) analysis of how the black middle class played a role in the urban power and politics affecting urban renewal of a traditionally poor district of Chicago.

<sup>17</sup> Translated: 'Proyecto Comunitario Para la Promoción y Apoyo del Desarrollo Integral de Menores'.

<sup>18</sup> In the first instance, it felt strangely ironic that this officially policed boundary did not require me to perform the typical 'stop and announce' protocol (stating my name as well as the name and address of intended visit) I was so accustomed to, as it was usually enforced in all suburban gated communities of San Juan catered by their private security guards.

<sup>19</sup> Each tower had a numerical or alphabetical 'name' that corresponded to when their construction was completed. The first two, called Gladiolas I, were towers A and B; and the last pair, called Gladiolas II, were towers 300 and 301.

<sup>20</sup> The concept of 'el mantengo' comes from the word maintenance- referring primordially to the financial kind. It is a phrase widely and disparagingly used in Puerto Rico to describe the island's social, political and economical dependency on American welfare through food stamps, subsidized housing, and other governmental programs. Many of the island's largest social, political and economic problems are often attributed to it. Caserío residents (especially 'welfare mothers') are commonly noted as the main 'parasites' to instigate this generalized evil. In rendering this condition more complex than normally assumed to be, sociologist Linda Colón Reyes (2005: 340) argues that when combined with disillusion, this 'help' provokes a false belief in some magical packaged American socio-economic salvation.

<sup>21</sup> *Barríos* are the colloquial name given to auto-constructed neighborhoods that the migrating rural populace originally chose because of their proximity to work and connections with the city. According to the Puerto Rican architect Edwin Quiles (2003), these places are variedly tolerated depending on the prevailing city-project of the State, and its need (or lack of) labour . It remains to be seen what the government intends to do with Las Monjas once Las Gladiolas is 'taken care of'. For the moment, the fact that it is filled with privately-owned houses of working-class (and Dominican immigrant) citizens, rather than public housing towers suggest that it will be a complicated community to displace.

<sup>22</sup> More recently, she and Don Mitchell content in their study of public space as property in the United States (2008), that publicity has three principal elements that condition inclusion, exclusion, and differential access to and struggles over the public realm. These are: 'the inter-relationships between property, both as a thing and a set of relationships; social norms and community membership; and strategies, practices and forms of legitimation.



## **Chapter 2**

### **Approaching public housing and Las Gladiolas- a methodological discussion**

‘So very tempting to want to distribute the entire world in terms of a single code. A universal law would then regulate phenomena as a whole (...) Unfortunately, this doesn’t work, has never even begun to work, will never work. Which won’t stop us continuing for a long time to come to categorize this animal or that according to whether it has an odd number of toes or hollow horns’  
(Perec and Sturrock 1997: 190).

## 2.1. Introduction

As the previous chapter explained, this thesis explores the colonial historical productions of public housing’s urban difference in relation to an ethnography of how a contemporary conflict over one such project manifests both legacies and departures from said trajectory. The struggle of Las Gladiolas weaves together political, governmental and legal institutions and its actors include four towers, residents, authorities, and other external allies. In what follows, I will be discussing issues that arose during my year of fieldwork between 2006 and 2007, elaborating the ways in which this research, which did not restrict itself to one form of data-gathering, came to be shaped; as well as discussing some of the ethical challenges it entailed. I then detail some of the limitations and opportunities offered by the collection and analysis of textual records and visual data.

## 2.2. A complicated position

‘There is no place of innocence for intellectuals, but there are many possibilities for anti-imperialism’  
(Briggs 2002: 203).

### **A personal trajectory and position of power**

As a young middle class girl growing up in the suburb of Guaynabo, I was always struck *and* scared by how close my house was to a nearby public housing project from where gunshots were frequently heard at night. We were separated merely by a shallow gully that ran below the furthest end of my family’s backyard. Indeed, I sometimes saw young boys walking or playing along that dirty river-path which- given their clothes and darker skin colour- I immediately assumed were from that *caserío* and which my parents assured me ‘were up to no good’. The general understanding was that they- or people who looked like them- were the perpetrators of crimes such as carjacking and

thefts in our otherwise perfectly safe (and primarily white) neighbourhood. In retrospect, when I think back to how movement in or out of our house occurred (locking windows, installing metal grilles, security cameras and electronic gates), I cannot help but feel saddened by the extent to which our lives were mediated by the fear of this nearby community which we never actually came in contact with, except when one of our dogs, which had escaped, was stolen and later returned for a ransom. Even though everything had to be done with some degree of precaution because the purported danger of the *caseríos* (which, except on that rather humorous occasion, never materialized in my life) was never too far away geographically *nor* psychologically- our sheltered world gave me the illusion of freedom. But after years of living and studying away from the island, I became more sensitive, in a different way, to how the short distance between my home and theirs was not only a physical separation, but mainly an immense invisible gap carved out of fear, disdain and ignorance towards these unknown ‘others’ which, in common speak, were seen to be poor, dark, criminal and/or stupid.

Like the stark spatial contrasts which *favelas* and fortifying walls erected around neighbourhoods all over the Brazilian city of São Paulo emit (Caldeira 2000), the physical divide of public housing from *urbanizaciones* (private residential neighbourhoods) in Puerto Rico also reflects ‘a tense and multi-layered production and contestation of inequality...naturalised [as] the taken-for-granted part of everyday life, the matter of social communication, even while it is denounced by unexpected interventions’ (*ibid.*, 4). The border walls described in Chapter 1 which delimit the perimeter of Las Gladiolas elicit a ‘fortress mentality’ (*ibid.*) or ‘architectures of fear’ (Blakely and Snyder 1997). Extending to the subalterns *and* dominant sectors of society, these guarded, gated communities are pervading urban environments through a logic of segregation which normalizes inequality (Dinzey-Flores 2005). Together with discriminatory policies, zoning laws and prohibitory housing prices, they act as a device that marks deviance onto public housing as ghetto, thereby reproducing its oppression and converting them into spaces of entrenched and ‘enduring marginality’ (Mendieta 2007: 389; Wacquant 2007). The senselessness of such real and theorized fissures, coupled with what I had come to see (from a distance) as a highly biased, aggressive and less than innocent media coverage against *caseríos*, became too obvious for me to continue to ignore, or shut out. Thus, this project- in its first intimations- was borne out of a highly

personal and experiential place; a knot that had grown in my otherwise privileged Puerto Rican belly.

In incredibly simple terms, I wanted to understand how such harsh socio-economic contrasts, traversed by all sorts of cultural discriminations and boundary signifiers could exist so coolly in a Caribbean island that prided itself on the progress and development granted by a politico economic relationship with the United States. Moreover, given my academic background in gender and development studies, and knowing that development policies and questions about the relationship between American colonialism and Puerto Rican poverty have, over time, been deflected onto working-class women's bodies (Briggs 2002: 121), I was interested in knowing how women living in *caseríos* were managing their 'ambivalent position within the collectivity'<sup>1</sup> (Yuval-Davis 1997: 47). Commonly accused of being 'welfare mothers' responsible for both their own and the nation's poverty (López 1994), I wanted to know how they were negotiating the purported depravity which that historical 'rhetoric of empire'<sup>2</sup> (Briggs 2002: 199) conferred upon them and their living spaces. At the same time, I was interested in analysing the connections between that reality and the visual representations that appeared 'natural' (such as those seen in newspapers like *El Nuevo Día's* 'Comunidad' [Community] section), where women's bodies, *caserío* spaces and images of poverty were continually juxtaposed and portrayed as 'the other' (see Appendix A); how as an additional layer of discourse, images 'operated as part of a regime of truth, while performing a central role in the surveillance and management of individuals and populations' (Knowles and Sweetman 2004: 5); in my case, the public housing population.

When I began my doctoral studies in London, I believed that in order to get a more accurate picture of the island's public housing 'reality', I needed to carry out a comparative study of how its residents and space varied across different areas. I therefore travelled to Mayaguez, the largest city of the West-coast region, to meet some of the members of a public housing projects' resident associations who worked closely with a well-known professor who I in turn had met years earlier through her extensive work with communities around the island. All the residents present were women of different generations—many accompanied by their children who sat watching a *telenovela* on a small TV set in the corner while the mothers or grandmothers discussed their most

pressing concerns. From the array of issues that some of them raised that evening - from faults in water and electricity supply due to problems in their buildings' 'remodelling', to child support, police abuse and absentee fathers- I realized that if I was going to spend a year in the field in an ethnographic way 'to reduce "objectifying" aspects of research and thus also power relations' (Ali 2006: 475), spreading myself across different communities would probably be detrimental to the project I had in mind, as well as disrespectful to the members of the community. I therefore returned to San Juan- the capital city I grew up in and knew well- determined to find out more about one public housing project situated in the middle of Hato Rey, its financial district.

I had heard about Las Gladiolas while growing up for being *caliente* (literally hot, or dangerous), and I had recently been reading about it in the newspapers because of their contentious law-suit. Its location, reputation, and community struggle brought together a number of fascinating elements that I was immediately drawn to, and which I wanted to learn more about. After performing some initial research, I also found out that the population therein was predominantly female: in 2001, 56% of the residents living in its four towers were women, and 41% of those were heads of households (MMOR Consulting 2001). Moreover, in a study conducted in 2002 of 50 female-headed families of Las Gladiolas and another public housing project in the municipality of Carolina called San Martín, it was determined that the median schooling for these women was the 9<sup>th</sup> grade, and one-fourth had achieved less than 7<sup>th</sup> (Guemárez 2002). While many had previously worked, most were associated to domestic (and therefore, less skilled or underpaid) tasks. These findings resembled the island's larger demographics, where women constituted 52% of the close to 4 million population, and yet still held the lowest positions in the labour market, had lower salaries than men, and as heads of household, represented the greatest percentage of poverty (60.7% in 1999) (Fernós 2000: 142; <http://www.gobierno.pr/Censo>). Such inequalities, reproduced through sexualised and racialized labour and the gendered needs those produce, tends to be called 'the feminization of poverty'<sup>3</sup> – a phenomenon amply studied in the context of Latin America and its relationship to women's active involvement in the more organized defence of their families and homes (Zimbalist Rosado and Lamphere 1974; Probyn 1989; Dore 1997; Woods, Darke et al. 2000; Leavitt 2003; Chant 2007). In Puerto Rico, public housing projects seemed to similarly elicit this trend, as women are not only predominant in

the demographic terms just mentioned, but they are also usually the community leaders or representatives of the same (Escalante Rengifo 2002: 39; Cotto Morales 2007). In the United States and in Puerto Rico both, these demographics are also frequently used to denounce women's over-reliance on welfare, or 'the benevolent' State (Fraser 1989; López 1994).

In the meantime, while I was constructing a plausible research proposal for the Sociology Department at the LSE, I found out more about some of my own family members' involvement, as civil engineers, in the remodelling of some of the island's public housing projects. At the time, I knew little about the close ties which linked developers, construction professionals and government in the lucrative industry of public housing 'modernization'<sup>4</sup>. This, and the central role of construction to the island's economy since the era of industrialization, only became more evident to me over the course of the project. But what *was* immediately obvious was that these family members were interested in my project inasmuch as they believed I could be contributing to the mainstream reading of residents' own responsibility in public housing's, and even the island's economic downfall. Linked as they are to the male-dominated machinery of public housing construction, they felt that their positions about public housing were not only justified, but informed, and that therefore, they had something to teach me about the appropriateness of Las Gladiolas's demolition. While not discussed in the following terms, these demolitions were of course also opening up more business opportunities for them. If I asked them about residents' own postures, they dismissed these as either ignorant or unworthy because 'those persons' purportedly chose to be *mantenidos* (meaning, dependent on welfare benefits). In Puerto Rico, itself called a "welfare island"<sup>5</sup> (The Economist: May 27 2006), this very common accusation of assistentialism is full of scorn and contempt for those who are seen to be continually premodern and working against, rather than for, the mainstream capitalist tenets of personal/national progress and advancement (López 1994; Santiago-Valles 1994; Alegría Ortega 2003: 178).

In quite a different sense, but with a strangely similar undertone, many of my acquaintances and friends who I considered more 'in touch' with the problems of Puerto Rican society considered my efforts either 'honourable' or too idealistic, qualities they attributed to my long periods away from the island, or to my academic immersion. Like many fellow islanders who tend to only rub

shoulders with *caserío* residents in shopping malls, a beach or a gas station, they approached public housing with a comfortable and passive distance, viewing them as an exotic ‘other’ to their normal lives. While my friends were not outwardly discriminatory or even supportive of the government, they did share a larger frustration with feeling that the middle classes were ‘stuck’ in a stagnant economy partially due to these *caserío* people who were seen to be freeloading from their labour. Mimi Abromovitz (1992) argued that these kinds of conservative middle class discourses reinforce punitive, populist and authoritative policies of an increasingly interventionist State. In the island, it helps to turn a communal blind-eye to the abuses and violent repressions carried out against public housing and its residents.

As a ‘native researcher’, I also saw how such attitudes strengthened the socio-cultural divisions which I wanted to surface and combat. Yet, at the same time, in choosing to study a place like public housing (so different to my own everyday life) I too was exoticizing ‘the other at home’ (Ali 2006) in narrative terms; a common, but nonetheless problematic anthropological and sociological device used to produce the symbolic effects of authority and distance (Knowles 2000: 55). In reviewing sociological ethnographic work on race and ethnicity, for instance, Claire Alexander (2004; 2006) argued that the growing concern for how ‘othering’, power inequalities, and partiality becomes part of our research processes has been both constrictive and productive, partially because there is a mixed effect when ‘our sense of ourselves and “the Other”, outside and inside, researcher and subject has become less certain, less taken for granted’ (Alexander 2006: 299).

Throughout my time on the field, the multiple forms of ‘othering’ that my research entailed continued to become palpable. At home, as the very different views held between me and my family became more apparent, their paternalism made them feel as if I was resisting to learn what was ‘really’ going on, and ‘family banter’ soon turned to humour: “Haven’t those towers just been demolished?” was the typical opening-line in what became a highly repetitive repertoire of ridiculing statements within our meetings over a meal. Knowing full well that the towers had *not* been demolished, this simply meant to reassert their position, while undermining mine before a discussion on the matter even got underway. While this undoubtedly affected me on a personal level, I quickly realized the benefits of ‘playing dumb’ with them in order to

listen to what their positions were, and find out why. Unbeknownst to them, I slowly began to see them as actors, in their own right, within my wider field of research. This covert technique not only gave depth to my own understanding of a complex and multi-layered social phenomenon, but it also proved practical.

### ***Palas***

In the island, it is commonly said that to get anywhere in life, you need to have *palas* (connections). This kind of social capital can include friends and family, but only really counts if such *palas* are somehow linked to an established system of economic or political power that can benefit you or your close ones. At first, I had come to Puerto Rico convinced that I would not use my ‘connections’ because, knowing its highly bureaucratic and elitist society, that would be abusing my power and therefore, unethical. I wanted to secure all my interviews without my privilege. But after failed attempts to get through to some key individuals, I realized that pretending not to know or care about certain things before my family could help me to secure those meetings or to place me in settings where I could witness things which would have otherwise been difficult to come close to. In retrospect, however, I had entered the field with my own moral double-standard for, when I found out that a friend had worked in the legal case of Las Gladiolas, I was not at all ashamed of asking him to pull some strings for me. In fact, my first gratuitous encounter with him during a night out in a bar in the small city of Santurce (when I still had no clue how I would ‘enter’ Las Gladiolas) was directly responsible for subsequently meeting the main lawyer in charge of the lawsuit who, in turn, facilitated access for me with Teresa (introduced in previous chapter). Looking back, I realize that I felt justified and comfortable with making use of *those* connections because I was supportive of their political alignments. But while those ‘allegiances’ were anchored upon a personal challenge to social inequalities, my choices were not innocent or devoid of power; indeed, they underscored the way in which politics and domination were part of my own forms of knowledge production-and not just elements of the subject I was investigating.

Not only did my desire to dissolve some of my power by evading the influence of *palas* have little political impact, but with time, I would come to understand how this deeply entrenched way of ‘doing things’ in Puerto Rico stretched beyond my own conduct and was an integral element to Gladiolas residents’



lives and choices as well. Of course, getting things in life purely through connections can be difficult, especially if you're a poor, dark woman from a *caserío*; and it is also- as the plethora of corruption cases in Puerto Rico demonstrate time and again- highly illegal. For some residents, *palas* became a serious issue when relocation from Las Gladiolas got complicated. Sometimes, for 'x' or 'y' reason, there could be inconsistencies of treatment, procedures and regulations, resulting in heightened levels of felt injustice for those residents who were getting the short-end of this informal benefit system. This is made clearest in Elvira's quote below:

'She got put into a new contract. But, why? Because she had a friend- the one who made the official reviews. That same friend didn't want to give-in with me [my case]... The only thing Puerto Rico has for sure is that *si tu tienes padrino, te bautizan* (if you have a godfather, you'll get baptized), if not, you're screwed wherever. There's a woman I know that works in 'Medicaid' and she tells me the same thing: 'Look Elvira, this is the bad thing about the Puerto Rican government. I have a BA, a Masters and still, here I am. However, if *fulano* (whoever) goes to the office because he has *una pala fuerte* (a solid connection) from the government, he may not have even a fourth of my position or preparation, but since he has the *pala* (the connect) ...and so on and so forth in all government agencies.' The bad thing about this is that you don't get valued for who you are but who you're friends with... And I know first-hand because I worked for two years in the offices when I was 18. I know *como se mata el cobre aquí adentro*' (how copper is killed, meaning, how things are done). Since I wasn't sucking up and going to that office normally except to get my mail... No way, I wasn't a *lambeojo* (suck-up). If we all would have been given a fair and equal chance then I would have adjusted, but I've seen how 'friends' are put on contract. That's what I see as unfair' (Elvira, interview, 2007).

Elvira suggests that the pervasive influence of *palas* was a class-less (in that it occurred in all sectors of society), but also class-bound system (in that it relied on and reproduced class structures) which allowed for the unfair allocation of resources according to personalized privileges, making the generalized sense of discrimination and inequality stronger. Thus, while *palas* appear as potentially instrumental for some, many Gladiolas residents spoke of it, in passing, as yet another form of marginalization in society. It was something that residents had to process, internalize and deal with on a day to day basis. In Chapters 3 and 5, we will see how the history of this 'way of doing things' in the island's urban development also translated into a paternalist top-down

approach which still dominates relations between public housing authorities and residents.

### ***Chismes***

The quote above further suggests that mobilizing *palas* or getting informed about how they were being used by others was facilitated by gossip. *Chismes*, the local word for gossip, could be a far more effective avenue of communication than many of the other kinds of meetings or assemblies which tended to have definite agendas, and therefore limited what could be said between people. It did not take me long to realize just how significant *chismes* were to the way people communicated, created or broke ties with each other; and how- in this sense- it was integral to the community struggle. Gossip is the epitome of a democratic act: able to be carried out anywhere, at any time, with and by anyone. Gossip knows no spatial or personal boundaries; it adapts to new technological developments, travelling just as smoothly and speedily from cell phone to cell phone as from person to person. There was an intricate and practiced network of *chismes* that travelled informally through invisible avenues in Las Gladiolas, granting its 'speakers' the kind of immunity any other kind of spoken act could not. It was recognized as a double-edged sword: something that can serve to forge strong links and networks of support just as powerfully as it can cut through or break down relationships. In the *caserío*, Mirta once explained to me, a *chisme* could be an isolated or random piece of gossip that apparently has no bearing or impact on the person it is about, but it could also set into motion a whole system of action, secrets and potential damage to known persons or even, to the entire community.

Seen as both an innocuous *and* threatening form of communication, ranging from pointless chitchat to cruel rumours, gossip has also traditionally been defined through its association with women and perceived as a gendered phenomenon; so much so that when I once asked a female resident how she would define the space of women in Las Gladiolas, she responded: "*de chisme y bochinche*"<sup>6</sup>. As emblems of domesticity who operate outside of the public sphere, the female figure has been multiply and traditionally represented through time as exercising power 'behind closed doors'; through the kind of gossipy networks her 'private' encounters with others allowed her. While undoubtedly a sexist stereotype, it was, in practice, an instrument of control and

power for women, where it had otherwise been denied, often used as a political device (as, for example, leverage).

On my way to a meeting, I sometimes unwillingly, yet inevitably interrupted what were clearly some heavy *chisme* sessions amongst women neighbours gathered in groups around the central courtyard. The slow, complicit silence that would quickly take over following my approach never failed to remind me of my outsider status. I felt that the precious information being exchanged through *chismes* could only be attained with further intimacy. Yet, as an insider of sorts as a Puerto Rican woman myself, I also found that women were never too hard-pressed to share some *chisme* or other with me in private. As feminist researchers have argued, the confessional style of gossip gives a feeling, for both researchers and respondents, of 'being on the same side' (Mies 1983) and therefore facilitates access, as well as helping to overcome barriers of difference. In fact, I found it to be both a space of safety- for telling stories otherwise hidden from view- and of transgression, where in saying things that would otherwise not be shared, it contests the dominant frameworks of public communication; a kind of 'counterdiscourse' (Leach 1997) that is not based on dialogue or formal speech. Given the rampant and seductive nature of *chisme* giving-and-taking, I too fell victim to its lure sometimes, using a new piece of information that I had gathered as valuable (but hopefully not harmful), and handing it over symbolically as a gift to someone who I knew would, however briefly, grant me a semblance of being in the inner circles of hearsay and private scandals.

In the end, the volatile, impulsive and inherently uncontrollable nature of *chismes* made the resident commitment to the association Gladiolas Vive- heavily dependent on human connection- an equally erratic and transient one (to be explored in Chapter 6). On a particular day or event, one never knew (but could suspect) to what extent the amount or lack of resident participation and/or proclaimed allegiance to the cause against displacement had to do with a feelings of resentment, sadness, outrage, excitement, etc., resulting from some piece of gossip, interpreted as knowledge, which had been circulating. Of course, at the moment that it is believed as 'true knowledge' it therefore has an effect as if it were so, and who am I to argue that it wasn't?

### **Linking representation and the personalization of conflict**

The points of entry and kinds of relationships just described inevitably raise the issue of disclosure, for which I want to briefly pause and think about more carefully. Since my research was fundamentally concerned with the mechanisms of the political, as seen through the development of public housing and Las Gladiolas's current battle against demolition, the way I incorporated the voices of my respondents in writing was an ethical concern as well. Eyal Weizman's (2007) study of the architecture of the Israeli occupation of Palestine suggests that when one is concentrating on a particular political event, the question of how to write criticism into it- as a form of active opposition or resistance- becomes an important one. In his case, he found marrying investigatory journalism with theory as the most appropriate way to push through the boundaries of a post-humanist academic immunity 'where individuals and individual responsibility don't matter' (Weizman 2010: 291). While my research is far from journalistic in the 'investigatory' sense he offers, and the context of Las Gladiolas is worlds apart from that of Israel and Palestine, there are two points linked to his discussion of responsibility which I find important to this thesis and the question of confidentiality.

The first is more loose, and has to do with how the national 'story' of public housing as an excluded space of socio-physical marginality (both in terms of its history, and of Las Gladiolas) has systematically entered the public realm of opinion and debate through their depictions in newspapers and a particular brand of irresponsible journalism that retains a predilection for making 'truth-claims'. In Puerto Rico, it has been argued that media representations including newspapers' and televisions' versions of the world- its people, issues and problems- have, for better or worse, become substitutes and reference points for thinking about and reducing 'social reality' (Sepúlveda 2002). Additionally, public housing has been reproduced as a space defined by violence, lacking any kind of peace and community-orientation (*ibid.*). These realities (or facts and truths) have been studied and criticized by scholars of communication and cultural studies who argue that journalism's connections to cultural power, production and citizenship makes it perform a range of social, cultural, economic, and political functions, and that it embodies ideologies and domination (Dahlgren and Sparks 1992; Zelizer 1993; Hall 1997; Zelizer 2004; Zelizer 2004; Papacharissi 2009). Thus, it produces, mirrors and spreads powerful ideas about the world. In forming part of the discourses

which ‘as a particular knowledge about the world [...] shapes how the world is understood and how things are done in it’ (Rose 2001: 136), newspapers are part of the ‘regime of truth’ (Foucault and Gordon 1980) constructing public housing as deficient or dangerous space. Their patterned uses of images and words in particular have not only had a significant impact on the lives and collective identities of residents (evident in their own uses and appropriations of that medium for their cause), but they have also worked with, around and against a larger truth-producing apparatus that includes local meanings, resistances and material practices (Suárez Findlay 1999; Gill 2000; Tonkiss and Seale 2004).

As introduced in the previous chapter, Vale (2002) analysed how, in the context of the United States, the media could be seen to be communicating a particular discursive ‘truth’ and understanding about public housing through generalized depictions of their ‘others’ essence, in ways that exacerbate the projected problems:

‘the sensory evidence of deteriorated conditions has been foreground or backdrop in all media coverage- so it is hardly surprising that public housing redevelopment efforts have been focused on matters of physical “modernization”’ ( 18).

The power of the media was here powerfully ‘acting’ through the repetition of representations of deteriorated buildings in a way which then brought about certain policy changes. Vale’s argument also speaks to the power of buildings and their deteriorated materiality to perform politically. Similarly attesting to the effects of representation, Laura Briggs (2002) argued that in Puerto Rico, the relentless representations of women (their rights, domesticity, fertility, etc.) in a particular light and through various textual mediums helped to launch numerous agendas, political projects, and authorized harmful policy interventions over time. These kind of interventions of the visual and material through politicized media performances are directly relevant to the case of Las Gladiolas, as their deteriorated buildings have not only been centralized in the political battle over displacement and demolition (Chapter 5), but they have also been cast over time as either culturally inauthentic, dangerous or deplorable spaces, alongside raced and gendered representations of degeneracy (Chapters 3-4). Thus, given the influence of certain journalistic modes and

narrative techniques in framing public housing, it would have been limiting not to be attentive to their representational trends.

This concern with media representations connects to my second point, related to Weizman's before, that if I wanted to respond to the goings-on of that world which I sought to criticize through my writing, it would require that I also consider this powerful journalistic and textual logic in terms of my own choices of who I did or did not quote. Political (and other social) arrangements are partially crystallized through the media's use of quotes which, in 'objectively' depicting certain persons and situations, 'lend authority to unspecified collective sources behind the news' (Zelizer 1989: 369). That is, they grant relative power to some individuals, and the institutions they represent. This, I believe, warrants that those same names be included here, without censorship (provided that they gave consent during interview scenarios, or that pronouncements were made publicly).

Moreover, as one resident complained in the first 'Social Forum' held in Puerto Rico in 2006, where one session was dedicated specifically to the struggle of Las Gladiolas, she felt that one of the situations they were facing was that they could not talk because otherwise '*te hacen una carpeta y la vida te la hacen de cuadritos*' [a file is created under your name and your life is made impossible]. She was pointing out how- in their position as residents- being vocal could lead to an unofficial form of persecution by the housing authorities- who, amongst other tools, could use (with immunity) their power with the media to single them out and make their life more difficult. This underscores the way in which naming people and places, while omitting others, was an important exercise of power through which the fight was being waged, and that the media was an integral element in that process. This dynamic was most poignantly expressed in the tense relationship that existed between Mirta C. - the community leader- and Carlos Laboy- the Director of the PRPHA. Mirta C. insisted to me that Laboy had a personal vendetta against her; that she was blacklisted in administrative files; and that the conflict had been given *nombre y apellido* (name and surname): Mirta Colón. When I interviewed Laboy, he did not deny this. In fact, he said so explicitly without me even asking. In a mirror-effect of sorts, it ended up that he, too, felt that Mirta C. had personalized the conflict, publicly setting the whole thing up against him.

This adversity, based on a personalization of the conflict, was highly influential to the way particular issues were being handled by the various actors of the struggle (to be explored further in Chapters 6-7). In this discursive context, where the struggle over demolition and displacement was often defined by the main ‘characters’ leading it, I considered who and how I included quotes from interviews or observations to be part of this field of meaningful intervention. That is, I found that ‘writing opposition’, however limited and modest in scope or reach, required that these choices be taken seriously.

I interviewed both ‘authorised’ and ‘resistant’ actors in order to gain a more profound understanding of how the local production of Las Gladiolas (as social, material and discursive space) was multiply understood and spoken about, and to get clues as to how to trace the broader representational legacies and disruptions of public housing development as ideological, political and material space (See Appendix B). The most obvious figure I quote from this set of interviews, which fulfilled the ‘qualifications’ mentioned above about ‘writing opposition’ (and who I got access to through *palas*) was Laboy. It was not unusual for residents, lawyers and supporters alike to frame their battle against demolition as a battle against Carlos Laboy, or *Lambón*<sup>7</sup>, as they humorously nick-named him. In her study of *favela* residents in Río de Janeiro, Donna M. Goldstein (2003) argues that this kind of humour should not be taken lightly. In a context of general disempowerment, poking fun at these powerful individuals can be a form of ‘discursive playfulness’ (*ibid.*, 35) that reveals the fault lines in social relations as well as a keen understanding of social hierarchies, thereby serving as a less than revolutionary, but nonetheless key instrument of opposition to the dominant gender, race and class ideologies. I also quote the manager of the private company ‘American Management’ in charge of the daily maintenance of Las Gladiolas at the time- a kind woman who residents had mixed feelings about because while she worked for a company that disempowered them and was connected to ‘lambón’, her personal actions were consistently sensitive to their needs.

Finally, I name some of the lawyers officially representing the Gladiolas case and the leaders of the community organization ‘Gladiolas Vive’ because both were highly vocal and visual advocates of the struggle, associating themselves publicly with it in the press; but also because their positions *vis à vis* other residents, while obviously supportive, was always one of greater influence and

power. All the other actors (residents, social workers, architects, lawyers, academics, activists, housing agency workers, or artists) who spoke with me in formal interviews or informal contexts such as the street, the courtyard, cars, parties, gatherings, assemblies, etc., while of course not operating outside the realm of power, have been re-named throughout to protect their identity and respect the confidence with which they so often disclosed information or opinions to me. These were people with who discussing ‘consent’ either never took place or was denied, and who had actively chosen to stay on the margins of the limelight. In other words, in those cases where confidentiality was not explicitly addressed, offered or given, and where the respondents were not public figures, I consistently rename them.

Ultimately, by incorporating mixed voices and positions, I’ve sought to underscore the local power dynamics multiply framing an active narrative of struggle. It is important to note that, because the selection of residents left in Las Gladiolas when I conducted field work was quite reduced and continued to decrease while I was there (from about 55 families of an original 700 when I first arrived, to about 39 on my last quick visit to the island in late 2008), this project does not attempt to claim the voices of the more limited number I spoke with to be a representative sample of the island’s public housing residents more generally, nor of all Gladiolas residents entirely. Clearly, my communication was with a reduced amount of those who had chosen to stay. I relate their stories of resistance to each other; noting their relevance to the changes that occurred during my time on the field; to the history of public housing; to the other actors interviewed or spoken with; and to the plethora of news-clips, images and documents that were found, consulted, and analysed during the course of this investigation (the second section of the chapter will address these).

### **Dealing with the politics of relationships and language**

As explained, I had initially wanted to challenge the social divisions which separated me from my ‘caserío’ neighbours by somehow critically dissolving them through my work and research practice. But I had not anticipated that, despite the knowledge I had gained over the years, and my serious political commitments, the markers of difference which had once structured the relations with my back-door neighbours could become even more heightened with time. On the one hand, I was openly in solidarity with the residents’



struggle against the governments' demands for displacement and demolition. And, given my interest in practicing feminist qualitative research which encourages less distant relationships between researchers and respondents, particularly through focusing on the experiences of women residents of Las Gladiolas, I sought engagements, through semi-structured interviews and participant observation in community events, that broke down formalities and allowed for open conversations (Fonow and Cook 1991; Bloom 1997; Harding 1997). On the other hand, because of the deep ties and emotional registers which connected me to my family, I had no choice but to mingle with individuals linked to the web of 'developing' public housing in ways neither I, nor residents, approved of. While this duality may not be too strange in much academic research today, what was perhaps most problematic was that even though I chose to be open with my family about my project and political positions, knowing full well that they disapproved of the same, I did not offer the same kind of disclosure to the residents of the project and, in the end, while I was open about other personal details, I never revealed my family's indirect associations to the governmental machinery which they felt trampled upon their lives. Thus, I imposed my authority as researcher in this way- staying in a kind of 'safe zone', and partially foreclosed the possibility of questioning or negotiating our interpersonal relationships based on our relative positions of class power. Nevertheless, there were various moments, particularly with the community leader, when other forms of differences that were underwritten by class distinctions came to light and were discussed.

On one occasion, well into my field work, an irrational fear of being 'found out' hit me when Mirta C., the community leader, called me over the phone to ask- in a slightly accusatory tone- why I had not said that I was doing my PhD 'in Oxford'. Apparently, a housing agency worker friend of hers who I had met days earlier, Ignacio Rivera, had told her this (or something like it). This put me in an awkward position, as I felt I was being accused of minimizing the power invested in that mistaken personal/academic privilege. Although I *had* told her I came from the LSE- and not Oxford- I had failed to elaborate on its 'ranking'. I realized I was feeling somewhat guilty not because the accusation was true, but because I had quickly run through my credentials the day I met her in an effort to allay my own concerns with how my class privilege, already partially marked by my whiteness and the way I speak Spanish (much less than popular), could impact her opinion of me and the research project.

And, in this sense, the mistrust which lay behind her tone of voice was correct. Having spent the previous ten years in a continuous *vaiivén*<sup>8</sup> (coming and going) between the island and the United States, and having no connection to the island's higher education system, I had incorrectly assumed that she would be more comfortable with someone from, for instance, the University of Puerto Rico (UPR) who could be more connected to the island's current everyday realities. But for her, finding out I was 'from Oxford' was seen as an opportunity because she believed in the social capital which this entailed, suddenly making me a more valuable ally and a well-connected outlet for the Gladiolas cause. She let me know explicitly that, to her, despite the limitations of the research relationship, it was important that academics from abroad 'like me' put the word out about what they were going through. She insisted on 'the cause' needing such kinds of people even if we were 'using them', and continued to treat me always with great respect and interest, introducing me thereafter as *la socióloga de Inglaterra* (the sociologist from England).

This story contains another important ethical consideration that traversed this project: the issue of language and translation. Except for some historical documents written in English, all of my field work- including note-taking- was based in Spanish, the language I grew up speaking. In an effort to allow space for local 'flavour', if you will, to be captured, this thesis retains the terms and phrases which I know are very specific to the Puerto Rican context, or which capture a particular social phenomenon that is otherwise untranslatable. Yet, for any Puerto Rican like me living and working abroad on topics researched in the island- the way we utilize Spanish and English is neither innocent nor uncomplicated; in fact, given our colonial history, in many circles it becomes political. While many words and phrases, such as 'parking' or 'el party' are now part of the Puerto Rican vocabulary and common parlance, the question of language has always been one of the 'hot topics' through which complex cultural boundaries are drawn and nationalism or political sovereignty debated (Flores 1993; Dávila 1997; Negrón-Muntaner 1997)<sup>9</sup>. In my case, the nuances of a Spanish-dominant bilingualism were relevant because while I can express myself more naturally or instinctively in Spanish, my educational background in American or British schools means that I often lack the sophisticated vocabulary with which to do so. In interview scenarios, I sometimes found this to be a limitation which 'got in the way' of more fluid communication- hesitations that often acted as yet another marker of my difference. I was

well aware of how – depending on the context- English phrases can be used to either mark certain kinds of social or cultural superiority, or to denote disdain, often in mocking tones, for what is being spoken about (by either side). Still, what could elicit hints of discomfort at moments did not prevent me from being able to capture the intricacies through which speech – and its local variations- contained cultural meaning and significance; and it is something which I try to remain faithful to in all of my translations. While outside the scope of this thesis, the problematic interactions that arise between language and culture/researcher and subject in the context of Puerto Rico is a topic that would require further elaboration in order to contribute to a more critical articulation of fieldwork experience, practice and analysis.

Beyond the cultural and class implications and power differentials contained in the Spanish-English divide, the translation of certain forms of popular language was significant to residents' own understandings of difference. During one interview, for example, a resident claimed she was more refined and composed than another because even though she could *hablar malo* (curse), she did not have the same *cafre* (a style associated to lower classes) outbursts that she had recently witnessed from another female neighbour. The aesthetic representation of public housing residents as *cafres* or *cacos* is their most common form of stigmatization in mainstream culture. This complex stylistic distinction- which she both implicated *and* separated herself from- was both classed and gendered. On the one hand, like television shows frequently do (Alegría Ortega 2005), she attributed the vulgar language to the fact that the woman came from a *caserío*; i.e., the stigma was place-based. At the same time, she highlighted the inappropriateness of that woman's excessive performance of 'low class' in public space by calling her a *loca* (a crazy woman who lost her composure). Thus, language not only marked the inability of certain women to 'act' according to more white middle-class gendered norms of restraint; it also highlights the importance of space (public versus private) in determining (i.e., disciplining) performances of class and gender. The example further highlights how 'embedded in taste is the essence of power relations between classes that are then naturalized and constituted as meaningful' (Goldstein 2003: 37). Moreover, like the example of *palas* demonstrated before, the gendered cultural distinctions embedded in language- which are also raced here- emerged as significant aspects of power in a different sense to mine for residents' own lives.

### **The uneasy limits of participation**

I have thus far noted certain details related to my research relationships as a way to frame my ethnographic study and the complicated ethics it involved in a more honest way, laying out the discussions and relations that were continually and often problematically inserted into it. In trying to guard ‘against a simple statement of reflexive intent, or a disavowal of one’s own embeddedness in the process’ (Ali 2006: 482), it adds layers to a personal web that inevitably became part of the process and written end-product of this project. While much of what I have detailed relates to some of the classic ‘insider-outsider’ issues researchers face when fieldwork environment is also home (Merton 1972; Narayan 1993; Naples 1996; Naples 2003), what was perhaps not so common in the resulting dynamic was how I felt, at once, in alliance with the group of residents while also implicated, by my complex positionality, in the reproduction of their demise. I understood the real limits of my position and power as a Puerto Rican researcher or observer that would return to London in a few months to write a doctoral thesis in English. However, I could not help but be critical about the self-imposed limits which determined the highly shifting way in which I moved and related to others. While the resolution of that burden was, depending on the circumstance, highly variable and far from perfect (given that I could not claim to have produced an environment of authentic trust between me and all of my subjects nor to have achieved an improved relationship with my family), I attempted to balance this disjuncture out by being as attentive and rigorous to the details emerging from my participation on the field as I possibly could.

Since my first visit to Las Gladiolas- which I described more thoroughly in the introduction-I felt the isolation of the towers to be unbearably palpable-like a ghost town waiting to be imploded. It discouraged me from ‘hanging out’ alone- simply waiting for potential passers-by in the courtyard that was couched between those tall panoptical-like structures. Luckily, after my first meeting with Teresa, she introduced me to Mirta, the community leader with whom I ended up (apart from Teresa) sharing the greatest levels of intimacy. Since our very first interview, held in the dilapidated hallway of her 8th floor apartment, one of the common features of our interaction was her mobile phone which hung from a necklace around her neck so she would not miss any calls. Frequent vibrating interruptions served as ice-breakers and helped to fuel conversation between us about what was happening in the community,

based on who had called or what the conversation had been about. As soon as she picked up (or ignored) one of these many incoming calls, her facial and body language conveyed to me a desire not to hide, but to share how she was feeling and consequently reacting to the person on the other line; that is, I felt that she wanted me to be ‘in the know’, even if there were clear constraints to me having any clue as to what she was talking about. I smiled, letting her know I was complicit, though my eyes must have revealed that I had no clue as to what the details of her talk were about. Her corporeal range of expressions was large: with a particular pout of her mouth, a roll of the eyes, or movement of hands she could, for example, let me know whether she considered what was being said to her to be true, false, ridiculous, surprising, bothersome, valuable or worthless. As embodied, non-verbal manifestations of social power (Schwartz, Tesser et al. 1982), gestures told me much about how social relationships were being managed, understood and distributed in the community, and about what was important to her and her own stake as a community leader and mother. Since non-verbal communication (like verbal one) is culturally patterned, paying attention to gestures which, as Lefebvre (1991: 215) argued, ‘embody ideology and bind it to practice’ is an important ethnographic method (Jacob 1988; Scollon and Scollon 2001). In my case, it allowed me to interpret some of the social layers imbricated in the ‘everyday micro-gestures’ (Lefebvre *ibid.*) between Mirta, her mobile phone and I. While it had originally made me uncomfortable, due to the silent position I had to adopt in this dynamic, I came to welcome, cherish and even long for those spontaneously vivid interludes. By ‘speaking’ to me in that particular way, it had created a bonding ‘ritual’ communication (Sennett 2008).

Beyond my regular communication with Mirta, I also became a common addition to the ‘Gladiolas Vive’ meetings held either fortnightly or once a month in the community centre to inform residents of the status of the lawsuit. In the end, I attended twelve meetings, including larger community assemblies or protests held in the towers or its vicinity. These events provided valuable information not only in terms of what was being discussed, as it often proved highly repetitive as well as ill-attended, but also in relation to the informal conversations it permitted me to have with different participants. Focused around the latest developments of the legal case, they offered an environment from where I could examine the way different social actors spoke about or related to the class-action law-suit and it constructed a much more complex

and multi-layered understanding of it than I would have otherwise gathered by concentrating strictly on one outlook, such as Mirta's.

I usually arrived half an hour early to either help one of the two community leaders set up the room along with some ex-resident supporters or children from the community. We opened windows, set some tables and unfolded chairs. Since the topics covered related to very particular personal situations or discussions over the legal case, I simply sat-in the rest of the time and usually took notes. Often, I was confused by those who had not seen me before (from inside or outside the community) for a journalist. If I was not helping to set up, I would just sit outside and see if I could find someone to talk to while we waited for the meeting to start. It was during these pre or post-event interludes when I managed to secure more contacts for interviews, or when I developed greater rapport with the leaders, who I imagine took note of the extent of my participation (or my lack of it). Given that these were comfortable community areas for everyone attending (mainly residents, lawyers, and activists), the small talk and *chismes* that would ensue within them clarified- in a more natural manner- the variety of beliefs, perceptions and conflicts which I was unable to grasp from an interview setting alone. It often happened that after I had arrived, I would learn that a meeting had been cancelled or postponed. But even these moments were useful in the sense that I would always find someone to at least have a brief chat with. Until the end, however, initiating conversations with strangers- and acting as if I was secure about what I was doing- proved challenging for me at a personal level. Thankfully, residents were always forthcoming with me.

In some of the larger, more organized protests, I helped Mirta and the social workers taping up some posters in front of the security gates, distributing pamphlets or simply participating in the manifestation out on the street. Given my rather shy nature for these kind of events, I tended to do this alongside other friends- such as the lawyers or documentary film-makers who I had met as collaborators of 'Gladiolas Vive' and who, like me, identified as 'external' actors to the cause. As time passed, these personal connections made it difficult for me to maintain an artificial ethnographic divide between my 'object' of study and my own participation in it- a situation which has been widely understood as a problematic aspect of feminist ethnographies (Tedlock 2003: 182) where inevitably, as Suki Ali notes (2006: 475): 'proximity and inti-

macy result in the development of personal relationships which require even more complex negotiations of power'. This complexity was compounded by the fact that, by associating myself more closely to the lawyers leading the case, I was playing part in supporting what has been noted as an increasing control by the legalistic realm of Puerto Rican cultural politics that does little to oppose or rearticulate traditional forms of 'doing politics' (Torres Martínez 2005: 162). This trend will be discussed in terms of the Gladiolas conflict in Chapter 7, and then returned to in the Conclusions.

In my case, as discussed before, I was clearly an activist supporter of their struggle- helping with what I could in an environment of limited resources. But at the same time, I always kept a conscious distance and continued to maintain my participation 'behind the scenes' and limited- not only because given the project's time constraints I knew I would not be able to commit myself fully to a lasting form of activism (my departure would constitute a rupture in that sense); but also because I did not want to compromise my ability of continuing to get interviews or have conversations with other relevant actors of the field. I knew that some residents were unsure about their position, while others were very critical of how the struggle was being waged. Thus, if I wanted to continue getting as much detail as possible with those I came in contact with, I did not want to appear too connected to one 'band' or the other. I also had to manipulate interviews or conversations with certain external actors by maintaining some semblance of neutrality. I walked along this border uneasily, switching between different personas or locations in the way I was participative. While I knew the merits of this in producing a certain kind of 'scientific' qualitative project, it never stopped feeling slightly, annoyingly, deceptive.

Outside of my participation in Las Gladiolas, I attended two separate educational workshops carried out by COPADIM- the social workers sponsored by the UPR to support Gladiolas community children. Teresa, who led it, was the most active (and loved) external actor working in the towers with both children *and* adults, and a key point of contact for me, frequently telling me the ins-and-outs of what the latest happenings of the community- from her perspective- were. Moreover, I also went to: five external activist-oriented protests/forums, where at least one of the Gladiolas leaders was also present in solidarity; one court case held over the future of a mural in another pub-

lic housing project and attended by some Gladiolas residents as well; and a public hearing in the House of Representatives regarding future remodelling plans for a select group of public housing projects and in which Mirta C. testified in opposition to such plans. Moreover, due to my concern with understanding how the discourse of top-down urban planning was influencing Las Gladiolas's struggle against displacement and demolition during my time on the field, I sat-in in several conferences hosted by private, governmental or housing institutions outside of the 'community network'. In all of these, bureaucracy (beginning with having to pay as much as a \$200 entrance fee), red tape, and what I could only describe as cold and corporate-like treatment, was the common factor. In those, I mainly limited myself to listening and recording.

Having addressed some of the complicated power dynamics of the research process which feminists critiques of positionality and politics of location in the social sciences have long concerned themselves with (Haraway 1990; Harding 1991; Mohanty, Russo et al. 1991; Mohanty 1997; Harding 2004), I now turn to explain how using history as an argument about the present was central to the methods I used to investigate public housing.

### **2.3. Investigating the history of contemporary public housing life**

'It is possible to write imaginative sociologies of past and present from fragments, discords, and silences'  
(Comaroff and Comaroff 1992: 19).

#### **Conceptualizing my historical research**

In noting Foucault's contributions to theorizations that depart from self-certainty (from 'truth'), Peter Redfield (2005: 68) argued that an attitude which critically questions history ('the perpetual disorientation of serious engagement') is essential towards understanding the porosity of what he calls 'the travelling present'; that is, the multiple layers and constant fluctuations that exist in the now. Similarly, I approach the current elements of the Las Gladiolas conflict in tandem with the production of urban public housing more generally because I consider the present to be a meaningful anchor from where connections between past and present can be both excavated and gleaned. I was interested in understanding how multiple productions of differences



are inscribed in the island's colonial processes of modernisation through an analysis of the textual, visual and physical materials that emerged as relevant not just in the ethnographic- but also in the archival research. Thus, records, surveys, documents, and other primary and secondary sources were collected to address the public housing development and the site of Las Gladiolas itself. Significantly, I did not take the archives to be a neutral place, but rather one which, in framing the use and meaning of stored materials, actually orders the value of that such knowledge in a powerful way (Brothmen 1991)- what Alan Sekula (1986: 184), in relation to photographic material, calls 'a [constructed] territory of images'. In the conclusion to his excellent book *Spaces of Colonialism* (2007), Stephen Legg adds that the heterogeneity of India's colonial archive (which I consider Puerto Rico's to be as well) makes it a space that both opens and silences paths of analysis; that it is a place 'of flux and indetermination, although certainly also of incredible power' (211).

Conceptually, the historical research pursued was traversed by a belief that the domination and oppression which define relations of power can be more appropriately foregrounded when approached as processes and relations<sup>10</sup>, rather than separate moments, existing in some sort of spatial, social or historical vacuum (Young 1990). In this latter sense, I drew insight from Gillian Hart's (2004) reflections of the methodological imports which critical ethnographies can offer. While her analysis reflects a wider concern over the discourses and processes of globalization, she argues that there is a need to pay attention to how there is a *processual* and *relational* aspect to the productions of space; how things, places, events, etc. are not to be taken at face value, but questioned and related to each other through 'a dialectical relationship between the concrete-in-history and production of knowledge' (*ibid.*, 97). Like Redfield's 'travelling present', she therefore emphasizes the relevance of both history *and* context when seeking to grasp the 'continuous rearticulations' (in Hall 1985: 113-14) and productions of space. This resonates with debates taking place elsewhere which, in stressing the links between postcolonial and development scholarship, argue that 'the historical and contemporary relationalities of urban space, the mixing of the "here" and "there", inform the practices of urban government on issues as diverse as planning, housing [...] and the production of city development strategies' (Legg 2008: 6). Thus, in moving beyond a traditional territorial version of city as bounded space or pre-given orders of spatial arrangement, these more open trajectories of ur-

ban studies- themselves indebted to a Lefebvrian take on the social productions of space (Lefebvre 1991; Lefebvre, Kofman et al. 1996)- are analysing the multiple registers of urban formation that can be read in the city to include, amongst others, ‘the sum of resonances from the past’ (Amin 2007):

‘The spatial is taken as the register of different modes and mobilizations of being and acting in the world; a topography of contours projected by the energies of human and non-human vitality, *but always rubbing against historically shaped territorial formations*’ (*ibid.*: 104, my emphasis).

Following on from these ideas, I did not want to treat history merely as ‘the context’ (though it is of course also that as well), but to emphasize its interconnections with the present; its realm of power and embeddedness in ‘the politics of place construction’ discussed in the previous chapter, as it relates to the dynamic articulations of both dominant and subjects’ meanings and resistances; the discursive truths and constructed representations that inform present-day urban configurations and contestations. At the same time, it was important to bear in mind the warning that a focus on representations produced in and of the city:

‘can become reduced to a facile exercise in naming perspectives and fantasies with no connection to the real. Alternatively, it can tend to accuse indiscriminately all organized efforts to intervene in urban developments of top-down authoritarianism’ (Biron 2009: 20).

I wanted to avoid this legitimate concern with reproducing superficial tendencies, while still recognizing that the colonial production of subject people has depended on stereotyping their difference in the organization of social and urban life through a number of signs and representations; what Laura Briggs’ (2002: 209) study of U.S. imperialism in Puerto Rico argued to have been ‘a burden; a violence, [and] the basis of policy decisions’. My analysis seeks to break through some of the pervasive hegemonic ideologies rooted on colonial legacies of racism, sexism and class exploitation that have gotten re-enacted in some of the island’s writing, images, and spaces by questioning the narratives that present certain evidence/images/experience of public housing as official knowledge, and searching for alternative ways of deciphering their connections to the spatial and affective characteristics of a contentious home

and urban environment today. In this way, and to reiterate, I wanted to account more fully for how difference is established, how it operates, and how it gets reproduced.

Noting the importance of discursive narratives and productions of 'subject' difference in urban configurations, however, is not to be confused with seeking some single or absolute reality or 'regime of representation' hidden behind appearances. Rather, I locate certain connections that help me to 'crack open from the inside' (Rancière 2009:49) the development and life of public housing space in order to 'reconfigure it in a different regime of perception and signification' (*ibid.*). In *The Emancipated Spectator* (2009), Jacques Rancière argues that doing so is 'to sketch a new topography of the possible'<sup>11</sup> (*ibid.*). His political critique centres around the potential which is to be found in *dissensus*, where there is 'neither a reality concealed behind appearances nor a single regime of presentation and interpretation of the given imposing its obviousness on all there is' (*ibid.*). Like the 'discord' suggested by the Comaroff's (1992) in the opening quote of this section, where spaces of difference are seen as useful for producing 'imaginative sociologies', this form of critique acknowledges the importance of noting- against the historical representations and narratives of single realities produced by so many scientists, officials, social workers, etc. - the actual multiplicity of truths which operate at once in both past and present. Foucault (1972: 155) similarly spoke of the potential found within the space of 'multiple dissensus'- where contradictions between discursive formations or fields reveal that they are not smooth or resolved: 'they define the points of its effective impossibility and of its historical reflection'. Thus, it is precisely from the multiple, incomplete and contentious nature of discourses from where we can glimpse at individual agency as well- an insight relevant not just to the productions of public housing, but also to the analysis of the community organization 'Gladiolas Vive'.

This emphasis on dissensus, or on *the many* and *contrasted* versions of the past and present, is also employed by studies of science and technology (STS) who 'divide the social domain into controversies [and their connections]' (Latour 2005). While straying somewhat away from the realm of representations, this strand of analysis seeks to destabilize the truths associated with the apparent seamlessness of the order of 'the social'<sup>12</sup> by 'tracing' the history of controversies, uncertainties and competitions involved in the coproduction of certain

socialities and technologies. It is argued that rather than taking their co-produced 'truth' for granted, it is necessary to approach the status of truth afforded to any artefact as a result of its ability to resist many claims, uncertainties and competitions that emerge with and through its creation (Latour 1987; Jacobs, Cairns et al. 2007). In other words, these authors also emphasize the productivity found within dissensus- and the importance of 'tracing' or studying its production. Thus, I also look at the materiality of Las Gladiolas- its place in current controversies- as a form of 'othering' intertextually, in relation to the multiple elements that produced public housing as an important 'modern' artefact suffused with contested colonial ideologies. If we are able to discern more subtle and resistant actions amidst this historical environment, and the many 'capacities' which are being waged at once today through residents' community and legal struggle, it also becomes clear that 'dissensus'- in the sense of political subjectivity which Rancière argues for- can be a tool not just of importance for the research process, but for empowerment. In the case of Las Gladiolas, dissensus is an ambivalent phenomenon.

### **Finding and organizing documents**

In order to 'map' some of the discursive relations (continuities and breaks) that shaped public housing as a contentious urban space of 'others', as well as the shifting way by which social and material factors gain or lose pertinence through time, I consulted many different sources related to urban development, public housing construction, and Las Gladiolas (See Appendix C). Policy and legal documents, government reports, surveys, press and magazine articles, personal or official correspondence, photographs and images, and maps and diagrams were all consulted. This amalgam of information was gathered mainly from the following places: the 'Archivo General de Puerto Rico' (Puerto Rico's General Archives), the 'Biblioteca de la Junta de Planificación' (Planning Board library), the 'Fundación Luis Muñoz Marín' (Luis Muñoz Marín Foundation archives), the 'Colección Puertorriqueña' (Puerto Rican Collection) in the University of Puerto Rico (UPR) library, and the Puerto Rico Housing Department. I was also granted access to the 'Proyecto Corporativo de Indización de Periódicos de Puerto Rico' (PCIP), an online database that while incomplete and still in development, holds the largest digitalized collection of newspapers from the island. Apart from those, I also gathered photographic material from: the 'Photographic Archives Department' in the 'Archivo General', the 'El Mundo' Newspaper

Digitalization Project located in the UPR library, the 'Aerial Photographs Department' of the 'Transportation and Public Works Department', as well as from the online 'Puerto Rican Digital Library' and 'Jafer Construction Corp.'. The vast majority of the major newspapers included in this thesis (EL Mundo, EL Nuevo Día, El Vocero, Primera Hora, and San Juan Star) came from either the online archives of the publications themselves, or from the UPR library collection. I also collected secondary sources to provide greater perspective to the many issues at hand, including legal commentaries, census data, theses, and social scientific studies found in the UPR's Puerto Rican Collection and Planning and Architecture Department libraries, as well as in the London School of Economics Library.

During the course of my search, I discovered that the island's archives, as cultural artefact, are generally regarded as a useless past. As an alternative, digitalization projects are not much better off- they are few and far between as well. Many searches and inquiries made for historical material, particularly from government departments, were met either with disbelief, or with the common answer that items had been lost, disappeared or even- in one occasion- burnt in some unknown fire. According to some local historians and sociologists I spoke with it seems that this was more or less the rule of thumb. In some places, this lack of appreciation translated into me having to scour patchy and disorganized material that often times did not even correspond to the filing systems instituted. One of the most important findings, in terms of the construction of official historical knowledge of public housing, is that there was abundant information relating to the programs of the late Governor- and much loved modernist- Luis Muñoz Marín, not only in the national archives, but in a separate foundation (located in his old residence) dedicated to his period as Governor alone. This was very useful because it was while he was Governor that public housing was instituted. Nevertheless, trying to find material that was not about condemning slums or celebrating the greatness of his projects was more difficult (i.e., evidence of dissensus had to generally be read between the lines). If I asked the archivists for different sub-themes of, for example, a particular housing project, these did not exist. Moreover, much of the public housing documents in general were not even found within the space of the archives, but on the third floor of a different building, on the other side of the Old City (where the National Archives are located), and whose elevators were often broken. Like Las Gladiolas, who suf-

ferred from continually broken lifts, it was as if- in a lived metaphor of sorts- working elevators were reserved for places and things that ‘mattered’.

In the National Archives, it was not rare that I never received some of the documents solicited, or that I would get them weeks after asking for them. To be fair, on some occasions they would go grab documents and deliver them on the same day. But this was the exception, rather than the rule. When those boxes were delivered, they were not filed or classified in any particular way. I had to go through each document individually to try to see what, if anything, I could use or was relevant to the development of public housing. Again, most of the material was governmental/official in nature, rather than related to the everyday life of people. I thus had to work with and through what was a colonial archive, paying attention to the themes that were important in the material that had been stored- as this responded to a certain understanding of the world and discursive creation of its own; while also being attentive to the non-verbal modalities of people’s actions, as recorded there. Chapters 3 and 4 work with this double sense of archival material where, on the one hand, I chronologically trace and analyse the way identities and subject positions were created through new forms of government, control and discipline in dominant discourses and actions, but I also open up the possibility for reading things like people not wanting to leave the slums, engaging in illegalities, or even playing part in the deterioration of their space as moments where their identities and resistances can be perceived as well. I found correspondence/ letters to be an especially fruitful sphere where both the productions and contestations of discourses and materialities could be seen in a more dynamic manner; where, through letters of people discussing a particular issue back and forth, power was more easily gleaned in action. This is also where disagreements or contradictions (dissensus and controversies) – in the production of artefacts- were made more obvious.

The lack of organization and classification to documents presented particular challenges, but also opportunities to the ‘conceptual ordering’ (Strauss and Corbin 1998: 21) I was constructing within my own archive of material. From the outset, I developed a system that evolved along with my research for organizing, interpreting and subsequently theorizing the data being collected. It was first important to see what themes emerged from the material itself and then locate – if possible- some of the broad changes and continuities in terms

of ideologies, politics, representational forms, the uses of materiality and social practices around public housing. I began to make sense of information by categorizing documentary material *and* experience from the empirical investigation in tandem, amending classificatory descriptions as necessary in relation to new information discovered either within the documents themselves, or through observations or conversations with respondents. Because my material was so varied, it required that I think comparatively about, ‘the properties and dimensions of categories [...] to the range of possibilities which in turn might apply to, and become evident’ (*ibid.*, 89) when looking at different sources.

Categorizing some of the material from archival or digital sources, including newspaper searches, required at least two ‘moments’ of classification. The first was in the search itself, described above, where many of the archival documents could be asked for according simply to the name of a known institution or famous person together with a date or range of dates (which made the request, but not the subsequent sifting of material straightforward enough). But much of it also consisted of finding more specific or appropriate ‘search terms’ (say, slum vigilance) in order to reduce the results. Learning to cut out unnecessary items for my own archive through search terms themselves- a second moment of initial classification- could only be done by either familiarizing myself with the kind of material that was out there in the first place, including the results I was getting from my own general searches and the initial tracing of routine themes and descriptions; following insights taken from secondary sources consulted; or by listening and taking clues that residents, interviewees or acquaintances were giving me in terms of what they believed had been significant to changes in urban structures, such as the creation of a certain governmental division, the appointment of new management companies, or imposition of new policies.

With the newspaper searches in particular, where the source (original paper, microfiche or digital) could vary based on the publication itself and years being covered, I had to keep strategic records of what had been looked at so that as my ‘search terms’ got modified over time, I would not inadvertently repeat myself. Moreover, depending on the limits of the solicited source (i.e., a collection *already* and only categorized according to years, versus a digital compilation that could be searched with any term), key words could vary from the general to the very descriptive. This first stage was therefore, a rather time-

consuming, intuitive, deductive *and* experiential learning process, crucial to how I would then, in a second stage, re-categorize and conceptualize material found after having read through it. It also determined the way I constructed and sub-divided my own personal archive (collection of material) based on the following categories: institution; year or time period (temporal); type of document; and themes (Charmaz 2003: 281).

### **Analysing texts**

As a basic rule, I analysed all of my material as a dynamic reaction to the goings-on of the world- not just as evidence of it. I also tried to read the past and present inter-textually, not only in archives and records but also “as it survives in buildings, objects and landscapes of the present day...” (Cohn 1990: 49). I read texts for the meaning intended and values inscribed in their design, management and use by attending to the historical processes that made them be/respond to what they do today (Lawrence 1990: 91). This method, which responded to my concern with tracing ‘the production of social difference through discursive claims to truth’ (Rose 2001: 163), also included the socio-technical analysis of the materiality of the buildings of Las Gladiolas in terms of its institutional and social characteristics -as an ‘apparatus’ with distinctive forms of architecture, laws, and technology (such as surveillance cameras, walls, elevators, or guard-houses) that enacted power/knowledge in ways that resonated with residents’ political struggle. Integrating the social and the technical as part of the same story, suggested connections between the original narratives of public housing’s rise and fall (Jacobs 2005; 2006; Jacobs, Cairns et al. 2007) and modern practices of criminalization, privatization, deterioration, and displacement.

Even though most of the historical material found belonged to the discourses of the dominant, rather than trying to simply ‘recover’ the lives of the ‘insignificant others’ in text, the analytic challenge rested in relating the many fragments and fields found through the different textual spaces and temporalities, so as to yield insights into the contexts and processes of which they were a part (Charmaz 2003). Thus, my analytic method sought to develop sensitivity to the shadings of language and the structure of text consulted, helping to grasp the terms and changes in relationships between certain subjects and the historical and present-day representation of Las Gladiolas. For instance, developing an ‘eye’ for what I would call ‘textual cultures’ or conventions of



language and expression embedded in different sources (be it letters versus reports versus press, etc.) and being able to cross-reference them through (and despite) their differences as assemblages of types of knowledge, could reveal small, but significant inscriptions constituting certain subjects. This approach recognized the *relational* aspect of texts; i.e., how they relate to externalities (to social events, practices and structures that shape them) and how they figure in representations (*ibid.*, 37). To carry out a discursive analysis of *all* texts collected and categorized required that I explain their ideological construction at the situational, institutional and societal levels, and how structures and relations of power are influenced by social and institutional constraints that are not necessarily obvious (Fairclough 1989; Dijk 1993). This process is succinctly summarized as follows:

‘the careful reading of texts (e.g., transcripts of conversations or interviews, or existent documents or records, or even more general social practices), with a view to discerning discursive patterns of meanings, contradictions and inconsistencies... identifies and names language processes people use to constitute their own and others’ understanding of personal and social phenomena [...] [it] proceeds on the assumption that these processes are not static, fixed, and orderly, but rather fragmented, inconsistent and contradictory (Gavey 1997: 56).

Thus, the following basic steps were followed to discursively analyse my material: (1) exploring the implications and connotations, specifying persons talked about- what they said or didn’t say- who or what got included, excluded, reinforced or associated; (2) laying out general picture of a world presented; (3) seeing where other texts were elaborating upon the same discourse or diverging from it; (4) historicizing the discourse by looking out for a dominant narrative and changes in discourse, if any; (5) reflecting on terms used to describe the discourse; (6) asking who stands to win, who stands to lose, and why. Ultimately, I was attentive to the detail contained in the language of texts and to the wider social picture- as well as to the relationship between those two.

### **Analysing images**

In their introduction to the edited collection *Picturing the Social Landscape* (2004), Knowles and Sweetman argue that the ambiguous *and* highly malleable nature of both textual and pictorial representations used in social research today mean that they can be equally useful sources of information when attempt-

ing to convey particular and general social processes, and that- as methods- they both involve ‘selection, abstraction and transformation (Jenks 1995: 48, quoted in Knowles and Sweetman: 13)<sup>13</sup>. Because pictures tended to be very common in the archival material consulted, I also considered them in my analysis to be an interrelated element contributing (in their correspondences and contrasts to texts) to a wider, more robust ‘picture’ of the world; what Gillian Rose (2001) called ‘visuality as discourse’. It is crucial to note that, while I tried to access a more nuanced picture of social life and its political representations through historical images/text, the fact that my study was *not* a visual ethnography, but rather that images emerged as relevant *a posteriori* to the connections I was making while carrying out the analysis, means that I did not conceptualize the use of images in terms of its centrality- as method- to my research process, but rather as one in a series of tools through which to add another interpretative angle to the arguments being constructed (Pink 2007: 41). I therefore invite the reader to look at these images as parallel texts, to be read alongside the other material presented.

My analysis includes five main image ‘venues’: First, photographs that appeared either in newspapers and magazines accompanying stories that pertained to housing or urban development, aiding in my evaluation of how text/image operated together to circulate certain truths about the world, and therefore legitimate or justify certain actions and interventions in urban space. Second, those that featured in government documents alongside reports of those same themes. Third, stand-alone images found in photographic archives that lacked any textual referent (except its source), but were organized according to either chronological or political time-periods. I interpreted those in relation to those categorizations- and their wider social referents. Fourth, I use some cartoons featured in newspapers and one of a government publication as ‘an indicator of public perception [...] a form of public opinion’ (Warburton and Saunders 1996: 208) that elaborates popular political and social commentaries (Grady 2004: 27). I believe that their recourse to stereotypical images of people and places were ‘readable’ precisely because of the concomitant circulation of similarly stereotyped ‘realistic’ photographs and texts being disseminated in newspapers or magazines.

Finally, I also included some of my own pictures when I felt these helped to give more illustrative depth, beyond my own words, of what I was attempt-

ing to describe. Since, as mentioned, images were not conceptualized in the methodological design of this work as part of the ethnographic or historical focus, the ones I took in particular (versus the ones found in archival material or newspapers) are used only to complement narratives I construct, rather than being used as critical or parallel sites of analysis themselves. This important task would lie within the purview of a different kind of project. Moreover, I did not include pictures of apartments' interiors for two main reasons: first, that domestic home spaces were never the focus of research, but rather a space in which some interviews took place; and second, because most residents expressed or demonstrated discomfort with my voice recorder. In evaluating their responses together with what I knew of the cultural context of my project, I felt that taking pictures would have been an inappropriate method (Pink 2007); an additional and unnecessary level of intrusiveness mediating our communication. These residents are accustomed to different kinds of authoritative probing of their personal/intimate environments through, for example, social workers, private apartment inspectors, housing personnel visits, and police incursions. The reticence with which some responded to my tape-recorder alone made me desist from providing another possible level of intimidation. The pictures I ultimately chose to insert or to leave out from the finished product- also admittedly an act of power constructing new knowledge through particular arrangements of 'found' material- depended on their relevance to the particular discussions within the chapter they figures in.

Knowles and Sweetman (2004: 6) also point out the three main theoretical strands used in visual analysis within social science research: the 'realist' paradigm that considers images as representations of reality; the 'poststructuralist perspective' that sees images as part of the construction of reality; and semiotics which, according to Stuart Hall (1997: 228), emphasizes the joint discourses of written and photographic language as that which produces and 'fixes' meaning; i.e., as 'texts which can be read to uncover their wider cultural significance and the ideological and other messages they help to communicate, naturalize and maintain' (Knowles and Sweetman: *ibid*). I align myself more readily with the 'post-structuralist' definition and analyse images (and their montage) discursively as active production, representation and articulation of contested meanings; as 'regimes of truth' that relate both to the material and objective accounts of the social world (Van Leeuwen and Jewitt 2001); using them to bring the complex construction of ideologies and attitudes they may

contain to the surface, as well as to think about the multiple ways in which social categories have literally been envisioned in the course of history through the entangled visual signifiers of, amongst others, class, gender and race.

Anthropologist Jorge Duany's (2002) method of reviewing the racist colonial displays of Puerto Ricans in various visual mediums was instrumental to my own analysis. His work traced images *together with* American academic representations produced since the U.S. take-over of the island in 1988 until the mid-twentieth Century (focusing on world fairs, ethnographic studies and photographic collections), demonstrating how Puerto Ricans became variously depicted as 'Other': from 'whitened and ennobled' (86)- i.e., *not* black and therefore translatable into U.S. race narratives of backwardness- to primitive, exotic, poor or dependent peoples (89)- i.e., in need of cultural assimilation and political subordination<sup>14</sup>. These photographs were usually accompanied by a spatial backdrop of tropical abundance, fertility and 'untamed wilderness' (120) that also presented the land as exploitable. Duany argues that, along with statistical data and government reports, the juxtaposition of people and place which tended to emphasize the docility of the Puerto Ricans is a visual tactic that has endured through mediums such as tourism and advertising campaigns to maintain today's operative neo-colonial order.

In a 2007 housing forum I attended, I witnessed a similar epistemological 'regime of truth' when HUD's American Regional Director for Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands explained proudly to the audience of Puerto Rican bankers and executives how 'When I see Puerto Rico, I see an island that's long, people are anxious, and developers are looking to do things' (Asociación de Bancos: 14to Congreso de Vivienda, Bernardi 2006). He described how impressed he had felt when his small jet, hovering above, had flown in that morning from the much smaller neighbouring territory of St. Thomas over the green and expansive lands of Puerto Rico that held 'such potential for growth and development'. These enduring colonial visions, literally 'from above', which minimize Puerto Ricans through discursive allusions to the conquering of land and 'othering'- are also employed by elite Puerto Ricans who use colonial visual language to represent, categorize and dominate their native others (i.e., racially and economically inferior), alongside local spaces which have been coded according to the long-standing 'exotic and primitive' logic of 'the other', and rendered conquerable. Accordingly (and as seen in

Appendix A), I argue that female bodies that look poor and dark, for example, have tended to be pictured alongside slums or public housing spaces in a way that makes them look not only like the representatives of poverty and its associated materialities, but also like dependent subjects in need of boosting, fixing, controlling, moulding, restoring, and enhancing.

Focusing on how race becomes 'inextricably part of the texture of everyday life' Caroline Knowles (2006: 513; 2009) has also used photographic images to study the often subtle relationship between seeing/visuality and race in the context of British white racialness/ethnicity in the postcolonial space of Hong Kong. While my use of pictures is not the central method nor focus of my research, nor do I look at the intimate social relationships in the way Knowles does, they do interrogate the social construction of the visualization of class and gender distinctions and racialized difference (Tagg 1988; Edwards 1992): images' 'subtle' connections to those various social inequalities and the reproductions of the postcolonial space of public housing projects. I will argue that, as the repositories of colonial developmental agendas- public housing space and its residents' bodies have always been intersected by formations of empire traversed by the kinds of gendered/raced/classed ideologies of progress and nationhood seen in Duany's analysis, which have translated into very particular material, spatial and political conditions for those who inhabit them, as well as for the rest of the citizenship that 'deals with' them. In a highly visualized sense, public housing buildings have served as a physical reminder not only of the continued presence of social distinctions- but everyone's complicity with its perpetuation. By concentrating on them, I highlight the constructedness of that collusion- not as artifice- but as one of the many levels influencing and forging (unequal) social interactions.

Like texts, then, I read the contextual specificity of images in relation to one another- in terms of their thematic continuums of what was centred/marginalized; visiblized/ invisiblized. This was crucial for noticing certain stereotypes through, for example, the depictions and embodied contrasts of femininity versus masculinity, poverty, etc. It also involved analysing the construction of social difference, persuasion, and internal discursive complexity of visual material including: suspending pre-conceptualizations, identifying recurring images and key elements within them, coding material and thinking about connections between and among key images, focusing on claims of truth or

scientific certainty (what appears natural); locating moments at which dissent from a discourse is acknowledged and dealt with; noting contradictions; and, looking again for what is not seen- for the powerful effect of invisibility.

Public housing, for instance, was not explicitly described as a failure for a long time after its creation. In fact, it was first heralded as the bright answer to the squalor of urban slums. Nevertheless, being attentive to the questions developed above helped me to recognize and translate the glaring absences of certain subjects and objects (textually and visually), or the repetition or connections between others, as the discursive construction over time of the idea of that program's (and its residents') malfunction. While they were heralded as a solution to urban disorder, they were also described along lines of morality and hygiene that tied the image of the new spaces to that of the raced and classed bodies of slum residents. It was a powerful inscription- and one which I will be tracing from Chapters 3-5. Today, the discourse and debates of urban regeneration circulating can be understood as the new face of that old vision. In terms of Las Gladiolas, its physical conditions of deterioration and residents' unruly, backwards, or criminal behaviour have been powerfully recreated as an example of failure in the midst of a booming financial district. By creating tacit associations to the past, these representations bypass the need for scrutinizing the actual plans and politics behind the desire to demolish. The consolidated status of such discourses makes it subsequently difficult- but not impossible- for residents' own actions and resistances to be understood as acting both with and outside the terms of that logic.

#### **2.4. Conclusion**

My ethnographic and archival research brought together an interest in social practice, spatial qualities, and discourse. This chapter laid out some of the opportunities and challenges which this multi-method interdisciplinary investigation involved. My position as a 'native researcher' brought to the fore the way in which social differences and power are not just a theoretical concern in this project, but an active constituent of it. Studying the lived environment of Las Gladiolas as a realm integrally connected to the history of public housing underlined the need to focus on the complex ideological, representational and material structures that have shaped Puerto Rico's segregating socio-spatial distribution, as found in the archival material as well. Despite the practi-

cal constraints which the historical search presupposed, the collection and analysis of texts and visual material were crucial components for reading the dominant themes and subtexts framing, complementing, and adding depth to the colonial urban mechanisms of control over public housing residents and resistance to displacement.

The different angles disentangled here will come together in the following chapter, where I will be discussing more thoroughly how ‘othering’ occurred in the colonial context of Puerto Rico and its early urban development practices in a way which has allowed for the continued stigmatization of urban public housing projects and the reproduction of their disadvantage.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Yuval-Davis (1997) argues that when any collectivity is defined (in this case, it would be the collectivity of the nation and the collectivity of the public housing project), women are often used to symbolize it while at the same time they are often excluded from its body politic: 'In this sense, the construction of womanhood has a property of 'otherness''.

<sup>2</sup> In her book *Race, Sex, Science and U.S. Imperialism in Puerto Rico* (2003: 199), Briggs emphasizes 'the prominence of language about women, gender and sexuality in the rhetoric of empire, nationalist, and various liberalisms and modernization efforts'.

<sup>3</sup> Silvia Chant (2006) has problematized the current mainstream arguments and understandings of the 'feminization of poverty'- so common to the American and Puerto Rican discourses of welfare and the public housing policies set in place because of them- arguing that rather than employing narrow economic indicators, the multidimensional aspects of gender disadvantage should be considered by improving the quality and coverage of sex-disaggregated data on material poverty. In particular, there is a need for: sex-desegregated statistics and policy commitments; less emphasis on income and more on how it affects gender assumptions; less concern for 'female-headed households' and more on agency; research on masculinities of wealth, power and privilege; and a shift towards looking at the feminization of responsibility.

<sup>4</sup> The work of the program of modernization – which many residents both from the Mayaguez project visited and Las Gladiolas told me was superficial- ranges from: the replacement of floors, cabinets, bathrooms, doors, windows, and appliances; the installation of new lighting, electrical and phone wiring, drainage, and sewer systems; to the painting of facades and the upgrading of ramps, sidewalks, parking, and access to common areas.

<sup>5</sup> Following an unprecedented partial shutdown of Puerto Rico's government in May of 2006 which lasted three weeks, the island made a rare appearance in an *Economist* article entitled 'Puerto Rico: Trouble on Welfare Island'. It focused on Puerto Rico's poverty in relation to the U.S. (48% of the island lived below the federally-defined poverty line, exceeding the poverty rate of the poorest states four times over) and signaled out 'big' government and the presence of a pervasive welfare state as the main culprits engendering such deplorable conditions. The objective "evidence" presented, drawn from Collins et. al. (2006) was framed in gendered terms, arguing that men were negatively reproducing 'labour distortions' by excessively manipulating welfare benefits, being lazy and lacking ambition, and effectively invisibilizing women from that 'active' picture (*Economist* 2006: 50).

<sup>6</sup> In Puerto Rico, *bochinche* not only means a loud racket, but it also means *chisme*, or gossip. This is a derived meaning from the native Taíno Indian word *bochinche* which meant brawl. Since *chismes* (gossip) tend to cause fights as well, the two began to be used interchangeably to mean the same thing. In English, the word is inherently gendered, as 'In the word's original sense, God-sibb meant 'godparent', then sponsor and advocate, then it became a relative, then a woman friend, then 'mostly a woman, of light and trifling character, especially one who delights in idle talk, a newsmonger, a tattler' (Mills 1991 cited in Letherby 32).

<sup>7</sup> While not a word in and of itself, it was meant to sound like a person who engages in the act of *lamer* or 'licking' in a pejorative and taunting sense. This is a play on words, also meant to make one think of a *lambe-ojo* or suck up.

<sup>8</sup> In *Puerto Rican Nation on the Move: Identities on the Island and in the United States*, Jorge Duany (2002) uses the cultural intricacies of this '*vaiwén*' to speak metaphorically about the fluid and hybrid identities of Puerto Ricans both in the island and in the mainland; of an island 'on



the move': ' [it] implies that people do not stay put in one place for a long period of time,... it suggests that those who are here today may be gone tomorrow...it connotes unsteadiness, inconstancy and oscillation' (3).

<sup>9</sup> In her article entitled 'English Only Jamás but Spanish Only Cuidado: Language and Nationalism in Contemporary Puerto Rico', Frances Negrón Muntaner (1997) traces the way language has been used as a political mobilizing force from the early days of U.S. rule until the 1992 elections. She notes how beyond the 'Spanish First; versus 'English-only' debates, Spanglish- as a linguistic practice- emerges as a hybrid resistance 'acting as a source of creativity, parody and political alignment (272). But intellectuals (particularly Nationalist ones) who see themselves as the healers of the colonial language problem divide bilinguals into various categories of greater or lesser status, depending on education (*ibid.*).

<sup>10</sup> Young (1990: 34-37) defines injustice as the combined conditions of domination and oppression. Oppression is defined as institutional constraints on self-development determined by five criteria: exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism and violence- all conditions which Gladiolas residents, in one way or another, live under. Domination, on the other hand, is defined by institutional constraint on self-determination.

<sup>11</sup> Rancièrè wants to argue that, '...there is no fatal mechanisms transforming reality into an image; no monstrous beast absorbing all desires and energies into its belly; no lost community to be restored' (48).

<sup>12</sup> In Latour's (2005: 24) words: 'ANT claims that it is possible to trace more sturdy relations and discover more revealing patterns by finding a way to register the links between unstable and shifting frames of reference rather than by trying to keep one frame stable.'

<sup>13</sup> In comparing text and image, Knowles and Sweetman (2004 *ibid*) also argue that pictorial representations can be less ambiguous because their format faithfully records emotional subscripts- in a way that transcripts of spoken word cannot: 'the smile, laugh or scowl remains' .

<sup>14</sup> Of the two photographic collections Duany reviews, the 'Underwood and Underwood' series 'dwell on the islanders' rustic, rudimentary, and destitute way of life, characterized by sheer misery, undeveloped modes of transportation, primitive technology, and a lack of industrial development...primarily as blacks and mulattoes, thus placing them at the lower rungs of human evolution in the dominant thinking of their time' (103). The 'Gardener' series, on the other hand, 'exalts the Island's abundant flora and fauna...represented as a valuable U.S. acquisition [...] with a colonial administration altruistically concerned with the native's welfare' (117-19).

## **Chapter 3**

### **Locating 'others' in urban space: The intersections of gender, race and national development**

### 3.1. Introduction

One of the main arguments that will be traversing this thesis is that the unequal divisions of urban space in Puerto Rico have been justified over time through the ‘othering’ of certain people, places and objects. As a framework that covers different time periods, it requires that some of the mechanisms through which such classifications came to be circulated and powerfully mediated in the production of urban space first be unpacked. That history is directly relevant to the construction of public housing and will prove important to understanding the trajectory of Las Gladiolas- a place recurrently labelled ‘other’ to the socio-physical order of its surrounding financial district.

The ‘other’ has been widely studied as a central ontological figure to processes of colonization that rely on the production of symbolic boundaries of essentialized difference as a means of establishing hegemonic rule. Foucault (1980) famously argued that in modern nation-states we come to know these different ‘others’ (criminals, deviants, sick and institutionalized) through the tandem production of power and discourse; where power is created and transferred through discourses that act as the embodiment, techniques or establishment of truth. Moreover, his work on governmentality (1991), while often criticized for lack of emphasis on place, resistance, and the non-Western world, stresses the way in which particular and diverse technologies of power- including knowledge production, technologies of representation and putting a political imaginary in place- are essential for the regulation of populations. Gillian Hart (2004: 92) stressed the richness of this concept of governmentality arguing that it is a precise lens that offers:

‘...a diagnosis of the rationalities of rule, the forms of knowledge and expertise they construct, and the specific and contingent assemblages of practices, materials, agents and techniques through which these rationalities operate to produce governable subjects. Governmental power [...] operates not through imposition or repression but rather through cultivating the conditions in which non-sovereign subjects are constituted. In addition, the concept of governmentality decisively de-centres the state as a monolithic source of power...’.

Despite this crucial emphasis on the multi-sited nature of authority and subject-production, Foucault’s work does not locate those important critiques in

relation to coloniality or empire. Edward Said (1980), on the other hand, expands that discussion by pointing out the symbolic power involved in Europe's representational practices and construction of an Oriental 'other', and departs significantly from it by focusing more on the resistances rather than the formations of power (1993). Said considered contestations to be linked not only to colonial instruments of domination and techniques of surveillance, but also to be 'rooted in actual territory' (2005: 269) rather than an abstract thesis. But, despite his will to 'articulate the potential to resist and recreate' (Ashcroft and Ahlualia 2001:68), Said's *Orientalism* has also been criticized for ultimately reinforcing a vision of power as one of dualistically opposed forces (of West vs. Orient). Homi Bhabha (1994) argued that any straightforward divide between an abstract Western 'us' versus Oriental 'other' was made unstable through the ambiguous manifestations of race- as stigmas- in practice. Moreover, Stuart Hall's (1996: 250) reflections on the global and transcultural context of the postcolonial world, add that these 'Western' versus 'Oriental' cultural categories are superfluous because colonialism produced 'hybridity, syncretism, cultural undecidability and [the] complexities of diasporic identification which interrupt any "return" to ethnically closed and centred original histories' for everyone. By pointing out the powerful cultural effects of colonialism, he contends that there is no 'us' versus 'them' to think of in the first place; and that, by implication, resistances should not be fashioned with those artificial divisions in place. Despite these critical elaborations for destabilizing a fixed notion of 'West' versus 'Other', Foucault's and Said's legacies remain foundational theoretical reference points to those concerned with how 'the other' was embedded in structures, circulations and resistances to modern power.

An excellent example of thoughtful and critical application of Foucauldian theory is Stephen Legg's (2007) study of Delhi's colonial urban governmentalities. He conceived elements of 'othering', such as race, to be one of many objects of governance and used it to trace hierarchical ordering and discursive formations of knowledge that were part of New Delhi's apparatus of control, specifically in the way it was linked to residential segregation. He argued that looking at ideas and practices of sameness and difference in colonial society can, 'help us to understand the episteme not only informing the regime of landscaping [in New Delhi] but also the discursive/spatial formations that infiltrated [the older city]' (*ibid.*, 38).

In the more specific field of housing studies, John Flint (2002: 621) has productively drawn on a governmentality perspective concerned with 'how particular governmental identities are tied to practices of self-government' in order to elaborate on the power relationships between national governments, local housing agencies, and social housing tenants, as these are manifest in discourse, strategies, or governance tactics. Following Nikolas Rose's (1999) notion of 'ethopolitics' as 'a configuration which governs the ethical self-conduct of the subject within a framework of fixed moral codes...involving conducting oneself through a prescribed art of living in relation to work, consumption, and other aspects of existence' (2003: 613), Flint argues that in the UK new 'politics of behaviour' or 'governance of conduct' (2002; 2004) are being constructed around rationalities of social housing governance. Crucial to these technologies is the centring of community as a spatial territory and social process where, paradoxically, citizens must become more empowered *and* disciplined citizens through a refashioned moral discourse of responsibility and duty to self and others; at the same time that amidst an increasingly polarized housing environment, active consumption is being pursued. Significantly to what follows, both Flint's and Legg's work emphasize the importance of material context and subjectivity to the text and language often associated with discourse, stressing that the cultural and material must be conceived through their interrelations, rather than separately. They therefore open a space for the analysis of resistances to past and present policies or governance technologies.

In this chapter, I will be looking at how 'the other', (or the 'governed', in Flint's sense), became an integral part of Puerto Rico's nation-building project during its history of colonial urban spatial planning. I will argue that gender, race and class were 'objects of imperial discourse' (Legg: 43) used as part of the modernizing colonial episteme which- since the 1930's- sought to enforce new socio-spatial orders of progress and development based on white, masculine, middle-class standards. The first part of the chapter provides a theoretical overview of some of the perspectives and debates surrounding questions of 'the other'. Following a brief discussion of how Spanish and American colonialisms created the figure of a native 'other' as questionable, I turn to look at the way in which- since the island's industrialization- the design and administration of the modern urban landscape depended on the establishment of internal colonial hierarchies dubbed the 'double coloniality of power' (Mignolo

2000) for its practical enforcement. The last section explores how the idealized national visions of ordered landscapes and model suburban homes were imagined in highly gendered and raced terms. I explore these ‘modern’ colonial national spaces of gendered and raced difference- or ‘others- by analysing a series of images published in newspapers, magazines and policy documents that, as argued in the previous chapter, provide an additional level of discourse elucidating some of the signs and sites through which these ‘objects of imperial discourse’ became visible and normalized, as ‘others’.

### **3.2. Theorizing the colonial ‘others’**

In the 1980’s, the Subaltern Studies Group studied how the figure of an ‘other’ was constructed and marginalized *vis à vis* the dominant ‘nation’. They endeavoured to ‘write in’ the actions, rhetoric and discourses of non-elites, or ‘subalterns’ of history in order to render them politically and socially active (Guha 1983; Chatterjee 1986; Young 1990). Yet, while their efforts further legitimated the need to look at the ‘others’ of history for a more complete picture of nation-building, their tendency to valorize the ‘local’ - particularly the woman- as more authentic and less power-imbued when trying to uncover ‘native consciousness’ as *the* subaltern of dominant historical record, generated strong criticisms. Most famously, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1995) argued that by trying to uncover this ‘other’, we ignore the ways in which experience is always interpreted and represented for us. She was critical of what this search implied: mainly the presupposition that something can be or needs to be uncovered, thus becoming a representation itself and obscuring other forms of power relations. Her guiding, provocative, and ultimately unanswered question, ‘Can the subaltern speak?’ (*ibid.*), points out the difficulty of addressing ‘otherness’ in work that seeks to give voice to others- a challenge, or productive tension, that as discussed in the methodology, is relevant to how I conceived public housing residents as subalterns in this thesis. Other feminist postcolonial critics have since taken up this critical question, including race and sexuality as critical sites of colonial encryption through which subjects and ‘selves’ are produced. That is, they have deconstructed this subaltern ‘other’ as a gendered and racialized production in relation to the homogeneous articulations of a mythical ‘nation’, typically conceived as an eternal reality. In doing so, they have uncovered specific ways through which power operates (for example through language) to produce gendered and racialized

'Others' (Stoler 1995: 10; Yuval-Davis 1997; Gedalof 1999; Kaplan, Alarcón et al. 1999; Stoler 2002).

'The other' has also been critical to the reconstruction of colonial histories in Latin American and Caribbean afro-diasporic studies of dependence (Dussel 1993). One of their key arguments- not unlike Said's postulations of the Oriental 'other'- is that Latin America was a central determinant of 'modernity' and that conquest was essential to the constitution of the modern ego as a subjectivity that takes itself to be the centre or end of history (Quijano 2000). This kind of European self-incorporation made 'The Other' peripheral *and* instrumental to the relationship between modernity as a social project of government, and coloniality as a power technology that rested on knowledge of that 'Other' (Espinosa Arango 2005: 239). This context granted Spanish imperialism a sense of legitimacy with which to exploit and oppress their 'others'; a process which has been referred to as 'the coloniality of power and knowledge' (Quijano 2000).

The Spanish empire's desire for territorial expansion integrated colonized people by moving them from 'the savage margins' to 'the civilized centers' (*ibid.*, 247), dominating and classifying human populations according to positive or negative identifications with social, cultural and spatial dichotomies, themselves informed through a 'racial myth of white supremacy' (*ibid.*). In Puerto Rico, the *cimarrón* (escaped slave-workers, Indians, and ethnic 'others' to the Spanish throne) was the initial modern subaltern figure, identified not only through race, but also through associations to particular spaces such as the mountainous (uncivilized) counter-culture society of that time (Quintero Rivera 2003: 95). At the same time, non-colonial women were similarly classified as marginal, arousing suspicion and allowing subordination (Torres Vidal 1998: 107).

Yet, after four hundred years of Spanish colonial rule, Puerto Rico did *not* undergo the decolonization process common to other countries of the region. Instead, through the Spanish-American War of 1898, it was handed over to the United States as part of that nation's 'practices of conceiving, creating, justifying and governing a far-flung empire composed of an incredibly diverse group of islands spread across the Caribbean and the Pacific' (Thompson 2002: 8). This granted them, at once, a post-colonial status combined with

a new colonial one. But when American imperial hegemony was instituted in 1898, coloniality took on a different form to the Spanish one before it. It rested primordially on ‘Americanizing’ Puerto Ricans in a way that marked them as dependent ‘Others’ to the metropolis via metaphors of femininity and childishness which symbolically castrated (Hall, *ibid.*: 262) and constructed them as second-class citizens. As a Foucauldian technology of representation, this mechanism of governmentality allowed the colonial power to introduce their modes of production, commerce, education and government while projecting the islanders as inherently unable to assimilate (Malavet 2004). This is what Hart’s quotation before referred to as ‘cultivating the conditions in which non-sovereign subjects are constituted’.

Colonial difference, however, was not only established and guaranteed by ‘the domination and exploitation of the entire Puerto Rican people by Euro-North American forms of colonialism, but also by an auxiliary colonialism that establishes and guarantees the inferiority of Caribbean non-white populations by the white *Criolla* superiority’ (Dietz 1989: 15). That is, local elites, or ‘privileged subject people’ who saw themselves as the legitimate rulers of the island’s space (as white descendants of Spanish colonials), were always interested in being accepted as ‘equal’ by the colonizers (Santiago-Valles 1994). Despite being caught in a dependent position themselves, administrators relied on the symbolic and economic support of colonial authorities in order to validate their own internally repressive position in the power grid. Consequently, this group of ‘native intelligentsia’ not only ‘othered’ themselves in relation to their master, they also did the same with their native ‘others’ in relation to their relative local power. Thus, by attempting ‘to seize or negotiate the mechanisms of exploitation and progress’ through ‘the intellectual surveillance and paternal preservation of the colonial majorities’ (Santiago-Valles: 229) they were performing what Bhabha called ‘colonial mimicry’: a colonial strategy of ‘reform, regulation and discipline which “appropriates” the Other as it visualizes power colonial process of domination’ (Bhabha 1994: 122).





**Figure 3.1. ‘Democracy Will Win’ Billboard. 1946.**  
Ponce street corner with school children and sign depicting Uncle Sam.  
Source: Roskam. Feb. 1946 Colección de Instrucción Pública (CIP). Archivo General de Puerto Rico (AGPR). Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueño (ICP).

This process, whereby colonial subject people dominate their own ‘others’ in a partial and metonymic fashion, has similarly been dubbed the ‘double coloniality of power’ by some Latin American post-colonial theorists (Quijano 1992; Mignolo 2000). It is a term which has consequently been picked up by a number of Puerto Rican cultural critics and scholars to describe local power structures and relations:

‘While all Puerto Ricans suffer from different degrees of racialization and exclusion as second-class citizens in the United States, subordinated social groups in Puerto Rico suffer from a *double coloniality of power*. The first coloniality of power- supported by racist structures and exercised from the metropolis- severely constrains the possibility of self-government and allows Congress to unilaterally determine all aspects related to Puerto Rico. The second, and much less discussed form, is a coloniality of power enforced by the local elites over local hegemonic political, cultural, and economic spaces, sometimes under the banner of nationalist ideology’ (Grosfoguel *et al* 1997:23; my emphasis).

What is significant to note here is that while the island turned post-colonial by separating from Spain's imperial dominion, it was also- at the same time- becoming a new kind of colony and transferring and transforming its double coloniality of power. This historical simultaneity and the kinds of social, political and economic processes they have implied is one of the defining features which has rendered Puerto Rico what many have called a 'postcolonial colony'. Firstly, it combines elements of classic colonial subordination to the metropolis while retaining some independence, economic viability, and a strong cultural sense of being. This alone makes it a less than classic, but nevertheless dependent colony. Second, despite American citizenship, Puerto Ricans are still seen as 'others' within the metropolis. At the same time, while any Puerto Rican will easily admit to the island's colonial status, it is not recognized as such in mainstream political and academic circles of the United States (Duany 2002). Thus, as Juan Flores (2000) has convincingly argued, Puerto Rico's condition does not fall neatly into the accepted definitions of postcolonial theory (where the Caribbean region is imaged as entirely and classically postcolonial). Instead, it tests the validity of any cross-cutting regional definition and asks for new kind of postcolonial discourse. Thus, in the context of post-colonial globality today, Puerto Rico has not actually overcome coloniality but pluralized it (through, for example, the camouflage of commercial culture or unequal transnational interactions) (Flores: 47). Below, I begin to describe how some of the island's very particular colonial structural inequalities became part of the early institutionalization of urban planning. As this argument progresses in my work, I will also be regarding dominance in the 'colonial postcolony' in relation to its persistence through architectural means. Thus, I analyse a number of coinciding elements as an attempt to provide an interdisciplinary approach to what could be part of the new 'post-colonial colonial' discourse Flores called for.

### **Planning for 'others'**

In 1933 and 1935 respectively, the 'Puerto Rico Emergency Relief Administration' (PRERA) (a sub-set of the New Deal's<sup>1</sup> 'Federal Emergency Relief Administration' (FERA)) and the 'Puerto Rico Reconstruction Administration' (PRRA) were created to attack the far-reaching effects of poverty and unemployment which plagued the island. These U.S.-sponsored programs allowed the local power elites or 'brain trust' (Dietz 1989: 147), in

collaboration with American technocrats committed to the New Deal structure, to ‘author’ (in Foucault’s sense) the project of modernity by attacking social problems through institutional and political measures which included:

Rural rehabilitation, rural electrification, forestation and reforestation, slum clearance and low-cost housing, construction of buildings and improvements for the University of Puerto Rico, construction of a cement plant, cattle tick and coconut bud-root eradication; Federal and non-Federal projects for highways, roads, streets, public utilities, public buildings, flood control and social service and relief programs of a ‘white collar’ type; and agricultural and rural rehabilitation (Curet 1986: 37; Rodríguez Vázquez 2005).

Some have argued that beyond the implied ‘practicalities’, the most significant and enduring effect these had was that it trained local elites for their upcoming primacy in the island’s social, political and economic structures (Dietz, *ibid.*). This dominance was realized over the following two decades, with fundamental shifts slowly taking hold such as the appointment of a popular local governor, the consolidation and modernization of an entire state apparatus through the creation of public corporations and legal structures, and an aggressive and holistic economic program called ‘Operation Bootstrap’, meant to promote U.S. private capital investment through intense industrialization, while also fostering massive rural to urban migration.

As industrialism took hold, rural and poor coastal populations were lured into the growing urban regions in ever-greater numbers. But since the State could not offer them adequate financial or infrastructural resources, shanty-towns and slums became extensive in the rapidly growing urban landscape (to be discussed in Chapter 4). They soon became known as ‘the problem’ of urban overpopulation that needed to be made-over. A resident of Las Gladiolas who grew up in one of these infamous city slums recalled them in the following way:

‘I lived in *el barrio Chino*’ (Chinese barrio) - which was called like that because they were *casuchas* (shacks) made of carton and pieces of old wood and because, above those houses, the cables of the electricity towers transited and every time one of those cables fell, they killed chickens, cows...Our lives were exposed in that ‘callejón’<sup>23</sup> (Arcadio, field notes, April 2007).

**Time line development of housing institutions**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>US</b>	<b>PR</b>	<b>Main Provisions</b>
1938	Puerto Rico Home Authority		•	Responsible for developing the federal public housing program locally.
1942	The Planning Board		•	In charge of all economic planning, land use zoning and case-by-case permitting in Puerto Rico until the 1970's.
1949	Housing Act of 1949	•	•	Enacted to help eradicate slums and promote redevelopment
1954	Housing Act of 1954	•	•	Local communities had to put together a workable program for the eradication and prevention of slums and urban blight.
1958	CRUV & ARUV		•	Official institutional substitution of the local housing authority.
1991	Departamento de Vivienda (Housing Agency)		•	Eliminated CRUV and included the 'Public Housing Administration' and 'Housing Development and Improvement Administration'

Flagging the inadequateness of this kind of environment, a host of radical changes in planning, financing, designing and building housing, particularly through programs of slum-eradication, low-cost housing, and urban renewal were devised by the government during the decade of the 1940's, especially through its newly-instituted 'Planning Board'. Henri Lefebvre's (1996) notion of the role of planning, featured below, will be relevant to how I approach urban planning practices more generally across this thesis. He formulated them:

‘as ideology [that] formulates all the problems of society into questions of space and transposes all that comes from history and consciousness into spatial terms...[where] the planner ...as physician of space should have the capacity to conceive of an harmonious social space, normal and normalizing’ (*ibid.*, 99).

While the next chapter will look more attentively at how this played out in the production of public housing, the interest here is in noting how the members, architects, planners and administrators which formed the Planning Board- ‘the middling modernists’<sup>3</sup> (Rabinow 1989)- were to coordinate local programs and projects to facilitate the island's progress through housing projects and designed communitarian environments meant to shift low-income groups' self-perception and standing (Rodriguez 1998). Today's conflict over displacement in Las Gladiolas will reveal continuity and departures from this

powerful hierarchy that imagines and executes city-planning practices in a way that interacts with residents' understanding of self in society.

When first created, the duties of 'The Housing Authority' (later called the 'Corporación de Renovación Urbana y Vivienda' (CRUV) and the 'Administración de Renovación Urbana y Vivienda' (ARUV)) included:

‘...to provide a greater degree of well-being to residents through planning and construction of true communities...to offer unity and physical cohesion one must study the needs and aspirations of low income and moderate income families, their customs, ways of life and economic capabilities so as to incorporate the best architectural techniques, engineering and planning for a serene and productive life... that an environmental and architectural design is reached in tone with the Puerto Rican realities of climate, traditions, modes of life...for greater individual and collective happiness’ (Alvarado 1967).

While the terms above were well-intentioned in many respects, they also express a deep struggle for colonial domination. The local bureaucrats (illustrated in Figure 2 in their multiple roles ‘solving Puerto Rico’s housing problem’) juxtapose a subscription to the *material* world represented by American capital power (‘low income’, ‘architectural techniques’, etc.) with an explicit sensibility for local ways of being (‘customs’, ‘tradition’). As such, the ‘ironic compromise’ or ‘double articulation’ of Bhaba’s mimicry (*ibid.*, 121-23) becomes evident in their binary expressions, where there is at once an affirmation (‘resemblance’) of colonial forms of authority *and* a threat (‘menace’) to it which insists on the difference of Puerto Rican realities. It tacitly recognizes the clash between those two logics as a way to place modern expertise as the most adequately equipped for straddling those two worlds. The selfless tone projected can therefore be understood as the ‘double coloniality of power’ in action. That is, it contained local male elites’ aspiration to ensure American support politically *and* economically by demonstrating their ability to act as administrative colonizers themselves: building up a local infrastructure for the poor could help them to be recognized as proficient in regulating and controlling their own ‘Puerto Rican’ realities; i.e., their people and places. Based on the ancient political premise that not everyone can govern’ (Chatterjee 2004: 77), Puerto Rico’s own bureaucratic planning practices set the tone for what

is still a highly paternalistic relationship between the Housing Authority and public housing residents.

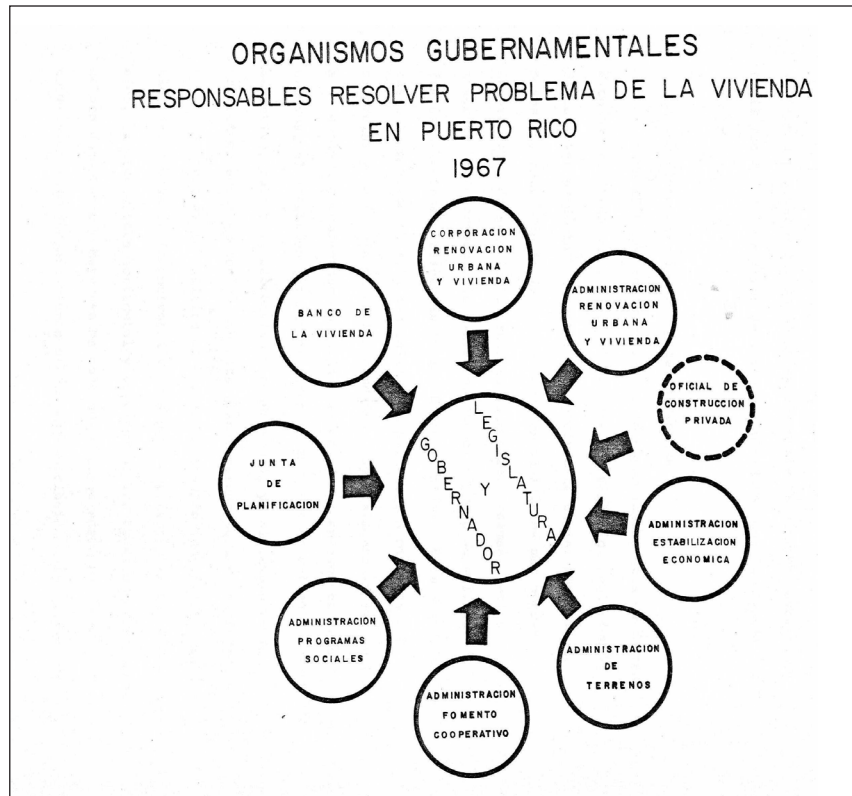
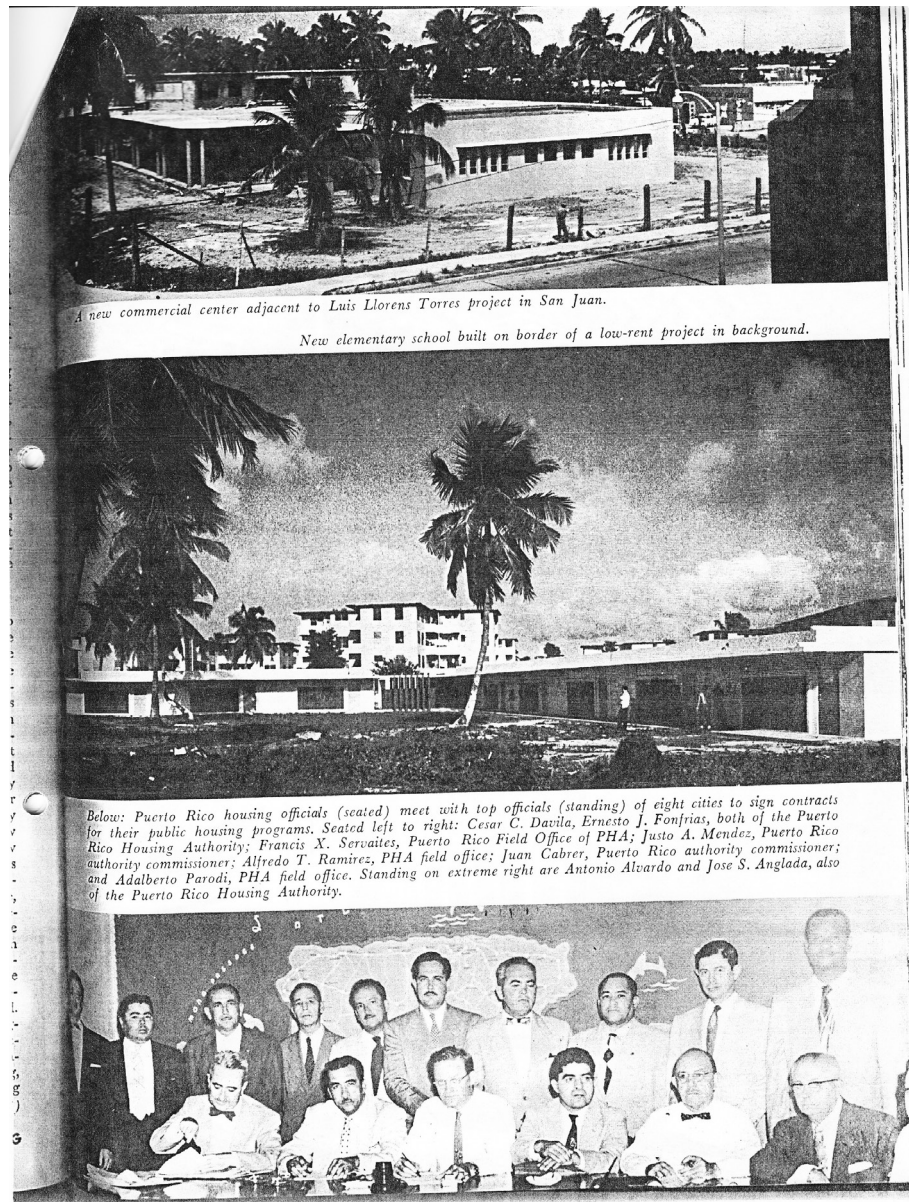


Figure 3.2. Governmental organisms responsible for solving the housing problem in Puerto Rico. Housing Bank, CRUV, ARUV, Private Construction Official, Administration of Economic Stability, Land Administration, Cooperative Development Administration, Social Programs Administration, and Planning Board all feeding into the Legislature and Governor. Source: Alvarado 1967.

Nevertheless, like Chattarjee’s study of squatters in India revealed, the actions of some Gladiolas residents such as Arcadio will also be seen to be actively involved in pursuing a community agenda of empowerment and self-maintenance, demonstrating that ‘people are learning, and forcing their governors to learn how they would prefer to be governed’ (*ibid.*, 78).

Nevertheless, the Housing Director’s quotation before framed urban planning concerns as linked to architecture in a quasi-sociological language that recalls the element of authority as expertise. This language effaced the role middling modernists’ planning *also* played (and continues to play) in creating a strong tourism industry for wealthy Americans by changing the city’s surface appearance through urban/architectural measures<sup>4</sup> (Torres Rivera ; Rodriguez 1998: 78). That is, improving urban landscapes and facilitating new built environment was not just a tool that facilitated consumption, pro-



**Figure 3.3. The middling modernists of Puerto Rican urban development. 1955.** Sitting below images of their accomplishments, including a commercial centre and elementary school near Luis Llorens Torres housing project are: Francis X. Servaites from the PHA Puerto Rico Field Office, as well as Cesar Cordero Davila, Ernesto J. Fonfrias and Antonio Alvarado.

vided houses, and disciplined the labor force; it was also a mechanism that had to be established in order to attract U.S. capital for the industrialization and development of the island. These socio-scientific colonial developments proved strategic for the local elites and for the metropolis, with Puerto Rico construed as ‘one useful example of planning for a poor region of a relatively rich nation...a testing ground for ideas planners could not sell in other areas, mostly the U.S.’ (Goldsmith, Clavel et al. 1974: 143). Indeed the island was the first breeding ground of the *maquiladoras* and tax-haven models for foreign manufacturers that would later be exported to Latin America and around the world. Thus, statements of benevolent government action like the one quoted before can not be divorced from the integral political and economic landscapes, continually inscribed in the island’s colonial development.

The critical intersections between urban development and colonial relationships were also made evident in some official ‘exchanges’ I found in the archives within letters that spanned from 1930’s to the 1960’s dealing with the growing ‘problem’ of housing. The language contained in these often reaffirmed local elites’ stronghold over the island’s administration, while also relegating them to their secondary position as colonial subjects and ‘others’ to their U.S. counterpart. In one letter sent to the island’s Governor by U.S. housing officials, they stressed how ‘impressed’ they were by ‘the progress achieved by the little island’ (Official letter from Bette Jenkins, Manager of Gratiot Redevelopment, Detroit to P.R. Governor Luis Muñoz Marín, May 7, 1952.). Puerto Rican administrators immediately responded by thanking their imperial masters for helping them achieve such noted improvements, thereby re-inscribing and concealing the constitutive difference of the colonial relationship; minimizing or obviating the complex economic and political terms that structured it and which, in turn, had a direct impact on the urban environment.

In other reports, local island administrators such as the Director of the Puerto Rico Field Office of the Public Housing Administration, Francis X. Servaites (1955: 324), pictured in Figure 3.3 alongside other housing officials and some of their ‘model’ projects, congratulated local politicians for their efforts to modernize urban space and improve the housing stock according to the American or ‘developing’ standards:



‘... recognizing the underlying concepts of growth, consolidation of growth and progress for more growth that is inherent in any subsidization program... Their actions were consistent with the quality of progress on other fronts- new roads were first class roads, new schools contained the best elements of design and planning, new hospitals were modern and complete, new reservoirs fulfilled every requirement, new hydroelectric dams were highly efficient, new transportation developments were the best obtainable... *Stagnation, experimentation, and factionalism gave way to drive, maturity and comprehensive planning...* It might be said that the extensive federally-aided public housing program [The Housing Act of 1949] is almost an attempt to undo the neglect of previous years by bringing about a standard of living that can be pointed to with face-saving grace... tailor made for congested, land-scarce Puerto Rico... a sense of envy touches them [visitors from around the world] as they see how Puerto Rico has met the challenge of its own under-development’ (*ibid.*, my emphasis).

Here, some of the interests mentioned earlier come together through a language that expressed an internalized sense of dependence or secondary status in relation to American ‘modes of production’ (exemplified in the quotation above by the ‘1949 Federal Housing Act’) [see Fig.3.1 for an everyday urban visual counterpart to this phenomenon]. **The author juxtaposes a sense of local inadequacy** (‘stagnation’, ‘underdevelopment’) to one of distinct achievement (‘quality of progress’, ‘maturity’) through a, once again, binary sense of evolutionary improvement from one state to another. An idealisation for American values of progress is underlined by the reverential tone employed. And, in suggesting that the Act was ‘tailor made’ with the Puerto Rican welfare in mind, he removes whatever incongruities may lie in the gap between that externally designed policy and its territorial application, evading all question of colonial productions, power relationships and its potential negative effects.

By presenting the housing solutions as practical (architectural/engineering) rather than imperial (Said 1983), *Criollo* elites helped to conceal American rule through everyday cultural elaborations and governmentalities. At the same time, while resistances and counter-discursive formations *did* take place (Santiago Valle: 1994), those ‘other’ subjects who were being planned for also got involved in the production of the institutional fabric of slum eradication, public housing construction and urban development through *their own* everyday acceptance and collusion, a reality illustrated through Arcadio’s

memory cited before of the shanty-town he grew up in. Citizen participation was incentivized through overarching policies that, beyond ‘improving’ infrastructure, also educated children and adults; brought technical innovation; established agricultural cooperatives to market their products; inserted social aid programs; and created public jobs (Rodríguez Vázquez 2005: 211-218). Today, this kind of collusion can be seen in the simultaneous provision of welfare benefits and relocation efforts, which place public housing residents in the often impossible position of having to ‘choose’ or pick sides based on these contradictory offers (i.e., if they do not move, they may lose benefits). But this difficult position is also the locus from where, as described in the introductory chapter, certain ambiguous positionalities and political moves have been developed (to be looked at in Chapters 5-7). In the following section, I take a closer look at how consolidating an emerging ‘modern’ version of nationhood was not only an institutional endeavour like the one described above but also, crucially, one that involved the continuous and multi-sited symbolic production and representation of gendered and raced ‘others’ to the dominant culture taking hold.

### **3.3. Constructing Puerto Rican modern urban identity**

#### **Gendered and raced ‘others’**

Studies have shown that under Spanish imperialism, San Juan’s elite, Spanish colonial officials, and the church’s hierarchy all drew on a spectacle of poverty and immorality to set a modernizing city in motion (Matos Rodríguez and Delgado 1998). Social disorder, violence and criminality were portrayed as belonging to the economically and racially inferior sectors of society, thereby constructing the privileged classes and their white, middle-class respectability as antagonistically opposed to figures such as domestic workers, seen as poor, black, and illiterate (Crespo Kebler 2005: 142). This racist environment (and its middle-class *and* elite Spanish colonial presence) relied on the paid domestic services of black women who, like the prostitutes in the southern city of Ponce at the time, occupied the public spaces of city wells, fountains and plazas (Suárez Findlay 1999). This presence was at odds with the colonial discourses circulating about women’s proper place of submission and dependence. The uneasiness that these dark women’s bodies produced in public space contributed to the drafting of early urban development plans of ‘hygiene and progress’ (*ibid.*). But the economic and housing crises of the time overshadowed

owed the intent to control, given that laundresses and other lower class populations of ‘unruly bodies’- the objects to be confined- still found spaces from where to refuse their marginalization and control (Matos Rodriguez *ibid*, 125). Nevertheless, overcrowding and a fear of racially-oriented uprisings eventually led to pushing people of the same race, class and gender (poor women, mulattos and blacks) outside the city walls into extramural *barrios*. New barracks had to be constructed by the displaced people themselves so as to allow for the expansion of the governmental vision of the city as a modern civil, secure and respectable economic infrastructure. Gendered and racialized senses of morality therefore filtered arguments that linked deviant behaviour to hygiene, entering urban debates and definitions of low-income citizens, housing and appropriate spaces early on. Like in New Delhi’s sanitation development under the British colonial regime, ‘it made sanitary reform coercive and blurred the boundaries between disease and deviance’ (Hosagrahar 2005: 113).



**Figure 3.4. Part of the Slum area of ‘El Fanguito’, which is a tidal swamp. 1946.  
Source: Rotkin. Sept.1946. CIP/ AGPR/ ICP.**

Since the 1930’s, discourses of modernity in Puerto Rico strongly encouraged a certain form of progress which condemned underdevelopment and portrayed it as a result of overpopulation. During that period, the official *Partido Popular Democrático* (Popular Democratic Party, PPD) led by Luis Muñoz Marín dominated the local political scene with a successful formula that rested on reconciling a cultural ‘personality’ based on a Hispanic, Spanish-speaking heritage with a continued ‘free’ political association with the United States- a design later consolidated through the present-day Commonwealth status. At the time, the bourgeois attempted to offset the loss of their elitist power beget by American colonization by presenting the island as an unstable *nave*

*al garete*<sup>5</sup> (ship gone adrift), and by recuperating Spanish cultural models that significantly erased multi-racial legacies and history, dominating class conflicts and women's place in it (Díaz and Zimmerman 2001: 263). The leaders wished to 'salvage manhood' (Jiménez 2004) according to a virile gendered Spanish past that replaced a traditional vision of home life and work with a version that would conform to the idealized, American forms of progress being advanced. In particular, the modernizing tendencies the PPD promoted linked the nation's economic well-being and status to the reduction of large families, the privatization of domestic capabilities, irregular marriages and maternal and infant mortality rates (Briggs 2002: 75). Thus, it sought to recuperate patriarchal authority in social and cultural relations by focusing on its nucleus: the family (Roy-Féquièrre 2004). In this model, the bodies of women became sites of cultural and political contestations (Kaplan, Alarcón et al. 1999) and were made responsible for both securing an idealized Spanish past of the essential woman and ensuring a modern, more American present/future. Women's incorporation into the work force was on the one hand portrayed as evidence of instability and fragmentation (Seda Bonilla 1969); while, on the other, due to a generalized concern with alleviating poverty, the need for nuclear families, progress, and national improvement was also being reiterated (Valdés and Hernández, *ibid.*). Depending on the family/work structure chosen, the Puerto Rican woman became variously depicted as either 'mother of the nation' or as 'failure of nationhood' (Briggs, *ibid.*). As forms of femaleness became a pervasive mark on the body of the nation and growing associations were made between nationalism and motherhood, their bodies were increasingly used as an object of governmental regulation and power (McClinktock 1995; Martínez-San Miguel 1997; Briggs 2002). Here, perhaps most poignantly, the tensions of negotiating the postcolonial colony are evident in how gender becomes incorporated into it.

These competing versions of gendered nationhood that emerged alongside urbanism generated anxieties which got filtered through a discourse of overpopulation, informed by questions of race and gender that explained (or, rather, blamed) poverty on the dangerous and excessive sexuality and fertility of Puerto Ricans, especially female slum-dwellers coming from the rural areas. Denominated popularly as 'irresponsible over-breeders' or 'demon mothers' (Briggs, *ibid.*), this undesirable but necessary surplus population became the 'others' of a growing city. Along with the rest of 'the cheap-accessible and



Figure 3.5. San Antonio Housing Project, 1946. Family looking out of the window of their apartment. Source: Rosskam. Jan. 1946. CIP/AGPR/ICP.



Figure 3.6. Sunday San Juan Star Magazine cover. September 29, 1963.

pliable labour force' (Santiago-Valles 1994: 191), poor women were regarded as the 'native' underclass of society, depicted as uncontrollable disorder. Women were not only seen to personify what had officially been announced as the national enemy (underdevelopment), but their reproductive role and excessive mothering were also considered to play a distinct role in the impoverishment of urban landscapes. During this historical juncture, other direct political measures anchored on women's bodies were taken to moderate unemployment and reduce birth rates, such as the institutionalized encouragement of out-migration (Ostalaza Bey 1986-87; Santiago-Valles 2005). In this environment, fertility control and reproductive technologies, many of which were tested on Puerto Rican women, came to represent progress- what Briggs (2003: 90) called: 'the modernizing nationalism of birth control rhetoric'. In Figures 3.4 and 3.5, found in the same archival photographic collection, the concerns of housing demand and overpopulation are linked in their gendered depictions of poverty: The first situates two women and a child as enveloped in the chaos of the slums' swampiness; the second literally frames and therefore shows the progress of 'containing' families within public housing, yet the number of children continues to connect them to their 'excessive' slum-like origins. These kinds of representations- grounded on the bodies of women- existed alongside other countless and politically manipulated colonial narratives of their subjectivities in ways that folded their impact back onto those very bodies. As Briggs (2003: 110), again, so eloquently argued:

"The relentlessly fertile Puerto Rican mother provided an interpretive key for (post)colonial poverty, communism, and the role of the U.S. in the Third World. For liberals, she was victimized by her endless children and they longed to rescue her from her own ignorance and *macho* Puerto Rican men who proved their virility through her suffering maternity; for conservatives, fecundity could only be halted by strong measures- sterilization, high doses of hormones, perhaps a contraceptive agent in the water. In either case, poverty was caused by reproduction, and U.S. experts had answers'.

At the same time, while there were cultural representations and narratives linking the migrating 'urban barbarians' denigrated as cultural, gendered and racial outsiders to crime, deviance, and immorality; this concealed the actual structural conditions that were responsible for the wide-spread poverty and increase in housing demand (Santiago-Valles 1994: 219; Colón Reyes 2005; Cotto Morales 2007). As Hall (1997: 263) has argued, 'What is visually pro-

duced, by the practices of representation, is only half the story. The other half- the deeper meaning- lies in what is not being said...what is implied but cannot be shown'. Such tacitness is important to this discussion in two ways: First, through the economic, political and cultural struggle to harmonize women's roles as mothers, citizens and workers in a dominant context of impoverishment where, in the photographic sources consulted, there was an obvious lack of women's images found *outside* of domestic spaces; And second, through the clash between images that constructed representations of the 'good' and 'bad' woman of modern urban space. This latter tension was poignantly contained in the contrasting representations offered in pictures and articles published within popular magazines, newspapers, and government reports of the 1940's-60. In these, woman was either invisible or woman was hyper-visible- as a mixture of tradition and modernity in her role as worker and/or mother. Images, in this sense, served as a duplicitous discursive layer of invisibilization that portrayed either a smooth connection between family, home and labour, or hid its potential problems and collisions.

In a 1963 cover on the magazine of the island's English-language newspaper 'The San Juan Star' [Figure 3.6], a white woman is figured as a happy mother of a small nuclear family, standing in the centre as if commanding the 'elements' around her; the clothes she wears and the activity she is performing (a BBQ) all suggest that she is also a modern working woman. At the same time, by placing her squarely within the *dominant*<sup>6</sup> middle-class domestic sphere/activity, she (whose acknowledging gaze tells us she is the focal point of the image) is returned to her place in a way that highlights how that place is now at the threshold between the modern and the traditional. The other signs surrounding her switch traditional gender roles in some ways, while retaining traditional ones in others (passive husband, playing and studious children, and a grandmother). The serene Puerto Rican backyard and the American-style BBQ- together- allude to the idealized cultural hybridity which suburban modes of living were supposed to deliver. These elements are all meant to be read precisely through the contrasts they evoke and what those seem to say about her: 'She can handle it *and* be happy while doing so.' In the previous image [Figure 3.5], while woman is also figured as mother, poverty is the dominant subtext. There is little ambiguity in those signs. If we return to the second, however, modernity and progress presuppose a redefinition of motherhood and female labour amidst domestic space *without* alluding to

the possible conflicts it entailed. Like the governmental narratives of progress discussed in previous sections, the image omits, or rather contains, the way gender has been central to the ways by which ‘the citizen’ and ‘worker’ have been constructed through notions of moral and spatial appropriateness, and how it also played a role in the discriminatory control and distribution of resources of the island. In that happy world, the ‘other’ woman- the one of the first image- is nonexistent, and her way of life rejected.

Moreover, men are differentially positioned in each of the images. In the first, besides a young boy/son, there is no man, highlighting the feminized character of her poverty. In the second, the men (children and husband) are definitely there, but they assume a less active role, except for the husband, who appears united to his wife through the undefined act of sharing the domestic item: a pepper mill. Unlike the first image, the ‘reality’ portrayed here is one where an immediate transfer of resources is assumed; where the success of national economic programs trickle down to Puerto Rican families racialized as white, while relying on the neoclassical ‘unified household story’ which assumes joint welfare maximization with a joint (male/female) decision-making process, based on rational choice (Kabeer 1998: 94). It fulfils the fantasy of home-ownership, which the woman in the first image stagnantly framed inside a public housing project with large numbers of *mulato*<sup>7</sup> children, has not attained.

Despite their differences, neither of the images conformed to official housing reports of the 1960’s which described ‘the composite picture to the typical family’ as a forty-two year old working male, living with a wife and three young children in a two-bedroom apartment (Research Office of the Urban Renewal and Housing Administration of Puerto Rico 1966) . In the first, the portrayal is akin to Helen Icken Safa’s studies of urban neighborhoods where she uncovered that, in shanty towns and public housing (but especially the latter), family structures were matrifocal (Safa 1964; Safa 1965; Safa 1975). Rather than reinforcing the dominant position of man, she found that relocation to the new government housing projects weakened their economic and social status. Women were often the economic provider of the home, while there were also instances of both husband and wife taking up employment not just for necessity but to fit the middle class ideal; sacrificing comfort (i.e., commodities) to provide their children with an education. This version of so-



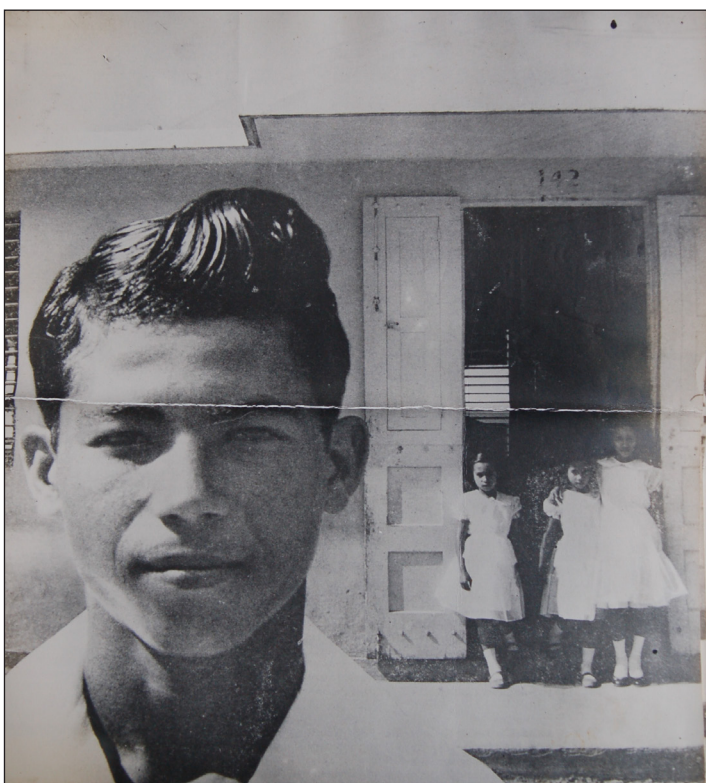


Figure 3.7. 'Coki' Lozano, young and older. Source: Junta de Planificación 1957.

cial reality has nothing to do with the middle-class image of the white woman which, as the mainstream face of a new national identity, reinforced the negation of the 'other', poorer or more sacrificed modes of living and signalled instead the benefits and pleasures of modern life. Even though the wife and mother of Figure 3.6 may have been working, what is significant to that picture is that such a possibility is merely suggested 'implicitly', in Hall's sense, while 'traditional' domestic roles remained explicitly in tact.

In the set of pictures below, taken from a 1957 Planning Board study of housing programs [Figure 3.7], 'the miseries of the slum' (Estado Libre Asociado de Puerto Rico 1957: 33-34) are narrated through the 1949 picture of a dark young boy ('Coki' Lozano) who is meant to personify the problems of the island's progress in highly gendered terms. In this representation, however, man is the central problematized figure traversed both by his race and class. In the first of the two images, he is described as a 'sullen face, unkempt ragamuffin', and stands before a wooden shack with a group of four shabby-looking girls, who we learn only from the provided subscript are neither his household nor siblings. The unhygienic conditions are then set against a 1954 update where he is 'neat, well-combed', standing proudly and centrally, again, before his three real (this time) and properly-dressed sisters and '\$12-a-month six room modern apartment...in a government owned housing project' (*ibid.*). In the first, poverty and illness are manifest in the dark subaltern bodies and grimy home so common to newspaper portrayals of slum at that time. Women-young and barefoot- are positioned in the background as the needy, passive recipients who can benefit from the man's achievement. It did not matter if they were actually related as long as the signs of poverty to progress suggested so. In the second, success supplants the squalor and is meant to be recognized in physical displays of middle-class standards, as embodied by: a raced man (neither black nor white but *mulato*), his gelled hair and crisp clothes (which suggest cleanliness, discipline and macho sexuality), and the centrality and power achievable through the new government-provided cement home, as it stands in relation to his still relegated, but now more decent-looking and dressed, female 'other'. These pictures and their 'map of meaning' (Hall 1997) are meant to be read against the local iconography of poverty being disseminated in newspapers demonizing the slum and celebrating public housing in both social and material terms, while also continually linking the two by marking the bodies of its inhabitants as inferior in raced and gendered terms (as we

already saw with Figures 3.5 and 3.6). In Coki's case, we saw how the ideology of modernity was being tacitly displayed through not only gendered, but also raced codes of appropriateness.

Thus, the nation and its progress were being constructed with and through paternalist representations alongside what was the racialized mythical-historical imagination of *la gran familia jíbara*<sup>8</sup> (the great 'jíbaro' family). In this vision, *Criollo* elites transformed what had been a unified portrayal of nation as 'one family' based on one race in order to emphasize their own role in a 'harmonious synthesis' of what they considered to be three separate and central racial elements of Puerto Rico: the *jíbaro*, the indigenous, and the marginalized black slave labourer of the coast (Torres 2006: 343). This racial triad is founded upon the portrayal of a naturalized hybrid mixture of physical and cultural homogenization, emphasizing multiple versions of race (white, black, *mulatto*, *moreno*, *trigueño*) determined through both physical aspects (eg.: skin colour and hair type) and social status, rather than descent. Its logic presupposes the absence and denial of blackness as ugly, dirty, backwards, hypersexual, etc. and the erasure of racial prejudice and intolerance, which hides the enactment of racist relations through activities, linguistic silences and stereotypes that represent whiteness as beautiful and superior (eg.: popular beauty contests) (Zenón Cruz 1975; Sued Badillo and López Cantos 1986; Santos Febres 1995; Godreau 2002; Godreau 2002; 2003).

Because, it is said, everyone has a little bit of each, this triadic integrationist racial myth allowed the *Criollo* elite to present themselves as representatives of *all* Puerto Ricans, suffering equally under the tyranny of the U.S.. The 're-racialization of national identity' (Fusté 2006: 16) also presented them as the more experienced and educated members of this supposed family, ideally fit (through the double coloniality of power described before) to lead the island's government and economy, all under the rubric of inclusiveness and persistent stigmatization of the black population. Thus, in their selective depictions of blackness<sup>9</sup>, the *Criollo* elite nostalgia marked those seen to be more African, or black, as last in chronological and cultural-value terms, seen as the 'folkloric remnants and sub-cultural appendages to this defining strain of Spanish, Occidental culture' (Flores 1993: 130).

Isar Godreu (2003) has noted how a popular myth of ‘mixture’ or ‘*mestizaje*’ in dominant Puerto Rican cultural narratives effectively silences or distances concepts of ethnic and racial differences. For example, national discursive strategies have rested on temporal displacement of blackness as a form of racial purity (*ancestral symbols*) associated to the past. The island’s schooling system has distanced blackness by silencing, trivializing and simplifying its contemporary implications (Godreau, Reyes Cruz et al. 2008). African heritage is invariably celebrated through folklore in the form of carnivals and commodified ‘black culture’, locating it in certain coastal communities, thereby spatially delimiting it and preventing a potential fall-out into the rest of the supposedly ‘white’ island. This racial discourse has claimed a need to protect society from its inferiors, positioning black women as degenerate in relation to their white middle-class, educated counterpart (Crespo Kebler 2005: 142). Thus, the image, bodies and sexuality of white *criolla* women appear as colonizing the definitions of decency, morality and rectitude (as seen in Figure 4), while African descent- ‘the black and mulato alternate woman’- is rendered chaotic, disordered, and in need of disciplining (as in Figure 3.4) (Jiménez-Munoz 1997: 87). The contemporary *trigueña* (wheat-toasted colour) woman, who in her racial in-betweenness stands somewhere between the European and Black phenotypes, must today negotiate her ‘upward mobility’<sup>10</sup> through other equally racialized cultural markers. For instance, because getting a hispano-public education or living in certain places of residence, like public housing, have become associated to race, class, culture and, language- merging into an imagined landscape of inferiority that distinguishes as subordinates the cultures of gendered/raced ‘others’- knowing one’s place within and negotiating through those multiple categories at once therefore becomes one of the ways to be part of, or absent from dominant national discourse (Quinones Rivera 2006: 168).

As discussed earlier, these gendered and racialized visions were combined through a discourse of overpopulation that stigmatized the spaces of slums, and later public housing, as black, poor, dependent, feminized and uneducated ‘others’. José Fusté (2010: 50) has called this process ‘place miscegenation’, whereby physically ordering dispossessed masses also consisted in ‘the assimilation of non-whites into the more ‘modern’ and purportedly more ‘civilized’ spaces and cultures of those marked as ‘white’ by virtue of their class, race and cultural backgrounds’. By having a rigidly classified ‘other’ to blame for

overpopulation (the enemy of progress and modernity) the symbols *and* spaces of the nation were able to define themselves concurrently. That is, the urban progress that was portrayed as necessary for national unity was partially projected through depictions of those opposite ‘others’. What I have been arguing is that, invocations of difference, gender and race were integral objects of governance to that selective composition.

### **The gender, race and culture of urban order**

The connections between gendered and racialized cultural discourses and the production of urban space are brought to light within the images found in a 1964 government document, *Una vez en un planeta* (Once in a Planet) (García Santiago 1964). This educational caricature for children created by the ‘Planning Board’ and meant to ‘bring knowledge of the need for planning to our citizens’, provides a wealth of information about how the *Criollo* Board members not only envisioned their superior position in Puerto Rican society (the double coloniality of power), but also how they situated the practice and contours of planning in an historical sense, and as a future projection mediated by the gendered and raced cultural referents of nationhood previously discussed.

The story recreates and reinterprets Puerto Rico’s colonial history from the point of view of Don Rafael: the white, masculine representation of the island’s national modernity. This ‘happy and reasonable’ (*ibid*, 7) business/ family person suffers from a struggle between the material (read, U.S.) and spiritual (read, P.R.) needs of man which are depicted as irritating contradictions between the beneficial and harmful effects of development [Figure 3.8]. Fed up with excessive growth, the nation- represented by a group of ‘integrated’ people- decide to board a spaceship in couples of everything, (like in Noah’s Ark) in order to conquer (read: colonize) a new *isla rica* (Rich Island) [Figure 3.9]. Metaphorically acknowledging the problem of ‘race’, this narrative claims that the citizens of the new conquered land were ‘special’ because they were integrated. But the seamlessness of that incorporation was contradicted by the tacit assertions of a ‘mixed’ nationality and the reinstatement of dominant racial mythology which denies blackness (as an autochthonous Puerto Rican feature) by assuming a racial triad. This is made most explicit in Figure 3.9 below which features a towering and very phallic spaceship, a mechanical luggage-carrier in the background and a couple of men dressed in gradua-

tion caps and gowns- all alluding to the benefits of scientific development and American progress. By way of contrast, several 'Puerto Rican' elements are discretely inserted to suggest that the island is not strictly an American product, but a result of the island's peasant, indigenous and African background as well. These are signified by: (a) the name of the ship- *La Borinqueña* - which was the name given to the island by the native *Taíno* Indians (*Boriquén*) before Spanish colonization; (b) the song 'coquí' emanating from the carriage pictured behind, which is the sound of the abundant native local frog most heard in 'el campo' (the countryside); (c) a few men wearing the straw hat, or '*pava*'<sup>11</sup> typical of the mountainous *jibaro* peasant; and finally, (d) at the very back, a single dark male body.

The purported racial mixture is painted here in white, cementing the idea that non-whites are not only a minority, but that they were- in effect- the only bodies to be considered raced. Furthermore, while all except one man are white; there is also only one woman in the entire story- the helpful white wife [Figure 3.10]. As well as wearing clothes that signify middle-class, she happens to be suggesting decency and domesticity in terms of raced codes of modernity. In line with the dominant fantasy of modern developmental goals, female bodies are merely supporting embellishment to progress- rather than central elements of it.

Once they arrived at their destination, they immediately started to construct houses and buildings. As the story continues and Don Rafael becomes perplexed by the excessiveness of this urban growth and forms a Planning Board as the solution that 'everyone', including a single black architect (again- in what seems like an attentiveness to racial categories), unanimously praised [Figure 3.11]. Together, they created 'the good life' for 'good people' through 'good planning' by designing an American-style suburban town plan replete with middle-class signifiers of progress such as utilities, roads and cars (*ibid*, 19) [Figure 3.12]. These planners' actions followed the three general and rationalist tendencies which Lefebvre (1996: 84-5) identified with planners as the self-designated 'physicians' of space; that is: a belief in themselves as the creators of new social relations; a scientism that favours the eradication of current social practices for the production of new models that 'leave way for



Figure 3.8. Planning Board Caricature A

‘One of them was Don Rafael, a business-man in the town of harmony. He’d always been a happy and very reasonable man’. Source: García Santiago 1964.



Figure 3.9. Planning Board Caricature B

‘The space shuttle was a marvel of technical ingenuity but the most important thing were THE TRAVELERS THEMSELVES... There was a couple of every race, color and creed...Two of every profession...One couple of every animal, bird and insect...It was truly AN INTEGRATED GROUP! Source: García Santiago 1964.



Figure 3.10. Planning Board Caricature C  
 ‘Constructing a City: Game for Constructing it, Model E- 4693. Blueprint Included. Made in Puerto Rico’. Source: García Santiago 1964.



Figure 3.11. Planning Board Caricature D  
 ‘Planning Board:  
 -Well, let’s go create it RIGHT NOW- screamed a voice.  
 -Yes, right now! Said another- Let’s create PLANNING BOARD!  
 -It would be good if we started EVERYTHING ANEW again- suggested a highly respected architect from the community’. Source: García Santiago 1964

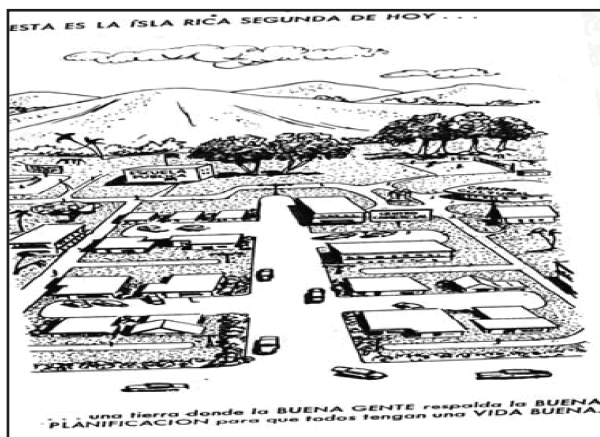


Figure 3.12. Planning Board Caricature E  
 ‘This is the second Rich Island today...a land where GOOD PEOPLE support GOOD PLANNING so that everyone can have a GOOD LIFE’. Source: García Santiago 1964.



cars’; and a notion of planning as an exchange value, where the new city is a centre of privileged consumption’.

By including the island’s natural topography (mountains and palm trees), the backdrop retained the cultural ambivalence inherent to the national order, reflecting the way by which these solutions always included the partial or ambiguous assertion of native ‘authenticity’ in exotic tropical terms, *vis à vis* the implicit colonization of that land by American models. The conflicting representations of nature resonate with Duany’s (2003) analysis of colonial racialized imagery of tropical abundance discussed in Chapter 2. Here, representations of urbanisms and its planning process are an expression or visual container of larger cultural struggles linked to colonial histories. As the central determinant figures of order, progress and rationality, I include an actual ‘real life’ picture of the Planning Board ‘dreamers’ [Figure 3.13] (as they were suggestively called in a magazine article that described the Planning Board president in heroic terms) (Preece 1963). Almost a decade after the picture in Figure 3 was taken, this real-life representation of ‘the middling modernists’ (Rabinow, *ibid.*), and the caricature, continues to be decisively male, white and middle class.

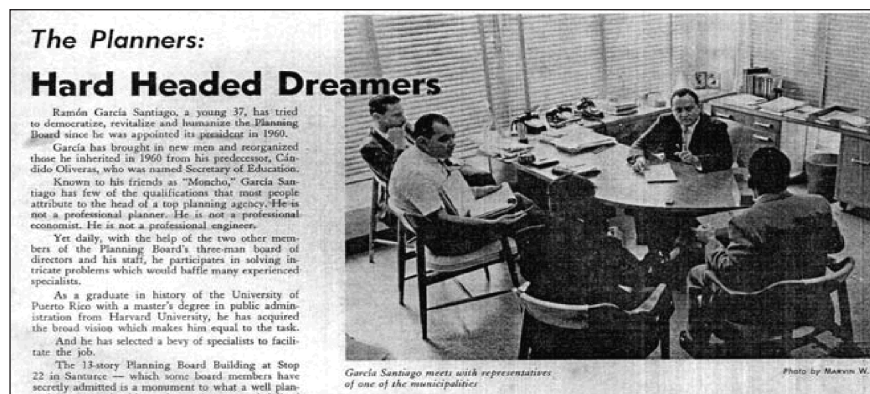


Figure 3.13. ‘The Planners- Hard Headed Dreamers’. Source: Preece 1963.

Indeed, when all the images presented above are considered together, they suggest that inculcating a colonial imaginary of well-managed local prosperity and progress entailed the establishment of gendered and raced ‘regimes of representation’ (Hall 1997; Rodríguez Vázquez 2005) – to be explored further in relations to the space of slums and public housing in the following chapter. The paternalist and racist overtones of this historically skewed story addressed the disorder beget by excessive growth through the imposition of

order in housing and urban solutions. But, like in the images of the women and 'Coki' before, what is *not* made visible here are slums and public housing; and what is made marginal- women and black men- becomes an important indication of how government (in this case, an agency responsible for housing, and planners) idealized urban space by 'othering' certain subjects and spaces.

Moreover, it demonstrates how they envisioned their own male, white middle-class expertise as central determinants in defining and controlling both. 'Othering', therefore, did not occur just as an external process of imperial versus colonized subjects, but also as an internal struggle for local control by self-designated 'superior' natives. This 'double coloniality of power' was not abstract, but entangled with the politics of space production and housing provision- what Said (1983:269) calls 'the realm of the real...the historical realm'. The success of these interactions (which led to institutional shifts) can also be understood through what Foucault (1980) called the 'normalizing disciplinary systems': that which organizes knowledge and effectively conceals modern power.

### **3.4. Conclusion**

Drawing on the Foucauldian aspect of governmentality that emphasizes the way discipline and the control of populations occurs through multiple avenues, including spatial management, 'othering' was used here as an analytical tool through which to begin to look into the colonial constructions and physical demarcations (governmental management) of appropriate national space and subjects since the 1930's in Puerto Rico; a time when, given the changing socio-economic condition and the increased interventions made upon native raw 'materials' in the name of modernity, a number of discourses about identity, space, and nation were emerging in unison. Symbolic and representational difference that responded to a gendered and raced colonial episteme was understood through emerging rural/urban divides and used as a tool of ordering and control in both textual and visual discourses, powerfully inscribing those 'others' into the social and physical fabric of urban imaginaries and space.

Additionally, despite their own place as 'subjects' of the United States, local elites established themselves within the colonial order as the superior raced,

gendered, classed and cultural authors of local urban and housing solutions. Promoting a white, male, middle-class and Americanized standard of national progress and cultural belonging involved the projection of certain people and their living spaces as gendered and racialized difference; an original formulation which, as we will see in the following two chapters, has had lasting consequences in the contemporary practices and representations of urban exclusion. Specifically, the elimination of slums and construction of public housing perpetuated the stigmatization of 'others' as a multi-dimensional difference seen to lie unacceptably outside the new urban norm being constructed. The material, political and social consequences of that discourse will later be discussed in relation to the construction of Las Gladiolas as a high-rise 'solution' embedded in debates over cultural authenticity and modern 'otherness'- with technologies and design presented as a stand-in for all things foreign and improper, but also advanced and modern, in the tropical city. The discursive 'othering' which those towers were originally subjected to continue to be seen and challenged today in debates over deterioration and demolition, to be discussed from Chapters 5 onwards.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> With the harsh depression conditions of the 1930's, this was a policy package of 'relief, reform and recovery' of the administration of President Franklin D. Roosevelt.

<sup>2</sup> Meaning alley-way, here the popular use of the word *callejón* it is not meant literally, but rather to confer the real sense of claustrophobia, impasse, or enclosure that a dead-end can or could produce. In common parlance, it is a word that without having to refer to actual physical properties, immediately elicits insecurity and/or the feeling of being cornered.

<sup>3</sup> Rabinow (1989) follows Henri Sellier's shifting interest in ordering space and population in inter-war France first through a mixture of efficient administration and coherent policy addressing the social effects of capitalist expansion and later through a focus on social scientific administration of norms by experts concerned with cost-analysis benefits. This *middling modernism* constituted a 'slipping away of architecture, history and social references in the name of efficiency, science, and progress and welfare' (322).

<sup>4</sup> This had been an interest of the U.S. colonials since 1932 when Governor Blanton Winship (appointed leader of the island) had lobbied for slum removal in order to fulfil what he saw as the tourist potential for the island (Fusté 2006: 56).

<sup>5</sup> This was a metaphor made popular by Antoino S. Pedreira to define the state of transition and cultural uncertainty of the 1930's. Beyond encouraging Puerto Ricans to confront their isolation by overcoming the fear of 'the threatening pirate', his most famous work-'Insularismo'- sought to answer the question of precisely what constituted the spiritual and national identity of P.R.. Juan Flores (1993: 19) argues that ultimately, Pedreira's presentation was that of collective weakness and deficiencies, coupled with ignorance and lack of solidarity.

<sup>6</sup> The 'dominant' I refer to here is borrowed from Stuart Hall's (1993: 483) notion of 'the dominant' as: 'a pattern of preferred readings (the whole social order of set of meanings, practices and beliefs)...with the institutional/political/ideological order imprinted in them and themselves institutionalized'.

<sup>7</sup> *Mulato* refers to the mixed-race descent of the majority of Puerto Ricans, whose racial identities, as Fusté argued (2010), are more fluid than the black and white model of segregation operating in the United States.

<sup>8</sup> The *jíbaro* is the white male peasant from the mountainous central region.

<sup>9</sup> This dynamic has been studied in relation to processes of colonialism: 'the racial has followed the destiny of other modern strategies of power/knowledge: it constitutes a crucial element in the symbolic configurations of socio-historical formations... they are materializations of the strategies of intervention deployed in various epistemological re-arrangements within which the racial was appropriated and produced as a concept that revealed the 'truth' of human conditions' (Ferreira da Silva 2001: 423).

<sup>10</sup> Racism today is not only denied by implicitly disparaging blackness, but its is also accompanied by an ideology of mixture or *blanqueamiento* (whitening) that emerged during the era of Spanish colonialism when migration of Europeans was encouraged as a way of civilizing the 'others' to the dominant white racial referent. Today, *blanqueamiento* is sought by diluting the 'worse' skin colour through either marriage to lighter skinned individuals or by managing degrees of whiteness in verbal phenotypic classifications.

<sup>11</sup>The *pava* is also the logo of the Popular Democratic Party (PPD) which sought to create an image of a 'great Puerto Rican family' through a single peasant *jibaro* man.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Moving ‘others’ from slums to public housing: linking ideologies, representations, and technologies**

#### 4.1. Introduction

The ‘othering’ introduced in Chapter 3 will here be explored in terms of how it became embedded in the ideological constructs and material practices of slum elimination and public housing construction, including the advent of high-rises and promotion of walk-ups. I will argue that the early idealization of public housing as modern panacea to slums’ urban disorder retained some of the sexist, racist and classist characterizations of the latter, setting the new spaces and its residents up for an almost inevitable projection of subsequent failure. The quote below from the director of the PRPHA, Carlos Laboy, suggests, these are links which continue to inform socio-physical imaginaries of urban public housing space and that in the case of Las Gladiolas have not been met with simple acquiescence.

‘It has been proven that those structures, in any project- be it a high-rise or a traditional walk-up – if it has more than 200 units, it’s a problem. Large communities where you are ‘rounding up’ people are not gonna’ work. Our people like to have chickens and they like to have their dogs and cats...and that’s what it is. It’s not like other people, like Americans. I lived many years in the Unites States and everyone lives in apartments and in New York everyone is happy. It’s another culture. In the particular case of Las Gladiolas, like in every place where there are towers, you bring in other elements...With other communities we are demolishing and reconstructing I haven’t had the problems that I have with Gladiolas...But you start to understand when you see the different places from where these people were taken - you’ll see why our clientele is so varied, from a family that has an education to others that are truly families nobody wants (Carlos Laboy, Interview, Dec.2007).

His explanation for the ‘inherent’ problems of Las Gladiolas and its consequent need to be demolished alludes to the way their historicized stigmatization has contributed to their current oppression. In forthcoming chapters, we will see how such relationships are indeed significant to Las Gladiolas’s battle over deterioration, displacement and demolition. But this declaration is not just important for its policy implications but because, as this chapter will be examining in more detail, it reveals a number of the socio-technical connections- between material structures and culture- that have historically linked public housing space and residents to the slums which preceded them. In the case above, the ‘varied clientele’ he speaks of which ‘nobody wants’ is a

proxy for what are generally understood to be the raced, gendered and class differences inscribed into the 'nature' of public housing residents and their living spaces; a difference introduced in the previous chapter used both as an explanation for the community's and towers' problems, and as a justification for policy interventions; a difference which, as the forthcoming chapters will explore, residents have made sense of and resisted in a variety of ways, partially shaping the dynamics of their current struggle. This chapter will render the implicit historical dimension in Laboy's remarks explicit.

Theoretically, I draw from Lawrence Vale's (2002), Jacobs (2005; 2006), and Jacobs, Cairns et al.'s (2007) work on the historical processes through which public housing in the U.S. and the U.K. became marked as 'successes and failures' (*ibid.*, 11) given the links between their physical and social characteristics. While concentrating in different aspects of public housing, these authors stressed the need to explore the often neglected processes that gave 'birth' to these projects- be it their inhabitants, workers and neighborhoods (Vale), or the varied 'actors' influencing the negotiations of their physical incorporation (Jacobs, Cairns et al.). These elements, they argue, are inseparable from public housing's subsequent, more publicized 'death'. The previous chapter has already begun that analysis.

Moreover, in her study of Polish migrant home-building practices, Ayona Datta (2008: 519) adds that a socio-technical approach allows for an investigation of domestic buildings: '...not just as a physical or symbolic space, but also as an assemblage of building elements which, in their coming together under different contexts, allow discursive formations of cultural difference and otherness'. Given that, as it were, this thesis analyzes the physical and metaphorical 'life and death' (Vale: 4; Jacobs, Cairns et al.: 11) of Las Gladiolas- i.e., its discursive *and* material trajectory from 'good' to 'bad' space, and the reactions which that path has elicited- these scholars' emphasis on the forgotten or subsumed conditions that framed certain productions suggest that in order to understand Las Gladiolas's trajectory, it should be located in relation to public housing's own rise and fall from grace. That is, the material and discursive promise and demise of public housing history needs to be addressed as integrally connected to the environment of praise and reservation that surrounded the emergence and decline of Las Gladiolas as a high-rise structure as well. Given the lasting stigmas of 'otherhood' grounding public housing's



portrayal as idealized socio-technical ‘solutions’, those visions have not simply been accepted by residents, but have also been challenged, contested and resisted at different levels.

What follows is divided into four main chronological sections: the first traces ideologies and practices of slum elimination during the 1930’s-40’s; the second then analyzes the socio-physical principles which guided early public housing construction as an answer to slums’ problems; the third follows on by exploring those elements which were subsequently depicted as ‘failures’ of public housing space and residents; and finally, the fourth examines the way high-rises, and later walk-ups- as typology and materiality- became re-embedded in debates over the appropriate socio-cultural re-ordering of ‘others’. Together, these four sections reflect the recurring historical connections which are made between slums and public housing through ‘othering’. The multiple discourses and practices to be introduced through them- mainly through dominant productions, but also from residents- will also convey the historical links found today between socio-materiality and resistance. This chapter will set the framework for thinking more carefully about how the case of Las Gladiolas elicits legacies or deviations from such histories.

## **4.2. The Problem: ‘slums’**

### **Linking materiality to race and gender**

During the 1940’s and 1950’s, while rapid economic and infrastructural development was being publicly heralded by officials as a modern success story, *arrabales*- or shantytowns- continued to become extensive in the periphery of cities, with half of the urban population estimated to be living there (Grosfoguel 1992: 95)<sup>1</sup>. The overcrowding, lack of flowing water, electricity, sanitation, and fragile structures which characterized them were a direct affront to the economic and aesthetic project of modernity; a material and ideological contradiction to the reigning narrative of progress. As such, they became the focus of strident condemnations based on the ideological ‘miscegenation of place’ (Fusté 2010) described in Chapter 3, and on material practices of repression. Colonial authorities, social scientists, local administrators and the growing media (newspapers and radio), variously described their environment as an apparent loss of all things good, traditional and ‘social’ filled with ‘unbelievable’ physical and moral decay. In this context, if the political and intel-

lectual leaders of the time wanted to portray themselves as being in control of their ‘others’ and the island as an economic miracle, nothing proved more pressing than eliminating slums.

A respected Puerto Rican senator, poet and novelist, for example (picture in the previous chapter with a group of the ‘middling modernists’), traced the origins of slums back to the Spanish conquest of the indigenous populations and the barracks of black slaves (Fonfrías 1949). He constructed a vision of enduring racial (and intellectual) difference by describing slums as an uncivilized and unsanitary plague that had spread and contaminated the entire island, situating that ‘disease’ as directly opposed to the realm of scientific modernity dominated by *Criollo* elite men like himself:

‘...It is almost an endemic evil, like hookworm once was, today defeated by the iron will of the men of science and the government; as is tuberculosis that will finally be aborted with the conquest that disciplined and well-intentioned men will achieve of the medical arts’ (*ibid.*, 232; my translation).

The gendered and raced discourse of decency and respectability was also reinserted into the narrative by invoking 19<sup>th</sup> century moral discourses that symbolically marked unruly women as black and downtrodden vis a vis their invisible white bourgeois counterpart. He continued:

‘Other contagious conditions to be found in those spaces are undesirable women, criminals, and sexual perverts or deviants...The woman of stalked life, fallen from the brothel and unpardonably perverted, is a paragon of the bad examples set for modest and honest women. The promiscuity experienced in the slum, lends itself to easy learning and to the repetition of crude and bigoted teachings. Poor marriages, but of religious life fear for their children who on a daily basis see pimps paying their prostitutes and listen to their profane diatribe. Before them, they have street scandals, where youngsters, learning the worst lessons, smoke at an early age, play with cents stolen from their parents, and in secret, get drunk to play as men, anticipating a difficult future, bound for prison’ (*ibid.*, 230; my translation).

Fonfrías’s words are directly relevant to the discussion in Chapter 3 of ‘middling modernists’ who abided by a belief in his own expertise for administering scientific norms, and it also reflects the greatest concerns of American

'New Dealists' in relation to slums in the island- the links between health and moral laxity:

'Bad housing in Puerto Rico is primarily a menace to public health... In the urban slums crowding encourages tuberculosis. The death rate from this disease in 1939 was 258 per 100,000 persons compared to only 47.2 in the United States. Puerto Rico also represents a social problem... The lack of privacy and the ever-present overcrowding result in family instability and moral laxity. The lack of community facilities for wholesome recreation contribute to juvenile delinquency and crime' (Information Research Section PRRA 1942).

The expressions above are emblematic of the national deliberations that made women and family rhetorical tools through which to discuss concerns with overpopulation and other factors seen to stall economic and social modernity-issues which I explored in the previous chapter as well. Citing high criminal indexes of sexual perversion, petty crimes, contraband, drug use, and murder as naturally emanating from these spaces served to imbue the matter with distorted shades of wickedness. By placing the moral weight of the argument on the links between poverty, family structures and over-reproduction, subaltern female bodies and slums were seen as inherently dysfunctional and impeding positive social development (Stycos 1945; Vázquez 1993-1994; Colon-Warren and Alegría-Ortega 1998; Fusté 2006: 15-16). These fierce condemnations were the breeding ground, if you will, of the contemporary stigmatizations of 'the *caserío* welfare mother', a figure who continues to be gendered and raced along the same lines and with similar allusions to cultures of poverty and dependency.

In Fonfrías's words above, poverty is further presented in a dualistic manner, pitting 'good' poor matrimones versus 'bad' poor parents and children of deficient moral values. This logic classifies differences within the culture of the poor, but nevertheless maintains a rigid demarcation between the destitute as a whole in contrast to the 'new men of the governmental power'<sup>22</sup>: the bearers of knowledge, with superior mental and emotional capacity to facilitate economic, and therefore national success. This kind of descriptive nuance was an important and lasting device of 'othering' which classified society in different levels and through different signifiers at once. It is also a distinction which we

will see operating in residents' own definitions of self and others in Chapter 6, and in legal practices within Chapter 7.

I also found that government documents and newspaper reports subsumed the question of economic and political structures that produced conditions of poverty by focusing instead on the description of material and sensorial details of 'squalid slums' as spaces of dehumanized 'others' that stood in direct contrast to the clean and orderly national imaginary.

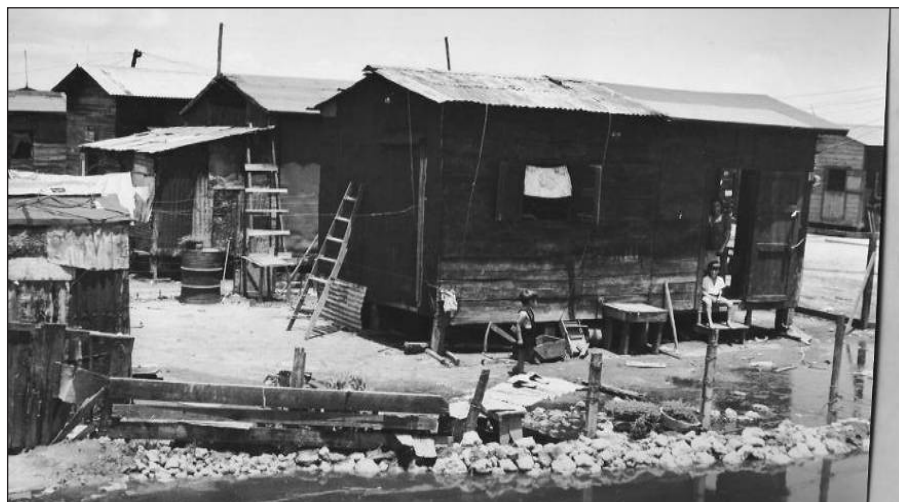
'Families live *apiñada* (packed together) in a room that is like a dark cave... there was a refrigerator, a gas kitchen, a big bed, a cradle, a cot and tow chairs...A curtain is used to divide the room when one needs to be alone. One of the chairs is hung up on the wall. The superior part of the only door has an aperture protected with metallic cloth... the only ventilation for a family of seven...The one-year old baby was standing in a wooden box in the backyard...the foul-smelling toilet, shared by twenty seven human beings was described as horrendous. The patio also has five cloth washers with two faucets, one of which was broken, a sink for kitchen utensils and a shower. This is typical of these types of houses...' (Tooker 1956: 16; my translation);

And in another example:

'...they are not the result of gradual decay or blight. They are slums from the very start...characterized by the high stage of deterioration of the structures, high land coverage, extremely high density, almost complete absence of streets, lack of sanitary and water facilities and absence of open spaces for recreational purposes. Many of those houses do not even have privies.... They usually construct the houses themselves with the help of neighbours. They are mere shacks, thrown up almost overnight out of any material at hand, usually scrap lumber, tin sheet, boxes, and roofing paper. In many cases when the shacks are built over the water, the only means of communication consist of improvised little trestles made up of odd pieces of boxes...average number of rooms is 2.5. Exterior or interior painting is not common' (Cordero Dávila 1955: 3).

Their substandard living conditions were variedly defined as a uniform entity or 'type' of dirty unpleasantness, or as a 'problem' of disturbing, abnormal growth patterns (2% per year). Using materiality to highlight difference by portraying slum houses as decrepit and filthy was a practice that dated back

to pre-capitalist times when peasant housing had recurrently been alluded to in relation to their unhealthy and unhygienic conditions [Figures 4.1 and 4.3]. During those times, the constructions carried out by hand with natural resources from the immediate environment were portrayed as problematic, resulting in an ideological separation grounded on materiality. Portraying certain types of housing as ‘sordid’ (1916), ‘miserable dwellings’ (1922) , made of ‘board, boxing, old tin cans and strips of iron...*crazy quilt* of straightened oil cans, odd pieces of bark and board, and *ancient* strips of zinc’ (1930), or ‘...a few rough logs...with grass or palm trees’ (1935), served to establish a link between local materials (and in this case, non-capitalist oriented construction) and the ‘type’ of people that utilized them (Grosfoguel: 118; my emphasis). The ‘scraps’ and ‘tin’ of these dwellings was a powerful instrument through which to attack the crowded and unsanitary sites, while underscoring a material level of civic belonging and national integration based on class, gender and race. These discursive connections were laid-out in various sections of a draft copy found of the Governor’s 1964 speech on housing. Tellingly, it was those fragments which had been crossed off by hand and eliminated from what would ultimately be delivered to the nation. They read as follows:



**Figure 4.1. Slum Houses and tide water flats in ‘El Fanguito’.**  
**Source: Rotkin, July 1946. Colección de Instrucción Pública (CIP). Archivo General de Puerto Rico (AGPRI, Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueño (ICP).**

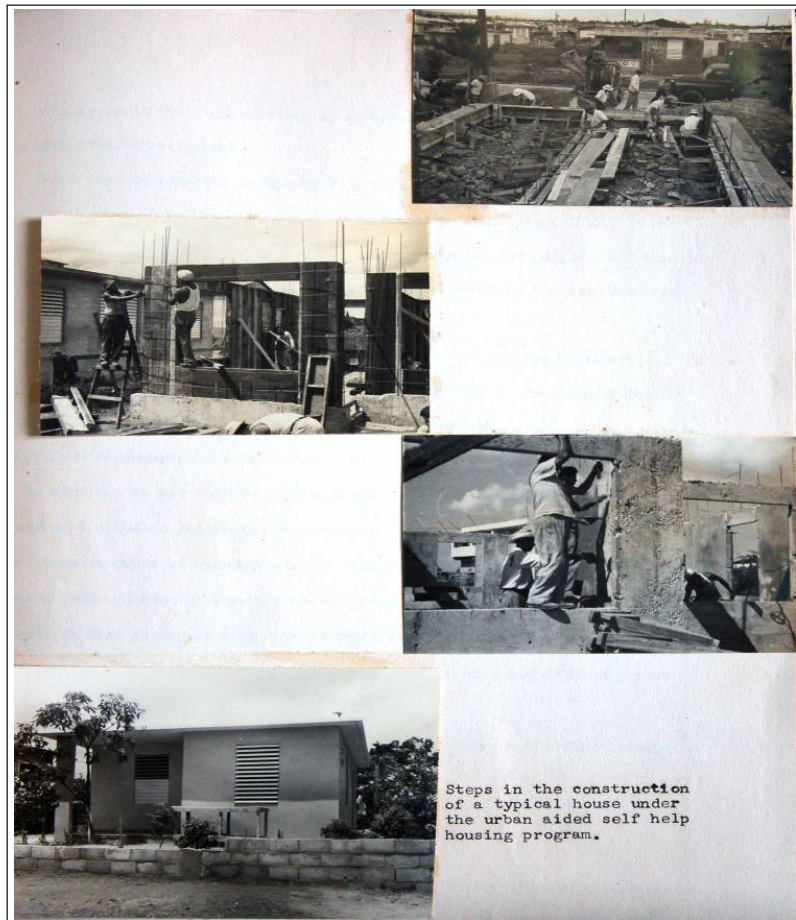


Figure 4.2. 'Housing Problems and Policies of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico'. Source: Puerto Rico Housing Authority Memo. Dec.16, 1955. CIP/ AGPR/ ICP.



Figure 4.3. Slums. Source: Puerto Rico Housing Authority Memo. Dec.16, 1955. CIP/ AGPR/ ICP.



Figure 4.4. 'A typical frame house'. Source: Puerto Rico Housing Authority Memo. Dec.16, 1955. CIP/ AGPR/ ICP

‘Nuestros jíbaros usaban yaguas para las paredes exteriores y matojos para los techos de sus chozas; en los arrabales de las ciudades y pueblos/ de los cajones de mercancía sustituía las yaguas y el cartón creosotado a los matojos. No podríamos decir que se sentían felices con los albergues que así se proporcionaban, pero sí resignados a vivir en ellos por el esto de sus días, tal vez con ambiciones de mejorarlos, pero sin contar con los medios y sin que nadie le ofreciera ayuda para hacerlo. Esta situación ha cambiado radicalmente...Prácticamente ya casi no se ven chozas en nuestros campos. Todavía se ven casitas modestas de madera, mucho mejores que las chozas, pero se están viendo cada día mayor número de hogares de cemento en los campos de Puerto Rico...’

‘Our *jíbaros* used *yagua* (the fibrous leaves and tissue of palm trees) for exterior walls and *matojo* (thick dense wild bush) for their shack’s roofs; in city’s and town’s slums they used merchandise crates to substitute the *yaguas* and preserved carton for *matojos*. We could not say they felt happy with such self-proportioned housing, but rather resigned to live in them for the rest of their live, perhaps with ambitions to improve them, but without the resources nor help with which to do so. This situation has radically changed...One practically does not see shacks any more in our country-side. You can still see modest wood houses,

much better than the shacks, but every day there is a greater number of cement homes in Puerto Rico's country side...' (Muñoz Marín 1964: 2-3).

The rural (*jibaro*), as an unhappy lifestyle transferred to the urban spaces of slums, was here framed in terms of traditional materials considered backwards. Alternatively, modern government housing programs financed by Federal Housing Administration (FHA) loans that used new construction materials such as cement and design innovations were presented as discernible signs of progress [Figures 4.2 and 4.4]. The institutionalized rejection of 'old' materials by the FHA not only led to the uniform application of concrete (Sepúlveda Rivera 2004) - a development that will be explored in more detail in Section 4.5- but it also justified an attack on certain home structures like the ones described above, seen as rickety and unsafe based on essentialized depictions that connected un-sturdy and insubstantial home elements to residents' own moral and cultural characteristics.

### **Practices of elimination**

The elimination of slums must also be understood in relation to the political and financial pressure which the Puerto Rican government was subjected to by federal urban renewal policies (the PRERA being one example of this). To be considered competent by the colonial metropolis and to continue to receive aid, it was not enough to simply vilify the space and its inhabitants. The 1955 federal report 'How Localities can Develop a Workable Program for Urban Renewal' required that communities:

‘...face up to its slum and blight problem, recognize what has been done and what remains to be done, and make the commitments which, when completed, will result in a program of action which promises success<sup>3</sup>’ (Housing and Home Finance Agency 1955: 3).

Thus, the Puerto Rican government created their own plans to create ‘...communities of good conviviality, simple life, and good taste’ (*ibid.*). Reports, senatorial resolutions and government documents found discussed with great and varied detail three principal goals that can be summarized as follows: (1) eliminating all slum housing and other inadequate urban housing; (2) rehabilitating slums in their place<sup>4</sup>, where possible; and (3) allowing for all families of low or moderate incomes to reside in their own homes (CRUV 1965; Muñoz



Marín and Hernández Colón 1969; ARUV 1970; Urbanismo 1974; Junta de Planificación 1978) [Figure 4].

In order to enforce these, as well as regulate, control, and restraint the spaces of the labouring poor, direct measures were taken, including the criminalization and repression of the many popular illegalities and income-generating activities of its inhabitants considered useless to capitalist production (such as the home manufacturing of rum ‘caña’, underground lottery, and cock fights) (Santiago Valle: 1994). Thus, the juridical field became involved in supporting the ideological reproduction of these actions and the subjects performing them as outside the social norm; i.e., as ‘illegal’ objects of discourse.



Figure 4.5. ‘The Immediate Purpose- more housing in an adequate environment; more rehabilitation on site; more homes of one’s own. Source: CRUV 1965.

But the mechanism that had the most far-reaching of urban changes, including the swelling of new suburbs everywhere (the ‘morphology of segregation’) (Sepúlveda Rivera 2004) was the zoning legislation passed in 1946. Modeled

on existing U.S. regulations, zoning ordinances protected single-family homes in higher-income residential districts or neighborhoods by prohibiting the construction of any other type of housing that was not uni-familiar in 300 square meter lots (Sepúlveda, *ibid*; Vale 2000: 117). With foreign architects trained in the United States serving as consultants to the Planning Board, the latter were thought to ease the way into a modern, dynamic and appropriate density for the metropolitan zone, with enclosed residential areas served by adequate commercial and industrial zones, transported by modern communication systems with schools, parks and other facilities (Baranano 1952; Rigual 1962). Furthermore, it legitimized the freezing of all slum-housing construction and the demolition of any new ones erected on ‘zoned’ land, while criminalizing those engaged in building houses within those ‘blighted’ spaces. **The ‘Slum Vigilance Act’ was passed in 1962 to collect and hold information on clandestine construction and alterations to homes, and a vigilante unit was set up to take on official complaints and destroy prohibited homes.** In their ‘Inter-Agency Newsletter’, the Home Authority had a ‘slum vigilance’ section that publicized: the number of clandestine constructions and alterations found and destroyed, denounced persons, complaints presented declared as valid, and cases sentenced by the Court (Autoridad Sobre Hogares de Puerto Rico 1957). In a series of CRUV press releases from the early 60’s, the Director of said agency supported collaboration with the Police and Licensing Departments in destroying slums because,

‘persons without scruples who...sell wood to build *casuchas*...[are]...exposing disorder and chaos...To tolerate it would be the seed of destruction of Puerto Rico’s democracy and progress (CRUV 1961: 25 de mayo).

Asserting the civilizing nature of these measures, it was also said that,

‘...thousands of children have been rescued from moral and spiritual misery to offer them a future of hope and achievements...an environment where they can develop their potentiality to create a product that benefits the entire community’ (*ibid.*).

Finally, in an environment where even economists working for the Planning Board reported slums as ‘a breeding ground for vice and crime’ (Miller 1962: 30), the Agency’s motto became the following: ‘Once people are taken out of

the *arrabal* we must tear out the *arrabal* from people's heart' (CRUV- Oficina de Información 1961: 14 de agosto).

Yet another level of inscription was facilitated by the island's most widely-read newspaper at the time, 'EL Mundo', which reported on the 'great benefits' afforded by these measures. On one occasion, an article written by the CRUV Director tried to persuade the people by stressing: '...the notable contribution of U.S investments in P.R.'s new public housing programs' and the 'great privilege of enjoying such pleasant consequences of our political and economic relation with the U.S' (Editorial 1956). He asks that in order to 'rescue people from the slums' and to prevent their resurfacing, an intolerant 'vigilant guard' be kept. This colonial administrator makes the people feel responsible for the colonial condition they are not only repressed by and have little power over, but for which they should feel grateful for and, in turn, pay their dues to by repressing their native 'others'. 'Watching' internal borders was a way to construct canons of truth over sick and dangerous bodies (slums) and to maintain the health and purity of the bodies that composed the greatest entity: the (colonial) nation. It allowed for that 'internal' figure of the slum, marked as grotesque, imperfect and different, to be cast as dangerous 'other'-capable of destabilizing the socio-spatial order wishing to be established. It also secured *Criollo*-elites' power over their native subjects through discipline. Over time, these discourses, which expressed relations between state racism, sex and hygiene through perceived landscapes of fear legitimated a cleansing from 'within', and reinforced territorial segmentation.

### **Resisting containment**

But despite the widespread stigmatization of slums, the plethora of projects instituted, the growing incidence of poverty, and the vigilance and aggression used to repress a large number of subaltern 'natives', the government could not contain the many social elements involved in what was, in fact, a *lived* struggle over housing by the poor. Many of the families who had migrated from rural areas wanted to stay in slums which had become communities to them, and resisted moving. Apart from not wanting to break community bonds long established within the slums, other reasons influencing their desire to stay included: not wanting to pay rent in new homes, what they saw as deficient and/or discriminating design for the poor in government housing, and

resentment at having to pay higher rent as soon as their wages increased in the newly developed public housing project (Cotto Morales 2007: 34)

In some instances, residents who actually desired to move were left in interminable waiting lists with no other choice but to stay 'illegally' to then face the repercussions of that categorization. If caught, groups of men, women and children would be accused of building their homes 'clandestinely', have their information stored in the 'Office of Slum Vigilance', and be ousted from their houses by the Home Authority with little notice and without the provision of proper replacement (El Mundo 1956). But there is ample evidence in the media and in letters and reports documenting dissent that some of these groups of families and neighbours denounced their displacement in legal battles- already pointing towards the importance of this tool as a mechanism of resistance (Autoridad Sobre Hogares de Puerto Rico 1957; Ocasio 1958; Ortiz 1967). Moreover, exchanges found within letters and confidential memos between residents and government workers show how, by seeking out the right political channels and producing strategic give and takes, some residents inadvertently produced rapid changes in urban policies which could benefit them (Acevedo 1956; Acevedo 1956; Cordero Dávila 1956). Inside slums themselves, residents took matters into their own hands (due to government's negligence) and forged local committees through mutual aid to defend and upgrade their physical space (Safa 1975: 235). This politicized a number of them and, in some cases, led to the creation of a more formal process of land appropriation, or 'land rescue' social civil movements which successfully urbanized peripheral urban zones via non-institutional means (Cotto Morales 2007: 28). Born out of every day life, these served as a reminder of the classed, economic and political nature of urban housing struggles more generally, while changing the typical way of making city (Baralt 2008; Cotto 2007: 123-137; Colón Reyes 2005). Such articulations of self and community were being created from within, or in contradiction to dominant discursive formations, disrupting any seamless solidification of spatial ordering and placement. As Legg (2007: 60) argued, these kinds of discursive contradictions,

‘...not only play out at the level of discursive formations, from objects to themes, but they also have different functions...starting experiments and making new objects possible. They can also transform the discursive field, translating statements to different contexts that re-forge them as new discursive objects’.

Thus, grasping the juxtaposition of discourses in this manner- through their ‘multiple enunciative modalities’ (*ibid.*) and contradictions- allows us to see subject positions, or voices, acting with and against objectified positions. The impact of those 1960’s movements are still felt today in the way community battles, such as Las Gladiola’s, are waged. Small and large-scale resistances from that era demonstrated that paths towards urban displacement were not fixed, but multiple, contested and pliable. They made it plainly evident that the elimination of slums alone did *not* actually solve ‘the housing problem’ or the poverty that produced it; facts which the government, in turn, tried to minimize by stressing confidence in their proposed alternative: public housing projects.

### 4.3. The Solution: Public Housing Projects



Figure 4.6. ‘Gov. Muñoz Marín and a low-cost housing project- both symbols of an island on the move’. Source: Miami Herald’ Sunday Magazine. Nov 19, 1961



Figure 4.7. ‘Far above, I see a people sheltered in houses, few of extreme luxury, but none of shack or slum...’- Luis Muñoz Marín. Source: CRUV 1958.

### Designs for home-ownership

“The environmental conditions of housing are the best indicator as to the economic, social and cultural development of the ‘pueblos’, for they exert decisive influence over the physical and mental health,

social behaviour, delinquency, productivity and literally in all aspects of the civilizing evolution of a human being' (Muñoz Marín 1964: 1).

In the 1964 speech on housing above- whose crossed out sections were also quoted before- Governor Luis Muñoz Marín expressed his staunch belief in the power housing held in building healthy communities and individuals (also visible in Figures 4.6 and 4.7). With the hope of leaving slums behind, the government looked upon public housing projects and the financial assistance provided by the U.S. for their construction as a modern and progressive answer to that much reviled problem. They were yet another opportunity for the elites, like the Governor, to contribute to the physical *and* psychological improvement of the community in a human (male)-centered fashion (Rodríguez: 103). The program was framed according to socio-environmental principles that stressed the role of physical space and design in extirpating social difficulties.

The main goal of the projects was to build quickly and inexpensively while experimenting with social functionalist theories. In its first stages, local planners followed the architectural trends of Mies Van der Rohe and Le Corbusier who, in America, had produced repetitive, stripped down, and undecorated structures (Rybczynski 1995). Their modern design was well-built and practical, 'purposefully cheap and austere' (Wright 1981: 229). They provided spaces of safety, comfort, ventilation, community, and commodities in which to confine the 'native' slum subjects and their imperfections (Greene 1961), while promoting the transition towards home-ownership. The aesthetic design and economic uniformity of the projects required that their guidelines, standards or regulations be consistently sober (Franck 1998: 97). As 'temporary slums for hope', it was hoped that they would encourage the poor to join the propertied classes in the suburbs. In the words of the CRUV Director, they were meant to:

'...temporarily house human groups of lesser economic means, giving preference to those displaced by governmental public works, while they fix their housing problem in a more permanent way...it has two important social functions: protecting depressed sectors of population and helping some people construct a base from which a better life can be sought by themselves' (Alvarado 1967: 3).

Temporality was key, as it linked the new projects to the middle-class ideology of achievement through economic growth and prosperity; of ‘moving-up’ an ascending class ladder by owning a home [Figures 4.8 and 4.9] (Dinzey-Flores 2007). Their transitory maxim meant that public housing was *not* meant to be a final destination, but a physical conduit of ‘transition, learning and adjustment’ (Chévere Rivera 1963: 3)- ‘a stepping stone between inadequate accommodation and a humble, comfortable and privately-owned nuclear family home’ (Muñoz Marín 1964: 3) that would deliver slum dwellers from their poverty to the dignity of progress. Houses were the indicator of having reached a national modern order of urban civility and belonging. As the official government philosophy of the time expressed: ‘Home is the proper place for spiritual and physical rest. It provides security and elements for the future...’ (CRUV & ELA 1962). Signalling economic achievement and moral rectitude (i.e., good family life), buying or constructing a home was something one worked *towards* in order to reach a higher level of human capacity and standing, with men and women fulfilling traditional roles in that quest [Figures 4. 8 to 4.14].

To try to promote that policy of *un hogar para cada puertorriqueño* (one house for every Puerto Rican), the government marketed single detached suburban homes as the ideal aspiration (Ávila Sánchez 1958). Even if the real and growing unequal income distribution of the times made the promoted ‘American-way of life’ mythical for most (Sepúlveda 1997), it was still upheld as the perfect solution to the cultural (‘spiritual’) gaps experienced between rural/urban lifestyles (Miller 1962; Chévere Rivera 1963). They insisted that these new housing spaces could grant the best of both worlds (much like the ‘Commonwealth’ pact between the U.S. and the island) by being embedded in an ambiance of ‘quietness and stillness’ (Passalacqua 1951: 18) that was at once reminiscent of pre-industrial, pre-migration peasant land plots *and* conveniently located within driving distance from the centre. Today, the housing program ‘La Llave Para tu Hogar’ (The Key to Your House) continues to provide this aspirational option to residents through subsidies to buy ‘social interest’ homes, provided their income is not above a certain level. But, from the beginning, this idea of ‘home’ was also highly gendered, as low-income housing development tended to be portrayed an opportunity for citizens, mainly male in their representation, to make *their own* dreams come true (Autoridad Sobre Hogares de Puerto Rico 1957). Ultimately, white middle-class and male

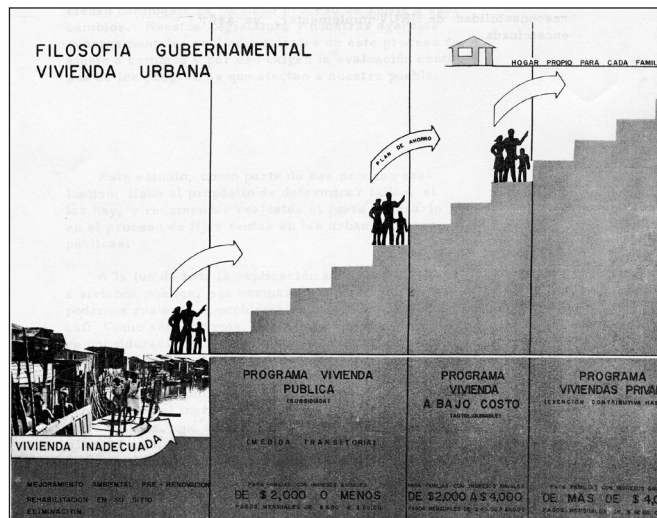


Figure 4.8. ‘Government philosophy: Urban Planning’ – Depicts upward mobility, from slums to home-ownership. Source: CRUV 1966.

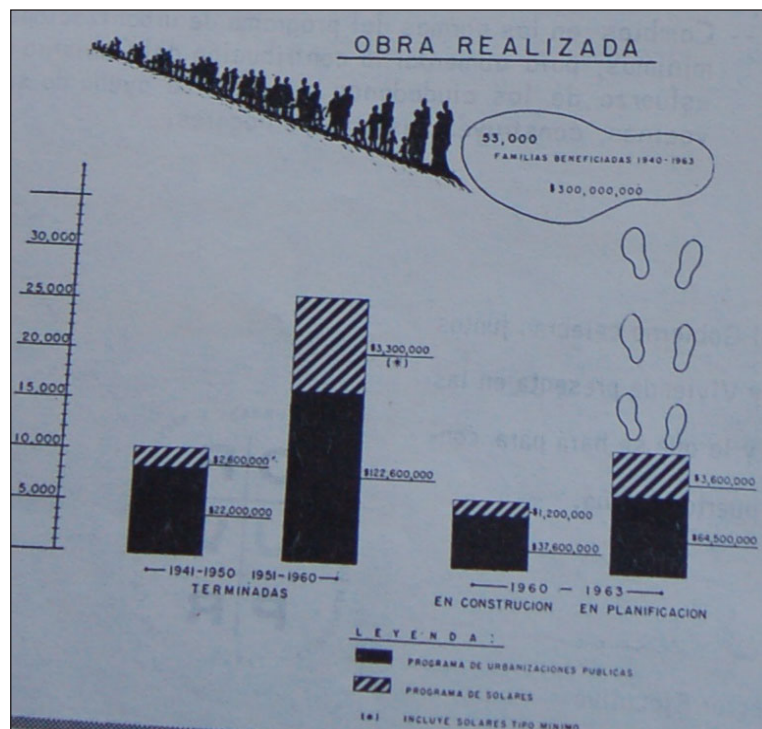


Figure 4.9. ‘Obra Realizada’ (Work Accomplished). Source: CRUV 1958.

*FAMILIAS QUE CRECEN REQUIEREN CASAS MAS GRANDES*

Figure 4.10. ‘Larger families require larger houses.’ Source: Hoy 1960.



home-ownership models based on American suburbia came to be incorporated as authentic cultural items into the real and imagined suburban *and* city landscapes of a changing San Juan [Figures 4.11 to 4.16].

Popular articles and photographs of the 1950's and 60's made the ideology of home-ownership pervasive, referring to it as 'a form of life' through which modern nuclear families- with a male working head- could not only invest in a respectable cultural status, but also contribute to national improvement (Passalacqua 1951; Hoy 1960, my translation). Conversely, not buying/owning, or having aspirations to do so, indicated a backwards, inert or feminized state of being which did not fit in with the new capitalist definitions of culture and nation being advanced.



Figure 4.11. 'Ideal Residence, Bucare Urbanization'. Hoy 1960.



Figure 4.12. Modern domesticity: Subscript reads, 'Coming from one of the largest slums of Puerto Rico, 'El Fanguito', this family looks satisfied to be living in a hygienic, comfortable and decent home in a popular housing project...' Source: Passalacqua 1951: 4.



Figure 4.13. Modern domesticity 2: Subscript reads, 'A typical family in 'Villa Kennedy' public housing project- that of Mr. José Rodríguez Torres, enjoys their house with the added incentive that they can buy it. Source: Proyecto Digitalización El Mundo. Supl. 31 octubre 1971.

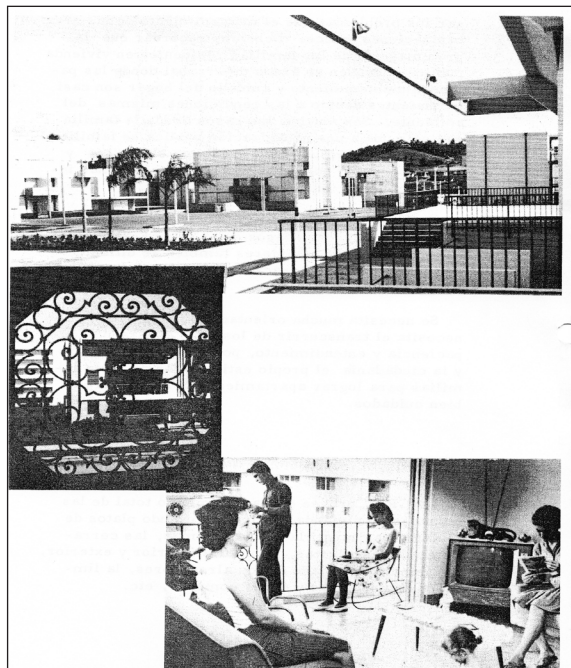


Figure 4.14. Modern domesticity 3: Images depicting modern design achievements of Public Housing Administration Program: from exteriority of buildings to interior domestic space. Source: CRUV. 1967. p.28.

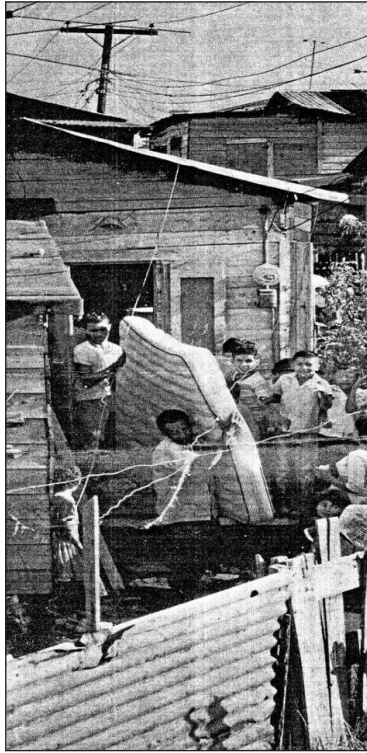


Figure 4.15. Placido Mercado, leaving Buenos Aires slum. Sunday San Juan Star magazine, Nov.19,1961.



Figure 4.16. Placido Mercado & family in 'Monacillos' Public Housing Project.' A man literally 'on the move', Placido is pictured as progressing up the ladder. The article points out the differences between the two dwelling and describes the fresh breezes and views of the latter as a better form of living. It also specifies the kindness afforded to him by the administrators, despite losing his job and the lack of running water: 'Plácido is a good man and it is good to know that he and thousands of other Puerto Ricans like him will always have a comfortable place to live, even when the going gets rough'. Source: Sunday San Juan Star magazine, Nov.19,1961.

In Plácido's chronicle above [Figures 4.15 and 4.16], taken from a Sunday 'San Juan Star' newspaper supplement we are presented with a man who embodies this passage. On the one hand, his 'culture of poverty' is made present through the images of his old shack, of his large family (raced overpopulation), and through the narrative of his job-loss (Magruder 1963). On the other hand, he is a hard-working family-man and believer in the program of public housing. Thus, while his mobility is still very much in process and his masculinity thereby questionable, crucially, he understands his family's travels- and the hardship endured through them- as a positive step up the male-centered ladder being promoted.

### **Educating residents: location and gender**

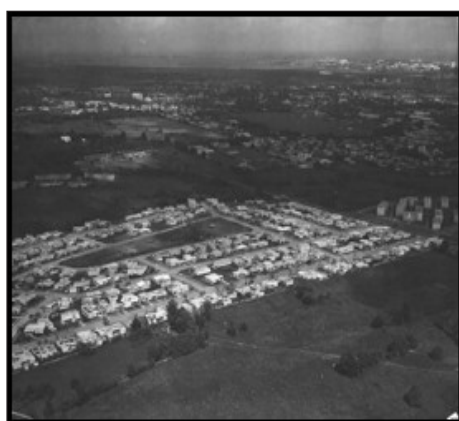
Another important element involved in promoting residents' transition to an ideal 'home' life was the housing projects' location. It was believed that by placing them next to higher-income communities, this would foster social integration, elevate the cultural level of the poor to a more 'civilized' one,

and thereby lead to home-ownership. Governor Muñoz Marín explained this eloquently in a letter promoting its benefits to a rather skeptical middle-class neighborhood resident<sup>5</sup>:

‘More often than not, undesirable behaviour is the result of lack of educational opportunities. The proximity of the ‘Caserío’ to the ‘Urbanización Dos Pinos’ [Fig.14], where teachers, public servants and people with educational benefit live, could serve to improve the understanding of those who, in the Caserío, are not clear on the matter, rather than to make separation stronger... You and all your friends in Dos Pinos can help them much through your example of good conduct and with the interest you take in equalizing the opportunities of the less fortunate... In good democratic and Christian spirit, the superiority given by God to some is to... *help those who do not understand, to understand*... You could stimulate the organization of neighbour clubs between the Caserío and Dos Pinos... to deal with common interests. You will see that even within those few that appear bad, some at least stop being so in an environment of good human relations’ (Muñoz Marín 1954: 1-2; my translation and emphasis).

Resonating directly with CRUV declarations made seven years later, where they stated that: ‘The integration with the rest of the community should not be for appearances, by imposition, or paternalistic, but sincere and in response to a deep Christian and democratic reality’ (1961), the ‘proximity’ formula appears to be designed not for the social, spiritual and cultural aspects of *all* of Puerto Rico (Chévere Rivera 1963), but for the social integration and salvation of the poor alone. They were the ones who- given their slum background- were assumed to lack an appropriate education and therefore be in need of ‘orientation activities’ (as they came to be called):

‘By definition, families that reside in public housing have more problems than those with higher incomes. An integral list of some of these are: poor hygiene and care for the home, bad use of family’s income, family discord, lack of care and supervision of children, abandonment of school by youth with the problems entailed, adult illiteracy, unemployment, mentally retarded abandoned and abused children, excess of elderly, crippled or incapacitated adults and with health problems... Aware of the ignorance many of these families have about how to achieve help to resolve their problems and conscious as well of how their problems gravitate over their conduct and conviviality in their public housing project, CRUV offers orientation services’ (CRUV 1967: 23).



**Figure 4.17. Aerial View of 'Dos Pinos' Private Housing Project. Arrow points at public housing project in area of Rio Piedras placed next to private one. Source: Andreu. ICP/AGPR/ ICP.**

Classifying undesirables through this kind of paternalist and assistentialist logic rendered tenants dependant 'others' and made public housing the perfect socio-spatial laboratory in which to provide the correct managed environment of 'orientation'. It made the government and middle classes responsible for 'taking care' and domesticating 'caseríos' according to certain classed, gendered and raced rules of obedience, decency and cultural honour. It was feminized in that women- while not just passive recipients of gender relations- have generally been subjected (subjugated) to domestic schooling by the men of the nation (and their families) meant to keep them in their place (Yuval-Davis 1997). But their gender came into play by trying to mould residents' actions, appearance and culture (which was also raced), seen as either excessive or 'unfeminine', unruly, and in need of even more control. Specifically, public housing became the training grounds for proper modes of civic and domestic life with women as the preferred subjects to 'teach' proper middle-class lifestyles to. They were to be disciplined according to appropriate feminine roles and practices of modern citizenship so they could adapt to the changing nature of national and domestic life and then teach their family members likewise. Towards this end, 'domestic science' students from the university were recruited to carry out 'Housing Improvement Workshops'. The latter were meant to order women's space and behavior along 'white', middle-class values by teaching housewives (described as natural lovers of their homes and families) how to turn their 'humble homes' into an American-styled 'Home, Sweet Home', synonymous with 'pulchritude and order' (Toro Cintrón 1954:

15-A). Based on the idea that ‘poverty is no excuse for lack of cleanliness, disorder or deficient home appearance’, the objectives of the course included:

‘...developing better conditions of life for low income families through the improvisation, reparation and construction of ‘indispensable’ home equipment (ex: using old bags or tin cans to produce chairs, cribs, sewing husband’s hem lines, etc.);... teaching efficient ways of taking advantage of available resources, versus the typical abandonment and negligence of houses; and... to demonstrate that she needs not be rich in order to have a clean, ordered, well-decorated and furnished home’ (*ibid.*).

Fitting again into the picture which portrayed the island’s poor populations as different and inherently dysfunctional in class-based terms that recalled the hygiene and poverty of slums, this statement framed the new salubrious program as a struggle against those originary locales. It also placed the responsibility of transcending the roots (domestic) of that ‘culture’ on women. María Milagros López (1994: 131) argued that, during the shift towards modernity, these so-called ‘domestic sciences’ provided the gendered technologies through which to legitimate (in proper capitalist work-ethic terms) a feminine subjectivity to the newly-hygienicized role of women as housekeeper, wife and mother. At the same time, as Fusté (2010: 52) argued in his study of racial signification and power in public housing, ‘It also allowed the U.S. colonial state to further legitimize their colonization of the island by centering a “Leave it to Beaver” or “Ozzie and Harriet” type of 1950’s consumerist, middle-class domesticity as a desirable social norm’.

Other gendered *and* raced ‘performances’ of the gains to be made through public housing were publicized in the media through, for example, a photographic supplement of a 1963 edition of ‘El Mundo’ (Figures 4.18 and 4.21). Those images and their short subtitles showed how women and young children were being taught to be civilized through a ‘Program of Activities’ that included sports, music, dance and dramatic arts. The bodies of pupils were being directed and moulded by their white teachers (one quoted frequently as a ‘miss’, and another as a ‘Spanish’ actor) (*ibid.*). From the narratives we learn that these programs were not only the fulfilment of residents’ ‘far-away dreams’, but that they also provided practical lessons of life (*ibid.*). Those in dramatic arts (presumably, women), for example, were said to be learning



Above left.  
**Figure 4.18.** Ponce. In the kitchen of an apartment in the Municipal Housing Prioject. Source: Rotkin. Jan.1946. CIP/ AGPR/ ICP.

Above right.  
**Figure 4.19.** Make-up for beautification, in Llorens Torres. Suplemento. Source: Proyecto Digitalización 'El Mundo'. Nov. 16, 1963

**Figure 4.20.** Teaching ballet in Llorens Torres. Suplemento. Source: Proyecto Digitalización 'El Mundo'. Nov. 16, 1963.



**Figure 4.21.** Teacher helps student placing hands in Llorens Torres. Suplemento. Source: Proyecto Digitalización 'El Mundo'. Nov. 16, 1963.

how to improve their own appearance on an everyday basis through make-up application. Their bodies were being worked on and beautified through the provision of mirrors and dressing table ('everything they needed'). Thus, the capitalist middle-class standards of education were taught through the raced and sexualised body which needed to be improved in classed, gendered and raced terms- made to look more white, feminine and graceful [Figures 4.19 to 4.21] - everything they were assumed *not* to be, in order to enter the sphere of productive citizenship. Years later, when Las Gladiolas was inaugurated, and then again in 2002, free workshops were also offered to women in their communal areas to learn manual skills. But these were of a very different nature given that, while again gendered (they were sewing, hair beauty, or flower courses), their purpose was to provide practical tools with which to empower themselves and enter the formal or informal labour market (Guemárez 2002).

#### **4.4. Reinserting stigma and resisting modernity**

The program of public housing was founded upon the idea that its creators could control or eliminate the stigma of the slums. Recognizing that their bad reputation was a hindrance to social conviviality between different urban neighborhoods and therefore to the promotion of home-ownership, government officials attempted to devise ways to keep those negative connotations at bay<sup>7</sup>. But like the 'educational' activities described, attempts made to 'fix' certain problems and 'improve' residents fed into the 'underlying cultural unease' (Vale 2000: 333) with racialized and gendered 'others' in a way that, despite their intentions to erase the so-called "culture of poverty", actually perpetuated it. Much has been written about the relationships between public housing estates and their stigma in the UK and Australia that can inform Puerto Rico's own context. Hastings and Dean (2003: 172) argued- much like Flint has elsewhere (2003: 618), that social housing estates and their residents are 'given an identity of flawed dependency on bureaucratic decision-making' and viewed as problematic in popular imagination partially because of the historical normalization of owner-occupation (i.e., private home-ownership). This was clearly the case in the production of a nuclear, middle class norm in the modernisation of Puerto Rico.

But the space and programs created could not shake off the stigma that had been attached to them because they had also been forged and reproduced



through those same stereotypes. Moreover, the national development model of progress adopted during the period of industrialization had been based on a fundamentally faulty and classist assumption that a good dose of benevolent paternalism together with a willingness to work hard, save, get an education, etc., would produce limitless opportunities for residents' social mobility- what Safa (1975: 239) called 'the myth of an open society'. In reality, it operated on the basis of low salaries and the continued existence of high levels of unemployment which inevitably translated into a lack of access to the so-called modernity of high or moderate incomes for the masses, which led to a large underground, drug-based (and violence-ridden) economy. The unfeasible work ethic being encouraged combined with the strengthening of a new bourgeoisie, an abandonment of economic redistribution programs, a growing dependence on U.S. capital, a large unexpected return migration from the mainland, and an extension of social security payments and tightening of social controls to create an enormous discrepancy between available public sector resources and urban renewal and housing needs (Colón Reyes 2005; Cotto Morales 2007). With the existence of a depressed economic class, the policy of socio-economic integration through transition-based housing made home-ownership an impossibility for most (Rigual 1962; Safa 1964).

This reality was coupled with the fact that the federal government increasingly restricted and disfavoured the 'juxtaposition' model by discontinuing FHA financing for the establishment of public housing projects near private ones, and it cut back on the construction of recreational facilities or other communal types of structures. This physically enhanced a growing vision of public housing as warehouses, rather than communities. The Puerto Rican Planning Board- around the same time- established 'New Guides to Planning' where they identified some of the 'old social issues and new problems'<sup>8</sup> (Rigual 1962) of urban growth, pointing out public housing's size and scale as two of the possible reasons behind the lack of desired social integration. They believed those could be mitigated by providing interactive communal space for neighbours<sup>9</sup>. Furthermore, direct juxtaposition was now discouraged. Instead, greater balance and heterogeneity was to be achieved through small-scale construction and building parks and communal facilities between upper and lower classed communities to facilitate movement between them (1963; García Santiago 1967; Rodríguez 1969; Rodríguez 1998). Finally, to increase a sense of territoriality, new public housing would be placed in more working class districts

or adjacent to sectors from where the families that would reside in them had come from (Rigual, *ibid.*). This created a paradox, for in trying to advocate homeownership, authorities were simultaneously persisting on ‘...tearing the slum from the heart’ (Nieves 1961) and recreating an interest in certain aspects of the slums as a way to promote community.

Without the resources to provide more opportunities through different types of public housing options, as originally planned, housing authorities had to come up with alternative solutions to this emerging ‘problem’<sup>10</sup>. One of the paths chosen was the American practice of enforcing greater control and restrictions on tenancy by evicting or limiting acceptance in terms of income increases or family structures (usually two parents with several children were preferred) [Figure 4.22]. Rent of poor families<sup>11</sup> was ‘fixed’ through ‘objective, factual criteria’ (CRUV 1965: 6-7; CRUV 1966: 22) that would categorize them as superior, medium and inferior incomes [Figure 4.23]. This suddenly made thousands of families too rich to continue living in public housing and too poor to buy their own house (ARUV 1966). While this system appeared ‘objective’ by delimiting availability, it sifted urban populations and veiled its true intentions- fuelled by a financial crisis- to turn away unwelcome public neighbours: the so-called “unworthy poor” (Wright 1981; Vale 2000). If families resisted this new system, they were made illicit and subjected to educational campaigns that explained to them the ‘justice’ behind the rent-fixing scheme. If they still persisted in rejecting it, they would be evicted (Alvarado 1956; CRUV 1967). To enforce this new order, internal surveillance was institutionalized, authorizing investigations over rises in income whenever residents were seen to acquire new furniture. If it was found to have increased without being reported, their water or electricity services could be cut off and they became subject to retroactive penalties or further displacement by eviction (which they had to pay for!) (Ocasio 1958; 1963). Indeed, changing consumption patterns were noted as one of the problems that had arisen alongside

‘...families’ aspirations, that have quickly been modifying their consumption tastes and preferences, not just in what is related to clothing, furnishings, diet and recreation, but also in that which has to do with housing’ (Alvarado 1967: 3).



Figure 4.22. Monthly cost of house per family according to federal aid and rent. Source: CRUV 1967.

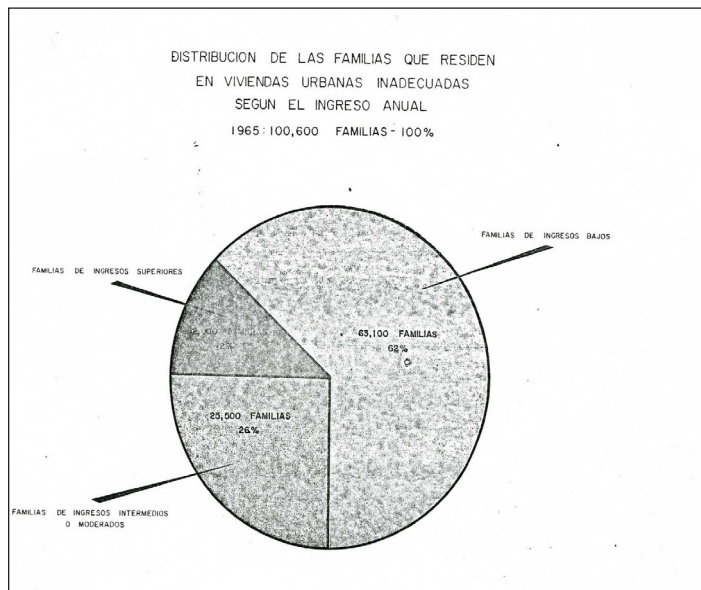


Figure 4.23. Family distribution that live in inadequate housing according to annual income. Source: ARUV 1964.

Still today, furniture and technological appliances which were originally formulated as ‘unnecessary items’ (Chéver Rivera 1963) are seen as material symbols of residents cheating the system and ‘staying put’, rather than acquiring a home. Given the class distinctions of consumption, something like a plasma TV- a marker of status in the middle classes- can, in public housing, be a reminder of the model’s and residents’ failure, and their cheating the system. This has to do with the fact that they have skipped what was meant to be their most important consumption: that of acquiring a home<sup>12</sup>. Viewed from another perspective, not reporting income increase was also a way for residents to exercise agency and redefine public housing space for themselves as permanent homes. Rather than ‘ascend’ according to the middle-class home-ownership model, many felt a strong and unexpected sense of community safety and belonging which impelled them to want to stay (Dinzey Flores 2007). In places like Las Gladiolas, which before the shift of tenancy terms had been called a ‘condominio’ (condominium) and was tightly bound to the working, rather than welfare classes, its residents felt proud of their homes on those class-based terms, and unhappy with the new wave of tenants allowed in (Chapter 5 will discuss this more closely).

### **Portraying failure**

As these changes took place, the space of public housing itself was increasingly portrayed as a failure and tied discursively to residents’ stubborn and ‘unjustifiable’ resistance to modernization (Ocasio 1958). In order to justify the production of policy interventions, resident failure needed to be classified, constructed and portrayed as a social problem (Flint 2006; Jacobs et al. 2003):

‘Here in Puerto Rico we have seen one of the most vigorous public housing programs in the world. Large modern buildings have been constructed for low-income families. These were inaugurated with the conviction that one of these families’ most serious problems had been solved. And a few years afterwards, *those same public housing projects have deteriorated to become cement slums*, rather than wooden ones.’ (Rodríguez 1969: my emphasis).

This 1969 newspaper editorial recasts the space of public housing as ‘cement slums’ and uses their physical degradation of the projects to reconstitute them as a visual affront to urban order- becoming stereotyped along certain material indicators (‘cement, rather than wooden ones’)- reemphasizing the links



Figure 4.24. Problem in Public Housing. An improvised shack serves as marked contrast to the modern housing building in the public urbanization Nemésio Canales as a mockery of the government's housing program in its effort to improve housing conditions in the island. Source: Rivas. April 2, 1973, *El Mundo*.

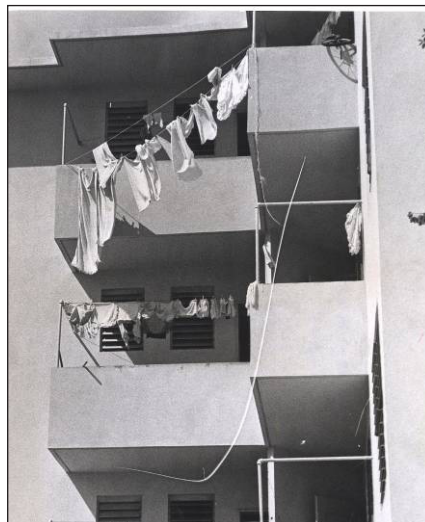


Figure 4.25. Hanging clothes drying. Photo by Casenave Proyecto Digitalización 'El Mundo'. Feb. 1967



Figure 4.26. Balcony with hanging clothes. Proyecto Digitalización 'El Mundo'. 4 Julio 1964.



Figure 4.27. Boy placed between project and market stall. Source: Proyecto Digitalización 'El Mundo'. Bigott 1998.

between the spatial and the social, and its connections to slums. The presence of dark and infested waters, for instance, was featured in news stories describing the ‘pestilent’ conditions of certain projects- tying them directly to old signifiers of ‘backwardness’ attached to *aguas negras* (literally, ‘black waters’- sewage water) in the slums. This particular issue continues to be raised both by residents and government in depictions either of institutional negligence or of inherent resident backwardness. In Las Gladiolas, as we will see in Chapters 6 and 7, it also became a focus of community dispute. Others would focus on the clothes hanging from balconies or on overgrown grass to offer a perspective of the buildings as untidy, and possibly, unhygienic as well [Figures 4.25 and 4.26]. They tended to re-racialize these new ascriptions of deficiency by, for example, including the bodies of young dark children next to the featured ‘problem’ [Figure 4.27]. One particular story contained the image of an ‘*improvisada casucha*’ (improvised shack) in the premises of a housing project which was:

‘against the spirit of the entire project...the rusty zinc, cans, cardboard, reused wood, etc. offer a disagreeable spectacle that does not correspond to the hygienic environment, comfort and modernism that’s characteristic of the rest of it’ (Rivas 1973)[Fig.23].

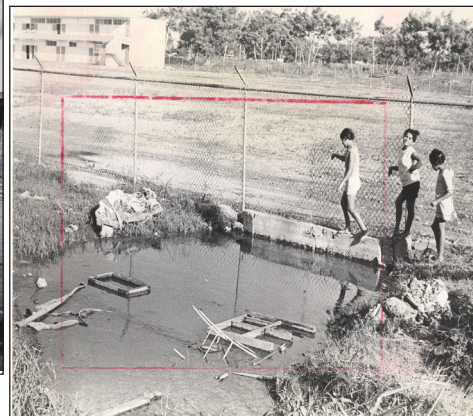
Figure 4.29 provides yet another example of this, where the published picture (the one delimited by the red square) was accompanied by a note that denounced authorities’ negligence in dealing with the ‘stuck water’ of the ‘Nemesio Canales’ housing project. It visually and symbolically reinserts the gendered and racialized stigma of the slum by recalling its tidal/‘black’ waters [see Figure 4.28 which depicts similarity of representations across time] through the bodies of young girls, stuck as well in their stagnant ‘culture of poverty’. Rather than staying away, the young residents seem ‘naturally’ happy to play in these ‘mosquito and disease infested waters’ (EL Mundo: 12 septiembre 1969), re-consolidating their slum-like tendencies. Not only were the materials and buildings introducing a new urban landscape of fear and loathing based on reminders of the slum, but practices and lifestyles too were coincidentally being cast as rural and backwards.

At another level, practices such as the planting of beans, common to the spaces of projects, became an object of controversy in letters exchanged between

the Governor's executive assistant and the Executive Director of the Housing Authority. When the Housing Director made it illegal to plant beans, the Governor asked that the norm be repealed because he thought it was actually a healthy practice for the island's economy and for low-income residents' sustenance (Alvarado 1956). The Director, however, convinced him that it 'deteriorated the appearance of public housing and made it very difficult to clean' after having invested large sums of money into design and landscaping (Cordero Dávila 1956). Sustained by a capitalistic 'common sense' vision of things, the hygienic aesthetics of modernity won over an old, rural practice which did not adapt to the salubrious order being established. Guided by ignorance over their significance, this moment exemplified how stigmas act in a mutually reinforcing manner- both perpetuating and acting as a shield to acquiring knowledge (Hastings and Dean 2003: 180).



**Figure 4.28. Part of Slum Area 'El Fanguito'.**  
**Source:**  
 Rotkin. Sept. 1946. CIP/ AGPR/ ICP.



**Figure 4.29. There's nothing idyllic about this puddle'.** **Source:** Proyecto Digitalización 'El Mundo'. Mandín Rodríguez. 12 septiembre 1969.

The paradigm of tradition versus modernity observed before also supported new regulations being placed on 'family' practices considered to be hindrances to the home-ownership model. These included: (a) the prohibition of domestic animals (in slums, hens and roosters were common), (b) limiting the prolongation of late-night reunions, and (3) not permitting family or friends to stay in the house for prolonged periods of time because they were considered 'uncomfortable' to the modern nuclear logic that promoted reduced individualized space:

'...for health and security, in order for the slum's over crowdedness not to be repeated in the *caserío*...Any additional person in the group would be taking away space, ventilation and comfort from the originally accepted family nucleus' (Alvarado 1956: 4).

Gwendolyn Wright (1981: 232) noted that in American public housing projects, despite the best intentions behind housing authorities' regulations and enforcement of habits for sanitation, order and improved domestic life, they 'had little real sympathy or respect for those families whose economic situation brought them into these architectural experiments'. Construing the 'problems' of projects as either inherent or extreme, management's desire for increasing control was not backed-up with the necessary financial resources because it was seen as wasteful (*ibid.*, 237). Likewise here, their idealism avoided *and* created its own practical limitations.

The traditional familial practices, which they tried to block, continued to exist despite official condemnation, demonstrating that resistances were being enacted. That is, if hygiene and the discourse of 'cleaning-out' public housing was a way to discipline residents, any kind of intentional dirtying, planting beans, keeping animals, illicit congregations, or other 'prohibited' practices pushed the boundaries of an externally-defined cultural decency. It was a way of rebelling against becoming 'educated' or domesticated in a certain way. On the one hand, residents *did* play along with governmental desires in a way that could ensure them a home; but, in maintaining certain preferred lifestyles alive, they were also claiming their own versions of urban home space, and challenging official ones. This simultaneous acquiescence with and departure from public housing regulations is a clear indication of how *jaibería*, as a practice of simultaneous resistance and complicity with one's oppressor introduced in Chapter 1, was being used since the first moments when public housing was declared problematic. Creating an ambiguous affiliation to the government authorities continued to be relevant, as will become more evident in subsequent chapters, when identifying residents' practices of resistance.

Nevertheless, the growing unemployment and underground economy just mentioned contributed to increased attacks made against public housing space and residents:

'Over the years, a subculture has been created, in which social stratification and patterns of life are distinguishable. Varied incidents of both adult and juvenile delinquency and other affronts to human dignity are daily occurrences in the project' (Research Office of the Urban Renewal and Housing Administration of Puerto Rico 1966: 6).





Figure 4.30. Por que Se Cuelan?  
Filardi 1963, El Vocero.



Figure 4.31. Es Hora de Limpieza.  
Filardi 1961, El Vocero.

Resignified as criminal and abject, newspapers communicated a growing anxiety over public housing's apparent 'failure' through images and discourses that depicted them as increasingly suffused by criminality and deviance. Below, I analyse two political caricatures because they illustrate and contain, with great detail, the intricacies of the various tensions described above. In the first, called 'Por qué Se Cuelan'? (Why do they slip in?)[Figure 4.30], the image is presented as a rhetorical question (Filardi 1963). Alluding to the discursively linked problems of hygiene and aesthetics, the well-maintained landscape clashes here with the rather shabby clothes drying against the walls of the buildings themselves- an aesthetics we saw being condemned in earlier pictures. A sign is placed on top of the housing project stating their official purpose: 'To improve the level of life of honest citizens' (*ibid.*). This is juxtaposed with the image of a towering dark male body smoking a cigarette and carrying a gun that reads: 'Thieves, drug traffickers, robbers, sexual perverts, etc.' (*ibid.*). The side-by-side placement can be read as an ironic answer to the question posed. By not displaying the bodies of the purported 'honest citizens', the figure of the male thief becomes the representative image of the entire population and therefore, it is not that they 'slip in' but that they indeed *are* the inhabitants. The second image, 'Es Hora de Limpieza' (It's Time to Clean) (Filardi 1961) [Figure 4.31] again places a man hovering at its center over an empty-looking, unidentified housing project, with a sign that reads 'Delinquents and undesirables that discredit caseríos' (*ibid.*). This time the active protagonist is the 'big brother' type white hand and suit sleeve that grabs the man's body to deposit it below. By contrasting the clothes of both men and depicting a small mountain shack with two palm trees in the background, the artist seems to suggest a masculine triad, where the delinquent (shamed/emasculated man) is unavoidably and passively caught between the forces of a rural/slum past and progressive technocratic present. The white hand, in turn, is that of the puppeteer (*Criollo* elite) who possesses the modern power to move around and place the subaltern subject in the space cast as being somewhere between modernity and tradition: the *caserío*.

The examples of public housing residents' education, socio-spatial control, and stigmatization above all suggest that the cultural actions 'spoke out' without words- undeniably marking their presence in their new urban landscape. It highlights the contradictions between their versions of public housing versus the planners'. It also demonstrates how material changes imposed by au-

thorities can prompt new discourses and actions by the subjects which that very materiality sought to order; how ‘discourses create multiple enunciative modalities, the contradictions between which can allow these positions to be used critically and in resourceful ways’ (Legg 2007: 61). Practices and counter-practices elaborated along diverse textual and visual discourses were filtered through a relationship between the material, symbolic and political aspects of public housing.

#### **4.5. A brief return of optimism**

##### **The hype of the high-rise**

As the stigma of public housing was managed and negotiated in the various ways pointed out above, a new typology of public housing as solution to poverty emerged during the 1960’s: the high-rise *condominio*<sup>13</sup> (condominium). Those tall structures were originally introduced to the island by the ‘Long Construction and Co.’<sup>14</sup> through a series of American-owned buildings called ‘The Darlington’ condominiums; originally only available to ‘those who can afford it’, and soon built extensively within a privileged sub-sector of San Juan<sup>15</sup> called Condado (Preece 1963: 6-7). As noted in the ‘San Juan Star Sunday Magazine’, they became extensive and trendy:

‘The many high-rise hotels, apartments, condominiums and office buildings now soaring towards the skies already give us a preview of the future. Even the ‘Urban Renewal and Housing Corporation’ is getting into the sky scraping business...’ (*ibid.*: 4).

Indeed, as authorities continued grapple with ‘the problem of housing’ during the decade of the 60’s, condominiums came to be seen as one of most promising programmatic solutions for providing ‘one home for every Puerto Rican’ [Figure 4.39] (CRUV 1966: 18):

‘... this program constitutes a solution to harmonize families’ aspirations towards owning their own home, with the need to make better use of land in cities where urbanizeable space is scarce and expensive’

That is, they were framed as ideal both to the public housing-as-transition to home-ownership model *and* to capitalist tenets of urban growth. It also marked a definitive shift in the material and conceptual parameters of home-

ownership reviewed before, extending that ideology beyond the single family home to include the multi-family, multi-storey building. Like the celebratory context of 1950's America, 'to housing officials, the high-rise tower was a visible expression of economic efficiency and social order; to the architects, it was a breakthrough in modern design...the new prototype of the central cities' (Wright 1981: 236). Thus, as they penetrated the local market, high-rises quickly became one of the main attractions for potential investment in a new far-reaching development effort to build a 'Nuevo Centro' (New Centre) in the district of Hato Rey, a former pasture land geographically located in the middle of San Juan. This towering visions was part of the 'Model City Program'



**Figure 4.32. CRUV 'Programa de Condominios' (Condominium Project). Source: CRUV 1958.**

created in 1966 through the federal law 'Ciudades Demostrativas y Desarrollo Metropolitano' (Demonstrative Cities and Metropolitan Development). Its architects described it in the following way:

'A symbolic place where one may sense the dynamism of Puerto Rico's growth...the equivalent of walking say from 42nd to 52nd Streets in Manhattan... The tone of the centre will be influenced by the business and commercial offices that already exist in the area, but the New San Juan Centre will be multiuse, containing elements of all the activities of a nature required for a rapidly expanding major metropolis. Thus it will serve uses as varied as government, housing, commerce, finance, culture, religion, education and recreation...At about the centre's midpoint, a park with a fountain pool will be established as a symbol to the visitor that he has arrived at a place of importance and dignity' (Reed and Molther 1970: 61).

The design for this imagined 'New Centre' dynamism [Figures 4.33 and 4.34], based on American forms of habitability and Puerto Rican tropical conditions, was important. High-rises in particular were to be "oriented in such a way as to take advantage of the views and air currents" (Planificación 1970). Of equal importance was the practical uses of those buildings. Originally, it was said that the project would 'amplify selection to the poor in an effort for people to live in greater harmony within a large city centre' by housing 8,200 people (spoken of in terms of 'families') in 4,500 'dwelling units' of different styles: row-houses, town houses, medium rise apartments, and high-rise towers (Planificación 1970). It would: '...attract occupants of all income levels... establish, early-on, a highly desirable residential ambiance...[and] *provide good and sanitary housing to eligible residents* of the Tokío, Nemesio Canales, Buenos Aires and other 'barrios' (i.e., slums)' (Planificación 1970: Ch.3, my emphasis). In other words, it would *re-house* those being displaced and uprooted mainly from slums by this new urban development project.

But like the trend in tenancy restrictions described in the previous section, the tenants of the new high rises to be built here were to be chosen according to FHA standards which responded to an American logic of the 'deserving poor': a two-tier system that provided generous middle-class benefits and limited aid for the indigent (Bloom 2008). In this case, the criteria to be considered most 'deserving' were the highest income tenants of other housing projects, or those who did not own adequate housing and were being directly affected by highway construction or urban renewal projects. Years later, following the suggestions of a private consultancy firm, 'deserving' also came to mean families understood as young and ageing marriages who had been less attended to before and who were smaller in size (Gobierno 1974). This represented a definite shift from the vision of 'family' we have thus far seen portrayed in images ranging from the 1940's to the 1960's. As subsequent chapters will show, some of the older residents from Las Gladiolas felt that this shift to 'the welfare model' was directly responsible for the problems that later ensued in the towers; that those with less economic and cultural capital beget a loss of respect and proper maintenance. Like in the UK, the figure of 'the lone parent'- and mother in particular- (Jacobs *et al.* 2003: 436) was turned into a morally condemned one of deprivation and dependency.



Figure 4.33. New Center for San Juan. Images of Metro area, Old San Juan, Hato Rey and the imagined New Center. Source: Junta de Planificación 1970.

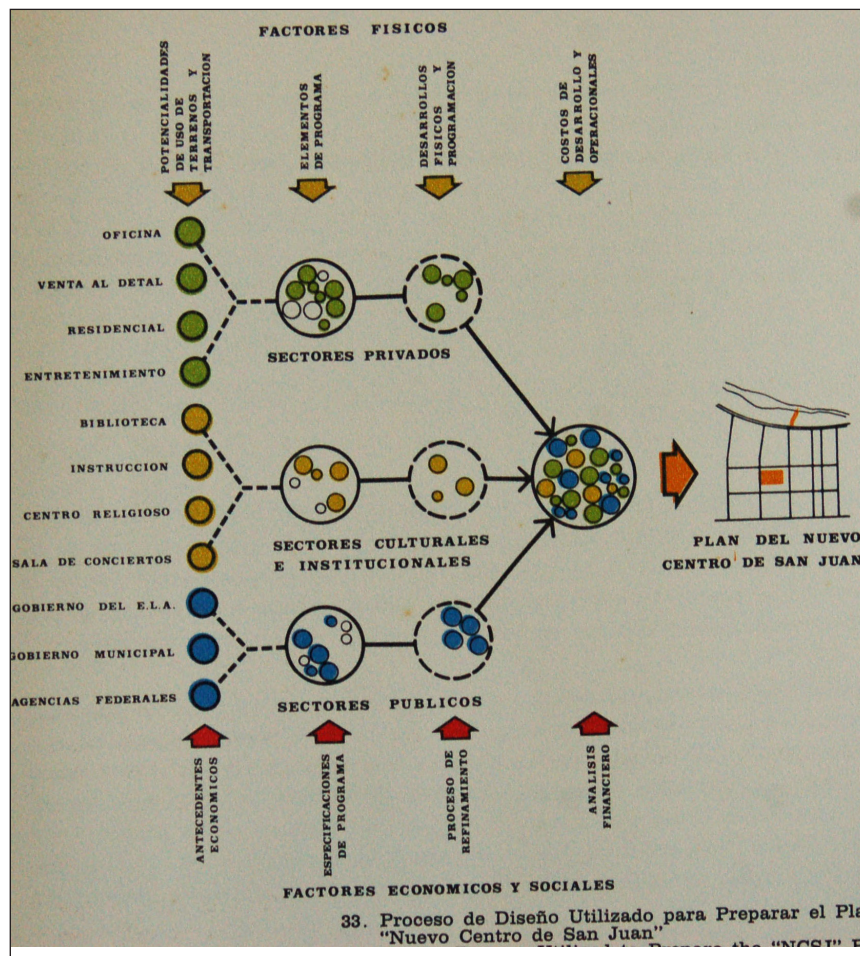


Figure 4.34. Physical, economic and social factors considered in design process of New Center of San Juan. Source: Junta de Planificación 1970.

### **Las Gladiolas and the new concrete experiments**

One of the nine projects built in the initial development stages of the 'New Centre' was Las Gladiolas because it fulfilled two of the required principles of the 'Model City': (a) being immediately close to the financial (economically solvent) area, and (b) being social housing, said to benefit the new residents of the area. The land where it was built was acquired in 1964 for the construction of four towers by the local 'Constructora Quisqueya'<sup>14</sup>. The buildings, originally called 'Condominio Quisqueya', were completed in two phases between 1970 and 1974 as the second and largest high-rise public housing project in the island. Soon, they were renamed as 'Las Gladiolas'<sup>16</sup>.

Once built, its pairs of towers of 296 and 380 dwelling units later sold for around 6 million dollars and, according to the original 'Deed of Segregation, Sale and Conveyance', a typical tower consisted of:

'10 residential units on the first floor and 12 units in the 15 floors thereafter of which 32 are of four rooms and also have the following facilities: living-dining room, kitchen, laundry area, a bathroom, 'linen closet', interior hallway and *balcony*. 94 units have three rooms and also contain same other facilities; 64 units are of two rooms and have same facilities plus one more bathroom. The dimensions of this 16-floor building of irregular form are 265 feet long by 63 feet and 8 inches wide. It contains *stairwells* with direct access to each of the different floors in its *hallways*. There is also access to each of the different floors with two electric *elevators*. Furthermore, each floor contains *water and electric readers* of respective apartments, installations to combat fires, and telephone service installations...Facilities for the building include: a paved area for motor vehicle *parking*, two (to three) stations of *waste management* (per building), and two *playing areas*' (Oller Monclova 1973: 5).

Unfortunately, despite all my attempts to gather primary documents relating to Las Gladiolas, I was only able to get a hold of the original deeds. The national archives do not hold further information and, as described in the methodology chapter, the PHA housing library indicated to me that all was lost or burnt. But, since the towers of Las Gladiolas were constructed during the prefabrication boom of quick and inexpensive assembly methods- advances which have been recorded in a variety of sources- it can be deduced that they would have used some or all of the following: (1) prefabricated ceilings; (2) prefabricated asbestos-cement panels made in the island called 'Durotex'; (3)

the 'presforzado' method made popular by a Berkeley University professor who designed this 'load-balancing' technique of walls; (4) a structural system of pre-cut walls that allowed for building even higher than before; and (5) steel beam imported from the U.S. Steel Co. (Baralt 2008). Each of these marked the growth of the housing corporation's involvement in the business of constructing 'multipisos' (multi-storey) while promoting 'the intense use of land to produce saving' (Gobierno 1974).

Facilitated by the U.S.-sponsored 'Operation Breakthrough' policy which intended to 'put an end to this ghastly drama of the subculture of the poor Puerto Ricans' (Puerto Rico Urban Renewal and Housing Administration 1972), the local government's instituted 'Workshops for a New Puerto Rico', which included an 'Experimental Program of Industrialized Housing'. The latter conducted research into new construction techniques, methods, systems, and materials, including prefabricated or industrialized cement systems (Puerto Rico Urban Renewal and Housing Administration 1972; Baralt 2008: 295). The FHA had been financing similar tests and demonstrations since the early 1960's to discover new approaches to home design. They had also supported experimental construction as a way to produce substantial savings in cost and to improve the urban environment through cheaper construction materials and methods (Cordero Dávila 1955; Autoridad Sobre Hogares de Puerto Rico 1957; Estado Libre Asociado de Puerto Rico 1957; Delegados al Congreso Mundial de Planificación y Vivienda 1961). But they also restricted any construction which was not carried out with reinforced concrete and which did not follow certain American guidelines to construction and urban design. As addressed in the first section on slums, this set definite limitations on the local construction scene, making those sponsored experiments one of the only feasible ways for the industry to develop, and marginalizing older, more traditional forms of building, as well as the rural cultures associated to them [Figures 4.35 to 4.39].

Despite the strict conditions they set, FHA regulations also set the standards for what would be an intense period of innovation. New technologies for the transfer or application of cement were developed and myriad ways were devised to, for example, mix 'native' elements like coconut fibre or 'yagrumo' tree leaves with other materials in order to provide firmer cement for roof boarding (Baralt: 298). With the rapid growth of premixed cement industry,



that material became the primary element of construction and a national vehicle of infrastructural and economic advancement<sup>17</sup>; both of which, as we already know, were part of narratives deeply embedded in gendered ideologies of individual, family and collective socio-economic improvement. Moreover, the figure of the developer and engineer (in charge of acquiring, controlling, and spreading cement) also appeared as a new kind of male technocrat who, along with *Criollo* officials, could act as enforcers of the ‘double coloniality of power’, directing and controlling a large number of the island’s labouring poor. Seen in this light, cement can be understood as one of the gendered material conduits of modern colonialism; and high-rises as a structural accompaniment to it.

The new techniques were put to use through working partnerships between the public housing agency, CRUV, the San Juan municipal government and private companies such as American-owned Shelley Enterprises [Fig. 38] and locally-based RELBEC<sup>18</sup>. That joint effort introduced mass-produced pre-fabricated ‘apartment factories’ that, like Fordist car-assembly models in the U.S., reduced production costs and time (1969; Valle 1969). Four to six apartment shells (external and internal walls, ceilings and floors) could be completed in one day and then quickly finished on-site. Having experimented in Montreal (Canada) with similar units, Shelley Systems boasted a reduction of \$2.50 per square foot to create a factory-produced stacked concrete box in Puerto Rico because of its: ‘...extraordinarily low costs compared to the U.S.: labour is cheaper, and the housing has no heating, air-conditioning, or insulation; that’s the way you can build in tropical climates’ (Architectural Record 1971). With moulds made in England, and equipment and expertise also coming from Scandinavia and other European partners and companies, these fast and mobile technologies were chosen in consideration of the island’s tropical heat and its seismic and hurricane zones.

The coming together of local and foreign materials demonstrates, ‘... that a seemingly global thing - like the residential highrise - is always at the same time situated and specific...that global effect [of the residential modernist high-rise] is the result of specific ‘work’ in distinct contexts’ (Jacobs 2006: 13). In Puerto Rico, that ‘work’ certainly consisted in: the insertion of global pre-fabricated technologies, the growth of a local pre-mixed concrete industry and methods for highrise construction, as well as the propagation of ‘big

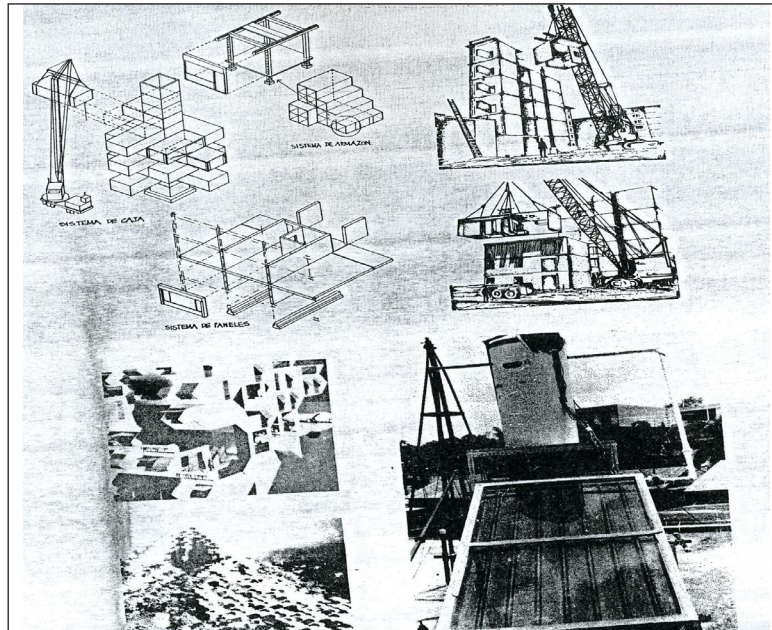


Figure 4.35. Prefabricated systems of experimentation. Source: ELA, 1980.

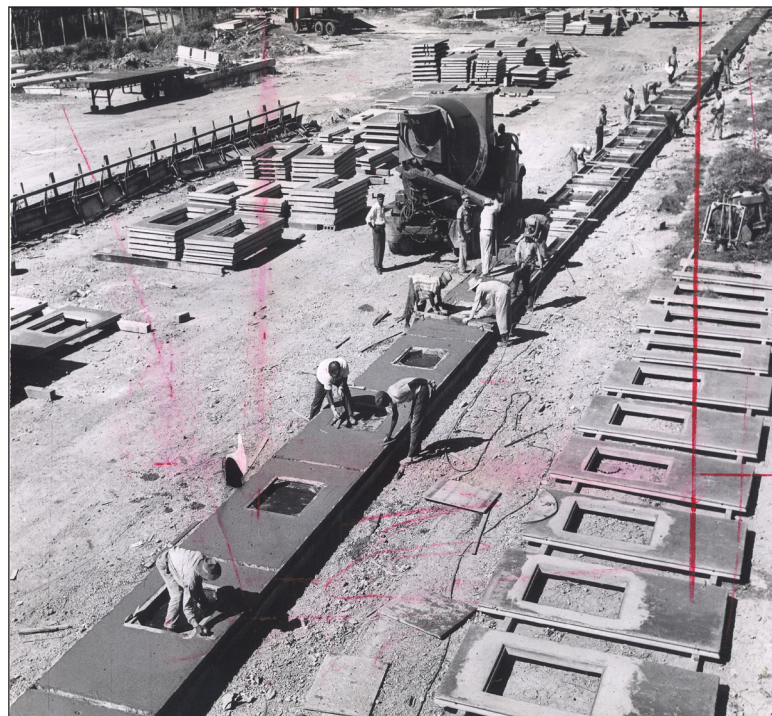


Figure 4.36. Workers prepare walls, windows and doors to prefabricated houses in Carolina. Source : Archivo Proyecto Digitalizacion 'El Mundo'. Mora. 21 Diciembre, 1963.

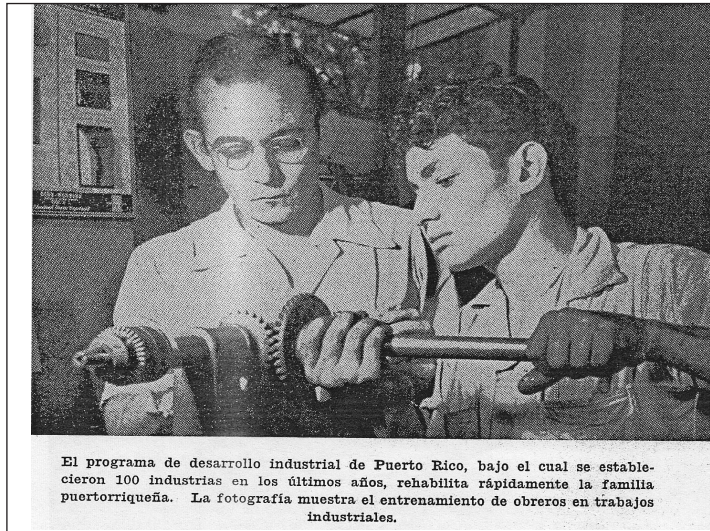


Figure 4.37. 'Training construction workers'. Subscript reads: 'Puerto Rico's industrial development program...quickly rehabilitates the Puerto Rican family.' Source: Passalacqua 1951: 8.

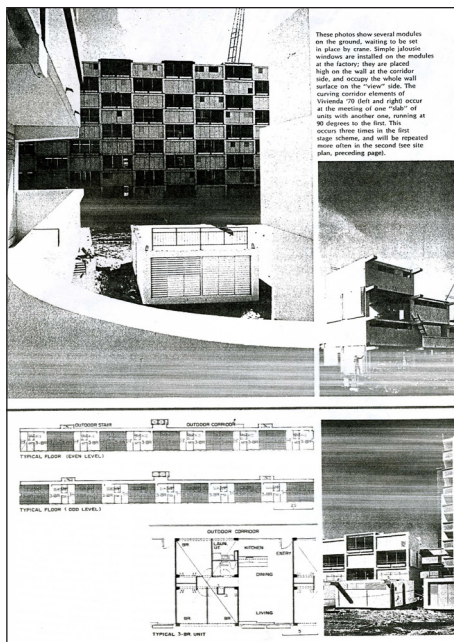


Figure 4.38. Shelley Systems outdoor and indoor plan for prefabricated apartment homes. Source: Architectural Record, April 1971.



Figure 4.39. 'Pioneering Condominiums'- Condado Gardens Condominiums. Source: San Juan Star Magazine, 1963.

stories' of modernist development and national progress which accompanied the previous two. It was a multi-dimensional assemblage that made the incorporation of foreign/tropical conditions appear seamless and positive.

### **Contentious high-rises and the proposal for walk-ups**

Nevertheless, the grand effect of high-rises and its part in the wider national construction of modernity as cultural identity- the 'work' spoken about above- also involved managing innumerable networks, associations, and relations in a way that would minimize disruptions to that seemingly faultless system (Jacobs, *ibid*; Latour 1995.). If we take a step back to look at the initial reactions which the *first* low-income high-rise building elicited, we can begin to see the discursive fault lines which were also forming part of the multi-layered structure of high-rise public housing construction.

Designed and constructed by 'Rexach Construction Co.' and guided by projects built in New York City, 'Condominio Quintana' was erected on the grounds of an old *hipódromo* (racetrack) in Hato Rey and inaugurated in 1963, a year before Las Gladiolas's land was sold for construction (Carlo 1963). It consisted of 2 buildings of 15 floors each, a total of 392 housing units, elevators, parking, communal laundry, waste incinerator, and central plaza (*ibid*; Baralt: 319). In a letter sent to the Governor, those same modern qualities so exalted in other mediums became the main focus of criticism:

'...Through the powerful filters of the air conditioners, the thick carpets, the heavy curtains, the plush armchairs of our public offices, what are not filtered are the sentiment of our town, its aspirations, its needs and its concept of family home' (Palacios 1963: 3).

The author argued that this 'unknown monstrosity' would lead to reclusion, mistrust, loss of values and general unhappiness because the government had failed to consider the traditional needs, customs, and culture of an entire way of people through its design. Condominiums and their material modernity were presented as a threat to the existence of hospitability, familiarity, personability, and friendly relationships of help and advice with neighbouring families. The concrete and steel which held the structure in place were signalled out as lacking sensibility towards 'true' cultural or architectural histories. Incidentally, these cultural 'roots' are today said to remain only in small pock-

ets of *jíbaro* mountain culture, regarded as the only resisters (or never having been equally afforded the benefits) of progress and modernity. Palacio's letter gives us an idea of how preserving a 'traditional' past was caught up with the processes of modern construction which denigrated and displaced 'autochthonous' building materials for a capitalist sense of advancement. While inverted, the connections he makes are not outside the logic described in section 4.2 where pre-capitalist slum materials were linked to a particular class and space.

Behind closed doors, the Governor himself expressed great scepticism towards that model and, in recorded meetings, asked that studies be carried out to assess the structure's impact on human happiness before being instituted (Chévere Rivera 1963). Following these directives CRUV director, Carlos Alvarado, made the public announcement that, in the Quintana project, it would take them (CRUV) at least a year to determine whether or not low income people could adjust to that style of housing and to the type of coexistence it imposed (El Mundo 1963a). But before that year was over, he had convinced the Governor of its profitability and positive impact in alleviating housing need. This political back-and-forth was significant in that it demonstrates: (a) that high-rises were not unquestionably accepted, but that they underwent a process of internal/external conciliation while taking their own form *and* shaping urban landscapes; and; (b) that their materiality was not in a realm of its own, but expressed and managed via debates over cultural inauthenticity.

Despite the rapid incorporation of these 'modern' elements into the structure of the buildings *per se* that followed, in 1980, the government was still stressing the need to orient the consumer about the responsibilities, advantages and limitations that living in condominiums implied ('a new form of life in Puerto Rico') (Planificación 1980: 32). When we consider that by that time, living in these buildings was no longer that 'new', such policy recommendations suggest that the concern over fit between materiality and local culture persisted; a vision which was undoubtedly reinforced by far-reaching social-science studies of the 70's, such as Lee Rainwater's (1970) condemnation of giant projects and Oscar Newman's (1972: 195) architectural appreciation of the deleterious impact of building height and type- 'the high-rise, double-loaded corridor, elevator tower'-on social conviviality. He suggested that part

of high-rises' security failure was the partial correlation between crime rates and density, and the definite relationship between the former and building height and type (except for the elderly 'because they are retired...and tend to socialize a lot') (195), further arguing that:

‘...for the low-income families with children- particularly those on welfare or suffering pathological disorder- the high-rise apartment building is to be strictly avoided. Instead, these families should be housed in walk-up buildings no higher than three stories...This puts a density limit of about fifty units...per project of this housing type...For high-income families, another set of guidelines is possible’(1973:193)

As Fusté (2010: 54) notes, the influential theory of defensible space which ‘... assumes that people are unaffected by racial power and class structure...does not account for how histories of race and class tension keep people in economically precarious circumstances thus leading people to engage in criminalized activities’. It also does not consider the greater structural economic circumstances which put pressure on providing any kind of new housing<sup>19</sup>. With the continued belief that forms of materiality and design impacted social space, which in the case of public housing was also pathologised as sick or deviant, ‘walk-ups’ were offered as the ‘new’ alternative housing model to replace towers which had not produced a sense of ownership.

Since then, Puerto Rican historians and architects have also highlighted high-rises’ ‘otherness’, arguing that despite the original hype, the importation of foreign materials and technology, especially those from Northern, colder climates, immediately resulted in an enclosed type of architecture that no longer respected spatial codes of tropical construction which had thus far mediated inside/outside carefully through the control of light and ventilation, thus producing a tension (Mignucci Giannoni 1999: 41; Quiles 2007, personal communication).

‘...large-scale urban design has so far resulted in oversized, inhumane conglomerates that do not promote social interaction. Nothing is more foreign to the concept of neighbourhood than apartment towers and condominium slabs’ (Rigau and Penabad 1993: 81).

But while this criticism against the incompatibility of high-rises to community or cultural life was directed against all high-rises, it was widely understood

that: ‘the high-rise building as an architectural type did not function for *this* (low-income/public housing) sector of the population’ (Rodriguez 1998). This is what Laboy also stressed within the opening quote of this Chapter. He spoke of a Puerto Ricanness (portrayed as a peasant-like culture that preferred animals like chickens) that is fundamentally opposed to American ways of ‘being happy’ (living in apartments). But his remark about a preference for animals was meant to act as a class distinction between those who were modern, or assimilated, and those who were still marked by their rural-to-urban and slum-to-public housing transition. Thus, his comments were traversed by two seemingly paradoxical positions: one spoke to residents’ right- as Puerto Ricans- to live differently than in the United States; and another was based on old place-based prejudices of residents being backwards or uneducated (‘where they come from’).

He also presented their resistance to demolition in typically paternalist ways, accusing them of not understanding that high-rise living is not good for them and against their own roots. Using the discourse of high-rises’ problematic authenticity to frame their resistance as a sign of lack of ‘proper’ culture (of knowledge), the stigma of the slum was once again used to make high-rise public housing unsuitability appear natural, and residents out of place in that urban locality. Furthermore, like Cotto’s (2007) argument discussed in Chapter 1 that the island’s ‘*Criollo* neo-liberalism’ granted State functionaries a vision of themselves as organizers of poor communities, he also believed himself to be in a better position to resolve the inherent incompatibility of residents and their living space. Finally, the narratives which marked the structures as ‘culturally inauthentic’ merged with those that already condemned public housing and its residents as ‘other’ to solidify the view of residents as marginal beings, inherently unable to adapt to modern living. In Chapters 5 and 6, we will see how the residents relate to the way the physical space of the towers, both in terms of their memories and actions, contradicts these more dominant understandings of incompatibility; and how, in fact, they see government authorities as being the ones responsible for the deterioration they are normally blamed for.

The solution which has subsequently been proposed and promoted to resolve the purported socio-physical commensurability within high-rises is mixed-income housing design and policies, based on the idea that:

‘...household with different incomes will develop relationships, higher-income households would provide models of ‘constructive behaviour’ for lower income households and low-income families would create additional social networks or bonds through higher-income households, which would create favourable people-based results such as employment opportunities for the poor’ (Fraser and Kick 2007: 2359).

Like Newman’s earlier paradigm, these also operate in a strikingly similar fashion to the ‘proximity’ formula for assimilation which guided early public housing proposals. As Alexander von Hoffman (1996: 441) noted in his review of American low-income housing policies from the 30’s to the late 90’s:

‘...it demonstrates the continuing tendency of housers to view housing policies as panaceas and, in particular, to overstate the importance of environment in determining social behaviour’.

This was made evident in 2005 through the case of Las Gladiolas when a local newspaper used exactly the same terminology discussed at the beginning of this section (when Gladiolas was originally built in the ‘Centre of San Juan’) to announce that the towers would be replaced by walk-ups to ‘harmonize better with its urban surroundings’ (Covas Quevedo 2005). It highlights the ‘recycled’ and colonized nature of modern urban development projects, where the language, concepts, and beliefs of public housing failure have remained relatively unchanged, while structural interventions continue to be shifted and changed as proposed solutions. That is, the associations between continually revisioned styles, architectural forms and political intentions (including colonial ones) are not inherent. Yet, at the same time that this walk-up model was being promoted, other discourses were also circulating in newspapers warning against the ‘intricate architectural structure’ (Albertelli 2000) which, according to the police, allowed for the drug trade to be carried out surreptitiously in walk-ups [Figure 4.40]. Stories of places like Llorens Torres, with its ‘wide open courtyards’ pictured below, dramatized the coincidental progress *and* regress which those spaces could incite. The article suggests that while they opened opportunities for children to play, they were now *so* clean that ‘drug buyers are not scared to enter the projects any more’ (*ibid.*). Thus, it was not just their lay-out, but also their urbanity and proximity to shopping malls, centres and main roads that made them ‘perfect areas to buy’ (*ibid.*);



their embeddedness in an urban fabric that continued to reject them as 'other' to that order. Their mere existence is projected as problematic.

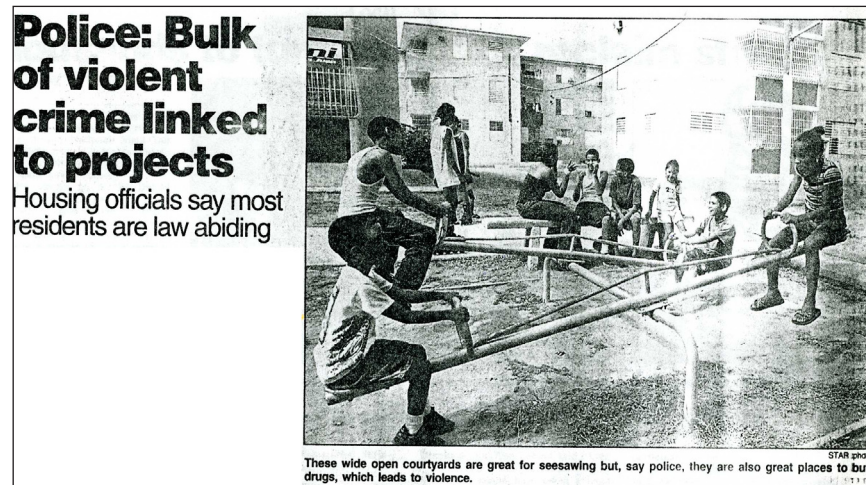


Figure 4.40. Crime and 'wide open' project courtyards. Source: San Juan Star, July 17, 2000.

It would seem that officials were now more cautious in what they fore-grounded when publicizing their latest 'solution'. Still, architecture, location and materiality continue to be presented as inextricably connected features that can be manipulated by designers, technocrats, etc. to combat crime (to be seen again in Chapter 6). In the image above, for instance, by placing the structures together with dark bodies, and a subscript about buying drugs, the *caserío* resident continues to be re-cast as the ultimately downtrodden figure responsible for the negative use (even in its potentiality) and therefore descending turn of any public housing space. It indicates that no matter what structure is promoted, be it high rise, remodelled building, or walk-up, the resident 'others' of public housing is the connective thread that ties it all together: the figures doomed to follow a criminal, and un-modern, path of deterioration because of their inherent (slum) vulnerability to such a negative force. However, as essentialized portrayal, it fails to take notice of the productions of space enacted by residents as users of those debated spaces.

#### 4.6. Conclusion

Karen A. Franck (1998: 86) argued that, 'developing policies and designing buildings are not simply technical or practical matters; they are also matters of belief'. In this chapter, I have also been making the case that the projects of

public housing and their historical accounts are based on political projects of identity, order and exclusion, filtered through long-standing discriminations against gendered, raced and classed 'others'; that the emergence of public housing projects as material and cultural objects of discourse is inseparable from an analysis of how truths about 'others' became operationalized by colonial government authorities- that 'othering', in effect, was also a 'technical matter'.

To do so, I first explored how slums' description as a homogeneous mass through gendered and raced signifiers that linked health, morality, and materiality to urban space continued well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century, construed as a housing 'problem' of physical and moral proportions, and labeled 'other' to the modern space being constructed. Public housing was then explored as the solution for 'that sector of the population that cannot make themselves a proper house with their own means' (Muñoz Marín 1964: 5). It was framed as a transitory measure which would lead to the fulfillment of the gendered and raced ideology of progress: home-ownership; the place where the socially deviant and homogeneously-defined subaltern 'others' were to reside in order to be converted into 'us'= white, middle-class, male worker/female housewife, fashioned against the *Criollo* elites. The paternalist displacement from the space of deviance to the space of propriety was enhanced through a variety of strategic locality and design efforts, educational programs, representations, and regulatory mechanisms. But the 'others' of this crafted landscape- the residents- were continually challenging and reconstituting the original formulas not only by their day to day practices, but by simply staying put. To the dismay of politicians, architects, and planners, they were forging permanent communities out of temporary homes.

As those became permanent, rather than temporary, they were also overwhelmingly represented as a logical failure, and re-stigmatized as the locus of contemporary forms of deviance and crime. In the final section, I looked at how these depictions of failure were tied to the 'birth' of high-rise construction and to claims of cultural in/authenticity; how it went from being greeted with enthusiasm to being fiercely criticized and blamed for social evils, becoming '...the form to which a tightly scripted story of life and death of the monster of modernist planning and architecture attached itself' (Jacobs 2006:8), revealing, in turn, what Lawrence Vale (2000: 279) refers to as, 'a

psychologically complex conflation of architectural form and social status'. I concluded with a brief discussion of how walk-ups were later instituted as the new (yet recycled) socio-technical salvation. This is the model offered now to replace Las Gladiolas (to be analyzed further in Chapter 6).

In all of the moments discussed, presenting 'others' as inherently damaged or faulty created an idea that, wherever they live, an inevitable path to failure will follow; thereby re-consolidating the stigmatized 'culture of poverty' within certain gendered and raced bodies and spaces, as well as justifying interventions. For high-rises like Las Gladiolas, the impact in this sense, has been two-fold: As a functional space, they are the object of one of the island's greatest and proudest obsessions - the home, which is also the historical locus of control of citizens and their place. In the early 90's, for example, a Senator expressed this continued belief by linking high-rises to the recovery of homeownership as a national objective (as if it'd ever been forsaken!):

'A resident converted into owner of his/her own apartment or condominium will be a human with not only a rooftop, but with the recognition of their human dignity as a newly-turned owner and, to a greater extent now, as owner of their destiny' (END: 25 julio 1993).

The 'path' towards owning a home- as morally and economically superior to any other form of living- was still very much part of how personal and national 'becoming' was being framed- with a housing typology becoming attached to it. On the other hand, as a symbol and material manifestation of the 'autochthonous' versus 'foreign other', high-rises have offered an avenue through which to engage with local forms of political cultural nationalism, filtering other forms of historical discriminations and prejudices- particularly through the discourses of authenticity and criminality. Linking the latter to sensory details of deterioration has since become a preferred theme in media coverage and political discourse, leading to strong support of privatizing, controlling, 'modernizing' and demolishing their physical space as a form of public housing redevelopment (Vale 2002: 18). The following chapter will be looking precisely at how the links between these representations and policy changes continue to 'other' public housing space at the same time that these historical portrayals are destabilized by residents' tales of deterioration, community and crime, and by their practices of resistance as users of such space.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> During the 40's, there were a total of 225,000 migrants to urban areas. As a result of the massive government-sponsored out-migration strategy, the 50's saw that number decrease to 88,000, diminishing the formation of shanty towns and contributing to the cited economic growth rate of the era (Grosfoguel 1992: 311-316).

<sup>2</sup> In this sense, I found one news item within a Housing Authority document dated March 1957 particularly telling. It announced a new housing project to be built in the town of Bayamón- with the following same group of men present in the project's signature that appear over and over again (and self-referentially many times) in historical documents. It points towards precisely the type of elitist 'club' mentality I have been incorporating in my analysis of administrative goals and functions.

<sup>3</sup> Localities had to show commitment to the following in order to fulfill the requirements for approval: (1) To codes and ordinances (seen as principal means by which slum and blight dwellings can be prevented); (2) To comprehensive community plan for physical redevelopment such as Land Use Plans as well as for Administrative and Regulatory Measures to control and guide the physical development); (3) Neighborhood Analyses (to establish extent and intensity of blight in order to develop basis for planning healthy neighborhoods of decent homes and suitable living standards); (4) To administrative organization; (5) to Financing; (6) to Facilitating decent, safe and sanitary re-housing for families displaced by government action; and (7) to Citizen participation (to provide understanding and support necessary to insure success- through citizens advisory committee and neighborhood participation) (Housing and Home Financing Agency, March 1955).

<sup>4</sup> As its name suggests, if the land was considered sound and was not going to be used for larger urban redevelopment projects, this program consisted of rehabilitating homes in their same place- many times with the manual labour of its owners- without having to displace the families.

<sup>5</sup> Ultimately, the persistent stigma of the projects did not allow the integration sought through physical juxtaposition because higher income neighbors who felt their ambience would be destroyed often resisted these measures by moving out of their homes and public housing residents also resented the intrusion of administration in trying to promote mixing and were not creating the desired bonds with the external community, nor with their 'landlords' (Back 1962; Chéver Rivera 1963).

<sup>6</sup> Since 1903, a course on 'domestic sciences' had been institutionalized and required of all girls in the public school system of the island (Ortiz Cuadra 1997). Later, with a Bachelor in Domestic Science in higher education, it was instituted in the University of Puerto Rico.

<sup>7</sup> In the 50's, for example, the Governor officially discouraged the use of the word *caserío* because of its derogatory connotation (tied to slum), while *vivienda* (housing) is offered as the more appropriate and 'democratic' term to be officially endorsed (Muñoz Marín 1954). A decade later, the term 'public housing' was to be officially substituted by 'minimum rent urbanization' as a way to: (a) 'desterrar el concepto y el vocablo' (to banish the concept and the term), and (b) to assure that effort and time was put into improving the places rather than dealing with their already deeply-rooted stigma (Rodríguez 1969).

<sup>8</sup> Old remaining problems were listed as: housing, unemployment, and the difficulties of growing populations to participate directly and continuously in production processes. New problems and preoccupations included: use and addition to drugs, new social conviviality modalities, transculturation problems, energy crisis, increase in price of goods and services, deterioration and abuse of environmental and natural resources, demands for development

of land in inefficient way, apparent loss of consensus, loss of sense of purpose and solidarity in Puerto Rican community.

<sup>9</sup> Still today, communal facilities such as the *plaza* ('the outdoor room to the city'), the school, local shops, etc. are projected as the appropriate physical scale and space that facilitates spontaneous interaction amongst citizens while responding to Hispanic Caribbean architectural traditions.

<sup>10</sup> Some of the solutions proposed in order to, 'give incentives ...to get closer to reaching the housing goals of Puerto Rico: home ownership for every family' were: (a) the granting of loans by the Development Bank and with the financial backing of the Legislative Assembly, (b) Law #82 authorizing CRUV to emit bonuses for finance housing costs, and (c) Law # 104 authorizing CRUV to create a Savings Plan amongst the *caserío* residents and to establish a donation by part of the ELA favoring those families who choose to take on the plan (Muñoz Marín 1964).

<sup>11</sup> Family was defined as: a group of two or more persons related by blood, matrimony or legal adoption; a single person, over 62; an incapacitated person; or person displaced by governmental works. This definition excluded single mothers or other forms of extended families entirely.

<sup>12</sup> For more on the commodification, consumption and governance of housing, see Flint 2003 a, b; and 2010.

<sup>13</sup> Taken from the English word condominium, these structures were facilitated through the Puerto Rico 'Law of Horizontal Property' in 1958, conceived through visits and consultations made with the Spanish and Cuban governments who already had similar legislation (Baralt 2008: 314).

<sup>14</sup> Owned by American contractor Leonard Darlington who built low-income houses and apartment buildings in some post WW-II southern cities of the U.S., his was the first company given FHA insurance for low-cost construction in the island, building the first large-scale commercial housing project in the island (for returning veterans) called 'Puerto Nuevo' (Baralt 2008: 244-249). The first *condominio* endorsed by the FHA was Condado Garden Apartments, built by Empresas J. Ramirez de Arellano.

<sup>15</sup> The first legal document found pertaining to this transaction dates October 27 1964. It is a 'Deed of Declaration of Trust' where it provided that the site 'Project PR 5-15, Hato Rey, Puerto Rico' (a) was acquired by the Puerto Rico Urban Renewal and Housing Corporation (CRUV) from the Puerto Rico Land Administration; (b) that the Puerto Rico Housing Corporation (PHA) would provide CRUV with a loan and annual contributions 'to assist the corporation in developing, and in achieving and maintaining the low-rent character of low-rent housing projects,' allowing for the development and operation of certain low-rent housing projects; (c) that PR-15 would be developed and the Puerto Rico Housing Corporation (PHA) (Oller Monclova 1964).

<sup>16</sup> Before the rapid era of industrialization, Hato Rey was a land of grazing for cows. In the 'Deeds of Declaration of Trust' (1964; 1974), there is some more specific information as to what the uses or ownership of colliding land of Las Gladiolas were: In 1964, at its East, there was the remaining property of Ernest D. Reyes, Josefina bravo de Reyes and Hector Pinero. At the West, 'Concrete Industires Incorporated' owned the land as we; as 'Metropolitan Real Estate and Finance Corporation'. In 1974, both the eastern and western colliding lands were owned by CRUV.

<sup>17</sup> Beyond housing, there was an accelerated surge in constructing hotels, highways, airports, bridges, aqueducts, filtration plants, and other public works.

<sup>18</sup> This corporation was formed by a working partnership between three others: (1) 'Rexach & Rivera Construction Co.', which was owned by family members trained mainly in prestigious United States institutions, introduced many new buildings methods and technologies such as the first premixed concrete plant (Baralt *ibid*); (2) International Basic Economy Corp. (IBEC), based in New York City, founded by Nelson Rockefeller with 140 subsidiaries in 33 countries, mainly those 'in development'; and (3) Larsen and Nielsen Consultor, S.A., a Dutch firm with experience in European post-WW II industrial home-construction.

<sup>19</sup> According to a Planning Board document of 1978, it was financially implausible to provide adequate housing for each slum-residing family, as had been stimulated in most plans of the 60's and 70's. In 1976, the average cost of housing in the private sector was \$34,000, which required an income of at least \$12,000 annually. At that time, 84% of families had incomes of less than \$10,000. Yet despite this recognition, the ultimate goal of government housing policy continued to be prompting citizens to acquire their own house in the private market (Junta de Planificación 1978: 197).

## **Chapter 5**

### **The logic of deterioration**

## 5.1. Introduction

The ideologies of modernity and progress embedded in the spatial management of poverty and place-making in the city were not abandoned with time, but extended to include the perceived failure of public housing which, as argued in the latter sections of the previous chapter, was principally projected through discourses and images of that underclass's 'endemically criminal proclivities' (Bauman 2001: 120). These 'marks of deviance' (Mendieta 2007) turned the socio-physical '(b)ordering' (Fusté 2010) of public housing, already stigmatized by signs of raced, gendered and classed difference, into environments of 'enduring marginality' (*ibid.*). As Fusté (2006: 79) argued,

'By resignifying caserío residents as inherently criminal and dysfunctional...security policies strengthened a hegemonic form of discursive, political, and economic marginalization that reproduces Puerto Rico's internal colonialism whereby subaltern Puerto Ricans are institutionally kept at the bottom of the island's social hierarchy'.

But crime alone was not sufficient for reproducing such entrenched conditions of marginality. In this chapter, I will argue that alongside criminality, deterioration- too- has been used as a central device in the perpetuation of public housings' 'othering'. As a concept that can imply a process of both physical and/or social decomposition, deterioration contains- at its core- the very material and symbolic allusions which have been politically exploited through time in the productions of urban space. Moreover, as part of the larger agenda of neo-liberal renewal, Blomley (2004) found that the displacement of residents and demolition of buildings in the gentrifying context of inner-city Vancouver was being justified through what he aptly called 'ghetto talk' (90): arguments which linked the physical decline of buildings to people's socio-economic characteristics in order to mark zones of the city as marginal or deviant- as ghetto:

'the poor are themselves imagined as causal agents of decline- a decayed built landscape and damaged bodies are locked together. The visual decay of the landscape- the boarded-up buildings, the disorder of the street [...] are both cause and effect of the feral population... Ipso facto, the removal of this population is a precondition for neighbourhood improvement' (*ibid.*).



Similarly, in the case of Las Gladiolas, the notion of deterioration became a crucial layer of defence since the late 1980's for imposing policies ranging from privatization to security to demolition. In re-coupling these characteristics as natural, the 'ghetto talk' of socio-physical decline made things like crime seem inevitable to those pre-modern people or places who had degenerated, if you will, and who consequently required more intervention, control and renewal. The issue I wish to explore here is not whether structural deterioration was in fact present when these policies were enacted since it is common knowledge that once they *were* deployed, they also served to aggravate whatever decay was already there; but rather to look at how its logic actually operated with and beyond discourses, in producing certain effects; as well as how it was lived and/or remembered by residents today. By integrating these combined elements, this approach hopes to break down any simple opposition between real or imagined space. While the relationship between objects and memory is anything but straightforward, I argue that approaching these two sides together provides a more accurate depiction of the materially-grounded and subjective process through which both urban development and community resistances emerge, in unison, and how they continue to be interconnected.

In an excellent review of geographies and processes of memory and forgetting, Stephen Legg (2007: 460-63) argued that memories are context dependent and can serve to inspire or repress change. They are specific not only to the histories they tell (as events), but also to the environments which contain them, or their physical prompts. Moreover, counter-memories and recollections of the silenced (the subaltern 'other' I integrate in my discussions), can be a form of counter-discourse; they 'can resituate perception and restore emphasis to excluded peoples and perspectives...[it] is the refusal to remember in a conformist fashion' (463). As will become apparent, residents' narratives of 'what happened' to Las Gladiolas are intricately bound to memories of loss, told mainly through material aspects of the buildings and their decay. In this sense, Ayona Datta's (2006: 789-90) study of gender, class and modernisation in a Bethnal Green Estate in London provides further insight, as she found that 'architecture is implicated in the complex interplay between memory and subjectivity'...that 'architecture is "produced" through subjectivities' as much as 'it in turn shapes subjectivities'. She continues to say that memory is important in the negotiations of changing spaces and temporalities, and that it is at the moment of loss (which, I would argue in the case of Las Gladiolas were

not specific instances but gradual and continuous) when ‘personal and collective memories of inhabiting places [thus] construct sites of significance’(*ibid.*). Drawing on this critical geographical and architectural analysis of the links between spatial, built, and social environment, I approach Las Gladiolas as a register of memories that prompted counter-discursive remembering and forgetting. Significantly, it is also through such materiality that residents express and enact opposition to the conditions which ‘other’ them (to be discussed in Chapter 6).

I first introduce the policy of privatization of maintenance and residents’ perspectives of it. Their expressions not only disrupt the dominant narratives of who/what was responsible for the towers’ deterioration, but they also render the ‘good versus bad’ or ‘moral versus immoral’ characterizations simplistically attributed to them since the times of slum relocations much more complex. The following section explores the concurrent security policy ‘Mano Dura’, devised as a direct response to the reviled ‘criminality’ of public housing. It analyses some of the dominant discourses which portrayed and physically reproduced Las Gladiolas as a space of deviance, while also looking at how residents understood and lived the interactions between such purported deterioration and the security apparatus through particular spaces of their buildings. Again, looking at these two versions together sheds light into how public housing space is not only produced from above, but also lived and reappropriated from below.



Figure 5.1. ‘Scenes of desertion and Apathy in Public Housing’. Source: El Mundo 1973.

## 5.2. The Privatization of Maintenance

### American agenda

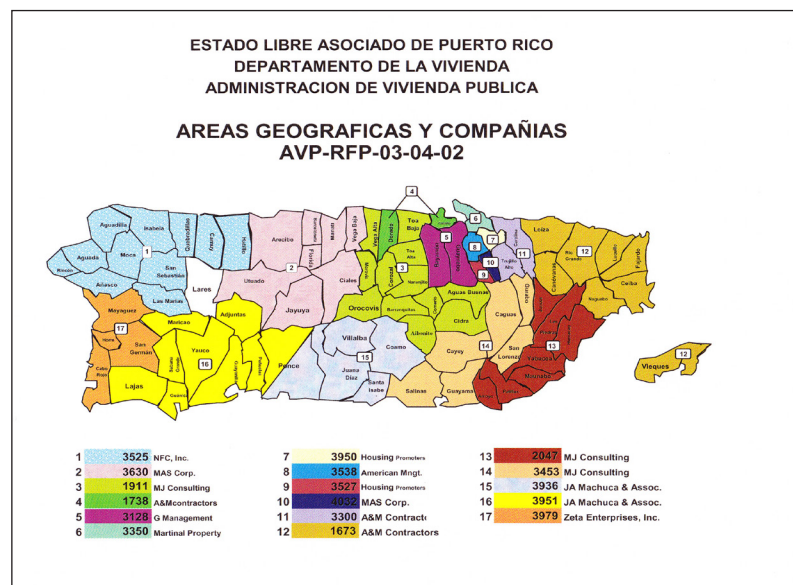
During the 1980's and 90's, as public housing high-rises were increasingly perceived as 'problematic' (Franck 1998: 92; Popkin 2000; Venkatesh 2000; Escalante Rengifo 2002), the United States Congress consequently established the National Commission on Severely Distressed Public Housing (NCSDPH) in order to assess: families living in distress, rates of serious crime in the development or the surrounding neighbourhood, barriers to managing the environment, and the physical deterioration of buildings (NCSDPH: National Commission on Severely Distressed Public Housing 1992). Echoing Oscar Newman's (1972) design-based crime prevention strategies, the Commission found that high-rises were particularly vulnerable to crime and that, as indefensible and high-density structures, they made the successful provision of 'decent, safe, and sanitary' environments difficult (*ibid.* 63).

At the same time, public housing in Puerto Rico was being depicted within newspapers as 'scenes of abandonment, dirt and apathy' [Fig.5.1] produced by residents involved in gang-crime, delinquency, alcoholism, gun-fights, and drug trafficking (El Mundo 1973; Berrios 1986; Berrios 1986b). High-rises like Las Gladiolas in particular were more persistently pointed out as the centre of 'drug wars', trafficking and prostitution- a place of 'blood and death' (El Nuevo Día: 19 de agosto de 1992; Día 1999; Navarro July 13, 1994). In the newspaper 'Primera Hora', for example, I found between thirty five to forty articles from the years 2000 to 2007 which directly referenced Las Gladiolas together with crime or other illegalities. With the coincidental growth of a neo-liberal agenda in all sectors of government, efforts quickly shifted towards cleansing and containing those perceived dangers through both physical and military measures in the name of 'rescuing' the community. As elaborated in Chapter 1, these measures can be understood as part of a middle class 'revanchism' (Smith 1997), which has used the intensification of surveillance and policing to 'take back' inner city public space

### Local negligence

One of the first measures adopted after NCSDPH's site visits to Puerto Rico was the privatization of public housing management in 1992<sup>1</sup>. Having de-

clared public housing a national systemic failure, it was decided that decentralizing the recently re-organized Housing Agency in Puerto Rico and its public housing program by transferring the maintenance and administrative operations of all State and municipal housing projects to private contractors would improve the conditions and quality of life of residents and their space (with federal funds) (Epp 1998: 123; Alameda Lozada and Rivera Galindo 2005: 26). In both my interviews and archival research, I found that this development was met mainly with great skepticism, with those companies soon getting accused of the same kind of mediocre maintenance and *dejadez* (abandonment) that the public system had already imposed on them before.



**Figure 5.2. Map depicting geographical ‘areas’ of private public housing management companies.**

**Source: Departamento de Vivienda de Puerto Rico. Sistema de Información Geográfica. Secretaría de Planificación Estratégica y Servicios Técnicos. Marzo 2007.**

Arcadio, one of Las Gladiolas’s community leaders who had been living there since its inauguration and who I met during the second visit to the towers, explained this phenomenon succinctly to me: ‘The paint started to shine because of its absence.’ He made sense of the issue of maintenance through the presence or absence of paint, where paint *stood in* for the condition of the structures in general, as well as relating it to the particular lived experiences of infrastructural care and neglect. As a material sign of authorities’ concern, or lack of it, it spoke loudly to the infrastructural deficiencies, grievances, and gradual loss of control which had slowly become commonplace in the towers

since the take-over of the *privatizadoras*. Some interviewees assured me that despite their desire to keep their common areas tidy, which they remembered being able to do when the government agency was the one in charge of maintenance, private companies had stopped lending them the tools and materials needed to paint their hallways. They argued that without such upkeep, the respect for common space diminished, as did its use, thereby negatively impacting their communal life. Similarly, in a number of studies looking at the intersections between State provisions and public housing residents' experiences, chronic government inattention to their needs has been found to contribute to many of the communities' problems (Sepúlveda 2002: 65; Cotto Morales 2007).

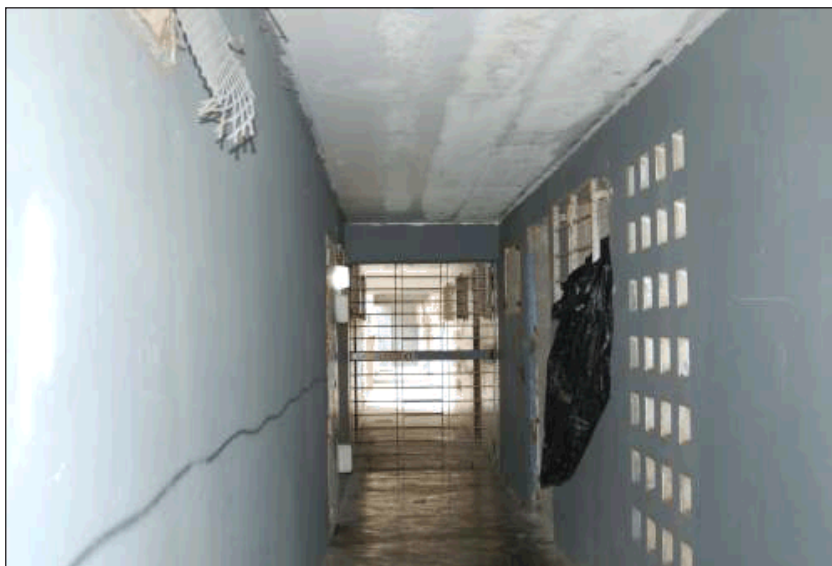
In a separate, more intimate interview scenario, another resident echoed Arcadio's comments and described to me the decay *after* privatization as the reason for the subsequent loss of what had been a tight-knit community:

'Here, we were a family- everybody. We would even do Christmas parties with competitions for the best decorations in the towers. We'd decorate the hallways, raffle off plant pots, adornments; we'd put arches and light- lots of things we'd make here ourselves... A friend would cook *arroz con gandules* (rice and peas), the other *pernil*' (pork), the other would make Halloween costumes. The kids wouldn't have to go anywhere else but could just get their candy here. We'd do Valentine's parties. When they'd say, 'let's all paint that', it meant we painted, or cleaning...I'd make the floor shine. Had my plants as well. Arcadio used to get kids to plant trees and *recao*', *aji*' plantain...and that was all cut down... All that's left is a skinny cherry tree. Maybe if we'd united back then...'  
(Carla, interview, 2006).

Carla interlaced aspects of maintenance and upkeep with a sense of security and community cohesion in a way that recalls the debate and ultimate prohibition described in Chapter 4 regarding residents' planting of beans. With privatization, traditions like planting and collecting native herbs were eliminated leading, as we will see later, to an individualization of space that focused on protection more than association. She recalled an informal sense of family-like togetherness that arose with and through what can be called the gendered 'cultural' use of their buildings' common and privately shares spaces. Activities like cooking typical foods; planting local herbs; and celebrating 'American' festivities like Halloween and Valentine's Day, were experienced in

her capacity as mother and neighbor, suggesting that those two identities were highly interlinked. That is, her recollection of better times was linked to the opportunity which safe and shared spaces granted mothers like herself to be able to celebrate, while keeping watch over their children.

This gendered and affective aspect of place-making should not be overlooked because it makes the political issues of privatization both highly material *and* personal; it moves from the otherwise depoliticized space of buildings' maintenance (and their links to domesticity) to the space and experience of community life itself. It therefore problematizes any kind of straightforward public/private divide by stressing the active and lived negotiation- through the realm of memory- that actually goes on between those two sides of the binary. This highlights the permeability and unboundedness of the boundary which typically divides public and private (Stacheli 1996; Anderson and Jacobs 1999). In short, attention to their accounts humanizes the experiences of the buildings in a way which the 'scientific' evidence recorded in the typical surveys conducted by the private maintenance company for the Housing Agency cannot. It shows that despite original regulations against their 'traditional' practices, residents had learned to maintain some which strengthened communal characteristics of life, as well as to adapt to American festivities into this modern colonial repertoire of culture- a hybridity fuelled by consumerism which all Puerto Rican participate in. Carla's comments further attest to a collective adaptation and manipulation of the spaces of the high-rises for *their* purposes, which contradict the accusations that rendered public housing subjects as inherently incompatible with those structures. At the same time, her last line of lament ('maybe if we'd united back then') suggests that while those types of activities had produced community and unity, they had not created togetherness in the political sense of the word which she now felt they both lacked and needed. In the end, this brief analysis recalls Keth Jacobs's (2002) own insistence on incorporating subjectivity and imagination (of city, in his case) to empirical and analytical research that focuses on urban social housing- a place historically dictated in so many ways by that very sphere of imaginative (and stigmatized) understanding.



**Figure 5.3. Semi-abandoned hallway, Las Gladiolas, Tower B. 2007. Source: Author.**

Another resident, Bianca, added the element of security to her tale, while also accusing privatization for infrastructural neglect and community loss:

‘A lot of things have changed. When I first came to live here, we’d sleep with the doors open. Because this was all peace, tranquillity and happiness. Now we can’t do that because with the vandalism now there is very little security. And it was the change of company that affected our community- because when the government, ‘Vivienda’, was in charge of this, things were much better than now with the private companies because now, everything that is happening is because of them’ (Bianca, interview, 2006).

According to her, the privatisation of management was directly responsible for different forms of vandalism and criminality that had stripped her of a sense of peace and comfort. Taken together with what Carla said before, it can be understood that a lack of maintenance led to experiencing deterioration not only as physical decay, but through a sense of ‘loss’ as well. This loss, in turn, gave meaning to the recollections of inhabited space (Datta *ibid.*). Given the fact that three of the five different companies that administered Las Gladiolas were eliminated and convicted of corruption, their neglect was also felt as an abuse. Like in many other projects around the island, companies had been discovered paying members of the ‘Residents’ Associations’ (thus denying them an autonomous position) to sway neighbors’ opinions over regulations and policies; and the government Housing Agency itself had

been engaging in political favoritism, granting contracts to companies owned by party-supporters (El Nuevo Día:1993; Sacchetti 1995). Again, it was this 'fraud'- more so than the criminality which residents had been exposed to and accused of over the years- which Arcadio viewed as responsible for the gradual deterioration of the towers:

'The Public Housing Administration point out that they have invested millions in administering Las Gladiolas, but they don't talk about those cases of embezzlement, of that administration; they don't talk about the conditions they have us subjected to' (Arcadio, Public Hearing in Las Gladiolas, March 2007).

By focusing on private companies' and governments' actions (or lack thereof), Arcadio, Bianca, and Carla all struck back at the mainstream understanding which blamed resident inaction for deterioration. They felt that depressed quality of community life was directly connected to the disintegration of their common living space and that such decay had been produced 'from above' by slowly disempowering them in explicit material senses such as not painting, cleaning hallways, or worse, being fraudulent with money that should have gone to the towers. Through such accusations, they emphasized the inhumanity, discriminatory practices, and hypocrisies of government, while also denouncing the immorality implicit in maintaining them in such states of poverty. Later in their law-suit against the Housing Agency, residents would frame institutional neglect as inducing both physical and symbolic harm (Chapter 7).

Additionally, in their rather bleak context of loss of neighbours, networks and security, remembering the past positively, almost nostalgically like Carla and Bianca, was a device used to recall the history of community and space before privatization. I am not interested in those memories' likeliness to or difference from what things were *really* like (if there ever is a truer version of others' reality to speak of), but rather on how they are applied as 'devices' which construct a powerful sense of meaning to the now- even when that now is characterized and narrated through loss. The picture I took of a Gladiolas hallway [Figure 5.3]- like the ones of Carla's tale- underscores how much her vivid memory of sociality and cleanliness contrasted with the current states of emptiness and disrepair of those spaces. For Carla and Bianca both, the materiality of that enclosed space- when it had existed in good shape- was



part of what granted the practices within it meaning. For instance, apart from the communal parties mentioned above held within that space, it was also, I was told, where- their children had once safely played, been watched, and scolded; and where sociality was practiced when people passed by. Hallways had now been transformed into spaces to be feared. From her study of the Bethnal Green estate, Datta (*ibid.*) argued that domestic architecture provides a material basis for the projection of gender and class identities. If we stretch our understanding of gendered domesticity to include the spaces of hallways as well, then a different – gendered and raced- dimension of what was at stake in the loss of this particular space emerges. Specifically, with the loss of paint and maintenance came the loss of common space and community interactions, as well as a more practical and safer physical space to watch their children, but also *not to have to* watch them. Ultimately, holding on to these more positive versions of the past as freedom granted the grim material contours of the present a stronger sense of common, almost complicit sense of loss. That is, the memories, as registered in the material, gave them something to fight for. As an *aide-mémoire* of sorts, the material environment of the hallways displayed agency by provoking certain memories which then mediated relationships between resident-building/resident-resident/resident-community and resident-administrators.

### **‘Good versus Bad’ Resident? : The dilemma of classification**

There was a second kind of attribution for deterioration circulating in residents’ memories. Most of those I interviewed pointed out other neighbours’ own antics- and the lower culture associated to those individuals- as blame-worthy too:

‘Our conviviality was affected by the loud music, garbage thrown around; hallways got dirty, graffiti everywhere’ (Arcadio, interview, 2006);

‘I’m telling you the people didn’t value this...the fact that you can take a bus here now from San Juan to Bayamón. Wherever you want to go- you’ve got the facilities right there, and people throwing garbage, rubble, even washing machines and televisions from their balconies down...’ (Carla, interview, 2006);

‘Many times, it’s our own neighbours vandalizing, stealing...The same residents don’t cooperate, you know?’ (Bianca, interview, 2007).

The residents being blamed above were framed as ‘guilty’ according to the same stereotypical terms or items (lack of hygiene, vandalism) which, as seen in Figure 5.1, the media generally used to denigrate them. Teresa Caldeira (2000) has explained this phenomenon in relation to São Paulo’s poor stigmatized *favelas*, where prejudicial categories and stereotypes became part of how people make sense of their experiences, even when it is with the same language that discriminates against them. That is, in their desire to separate themselves from the negative assumptions of mainstream portrayals, ‘they emphasize their own dignity, cleanliness, good citizenship, home ownership and good family’ versus the others’ lack of it. Carla, for instance, felt that living in a *residencial* conferred her (and all its residents) a bad reputation which she clearly wanted to disassociate herself from by stressing her own positive strengths and achievements: ‘Just like there are good people, there are also decent ones... Because I say, ‘I live in a residencial, but I feel that I know how to *bregar* (deal) with a person’’. Knowing how ‘to deal’ refers to the kind of class aesthetics I described in Chapter 2, where a resident also distanced herself from a neighbour based on the latter’s ‘low-class’ language. They use parallel stereotypes because those are the available explanatory mechanisms for asserting that difference.

Establishing that distinction also relied on reasserting a ‘good versus bad’ discourse of public housing residents that I found commonly featured within my revision of articles from those decades. On the one hand, *caseríos* were described metaphorically as- for example: ‘a jungle of criminals that maintain their inhabitants terrorized’ (El Nuevo Día: 29 septiembre 1990); ‘*madrigales de hampones*’ (dens of delinquents) (Editorial 1993); and ‘*mal vivir y morbosidad*’ (bad living and morbidity) (END: 25 Julio 1993). On the other hand, while negative representations of public housing intensified and tenants turned into the new spectacle of urban poverty (the official welfare ‘*arrimados*’ - urban aggregates of a governmental farm- recalling pre-capitalist feudal relations), there was a parallel tendency to mention ‘the good’ which still resided there, through statements such as: ‘It (crime statistics) may sound dreadful because there *are* many good people in the *caseríos*’ (Borges Ortega and Garcia 1995, my emphasis), or ‘these actions are for the good people... and against those that stain the reputation of the rest of the neighborhood through drug-trafficking’ (*ibid.*). Like in the early missions of slum removal, emphasizing the humanity and decency

of *some* public housing residents here helped to bolster neo-liberal policies of privatization and repressive security interventions meant to ‘save’ them from their more unsuitable neighbors. By presenting a black and white picture of public housing residents through simplified discourses of good versus evil that dated back to slums, it framed government action as altruism working in favor of ‘rescuing’ those rare deserving individuals/families from their fellow delinquent *caserio* resident. These distinctions are grounded upon the same kind of pathologising behavioural discourses that we saw framed the stigma of ex-slum dwellers/new public housing residents. That is:

“[it] claims that the poor are to blame for their own misfortunes: they have different standards of behaviour and attitudes to, for example, work and crime, than the mainstream population...and estate’s run-down appearance is explained with reference to residents’ laziness. Within this discourse there are two types of people: ‘nice’ people and ‘problem’ people. Crucially, pathological discourses often make claims about the intergenerational transfer of aberrant values’ (Hastings 2004: 246).

Some residents reproduced those same stigmatized portrayals, pointing out to me that others expected ‘to get things on a silver plate without doing anything to earn it’, and that this was partially due to the introduction of ‘negative rent’ discussed in Chapter 4, where the opening up of tenancy regulations had allowed an internal socio-economic shift that ‘lowered’ the standard of residents. (i.e., the newly demonized welfare mother). Their association to slums or a rural background degenerated the status of public housing in classed and raced terms. My respondents did not see themselves as associated to *that* class and regarded ‘those problem people’ as the ones with the *real* welfare mentality - a culture produced either by their slum backgrounds, their lack of education, or by the government’s assistentialist policies. For those who had been there since the inauguration of the towers, these beliefs were grounded on the idea of a ‘better time’ having existed when housing policies were worker, rather than welfare-oriented (Bloom 2008: 212). Arcadio, who was in charge of leading the community activities along with Mirta, but who had been living in the community from the beginning (unlike Mirta), often repeated this to me arguing that welfare policies had brought bad quality residents to Gladiolas, which had contributed to a rapid decent into in-civility. He retained hope that

some day, through education, training, and resident empowerment, the towers would return to their original state and residents would behave accordingly.

According to Arcadio and others (residents *and* non-residents), this group of undesirable residents was also gendered, for it was *madres solteras* (single mothers) who were primarily seen to perpetuate and reproduce undesirable behaviour. In Puerto Rico, *madre soltera* has become a stand-in for ‘welfare recipient’, doubly condemned through capitalist tenets that criticize the jobless, and an underlying moral (Catholic) and cultural unease with being a single woman. Thus, welfare is gendered *and* raced (much like the culture of poverty was) inasmuch as women are seen to be the perpetrators, carriers and reproducers of that ‘assistentialist’ status (López 1994; Fernós López-Cepero 2003: 195). They are vilified not only as sexualised over-breeders- which we know from previous chapters to be seen as a raced phenomenon- but also as bad home-makers and home-keepers. This combination is seen to undermine proper womanhood by, on the one hand, abusing their reproductive role for economic benefits; and on the other, for not abiding by traditional gender norms of ‘home-keeping’ which early public housing programs had been so hard-pressed to orient them in, so as to turn them into better citizens. Seen as a homogeneous group, these women are conceived as embodying the failure of a program that tried to educate and domesticate its subjects along white, middle-class rules of social propriety, decency, and upward mobility.

Another typical phrase used to describe ‘welfare mothers’ was that they were *solteras de día y casadas de noche* (single by day and married by night); or as Ignacio from the PRPHA put it:

‘It is a feminine space from 8 a.m. until 6 or 7 p.m.. After 7, it’s another configuration for obvious reasons- purely in terms of the benefits that they get as participants of different assistance programs’ (Ignacio Rivera, interview, 2007).

As a woman, living two seemingly contradictory identities at once (single and married) seriously challenges the fixed and sexualised role traditionally attributed to them by Puerto Rican culture. It is a difficult trend for policy makers to pin-down and ‘attack’, yet easy to condemn precisely because it plays with traditional categories while also transcending them. It constitutes a double

transgression because they defy the capitalist logic and work ethic of individualized 'progress'. In my experience of the apartments and communal spaces of Las Gladiolas, both were primordially 'feminine' spaces in that every time I spoke with women or went to their apartments, there were never men with them, except perhaps their children. When the courtyard had groups of older residents sitting around, it also tended to be women. A few mentioned men involved in their lives, either as partners, father, or lovers, variously contributing to child payments- but who did not live with them officially. These relationships were often felt as problematic due to child maintenance issues or past experiences of abuse that they did not want to replicate. Nevertheless, most spoke confidently about their lives and relationships, with or without men, in a way which, I would argue, made the lived practicalities of 'pretending' not to be married or of having a partner for 'assistance' benefits a kind of gendered resistance against a dominant male culture that continues to control them in other aspects of their life. The way deterioration was conceptualized must therefore also be understood in relation to this dominant gendered discursive framework.

As discussed in Chapter 1, literature on *jaibería*- the simultaneous use and resistance of the system that oppresses them- can help to frame Puerto Rican uses' of the welfare system as a form of strategizing against the odds- a tool of the oppressed (Negrón-Muntaner 2004). I would add that there is a specifically gendered form of *jaibería* operating here through *madres solteras* which supposes a sense of power and independence for *caserío* mothers that bourgeois women and men cannot understand because it seems to undercut the traditional gender roles which continue to operate as the dominant one within that class. As a kind of oppositional culture, being 'single' here constitutes a subtle and unorganized, but nevertheless powerful resistance to colonial legacies and contemporary forms of patriarchal domination. Even if there are negative connotations attached to such family forms- framed within an assistentialist framework- it is nevertheless women who are giving *caserío* space a feminine identity centred on them and their new forms of motherly provision. In the following chapters, we will also see how this has translated into spaces of leadership as well. Thus, while there has been some analysis framing the strategies emerging with the welfare system as an ambivalent tool of the oppressed, there is a sense in which women's life in public housing and their experience of loss in Las Gladiolas in particular, produces gendered *jaibería*.

But, just like the question of responsibility for the towers' deterioration was made more complex by some of the neighbours' ethics or practices, including the gendered use of welfare benefits, the critiques offered about those considered blame-worthy were not straightforward either. While described as deviant in some ways, residents also tended to justify such improper actions as the inevitable result of their economic and structural circumstances. The varied interpretations of the actions of those internal 'others' both enforced *and* relativized the distinctions used to differentiate. That is, while they were not necessarily celebrated and respondents claimed their own difference from that 'class' of people, problem neighbours were also never considered *as* bad as the housing authorities either. Instead, a common experience of abuse and neglect was shared by those who felt they had been equally 'stepped-on', 'deceived' and 'pressured' into their current state of deterioration. By adding this element of commonality, as an oppressed community, it made any basic claim of difference more complex- what Teresa Caldeira (2000: 77) called 'a dilemma of classification'.

This nuance is highlighted in the following story, told to me by a number of different residents: Apparently, two days before Federal HUD officials (derogatorily labelled 'los gringos') came from the United States to make their inspections of the towers' premises (done every five years), the PRPHA and the private maintenance company workers would suddenly carry out a superficial 'clean-up'. According to residents, in those days there would be a sudden flurry of maintenance and cleaning activity which surpassed that of all the years since the last visit. They knew that this occurred because the local agency was scared of losing financial allocations if they were judged to be performing below HUD standards. In the early 1990's, the agency had already been placed on 'trouble' status by HUD, which meant that if they were seen to be underperforming, they would lose crucial annual financial allocations. Ignacio, from the PRPHA, revealed to me how colonial politics that disfavoured the island were involved in that process when- during the 90's- a group of local PRPHA officials had realized that mainland States were actually receiving money from the federal agency if they were placed on 'trouble' status, whereas the Puerto Rican office was getting penalized for it. It took years of official mediation with the National Centre for Housing Management, as well as the island's Governor's Office to reach a new agreement with HUD that helped to keep

the modernization program of public housing going. To residents, the colonial hierarchy evident in the 'cleaning flurry' was obvious, in a rather pitiable way. It angered them because while, on a day to day basis, their community needs were completely disregarded, only on extraordinary occasions- when 'los federales' (HUD) were involved- did the local agency gesture towards the opposite. Certainly, these incidents makes one wonder who and what really matters when 'restoring' public housing is concerned: Is it the lives of the residents, the lives of the towers, or (ensuring the) politico-financial relations with HUD? It also raises the issue of deterioration from a localized, to a federal scale as well.

### **5.3. 'Mano Dura': materializing security**

#### **Invasions: 'Rescue and Restore'**

Alongside privatization, the criminality and deterioration attributed to public housing during the late 1980's and early 1990's- came to be addressed through the overarching security and design policy called 'Mano Dura Contra el Crimen' (Hard Hand Against Crime)<sup>2</sup>. Conceived as a 'rescue and restore' operation- much like Chicago's 1980's 'Operation Cleanup Sweep'<sup>3</sup>- 'Mano Dura' meant to: 'improve neighbors' quality of life, guaranteing more secure conditions and avoid drug hustling and criminality' (Cordero 1997). In line with most Puerto Rican media projections of public housing as places where drug trafficking, indiscriminate killings and child abuse are rampant (Toro Adorno 2002), most of the newspaper articles I found about Las Gladiolas from that era revolved around drug confiscation, shootings, murder, injuries, vandalism and robberies. Like slums before it, with its name serving as a kind of metaphor for crime and social deviance, the community it represented also got construed as an urban epidemic spreading chaos and insecurity way beyond the space of the towers. For instance, if residents were caught stealing or were arrested in a raid in places far-away from Hato Rey, pointing out their place of residence was just as integral to the story as what they had actually done. Thus, delinquency was no longer portrayed in its own terms nor confined or restricted to the buildings. Instead, it was seen as an expansive wave of crime that symbolically and materially spilled beyond their walls and onto the urban streets, threatening with its anti-social characteristics. The logic of fear dictated that because their evil was striking elsewhere, it could strike any-

where and that therefore, this danger had to be contained. The first of ‘Mano Dura’s’ three stages facilitated just this.

During that first phase, the FURA (Force of Rapid Action), the ‘Fuerza de Choque’ (Shock Force), the Cuerpo de Investigación Criminales (Center of Criminal Investigations, CIC) and the ‘National Guard’ ‘occupied’ the space [Figure 5.5], arrested individuals that operated drug points, took possession of narcotics and illegal arms, and established *control de acceso* (access control) by sectioning off the community with walls with razed wire above, fences and a guardhouse at the entrance<sup>4</sup>. Gates were seen as a necessary environmental intervention for the monitoring and control of crime (Dinzey Flores 2005). These actions literally sealed the stigmatized link between social degradation and physical demise stigma of by, (a) fostering the sensationalized accounts of those ‘rescue’ incursions, and (b) erecting physical walls as barriers around their perimeters and instituting a permanent police presence in its ‘access point’. Newspapers praised it not only for the arrests and illegal seizures made, but also for discovering the ‘incredible lack of hygiene’ that was apparently natural to those spaces (Editorial 1993)[Figures 5.4]. At the same time, it employed the same simplified discourse of criminality as ‘good versus bad’ public housing residents discussed in the previous section. Even after the National Guard withdrew from the projects, ‘recue’<sup>5</sup> operations like the one described at the opening of this thesis continued in Las Gladiolas and its space was still accused of major delinquency and drug-trafficking activity. Arcadio described one such incursion to me carried out live in front of television cameras in 2005 following alleged rumours that one of the abandoned apartments had been taken over by illegal squatters and re-opened for drug activity. This incident would prove crucial for the future interventions of the towers [Figures 5.6 and 5.7]:

‘The last ‘operation’ created a negative image of us. It brought 300 police officers. They brought dogs; they brought fire trucks, ambulances, and the civil defence. They surrounded Las Gladiolas with patrol units. And then, in came Carlos Laboy, the Public Housing Administrator and superintendent Toledo with a number of police with them that it looked like the Vietnam or Kuwait war. They said they were coming to rescue us from criminality and violence...After breaking everything and pointing their huge guns at children, in hallways, they occupied all of the halls in all four towers. The result: two illegal immigrants (Dominican), registering 5 drug addicts a few of





Figure 5.4. 'Now it's time for the cleaning': One rat says, 'get out of the cave, Perico, they're not here for us' (i.e., not here to control hygiene). The other asks, 'will peace return?' The monkey at the bottom comments, 'If the 'narcos' (agents) and National Guard don't go, they'll run away from the trash!' Source: Yopez, El Vocero June 8 1993.



Figure 5.5. National Guard invade project. Source: Ponti .San Juan Star, 1993.

which had a couple of capsules or needles. And a dismantled car they said was stolen. All that money for what? It didn't matter; the purpose was to create a negative image of us in the public opinion to justify putting security cameras here' (Arcadio, interview 2006).

Like Arcadio's account, I found that the images published of that invasion effectively created a picture of the towers of Las Gladiolas as a menacing enormity to be controlled through the military order of the police line figured centrally in it [Figure 5.6]. Even if there was little evidence found, the visual show of force and the various elements inserted into the 'criminal' scene, including the new excluded 'other' of contemporary cultural discourses and urban space- Dominica 'illegal immigrants'- sealed the discourse of criminality. Dark-skinned, young, poor males (Dominican and Puerto Rican) have become synonymous with illegality and crime in the island, responding to a collective prejudice against their nationality, culture, socio-economic status and race (labelled as 'darker' than Puerto Ricans; i.e., inferior) (Montijo 2006: 5). Dominican women are also used as the cheap labour for the lowest paying jobs such as domestic service; and are the popular focus of denigrating 'immigrant' jokes (Hernández Angueira 2005).

Declared in exactly the same way as in the introductory chapter, the Police Superintendent said it was a preventive act meant to disallow any further sale of drugs and to intimidate delinquents and vandals who were allegedly not allowing private companies to carry out their maintenance work in other public housing projects considered 'similar' to Gladiolas. With an air of unquestionable certainty, he further announced that this was the first step towards sealing up the entire project before it was demolished; that, in this sense, they were providing the PRPHA with a tool with which to work. This event was the beginning of a much more aggressive newspaper coverage of Las Gladiolas, its deterioration and relocation<sup>6</sup>. It reiterates Jacobs et al.'s idea (2003b) that while social policy is hinged on structural factors and effective arguments, three things have to be linked and in place in order to effectively construct housing and its tenants as a problem: power, discursive space and institutional practices. The invasions and concomitant rhetoric and images of 'Mano Dura' constructed the narrative essential for 'telling a plausible story of a social problem' (*ibid.*, 430).



Figure 5.6. 'To expropriate illegals: Las Gladiolas wakes up with 'Mano Dura''. Source: Hernández, Primera Hora 2005.



Figure 5.7. Images of incursion: arrests, drugs, apartment invasions, police Superintendent, residents protest to Laboy (housing administrator), resident faints. Source: Hernández, Primera Hora 2005.

### **Cameras: Instruments of ‘monitoring and observing’**

Euphemized under the good versus bad resident discourse as the ‘need to rescue (Hernández 2005) decent citizens’, the spectacle of crime and deterioration was utilized a spring-board to make the televised announcement of two costly and controversial measures: (a) the installation of the first-ever security cameras as an instrument of permanent control and vigilance, and; (b) the creation of a relocation office within the premises of the towers (this latter event will be discussed in Chapter 7). The police insisted that in a place as ‘anarchic’ and criminal as Las Gladiolas, the cameras (‘the future of security’) would serve to curb delinquency. The very next day, amidst a wave of criticism from other community leaders about the privacy issues which these cameras entailed, the Public Housing Administrator insisted that they were preventive technologies meant to deal with ‘the issue of security’ (Hernández 2005). The governor at the time, Anibal Acevedo Vilá, quickly came to his defence as well by stating that ‘the real violation of privacy is that a ten year old cannot go to a basketball court because there is a drug ‘point’ at its entrance’ (Díaz Alcaide 2005). Like those in shopping malls, he argued, the camera’s success lied in ‘catching’ delinquents and on not being out of view, so as not to get vandalized. These secret vigilant ‘eyes’ were programmed in such a way as to distinguish when the gathering of three or more people was not considered ‘normal’ or when a package half the size of a shoe-box was in sight (Covas Quevedo 2005). In his interview with me, Laboy justified the use of the cameras through yet another argument; mainly, because of the strong ‘alliance’ *he* had developed between the PRPHA, the police, and ‘the federales in Washington’ (i.e., HUD) over the years:

‘Those security cameras, for example, are a result of that alliance. We work with the FBI and all those people because they’ve supported us and many of those arrests, those ‘limpiezas’ (cleaning-up) that are taking place is with their help because I’m not law-enforcement, but I provided them a tool with which to do their job. Cos’ there’s communities that you have to go ‘con el garrote’ (with a billy-club). You have to clean them up and then ‘bregamos’ (we deal). There are other communities where you don’t need that, which is the ‘mano amiga’ (friendly hand)’ (Laboy, interview, 2007).

Based once again on the distinguishing discourse between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ communities, his expressions not only show that the PRPHA regard the police

in partnership terms, and that they were aware of their colonial dependence on HUD for ‘Mano Dura’ incursions, but that they were strategic in how such relationships were handled for their own interests.



**Figure 5.8. Security camera ‘watching’ Las Gladiolas parking space. Source: Author.**

Once the cameras were installed, signs were placed in hallways and entrances around the four towers to reassert their ‘benevolence’ and assuage residents’ concerns: ‘To give you greater security, communal areas are being observed by a system of vigilance. This system only monitors and observes communal areas [Figures 5.8 and 5.9]. Residents, however, were highly sceptical of the personable altruistic language (*para brindarte mayor seguridad*: ‘to offer you better security’) used to balance out the fact that they were being ‘monitored and observed’. Given the way *Mano Dura* had been framed, how *Las Gladiolas* had been portrayed through it, and the negative effects seen to result from it, the sign’s presence and text only underscored the already existent cold distance and pervasive ‘big-brother’ management that defined the relationship between authorities and residents, while highlighting the disciplining power of the camera’s technology.



**Figure 5.9. Attention Sign nailed around Gladiolas hallways and public spaces. Source: Author**

Residents were perplexed that so much public money would be spent installing new expensive surveillance technology in towers that had been earmarked for demolition. Every resident I spoke with told me that those cameras were a smoke-screen; that they never worked properly; and were simply there to add to an ambiance of fear and intimidation- thereby effectively contributing to people's lack of use or misuse of space and eventually, to more deterioration. There was also a rumour going around that the cameras were actually high-tech instruments installed strategically by the government not to watch *them*, but- given their location and height- to watch activities elsewhere in the surrounding areas. Recognizing the history of neglect and negative management of their lives, they did not discard the possibility that the more powerful sectors of society could be using (and abusing) them as a cover for their secret and possibly illegal operations; underlining their lack of trust in the State as a legitimate organization. This 'urban myth' also demonstrates how material impositions can be conduits that make residents reflect and talk about what they consider their location to be (both urban and social) in relation to dominant socio-economic hierarchies. Like the use of memories as counter-discourse, rumours like these disrupt any fixed top-down definition of disciplinary technologies- such as cameras- and place it in a much more ambiguous location where they, and the relations that produced them, can be thought of differently in different terms.

This was made obvious to me during my time on the field, when I noticed that cameras had clearly infiltrated the wider discourse of the Las Gladiolas's struggle:

“Three different articles were published just last week relating to cameras and Las Gladiolas. Could this sudden flurry and re-emergence of ‘camera’ talk be coincidental? Or is there something to be said here about the struggle for control over space? One was positive in tone, announcing an educational program for Gladiolas’s children sponsored by ‘Iniciativa Comunitaria’ for them to learn camera production techniques, particularly related to news coverage style, thereby offering a powerful medium for them to document the voices and realities of those that remain in Las Gladiolas. Two days later, an article came out where Mirta was condemning, once again, the security cameras installed in Las Gladiolas years ago, labelling them as inefficient, disturbing, and corrupt use of funds. Next day, the PHA counter-attacks with yet another article that responded to allegations that cameras don’t work, citing petty crimes that had been captured as justification for camera’s existence and evidence of their success. Meanwhile, a few residents are telling me that when one of their cars got vandalized in the public parking space, they were told by managers of building that cameras didn’t capture it because they didn’t actually work” (Author field notes, April 2007).

Within a very brief time period, two very different uses of cameras as instruments that record ‘reality’ were being discussed (López Alicea 2007; Rodríguez-Burns 2007; Santana Ortiz 2007). One was based on cameras as a tool of empowerment and resistance- a metaphorical ‘eye’ that could capture the *real* life of Las Gladiolas, rather than the stigmatized one commonly portrayed in newspapers and the TV [See Figure 5.11]. The other was based on the opposite- centering cameras as security instruments that ‘watched’ them and therefore implicitly criminalized them [See Figure 5.10]. Housing officials celebrated cameras as scientifically and objectively infallible, while residents accused them of being tools used against, rather than for them. Yet by achieving a form of publicized community control over cameras as a news medium, residents enacted a counter-discourse to the one where cameras were viewed as disciplining artefacts. That is, while it was the same instrument under dispute, the ‘truths’ being recorded and disseminated by each was of a completely opposing nature. In the end, it was *that* nature which was purposefully being placed under scrutiny as a way to influence opinion about what Las Gladiolas actually was. This moment of camera’s reappearance in the lexicon of the conflict highlighted how significant material artifacts were to the conflict of Las Gladiolas.



Figure 5.10. Governor Acvedo Vilá visits new security camera command centre in San Lorenzo. Source: Oficina del Gobernador, 2007.

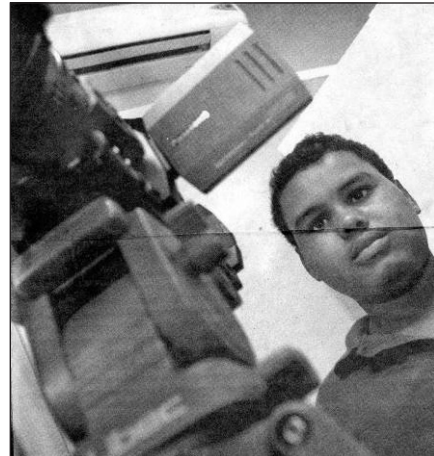


Figure 5.11. News action of Las Gladiolas. Photo by Xavier J. Araújo. Source: El Nuevo Día. López Alicea 2007.

### **Walls of Discord: protective division or faulty security?**

‘Mano Dura’ had another controversial technology at its disposal: building walls around the perimeter of all public housing projects. Those barriers, which I described in Chapters 1 and 2, constructed during the second phase of the policy, followed the same divisive premises of the gates which had become commonplace since the late 1980’s in ‘urbanizaciones’ (private residential /suburban neighborhoods), like the one I grew up in, through the ‘Ley de Cierre’ (Law of Closure) as a way to avert crime. While, in their many forms, locations and typologies, gates were constructed to ‘improve’ social relations, they actually severed them further through controlled movement mediated by class relationships. They acted as ‘symbiotic’ participants in defining and limiting particular kinds of social interaction between neighborhoods (Dinzey-Flores 2005), much like the one I grew up with and described in Chapter 2. But while they demarcated the uses and flow of bodies across certain urban spaces, these mechanisms of situational crime prevention also provoked protests, resistances, discussions, negotiations, perforations, representations, disuse, and transformation. Aptly dubbed ‘murallas de la discordia’ (walls of discord) (Editorial 1992), residents from several housing projects vehemently protested against them, claiming that they would create additional hardship and would not serve the intended purposes of drug-eradication, but simply move its geography around (Thurston 1994; Toro Adorno 2002: 78). While I was conducting fieldwork, the maintenance of the walls around Las Gladiolas



built to protect them was one of the materials through which residents attempted to assert a vision of empowerment and to project a semblance of ‘colourful’ life in relation to the greyish towers behind.

Susan Popkin’s (2000: 29) study of crime in Chicago’s public housing found that ‘it is possible that target hardening may simply displace criminal activity to other locations; for example, drug dealers forced out of lobbies to move into vacant apartments, or drug markets shifting from one development to another’. In Las Gladiolas, residents told me that both of these cited geographical shifts indeed took place in the towers themselves, with drug lords simply moving their selling operations out of the public areas of parking lots and courts to the private areas of abandoned apartments and hallways. The purposes of the wall were disrupted in other ways as well. I found newspaper stories of people trying to prevent the police from interfering with their daily lives, blocking their entrance of physically attaching them; some visitors also became upset, ‘loud’, and obtrusive if they were not allowed to enter gated neighborhoods; and entire communities were cited as regularly screaming obscenities (Torres 1995; Cordero Dávila 1996; Cordero 1997). While these stories show how the imposition of discipline can generate new resistances or discourses that exist in contradiction to them, they also demonstrate how lower-class aesthetics of people from *caseríos* as ‘loud’, ‘obscene, etc., are reasserted by the media. Residents’ resistance was often presented as evidence of the inability of the lower classes to be civilized or governed. But the multiple reactions and protests that the walls induced show how their meaning was not authoritatively fixed, but in a continuous state of flux. Thus, understanding the complex effects of these barriers were just as important as why they were created.

The security walls also began to figure prominently within debates and representations of criminality- an example of which is the caricature featured below [Figure 5.12]. Walls came under attack for being permeable and ‘faulty’- symbolizing both the feminized weakness or incompetence of government efforts and the unyielding, penetrating presence of crime. This form of popular visual representations makes the intricacies of socio-technical ‘othering’ explicit, providing an additional layer of humour through which to read those walls against the discourses of public housing’s criminality and deterioration. The ‘Editorial’ section accompanying this image read:

‘...supervision continues to be dubious...Principal access may look like the entrance to a fort, but if the person wants to enter the housing project, all they have to do is go to one of the less concurred extremes and they shall find not one, but various open gates, or with broken locks and bolts, or simply without doors to deter intruders’ (Editorial 1994).



Figure 5.12. Thieves and fences. Reads: ‘Hi Pucho! Great harvest I made! I went in through a hole in the fence. And you?’ Pucho answers, ‘Through a lateral gate that had a broken lock!’ The monkey asks, ‘What does the ‘access control’ actually do if delinquents get in anyway?’ Source: Yopez. El Vocero, Sep. 21, 1994.

The gates’ purpose was deemed a failure because they were not as tightly sealed as they should have been. They also came to be seen as poorly maintained and deteriorated as the buildings they closed-off and they were criticized for the fear, laziness and/or corruption of police that were posted within the guardhouses; as well as for the sheer inventiveness of those who wanted to get through the walls without obstruction. In Figure 5.12, a woman is figured as the friendly ‘seductress’ who is responsible for the guard’s distraction and theft, making the scene particularly gendered with each character fulfilling a set role. Yet, while these ‘penetrations’ were exposed as gendered socio-technical failures, Las Gladiolas residents spoke about the problems of the walls in entirely different terms: as symbolic incarceration. Those structures had not ‘helped’ them, but in fact made their lives more regulated and excluded from their surroundings- because ‘fencing out is also fencing in’ (Vale 2002: 15), or as Mendieta (20008) argued, the ghetto takes on the form and role of the prison.

Moreover, the police which had been left in their entrance were a daily reminder of the aggressive control they had been subjected to and which, as

far as they were concerned, did nothing in the way of protecting them. For instance, when all the tires of one of the residents' cars were popped and slashed in the open parking spaces out front, neither the police, nor the cameras 'saw anything'. Yet, they noted that when it came to stopping, searching or arresting neighbours for any kind of misdemeanour, or for 'watching' protests, police would suddenly be present in large numbers. When I was there in 2006-07, most told me that the police was either 'a joke', or a frustrating, or abusive experience- something which reminded them of their own lack of power vis a vis the PRPHA. Poor areas like public housing are much more exposed to violence in general than the rest of the city, but it is widely held by residents that the police and their tactics have historically been part of the official apparatus effectively controlling and brutalizing the lower classes like themselves. Not only had they been responsible for oppressions and abuses during the *Mano Dura* incursions- including the fathering and subsequent abandonment of many of the community's children (Díaz Alcaide 2010)- they were also seen to be actively contributing to the buildings' overall deterioration by allowing windows, doors, etc. to be stolen [Figure 5.14]:

'Those police-guards don't do anything. They just sit there with their air-conditioning and don't even do their preventive rounds...they allowed vandalism and dismantling to occur right in front of their eyes. They've (vandals) taken windows, doors, kitchen and bathroom cabinets, panels, toilets – through there-right across the police guard-house!' (Hilda, author field notes, 2007).

To them, the permissive robbery of domestic materials such as wooden boards, plastic windows, and copper cables<sup>7</sup> was another sign of the guards' active complicity with the Public Housing Administration and the private maintenance company in actively dismantling the buildings. With the passing of time, the cameras, walls and the police put there to guard them became signs of the everyday violence and deterioration they were subjected to. Even when the PHA itself recognized the failure of walls, they recentred cameras as 'virtual fences' that could replace the former in not only ensuring security control, but also solving the problems of style and design which the walls had implied (Fernández Colón 2007). The contestation produced by these instruments demonstrates that they were *not* the material embodiment of one single political will or ideology, but responded to multiple and diffuse sources of power at once. In this sense, it could be argued that the apparent solidity

of the new security technologies were made malleable and elastic through use and counter-discourses, turning them into an arena of modern social contestation: 'a politics in matter' (Weizman 2007: 7). Like the production of public housing more generally described in the previous chapters, the socio-technical aspects of privatization and *Mano Dura* help to address and frame the way in which buildings are in fact an 'assemblage' (Jacobs et al. 2006) that, through their multiplicity, filter discourses and counter-discourses of 'others' in both physical and symbolic ways.

### **From crime to demolition**

In the year 2000, despite all the policies and efforts described before, local newspapers were still publishing stories that highlighted crime as an inherent feature of public housing space. One reporter wrote that, 'if it were not for the island's 324 public housing projects, or 25% of its residents, violent crime in Puerto Rico would decrease by 80%' (Albertelli 2000). At the same time, federal law had instituted a 'viability assessment' of all public housing projects which required demolition if the remodelling costs exceeded a certain amount<sup>8</sup>. Stemming from NCSDPH's earlier assessment, HOPE VI's overarching policy considered the demolition of 'severely distressed' public housing units 'a management strategy option...due to the realization that some developments have difficulties associated not only with physical deterioration, but also with overall deterioration of the surrounding community' (HUD 2009)<sup>9</sup>. This wording puts the burden on the developments themselves- as if they 'acted' autonomously and *upon* its interior and exterior environment without other constitutive elements being part of that process- the most notable omission here being HUD's and local policing's own role in producing those 'difficulties' which need to be remedied through demolition. Moreover, it lacks any discussion of how that policy falls within the larger 'destructive and creative moments of neoliberal localization' (Brenner and Theodore 2002: 369). I am not denying that certain conditions of disrepair warranted such measures, but rather pointing out the language used by authorities- so distant to the one utilized by residents- to communicate certain buildings' state of being. This mismatch, based on the historically antagonistic relationships between those two actors has resulted in a form of adversarial politics that hinders possibilities for engaging in the productive reconstruction of the future spaces of Las Gladiolas.



**Figure 5.13. Las Acacias demolition. Dec. 17. 2000.**

**Source:** <http://www.puertadetierra.info/edificios/acacias/acacias.htm>

That same year, the PRPHA demolished the public housing project Las Acacias I and II because ‘multi-storey buildings simply did not improve quality of life’ (Pares Arroyo 2000). Built right after Las Gladiolas’s inauguration, in 1975, it was the first high-rise complex of its kind to be demolished at a cost of \$2million and it is still remembered for the shoot-outs that took place between residents and the police, whose San Juan headquarters were located adjacent to it. On the same day of its spectacular implosion [Figure 5.13], Las Gladiolas (whose physical resemblance to Las Acacias is uncanny) was mentioned for the very first time as a place that may also have to undergo a similar process. PPD governor Sila M. Calderón confirmed this a year later, stating: ‘...that buildings like Las Gladiolas would be demolished or replaced, rather than rehabilitated, because of their state of deterioration’ (Rivera Marrero 2001). Although this would not be officially approved by HUD for another four years, her statement brought all of the explicit and implicit accusations against public housing together- as if naturally- to point out Las Gladiolas as a stand-in (‘building *like* Las Gladiolas’) for problematic projects in general. In that moment, when much of the crime and drugs previously afflicting the life of the towers had been eliminated or displaced through the harsh police invasions of Mano Dura, deterioration replaced criminality as the dominant and operative object of discourse. As a process of ‘rotting’, decay is inherently contrary to the precepts of modernity that reproduce visions of the city as an emblem of hygiene, propriety and progress. Thus, whatever causes it must inevitably be removed.

As an official argument, it was said that the cost of remodelling the towers exceeded 90% of the ‘Total Development Cost’ (TDC)- the mathematical cap point fixed by HUD that justifies demolishing, rather than remodelling projects. During my time on the field, the acronym TDC was often repeated by housing authorities and developers to give me the ‘objective’ explanation as to why demolition was inevitable. This technicality turned the physical state of deterioration into something that appears finite, fixed, and irreversible; it side-lined all discussion of the logic which produced or maintained such decay; and it diminished HUD’s central involvement in this local decision. As a quasi-scientific rationalization that dehumanizes, it occludes or justifies the negative impact of that which it inevitably set into motion: resident displacement (to be discussed in Chapter 7) (Lefebvre, Kofman et al. 1996).

The TDC first became an issue of dispute in 2002 when, after a campaign issued by residents and some supportive groups<sup>10</sup>, San Juan’s Commission of Municipal Development of the House of Representatives investigated the state of the towers and issued a report that considered the original calculations of the number ‘invalid and unsubstantiated’. They found lack of evidence for it and argued that the structural evaluation of the damage, usefulness, or value of the buildings was not conclusive. But despite that (non-binding) order for the PRPHA to carry out a second cost-evaluation of rehabilitation versus demolition, the TDC was never re-calculated. Instead, led by Arcadio, residents had to seek out their own sources of evidentiary support by carrying out small surveys, visually documenting damaged areas such as the incinerators, the elevators, the cisterns and lighting, and soliciting studies from an architect and structural engineer to inspect the complex; subsequently reporting that, in fact, the towers *could* be rehabilitated at a much lower cost than that established by the Housing Authority. When I interviewed that architect and later the engineer, they both said that the reason for the inflated calculations made by the housing agency had to do with them basing their numbers on the most expensive materials, rather than alternative ones that would lower prices. Yet, as these continued to be ignored, the towers fell into deeper forms of disrepair, opening the door even wider for relocation and eventual demolition. Much like Kathy Arthurson’s study of the demolition of the East Fairfield Estate in Australia (2004: 263), here, imploding did not constitute a low-cost solution neither financially nor socially. Nevertheless, it was supported by a

historical and never-ending emphasis on public housing and its tenant culture as the major causes of its social problems.

#### **5.4. Remembering the Good Times: reflections of community and crime**

##### **Locks and Doors: signs of security**

Crucially, most residents felt that ‘Mano Dura’ had worsened the conditions of their buildings and community and that it had intentionally segregated them from the outside world while fabricating an aura of fear inside as well, often referring to it as an urban jail. This kind of carceral discourse was crucial for having a common language of protest. They tended to be highly critical and resentful of having had to take matters into their own hands in order to protect themselves from deteriorating circumstances caused mainly by government’s neglect. Specifically, they had had to retreat into the space of their homes and install fences, gates and locks. Certainly, all the apartments I visited had some sort of security mechanism on their front doors, hallways or windows, which were reflected upon in the following ways:

‘Before, my door would have been closed, like now, but you could hear people. Now, the building could fall down and I wouldn’t feel anything from my room. I just don’t hear anything of what’s happening locked up in there. As someone that’s quite social, I feel scared and alone, like I’ve lost a part of my identity’ (Elvira, interview, 2007);

‘The situation is critical. Deteriorated. You don’t know who is sleeping in the abandoned apartments next door. I don’t feel safe and fear for my life- my gate is all bent from the top and bottom. I have to put a lock on my door. If I get sick in the middle of the night, how do I throw myself to open that door?’ (Felicia, interview, 2007);

‘Me, I sleep here with a battery-operated alarm placed on my door and whoever pushes the door, you see all those cans; they fall to the floor and I run quickly to my room. I have a machete close by... *le corto la cabeza al que se meta aqui* (I’ll chop their head off)’ (Bianca, interview, 2006).

As Bianca’s ‘do it yourself’ measure above reveals, doors had ceased to be an open threshold and become materials of fear or instruments of security. In all accounts, living with open doors and accessibility to the spaces and

neighbours had been fundamental to the experience of security and community. The three women did not coexist peacefully with the necessity of these installations for their homes- which was normally a space of power and control. Like the hallways described in the first section when they reflected upon privatization, these instruments of security were a symbol of their isolation and a reminder of the loss of community ties, as well as their freedom. Home, in this sense, had stopped being a safe-space or a space of control and turned into one suffused by fear.

Arcadio had also proudly taken matters into his own hands by fixing-up some spaces where windows were being stolen; installing make-shift fences in their place. He once showed me exactly where he had painted them red so they would be undesirable to thieves and covered rail posts in the back part of the buildings that people were using to jump into apartments with ‘mante-ca’ (frying oil) so as to make them slippery and unusable. Like the perimeter paint on the walls, these crude solutions within the spaces of the building were borne out of sheer desperation but were also attempts to maintain order and control, albeit fledgling, over the community. Their ingenuity reflected knowledge gained through the accumulation of everyday experiences of the towers and, like Carla’s narrative of the uses of hallways for cultural activities, they manifested residents’ detailed, hands-on understanding of how to deal with living in high-rises. They also highlight the contrast between ‘authorial’ forms of security which rely on high-tech, military or birds-eye view perspective, and residents’ own forms of protection which are based on the scale of the human body interacting with the spaces of the buildings. Through their narratives, the role of memory in making sense and responding to deterioration becomes explicit. Specifically, because the dichotomy between a safe past and an insecure present figured so centrally in their histories of violent and symbolic disposessions, these had also become inseparable from the senses of spatiality involved in their individual and communal urban politics.

Despite their common perception of ‘a loss’, it is important to note the differences which were implied in residents’ memories as well. For Arcadio and Bianca, who had been living in Las Gladiolas since the beginning, the ‘before’ they referred to was of a very different nature to the one Felicia and Elivra- who had each been there for less than ten years- spoke of. Like residents’ ‘dilemma of classification’ described above, where good versus bad residents



were distinguished based on the status of tenancy and the mainstream stigmas those suggested, those who had been there longest tended to relate to a time when Las Gladiolas was still officially called a *condominio* rather than a *residencial*. For those who told me that ‘situations of life’ had brought them to live in public housing after having spent the majority of their lives in private ones, their ‘before’ was a much more recent memory, and it was tinged with a different kind of class-based discrimination where they felt that, while dignified, living in any kind of public housing was a step down in the status ladder. Unlike those who had been there their entire lives, they had had a shot- and experience- of the ultimate elusive ‘middle-class’ status symbol: a private home. Thus, their opinions about the conditions of the towers tended to be more negative in tone. Significantly, as we saw in the way deterioration was blamed on internal others, none of my interviewees saw or identified themselves as part of that ‘other’ problematic class. Thus, while residential longevity influenced their opinions, time was not the only factor playing into people’s relationships and understandings of events and people (as the previous sections have shown). It was one of the many elements contributing to the nuance of recollections and present feelings in their narratives of current deterioration. Open doors, in this case, provided a key to memories of community, which in turn provided a filter for expressing how residents felt both different from and connected to one another through the experience of loss, crime and insecurity.

In terms of crime *per se*, most residents expressed feeling that it had improved since Mano Dura in the sense that there were not so many shoot-outs and drug-dealing scenarios as before, but they still somehow felt an abstract and more generalized sense of insecurity; of not being protected like before. They variedly remembered the past as ‘the good times’, while not denying that crime, especially drug-related, had been prominent in their towers during the 80’s and 90’s:

‘I had three children here, brought them up all on my own. But before, I didn’t mind staying alone, even when you had to come running because shootings would break out when you least expected it. But now, I tell you, I’ve never felt so scared as now. ... There’s no respect anymore. And right next door to me used to live a *chulo* (pimp); people were injecting themselves right there, and yet they’d always say ‘Good Morning, good afternoon’. All drugged up they’d just go back into

their houses and never tried to jump a fence or a door ... You look at me with a double lock, with those windows, I barely sleep thinking someone might be robbing me... Because the people that are getting in are no longer from here and they're stealing *hasta los cables* (even cables, from elevators). Now you don't know who is who' (*ibid*). ...' (Carla, interview, 2006).

Carla recalls the times of greater violence and drug trafficking with a certain degree of nostalgia. While delinquent figures were neither revered nor old times simply glorified, their presence was remembered through personal stories of everyday conviviality ('saying good morning') - rather than the kind of simplified 'good versus bad' categorizations which drove *Mano Dura* in the first place. On the one hand, she does rhetorically distance herself from pimps and drug-dealers as 'bad'- something which many of the mothers of the community repeated to me on separate occasions; but, on the other, she recalls a time when these 'criminals' (who were also neighbors) had control over the spaces of the towers, making her feel more 'secure'. Goldstein (2003: 204) analyzed a similar phenomenon in São Paulo where, in the context of economic crises and social tension with a palpable absence of a reliable state, social banditry arose as a direct response to long-term, historical conditions of economic oppression and installed a successful form of community help. In Las Gladiolas, these internal organizations helped to protect residents against outsiders who, in the context of a dominant subterranean drug-economy, were seen as dangerous or problematic. That sense of community was lost to Carla when mutual respect and security- even if provided by 'criminals'- had disappeared. The State had not stepped in to protect them afterwards; rather, they had further contributed to an environment of repression, deterioration and fear. Security, therefore, was not abstract, but intricately bound to practices of 'respect'- which implied a particular internal social structure- and the ability to quite literally live with 'open doors'.

### **Windows: emblems of protection**

Elvira told me the story of a teenage son of a neighbour who 'everyone knew' was using drugs, vandalizing, and stealing from abandoned apartments. In a recent community meeting, his mother had assured her and others that he was only taking things from emptied apartments. However, when an occupied apartment was broken into, no one could trust for sure that it had not been her son. Elvira said that she was not afraid of him (she saw him grow up)

and had in fact confronted him on a few occasions about his delictive actions since he was doing it 'for no good reason except for being high'. She had even caught him crawling out of the window of an empty apartment in her own hallway, squeezing through a hole he had made with a 'pata de cabra' (crow bar) on the gates that had been installed to block access. While thefts were not something the community wanted to tolerate, they knew this *chamaquito* (kid) since he was young and did not want any harm to fall upon him. This is why, when news spread one day when I was in Mirta's apartment that the police had caught and arrested a thief, she waited impatiently with her phone in hand for Arcadio to call her back once he knew who it had been- hoping it was not 'that kid'. When it was confirmed to her that it had been 'a stranger' who was caught, there was both a sense of relief and of at least some justice against those 'outsiders' disturbing their peace. That evening, during one of the community meetings, a few other female residents echoed their sense of relief that it had not been their friend's son involved. They were certain that the Relocation Office worked together, conspiratorially, with the police guards in front of the buildings to allow such thefts to take place, in order to instigate insecurity and propel disintegration from within. Thus, they would not be very forgiving if those same officers would arrest a relatively harmless resident youth. But at the same time, while this particular boy was not seen as a harmful intruder or outsider, his solitary 'hanging about' in Elvira's hallway did not make her feel comfortable at all.

The story above showed that residents remaining in the towers were complexly tolerating the vandalism that had produced a need for such boards. For example, since the order for demolition had been announced and residents were being increasingly relocated into new communities, they were surreptitiously taking their windows (government property) with them in what they felt was a matter of right. They felt that if thieves were going to be stealing them to sell within a week of their move and police turning a blind eye to it, why should they *not* take them? The remaining neighbors did not condemn those removals but rather explained it as a matter of right earned by living there; also a minor but justifiable way of 'sticking it up' to the abusive powers which had driven them out of their homes. Like in Elvira's case above, while they were critical of theft overall, the disintegration it implied, and police complicity with it, they had a more elaborate discourse when it came to ex-residents actions, even if they were also contributing to that aspect of disin-

tegration. It was no longer theft, but taking their property with them. Some maintenance officers and housing agents had a contrasting appreciation and hinted to me in interviews that it was yet another sign of public housings' incorrigible delinquent nature. This more authorised explanation- which used the technology of windows as its central justification- is further marked by what Jacobs, Carins and Strebel (2008:171-172) pointed out in their study of the invisible geography of windows and their part in 'the building event' (or, building technology in action) of the Red Road high rises in Glasgow, and the socio-technical history of post-war mass housing provision more generally:

'...just as the window marked the positive hopes embodied in high-rise housing, so it came to be stitched into the story of high-rise decline...As high-rise environments came to be associated with various social pathologies (...)the window was often drawn into the emergent high-rise science as an indicator of all that was wrong with this housing type...This is indicative of that wider quasi-scientific theory about crime and urban environments known as the 'broken window' theory [where] "one unrepaired window is a signal that no one cares and such an area is vulnerable to criminal invasion...This theory...was drawn into the service of various urban interventions that intensified other technologies of surveillance and policing.'



**Figure 5.14. The effects of vandalism: this boarded window is one of the precarious effects of vandalism, with a mere wooden plank separating the space of the abandoned apartments and the hallways. This had become a common feature of many of the building's windows and a symbol of residents' new sense of insecurity. The boards were pointed out frequently to me as evidence of how bad things were. Source: Author.**

Here, also gender roles were again an important factor in the way the different versions of past space were remembered and made sense of. All the mothers I interviewed would at some point mention to me the time and energy they had invested- some with more success than others- in trying to maintain their children away from drugs and the dangers which the drug-related economies posed. But those were attractive options for youngsters, particularly males,

in a world where jobs and positive extracurricular activities were scarce, and where the allure of a consumerist society is everywhere. One resident told me that while she no longer invited friends over because of the sheer deterioration of the space and lack of people around at the moment- elements which depressed her deeply- she also lamented the times when, even though the towers were less deteriorated and more populated, drug dealers controlled them and had lured her nephew into that business, landing him in jail. She resented that outcome and had always ‘minded her own business’ trying to keep her nephew out of trouble. ‘Minding my own businesses’, was a common phrase used when I asked residents about how they felt or remembered living in the towers. It was a short-cut way of saying that they actively separated themselves from some *other* or someone *else’s* business which presumably occurred outside their immediate family life. It implied that doing otherwise (i.e., *not* minding my business) could have a negative outcome for them or their families. At the same time, the current lack of community and security, coupled with a continued lack of opportunities, did not make her life any easier. Alternatively, another resident told me that she felt more comfortable and free with the growing isolation because, since there was not so much drug hustling going on, she did not fear for her children any more when they played in the courtyard downstairs at night without her supervision.

Mirta’s case as a single mother of three children of different generations is also very revealing in that they each brought up different issues of race, gender and age in relation to the buildings and security. She was hoping that her eldest son, who had recently returned from prison, would stay in a religious ‘Jesus-loving’ community that had offered him abode in exchange for his commitment to ‘the cause’ because she was scared of what could happen to him if he did not find a job quickly- a task which was made more difficult still because of his criminal record. While she herself was sceptical of *los religiosos* (fanatic religious followers), she quickly mobilized her contacts to land him a job in a construction site nearby, where he could commute to that new home. Above all, she wanted to distance him from the other two children- from different fathers- whose seemingly bright future she was very proud and protective of: one was a 17-year old female college student in the UPR, and the other a 15-year old boy, with a scholarship to the most prestigious art high school of the island for his drawing skills. He was also an athlete. When recalling how things were before, she told me a story of when, one evening, a bullet

had entered her daughter's room through the window and become wedged in the young girl's wooden wardrobe, while the girl slept -unusually so- in her mother's room. Mirta had immediately barged into the courtyard below where the drug hustlers stood guard to scream at them and demand that whoever was responsible be 'given a lesson' (probably a beating). She showed me the crack on the wardrobe as material evidence of her daughter's luck; it was a silent/living witness that, for her, contained all the drama of her actions that evening. Like the *favela* Goldstein (2003) studied, the perpetrators of violence here were also involved in 'resolving daily injustices in the local arena' (190); therefore, these kinds of events were relatively tolerated. While that moment had produced fear and rage, she spoke proudly of how she was able to go out into the communal space, demand explanations, and that someone would have to answer for it. There was a simultaneous sense of threat *and* empowerment, as a mother; an instance of justice which spoke to the powerful role of criminals in the community, and to the relative sense of control it afforded individuals, in a community that lived according to an alternative, non-State sponsored sense of justice.

Mirta spoke of her youngest son as the most promising of the three- and often combined her praise for him with racial signifiers because he was considered attractive due to his lighter *mulatto* features and styled braids which held back tight his *pelo malo* (Godreau 2002). While she trusted him completely, she sometimes expressed feeling insecure about what living under those conditions of lack of security could mean for a young boy his age. She feared that the deteriorated and isolating condition of the towers now (which often meant she had to stay upstairs so as not to go up eight stories with her leg and back problems), could somehow put her youngest son at risk of harm- and that she would not be able to protect him. In one of the community manifestations held in Las Gladiolas with the participation of the Civil Rights Commission of the School of Lawyers, this theme erupted with full force when she blamed a recent epidemic of *dengue* which had put her son in hospital for weeks and infected others living there as well, on the *aguas negras* (black water) that had not been taken care of by the maintenance company nor PRPHA. Recalling the stigma of the slum, these *aguas negras* discussed in Chapters 3-4, were briefly debated during that event precisely for their raced inscription. One of the lawyers on the Commission, who was *mulata* herself, gave a brief talk about

the implied racism and classism of that phrase and asked that they please be called '*aguas estancadas*' (stuck water) instead.

Mirta's intervention revealed perhaps more explicitly that in the other cases how important mothering was in relation to how women residents understood the deterioration of the space around them. It was not only the difficulties it produced for them, or the losses it constituted for the community, but most importantly, how it interfered with the lives, futures and health of their children. It was not unusual for residents like Mirta to be adept at knowing when to use their children to make their claims be heard- to gain greater strength (to be discussed in terms of the manipulation of health for relocation in Chapter 7). **The anecdotes also reveal another angle to residents' 'dilemma of classification':** their relationship to the memory and experience of violence, insecurity or crime did not allow them to categorize each other in simple black and white fashion because to them 'criminality' was not simply 'good or bad' but recalled in contradictory, relativized ways. They felt different senses of control depending on their particular interaction and experience with 'criminal' space, but were adamant about a common sense of lost community after 'Mano Dura' came in. The familiar or close relationship between residents and many of these 'criminals'- who were sometimes friends or family members- made the internal 'fight against crime' an entirely different and much more complicated matter than the publicized 'Mano Dura' made it out to be. There was a simultaneous and ambiguous attraction *and* aversion to those elements of the past that had provided security but, also, had produced severe problems, especially when children were concerned. What some experienced as a loss of security and safety, others felt as liberation. In some cases, such as Mirta's, both of these otherwise contradictory feelings operated at once. The experience of deterioration- its perpetrators and its effects- had further complicated the matter.

## **5.5. Conclusion**

The homogenizing discourses of criminality and deterioration which became attached to public housing high-rises suggest that they are necessary preconditions to the workings of urban politics today. That is, the neo-liberal logic of an urban 'modernity' of progress seems to rely on the physical aspects and social implications of degradation- as 'creative destruction' (Brenner and

Theodore 2002) of space- to justify the ‘rescuing’ of these places and people through demolition, displacement and the construction of new mixed-income walk-ups. In the particular case of Las Gladiolas, residents’ complex tales of loss, insecurity and crime supported the argument that the policies which privatized maintenance and militarized security during the 1990’s actually reproduced and aggravated those very conditions of decay which they had set out to eliminate. But their memories and accounts also make the case that deterioration was not only a political and discursive feat that relied on old symbolic attributes, but also a condition traversed by the nuances of lived experience. As such, their recollections provided a counter-discourse to those stigmatizing portrayals.

On the one hand, by differentiating themselves as superior from fellow residents who had ‘negative rent’, stories told of what had happened to the towers and who was responsible for it often reproduced the same ‘good versus bad’ stereotypes disseminated in mainstream political and media forums to justify interventions. Single mothers were the most common group accused of having offset the community’s ‘degeneration’. Like blackness, which is seen as a degenerating feature for the culturally desired standard of national whiteness, the raced and classed bodies of these ‘welfare mothers’ are rhetorically used to mark the inevitable path towards deterioration of *caserío* space. It is not surprising that both *caserío* women and *caseríos* themselves are interchangeably accused of being ‘stuck’, like the *aguas negras*, in a permanent rot, or of keeping the nation (its middle classes) behind. In this way, through the rhetoric of welfare, the reviled figure of the ‘over-breeding and degenerate slum woman’ is kept alive. When these women are signalled out as naturally falling behind or outside the desired racial and economic order, modernity’s spatial ideology of progress becomes re-entangled to those historically raced, gendered and classed signifiers of what appropriate urban space is and which bodies belong in it.

But residents who lived the effects of policy shifts and deterioration engaged with those ‘othering’ discourses in less rigid ways as well, often expressing it through ‘dilemmas of classification’. Judgments about past crime and current vandalism, for instance, were not straightforwardly described as a ‘bad versus good’ thing, but intricately bound to their memories of banal everyday conviviality, as well as to their identities as mothers or carers, which also proved to be an important category of struggle and resistance. They also departed from



mainstream narratives of 'blame' by expressing some form of solidarity with their neighbours because of common exposure to abuses such as structural neglect or police invasions by the local and federal housing agencies, recognizing that current conditions were part of a larger discriminatory system and history.

In his study of high-rise housing projects in Chicago, also infamous for criminality and earmarked for demolition, Sudhir Venkatesh (2000: 276) found that residents who felt threatened by displacement deliberately spoke with acute awareness about their towers' past as a way to hold on- through history- to hopefulness about the future<sup>11</sup>. Certainly, in the accounts reviewed here, the uses and understanding of the Gladiolas spaces 'now' were continually related to the memories of the materiality of the buildings 'then', when things such as hallways, doors and windows set the framework for a better form of animated community life; a time when crime was more present as well. As particular spaces and objects of the buildings propped up memories that offered a complex affective vision of inanimate things (which transcended the explanations imposed 'from above'), the recollections evoked also contained evidence of a type of conviviality and adapted lifestyle which contradicts the rhetoric of high-rise as unsuitable to these 'un-modern others', suggesting instead spaces of hybrid cultural performances and lived adaptation. Significantly, residents' act of 'remembering'- which also necessarily implies forgetting- implicitly evoked a 'learning' process where the past is not used simply to re-inscribe some sort of lost meaning onto present space, but rather to note what was worthy and unworthy of those other times and therefore, what they would like to see in their imagined future community space. The crystallization of the future, then, is not about simply recreating the past for the sake of nostalgia, but about drawing lessons from it as a way of retaining some sense of hopefulness, like the one described by Venkatesh as well.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> This itself was the result of a financial and institutional overhaul which, in 1991, removed CRUV and consolidated a new Housing Department in order to shift its role from one of constructor to one of facilitator of social housing development: 'to foster and strengthen private sector participation...' (ELA 1991).

<sup>2</sup> On July 1986, 'Ley #52' created an 'Office for the Coordination of Help and Services' for citizens which then led to the creation of the 'Program of Interlaced Resources with Dedication' (RED) – meant to devise ways to 'rescue' populations exposed to criminality (Alameda Lozada and Rivera Galindo: 24).

<sup>3</sup> This Chicago Housing Agency-driven operation against gangs lasted into the mid-90's and consisted of surrounding buildings in the early morning, entering each apartment of the high-rises of the city and 'sweeping' for drugs, gang members, weapons and illegal tenants. It was followed by the costly community crime-prevention program called 'Anti-Drug Initiative' (Popkin 2000: 18; Venkatesh 2000: 254).

<sup>4</sup> The second phase of 'Mano Dura' –the so-called 'modernization' phase- included infra-structural rehabilitation and social reconstruction by the 'Congreso de Calidad de Vida' (Quality of Life Congress), an entity composed of 16 agencies. The final phase 'gave back control' or 'empowerment' to communities through the gradual retreat of forces, but often left mini-police headquarters or guardhouses inside the premises. This final phase euphemized the extent to which public housing had been turned into prison-like enclaves that further segregated poor, subaltern residents and limited any kind of communication or conviviality with the rest of the city.

<sup>5</sup> These were carried out under a new 'Surveillance Program for Rescuing High Impact Crime-Zones'.

<sup>6</sup> For example, of four stories published about Las Gladiolas in 'Primera Hora' in the latter part of 2005, three were told from the perspective of housing agents and their defense of both the raid and the subsequent relocation plans (Díaz Alcaide 2005; Hernández 2005a, b).

<sup>7</sup> Copper cables, found in elevators, are sold for a very high price in the underground drug market.

<sup>8</sup> That is, demolition would be approved if the cost of providing all residents with Section 8 vouchers to use in private rental market was lower. This system was conceived as the new ticket to home-ownership.

<sup>9</sup> Currently, at least five large-scale projects in the island are being contemplated for total or partial demolition under the 2008-1012 Public Housing Administration plans (Public Housing Administration 2008).

<sup>10</sup> These included: the Buena Vista and Las Monjas barrios, the Head Start program operating in the towers at the time, the local supermarket 'Econo', and three different residents' associations.

<sup>11</sup> Interestingly, housing projects in Chicago which eventually underwent demolition were first seen as 'losing' stature in the late 1940's when their constituency became identified with 'lower-class rural migrants from the South and Puerto Rico, many of whom were uneducated and had little experience with the city and its institutions' (von Hoffman 1998: 13).

## **Chapter 6**

### **Spaces of struggle**

## 6.1. Introduction

Eyal Weizman (2007:7) argued that ‘political action is fully absorbed in the organization, transformation, erasure and subversion of space’. Thus far, we have seen how this is true to the manipulation of public housing as an artefact immersed in the political production and division of urban space dictated by HUD and practiced by the PRPHA. Most recently, in an attempt to justify high-rises’ demolition and give way to the new model of mixed-income public housing project, a logic of deterioration facilitated the projection and reproduction of Las Gladiolas as an environment of decomposition, with its residents identified as inherently faulty; failures in need of control and discipline. But that political, discursive and material transformation of space also set the ground for its subversions, as glimpsed through residents’ memories and counter-discourses which disrupted the dominant portrayals of Las Gladiolas as an essentialized space of criminality requiring intervention. Their subjective and communal experiences of decay, expressed through their deep dissatisfaction with the current circumstances, highlighted the importance of reflecting upon space and place ‘beyond metaphors and as formative factors in thinking about the presentness of the past’ (Legg 2004: 106). This chapter will argue that the currentness of their past can also serve as a resource for the future, filtering into the political struggle around demolition and displacement (Butler et al. 2003).

I will examine how residents’ resistances were waged both through socio-political outlets and through materiality. To examine these two registers of resistance, I will first look at the resident association ‘Gladiolas Vive’ - its history, leadership, and forms of support- to argue that, like the differences mediating relationships amongst residents in Chapter 5, that political ‘cause’ was not characterized by straightforward unification. Therefore, understanding its divergences and ambivalences will be crucial in revealing the mechanisms of its community organization at work. I then continue by exploring some of the political clashes and issues that arose between residents and authorities due to or through the materiality of certain parts of the towers *per se* – particularly its walls, elevators/stairs, and the new proposed design for Las Gladiolas.

We have already seen how architecture and its representations became tied to the identity of public housing place, and how its socio-technicalities were

connected to notions of home and community through, for instance, memories of spatial loss. The discussion here turns to highlight the extent to which political conflict and debates over demolition were also very much traversed by coinciding material and symbolic struggles, in turn connected to the long history of public housing's 'othering' (in class, gender and race-based terms). Drawing again on Jacobs' (2006: 3) analysis of high-rises as a '*Geography of Big Things*', I want to emphasize here how, inasmuch as the Gladiolas buildings are themselves big physical and discursive 'things' 'stitched into place by fragmented, multi-scaled and multi-sited networks of association' (*ibid*), then the links between their community politics and their material 'surface' becomes an important avenue for addressing the heterogeneous elements constructing it as a (colonial) community space; i.e., for understanding 'the wider systems in which [such] a 'thing' is entangled' (*ibid*).

## **6.2. 'Gladiolas Vive': Spaces of resistance**

### **Demonstrations of alliance**

Up until March 2007, Gladiolas Vive (GV) protests had been 'popular' and intentionally disruptive in nature, usually performed under the heat of the sun, right outside the front entry-way on Quisqueya Street to block cars' entrance or to be loud enough to catch people's attention. This one, however, would host a public hearing before the 'Comisión de Derechos Humanos y Constitucionales' (CDHC) (Commission of Human and Constitutional Rights) of the Puerto Rico Bar Association within their community centre, more commonly used for meetings between residents and their lawyers. That one-story rectangular cement structure, which was visible from all the floors of the four towers, was couched between Towers 300 and 301, just a few steps down from the public, open-air basketball court that acted like a *plaza* for its residents<sup>1</sup>, as it is where they tended to meet, gather, play, talk... [Figure 6.1 and 6.3]. Far from luxurious, the centre nevertheless provided a more private, formal and comfortable setting for this kind of protest, as it was filled with foldable metallic chairs, a few expandable plastic tables, and a set of fans attached to all corners of the ceiling. These basic elements were crucial for trying to lure residents and visitors to come and stay in the activities, seeking shelter, as they are, from the heavy heat, rain or humidity outside.

‘El Bombazo del Segundo Abrazo Solidario’<sup>2</sup>- as this particular event was called- marked the end of an uncomfortable month-long dispute between GV leaders and the towers’ private administrator - American Management - regarding residents’ right (*not* the company’s) to hold permanent possession to the keys of the centre’s entrance lock. Until then, permission had to be solicited on a case-by-case basis from the administrator, who then had to consult her ‘superiors’. As the number of community meeting increased since GV was organized as an association opposing demolition, such ‘soliciting’ had become a burdensome, if not insulting fact for GV’s organizers. Having power and control over the keys meant that they could use that space of gathering freely; a small step, they felt, towards autonomy and empowerment. Moreover, the ‘Bombazo’ was the culmination of efforts by the GV leadership and its legal representation from the ‘Community Rights’ project of the UPR Legal Assistance Clinic to get as much favourable press coverage as possible in the denouncement of the towers condition.



Figure 6.1. Gladiolas courtyard, from above. Source: Alvin Cuoto.

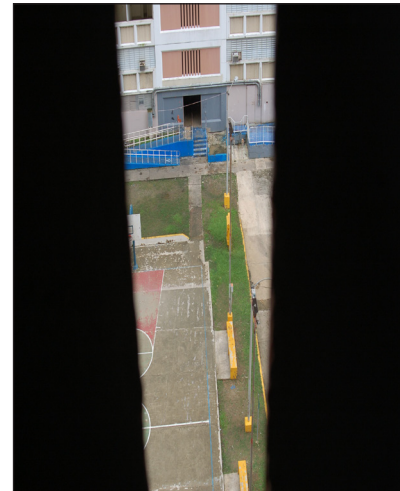


Figure 6.2. ‘Panopticon’ vision of courtyard, from Las Gladiolas stairs on Tower 301. Source: Author.



Figure 6.3. Evening entertainment for Gladiolas Vive event, ‘Segundo Abrazo Solidario’ (March 2007), in front of community centre. Source: Alvin Cuoto.

As Staheli and Mitchell (2007: 809) have noted, for marginalized social groups involved in debates over publicity and actions in public space, ‘finding a space to be seen or heard, or simply to *be* is vital to their ability to develop a political subjectivity...for themselves as political subjects and to their struggles to gain recognition from the state and the political community.’

To begin the proceedings I am here recalling, Mirta and Arcadio explained what ‘Gladiolas Vive’ was to those present in the following way:

‘...at a certain point in time, after having had a number of informal meetings, we understood that the only way we could help to make residents’ rights be valued in our community was by organizing ourselves. In a resident assembly that took place in February 2004 in the housing project Gladiolas I, the mass-participation of Gladiolas I and Gladiolas II residents agreed that we would become incorporated as a resident association. To that effect, in March 1 2004, we made our incorporation effective in the State Department. And, as a group, we respond only and exclusively to what we understand are the rights of our neighbours and ourselves. We do not respond to the interests of the Public Housing Administration. We respond to the situation that we are all living here, as equals... We have assisted training workshops with union groups and other groups... The first group that was with us was the COPADIM project... And through that first encounter- through them- they opened other support networks such as the UPR Legal Assistance Clinic, specifically the program directed by Myrta Morales. And from there we went on and have connected with a great number of communities. We have assisted workshops and activities everywhere...’ (Mirta Colón, *El Bombazo del Segundo Abrazo Solidario*, 2007).

‘...we have held on through 6 years of resistance here in Las Gladiolas. We want to ...openly denounce and listen to testimonies of residents who are suffering the negative consequences of an imposed, damaging and abusive relocation. We hope our case can serve as an example for other places, communities that are in danger of disappearing by this governmental plan that has left all of us outside of the realm of participation and that has violated our rights to reclaim a fair renovation of our housing’ (Arcadio, *El Bombazo del Segundo Abrazo Solidario*, 2007).

The leaders described the conflict through an official chronological story line centred around the defence of residents’ equal rights against the government’s housing plans and institutions. Two crucial elements to their framing

of GV's existence and outlook was: (a) a version of community that denies internal difference and fragmentation, in regards to 'the cause' (Stacheli 2008: 7); and (b) the incorporation of 'other groups' or 'other places' as an essential part of it. Indeed, their language of resistance often resorted to the larger counter-cultural discourse of *los grandes intereses*, or 'big interests'. This is a phrase used by other more established community groups such as their ally 'Santurce No Se Vende' (Santurce Is Not For Sale)- to protest the experience of being uprooted from their working-class urban homes for the construction of expensive condominiums. Akin to the Anglophone phrase 'fat cats', *grandes intereses*, refers to the abstract structures of power and domination that operate in masculine club-like fashion at the expense of the poor. In the context of Puerto Rico, it usually also connotes the *Criollo* elites' association to American political power and economic interests. The rhetoric is common to struggles against displacement, gentrification, and privatization of public institutions; and it is eloquently disseminated during speeches, press conferences, and community events. Given what Gladiolas residents felt to be sustained forms of oppression and socio-physical segregation over the years, they did not find it difficult to relate to its lexicography. Even if they did not know for certain what the fate of their towers would be after displacement, most believed that what was happening was a direct result of the government wanting to use that desirable city land as their playground; a situation which chapter 1 explained in greater detail in relation to the gentrifying district. *Los grandes intereses*- as an abstract financial and governmental force- worked against their interests and for the rich, to move into their coveted city space. Still, as the idiosyncrasies of Puerto Rican life would have it, even though the 'Banco Popular' down the road was one of the institutions perceived with most distrust for their potential interest in the real estate value of Gladiolas land, one of the protests held in the towers would seem to have been sponsored by that bank: a tent for selling food had its insignia all over it, and baseball caps to protect from the sun with their label were also being distributed for free. As a kind of 'charity' provider, this was not considered problematic nor inconsistent to their otherwise scathing criticism of the bank and its interests.

During the year I spent in Puerto Rico, I not only witnessed that the language of resistance to gentrification was part of what held an organizational identity together, but as Mirta and Arcadio pointed out in their description above, there was also a growth in allegiances and support networks with different





Figure 6.4. Leaders of Villa Caridad, from the municipality of Carolina, show their support to Las Gladiolas. March 2007. Source: Author.



Figure 6.5. 'Gladiolas Presente'- Residents join march in Old San Juan in support of 'Villas del Sol' community, August 2009. Source: Indymedia.org.

‘causes’ against injustice around the island<sup>3</sup> [See Figure 6.4]. There was a growing recognition by very different sectors- such as the environmental movement, labour unions, and housing rights activists- that in order to produce change, they had to amass their power and unite, whatever their differences may be. In court, in public demonstrations, in street manifestations, in press releases, etc., ‘Gladiolas Vive’ began to appear more frequently as a name of one of the community organizations supporting ‘x’ or ‘y’ cause. While I was in the island, there was particular affinity with the other communities being defended by the Legal Assistance Clinic such as ‘Mainé’ and ‘Los Filtros’, as well as with ‘La Perla’; with the environmental anti-development movements of ‘Paseo Caribe’ and Piñones; and with an Amnesty-International anti-racism campaign. Since leaving, their links with other causes have extended amply and now also include the wider Coalition Against Displacement [see Figur6.5] (‘Coalición Cero Desalojos’) and support of the ‘Caño Martín Peña’ and ‘Villas del Sol’ communities- both threatened in different ways by *los grandes intereses*. Ironically, while their own number of residents continued to dwindle, these external links extended their presence and struggle beyond the contours of their towers and gave their ‘cause’ a more profound resonance- one of solidarity based on greater forms of structural injustice.

The lead-up to the first Puerto Rican Social Forum proved to be a particularly important time-period during which these associations began to take hold, with groups and individuals meeting one-another for the first time, presenting their experiences and thinking about possibilities of working together, through their differences. In the forums I attended, ranging from seminars on coastal protection to workshops on grass-roots tactics, there was also a common assertion being made that the law (to be discussed in the next chapter) was one of the main tools at their disposal to achieve real political gains and transformations. As presented in Chapter 1, this was a knowledge passed on from 1960’s and 70’s, when the Corporation of Legal Services of the island’s lawyers’ association and independent lawyers became integral allies of the social movements of the time by offering legal, communal and organizational assistance (Cotto 2007: 48). But this message of unity- *the* plot around which the official business of protest, reporting, activism, and the law revolved tended to bypass an investigation of the way multiple differences were also part of the struggle: how the divergent attitudes, beliefs or practices of individuals

and their diverse positions within GV made their existence both an upward battle and a strength.

### **Complex origins**

While not addressed openly, there were other reasons beyond a common desire for unification after demolition was ordered which had contributed to the formal incorporation of Gladiolas Vive. They were implicit in Mirta's comment that 'we do not respond to the interests of the Public Housing Administration. We respond to the situation that we are all living here, as equals.' GV, as I learned from various interviews, had also been created as a direct reaction and alternative solution to what many felt to be an incompetent and 'sold-out' Resident Association. Under federal law, official tenant organizations are required to be part of all public housing projects. In Las Gladiolas, their Association's reputation had been stained by the 1990's cases of corruption mentioned in Chapter 5 in relation to privatization, putting the representative's real interests in question. Specifically, they were accused of bending to political will, rather than residents' interests and therefore embodying the neoliberal assistentialist politics that were based on clientilism; that is, active cooperation with politicians by handing over their internal problems to them (as well as to legislators or the police, if necessary) in return for a vote to their political party or person (Cotto 2007: 44, 126). Since the 1960's, political leaders have made it a tradition to direct strong campaign energies on the large population of public housing projects. Chapter 4 depicted a late Governor's wife, for example, using the campaign trail to visit and survey women's life and 'cultural' activities. Nowadays, especially in election years, when driving by any public housing project in the city, a typical aesthetic feature is that their balconies and poles tend to be covered in candidate or political party posters. In Las Gladiolas, when corruption had taken hold, accusations and complaints were made against the Association's president, Sheila, including: linking her to the PNP (pro-Statehood) political party and *their* conservative interests; uselessness; neglect of residents; assuming a spirit of defeat and inevitability *vis à vis* the Housing Agency and their power; and finally, instigating residents to passively and quietly accept their relocation. This less publicized internal battle shows how much the politicized history and political culture of the island is intricately linked to the successes and failures of groups such as this one. It also demonstrates how difficult it is to shake off hurtful pasts shared by a community.

By breaking with the traditional resident association and creating a new one, Gladiolas Vive limited the control of the former and of the Public Housing Administration, over residents. While relying on a similar model of leadership and representation (with the exception that there were two, rather than one leaders), it provided an alternative political outlet based on resident empowerment. But because it constituted a break with the established way of handling internal community matters, feelings about its creation were mixed. After its inception, two bands were formed: those who were for demolition (Association)- seen as conspiring with the enemy (the PRPHA), versus those against displacement and the government responsible for propelling it (GV). This struggle became framed as one of differing allegiances between the traditional Association (and its representatives) and Gladiolas Vive. It became 'an issue' for neighbours and friends who were connected in many other aspects of their lives- through sheer conviviality- but suddenly had to face differences of opinion in this respect, and choose sides. It was, in this sense, an adversarial turn towards the inside. Thus, GV granted the community a new space for autonomous and empowered action and – given the potential impact on personal relationships- it also de-energized the potential of working together with and through differences to achieve certain goals. Still, when I interviewed Sheila- the old Association president who was still living in Gladiolas- she had grown frustrated with government inattention to their needs, and shifted her support to GV and its politics more so than the Association's. Her personal experience of how the Housing Agency had 'duped' residents had led her to back-up the same organization that had brought an end to her own Presidency:

'It was a mistake to let families leave....The whole thing was stomping on residents' rights...a private market deception. The government, Laboy...they live in houses. I mean, they could care less about Las Gladiolas. I am now retired from all that, but I was the Board's President for 6 years- just retired this past March. I feel like those six years were lost. It's not that I was looking to get gratified, but people aren't as honest as they should be' (Sheila, interview, 20007).

Sheila, now well into her 50's, realized- too late- that the government was dishonest in their intentions to provide better homes or improve their conditions. It was something she experienced daily upon returning from her long shifts as

a security guard, when she had to walk up fifteen flights of stairs despite long-standing bone and respiratory problems. This situation had meant more visits to the doctor, laboratory tests and, inevitably, costs on health care and medicine. Above, she explained the insincerity of government in relation to ‘their lack of care towards residents’ circumstances because ‘they live in houses’. To her, political inattention and negligence boiled down to elites’ relationship to property and the privilege which having a house (having ‘made it’) implied. This separated them in class-based terms from public housing residents, thereby disallowing true understanding or empathy of resident needs and rights as tenants. Given that, as previous chapters have elaborated, residential status and race are so culturally entrenched in the island, with public housing being the space designated as that of the dark poor dwellers, this complaint about a certain attitude of property ‘superiority’ can also be understood in racialized terms.

Excavating GV’s origins not only shows the complex intersections between public housing and the penetrating power of the larger political culture of the island, but if we listen to the reasons residents gave for being allied to GV, their connections also transcended the original and official reasons for the organization’s creation. For instance, during the same ‘Bombazo’ event detailed before, declarations varied as to what GV meant to members of the community:

‘I have been in the building for thirty years. Here, everything is close-by: schools, supermarkets, everything. If someone like me who doesn’t have transportation leaves, how will I be able to get to work, which finishes at 11 o’clock at night? I’m not going to be able to take the bus home... I walk to work. That is why I would not leave Las Gladiolas and for many other reasons, because *that* is Gladiolas Vive’ (Aidé, El Bombazo del Segundo Abrazo Solidario, 2007).

‘Administration and relocation people have come to me to tell me I have to leave. They send me letters almost every day. Sometimes one or two of them come personally saying, ‘you have to move to such and such a place...’ and I said, ‘As long as Arcadio lives and continues to battle it out, Daniela de Jesús is not going away! Gladiolas....VIVE!’ (Daniela, El Bombazo del Segundo Abrazo Solidario, 2007).

These two residents gave highly individualized accounts of the ‘stakes’ involved (losing their homes) in their attachment to GV. They did not express a

concern for their fate ‘as a community’, but rather in terms of their personal situations; i.e., what they had there, and what they would lose if demolition took place. Of course, from the previous chapter, we know that ‘what they had’ was also a sense of community which had already been lost. To Aidé, the organization was literally the resistance to the potential loss of the towers’ practical location and, consequently, her job. Her stake in the struggle was intricately informed by the comparable resources which her urban milieu afforded her, and her sense as an urban city dweller, whose home was partially defined by its central location. Daniela, on the other hand, saw Arcadio as the embodiment of GV and found strength to resist due to his presence, longevity, and leadership. When she cried out ‘Gladiolas ...VIVE!’ at the end of her statement, she was also reinforcing the connections between the movement and Arcadio. He had started that chanting practice of the organization’s name in an emphatic and powerful way- making it their auditory insignia. It had an instantaneous appeal to most people, especially the community’s children, and screaming it out in groups always produced a sudden feeling of resistance and unity. I always felt that, in filling the air with such a distinctive sound, it momentarily and ironically counteracted the increasing sense of emptiness and isolation that was taking hold of the space of the towers.

### **Embodied leadership**

Many residents and external actors- like Daniela- identified GV with its leaders. GV was a rather extraordinary example for a community organization in that it not only had two representatives, but each was of a different sex. Apart from very few notable exceptions, most public housing projects in Puerto Rico have female, rather than male community leaders (Escalante Rengifo 2002). In my conversations with residents, both Arcadio *and* Mirta C. reappeared time and again as emblematic figures who *cargan la cruz* (‘carry the cross’) of the fight for an unspecified resident ‘we’ whose interests and grievances they represented. But their leadership and activist styles were very different and had a definite impact in the way the battle was waged (and the allegiances that were made). With time, these grew increasingly dissimilar, creating tension and conflict (an important development that will be further elaborated in Chapter 7).

As a whole, Arcadio was more ‘people-oriented’ and sought to create as many meetings as possible, foster community action such as DIY cleaning, fixing

and painting jobs, and could frequently be found walking within or around the spaces of any of the towers, visiting people or making sure things were 'in order'. In the more low-key meetings held in the community centre some weekday evenings, for instance, he would bring natural tropical juices and ginger cookies with him to offer those present, giving the environment a more familiar and friendly undertone. When I met residents for the first time, they often told me I should meet and speak with Arcadio because he had the power over the community, derived from 30+ year involvement with it. A 60-something *mulato*, skinny man, he is invariably dressed in loose-fitting cotton whites: cap, t-shirt, pants, slacks and tennis-shoes. Resembling a cross between a classic *Santero*<sup>4</sup> and a male nurse, his exoticized image, which appears almost deviant to the Puerto Rican 'masculine' norm of macho strength and whiteness, is regularly presented in GV news items. In taking over the role of overseer of maintenance, from the ground up, he was performing what was traditionally the role either of the housing institutions or of women.

In my first interview with him, he said his style was to *bregar con la comunidad* (deal with the community) from the inside, differentiating himself from Papo Cristian, the most famous community leader in the island at that time who frequently appeared on television. Part of his efforts included working on a participatory model geared towards community maintenance and repair, which he hoped to present as part of the legal package of evidence in the lawsuit, as a way to demonstrate residents' good will and capacity for responsibility<sup>5</sup>. In three of the annual hearings the Public Housing Administration are required to hold for all of the island's public housing residents, Arcadio also tried to sway the agency against their plan for demolition by presenting pictures of severely damaged areas in the buildings together with declarations made by architects and engineers to show that the buildings were indeed structurally 'sound' and rescuable. His vision of leadership centred on what was happening within the towers because getting 'outside' (meaning alliances with government, becoming the sole representative voice, hugging politicians or appearing in *el canal dos* (local Channel 2)) was something he believed detracted from the ultimate purpose. He told me that to *bregar con la comunidad* kept him out of trouble as no one dared to mess with him [See Figures 6.7 and 6.9]. He had learned this kind of leadership and participatory model during the early 1990's when, at the same time that *Mano Dura* was being pursued, the government was facilitating training courses to individuals like himself, who

felt immersed in the neighbourhood. He was taught about grant-application procedures and empowerment models.

His persona and style have two important implications in terms of housing and community. First, his notion of empowerment can be seen to fall within a larger ‘politics of behaviour’ (Flint 2004: 895) where (perhaps not surprisingly, given how he learned them) an integral part of housing governance and the social control function of social housing management is to tap into people’s moral and ethical behaviour by insisting (policy wise) on their responsibility not just to desist from undesirable behaviour, but to engage with more proactive and empowering one. Responsible conduct is produced around two principal rationales: that of self-agency or self-responsibility, and of tenants as duty-laden members of communities. Bringing it back to Arcadio, he saw his responsibility as a natural ‘taking care’ of matters. This has been noted as an important strategy ‘against the onslaught of revanchism and an economy and governing regime that seems anything but caring’ (Staeheli 2008: 13). Nevertheless, his politically significant values of care and community, also called ‘ethopolitics’ or ‘ethopower’ (Flint 2003; Staeheli 2008: 15), can be manipulated or coopted by a State that wishes to absolve itself from the responsibility to care for its citizens. Thus, ‘care’ here provides a framework for governing tenants through their roles as responsible members of communities that have to manage their own obligations to others. This, however, is not to be overstated as Arcadio’s mobilizations need to be understood not in a vacuum between Gladiolas and Housing Agencies alone, but as part of a larger continuum of noninstitutional urban housing struggles mobilizing and gaining ground in Puerto Rico.

Mirta had a very different style. As opposed to Arcadio’s long-term tenure, she had only been living and active in Las Gladiolas for six years, yet she preferred to focus more on the power of publicly denouncing, via the media and collaborating groups, any new incident considered unjust, such as an elevator break-down or water shortage (Cobián 2004a; 2004b; Prensa Asociada 2007). (Candelas 2007). She strongly believed that this could help to make visible their problems, thereby pressuring the housing agency to respond. During that comparably short time of residing in the towers, she had also managed to gain the respect of many of her neighbours, seen as a true *guerrillera* figure (a fighter). She believed that the nature of resistance in Las Gladiolas changed





Figure 6.6. Mirta, in crutches, explains the protest to Channel 6 broadcasters. Source: Author.



Figure 6.7. Arcadio featured in newspaper painting apartment's wall. Source: Rosario 2008, El Nuevo Día (END)



Figure 6.8. 'Water absent in Las Gladiolas'. Mirta holding up water gallons in her apartment; Arcadio carrying granddaughter in front of elevators. Source: Cobián 2004a, END.



Figure 6.9. Arcadio chants with children in street protest. Source: Author.

due to her presence and influence therein- turning residents' complaints from 'a quiet style' led by Arcadio to a more publicly defiant mode of expression. Like in Andersons and Jacobs' study of the Green Bans battles in Australia (1999: 1019) Mirta was drawn to the struggle because changes to the built environment had directly impacted her and her family's service provisions.

And, like the women in their study who breached conventional arrangements of home and politics, '...the media delighted in depicting her as a transgressive in other ways' (*ibid.*, 1020). Mirta C. was also a *mulata*, but semi-obese woman who wore tight-fitting clothes and, when I met her, she was in a wheelchair (and remained in it for 4 months) due to a broken foot. Her body, according to Puerto Rican standards, was that of aberrant femininity and was also frequently displayed in the news, representing GV. She nevertheless used her 'faulty' physical condition by making it public- connecting it to the deteriorated state of the buildings which forced her to walk up and down eight flights of stairs daily and causing her injury and other related health problems [See Figures 6.6 and 6.8]. She was also much more willing and, I would add, able, to 'play' with the administrative and governmental aspect, as she valued (and, it seemed, very much enjoyed) getting information through all available mediums and channels. In the methodology chapter, I explained how her cell-phone, often hanging from a necklace, acted as an information command centre- with calls coming in and going out about what was happening within the towers, but also with the lawsuit, and to other communities with which they collaborated.

While they were very different amongst themselves and had different leadership styles, both Arcadio and Mirta used maintenance and decay to portray a coherent picture of government neglect to be condemned by the outside world, and through these portrayals, they were also creating a second coincidental image of cohesion: that of community and external support over their own durability. Thus, while they highlighted the breakdown of the buildings they were in fact working towards holding it together. The fact that their styles were varied provided a stronger buttress, in this respect. Yet they also provided the kind of embodied 'otherness' to image of Las Gladiolas, which corresponded to the stereotypes discussed in the previous chapters. Their transgressive gendered and raced bodies were unruly; that is, they moved beyond the embodied space of white middle-class national legitimacy, and beyond the

defined cultural roles of proper femininity/quiet domesticity; masculinity/strong virility. Like the previous chapters traced, this ‘othering’ did not exist in a space of empty representation, but was embedded in national ideologies that were then spread towards both political and popular mediums. One of the details of the legal case itself brings this into sharp view.

Part of the residents’ legal claims was that the Housing Agency had not consulted their organization- GV- for demolition, as required by the law. But, because federal regulations required that the Housing Agency consult a so-called “valid” (i.e., legally recognized) resident organization before issuing an order for demolition, the PRPHA responded by placing GV’s ‘official’ representational status in doubt in order to sway the judge’s opinion their way. Specifically, they attacked the figure of Arcadio in order to portray GV as an incoherent or unstable group outside the ‘proper’ order of political representation:

‘If the so-called ‘community’ of one single individual, which is Plaintiff Arcadio-Aponte Rosario, does not know how to manage his own dwelling, it is impossible for the Government to do everything for him’ (Defendants 2008: 191).

Here, Arcadio’s representation is accused of being weak (un-virile) and incapable of controlling his subjects, while also questioning his very status as representative of the community (the inverted commas emphasized its questionability or artificiality). Resorting to his alleged incapacity as a man to control his own people made residents’ claims against demolition appear untrustworthy at best, or illegitimate. It was a rhetorical (legal) manoeuvre based on character defamation and on re-centring the government’s role as ‘provider’. In one of the media anecdotes discussed in the Introduction, we saw something similar occurring when the Police Superintendent implied that Mirta’s protest of the towers’ invasions was fabricated; and then again in Chapter 2 when PRPHA’s director Laboy accused her for invalidly and publicly pursuing him as a target of GV’s protest. These moments showed how Mirta, too, was being discredited. Furthermore, like Arcadio’s feminized portrayal, her unfeminine body was linked to her forms of activism and portrayed as exuberant, rough and therefore outside the realm of the politically legitimate.

Adding to his comments on Mirta's and Gladiolas's illegitimacy as a political group, Laboy later extended his argument to the physical space of Las Gladiolas by saying there was no physical community centre there to speak of. When I reminded him that it did in fact exist and was in frequent use, he literally brushed it off with a flicker of his hand and insisted that the 'object' space therein- where, according to him, there was no community to speak of- had to be demolished. The logic of his accusation was that if they did not have a community centre, then this meant that there was no real community to speak of- no real identification with their living space, and therefore that there was a legitimate justification for displacing whoever was left and constructing anew. That is, by stubbornly denying community and giving the impression that Gladiolas was a place that was not grounded on resident cohesion, it also rendered its space conquerable- colonizeable. This highlights the neo-liberal mechanisms of 'creative destruction' (Harvey 2008: 33; Blomley 2004; Brenner and Theodore 2002) where the politics of space and urban restructuring are deeply embedded in the ideological construction of materiality. In light of how residents were utilizing the community centre through activities like the *Abrazo*, this also underscores the fundamental incongruence between the authorities' and residents' perspectives of what was going on 'on the ground'; a disjuncture that speaks to the way physical space was being variably understood and used by each side of that urban battle for their own purposes.



**Figure 6.10.** View of Gladiolas central playground square, from the entrance of the community centre. Children play basketball while Arcadio, surrounded by residents, calls on neighbors to come to the documentary screening taking place in the centre. Source: Author.

Residents also had their own ways of challenging the accusations made against them by questioning the legitimacy of authorities themselves. Above all, Laboy was the figure upon which the government's immorality, hypocrisy, abuse and untrustworthiness were measured. As the embodiment of PRPHA, his name was frequently evoked in public and private forms of protest. When the community lawyers were looking to make an argument during meetings, they would often resort to calling up Laboy's name, mentioning something he had done recently. That alone gave whatever was being proposed a more definite sense of injustice and urgency. His name was always included in the slogans that were cried out during street manifestations. For instance, in GV's first 'Abrazo Fraternal' (December 2006) demonstration carried out on Quisqueya Street, the 'themes' distributed in photocopied papers to participants and chanted out through a loudspeaker said:

“Laboy decía son 3 gatos nada más. Que se mire en este espejo de este abrazo fraternal”

(Laboy said that there were only three cats [meaning, very few people]. Let him look into the mirror of this fraternal embrace).

And;

“Cámaras de vigilancia trajeron Toledo, Laboy y Acevedo Vilá con grandioso operativo y no ha servido para na”

(Toledo, Laboy and Acevedo Vilá brought security cameras with grandiose operative and it hasn't worked for nothin')

It was not just the sound of his name- along with the Governor's and police Superintendent's- that inspired unity, but the actual look of it on paper as well [Figure 6.11]. Posters or slogans used during manifestations would often have his name written on them. In Figure 4, the fact that it was misspelled (Lavoy, instead of Laboy) not only shows that it was probably a child involved in that material's production, but that what mattered was evoking the sound and look of his name in order to inspire a greater and united sense of institutional injustice. Blomley (2004) noted a similar phenomenon in Vancouver's community struggles against gentrification, where identifying individuals was a way to refuse the mystification of the powerful individualized corporation that was abusing the less powerful. It was a way to stress that the processes of urban renewal 'not only entails the displacement of real people, but is also caused by real people' (Blomley 2004: 98). Accordingly, during the special

session on the plight of Las Gladiolas in the 'Puerto Rico Social Forum' when a new manifestation based on blocking the entrance of the towers was being planned, Laboy's mobile number was written on the chalk-board and slowly repeated out loud to those present by Marjaine, one of COPADIM's social workers, because according to her this would:

'...draw attention...Carlos Laboy will be called and he'll have to turn on his TV in his office or have to respond to his superiors because of what'll be going on in Las Gladiolas at that precise moment. That's what we're suggesting.' (Marjorie, Puerto Rico Social Forum, 2006).



Figure 6.11. Gladiolas demonstration on the street. While, on the right a Ch.6 newsman prepares his newscast, ex-resident Reggie sends a text message behind, and Teresa holds slogans up for youth to read out into loudspeaker, Elena joins the picket-line carrying a poster that reads: Carlos Lavoy, with Carlos used as acronym for: Cruel, Abusive, Ruinous, Languid, Opportunistic, Sinister. Source: Author.

### **Ambiguous membership**

Despite the unity that a common enemy afforded residents, there was an underlying experience of fear and mistrust which also made them keep a distance from the activist cause. In our very first meeting, Teresa, the social worker, offered me the following explanation after I asked her- in an open-ended manner- what exactly was happening in Las Gladiolas:

'There are about 115 families left now... They don't say anything and, instead, throw all of the [community's] problems onto the leaders. But they stay because they want to and, deep down, by staying they are supporting the cause' (Teresa, interview, 2006).

Her response tacitly acknowledged resident displacement as *the* motor propelling their urban resistance, but she framed such opposition in relation to residents' *inaction* which, I came to discover, was far from an isolated judgment. There was a recurrent attempt by those associated with the community struggle to frame it as something coherent and solid *vis à vis* the seemingly passive and weak resistance offered by its residents. These clashing elements were not always that simple to summarize:

'When we used to get together a lot with people, Myrta would say, 'in the hour of truth, nobody comes out'. And then you see them[residents] talking, saying, 'No, I'll go...' Yeah, supposedly. But, at the hour of truth, when Arcadio had his meetings, *siempre venían los mismos gatos* (only the same few individuals would show up). [They'd tell them] 'Look, the press is coming; it's an opportunity for you to vent your frustrations'. How many would there be? Of 300 people, if 20 came, and I'm not exaggerating, that was a lot. And then other people would say, 'Oh, but I don't want to get into it.' But, hello?! If you don't support us, how are we going to do it?...If you want an effort, look at me, I have put in a lot of effort.' (Carla, interview, 2006)

Like Teresa before, Carla expressed the existence of a paradox of support: a mismatch between the theoretical and 'real' support for GV. She felt frustrated by the fact that despite Mirta and Arcadio's influence, her own self-sacrifice, and their allegiance to it, residents were either hesitant or inactive when it came to speaking out and showing up in the activities. Whatever the reason (many told me it was just pure laziness), a lack of participation debilitated the organization's activities and it counteracted the unified front of protest which GV publicized as its identity. Nevertheless, as the comments below assert, it was precisely through ambivalent feelings that GV was lived, performed and expressed:

'I think the implosion will happen anyway, because of all of the problems I told you. And I am kind of both for and against it. But yeah, I'm with 'Gladiolas Vive'... I don't go to their meeting though because I used to go down there and they'd just talk about the same thing; *Es más de lo mismo*<sup>6</sup> (it's more of the same)' (Carmen, interview, 2007).

'In the last assembly, it was the only activity people actually went to, but I think they only went to listen, not to participate, really. People are just tired of the same old thing. So many of them talk and talk, saying they will do things, but at the hour of truth they hold back and

don't give anything. Still, they love to benefit from what you can give them' (Sheila, interview, 2007).

Carmen 'sort of' supported the movement against demolition and believed that the repetitiveness of the discussions within community events led nowhere and were therefore pointless to assist. Fatigue had set in. While, in principle, she continued to support them, in practice, she distanced herself physically, opting out of attending the actual activities that could have made a difference. Sheila describes how even when residents *do* attend, they seem to do so passively, without an intention of doing anything for the cause beyond being there, silent. Thus, both these residents inhabited a space of political ambivalence- of simultaneous allegiance to but separation from the cause against demolition- which many other residents also expressed.

During my attendance in some community events, meetings or assemblies organized by the GV leadership, either on their own or in collaboration with COPADIM, the UPR legal clinic, and/or other groups, I witnessed how residents would sometimes venture out of their apartments mostly only to see what was going on, have a chat with a neighbour or two, and leave quickly thereafter. Others would come around by chance, searching for their children or grandchildren who were playing basketball in the open courtyard or *hanguendo con los panitas*<sup>7</sup> in the yellow cement benches that surround the court area. Adolescents could also usually be found in groups, standing around a motor-scooter placed on the sidewalk between the parking lot and Tower 300, listening carelessly to *reggaetón* as it emanated from the speakers improbably installed on the bikes. Many more, if not most, looked out from their fenced balconies, watching and listening to what was happening, while others peered through their semi-opened 'Miami' windows, as if hiding from view. Mirta, the leader, and Irene, another resident, explained that scattered presence in the following way:

'... in terms of quantity, yes, we are only a few families left compared to what there was initially and there is fear of getting evacuated, thrown out; fear that perhaps information that I may not have informed at a certain point comes out into the open. For this reason, many of our neighbours are afraid of attending a manifestation. So we want to expand our networks.' (Mirta C., Foro Social, 2006)



‘Well, people support ‘Gladiolas Vive’ but they also want to move out...they’re afraid of what can happen to them and don’t want to be involved in any kind of mess.’ (Felicia, interview, 2007)

Both Mirta and Felicia suggest that intimidation was a major factor discouraging residents’ participation. Earlier in the Chapter, we saw that this was true inasmuch as the struggle was personalized and that they could easily be ‘picked out’ and discriminated against given their relative lack of power. Iris Marion Young (2000) argued that true democracy is in fact impossible if fear influences behaviour because it prevents different opinions or positions from expressing themselves freely. In the case of Gladiolas residents, it would be a difficult position to try to ascertain the extent of ‘true’ democracy- in the sense Young suggests- given that fear has been such an integral element imposed upon their lives at many different levels from the maintenance and housing agencies. I would suggest that while it is important to be cautious of the extent to which fear pervades decisions and participation, it is also equally important to acknowledge the different ways through which politics are waged precisely as a reaction or adaptability to decades of multiple layers of fear. In other words, democracy, in this context, cannot be measured by a binary fear/no fear equation. Instead, understanding the histories of the ideologies which produce these fears in the first place- and how they are made manifest in the explicit and subtle reactions to them – is perhaps a more attuned mechanism for gauging their actions as counter-discourses.

In her account, Mirta added that fear not only justifies inaction, pervading the ‘country’s situation’ more generally, but that it also created the conditions for needing to solicit external camaraderie. In this light, creating the networks with other movements did not follow some abstract or theoretical ‘how to practice community politics’ manual, but it was also very much grounded on need. Without those external networks, the ambivalent internal connections would not have been able to hold together a sustainable movement. But, as Cotto (2007: 133-34) suggested, an attitude of assistentialism also pervaded the larger tactical demobilizations of the 1960’s to the 90’s which moved the alternative politics of movements into a circuit of government and political party dependence for survival. This process had led an internalized perception of needing the State, or something like it, to facilitate things. Whatever the reason, residents’ evident reticence to participate led to GV’s leaders hav-

ing to get creative. In one occasion, following another not very well-attended meeting a few weeks earlier, the lawyers and the leaders decided, that for the following assembly they had to grab everyone's attention somehow. This led to the use of a microphone and loudspeaker on loan from a collaborating labour union (*gremio*) that Myrta M. got a hold of and connected with the help of some of the younger residents. This technology allowed them to communicate important updating messages about the state of the legal case, introducing a new way for 'Gladiolas Vive' to perform their politics (diffusing their voices from below, in the courtyard, to apartments above).

It also marked a definite shift in the organization's perceived urgency of the matters at hand. Until then, the leaders had 'spread the word' about meetings, events, and new 'case' developments by Arcadio's laborious distribution of flyers on the doors of all inhabited apartments; flyers that Teresa- representing COPADIM- would type up and print within the offices of the organization 'Iniciativa Comunitaria' a few blocks away. Mirta often told me she thought that using Teresa like this, for help with almost everything, was an exploitative dynamic pursued and maintained by Arcadio. Both leaders, Teresa, and Myrta M. would also make use of their networks, calling up neighbours, asking them to tell their own friends, reminding children to tell their mothers, and chatting up others if they happen to have crossed paths entering or exiting the towers. They had always done this despite a noted lack of results, in terms of attendance or amassing additional resident support.

Finally, using a loudspeaker as a medium for the meeting signalled their recognition of a need to move beyond GV's normal protocol. It facilitated audibility to everyone- even those they frequently complained about given their alternating allegiances or inexcusable lethargy to simply descend the stairs. It reflected a clear understanding of the uncertainty and fear that underlined those actions; a 'neither here nor there' attitude; an ambivalence which they could no longer afford to go along with hoping one day their neighbours might change. Instead, they played on that knowledge and fought against it, trying to seep into their homes in new ways: through balconies, windows, and any other open groove available to sounds waves. Ambivalence, then, was not only a position adopted by residents, but actively mediated in a number of social and material practices by GV. In the following section, I extend this discussion by focusing on some of the specific physical elements which existed

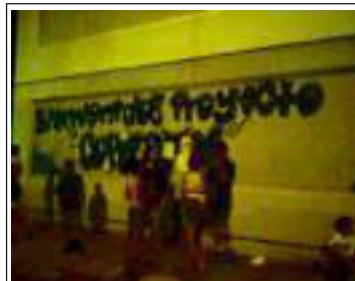
not only as representational factors or containers of the struggle, but which also became integral to the very contestations over demolition. These underscore the intersections that lie between the kinds of community politics just described and materiality.

### **6.3. Spaces of Conflict**

#### **Walls as a medium of protest**

On December 2006, during a publicized and anticipated evening launch of the ‘Las Gladiolas’ documentary (2006), created by video producer friends of the cause, and held within their own courtyard, a maintenance squadron from AM surreptitiously entered the housing complex and attempted to paint over two of its walls. This followed an announcement which had been made the week before by the PRPHA that all ‘non-designated’ or ‘unauthorized’ murals were to be eliminated because a public scandal had erupted when one such mural in a *caserío* in the municipality of Carolina had been painted by residents depicting the life of ‘Coquito’- a murdered drug-lord considered by many to be the Robin Hood of much of the metropolitan area’s underworld. In Las Gladiolas, however, one of the walls that was secretly going to get painted over had been created by the children of the community bearing the innocuous image of a hamster and the initials of their community youth project, COPADIM [Figure 6.12]<sup>9</sup>. When those same children saw what was happening behind their backs, they warned some of the adults watching the documentary in the courtyard and, following a growing mass of murmurs and a palpable build-up of tensions in the environment, those same children proceeded to defend the wall with their bodies by making a line across it and ‘throwing out’ the workers from the site with loud chants of ‘Gladiolas-Vive!’, expressively waving their arms as if literally throwing them out. The scene was electric: the excitement of the jumping bodies of boys and girls; the strength elicited by the partially covered young ‘revolutionary’ faces standing their ground before the wall; the power of the lights and cameras who happened to be there documenting the launch of the documentary; Mirta C. and Arcadio vociferously demanding explanations and crying out abuse. When confronted, the maintenance worker in charge of the alleged ‘cover-up’ said it was Laboy who had issued the order. Those present, including me, interpreted the act as cowardly and intentionally provocative.

Soon thereafter, the residents from Manuel A. Perez- another public housing project close by- preemptively took PRPHA to Court for having secretly begun paperwork to eliminate one of their highly militant murals which depicted a Puerto Rican nationalist activist assassinated earlier in 2006 by a joint operation of the American and Puerto Rican FBI<sup>10</sup> [Figure 6.13]. In the Court debate that ensued, the PRPHA lawyer, Mariel Machado, insisted that it was *their* constitutional right of private property (as they were owners of the buildings and by extension, walls) to do so: ‘no jurisprudence says that the walls of a public housing project are forums of public expression or forums by designation’ (Martínez 2006); and that it was their duty towards HUD to deal locally with any potentially dangerous elements found in a public housing practice which, in this case, was the possible ‘indiscriminate’ uniting and spreading of ‘all sorts’ of murals. They argued that if the Court took away the Housing Agency’s right to paint over walls, they would be supporting and allowing a ‘harmful’ practice to take place. Residents, in turn, were saying ‘we are going to protect our mural because none of those that come to buy out our votes every four years is going to do so, those are the ones that later give orders to hit us with billy-clubs and to follow us with cameras and weapons’ (Marin 2006).



**Figure 6.12. Gladiolas ‘COPADIM’ mural: Childrenstnad in front of wall protecting it from getting painted over. Source: Author (mobile phone).**



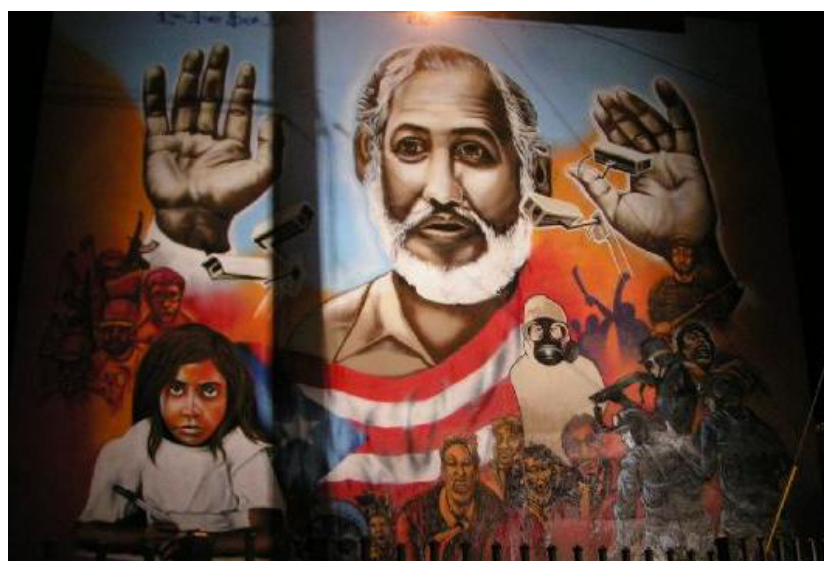
Figure 6.14. Vivienda Contra el Pueblo (Housing Against the People). ‘Santurce No Se Vende’ Coalition mural against PRPHA actions. Source: <http://www.museodelbarrio.org/galeria3.htm>



Figure 6.15. Otra Demolición Financiada por el Banco Popular. (Another demolition financed by the Banco Popular). ‘Santurce No Se Vende’ Coalition mural. Source: <http://www.museodelbarrio.org/galeria3.htm>



Figure 6.16. Mural depicting police abuse in ‘Candelaria’ public housing project. Source: Vargas Saavedra Primera Hora, 2006.



**Figure 6.13. Manuel A. Pérez mural depicting nationalist and anti-colonial visual emblems such as Filiberto Ojeda, the Puerto Rican flag, militarism, CCTV cameras, and revolutionary ‘machetero’ group. Source : Tito Román**

The PRPHA’s argument related to the historical construction of residents as faulty or deficient tenants that need to be controlled and disciplined by their landlord- the government; a message which was directly being counteracted through the images displayed in many of these murals [Figure 6.14 to 6.16]. But another thought-provoking contradiction also emerges here: as ‘landlord’, the Housing Agency is insisting on its right of ownership and control over its subjects (what Flint (2002:622) calls a ‘governance of conduct or anti-social behaviour’) while it continues to denounce residents’ dependent culture. In the case being described here, the murals became the place through which discriminatory legacies and constructions of stigmatized deviance were being enacted; where the conduct of the governed was being subtly controlled via moral discourse (Flint 2002: 621). They ambiguously categorized murals of ‘all sorts’ in order to hide what was contrived as the threatening nature to national order by *this* sort- that belonging to the public housing underclass. Art, and what would otherwise be considered a useful cultural outlet, was construed politically here as illegal, criminal, anti-social, and against the welfare of the State and its ‘other’ more decent citizens, i.e., those who feared ‘Coquito’, and what he represented. Intervention, in such a discursive context, becomes the next logical step. The fascinating twist in these dynamics is that the question of who is attributable for the implied socio-structural failure is systematically omitted. Nevertheless, the judge decided ‘to give the wall judicial protection’

because PRPHA could not ‘just take the justice into its hands from one day to the other’ (Martínez 2006). In this last instance, it also demonstrates how certain types or categories of property can be used to enforce behaviour or deny access to a potentially public space; but also, how this is always under contestation and fluctuation of meaning (Staheli and Mitchell 2008: 149).

As with the erection of ‘security’ border walls seen in Chapter 5, the ‘murals of dispute’ here became much more than their physical container- they were sites of cultural and political contest that reasserted the division of public and private space (and belonging), the governed and the authorities, through a contest of legality<sup>11</sup>. In the context of public housing, white-washing their murals is a contemporary mechanism of power for imposing certain moral rules, boundaries and urban aesthetic imaginaries- for maintaining ‘others’ in their place. Moreover, the wall/mural was a space where actors from opposing sides who normally addressed each other abstractly through press releases, met and confronted each other more concretely. So, while the painting of a ‘hamster’ had perhaps not been as important before that evening of disruption, when the attempt to cover it up occurred and got interpreted as a tactical tool of dispossession, it immediately became a symbol of the historically repressive forces working to contain and control residents. Two weeks later, under the brightness of a normal week-day’s sun, while children were in school and adults worked or were inside their homes, workers from American Management painted over the mural under dispute in white.

### **Elevators and stairs as materials of displacement**

Apart from the conflict over walls/murals towards the end of 2006, perhaps the most poignant example of how materiality was used as evidence inside and outside the legal case to discredit Las Gladiolas as a legitimate community of concern was the struggle over elevators. This was not associated to a particular time-period/event, but existent as an ever-present ‘issue’ given the height of the buildings and the frequent break-down of the lifts. With both sides (Housing Agency and residents) claiming lack of upkeep, elevators came to mediate and define many of the terms of the conflict for individuals affected by their continual breakdown. During the period of one year (2004-05) in one newspaper alone (‘Primera Hora’), there were seven stories featuring the elevators centrally (Cobián 2004a; EFE 2005; Garzón Fernández 2004; Hernández Pérez 2004; b; 2004b). Almost every time I visited the towers, lifts

and their working status tended to be the first item of spontaneous discussion. They served as a kind of icebreaker through which residents then filtered other concerns and complaints about the kind of hardship they had to endure over time from Housing Authorities and the maintenance company. In all of their complaints, the common message was that elevators' frequent malfunction, their putrid state and smell of urine, and the rusty staircases they had to use in their place were all means used to push them out of their homes [Figures 6.17 and 6.18].

As Arcadio testified for the lawsuit, 'Out of the ten elevators only two are partially working' (Cerezo 2008: 21). In the two towers that were almost empty, the elevators never (or extremely rarely) worked; whereas in the other two towers, they worked more sporadically. In all the time I was there, I never rode on one. Part of the hardship of living without elevators was captured in the documentary mentioned earlier, where a long sequence depicted Mirta being carried down the flight of stairs of her tower by fire-fighters when she was in a wheelchair because there was no other way of getting down (Gladiolas Vive 2006). Another resident told me she had been bitten by a rat at night because, given the lack of lights in those areas, she had accidentally stepped on it. Yet another older neighbour complained in a community assembly about the leg and hip problems, like Sheila, and the health bills which she had to live with due to falling in those stairs when they had been slippery and unkempt. Having to walk up many flights of rusty, dark and swampy stairs every day was a tiring and dangerous affair, especially for the elderly. In fact, two of my interviews had to be held in the courtyard because the women returning from work found it tiring and depressing to have to trek up ten to fifteen flights of stairs and not have the energy or courage of going back down (to then have to ascend again).

That personal and community plight had turned even more public when a neighbour moving his refrigerator out of his apartment was electrocuted and killed in the make shift *guinche* (replacement lifting elevator) [Figure 6.19] which had been placed behind the towers as a temporary measure for these kinds of movement. The kinds of movement (Covas Quevedo 2004; Hernández Pérez 2004) [Figure 6.20]. Residents blamed the PRPHA and the private maintenance company of being directly implicated in that event due to bad management and negligence.



Figure 6.17. 'Unlucky'- 13th Floor in Residencial Las Gladiolas at Hato Rey, Puerto Rico. Source: Abnel Gonzalez.



Figure 6.18. Image of rusty stairs in Gladiolas, Tower B. 2007. Source: Author.





The elevators gathered such significance that they were introduced as evidence- by both sides- in the legal case. They penetrated the legal debates by becoming part of the representations given, on the one hand, for the deficient or deviant nature of the Las Gladiolas community; and, on the other, as a sign of the extent of maintenance neglect. The PRPHA referred to elevators in their legal depositions as ‘public monies wasted in favour of these residents... self-inflicted actions...’ (Defendants 2008: 2-6). Laboy also repeated that belief to me in the following way:

‘In the particular case of Las Gladiolas, we repaired an elevator which cost me twelve thousand dollars to fix. Five minutes later they’d broken it. It was as simple as grabbing one of those pools you can put in corridors, one of those they sell in ‘K-Mart’; They put it there, emptied it and the water that fell, ‘Pap!’, broke our elevator. And then they talk about community. For five years we’ve been trying to show them that we don’t have the money to fix this...Cos, I mean, twelve thousand dollars to fix the elevator! My approach is that there is not enough money in the world to be subsidizing this all the time. I mean, we have a budget. You ate it up and, theoretically, so that I can fix it again, I have to take money from another project. So, where is the justice there? We need to understand that dynamic because the money is not unlimited....there is a common fund and you used yours up’ (Laboy, interview, 2007).

His paternalistic argument portrays the elevators’ failure as the community’s act of selfishness towards the common financial pot of all other housing projects. Thus, similar to the quick disqualification of Arcadio’s as representative before, their status as a good community is immediately questioned, steering all attention away from the agency’s inadequate maintenance as an infraction of federal regulation. His rhetorical question ‘where is the justice there?’ is meant to render Las Gladiolas own quest for justice as frivolous or null. And, by mentioning ‘K-Mart’ as ‘the kind of store’ where residents would buy the culpable inflatable pools, images of the lower classes’ indiscriminate consumption of cheap goods are conjured, serving to further discredit them in class terms, according to their social manners. Laboy used the principles of community as individuals and public housing as undeserving communities under the modern notion of place as one linked to its members for identification, to underline the non-communal or abject nature of Las Gladiolas, and to justify its deterioration. The deservedness of the community had to do with the individuals that compose it (deemed deviant *a priori*).

The elevator example successfully shows how public housing place becomes linked only (or mostly) to its members, in order to emphasize the non-communal or object nature of Las Gladiolas and how, like Venkatesh (2000: 273) found in his study of Chicago's public housing projects: 'In too many instances, the very same struggles by public housing tenants to procure basic services that are available in the mainstream are not cast as a sign that tenants lack basic entitlements and that the institutions servicing the community need restructuring'. That is, rather than their claims getting interpreted as a need, the discourse reinserts the logic of responsibility onto residents themselves. Like the murals before, the materiality of the elevators provided a concrete space through which to quarrel and express feelings that would otherwise be circumscribed to official legal or community protests.

Finally, the actual state of the elevators served as a thermometer that indicated how cool or hot the relationship was at that particular moment in time between the PRPHA and the residents. That is, the working state of the lifts responded to the state of the conflict itself. It was used as leverage by both sides as a 'give-and-take' mechanism. Like walls and cameras had represented in earlier stages of public housing intervention (Chapter 5); it was, plainly put, the contemporary embodiment of the 'politics in matter': a mundane but powerful tool of disempowerment *and* resistance.

### **The buildings' design as matter of urban public imaginaries**

As much as the parts of the buildings discussed above entered the debates over demolition, the image of the project as a structural whole was also at the centre of the political battle. We know from previous chapters that the image of high-rises went from being projected as the modern technological 'answer' of public housings' failures, to becoming the very spectacle of socio-physical depravity in need of replacement by new walk-ups. In this final section, I present an analysis of the specific model proposed by the PRPHA for the new Las Gladiolas in the midst of the community struggle I have just been describing. It provides a current example of how the controversy over urban renewal has gotten filtered once again through the very socio-technical ethos that has defined public housing programs as either panacea or failure from the beginning; i.e., the belief that architectural and infrastructural design/interventions will lead to either the social improvement or demise of the resident 'others'. This new version was presented by authorities as the promise for physical and

socio-economic progress for the future, while ‘Gladiolas Vive’ – which literally means ‘Gladiolas Lives’, continued to use and centralize the image of the four towers with pride in their own ‘promotional’ and audio-visual materials, such as the t-shirts distributed for demonstrations by Mirta, and the documentary produced by activists about their plight (See the two representations side by side in Figures 6.21 and 6.22).

Since 2003, newspapers quoted Laboy’s declarations saying that there was an island-wide \$1.3 billion plan for remodelling certain projects, but that it was not certain what would be built on the Gladiolas site (Albertelli 2003). Laboy himself told me that he believed that, in the context of the legal fight against displacement and demolition, the one and only mistake he and the Agency had made was not to have produced an architectural design or model to show people what the ‘new’ Las Gladiolas would look like:

‘I regret not having a plan to show you. That is the only mistake that I admit I committed because we concentrated on the demolition, we contracted the firm that would demolish, all the studies to justify the demolition were carried out, but we didn’t work on the new Gladiolas. And by not having a new concept, it creates more distrust in the community...because I can’t sit with the residents and show them a scale model. But shortly, we’re going to have an architect that is going to give us a perspective of the new Gladiolas... Maybe we’d have had fewer problems.’

Laboy had ‘realized’ that a model would have granted the process of displacement an air of transparency and scientific accuracy that it otherwise lacked. Whether this was a sincere realization or not, it speaks to his belief in the power of spatializing or visualizing issues (in this case an urban one) as a form of control. Residents would speak informally and publicly about this lack of future plans, speculating that the land where Gladiolas stood would be sold to the highest bidder (probably the Banco Popular close by) once they had been moved out- an accusation against *los grandes intereses* which Laboy staunchly rejected time and again. Even when the Housing Agency made declarations that they would retain that land (because of the legal restrictions on it) for public housing, residents still did not feel reassured, since they had not been given a contract to sign, safeguarding their return.

When the new Gladiolas model was finally made public, it was published in a newspaper article entitled, ‘Walk-Ups at the New Las Gladiolas’, in the *Primera Hora* newspaper (AP 2008; Diaz Alcaide 2008) [Figure 6.21]. Employing an immediately recognizable architectural device that spoke the language of authority by virtue of ‘expertise, detachment, spatial emptying and naming’ (Blomley 2004: 65), the formulation of the buildings (as short colourful walk-ups embedded in palm trees and sky) not only produced them as seductive middle-class artefacts, but also gives the space an air of legitimacy<sup>12</sup>. It offered a close-up perspective of a rather empty space that mirrors any other architectural model of a walk-up; thus, it appears as something we know and is therefore, unthreatening. It foregrounds the parking area and includes one sole car whose model may have been used as an instrument of identification for those ‘lower classes’ that are going to live there, while it also conceals any kind of detail from the people inside the frame- making them look rather gender and race-less. Thus, what is made invisible here – actual residents- has a powerful effect: it removes ‘others’.

At the same time that this is a disembodied representation, it separates the buildings from the surrounding environment focusing only on the details that a frontal angle allows. By eliminating allusions to anything outside the premises of the future buildings, the authority of *detachment* takes on a different viewpoint to that of, for example, traditional maps. More specifically, it strips the space of any allusion to the context of conflict and difference, while it also produces an immediate association with the hundreds of walk-up projects all over Puerto Rico. By erasing the memory of the previous structures it also eliminates the possibility of reading its presence as integral to the vitality of that specific city context. The illusion created is all the more violent because in reclaiming a ‘new’ project, it actively negates the old one, which was still very much in existence. Difference or diversity is erased from the ‘newness’ being promoted. Except for its name, there is no attempt, however minimal, to retain any element of ‘Las Gladiolas’ or trace of its ‘community’, as understood by residents- much less the ensuing protest therein. This *naming* (by omission) makes the endeavour appear to be one that works with rather than against the community- extending and improving its life, rather than dramatically altering its space, residents, and surroundings.



Figure 6.21. 'Walk-Ups as the new Las Gladiolas.' Source: Díaz Alcaide Primera Hora, 7 March 2008.



Figure 6.22. Setting up a 'Las Gladiolas' (2006) documentary screening inside community centre. Source: Author.

This cold static portrayal removes any ties to a fixed group of people and introduces instead what Blomely (2004: 92) otherwise calls ‘a postcolonial geography of property’. This presupposes that those who lived there are somehow failed urban subjects, making the take-over of their space legitimate. Of course, in Puerto Rico, this is still very much a colonial articulation as well. It reproduces the same kind of discriminating effects that linked gendered bodies (in this case, their absence) to race, which Duany (2003) noted in his analysis described in Chapter 2 of colonial photographic collections and island-knowledge. It also works according to the general technocratic planning tendencies discussed by Lefebvre (1996: 98) and introduced in Chapter 3 in relation to the Planning Board and *Criollo* elites’ actions, where part of the scientism ‘that transposes all that comes from history and consciousness into spatial terms’ responds to ‘an ideology, a functionalism which reduces urban society to the achievement of a few predictable and prescribed functions laid out on the ground by the architecture’. That is, it draws from and reinscribed the old belief that society’s problems and solutions can be addressed through a spatial fix.

Together, these features, including Laboy’s acknowledgment that this was something he had to ‘deal with’ in order to persuade others about the veracity of their plans, produce the discursive effect of truth. Supported by architectural models, the modern ‘themes’ of cleanliness, order and hygiene are once again projected as solution, while all forms of difference, deviation, and deterioration- of ‘others’ as they have come to be known through time- are effectively excluded. I would argue that just like the stereotyped images analyzed in Chapters 3-4 which idealized certain kinds of national citizenships via the exclusion or explicit discrimination of others in gendered, raced and classed terms, the blurring of difference and distinctions in these new ‘conceptualized spaces’ (Lefebvre 1991: 39) produced by a certain kind of technocrat (architects, housing authorities, urbanists) is replacing those older instruments of representation as the new modern visual technologies facilitating urban transformation in a more silent, yet- given the power of visual images today- much more pervasive way than before.

Acknowledging its power, the model was immediately used by the PRPHA in the newspaper article not so much to reassure residents in the way Laboy spoke of above, but rather to mediate, control and veer the conflict and public



opinion their way. The article used the spatial metaphor of ‘concentration of poverty’ to describe the old Las Gladiolas as ‘a bunker’ - a rhetoric that hides the complex socio-spatial forces that give rise to poverty in the first place and is commonly used to justify American federal demolitions as a way to disperse low-income residents (Crump 2002: 584-586), and to provide a legitimate basis for ‘saving’ residents from such demonized conditions through the new spatial ‘community’ fix: demolition and walk-ups. This is a recycled discourse of ‘saving’ poor or downtrodden individuals, integral to the earliest programs of urban reconfiguration and public housing construction. The imposition of abstract middle-class standards of living which removed gender and race from the spatial apparatus in a seemingly benign (absent) way is here reintroduced through the divisions that mixed-income occupancy implies. It silently pursues an agenda of mixed-income housing based on the renewed belief of low/middle class interaction. Recent studies have shown (Arthurson 2010:58) that ‘any interaction is likely to be too low level to make any difference to social integration or other anticipated benefits of social mix.’

But the newspaper article ‘acted’ against, rather than for residents in yet another way. Quoting Laboy, it explicitly said that Mirta, GV’s leader, would not have a shot at returning to those walk-ups because of lack or late rental payments (Diaz Alcaide 2008). The idea behind making her exclusion from new housing arrangements so public can be interpreted in two ways: one, that it gave Laboy, so caught up in the personalization of the struggle described in the methodology chapter, the chance to make his triumph known, thereby reasserting his power over those who dare to protest against him or the Housing Agency; and/or, that it disincentivizes future public housing residents from protesting in the way (rebellious and highly vocal) which Mirta had. Whatever the reason, the belief in using newspaper articles to announce actions and developments in what was going to be pursued- by either parties- was a common tool of their politics. Like all stories of Las Gladiolas published on the internet, this one was followed by a string of denigrating remarks and user- comments celebrating not only the destruction of the towers, but the fact that this ‘welfare mother’- which is how Mirta was tacitly framed- would finally go and stop complaining<sup>13</sup>. Certainly, if anything, this negotiation with “Gladiolas’ as a publicized idea and model clearly demonstrates what Staeheli (2008: 17) found in her own work with Arab community organizations in the United States: that ‘community based action can actually put the community

in some peril and subject them to greater control and surveillance' and that, she continues, ' [while] visibility may be an important strategy for empowering communities and ushering them into the polity...it is an entry, however, that does not come easily or without a cost'.

Within the article, the Housing Secretary, Jorge Rivera, also announced the 'modern design' as 'all new, all public' (*ibid.*). In doing so, he portrayed the act of demolition as a noble and progressive one that would benefit an ambiguous 'public'. By completely disregarding the fact that what existed there was already fully 'public', it also signals a shift towards a new and much more limited conceptualization of what the PRPHA understood by an urban public<sup>14</sup>. One can glimpse at what this 'public' meant to them by paying attention to the words used in the PRPHA declarations of the 'Conclusion and Prayer' section of the lawsuit (which came accompanied by the same picture of the new Gladiolas published in the newspaper as a 'material' piece of evidence). It said:

'...the only route *for the benefit of the public interest* is to demolish such towers and to build a new complex for the current residents, *if they are eligible for such a privilege*' (*ibid.*, 6: my emphasis).

Together, the words and image sought to shift the Court's attention away from the evident neglect of maintenance sustained, and towards the promise of an improved physical future. Above, the issue of residents' *right* to housing was subsumed here by the occupational status of 'privilege'. This neo-liberal market logic occludes the fact that new mixed-income developments are, by design, incapable of housing all original residents due to a net decrease in housing units, and that a selection process is inevitable. By implication, the public interest being referred to here was an abstract public- *not* the residents- who would benefit from the displacement of non-'eligible' tenants. By framing the results of that process as an advantage rather than a necessity, it suggests that this unquestionably good and new special status should be worked for, rather than it being an unfair circumstance to be opposed. It is, therefore, inherently disciplining; a feature which David Harvey (1989: 126-27) has argued is central to urban politics and the uneven production of space appearing innovative (like the model).

This does not mean, however, that the image produced ceased to ‘work’ in other political ways- as part of a process, rather than a fixed product. I already mentioned that GV was using their own images of the towers as emblematic of their struggle at the same time, and that Arcadio and others were struggling to make other visual and expertise evidence like photographs of parts of the towers’ deteriorated spaces part of the evidence that would be relevant to the case, and of the media images of protest. Thus, while they all centred very narrowly on the physical space of the towers, the public elements entering the debate were of an entirely different nature. One was based on eradicating the buildings portrayed as ruinous and the other on reclaiming, retaining and returning that space to a habitable status.

### **Conclusion**

The ramifications of the privatization and security policies explored in Chapter 5- themselves an answer to the purported failure of early public housing models- as well as the technical determinism that continued to dominate urban planning ideologies and practices since its origins, meant that the materiality of the buildings became central to GV’s dispute against urban marginality and exclusion. As the last high-rise development left in the centre of the city, notable for a history of criminality and its physical deterioration, the towers became a symbol of struggle between the ‘failed’ gendered and raced subjects of public housing programs and the neo-liberal ideologies of progress infiltrating San Juan’s city space. Today, it stands out as a register of long-standing social and political battles between residents and the State. The historical weight of its stigma and the actual experiences of life therein produced mixed senses of community and loss which influenced the way resistance was consequently waged against displacement and demolition. As I have argued here, the current struggles over those processes also need to be understood as generated and negotiated through that very physicality.

On the one hand, the community organization Gladiolas Vive - its mixed leadership styles, productive ambiguities and multiple associations- was the response to what were felt to be purposeful abuses and neglect over both their lives and their living spaces. Exploring the performance and varying allegiances through which GV manifest itself was important because it pointed towards the need *not* to take community for granted as a unified collective, but

as something that expresses itself multiply, even, contradictorily and which is in a continuous state of flux and production. It questions the very notion of 'politics' as a public and unified front, and proposes paying attention to the spaces- both social and physical- through which less recognized forms of community resistance and authority-making are being waged. The political syntax of Gladiolas Vive, which emerged as a formal protest against deterioration, displacement, demolition, and as an alternative to the old tenants' association, involved internal and external relationships to people and organizations as well as integral connections to the material environment which enveloped them. It had a 'cause': a narrative, a name, leaders and supporting actors and a unified voice that denounced one common enemy: deterioration/displacement/demolition, embodied by the PRPHA director, Laboy. But upon closer inspection, its history was more complicated; the leaders themselves had discrepant representational styles and practices, and its actual 'members' rarely spoke of it as a solid organization of unity.

Thus, GV was lived and performed through residents' ambiguous associations to it, where they paradoxically supported and distanced themselves from the cause. This *lack of* unity or political will speaks to the real environment of contestation within which their support emerged with mixed senses of fear, blame, tiredness and/or inevitability. It shows that the 'public face' of GV was therefore a kind of 'imagined community' (Anderson 1983) where 'the unifying process required by group representation tries to freeze fluid relations into a unified identity which can recreate oppressive exclusions' (Young 2000: 122). Their promoted 'unified identity' was above all an identity based on the common experience of infrastructural neglect.

Yet, as much as it was 'imagined' and detrimental in forging a more sustainable movement from within, it was also integral to how GV manifested itself and how its leaders handled and negotiated its informal membership base successfully. They had to learn to deal with the fact that deterioration and neglect were conditions that, on the one hand, favoured unification and, on the other, facilitated the disintegration of community by pushing people out. This reality, which led to the loss of many residents, also determined the forms and extent of allegiances that were sought outside the community for support. The weakening of internal connections pushed their 'militant particularism' (Harvey 1989: 200) towards an essential collectivization for their struggle's

survival. By broadening their political challenge, their local issues were slowly becoming connected to the global contestations against urban displacement and rights.

In addition to these social processes, I argued that at its core, the battle for and against demolition was also a ‘politics in matter’- a multi-layered struggle over the transformation of urban space whose physical properties had symbolic undertones traversed by gendered, raced and classed ideologies attached to it. In previous chapters we saw how Las Gladiolas’s walls and buildings had already gained wider cultural significance as powerful signifiers of the discriminated raced and classed bodies that inhabited them. As the structures became centralized in the contestations over space, those old underlying layers of class and race distinctions were also surfaced in the discussions and debates that ensued about the future of Las Gladiolas and its residents, with murals, elevators, and architectural design becoming crucial spaces through which that battle was fought. These ‘artefacts’ - which residents had to live with and negotiate on a day to day-basis- were being produced and contested as physical, but also discursive platforms for political purposes. They defined many of the terms of the struggle against demolition and they filtered and enacted certain kinds of discriminations as well. The architectural model presented in the end acted as an abstract object of authority that attempted to redefine the imagined but politically powerful terms of what counts as valid urban community space today. It gave an indication of how this ‘modern’ artefact gets translated as ‘true’ representation, subsumes contestations over (and through) public housing space and typologies, and thereby repeats histories of spatial forms of exclusion. As a tool of urban development, it demonstrates how white middle-class economic prosperity and the erasure of gendered and raced signs of poverty continue to operate institutionally both as ideal and as practice.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>For a more detailed analysis of the use of public *plazas* and its spatial and cultural significance in Puerto Rico, see Vivoni Farage, E. and S. Álvarez Curbelo, Eds. (1998).

<sup>2</sup>The event was called *‘El Bombazo del Segundo Abrazo Solidario’*. The word *bombazo* derives from *Bomba* which is a traditional Puerto Rican music genre that emerged during the period of slavery, combining African and Spanish elements and resulting in a fused style of music, singing and dancing. Its African roots and social and political dimensions are reflected in its dress, improvised choruses, drum and dance challenges. Thus, calling an event *Bombazo* has immediate cultural resonance, particularly as an expression of national pride through ties to a resistant African and/or Latin history to colonial influences. It also carries a strong festive undertone. As a kind of political event, *abrazos* (hugs) begun decades before in other public housing projects protesting against cultures of violence (Sepúlveda 2002; Cotto 2007).

<sup>3</sup>For instance, on the the ‘Puerto Rican Day for the Eradication of Poverty’ in October 2007, the local chapter of Amnesty International held its press conference in Las Gladiolas from where Mirta issued the following statement: ‘As long as we continue to be stepped on, we will unite even more because we have the same needs. We will continue battling it out. Now, we have support networks between marginalized sectors that we did not have before’ (Solórzano García: 2007).

<sup>4</sup>*Santeros* are the official practitioners of the fused Afro-Caribbean religion *Santería*. Colors are significantly associated to the *orishas* or, gods, of this voodooesque practice (Quinetro Rivera 2003).

<sup>5</sup>It was called ‘Proyecto Experimental de Auto-Gestión y Desarrollo Comunitario en Forma Integral’ (Experimental Project of self-management and Community Development in Integral Way) consisting of three proposals: (a) an experimental one (Proyecto Podemos), (b) a community organization one (Proyecto Organiza-te) and (c) a maintenance one (Plan de Mantenimiento).

<sup>6</sup>Translated: *It’s more of the same.*

<sup>7</sup>Translated: *Hanging out with friends*

<sup>8</sup>For some of the latest discussions of Reggaetón’s history and recent cultural influence and relationship to spaces such as *caseríos*, discussed briefly in the introduction, see: Dinzey Flores, Zaire Zenit. 2009. “De la Disco al Caserío: Urban Spatial Aesthetics and Policy to the Beat of Reggaetón.” *Centro: Journal of the Center for Puerto Rican Studies* (Forthcoming), Z. Rivera, Raquéel, Deborah Pacini Hernández and Wayne Marshall eds. 2009. *Reading Reggaetón: Historical, Aesthetic and Critical Perspectives: An anthology of scholarly articles, critical essays, interviews and creative writings on reggaetón.*

<sup>9</sup>Footage of the evening also available at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2CXRN0H0L0>

<sup>10</sup>The death of Filiberto Ojeda, graphically represented in the mural, had marked a resurgence in Puerto Rican independent and nationalist anti-American sentiment, bringing the discussion over status, local autonomy and American imperialism back to the mainstream. Activists, protestors, journalists and other ‘sympathizers’ began to be targeted and censored by the police and the government through raids, arrests and brutality in a way that brought to popular memory the nationalist and pro-independence political repressions of the 1930’s and the late 1970’s (For more on that era, see Dávila 1997).

<sup>11</sup> Some particularly poignant discussions over the cultural and political production as well as personal reception/perception of walls are: Berthold, J's 'The Idea of Human Walls'; Petet, J's, 'The Writing on the Walls: The Graffiti of the Intifada'; Sukkar, A's, 'MeWall'; Teresa Caldeira's 'City of Walls: Crime, Segregation, and Citizenship in Sao Paulo'; and, Weizman, E's, 'Hollow land: Israel's architecture of occupation'.

<sup>12</sup> This was especially evident through the reader comments that emerged from that published article, where the self-described 'middle-class' citizens of the island were in an uproar over the physical similitude of their expensive walk-up projects to these 'free' ones to be handed-out to the undeserving poor. They reveal the social ripples that an image- as representation of the real- can both draw on and provoke.

<sup>13</sup> One has only to read the uncensored 'readers' comments posted on-line after Gladiolas stories are published in the local newspapers, or short videos posted on 'Youtube.com' , to get a sense of how they are filled with dense social, political and cultural disdain, historically attributed to public housing.

<sup>14</sup> This was now guided by a federal 'deconcentration of poverty' policy, which sought to bring higher-income households into lower-income developments or lower-income households into higher-income developments.

## **Chapter 7**

*Realojo:*

**Legal process and moving out**



## 7.1. Introduction

<p><u>Tema 3</u></p> <p>Coro 1 (se repite 2 veces)</p> <p>- Te hablan de emergencia fátala, también de mercado privado, te la ponen bien bonita. es un engaño tapado</p> <p>Coro 2 (se repite 2 veces)</p> <p>- filtraciones, ratas, sabandijas y gran suciedad las trajo Realjo en gran cantidad</p> <p>Coro 3 (se repite 2 veces)</p> <p>- Realjo ilegal y sin freno autor principal de todo este embudo</p> <p>Coro 4 (se repite 2 veces)</p> <p>- no pedimos el Realjo ni tampoco la implosión repudiamos desalojo queremos restauración</p> <p>¡Gladiolas Vive! (se repite 2 veces)</p> <p>Implosión <u>NO</u></p> <p>Restauración <u>SI</u> (se repite 2 veces)</p>	<p><b>Theme 3</b></p> <p>Chorus 1 (repeat 2 times)</p> <p>They speak of a false emergency, also of private market, they make it sound real pretty. But it's a covered-up deceit.</p> <p>-o-</p> <p>Chorus 2 (repeat 2 times)</p> <p>Leaks, rats, creepy-crawlers and great dirtiness</p> <p><b>brought by Realjo in great quantities</b></p> <p>-o-</p> <p>Chorus 3 (repeat 2 times)</p> <p><b>Illegal and unrestrained Realjo,</b></p> <p>principal author of this whole mess</p> <p>-o-</p> <p>Chorus 4 (repeat 2 times)</p> <p><b>We didn't ask for Realjo nor the implosion</b></p> <p>We repudiate our removal</p> <p>We want restoration!</p> <p>Gladiolas Vive! (repeat 2 times)</p> <p>Implosion <u>NO</u></p> <p>Restoration <u>YES</u> (repeat 2 times)</p>
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Figure 7.1. Theme from 'Gladiolas Vive' street protest.

Deterioration, in its many forms, was the main issue all actors of the Las Gladiolas struggle focused on to either support or challenge the order for demolition. Its implied process of degeneration has been discursively and materially associated to the public housing 'others' of urban space- in gendered, raced and classed terms- in ways that, historically, have facilitated authoritative interventions and spatial transformations. In the case of Las Gladiolas, the experience and condition of the towers' corrosion produced not just complex senses of loss and disapproval between and amongst residents; it also provided a palpable conduit through which to come together to wage their community battle against implosion. Decay was therefore not just a side effect, but a central element framing narratives of public housing's past, present and future at once. This active engagement with its material manifestations- both by the GV organization and the proponents of future public housing- was not an arbitrary one since, at its very core, deterioration was the principal mechanism through which displacement was not only made possible, but for many, also necessary. As such, it was an instrument gradually facilitating a form of urban renewal based on the erasure of long-standing markers of poverty and difference. But, as the GV protest theme above indicates, deterioration was not only seen by residents as an individual phenomenon creating the conditions for an inevitable removal (or *Realojo* - as the process, offices, and workers of displacement were called); crucially, it was also believed to have been purposefully and illegally produced by *Realojo*'s intimidating threats and practices. Thus, perceived as both the creator *and* enforcer of their demise, *Realojo* was a nexus that tied the many ends of their battle together. Giving-in to them was seen as a weakening force to GV's struggle, while challenging it and staying put was the ultimate act of individual and group resistance.

In this final chapter, I explore how residents learned to perform (or not) such defiance through the other important actor of the conflict which I had left unexplored until now: the legal realm. As already mentioned, the language and practice of rights turned into a major element of social movements since the 1970's when legal assistance clinics and lawyers became integrally connected to them. The 'juridical' shift of political culture has also been a growing tendency in the island more generally, where political culture is controlled by party politics, and led mainly by lawyers (Torres Martínez 2005). Las Gladiolas has not been exempt from this wider context. Specifically, since the order for demolition went through in early 2006, their battle has been intricately tied

to the lawyers of the UPR Legal Assistance Clinic who drafted their class-action law-suit and defended them *pro bono*- both as a group and, often times, as individuals. Since one of the claims made within their legal suit later that year was that the illegally-placed order for demolition made the pursuance of relocation accordingly improper, the presence of *Realojo* in their towers made residents engage in a very concrete way with what was otherwise an abstract sense of legality; it forced them to get to know and exercise their rights around housing alternatives. As the lines of the ‘chorus’ above so clearly demonstrate, I will argue that the ‘legal’ opposition to *Realojo* worked hand-in-hand with the community politics of GV. That is, that the way residents interacted with ‘the legal’ and appropriated it for their individual or communal purposes extended ‘legality’ beyond the limits of the formal lawsuit to the realm of the experiential, making it something that was intimately bound to their shifting sense of political subjectivity and articulations of home.

My analysis is informed by the idea the law is an active and heterogeneous process whose meaning and relationships we cannot assume to know by merely focusing on its textual discourse or ‘result’. Following on with my work’s cross-cutting concern with the discursive and material reproduction of urban difference through practices, ideologies and representations of ‘othering’, I draw on the notion that legal discourses can frame narratives about social margins and centres and should therefore be analysed not just through its textual outcomes, but also through its heterogeneous nature as discourse, artefact *and* process (Palmié 1996: 185). That, as Foucault (1970; 1979 and with Gordon 1980) argued, the discipline and power of the law is part of a larger modern ‘truth-production’ apparatus- intimately connected to other exercises of discipline and institutional and judicial procedures, like the ones explored from Chapters 3 to 5. When analysing such processes, one needs to also be attentive to the cultural and political context that constructs a notion and practice of ‘justice’ in highly localized ways, including its gendered dimensions<sup>1</sup> (Molyneux 2007: 59). Therefore, I take the discussion of the Gladiolas lawsuit away from its written corpus and towards its everyday practices (Baitenmann, Chenaut et al. 2007), via *Realojo*. That is, rather than taking law/justice for granted as an understood and homogeneously-practiced given, I pause to analyse some of the local cultural particularities of ‘las leyes’<sup>2</sup>- as these became evident during my time on the field- paying attention to residents’ interaction with various aspects of *Realojo*. In doing so, I want to re-emphasize the con-

temporary significance of ambiguity and negotiated resistance – of *jaibería* – not just as an analytic tool that enriches our understanding of urban changes in San Juan today, but also as a practical, localized mechanism for engaging with it.

In gesturing towards that more contextualized understanding, this chapter begins by outlining how residents gained knowledge of the particular terms of their lawsuit, followed by an examination of the often hard-to-resist housing options offered to residents, as well as the mechanisms they had at their disposal for resisting (or not) the advances made by relocation officials. Finally, I dedicate the last section of the Chapter and thesis to the story of Edna – a resident who was declared an illegal squatter upon returning to her Gladiolas apartment after having already been relocated. Her case is a clear example of how the purported objectivity of the law is tainted by moments of legalized and gendered neglect, as well as preferential treatment. It shows that the ‘others’ of urban space have had to deal with and learn to interact with the idiosyncrasies of the law in practice (Holston 2008). As some anthropologists have noted, those inconsistencies – between ideal and reality, law and practice, local custom and state legislation – become particularly marked in colonial contexts such as Puerto Rico (Harris 1997, 9; Comaroff 1999). That fundamental lived disjuncture between law and justice is – according to Derrida (1992: 15) – where ‘the experience of the impossible’ becomes evident. It is also, I argue, the ambivalent location from where public housing ‘others’ are carving out their resistance.

## **7.2. The Right to Stay Put**

### **First encounters with relocation**

‘We fought because before, the offices of relocation said ‘relocation’. I mean, we went to court because according to them they said those were not offices of relocation because they’re there to help people that *voluntarily* want to go...And we were like, ‘No way- that’s a lie!’ You can’t imagine the confidence with which they’d just say that in court. And everyone wanted to just scream out: ‘You liars!’” (Lara, interview, 2006).

When the *Realojo* (relocation) office opened on Tower A's ground/lobby floor in 2005 *despite the fact* that HUD had not yet approved of the local authority's demolition application for Las Gladiolas, a group of residents put up their first legal fight against the PRPHA by contesting the way that office was advertising itself. They argued that the placard nailed above the office's door reading *Realojo* was, at best, a form of false advertisement or worse, illegal coercion. Its wording seemed to suggest a voluntary act of movement from the part of residents rather than highlighting the imposed and, according to them, illegal nature of their displacement. They therefore used the law as a tool against that felt injustice, while making a claim about the uses and limits of certain residential spaces such as lobbies; in this case, the right to be free from visual coercion. But, as Lara's words above indicate, the legal process was also laden with injustice. Her frustration before *Realojos'* lies in Court immediately calls to our attention the nuanced views and experiences of justice and legality. That is, as her personal circumstances of having to face *Realojo* on a daily basis 'politicized' her, she began to see protests, demonstrations, and legal confrontation as integral to the movement.

Even though the PRPHA and relocation officials were ordered by Court that year (2005) to replace that original disputed placard with one that read 'Vivienda' (Housing) - because the latter was more linguistically 'transparent', those involved in the process could not deny that they had witnessed another institutionalized mechanism of exclusion in practice. While replacing the sign constituted a small group victory over those who normally had power over them, the fact that the office was still encroached upon the space of the towers confronted people's resolve to stay put. In light of what was to come the following years, changing that placard seems to have been merely an act of momentary and symbolic appeasement. Yet from its contentious beginnings, that office- its workers and actions- became the embodiment of 'the enemy inside', representative of the abusive powers of the PRPHA. The pressures it enacted compelled many to leave, thereby impacting the numbers of supporters and strength of 'Gladiolas Vive'. It also provided yet another example of how the space of the building acted not just as backdrop, but as one of the negotiated aspects of the lived struggle. Placards on top of doors and an office in a lobby became the stuff of legal dispute and political contestation.

A year after that first legal encounter, the PRPHA announced that HUD had formally approved the towers' demolition. Far from being intimidated, it was then that 'Gladiolas Vive' legally incorporated itself as a non-profit organization before the State Department. Allying themselves with the UPR legal assistance clinic and their pro-bono team, it presented the first class-action lawsuit of its kind in the island against both local and federal housing instances<sup>3</sup>. The previous chapter detailed some internal community mechanisms through which this association, already in existence loosely as an informal association called 'Residents in Action', came to be. With the aid of Mirta Morales and her team of student lawyers, the group claimed that the lack of maintenance evident in the towers was directly and intentionally linked to the determination of demolishing Las Gladiolas (this is called a *de facto* demolition, or, demolition by neglect, whose causes and consequences were discussed before), and that there had been a lack of consultation with residents required by federal HUD regulation in the development of the application for demolition approval. Consequently, they asked that the order for demolition be reverted; that the 5-year PRPHA plan for Federal Years 2000-2004 during which the demolition determination was considered be reviewed; that the buildings be maintained in full operating condition with full housing services; and that all relocation activities cease. That final demand took relocation and displacement away from the sphere of 'effects' and brought it in squarely within the terms of legal engagement. That is, for the lawsuit to be resolved, they wanted relocation to get temporarily halted.

As discussed in the introduction, directing their accusations at both the local and federal government levels at once stressed the ambiguous colonial location of the Puerto Rican authority in relation to the American one and highlighted the hierarchies embedded in the island's 'double coloniality of power', also explored in Chapter 3. While the claim being made by residents was not a nationalist one, the fact that it was aimed at those various levels of government and that it was a 'class'-action (i.e., group-based), made it political at its core. By engaging with various sites of their own differentiation at once (colonial, political, housing), residents disrupted the traditional relations of power, while paradoxically perpetuating entrenched systems of domination. They used the very same legal mechanisms whose legitimacy is granted by the colonial 'father' as weapons to resist the normal state of legal and political affairs which conceals the way in which the U.S. is also responsible for how

local conditions play out. Thus, this can therefore be understood as another instance of *jaibería* put in practice- where a simultaneous opposition and collusion with systems of domination was being consciously performed in order to hopefully gain more rights or advantages in the long-run. In a way, the entire law-suit was an example of the many elements and multi-scalar politics that make up the slippery and often ungraspable practice of modern colonialism.

Furthermore, the allegations made in the lawsuit, which included the neglected space of the elevators and stairwells from Chapter 6, but also cisterns, parking spaces, and other communal facilities, brought to the surface the extent to which the materiality of the towers legitimately permeated the space of the legal; with its discourse accepted by both sides as a natural part of the struggle. In the GV chorus above, for example, the state of the buildings was brought to bear (leaks, rats, creep-crawlers and dirtiness) in reference to their preference for a technical process of restoration, rather than implosion [Figure 6.1]. Thus, the claims made were not abstract, but grounded on the materiality of the buildings as structural deterioration with a history, and as part of the community's spatial, social and legal neglect. Given how significant the legal case became to residents' daily lives- i.e., their decisions to either stay or move out- it is not an exaggeration to say that the demands contained within the lawsuit were not only textually important, but that once they were made judicially legitimate, the case itself became fundamentally linked to how people thought about, lived and shifted their senses of daily resistance. This is the type of nuanced analysis that I am interested in engaging with here.

### **Gaining and disseminating legal knowledge**

Myrta Morales was the person most involved in teaching residents their rights and informing them of the lawsuit. As the founder of the University's free legal assistance clinic and lawyer to a number of communities under imminent displacement, she was wholeheartedly committed to the case as one of structural governmental injustice against the poor of the island. Her role as an activist lawyer was far-reaching. It included: being present in most of the community meetings to provide an update of the latest developments of the case, helping organize events that publicly denounced the towers' and residents' circumstances, leading a team of students and other colleagues in moving the case forward, serving as legal adviser and friend to many residents individually when they had problems or doubts about 'the law', representing individual

cases in Court, and acting as voice to the community in various forums and activities. Residents trusted her judgment so much that when, during the latter part of 2008 she had a fall-out with one of the other collaborating lawyers, Ricardo, and was not renewed her UPR contract as professor due to a lack of publications, they attended protests organized by students and spoke out publicly in her defence.

In each community meeting I attended, she reminded them of the relevance of ‘the case’ to their future, offering them frank advice as to what the best individual and community strategies were at that particular juncture. She always insisted on the strategic nature of the law and the small-politics inherent to it, frequently calling upon her audience to ‘use’ the law as one of many tools for waging community battles. By emphasizing the manipulability of the law and the need to carry out battles in a multi-dimensional way in order to fight for justice, she was openly recognizing what Drucilla Cornell (1991: 116) noted as women lawyers’ and professors’: ‘...call to give justice...to serve justice...to work within the law but without conflating law with justice. As we work within the law we are also called to ‘remember’ the disjuncture between the law and justice’. In other words, while she instructed them on the fight for justice which their case implied and how it resonated with other international battles for housing, she also stressed the freedom they had to move out if they felt the conditions of the towers or the pressure of authorities to be unbearable. In this sense, she balanced out the pressures some could naturally be feeling, as subjects caught between being on the one hand ‘loyal’ to GV and staying, and, on the other, listening to ‘[the] whispers of futility, [the] voices that questioned whether the community could suffer the challenge of “project living” any longer’ (Venkatesh 2000: 239).

In one of the community meetings, a not so typical debate questioning the sense of ‘the law’ broke out in regards to the value and impact of civil disobedience versus other outlets, such as the media, when wanting to communicate injustice. The discussion arose following an impromptu non-institutional protest which had been staged by a small group of residents (not under the tutelage of Gladiolas Vive, but led by Arcadio alone). In June 2007, already a year into their lawsuit, a group of about seven older women had blocked the entrance of the *Realojo* offices, leading to the workers alerting the Housing Agency, the police, and some news channels. The idea, according to Arcadio,



had been to ‘make their [*Realojo* workers] lives miserable so that they know what they’re doing to us’. Myrta M., however, advised strongly against that form of protest because she argued that while civic disobedience could be useful in some instances, it did not mean that in all cases, justice would follow. Given the contentious political resonance of their case, she believed that the judge in charge of the lawsuit could interpret that action as provocative in a negative sense and consequently favour the Housing Authorities’ argument for demolition. Interestingly, while civil disobedience was framed as acceptable and condonable when pursuing nationalist causes such as the battle against American military training in the neighbouring Puerto Rican island of Vieques, it seemed that the stigma associated to them as a particular urban underclass produced this civic action as devoid of community concern. Indeed, it could be interpreted as *against* community and reflecting *caserios* civic deficiencies. And, because of how duties of social housing tenants are increasingly framed as a ‘duty and responsibility to others’ (Flint 2003: 622), this groups’ actions struck the wrong chord in that particular discourse.

From conversations held with others present, and by comments and responses voiced loudly during that meeting, Myrta’s position on the matter was clearly shared by most of those in attendance. The protestors’ actions had been conceived as reckless and rebellious; outside the boundaries of the ‘legally’ acceptable. Residents’ problems with the action, however, were not with the legality *per se* – probably due to the fact that they knew first-hand the way such legality had been responsible for so much harm in their history- but rather with the practical impact that could have on their lawsuit. That is, it could be risking the legal efforts put forth thus far, and therefore sacrificing the main reason why residents had held on to hope and stayed in the first place. Arcadio, nevertheless, remained adamant in his position and even suggested that violence may be the only logical solution left for them.

As a whole, by putting forward the advantages and limits of the law, as well as the need to sustain and rationally manage the hierarchies of the juridical apparatus (even when its mechanisms are considered to be flawed), this incident underscored the contextual, localized nature of law and justice. It also demonstrated ‘how good and acceptable behaviour is constructed within social housing governance rationale...to reinforce this desired conduct based upon the concept of the reasonable tenant’ (Flint 2004: 894). Moreover, Arcadio’s

action highlighted the fact that there were limits (which could be confronted, debated, negotiated) to how the law could control the contours of their own definitions of what was an appropriate response to injustice. Underscoring the enacted contradictions of community, where perspectives and experiences are always in competition and can be reconfigured (Staeheli 2008), he attempted to negotiate a different politics of citizen inclusion- outside the boundaries of the law.

Finally, it also severed definitively the relationship between Myrta C., the leader, and Arcadio. Both Mirtas complained to me that Arcadio was ‘losing it’ and harming their greater cause stubbornly and irresponsibly. Ricardo and Norberto, two other lawyers who also helped the community case ‘behind the scenes’, told me the same in different occasions, linking his personal dissent with his increasingly uncontrollable desire to break out of the limits of the legal case. Apparently- and worryingly for everyone that knew him well-after years of sobriety, he was ‘going back to the bottle’. Moreover, he had a very sick brother who he had to travel great distances for on a daily basis to look after which invariably made the tone of complaints against him be riddled by overtones of sadness and empathy as well. But separately, Arcadio too complained to me that he was ‘fed up’ with having to respect these more ‘civilized’ orders by Mirta and their lawyers and that it simply made no sense to him anymore to wait around while residents were harassed and leaving- a position that I could not help but understand. Soon thereafter, he began covertly letting some old tenants who had been moved into unsanitary places back into empty apartment buildings- which he somehow had the keys to. Although he never told me directly that he was doing so, I saw it in practice. Mirta C. was also aware of it, but highly disapproving of it because if authorities found out it could hurt their legal case. This highlighted once again their very different styles of activism. Since then, Arcadio began to take a secondary role in the public face of GV activities presumably, I was told on a quick visit on September 2008, having retaken to the bottle.

Information about the status of the lawsuit was not only gained through meetings such as the one described above but also through flyers and pamphlets produced by ‘Gladiolas Vive’ collaborators, designed and printed in Teresa’s office with basic ‘Word’ images and caricatures born out of her brand of educational activism for children, drafted by Myrta M.’s legal team, and dis-

tributed to people's front doors by Arcadio. This network of mobility- and its limits- was described in the previous chapter. Their end-product, the leaflets, meant to educate and alert residents of their right to stay put, encouraging them to ignore advances made by *Realojo*. Given the lack of participation in community meetings by a large part of residents, many came to know the legal parameters of the case through these texts which were not only the product of networks of support and collaboration, but entered their front doors or were wedged between their security fences. These presented a version of 'the law' and a notion of residents' rights very different to the one distributed in letters and notices issued by the private administration company (American Management) or the *Realojo* office. Instead of being dictated their responsibilities as tenants or told about the negative repercussions which certain actions could result in, they were here reminded of their ability to stay put as legal subjects with rights, without fear for negative consequences. In particular, they had the right, 'not to be harassed in your apartment by AVP or *Realojo* functionaries...not to be removed from your apartment before a judicial process of expropriation is carried out...to resist going to the *Realojo* office, deny their visits to your apartment and not sign any document' [Figure 7.2].

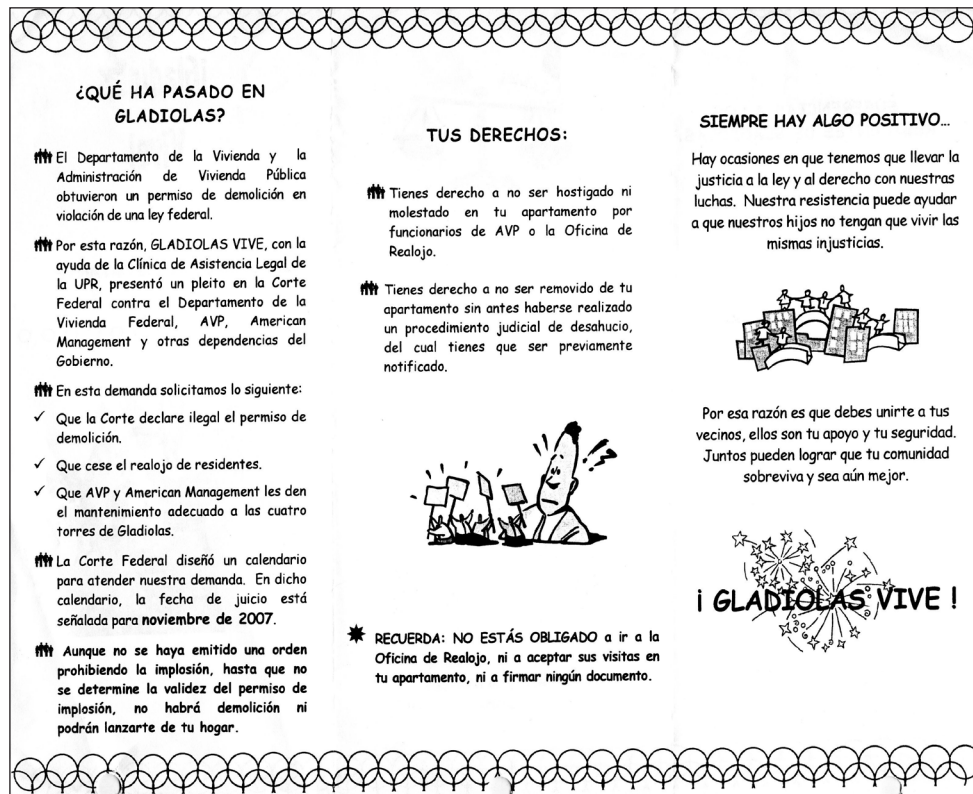


Figure 7.2. Example of ‘Gladiolas Vive’ legal flyer produced by UPR legal clinic.

This legal advice tacitly acknowledged the relentless tactics employed by *Realajo* who were continuously sending letters inviting residents to their offices in order to offer alternative housing and help with their moving out and frequented apartments in person to ‘inform’ them of their housing options. With residents caught in this war of letters, leaflets and information, the moment in which office workers came knocking at their door, they were faced with an opportunity outside the Courts of justice to engage and practice whatever version they had picked-up of ‘the law’ and their rights. While visits were often met with feelings of fear and intimidation, it was also expressed by many as moments of pride when challenging authority was possible. Before entering a more detailed discussion about how they exercised this agency, it is first important to understand what the choices offered were, and how those options, as an integral component of the *Realajo* strategy, were understood.

### Housing options

The most common housing alternative offered to residents came under the Section 8 programme which many called, interchangeably, ‘mercado privado’ [private market]. Section 8 is a federal programme that provides subsidies for

low-income families to rent housing in the private housing market. There is both municipal and state-level Section 8, and there are two types of systems that grant this subsidy: the ‘certificate’ (where family income cannot exceed rent) or the ‘voucher’ (a contract that exceeds rent and the participant pays the difference). The other main option was moving to a different public housing project, ranging from the relatively close-by to the very far, the most popular of which were: Manuel A. Pérez, Las Casas, Margaritas, Los Lirios or Las Camelias. None of these, however, were as centrally located nor close to amenities and public transport as Las Gladiolas was.

Each of these alternatives was surrounded by rumours or stories from friends, family members, acquaintances or ex-neighbours who had some piece of inside knowledge of what those new places were ‘really’ like. In a context where moving represented the loss of social networks, these bits of information proved crucial for making decisions. For example, even though Las Camelias was close, a friend of a friend who worked in the private management company of that project told a resident that it was apparently in the process of getting sold, thus making it an insecure and undesirable option as a permanent home. In a community meeting, Arcadio once added much-needed humour to the intricacies embedded in these confusing choices, telling residents to ‘reject any offers of Las Camelias! If they come offering, tell them, ‘Why would we want Camelias when we already have Gladiolas<sup>4</sup>?’ Mirta once was about to accept an offer to relocate when an old friend who she had contacted to ‘find out’ what she was really being offered called her to let her know the new place would not be as good as what she had now. She immediately rejected the offer, upsetting those who thought they’d ‘finally gotten rid of her’. Others were felt to be false promises made ‘de la boca pa’ fuera’ [from the mouth out, meaning they were untrue]. One resident who had recently gone to visit one of the housing projects she was being offered warned others in a small community meeting: ‘There’s no balconies like they say in the new apartments. You just asphyxiate in there.’ She was tacitly drawing on a common appreciation for the scale and division of spaces of the apartments in Las Gladiolas, most of which had large breezy balconies, and which many feared they would lose out on if they moved. Still other locations were feared for having a reputation of being spaces of heavy drug trafficking and crime, circumstances that had already made most of them live through the harsh policies of *Mano Dura*, and which the mothers I spoke with did not want their children exposed to

again. One mother- I was told by another- had to return to Gladiolas because of the problems (unspecified- but given the content of our conversation- it was implied to be drug-related) which her son had gotten involved in. Such double displacement underlines the gendered nature of relocation, when it is the mother, as single parent, who has to deal with the consequences of a problematic movement. This will be explored in more detail in the second section of the chapter.

But *regardless* of where the final destination was, most cited the distance from the city centre and loss of transportation routes as a negative element that would result from moving. Relocating would be a loss of life in the city as they knew it. As discussed in the introduction, this was an especially infuriating element because it was felt that Gladiolas's prime location was the main factor driving their displacement and the city's gentrification. Many were also sceptical of 'moving-to-opportunity', as the programme of Section 8 is called, because stories travelled about how ex-residents had suffered traumatic changes in lifestyle, location and status, ending up 'out of place' in their new middle-class neighbourhoods with pools. Neighbours would not speak to them because of their social stigma and children suffered an un-grounding uprootedness. These experiences suggest that, like the discriminations which movement from slums to public housing implied in the history of the island's socio-spatial geographies, these new 'modern' relocations continue to transpose the stigma of inferiority onto the bodies of those who come from public housing, even if they are living in a middle-class home and neighbourhood. That is, the movement says something about 'the tenacity of stigmas' (Hastings and Dean 2002: 178). But they also demonstrate active negotiation by tenants around the consumption of public housing as a 'product'. They were very involved in making their own decisions, even when administrators seemed to be creating an environment that was neither transparent nor easy to decipher in terms of choices.

There was a rumour going around while I was there that once Section 8 vouchers or the subsidized private market rent from government ran out, this would only lead to being moved around again, with little, if any personal choice in the matter. Elisa explained this succinctly below:

'When people ask me about private market, I tell them, 'Look, that's a lie! When that money runs out, what are they gonna say to you?' 'Hey,

you there, Manuel A. Pérez, take it or leave it.' ...But the owner of the house is not gonna tell you, '*Ay bendito!* [Oh, poor thing!] Look how good she is.' No *mi amor, lamentablemente* [No my love, unfortunately] 'You've got a month left!'" (Elisa, interview, 2006).

Human compassion, she argued, would not enter new negotiations of relocation when the private market ran out of resources. By that point, it would be too late to ensure any benefit from either staying or moving. The lawyers from the legal clinic reconfirmed to residents that, '...many alternatives of housing that are being given to people are no good because a lot of the people being relocated in the private market are having horrible problems.' They cited a highly publicized corruption investigation of the Section 8 program, led by the federal government, which had put the financial security of the private market option in question<sup>5</sup>. If the federal government issued funding freezes and the PRPHA could not pay their share of the rent indefinitely, this would leave residents at the mercy of landlords' wills. It was feared, much like Elisa's statement above, that the privatized nature of Section 8 itself would make landlords incur in all sorts of abuses against residents with greater impunity than the PRPHA. This frightening prospect impelled many to 'keep up the fight'.

All these kinds of rumours served as essential 'news' avenues through which people could acquire knowledge about potential places to move to or not. It provided a filter for more informed decision-making within an environment that they felt was covertly trying to deceive them. The stories seemed to imply that if displacement was resisted, those who remained could benefit from what (what?) was to come. But the future was highly uncertain, as it would ultimately ride on the judge's determination of their class action law-suit- a fact which they were reminded about in every leaflet distributed or meeting attended. So, the more they waited could also result in ultimately getting the 'short end of the stick'. Additionally, everyday they were losing neighbourhood networks- crucial forms of social capital they had built over the years and come to rely on. In this sense, some of the housing options given provided either the possibility of new associations or the continuation of old ones, if family or friends had already been transferred to another project or district. Coming to a final decision on the matter was so confusing and traumatic, that it was not uncommon to hear that a neighbour had moved surreptitiously

during the evening or early in the morning, so as to avoid any kind of confrontation or questioning of allegiances by fellow neighbours. Noticing that someone else had left was, to say the least, demoralizing. Every time it occurred, the rest had to re-question and re-affirm their place and position in relation to relocation and to GV. They had to re-assess home. While it is beyond the scope of this work, it would be important to look at the impact this subsequently had on those who stayed *and* those who move, in terms of reformed conceptualizations of loyalty and friendship, as connected to the construction of new communities, associations and spaces. The negotiation of stigmas is another area to be explored. While I was there, it was widely said that children were experiencing trauma from the moves and frequently returning to the towers to 'hang out' because they were unhappy and felt out of place in their new homes. One person was rumoured to have committed suicide from the stress.

### **Resisting advances**

Faced with so many housing options, residents frequently spoke about their reactions to *Realajo*, multiply understood as an office, its workers, and their actions, as henchmen of the PRPHA for enforcing relocation. In all of my interviews, as well as meetings and assemblies attended, it was clear that the harassment of *Realajo* officers was not met with simple acceptance:

'They send you letters. Go over to your house and tell you 'you gotta go'. The last time they came around I told them they were wasting their time- that I wasn't leaving. ...They came like four times and told me I had to move because if I didn't leave I'd have to look for other alternatives but I told them that my only alternative was staying here until I wanted to' (Virginia, notes from community meeting, Jan. 2007).

'They tell me I have to go. They send me letters almost every day. Sometimes two of them come, sometimes one, telling me I have to move. They ask me where I want to go but when I tell them they say, 'No, no, no, not there'. I feel bad when they come around... How am I going to go to a place I don't know? To Bayamón, Canales, Trujillo Alto... This is where all my people are...' (Ana, Segundo Bombazo del Abrazo Solidario, 2007).

These statements made by two residents are highly representative of the kinds of complaints made about *Realajos'* presence, particularly in relation to the



constant flow of letters issued by that office and the visits made by their workers to people's front doors. Both were clearly aware of the fact that, although being told to leave, this was not an order they had to follow. They knew they had a right to stay. While Virginia, who lived alone, was fearless in her decision to reject offers made, Ana 'felt bad' about the choices given because of their affront to her sense of community in Gladiolas ('where all my people are'). Despite the noted difference in emotional registers, both actively opposed and resisted moving out, armed with the knowledge that they had the right to stay put. This did not mean, however, that the process was lived calmly.

Many spoke of the negative health impact, especially psychological, these visits and threats had produced. That is, they often connected relocation pressures (and lack of maintenance) to ill-health and disease: "There's a woman there that got pressured a lot and had a brain stroke. Another one was being pressured through family court and I don't know what else, and just like that she fell in the office- slight cerebral stroke." Every resident I spoke to told me about at least one condition which they felt had started or gotten worse since the pressure to relocate began. These included: diabetes, blood pressure, bone/rheumatic conditions, heart problems, brain strokes, depression, psychosis, and even the death of others. Occasionally, I was shown lab results and pharmacy bills as a way to prove to me, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that these infirmities were real, and costly: "My blood pressure rose *so* much 'que por poco estiro yo...la pierna' [I almost died]. So I ended up with yet another problem cos' my pressure went up so high. Now I have to go to a psychiatrist." In Chapter 5, I described Mirta's experience of being in a wheelchair due to problems from going up and down the stairs, and of her son's disease, as important to the way she also framed the struggle against authorities. The role of care was clearly an important one in its obvious lack from the government; and mothers' own need to practice it under such a context. In press conferences, meetings, assemblies and personal conversations, she tended to emphasize how conditions created by them literally 'made them sick'. After some cases of haemorrhagic *dengue*- including her son's (discussed before) were diagnosed, she declared:

"...One doesn't want to live in stench, in dirtiness. If you're filling me up with that everywhere, then you're forcing me to go...So, I go because I cannot take the tension...because I don't want to see my son go

through that again. Unless you really understand that since they're doing it to pressure you, *then* you don't give in" (Mirta, Segundo Abrazo Solidario: March 2007).

The lawyers of the Commission of Constitutional Rights of the Puerto Rico Bar Association, before which Mirta made those comments, further encouraged residents to take their individual instances of ill-health seriously; that they were in fact a matter of collective legal concern connected to the case of the towers' intentional deterioration. By likening pressure to physical deterioration, the lack of maintenance could be portrayed as one of *Realojo's* most convenient, yet seemingly detached instruments.

There was a gendered dimension to these associations, as the majority of the women I spoke to mentioned depression, from light to severe, as something they had recently experienced: "At the beginning, I'm not going to deny it, I was crying all the time." I never once heard the same kind of admission from a man. Furthermore, when women spoke about disease (very often), men were absent from those conversations as if they lived in an invisible realm of health. Only when their conditions were seen to be a result of age, solitude, and lack of female partners or care-givers, old male neighbours would get mentioned. Even in large public forums, women openly spoke about how they had to get psychiatric support and medicine to be able to bear the pressure of *Realojo* who offered them an uncertain future. From what I was confided, it seemed that some branches of social services encouraged and presented this gendered approach to mental health as normal, while, on the other hand, "Medicaid (medical insurance) doesn't cover anything at all, except the visit to the doctor- not even a five dollar pill it covers...". Thus, for women who bore the financial responsibility of children, parents, or other 'care-dependent' individuals in the middle of the fight over displacement, these now necessary treatments became an emotional and financial strain indeed. Like the lawyers reminded them above, emphasizing the links between disease and *Realojo's* pressure could, at the very least, have their difficult life circumstances recognized. Moreover, if the PRPHA or maintenance company were to be made responsible for those conditions, it could also perhaps warrant special treatment, help gain some form of financial compensation, or grant more flexibility and privileges when choosing where to relocate to. In showing how community politics of inclusion may require exclusionary acts, one of Staeheli's

arguments (2008: 17 quoting Mouffe 2005) was that ‘ the politics and long-term goals of political agents are as important as the tactics. The invocation of responsibility, care and ethics do not deny or obviate politics; instead, agonism and adversarial relationships are an ineluctable element of engaging as citizens and as members of communities.’

The recourse to the language of health was based on resident’s knowledge of the precarious situation they were living in, which -under the control of the government- fed into an underlying fear of being evicted or made illegal; of being penalized. They learned to build on and use this power differential to their advantage, where possible. Yet while these underlying instruments of pressure were highly influential in residents’ decision to move, Araselis’s case below demonstrates that they also triggered unexpected responses:

‘They’ve told me, ‘When are we gonna move you?’ And I say, ‘Whenever I feel like leaving.’ I was one of the first ones to apply for Section 8. And it was approved. But I never actually went to look for a house. Then, it was through ‘mercado privado’. During that time, my electricity got cut off; 7 months I lived without electricity. Until I managed to pay for it. And they kept dealing and ‘luchando’<sup>6</sup> [battling] with me. The other day they said, ‘ Oh...now we can look for a place wherever you want.’ And I said, ‘No, not yet. I still have to take care of something.’ And they said, ‘You can resolve whatever once you’re gone.’ And I said, ‘No, the problem started here. The problem ends here’ (Araselis, interview, 2006).

Her remarks reflect knowledge not only about her right to refuse relocation, but of the housing authorities’ misleading intentions in using electricity as a bargaining element. By applying for programs which she knew she’d later reject, she was taking her legal know-how a step further and playing with it in a way that was still legal but which she knew made *Realojo* agents work overtime. A few other residents told me they’d acted similarly not *just* to spite the authorities, but in a sense, to remind them that they could. It was ‘a matter of dignity’ and one of the only avenues available to them to exercise a limited amount of power over those that, on a daily basis, were giving them *dolores de cabeza*’ (headaches, meant here as trouble). Faking an interest in moving was a rebellious parodist action akin to *jaibería* – of negotiating and subverting the system for their own purposes. Even if they believed they would have to move out eventually, giving the authorities a hard-time in the process, or making

them work *for* them, was a small victory they could share and laugh about in private with pride. In this sense, the recourse to health discussed above was also a way of moving some of the terms of the struggles strategically their way. They had learned to use regulations, legal entitlements and the housing agency's desires for them to move to their immediate, if short-lived, advantage. In other words, they learned to mitigate their subordination and to 'play the part' without actually conforming fully to those expectations. While that game- if played loudly- could result in getting 'black-listed' like we saw happened to Myrta when the new Gladiolas design was announced, it could also lead to getting the best offers.

Those who were active with 'Gladiolas Vive'- who felt that staying was the only option that gave their community struggle a chance of succeeding- tried to dissuade others from accepting relocation by either emphasizing the downsides of moving or by simply using their own cases of personal resistance as models to be followed:

'The problem is that people have not known how to defend themselves. I always use myself as an example. I was ignorant and because of pressure I thought I had to go. But once I went to court and saw how things really worked, the lies Realojo tells...you know, I made a really big mistake (leaving)' (Lara, interview, 2007).

Nevertheless, despite the intention of teaching others through personal accounts of 'defence' and justice, many sensed the combined events of the previous years as an inevitable displacement from their homes and chose to move away. After I had finished fieldwork and was back in London, I returned to visit the island in September 2008 and quickly visited the towers and its residents one evening. Only 39 families were left then, and some residents who were clearly still there in a consciously resistant and political position, were also still asking the lawyers about what their alternative housing options may be and where they could relocate. Having an ambiguous position everyone knew could change overnight depending on a new or better offer given was perhaps not the best tactic for a strong social movement to emerge, but it did allow those that remained to continue to endure difficult conditions and resist advances without having to make committed promises one way or the other. It made them experience home, as it were, on a day to day basis; with the politics of relocation imposing a different temporality to it, as well as a

different affect- that of a continuous fear of losing the home. We know from Chapter 5 that, for many residents, this was also traversed by how past times and memories mediated their current understanding, of what was happening, and how to consequently act upon it. Ironically, they had also become more convinced than ever of their cause, while experiencing the greatest forms of pressure and insecurity.

But despite the common knowledge that they were all going through similar circumstances, when they expressed weariness or feeling overwhelmed by *Realojo*, some of even their closest allies judged it as weak and unbecoming ambivalence:

‘...For years I’ve been telling people that come to tell me that they’re going for this and that reason of the ‘cogida de bobo’[taking for fool] that the private market is...for yeeears you’ve all been told and those who’ve left, that you shouldn’t go for this and this and this other reason. At this precise moment, you should not be accepting if relocation comes around, nor should you pay attention even- just ignore them, period... Because you are clear already that if you’re going to stay here, you’re going to fight for your home- and you’re pretty scarce in numbers by now, so don’t pay attention to them...If you’re conscious, and you’ve been told plenty of times, ‘look, don’t go’- It’s just a matter of ignoring them because you’re gonna stay here ‘dando la batalla’ [battling it out]...Because that doesn’t mean that ‘uno se esbulle’ [that you chicken out]. But the battles have to be waged in little steps... People here have been warned...Be firm. Ignore those from *desalojo*. Remember that the enemy does its job’ (Marina, notes from community assembly, July 2007).

This activist found it difficult to understand that those who remained would, after so long, still struggle to resist the advances of *Realojo*. It was their battle, after all, to remain in their houses. According to her, their ambivalence gave the impression that residents did not know how to act, or did not understand their rights well enough- that they lacked strength, understood in highly masculinist terms. Such an appreciation leaves out the fact that most of these residents’ lives- by virtue of living in the housing project- have been controlled like children’s through innumerable ‘regulations’ and ‘laws’ that perpetually threaten them with punishment. When one considers that their lives and future have been constantly measured through and subject to shifting frameworks of legality that they’ve had little power over, it is not so surprising that

they could be scared by the potentially penalizing effects of resisting *Realojos*' offers; especially when the latter were presented to them as something they 'had to do'. In other words, it was not as simple as just 'ignoring them', since this was the first time they actually could without (hopefully) getting into trouble. At the very least, they had never been given such attention, counselling and advice about what they were entitled to do and/or claim as residents. Some, who acted upon such newfound knowledge, like we saw with Araselis's case, might have had to consequently deal with their electricity or water being cut off, or more extremely- like Myrta- with being denied a chance to return to the new buildings. And if, as most residents there you were a woman caring for children or other family members; these impositions would inevitably create the circumstances for needing to relocate.

Thus, I argue that in this context of pressures, the constant struggle to remain in their homes- to stay put- was in itself an active and political response, mediated by gendered concerns, even if muddled with doubts and hard-to-resist advances. It contained knowledge of both historical repressions and anticipation of potential future abuses based on it. As a new-found sense of empowerment, staying and resisting *Realajo* was therefore a choice to resist the accumulated forms of disadvantage and discrimination imposed by those mechanisms they knew well. It was also a particularly gendered phenomenon as many of the women I spoke to had accumulated extensive experience with the courts in relation to issues as diverse as fathers who did not pay child pensions, some of their children's' incarcerations or trouble with the law, and late rental or utilities payments. Way before the case of Las Gladiolas came along as a 'community' issue, they had experienced 'the law' as something that could put their entire livelihoods at stake and their families at risk. For those who had lived through 'Mano Dura', they'd known first-hand how a legal and political instrument of purported fairness could work to erode rights indiscriminately via militarized and punitive measures, striking at the very core of family and home. The known collusion between the PRPHA and the police during that era was something that also still lingered in the memories of the men of the community- signalled out as criminals, drug-addicts or vandals- and that remained physically present through the continuous placement of ineffective police-guards in their community entrance. Yet these gender differences, which undoubtedly influenced the different ways individuals were dealing with *Realajo*, were rarely pointed out in public discussions, assem-

blies or Court. Instead, the experience of displacement was cast as a gender-neutral action that was ‘just’ because it was being carried out in accordance with ‘the law’ to everyone equally. Resistance to it was also waged under the language and rhetoric of unity- a version of community that subsumed the internal differences actually constituting their organization. Below, I present a case in which a woman broke that ‘law’ as a way to contest the injustice of her relocation.

### **7.3. Experiencing the Legal: Edna’s case of invasion**

#### **Unequal treatment**

Like most other residents of Las Gladiolas, Edna had to face the pressure of relocation letters and home-visits. After considering and rejecting a number of offers, she finally accepted one in the relatively nearby Manuel A. Pérez housing project in 2005 because ‘everybody was moving away.’ But after spending only one day in her new flat, the electric circuitry exploded before her eyes. She immediately called the project’s maintenance crew, and continued to do so for weeks, but her requests fell upon deaf ears. She remembered the promise given by *Realojo* that she would be given a flat in ‘equal or better conditions’ than the one she had and, fearing for the life of all those under her daily care (including her mother, who has acute Alzheimer’s and two or three of her grand-children at a time), she took a picture of the affected area and returned unannounced to her apartment in Las Gladiolas. Despite the fact that she transferred her utility bills to her old home that same morning, she was immediately designated an illegal ‘invader’. This marked the beginning of a legal case against the PRPHA (with Myrta M’s aid) in defence of her right to live in Las Gladiolas without being considered illicit (while a more suitable living option was found for her). Running in tandem to the class-action lawsuit of Las Gladiolas, her singular struggle became inexorably connected and emblematic of the battle to save Gladiolas from demolition.

During the year and a half which Edna had spent ‘invading’ when I met her, she had become a vocal advocate of resistance to relocation and learned first-hand the rather vague and discriminatory nature of legal/illegal categorizations and the mismatch those could have with ideas and practices of local justice:

‘The times I’ve been to Court, Laboy *never* goes. He’s always sick. It’s like Myrta says, if it were John Doe, he’d be filed for being in contempt. But since it’s him, he gets away with it. He always sends his lawyer or that assistant of his saying he was sick... ‘the bodyguard’, we call her; and the judge has never done anything about that. But something good is gonna come of this, because a lot of people can gain benefit from this too....I’ve got my God up there and that’s the best judge there is in the world. Let’s see who wins this case. *Que sea lo que Dios quiera, por Corte* (may it be God’s will, through Court).’

Edna felt that the treatment of immunity granted to Laboy was an undue privilege supported by the Judge which she would never have been entitled to; an injustice related to the local interactions of power and socio-political standing. She knew that because she was unfairly categorized as an illegal invader and discriminated against anyway as a poor public housing resident on welfare, she had no choice but to accept those conditions. In Vicky Muñiz’s (1998) study of the experience of regeneration of a Puerto Rican community in Brooklyn, she similarly found that women facing displacement in New York’s Housing Court often had to return to hearings because landlords did not show up; that they had to rely on interpreters who many times were not available; be subjected to Judge’s reprimands which were never extended to the other side and that, therefore, ‘many lacked faith in the legal system and particularly in the promises of the government’ (116). Similarly, other sociological studies on gender bias found within the legal system have argued that women’s testimony in Court often counts less than men’s (Molyneux 2007: 62).

Edna’s experiences taught her how discrimination was embedded in the legal system to disadvantage poor single women like herself, the downcast ‘others’ of contemporary society, by placing powerful barriers that limited her fair interaction with it. She uses the ridiculed figure of ‘the bodyguard’- a female assistant that betrays her own (gender) by adopting a typically masculine and abusive role- to personify the inherently problematic nature of the system. Transgression and ambiguity were thus re-centered as ‘feminine’. Moreover, in describing justice, she supplants the power of the human judge by her belief in a greater, divine justice; i.e., God. Yet even though she rendered the Judge’s power and his system faulty and corrupt, she also speaks about the Court as a fair sphere that can - through the helping hand of God- act autonomously



and justly. It was both autonomous and dependent. What emerges from this brief analysis is that her interactions did not lead to a straightforward, black and white vision of the law, but to a much messier, but no less coherent understanding of legality and justice.

Edna further spoke about how legal contracts and responsibilities to the Court did not cut both ways: that while Laboy's privilege was assumed, her own rights had to be fought for, demanded and defended. This was especially irritating to her because her utility bills were all '*en orden*' [had been paid appropriately]. She understood that this gave her a legitimate right, just like any other *paying* citizen, to housing. When Laboy missed Court meetings, the social contract which *she* was keeping in paying bills and attending those hearings was broken. Her feeling is not only tied to a desire of making herself a legitimate subject/tenant amidst accusations that she was 'illegal', but they also relate to a naturalized representation of society and the many interactions that constitute it as a contract based on legal terms (Román 2006: 12). Holston (2008) denounced the system which fosters this rather rigid reduction of modern life to a notion of 'rights' because it is based on the underlying logic that those who do not 'contribute' to society in the same way (i.e., not paid their bills) are not as deserving as others. This, in turn, can have the inadvertent effect of reproducing inequality at other levels:

'...a citizenship of special treatment ...creates relations of immunity and disability that entail privilege and disempowerment in the mediation of rights...and engages the poor in a perverse exercise of citizenship that those with immunity and privilege bypass: It not only perpetuates but also legitimates the distribution of inequality because it gets individual workers to defend special treatment for themselves and *disqualification* for others as the means to confirm their particular worthiness and attain' (Holston: 258; my emphasis).

If we substitute the word 'workers' above for 'tenants', we can see how experiencing inequality and granted privilege *inside* the system of the law in Puerto Rico can foster other relative enactments of inequality and 'disqualifications', albeit in a passive way, even amongst those who, like Edna, may feel themselves in other situations to be the 'have-nots'. Even though she identified and spoke for those who were being abused by the housing system, the legal parameters that partially defined her understanding of self as citizen led her to

enact relative exclusions as well. Thus, the ubiquitous presence of the law and its relationship to displacement, mediated through real and conceptual social contracts, locks everyone into an inherently unequal game of give-and-take, played out through entrenched discriminatory dynamics.

**‘My rights begin where yours end’**

Edna told her story not only as an experience of injustice *vis à vis* an imposed categorization of illegality, but also in terms of the process through which she *learned to use* the law, despite being-in a sense- its victim. She framed her rising incredulity towards the housing system and the *Realojo* process alongside a growing sense of agency and empowerment:

‘I’ve been here a year and three months as an invader. She (American Management director of project) came here with 7 policemen carrying sticks and a crow bar... The guard told me: ‘According to her and what I have here, you have an eviction notice from 7 days ago and you’re not supposed to be here.’ I looked for my letter and said: ‘You don’t know about this letter, do you? I was told to apply for a new apartment. I applied but Housing rejected it... This is an order issued by the Court. I’ll go when they find me a place where I can live... that’s what the Court says. I have to be relocated in another housing... And this was not invented by me or my lawyer, but by a judge. From the *Tribunal*... You bring in here whatever raid you want but *my rights start where yours end*. I’m here *por Corte* [by Court order/legitimately] and until the judge doesn’t tell me that I have to go... I cannot go just like that because you feel like I should...’ (Edna, *ibid.*).

She relied on a Court order as an instrument of power and protection, asserting a sense of control over her personal situation when faced by a private management worker and a police officer: The former Director of American Management had brought the police assuming that Edna would bulge in light of their forceful presence. She had already threatened her on previous occasions with ‘taking the children away’, further attesting to the way in which the practices and politics of displacement were highly gendered through the tactics and threats employed to force people out. Edna’s vulnerability as a single, poor, public housing female resident caring for many others was exploited. Together with her status as ‘illegal invader’, this made her suspect *a priori*, granting more leeway for authorities to dramatize their power over their ‘subjects’ with intimidating force. And while, as her incident suggests, she had managed to resist such pressure, she later told me, had serious psychological

and emotional consequences for her. Notwithstanding those developments, she had learned about the law and how to manipulate it to her advantage from the time she had been labelled 'illegal'. Her phrase: *tus derechos acaban donde los mios empiezan* (my rights begin where yours end) was a colloquial way of telling the management Director: 'I know what my rights are; where they begin and where they finish; how they're related to yours and you're not going to be able to infringe on mine'. More importantly, it was an assertion of agency: Living through the consequences of this categorization created a new sense of self- with a political consciousness- tied to shifting feelings and allegiances towards her home and community:

When I later called Myrta (lawyer) and told her what had just happened she said, 'I'm so glad you knew how to defend yourself. You've learned a lot from us. You've graduated.' Yeah, cos' I told them, my *rights start where yours end...* If I'd only been here a year or two, then it'd be ok that you came to me with some issues, but a person that has been living here 30 years?! ...The judge herself was like, 'What? That's a lifetime. A lifetime...' ...There was this discussion in Court in November where the housing lawyer was saying that that wasn't my house. And I said, 'I know it's not mine, but I've lived in it for 30 years. I'm conscious that it's not mine; that it doesn't belong to me *as property*. But it's a house I've been living in for 30 years. Don't come telling me that's not a lifetime. If you're gonna' buy a house, 30 years down the line, that's your house.' She (American Management Director) said it wasn't mine cos' it belonged to Housing. But I insisted that I wasn't saying it was mine, only that I'd lived there my whole life and raised my children there. So, don't come saying that's not a life... " (*ibid.*).

As legal authority, Myrta's laudatory remarks served to reinstate Edna's own sense of self-pride, now intimately tied to her familiarity with the law. In her statement above, the judge handling her case in 2006- another 'formal' actor in the practice of law- also reconfirmed what she felt was a legitimate claim to housing due to the time spent living in Gladiolas: 'a lifetime'. In the struggle between the housing agency and herself, time (30 years) became one of the focal points through which community belonging, property, and the 'right to housing' was claimed and debated. This was the same longevity residents used to distance themselves in class-based terms from other tenants who were seen as somewhat inferior and more blame-worthy for the towers' deterioration. Thus, making time a legitimate element towards claiming the right to housing here has the parallel effect of denominating 'those who have only been here

a couple of years' as less deserving of that same right. Like with the 'paying bills' example above, it becomes another form of citizenship- tied here directly to property- that enacts other inequalities and leaves them unquestioned.

### **Property and legality**

The above discussion also relates to the private nature of individual property- and its relationship to the State. Blomley (2004) has shown that the practice and language of property, as embedded in legal paradigms, permeates part of conflicts over land, displacement, and gentrification. Property discourse, he argues, is not only important due to how it positions 'legal subjects' in society, but also to how it,

'...offers a dense and pungent set of social symbols, stories and meanings...an important means by which we assign order to the world, categorizing and coding spaces and people according to their relationship to property with both material and symbolic effects...It effects the moral and political claims that are made, the ways in which they are articulated and the issues that are excluded from discussion' (*ibid.*, 38).

From Chapters 3 and 4, we know that property in Puerto Rico is no simple matter. The 'home-ownership' model has been an integral part of the historically-entrenched narratives of (American based) property and progress shaping Puerto Rico's urban development since public housing was inaugurated. There was always a gendered, raced and classed moral dimension embedded in the early cleansing agendas of urban planning and the middle-class ideologies of ascendancy imbricated in the same. Residents' failure to 'move-up' the property ladder had made them the object of urban repudiation and continued to mark them as flawed citizens. But while those earlier mechanisms are no longer as explicit as before, Chapters 5 and 6 demonstrated that they are nevertheless very much present within new discourses that focus more on crime and deterioration than, for example, degeneracy. At the same time, they are subsumed under contemporary forms of visual and spatial discrimination evident, for example, in the architectural models of the new Las Gladiolas as walk-up; that is, the continual enforcement of social engineering via environmental determinisms. Thus, while the terms of the discourse have changed, the power relationships between land owner (government) and tenant/subject (residents) have not. The debates over public housing murals in the previous chapter were particularly illustrative in this regard as the PRPHA enacted its

new forms of discipline by claiming ownership of the buildings' walls and eliminating paintings made on them.

This is further complicated when we recognize that as much as public housing is 'property' of the PRPHA, Puerto Rico too is property of the U.S. Thus, as a site of colonial control, PRPHA's authority lies in 'managing' what is in fact federal HUD property. Laboy explained this conundrum to me in the following way:

'I have the option of taking them [residents] out and putting them where there is other housing. We've never exercised that option. And we could've from day one. I have a letter from HUD that told me that I had to empty that building for security reasons. And, the only thing I had to do was tell you, "you either go, or I force you to get out through Court." But we haven't done that. We gave them options' (Laboy, interview, 2007).

While his declaration obviates the fact that he could *not* have done what he argues from day one because the housing agency was blocked by Court from forcing residents out while the class-action lawsuit was decided upon, it nevertheless reveals the colonial paradigm (and paradox) of the relationship between the local agency and the United States. Here, Laboy asserted PRPHA's institutional autonomy while recognizing its inseparability from the directives of its father-agency, HUD. He was just as proud of the power this granted him, as he was of the relative autonomy he exercised in *not* doing what was ordered from him. In a sense, his position of 'choosing' when to follow HUD orders demonstrates an institutional case of *jaiberia*, where he exercised discretion about whether or not to kick residents out depending on how benevolent or powerful he wanted to seem. It paralleled some residents' own decision to 'choose' when to move out or not, despite the institutional pressures. Here, Laboy was trying to make the most out of a situation of relative powerlessness; of turning a relationship of dependence into one of convenience.

As someone who also had to deal with community outreach work and negotiate the federal and local levels in funding applications and multi-sector work-committees, the ever-insightful founder of 'Iniciativa Comunitaria', Dr. Vargas Vidot, used a spatial metaphor to describe to me the extra limitations

which the Puerto Rican agencies place on the already existing pressures from the U.S. He said that beyond the ‘concentration camp fences’ erected by the federal government, before we even reach the limits of those demarcations, local authorities build even more walls that constrain action further. In this way, they limit community organizations and small grass roots activists from engaging in an open and free landscape of action. In the end, however, despite Laboy’s own ‘autonomous’ manoeuvres, PRPHA’s political and financial dependence on HUD meant that *Realojo* took place, destroying livelihoods and neighbourly networks forged over the years from within.

A debate about residents’ legality and the limits of public housing property today needs to be understood in terms of the underlying conceptions of ownership, private property, and public space that have made certain determination of ‘legality’ versus ‘illegality’ possible in the first place. In the previous chapter, we saw that, in promoting demolition and mixed income walk-ups as replacements, the abstract notion of what ‘public’ meant removed the tenants themselves from the definition and replaced it by those who had the ‘privilege’ of forming that special group. In Edna’s case, debating a resident’s status as ‘invader’ can replace yesteryear’s discussions over slum ‘invasions’, becoming the symbolic medium through which to single out and eliminate undesirable elements from the city, while continuing to situate public housing and its poor (non-owner) and dependent residents as the ultimate ‘other’; a problem to be handled and ordered. Furthermore, while Edna’s case was an individual one looking to define the legal parameters of ‘invader’, the fact that it is a debate which occurred in relation to public housing immediately takes it outside those strictly individualized boundaries and turns it into a greater question about property as a social and political process- understood differently depending on where the actor in question is positioned.

In this case, the private property which PRPHA insisted on in order to enforce its accusations of Edna’s illegality and drive her out of her home could only be understood in relation to the public nature of public housing residents. When these two poles are set against each other, as if they were fixed opposites, it presents the realm of ‘public’ housing residents as consisting rigidly, and separately from the ‘private’ materiality of buildings, land, and maintenance. But, as the inequity of property relations in Edna’s case reveals, and indeed as this entire thesis has been exploring through socio-technical elements so crucial

to people's relationship to public housing and its space, the public/private divide had to include this particular individual's claim of ownership in relation to a long-term relationship with a community and lived space. That is, it had to include time and a shared notion of space in its final determination. It also, inevitably, turned the private realm into a public issue given that policy determinations were directly impacting on the status of Edna's private life and domestic future (St.... Edna's case therefore forces us to think of property both within *and* outside the typical framework of individualism and place, to include an understanding of it that transcends the privately owned physical space of an apartment, in order to include the social and political process that makes it a home.

Finally, Edna's story of interaction, reliance, and use of the law shows how coming to know and feel her entitlement to particular *rights*, was a process (not a given fact) that combined collusion and empowerment; hope and disappointment; agency and resistance. On the one hand, it demonstrated that 'the law' is neither straightforward nor equitable and that politics and power are a part and parcel of its multi-layered mechanisms. The law reproduces unequal power relations, discrediting public housing residents – especially women- and communities as the contemporary 'others' of society. On the other hand, her struggle to get her right to housing recognized despite her illegal status reflects an inherently unstable and shifting nature of the law traversed by a lived indeterminacy that can provide avenues for subjectivities to shift and new social constellations or even legal definitions to arise (albeit in tension with existing ones). What I have been trying to emphasize through her example is that the distinctions between legal and illegal do not respond to 'justice', and are not fixed through text, but respond to the way the law becomes enacted- through people and spaces-*as a practice*. Illegality continues to be an important category because the fear people have of it induces particular actions and relationships to place, becoming meaningful in cases already embedded in wider conflicts, such as Las Gladiolas.

## **Conclusion**

The multi-faceted program of *Realojo* was designed to infiltrate the space of public housing towers and, through offers and intimidation that played on residents' fears, conquer whatever spirit of resistance they may have been

entertaining as well. While less explicitly violent than the 'slum vigilance' of the 1940's to 60's, it worked in precisely the same effective manner, playing on the immunity which public housing's already existent stigma gave them to be oppressive, acting as vigilantes and producing an environment suffused by physical and symbolic threats in order to enforce a larger politics of urban redevelopment and spatial change; to, plainly stated, carry out the dirty work of the PRPHA, the police, the social service apparatus of the public housing system, as well as the law. Through legal coercion in particular, they adversely impacted the numbers and community life of the towers.

But beyond the experience of deterioration which relocation helped to produce, the pressures *Realojo* exerted also made residents come into direct contact with the legal aspects of both their individual and community circumstances. Thus, because of it, and with the aid of their lawyers and the Legal Assistance Clinic, they developed more knowledge of the legal apparatus, as well as a diminishing sense of trust in the same system that purported to protect their rights. Ultimately, however, as Arcadio's movement *outside* that discourse demonstrated, going beyond the legal was not considered a viable or desirable option. Residents considered it to be an empowering system which sustained them in a common playing field with the rest of society, gave them better options (down the road) than being evicted or given a shady private market housing contract, and it facilitated mechanisms of direct support and aid, such as the legal assistants.

In this context, then, utilizing the law as a tool is, in and of itself, a form of *jaiba* politics. Furthermore, staying under the circumstances of advanced decay and strong pressure to leave constituted an engagement with more radical notions of a right to public housing and the city. It was an act of transgression to historical norms that- as previous chapters variously detailed- have sought to 'order' public housing residents. Residents learned to carefully calculate the costs and advantages of remaining in Las Gladiolas according to the knowledge gained about the possibilities and limitations which the law afforded them, particularly as the latter was related to *Realojo*. That knowledge, gained through rumours, informal information channels, through their lawyers, or through interactions with *Realojo* generally dictated that, as a part of the class-action lawsuit, those who stayed on the rather shifty and desolate grounds of the current Las Gladiolas would probably be in a stronger position later



on from where to negotiate their futures. While waiting for that unknown eventuality, they also learned that lying about having made alternative housing choices; protesting with GV or in separate groups; moving back in when things went wrong elsewhere; and also publicly expressing doubts about the benefits of staying, were all mechanisms in their control which made the law a highly fluid and lived practice, far from straightforward in terms of how it operated, or what its results would be. These subtle appropriations, based on a cautious knowledge of the law, gave them a temporary upper-hand over those that normally oppressed them.

Women- who were predominant in numbers- learned to weigh the possible effects of relocation on personal and community levels to then negotiate what could benefit them most in terms of their roles as carers. In Edna's case, her decision to stay or move emerged contextually, through her acquired knowledge of rights in her struggles with *Realojo*, which transcended a simple legal/illegal distinction. The threat of being considered illegal, on the one hand, was a silent and ever-present force influencing her actions. On the other, the growing sense of a resistance that was shared by others made that possibility less threatening than if she were facing it alone. Nevertheless, being immersed in that environment, where the powerful discourse of rights was likely to determine their lives, highlighted how justice was a quest that the law and its powerful tentacles did not ensure; that, as much as it offers a window of opportunity, it is also built around certain forms of exclusions that condemn the lives and actions of the property-less poor as unworthy of the same forms of justice and privilege afforded to those with power. And, ironically, it was precisely through such injustices that residents came to intimately know the internal power structure of the law and to know how to try to use it to their advantage (where possible).

What this chapter has been arguing is that legality transcended the abstract textuality or distant practices of a lawsuit, becoming instead a lived *process* with spaces for resistance and change. Analyzing people's approach to the law as something that moves beyond text to include practices, discourses and institutions, helps to grasp the multiple interests, incoherent practices and relations of power (of oppression and domination, but also of resistance) that shape it. This thesis has shown that, in Puerto Rico, these relations operate ideologically just as much as they do materially in order to produce an urban space

that persistently attempts to 'relocate' undesirables. By understanding the law through this ethnographic lens, it tied it to the different scales of analysis provided throughout this work; that is: from the raced and gendered postcolonial history of public housing and shifts in urban policies and practices; from the politics of intentional deterioration; and from the political, material, cultural and personal avenues of resistance forged with, around and in response to all of the former. It provided a last crucial space from where to glean the heterogeneous ways through which a contemporary struggle of public housing residents over retaining urban space is practiced- with both intersections and breaks from a highly turbulent and authoritatively controlled past.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> In order to understand the ethical/moral implications of legal structure and to propose versions of justice that are more attuned to and respectful of differences, some contemporary scholars have drawn from feminist critiques that contend that the law is gendered in its implicit epistemological favouring the symbolic order of ‘man’ (Davies 1997; Naffine and Owens 1997; Cornell 1991), demonstrating as well how women are increasingly dynamic actors influencing community battles (Muniz 1998; Feldman, R.M. and S. Stall (2004)) and the legal system itself (Baitenmann, Chenaut et al. 2007; Collier 1995; Roman 1993).

<sup>2</sup> In Puerto Rico, ‘leyes’ in its plural form, is used to mean the study, debate, and practice of law. It is an encompassing term one hears frequently to describe what people study or ‘do’ professionally, and along with engineering and medicine, is still considered one of the most ‘respectable’ paths an individual can take. At the same time, with the increasing number of lawyers in the island, ‘leyes’ is also sometimes used pejoratively in an ironic way to suggest the increasing arbitrary nature of the profession and lack of selectivity in those who practice it. This makes it a kind of playing field that, more and more, all can participate in. However, because of the polarization of Puerto Rican society, where the distribution of privilege traditionally reserves ‘the best’ respectable positions for the affluent families of ‘apellido’ (last name), this democratization of the practice of law has increasingly meant an unequal distribution of wealth and benefits within the legal field itself (i.e., legal firms, partnerships, appointments, etc.).

<sup>3</sup> These were: the Honorable Anibal Acevedo Vilá, Governor of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico; the Honorable Jorge Rivera, Secretary of the Department of Housing of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico; Carlos Laboy, Director of the Puerto Rico Public Housing Administration (PRPHA) (hereinafter referred to as ‘Commonwealth Defendants’); the Honorable Alfonso Jackson, Secretary of the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (hereinafter HUD); Michael Colón, HUD’s Field Office Director for Puerto Rico/Virgin Islands; Olga Sáez, HUD’s Director of Public Housing for PR/VI (hereinafter, the last three defendants will be referred to as ‘HUD Defendants’); and American Management, Inc., company which has contracts with PRPHA and Defendants and is under the obligation of providing safe, decent and sanitary housing to Plaintiffs.

<sup>4</sup> Camelias and Gladiolas are both the names of tropical flowers.

<sup>5</sup> In my research, I found that from 1995-2008, at least 14 different HUD ‘news-releases’ spoke about Section 8 cases of corruption and the improper management and use of funds; erroneous housing assistance payments; deficiencies in inspections, assistance determination, financial reporting and record-keeping. They accused the PRPHA of not ‘implementing controls to ensure that grant funds were used solely for authorized purposes’ (See: HUD 1998; 2004; 2005).

**Conclusions:**

**Reflections on the politics of Puerto Rican urban 'others' and the  
unsettled architectures of modernity**

‘Pues siéntate un día en la acera y mira bien de cerca para que veas que de cualquier fisura, sale una flor. Tócala para que veas que delicada es. Hasta orgullo tienen. Pero tienes que preguntarte, ¿Crecieron en la fisura, o provocaron la fisura? La mayoría de esas flores provocan esas fisuras. Eso es Las Gladiolas- una flor de pavimento.’

‘Sit on a sidewalk one day and look very closely so that you can see how, out of any which fissure, a flower appears. Touch it so that you see how delicate it is. They even have pride. But you have to ask yourself, did they grow in the fissure, or did they provoke the fissure? The majority of those flowers provoke those fissures. That is what Las Gladiolas is- a pavement flower.’  
(Dr. Vargas Vidot, interview, 2006).

### **8.1. Power and resistance**

In Dr. Vargas Vidot’s quote above, he compares Las Gladiolas’s life of struggle to the highly precarious circumstances of the life of a pavement flower; a natural object that materializes the strength and vulnerability contained in residents’ historical fight against the odds. His ‘fissure’ metaphor underscores the need to pause and carefully examine the typically overlooked cracks created by those living under the pressures of ‘cemented’ oppressions. If extended, the allusion also serves as an allegory to the colonial forces of economic and political instability shaping the ‘illusory autonomy’ (Negrón-Muntaner 2004: 14) between the U.S. mainland and Puerto Rico. It is within these blurred postcolonial boundaries that the previous chapters set out to analyse the social, political and material landscapes of public housing’s production, addressing its past and present as a ‘dialectically related’ (Hart 2004: 98) nexus and process. In order to trace and unravel some of the elements involved in ‘the politics of place construction’ (Hayden 1995) discussed in the introduction, I concentrated both on ‘the pavement’ referred to above; i.e., the historical trajectory of urban governmentalities over the social and material space of public housing as a means for the reproduction of social power relations (Lefebvre 1991); and on the ‘delicate flower’ spurting forcefully from below; i.e., on the multi-sited resistances that emerged alongside and against such experiences of inequality and oppression. This approach enabled me to look at multiple dimensions influencing the shape and meaning of a contemporary conflict over urban space.

Chapters 3 to 5 analysed how the prominent representations of women, race and poverty became entangled in the rhetoric and practices of national modernization, particularly during the enthusiastic promotion of a comprehensive urban public housing program that would lead to an idealized state of home-ownership. I argued that the permeating stigma of the slum filtered through that initial sense of approval, creating a discourse of untamed deviance and crime which portrayed those projects' social and physical characteristics as inherently failed and in need of continuous interventions. While those first few chapters dwelled on the 'dominant' productions of urban space to emphasize the lasting raced, gendered, and classed markers attached to public housing, they also framed and enriched our understanding of how urban landscapes are being contested today. The case of Las Gladiolas, from Chapter 5 onwards, provided a more grounding example from where to explore the impact, effects, and resistances to the pervasive identifications of undesirable urban difference. Those towers' highly publicized histories of aggressive repressions, neglect, and deterioration turned its space and residents into targets of new neo-liberal urban policies of spatial transformation, exemplified today by an order for demolition and walk-up construction in its place. The research showed that the process of decay and its many consequences was not a straightforward one for Las Gladiolas residents, but rather a landscape of unsettled, controversial and ambiguous relations to space and subjective memories of it (Chapter 5); to materiality, community politics, and people (Chapter 6); and to relocation and the law (Chapter 7). Their relationships to the conflict were therefore flexibly bound to those discursive, material, everyday and political places, while their expressions of the same remained anchored upon the spaces of the towers themselves.

Thus, the national, urban, community, and personal histories analysed demonstrated that the buildings of Las Gladiolas were the effect of all of these stories and actions in unison –what Jacobs (2006: 3) called the 'fragmented, multi-scaled and multi-sited networks of association'. In this account, however, the structures did not 'cohere' according to the dualistic framework of Jacobs' study of modernist high-rises, which was interested strictly on the socio-technicalities of how they either 'assemble' or 'come apart'. Instead, the existence of Las Gladiolas, as analysed here, was not an either/or production, but a multi-sited engagement with elements that ranged from the personal

and political to the material and ideological, in order to continually ‘make’ and ‘unmake’ it.

The analysis provided had two main interlinked findings. Firstly, that ‘others’- as marginalized gendered, raced and classed identities- play a crucial role in shaping unequal urban space because historical significations of difference codified on bodies, cultures and places have been integral to the relations of dominance and resistance producing the social, political and material space of public housing. Drawing on Foucauldian, post-colonial, and feminist critiques of ‘difference’, this emphasized how identity differences have become deeply enmeshed in the ideological, material and social productions of national belonging and urban spatiality. To understand how colonialism was operating here contextually, it was important that I look at the interactions between subjectivity, representation and power in the productions and related contestations of public housing (Stoler 1995, 2002).

Secondly, the material, symbolic, and social components of public housing were demonstrated to be inextricably linked across the time-periods studied through a colonial Criollo quest for a national project of ‘indigenous modernity’<sup>1</sup> (Hosagrahar 2005), as well as disrupted and destabilized today through resistances to such formulations. This finding was informed by critical geographies of architecture that look at the co-production of architecture and subjectivities (Datta 2006; Hill 1998) as ‘an important way of anchoring identities and of constructing, in the most literal sense, a material connection between people and places, often through appeals to history’ (Lees 2001: 53). As stated from the introduction, my method recognized ‘the many components, human and non-human, that constitute the building event’ (Jacobs 2006: 12). In doing so, I was able to trace how certain histories, subjectivities, and conflict were registered and articulated through the spaces of the four towers of Las Gladiolas, and at how ordinary people ‘engage and inhabit’ (*ibid*: 55), but also contest and protest through that dwelling space in ways that are also traversed by their gendered identities. The ‘actors’ to that urban conflict were therefore not only the people, but also the very materiality and mechanics of the buildings: from architectural models, cement, walls, and cameras; to elevators, cisterns and windows. The controversies surrounding those elements revealed a more nuanced picture of what Las Gladiolas meant to different parties, and how such elements can be essential constitutive elements to the make-up

of a struggle. Seen through this light- the cement borders around the towers we first saw in the introductory chapter were not simply colourful or grey, but emblems of discipline and empowerment following a history of violent repression; the guarded entrance- full of potholes- was not just a divisive gate, but a porous and multiply crossed threshold through which all sorts of actions and subversions had been enacted; the wooden placards covering stolen windows were both evidence of residents' opposition to relocation, and badges of insecurity linked to the materials of slums; and the space around the towers – which I had originally found inhospitable- was what the remaining residents claimed to be their urban home.

To summarize, employing the approaches detailed above allowed me to focus on how the symbolic, spatial and material co-productions of public housing difference- or 'othering'- were made manifest through sites such as: national ideologies, built form, and social, political, and legal action. These foci and their unstable configurations should be of interest to urban postcolonial scholars and feminist geographers concerned with the links between gendered agency and materiality in the transformations of urban space. It must be noted, however, that because my field work was mainly based on participation in events held within the towers' communal spaces, rather than its apartments or surrounding areas, the views on urban shifts, or gentrification, tend to be limited to how place-making was felt by residents of Las Gladiolas in relation to their political participation, and to the historical representation and controversies embedded in the struggle, and not on the reactions of its urban neighbours and environment (Lees 2008), nor on the materialities of domestic home space (Blunt and Varley 2004; Young 2002). It nevertheless includes the realm of spatial memory as an integral sphere implicated in current forms of conviviality and political participation, stretching that notion to insist on the subjective and gendered accounts of postcolonial regeneration as experienced through high-rise public housing buildings.

Using both space and time as a necessary backdrop for investigating the co-production of postcolonial national ideologies and urban public housing space in Puerto Rico, I was interested in revealing what Michael Keith (1996) described as 'the grand scheme' embedded in the local; or what Anthony King (2000) in the context of geographies of architecture, has similarly referred to as 'globalized localities'. That is, through this particular locale, his-



torically considered to be at the margins of colonial modernity, subversions to displacement and strategies of negotiation became rich sites from where to explore the emerging resistances to what are relentless affirmation of the space and time of the 'now' in urban planning practices. In this way, local affirmation of modernity, and its relationship to public housing productions and contestations, proved to be entangled in the larger colonial relationships of P.R. and the U.S, which are in turn conditioned by increasing global capital flows and movement of people, ideas and materials. In what remains of these conclusions, I will be suggesting likely paths of convergence and future analysis from what was learned about 'others' and the multiple uses (and scales) of difference in the landscape of public housing.

## **8.2. Towards a multi-sited politics of difference**

### **Recreating 'others' in urban planning**

The first chapters of the thesis demonstrated how, since the industrialization boom of the early 1940's, white Criollo elite men whose positions rested upon a 'double coloniality of power' enforced control over their 'native others' by producing 'modern' urban spaces not just physically, but also politically in accordance to particular gendered, raced and classed ideologies of progress. Certain narrative tropes founded upon discriminations construed place-identities as inseparable, with slums in particular becoming culturally comprehensible as spaces/people of backwardness and deviance. The sexuality and excessive-reproduction of poor women racialized as black and linked to cultures of poverty that stood in stark contrast to the 'modern' white woman's world of home-ownership and a nuclear family became the principal visual and discursive 'markers' used to denote that marginality and justify interventions. At the same time, public housing was politically conceived as the idealized architectural artefact that would salvage and contain those needy slum populations and facilitate a transition from lower-to-middle class citizenship through a combination of modernist housing typologies, physical proximity, gendered 'educational' mechanisms, and security programs.

Yet from their inception, public housing were spaces of contradiction that, on the one hand, got celebrated as the answer to landscapes of poverty and the promise for social equality, while on the other, got publicly and politically rearticulated through the same stigmatized narratives of undesirable differ-

ence; reviled as the stage for all forms of delinquent depravity, understood again in gender, raced and class-based terms. Moreover, with the increasing lack of socio-economic support and resources, and the rise of regulations in an impoverished post- World War II policy environment, tenants resisted getting ordered as ‘others’ in a fictitious and authoritative affirmation of national stability, social mixture, and endless opportunities based on a capitalist American work ethic. Instead, many stalled their movement up the home-ownership ladder and became permanent members of an unequal urban fabric (Dinzey Flores 2007). In doing so, they also became re-inscribed as the failed subjects of the project of modern citizenship, with their lower-class ‘culture of poverty’ status projected as an inherent behavioural pathology. Over the years, newspaper constructed images of public housing crime and poverty along gendered, raced and classed signifiers that re-scripted old versions of poverty onto the dark, single and State-dependant welfare mother – a figure judged along the American discourse linking morality and wealth labelling them as dependent and reckless (McCormack 2004). Like with slums before them, the narratives were produced with the accompanying images of specific materials, spaces, bodies and cultural practices depicting disarray and lack of hygiene. The first three substantive chapters of the thesis used visual methods extensively to partially uncover those early constructions.

Even though the architects of these projects- the ‘middling modernists’- tried to improve the city according to American models of suburban home-ownership, all the while retaining the political rhetoric of raced and gendered national pride (the so-called “gran familia Puertorriqueña”) they failed to recognize and appropriately address the kind of social and symbolic significance residents placed on their established forms of living and relationships (Safa 1964)- a situation which is currently being repeated through the formula of mixed-income public housing programs proposed and enforced by the PRPHA as part of HUD’s HOPE VI programs. In this newer and by now globalizing vision of mixed-income housing immersed in cities’ transformed and regenerated space, there is an underlying institutional language of ‘moving to opportunity’ or ‘hope for everyone’<sup>2</sup>. This American phraseology of privilege and its concomitant policies, introduced in Chapter 1, resonates directly with the original ‘moving up to home-ownership’ rhetoric of public housing programs that we saw in Chapter 4. As in those original formulations, this one is out of touch with the lived context Las Gladiolas, where moving

away from the city centre is in very few senses a shift towards opportunity, and where residents' hope is being strategically manipulated as a way to enforce a larger gentrifying urban plan that does not include historical and colonial markers of poverty. Devoid of any social interaction analysis, it relies on the faulty recycled notion that living close to higher-income neighbors and their assumed social capital will translate into sharing of the same (Smith 2006: 272). It fails to address the complaints residents voiced in chapter 7 regarding the difficulties many were experiencing in the process of relocating and integrating into new suburban detached homes.

This new rhetoric, and the walk-up architectural model seen in chapter 6 to accompany it, disguises the reproduction of old colonial political maxims which insist that a correctly managed physical environment can produce the proper 'modern' citizen and solve their 'inherent' social problems. These beliefs are once again grounded on the historically sexist, racist and classist stereotypes reviewed in Chapters 3 which, based on popular American social-scientific texts from the 1950's onwards, continue to depict the 'modernization' (read, 'correction') of the poor as something yet to be achieved, thereby justifying different kinds of intrusive policies such as privatization and sweeping security measures. Amidst this postcolonial context, it is not surprising that in American cities like Chicago, gentrification strategies that target the ethnicized bodies of Puerto Ricans have been documented as using an uncannily similar class-rooted rhetoric to the one employed in the island in order to 'correct backwards' subjects conceived as: 'irresponsible poverty, consumptive dysfunction, productive ineptitude, and social reproductive failure' (Wilson and Grammenos 2005: 310). The implications of this shared trans-nationalist racist discourse against Puerto Ricans in urban policy-making suggests that public housing's built environment is not so readily integrated into one particular space of mainstream and dominant imaginary, as it is to national ideologies of progress whose desires and frustrations get filtered through interventionist agendas, deposited onto those stigmatized gendered and raced bodies that inhabit certain buildings.

In fact, I would argue that because public housing lacks the local political overtones that a cultural hot-topic such as 'the status question' evokes, the racist and sexist colonial logic within which it is deeply imbricated also gets overlooked. Their structures' rather unspectacular existence in the everyday

socio-material fabric of urban space and its long-standing stigmatizations as criminal has helped to subsume economic, political and cultural questions of how colonial power, by part of both Criollo elites and American officials, is performed through those projects. As such, it has served as an ideal space to deflect contentious issues and to continue to perform questionable practices and recycled policies with relative immunity. Specifically, they have continued to filter denigrating discourses of the so-called 'culture of poverty' through women's bodies and their fertility in the form of 'the welfare mother', or *mantenida*, thereby preserving the relationships between imperialistic mechanisms of control and women's bodies. Yet residents' engagements with and understandings of the Gladiolas urban struggle were disrupting those impositions through their own narratives of and practices of 'othering' and of resistance, including the growing practices of rights.

This situation warrants further investigation in relation to the transnational development 'housing' networks (Purdy and Kwak 2007) which are influencing the shape public housing takes- materially, politically and socially- with and beyond the American frameworks. For example, one possible avenue would look at how global financial and political capital intersect to impact local constructions costs, partnerships, materials, and regeneration projects; as well as how those intersect with the growing relevance of international housing rights decrees, development models, and emerging local social movements. This is especially significant in the current context of intense trans-local movements of people and resources where Puerto Rico can be understood as both a colonial anomaly in the region and as a continuum to its Caribbean and Latin American counterparts.

Public housing's ideological trajectory further suggested that the elastic yet durable representations of urban 'others' have gone hand-in-hand with larger shifts in political and economic forces and with public housing's changing material face. During the late 1950's and early 60's, the development of the financial district of Hato Rey as a 'model city'; the increasingly aggressive vigilance and destruction of shantytowns; the advent of upper-middle class condominiums as new modern urban living; the rise in the cement-based and international networks in the construction industry; and the attacks on scaled-down public housing modernist architecture all coincided to make high-rises the new preferred typology for these public housing. Las Gladiolas itself was

constructed in the late 60's and inaugurated in the early 70's as part of the story of Hato Rey's development at a time when juxtaposing social classes and encouraging cross-class mixing in urban centres was still a political priority. But its form and technologies were immediately debated in terms of cultural authenticity and the poor's potential for adaptability. Soon, and with the opening of tenancy to 'the unworthy poor' (Vale 2000; Wright 1981), the towers were seen as both part of the same 'greater' public housing problem of crime already in existence, as well as a foreign anomaly to other public housing structures and cultures. That is, they were once again debated within national projections of modernity and progress, attached to the architectural properties of its structure- and their incongruence with the culture of people living therein.

Portrayed both as cause and result of criminal behaviour, its 'othering' became inextricably tied to deterioration- a classic symbolic emblem for regeneration (Zukin 1987)- as the major narrative trope and political logic organizing old prejudices and directing new acts of ordering and '(b)ordering' (Fusté 2010). These included the privatization and militarization of public housing, as well as the more recent policies for the 'deconcentration of poverty' through demolition and relocation. Paradoxically, the same actions that tried to consolidate 'proper' urban space were also destroying it. Such neo-liberal "creative destruction" (Brenner and Theodore 2002) by the PRPHA was formally denounced by residents in the press, in protests, and in their legal case. More popularly, it became known through the counter-discursive classed concept of *los grandes intereses*; an idea disseminated in demonstrations, newspapers, meetings, and people's speech. Thus, despite-or because- of the pervasive logic of deterioration, *Las Gladiolas* and its residents' resistances existed as a counter-geography of urban endurance; as a living recollection of the past, and as a disruption to the government's desired future. From the point of view of the political economy of the production of urban space, the buildings themselves were powerful sites of exchange that conveyed histories of public housing optimism and failure; spatial actors in the political and cultural narrative of crime, but also concrete ever-present features within their urban milieu, inescapably there, interfering with the national ideal of finance through their very resistant, and gendered, presence and uses.

Having reviewed the history of public housing, as well as how Las Gladiolas's towers became a site used to reinforce, challenge, or negotiate authority, expertise, and urban and national authenticity, I would suggest that the slow decay that befell the towers also made these artifacts an integral part of a process of social forgetting. Ample bodies of work that are beyond the scope of this thesis have looked at the role which the destruction of monuments in revolutions, or their preservation as national symbols can play as imposed acts of remembrance or forgetting (Hodgkin and Radstone 2002; Hodgkin and Radstone 2003; Legg 2004, 2007; Nora 1989). With a space like Las Gladiolas, so widely and almost monumentally presented in public forums, yet whose location- as described in the Introduction- is so 'unremembered' or 'unseen' by most (what I called the paradox of invisibility), it could be argued that its slow descent into deterioration, supported by historical stigmas and social repudiations, was a tool of gentrification in a deeper sense: That, as a long-term victimization of the poor that produces a sense of apathy, its decay seals their stigma (now also, as unmemorable) and reinforces a vision that whatever lies ahead is 'progress'; thereby justifying similar government practices elsewhere without seeming out of the ordinary. Indeed, the elimination of slums and early construction of public housing showed that the State insists on erasing markers of poverty through a mixture of representations, violent, and repressive acts that- in promoting the future progress of the nation- encourages turning a blind eye and forgetting what was there before.

This future, which hides the past (yet does not renounce old stigmas), was once celebrated by modernist or spectacular high-rise architecture. Today, it is exalted through the toned-down, middle-class walk-up. Destroying and then recreating the built environment of public housing in this *carte blanche* way – with the aid of authoritative architectural models- may also offer a way to 'forget' the more negative comments and debates that have circulated when aggressive security interventions or pronounced neglect were publicized. At the same time, this tool of forgetting and replacing according to new internationalized markers of modern nation, city, and citizen, may also respond to a complex desire to eliminate problematic markers of the turbulent colonial relationship between the U.S. and P.R., which Gladiolas's tall buildings- in their very structure- contain. All these characteristics suggest a need to study these forgetful architectures of discrimination in relation to post-colonial studies of modernity and nation; through analytic lenses insightfully suggested by recent

attempts to 'gender' the revanchist and gentrifying city (Brownill 2000; Kern 2010 Smith 1997); and with the tools provided by critical geographies of architecture. Specifically, if we are to move beyond the antagonistic portrayals which essentialized public housing space as 'good versus bad', buildings are not to be approached as constructed and acted upon only from above, but also used, negotiated, changed and given meaning through practice, inter-subjectively. It is in this sense, that residents' own memories of the towers as lived space also need to be excavated as a site of counter-memory that not only forces us to remember differently (Legg 2007: 460), but which is also connected to the contours of politicized identities.

### **Negotiating space and community through memory**

This investigation began to show that the decayed spaces and materials of the buildings were remembered, pictured, retold, and used for attacks or contestations in many different ways, figuring centrally in the emerging narratives of conflict, as much as they mediated residents' subjective senses of community, loss, insecurity, and legality. Their tales connected the grander scale of politics to the more personal level of shared community space which had sometimes been safe and open, and other times threatening and controlled. When speaking about the struggle and the extent of their participation in everyday, political or legal resistances, for instance, some of the women residents spoke to express affective memories about the changes in their current and past uses of the buildings' common spaces. These suggested- against government's contention- that the towers, while difficult to live in, were in fact culturally hybridized through practices, and ultimately habitable. Chapters 6 and 7 showed that women's roles as carers (as well as Arcadio's complex position as overseer of maintenance and general other 'caring' community duties) so important to their identities, were also decisive in how they remembered or felt the gravity of particular forms of deterioration or insecurity. Women's care-taking role mediated the kinds of gendered claims and demands they were making through *Gladiolas Vive*, as well as through the lawsuit in terms of how deterioration affected their families or their own health and well-being. Given their importance in shaping personal and political allegiances, as well as how they speak to complex personal senses of belonging and future hopes, residents' narratives made me think that rescuing the gendered dimensions of memories of space in political and design practices may be an important way of transforming stigmatized depictions of public housing. It may help to

positively expand the notion of what community participation means from its institutionalized and entrepreneurial versions which currently define it as, 'responsibilization... which encourage and harness active practices of self-management and identity construction, of personal ethics and collective allegiances' (Rose 1999: 176 in Hart 2004: 92), to include instead the everyday debates over cameras, walls, hallways, and elevators- for instance- as spaces where the meaning of community life and gendered subjectivity is invested in; where any dualistic public/private divide is questioned as an organizing framework of sociality (Syacheli and Mitchell 2007); and where participation- as a process of interaction, negotiation, and debate- actually occurs.

Ayona Datta, who has previously looked at how architecture is involved in the exchange that occurs between memory and subjectivity through residents' perceptions of modernisation (2006), recently studied the building 'acts' of Polish migrant workers in London (2008), labelling the interlinked notions and practices of home and identity as 'paramount to the flexible relationships between building and inhabitation'. By extending her notion of home from the limits of a domestic self-enclosed setting to that of an entire building complex, and the idea of inhabitation of a house or flat, to cohabitation as coexistence in same community space, I find that it was similarly the case with Gladiolas residents that the very 'flexible relationships' they had to develop over time between the towers and their managed life within them, shaped the complex way they came to think and feel about community and home, as well as how they became (or not) politically active. For instance, staying put and dealing with walking up the stairs despite the incredible stress and strain which doing so entailed, while arguably a strategic measure recommended by their lawyers so as to get a better deal after the lawsuit was decided upon, was also forging stronger ties and senses of commitment to the dwindling community life within. As deterioration got more advanced, and stairs and elevators became dynamic actors in the plot of the struggle, endurance and sacrifice (not devoid of complaints) of that sort became embedded in new appreciations of community life, as well as to particular aspects of their protest or legal claims. Therefore, their uses and memories of deteriorated space mixed the physical with the political in everyday ways, creating resistant subjectivities, and challenging the ingrained assumption that decline was due to 'their classes'.



Yet we saw that, at other times, residents blamed some of their own neighbours, who they differentiated themselves from according to the same class, gender and raced-based distinctions normally used to denigrate them, for the fate that had befallen them. They used categorizations such as ‘negative-rent’, ‘single mothers’ and ‘unruliness’ to express what they saw as those individuals’ involvement in deterioration, criminal activity, or their general lack of responsibility as tenants. Thus, they reproduced, albeit in a highly nuanced fashion, the ‘othering’ discourses which Chapters 3 to 5 demonstrated were created officially, as well as through newspaper and magazine images depicting physical and symbolic depravity through a simplified ‘good versus bad’ resident rhetoric. This relates to the fact that, unlike Datta’s (2008) work which concentrated on elements of construction and the building of homes, the flexible relationships moulding home identities in Gladiolas were crucially mediated by material elements creating the opposite: the dismantling of home space and erasure of old community ties. As a painful lived experience that physically bore the marks of the unfavourable passing of time, being in direct contact with the buildings’ precariousness intersected with their registers of what used to be there, complicating their senses and articulations of what was lost and what was hoped for. Thus, as affective experiences, deterioration was not only lived as pressures in their daily lives exerted from above, but also as sites of struggle materializing social differences that existed from before and threatened to break them apart from within. Ultimately their nuanced everyday experiences, which tied-in to memories of what community used to be like and to judgments of who was responsible for such change, intersected with the more authoritative and mainstream narratives of decay being created, dispersed and physically manufactured, producing in turn a highly dynamic scenario of their conflict. Under the pressure to move out, with new spaces being offered by Realojo for change, the purposes and unity of their community struggle became ambiguous in practice.

### **Strategies at the margins: ambiguity, difference and legality**

David Harvey (1989: 198) argued that,

‘Given the intricate complexity and sheer scale of urbanization under capitalism and the peculiar mix of alienations and opportunities that arises out of the urban experience [...] political consciousness becomes multidimensional, often contradictory, and certainly fragmented.’

The histories of the multiple scales and experiences of urban public housing marginalization reviewed were part and parcel of the way its nuanced politics and resistances were pursued and practiced. In the opening quote of this chapter, Dr. Vargas Vidot depicted what Chatterjee (2004: 60) would call ‘the politics of the governed’ in a decidedly adversarial tone- pitting ‘the governors’ of space against ‘the governed’, whilst still granting a space of power to the latter within that shifting relationship. This was not an inaccurate portrayal of the situation. The examples from this thesis also showed that in the context of public housing development, the ‘pavement’ of authority and the ‘flower’ of resistance were forces working symbiotically with and against each other, and that with the passing of time, the antagonism between these different actors grew in intensity. This antipathy was supported and mediated by third parties such as the news media and legal actors. In this ingrained, but increasingly fragile dynamic, local State authorities’ position as ‘landlords’ of public housing residents granted them the political and financial power over them. But given their own position of powerlessness within the American colonial system, along with the rights and knowledge being enacted by residents through their growing popular mobilizations and defiance of *Realojo*, the borders of political negotiation were not fixed. They dynamically adapted and reshaped according to the circumstances.

Both residents and government officials often made cultural micro-adjustments or *jaibería*, characterized by a dynamic interplay of complicity and resistance with the U.S. (García 2000: 58) as a way of working with and against the system by using everyday spaces to transgress roles and stereotypes, and to resist traditional forms of oppression. In the case of the PRPHA, for example, because colonial political agendas do not always translate into the kinds of projects being sought locally (Hosagrahar 2005: 189), its Director learned to respond to HUD’s policy requests positively. At the same time, he resisted the colonial project by retaining a space to enforce his own decisions, based on personal and political motivations, prejudices, cultural perceptions and concerns. Under this purview, Las Gladiolas could equally be a site of either focused political interest or of cultural apathy and disdain. Thus, Laboy responded to the status of colonial national ambiguity by using the federal phenomenon when it was convenient, and shedding it, if possible, when it was not. This is a crucial finding that takes Bhabha’s ‘mimicry’ away from the abstract space of postcolonial theorizing to what Legg (2008) suggested should

be the material understanding of how that ambivalence is seen in the material practice of economies and histories.

Residents, on the other hand, used *jaiba* politics to protest against relocation and the hierarchies embedded in its practices, while also flirting openly with the advances made by the Relocation officials. Even though most felt strong connections to Gladiolas as both community and home, they also experienced high levels of insecurity under the current state of the towers. They were also unsure about what choice to take under Realajo's continuous pressures, often choosing to remain ambiguous and shifty about moving out, following advice from their legal pro bono team, in case a more appealing option turned up. As a tactic of 'in-betweenness', it allowed them to engage with housing and management agencies on 'regulatory' terms while using their newfound tools of official complaint to either demand better relocation options or play with authorities while they continued to resist on-site. Rather than serve as a space of idleness, the instrumentalization of ambiguity and ambivalence by residents emerged strategically as a resource.

While residents' intentions differed greatly from those of the PRPHA, both acted in ways that identified and intended to resist American authority, without ever subverting it completely. The hidden agendas, political ambitions, and local customs set forth by both of their forms of *jaibería* unknowingly and deliberately reshaped politics and urban landscapes. In doing so, they both responded to and departed from those devised by HUD. Therefore, as a decidedly cultural practice in the context of colonialism, the multiple uses, scales and appropriations of 'othering' explored in the thesis linked ambiguity to personal, community and national subsistence.

Yet, as much as the metaphorical 'pavement' and 'flower' had complex ways in which they opposed and confronted one another and their colonial 'master', residents' own voices and practices demonstrated that the so-called 'fissures' produced by 'the flower' of resistance were also multiple and diverse. A shared sense of resistant community action was less than straightforward. Although residents either criticized or blamed their neighbours for causing Las Gladiolas's problems, they also seemed to know that they too were being judged by society according to those standards. They felt that it was the government's intention to fragment their political consciousness and collectivity

from within by pitting residents against each other. The government's offers of personal gains through relocation were intended to slowly erode a sense of common struggle among the residents much like the physical deterioration of the building. Therefore, if the leaders wanted to resist displacement as a group in a successful way, they had to make an appeal to an 'imagined community' (Anderson 1983) of solidarity which publicly subsumed or masked markers of internal difference by claiming harmonious unity (this was engendered by 'Gladiolas Vive' and its leaders- Chapter 6). This was an explicit attempt to show that despite the structures' decay, they were not morally corrupt, but strong and, ultimately, 'good'.

Consequently, clashing narratives were being discussed- one privately in the other publicly- about difference and unity. This highlighted the residents' rather uncomfortable position of having to discipline, or at least calibrate, their neighbours' adequateness according to dominant official and cultural judgments based on the good-bad resident dichotomy. Much like children who want to avert punishment, the members of 'Gladiolas Vive' felt they all had to behave properly if they wanted to guard against the more punitive measures and governmental abuses that they were so accustomed to. Certainly, if they wanted to stay and claim their rights as a group, they needed to proclaim unity. On one hand this task was facilitated by Mirta's extensive use of the news media shed new light on their plight (they had only been associated to criminality). On the other hand, the rifts in the relationship and styles of the leaders were significant obstacles.

During my time in the field, I found practices such as gossip (Chapter 2) to be powerful enforcers of visions of community, potentially constraining undesirable conduct. Iris Marion Young (1990: 236) argued that, 'If in their zeal to affirm a positive meaning of group specificity people seek or try to enforce a strong sense of mutual identification, they are likely to reproduce exclusions similar to those they confront.' Extending Young's argument<sup>3</sup>, Judith Butler (1997) stressed that, as a shared feature of humanity rather than an oppressive enforcer of separation or boundaries, difference can be politically liberatory when it is accepted as the very condition of identity upon which connections to 'another' can be grounded. But when Gladiolas leaders' political tactic of 'exclud[ing] others who threaten that sense of identity' (Young 1990: 12) is looked at in light of: (a) how public housing itself has been so powerfully struc-

tured as unwanted difference within Hato Rey's unequal urban landscape, and (b) how residents felt both strongly affiliated to, but also dis-identified from Las Gladiolas as a community, it becomes a more complex and empowering practice.

Harvey (1991) agrees that differences need to be bridged and accepted in order for larger solidarities and political presences to emerge. But he also argued that for a politics of collectivities or grassroots to become strong urban presences, they first need to cohere internally as a 'militant particularism' (*ibid.*, 190). This process can often be based on class or racial antagonisms. Of course, he continues, how a 'community' is defined will vary depending on the resources sought (for example, to secure privilege or to control a space under threat). But, in order to think seriously about the possibility for social change Harvey suggests that we need to understand local forms of solidarity and political cohesions. Following this criteria, (Chapters 6 and 7) I found that the leaders of Las Gladiolas and their supporters were drawing internal community boundaries from a location of multiple marginality and historical oppressions. Their 'othering' became a site where mainstream portrayals of who they were- as a people and a space could be transformed. Moreover, new relationships and networks with external movements, political meanings, legal knowledge and bodies of resistance (Haraway 1990; hooks 1990) could also be produced.

At the same time, the enforcement of such commonality was made difficult given the historical stigma that hovered over residents, not to mention the continued loss of residents to Realajo, and the power structures and struggles that were emerging in the leadership. This became most apparent when residents were advised not to carry out any acts of civic disobedience – much less violence – lest the judge in charge of their case turn against them. For residents such as Arcadio, these tacit terms of permitted and forbidden conduct which the lawsuit was filtering merely highlighted the injustice of their position. His critique, supported by some of the older female residents, revolved around how the law, too, was yet another mechanism keeping public housing in the political and legal space of 'the other'. It silently recognized how, within the politics of welfare capitalist society, insurgency is rechannelled and contained by mechanisms such as the law (Young: 89). Moreover, experiences of corruption, a coincidental lack of trust in political elite by most parts of

society and a disillusionment with the colonial political status, have opened a key space for confronting and questioning traditional forms of oppression. This is evident in the growing number of movements from poor communities threatened by and contesting displacement all over the island. Their demands are taking place ever so carefully with increasing force through popular civil action, but also within the limits of the law. In an environment of multiple sources of power, the legal can be understood as a mediating site 'cultivating the conditions in which non-sovereign subjects are constituted' (Hart: 92). Such a populist practice of legality simultaneously extends and contains the power of government.

In a more personal sense, the lawsuit also gave residents space to manoeuvre and play with the actual discrepancies of their everyday lives in way that contractual arrangements and endless regulatory contracts with the management and housing agencies could not. Specifically, it changed the relationship of power with PRPHA by pushing the boundaries of what had previously been non-negotiable zones. In the wake of the residents' unforeseen legal battle, each decision made to resist or protest in some way may have had an impact on the groups' future and their claims in the class-action lawsuit. As their lawyers consistently pointed out, each choice was theirs to make, but it had collective results. However, in the end, as Arcadio's story suggested, the legal acted as another (more benign) instrument of ordering. Friction and fault lines were to be subsumed under a vision of cohesion for the greater good of the 'community'; i.e., the lawsuit.

Finally, Edna's story also illustrated the ways in which frustrating legal processes can highlight and reinforce oppressive power relations while residents were simultaneously learning to act their part in this theatre of injustice so as to attain relative rights and opportunities. Edna's claims and growing sense of legal subjectivity were inextricably tied to the space of her life-long apartment in Las Gladiolas and the accessible and socially connected urban centre she felt was her home. As an illegal invader, upon returning to that home, her struggle with the law not only emphasized how the robust tentacles of urban governmentalities (in collusion with the juridical sphere) could make residents feel the weight of their powerlessness vis à vis authorities. It also stressed those governmentalities' incompleteness when faced with her complex lived prac-

tices of home-making (moving from one place to another and re-asserting the first as her 'true' home in her search for a right to stay there).

It is through ambivalence that spaces of entrenched marginality are being challenged. Therefore, tools for understanding it need to be more robust. Future investigations need to look at how women's *jaibería*, in conjunction with the growing pervasiveness of the legal as process (lawyers, laws, tribunals, court, sanctions, orders, appeals, lawsuits), interacts with the multi-level politics embedded in the productions of public housing. One of the most interesting questions to arise from this thesis for future research is how women's leadership- such as Mirta's, and their larger participation in the community movement may be redefining the specific gendered categorizations attached to public housing space since its inception. It would be important to analyse the arguments about education, work, and mothering, attached to the post-colonial bodies of women and centralised in the struggles within insular class relations and relationships with the U.S. in terms of how welfare politics are possibly intersecting or undergoing cultural shifts due to women's leadership, as well as their sheer predominance in numbers; And, finally, how the materiality of those projects are mediating that process in active ways as the stage, but also actor of such transgressions.

This thesis has been an exercise in thinking relationally across a range of perspectives to broaden the dialogues between gender and urban studies; development and postcolonialism; and critical geographies of architecture, in order to move with and beyond the symbolic terrain to questions of how space is a product of performances and transformations of use, process and social and politicized practice (Lees 2001: 56). In questioning the 'regime of truth' status of public housing through these intersections, it became clear that there was no one way of thinking or making community, politics and resistance, but multiple sites through which the 'difference' of public housing is established, operated, reproduced and contested. These are the sites where the geographies of colonialism, established through the socio-materiality of public housing spaces, are being altered. Thus, rather than reaching some final note of optimism or pessimism, the research suggested that the current environment of urban gentrification, which is deeply enmeshed in broader social and cultural inequalities of class, race and ethnicity, and gender, elicits important rhetorical and practical continuities, and offers a departure from

a past that constructed public housing as a 'saviour' for the poor migrating masses.

The work also highlights the importance of considering the physical structures of public housing as equally crucial to the governmental project of modernity as the social policies directed at its resident 'other'. It shows that Las Gladiolas' towers were central to residents' experience of everyday life and their participation in the community or legal struggle as the common physical nexus linking what was variously remembered about the community's life, a contentious and highly fought-over present and aspirations for future urban living. This context stresses how the hierarchical domination of urban planning practices, while powerful, is being contested. Residents have been forced to inhabit their space differently because of the many changes occurring therein and this process has shifted their subjectivities, community and politics. Therefore, historical attempts by colonial administrators to fix public housing and manage its residents from above through both policy and material interventions, have had to be changed, stalled, and adapted due to a small, unexpected, strong and persistent multi-sited resistance against relocation. Residents are claiming rights to their home in the city through legal mechanisms, seeking improvement on their own terms, and forging allegiances for the future.

Hopefully, this story of how a section of the financial district of the city of San Juan is being contested, will offer a stronger basis from where to think about the reproduction of certain kinds of dominant knowledge about public housing and the coincidental construction or destruction of its physical space. As a final reiteration, it is also my expectation that in thinking through these linked trajectories and the contemporary actions destabilizing them, it will become clearer that, in Puerto Rico's colonial context, the physical and symbolic contours of urban borders are multiple, operating at the political, cultural, economic, physical and social levels at once. This is crucial because even though socio-physical frontiers such as boundary walls, security cameras, and other traditional forms of marginalization continue to be used as oppressive tools of domination, the multiple scales explored in this thesis demonstrate that they are in fact elastic and malleable to their environment - open to all kinds of changes and transformations.



## Notes

<sup>1</sup> In studying the architecture and urbanism of Delhi, he argues that modernity was imagined by India's colonial officials through the symbolic terrains of housing. But, because colonialism and modernity were fundamentally connected processes, both part of the same original global project that constructed oppositions between 'traditional' and 'modern', there was nothing inherently 'modern' about one built form versus another; rather, all expressions of modernity were indigenous – the consequence of negotiations and imagined ideals (190-191).

<sup>2</sup> Crump (2007: 180) argued that the links between the rhetoric of mobility in American public housing policies and welfare reform are not merely discursive but 'intended to facilitate the spatial reorganization of urban labor markets.'

<sup>3</sup> As discussed in the introduction, other feminist scholars have also made the idea of difference- from ethnic, racialised and religious differences to location, time period, class and sexual orientation- a central question to the critical studies of society, community, politics and justice (Irigaray 1985; Young 1990; Cornell 1991; Epstein 1992; Benhabib 1995; 1996; Naffine and Owens 1997; Yuval-Davis 1997).



## Appendix A: 'Comunidad' in El Nuevo Día

This appendix contains six images- and their subscripts- from different stories published in the 'Comunidad' (Community) Section of the island's main newspaper, El Nuevo Día during the 2006-07 time-period. Together, they provide another lens through which to think about the multi-sited production of authority, the justifications of interventions justified, and the sources and sites of resistance. They are followed by a brief analysis, supported by my interview with Dr. Vargas Vidot from the NGO 'Iniciativa Comunitaria', about how those images work together- as a visual discourse that co-produces of the nation's 'otherness'.



Figure A.1. 'Cured by Service: For Doña Georgie, work for El Vigía is her best medicine.'  
Source: Nieves Ramírez 2006b.

Figure A.2. 'Change with a feminine face'.  
Source: Nieves Ramírez 2006a.



## Reciben ayuda para reparar sus casas

Vivienda dio vales para materiales a una veintena de familias

POR SANDRA CAQUIÁS CRUZ  
end.scaquias@elnuevodia.com

**PEÑUELAS** - Para caminar en la casa de Juana Torres Sáez hay que estar pendiente a que el pie no caiga en uno de los huecos que tiene el piso de madera de esa vivienda.

La estructura de madera y zinc está en medio de un callejón, en el sector Los Chinos de la barriada Maldonado de Peñuelas. Allí vive con tres niños menores de 11 años. El papá de los pequeños está en prisión.

La casa la compró hace varios años por \$3,500. El terreno no le pertenece.

Con sus pedidos de ayuda al Gobierno obtuvo varios sacos de cemento, bloques, madera y ventanas de aluminio con las que espera reparar parte de la frágil es-



Figure A.3. 'Help received to repair their houses: Housing gave o.k. for materials to twenty-some families,' and 'West region without water due to possible contaminant.'

Source: Caquias Cruz 2007a.

COMUNIDAD

EL NUEVO DÍA  
VIERNES  
26 DE ENERO  
DE 2007

## Removida de la miseria

Las autoridades sacan de su choza a doña Ildelfonsa

POR SANDRA CAQUIÁS CRUZ  
end.scaquias@elnuevodia.com

**PONCE** - Un poco aturdida, con ayuda de funcionarios de varias agencias y en compañía de familiares, Ildelfonsa Camacho abandonó anoche la frágil casucha de bolsas plásticas y ramas de árboles en que vivía.

Fue necesaria una orden del juez Ángel Candelario, solicitada por la Oficina de la Procuradora de las Personas de Edad Avanzada, para que doña Ildelfonsa recibiera asistencia para abandonar las condiciones de miseria en las que vivió desde hace años.

"(A) esta señora hay que removerla", dijo Adolfo Vaergas, manejador del programa de Servicios al Desambulante de la Administración de Servicios de Salud Mental y contra la Adicción (Assmca), cuando, junto a otro personal de asistencia gubernamental, intervino con la mujer de 69 años de edad.

Vaergas aseguró que fue ayer que tuvieron conocimiento de las condiciones en que la sexagenaria vivía, reveladas por El Nuevo Día. Explicó que luego de la evaluación física que se le haría en el Hospital Metropolitano, en Yauco, se encargarían de acomodar a la mujer en una institución para enfermos mentales.

Encarnación Camacho, hermano de doña Ildelfonsa, dijo que estaba "con-

Un caso como éste es crítico. Son casos de condiciones inhumanas y que se tienen que activar (las ayudas) el mismo día que se tiene conocimiento"

ROXANA LÓPEZ LEÓN  
Procuradora de las Personas de Edad Avanzada

Figure A.4. 'Removed from misery: authorities take Doña Ildelfonsa out of her shack'.

Source: Caquias Cruz 2007b.



Figure A.5. ‘No turning back: The total vacating of Las Gladiolas continues its course despite the lawsuit.’

Source: Rivera Marrero 2006.



Figure A.6. ‘Life changes in the public housing project: Neighbours from Las Palmas comment about their experiences in the complex’ Source: Caquias Cruz 2006.

As a kind of linguistic and visual ‘conceptual category’ (Lister and Wells 2001: 141), ‘Comunidad’ sought to bring different people, places and things together under the physical ‘print space’ of projected commonality. But what, one may ask, did they mean by such an ambiguous and all-encompassing term such as ‘Comunidad’? What inclusions and exclusions did it depend on? In what seem like clear legacies of the 1930’s-60’s depictions of slums and public housing as socially, morally and economically deficient, the photojournalis-

tic montages of this section typically depicted certain spaces, now labeled 'community', alongside stories of poverty and women, with the underlying discourse of change throughout. Whereas traditionally, fear and crime had been linked to destitution in certain places (like public housing), the section 'Comunidad' extracted poverty from its normal 'criminal' milieu and recast it as something that also (but, not only) existed along the less violent axes of humility, perseverance and pre-modern living, all seemingly caught up in a continuous process of (female) improvement, but nevertheless still stagnant in an inevitable state of backwardness. Typically, the column was represented by an old, dark-skinned woman/mother, identified still as exotic 'other' to the dominant white elite order of the island. 'She' opened up a new, positive and more colourful 'face' to poverty, while crime and violence never stopped being covered in other sections of the same publication retaining their old associations to young/dark/male/public housing.

This signals a particular understanding of community as belonging only to a certain class of people (the poor women racialized as darker or black) that need either saving or intervening. The limited story-lines (which seemed at once deliberate and arbitrary) celebrated those 'comunidades' that were, on the one hand, anomalous to the dominant order, but on the other, rescuable because they could be reigned in through the American upward mobility model of housing that retained shades of 'local' flavour (often named, culture). The section both revered and exalted the 'community' being portrayed, while tacitly condemning and infantilizing it in highly gendered, raced, and classed terms.

In my interview with Dr. Vargas Vidot- founder of the organization 'Iniciativa Comunitaria'- he revealed to me that he had been involved in the creation of this section and that, to his chagrin, it had turned from a dream of objectivity and empowerment, into a section of 'misinformation'; a 'strawberry short-cake' version of reality, that had :

'Been affiliating itself with a system of mendicancy and pity as well as of telling the people "this is what we expect of a poor barrio" ... They try to look for that "oh, so pretty" angle but... There should not be any censorship that makes viable only the reporting of those who respond to the domesticated model people want...'

Accordingly, in Figure A.5, we see a picture of Migdalia, who is Arcadio's wife, looking forlornly, rather than angrily as was more normal of her, onto the space of the soon-to-be demolished towers of Las Gladiolas- a process characterized here as one from where there is 'no turning back'. In the other figures above, women have all been 'changed' by help from the government; their own dedication to a cause; their group affiliation; or their residence in a particular place. Regardless of why the change is occurring, the poverty – and the challenges involved in transcending it- is feminized.

Soon after finishing my fieldwork, 'Comunidad' was suddenly eliminated as part of a general organizational overhaul of END, easily (and quietly) switching back to its previous format: that is, it went from a quasi-optimistic take on communities back to an old model with a more explicit sense of mistrust over poor living spaces and their residents, covered mainly in through crime and other lurid tales in the 'Seguridad' (security) section. The short-lived history of 'Comunidad' is a strong example of how power and politics can interact with the concept of 'community' as a representation of a certain sector, as imagined by a limited group of people; how it can be negotiated by different parties in ways that can have very real social reactions and effects, for example, for how residents feel about themselves and how the public views and act towards public housing; and how urban public housing policies are then chosen. Yet, as this thesis argues through the interpolation of residents' own voices and versions of what community is, this impact should not be seen to 'work' alone, in a separate sphere from other social and political representations circulating at the same time.

## **Appendix B: Interview categories, narrative and questions**

### **By 'actor' category, ranging from 09/06-09/08**

Category	Type	Number Interviewed	Sub-Total
Residents	Women	12	14
	Men	2	
Administrators	Government: PRPHA	3	4
	Private: 'American Management'	1	
Social Workers	COPADIM	3	6
	UPR	2	
	'Iniciativa Comunitaria'	1	
External collaborators	Visual artist	1	2
	Community activist	1	
Professionals	Lawyers	4	11
	Academics	5	
	Architects	2	
<b>Total</b>			<b>37</b>

### **Narrative Description**

One of the principal avenues through which I gathered information about Las Gladiolas was by conducting interviews to a number of different actors. Given that the conflict was being produced and debated from various angles, it was important to get a first-hand perspective from those identified with those many positions. All interviews were semi-structured and open-ended, lasting from a half hour to three, with varying depth resulting from each depending on elements such as: the setting (either in flats, offices, homes, food establishments, or public open spaces), the extent of previous contact or relationship, the moment/progress of my own research at the time, the personality of the interviewee (talkative versus reticent), and whether it was a scheduled or spontaneous meeting.

When I began field work and after meeting Teresa, I distributed letters of introduction that briefly described my project and interest and included my phone number to all the apartments that were still occupied, but did not receive any responses from that initial approach. Thus, the fourteen Gladiolas



resident interviews (12 women and 2 men) carried out were referred to me in a snowball fashion or by spontaneous acquaintances made in a meeting. Selecting respondents in this way had a high probability of bias of speaking to only to those who shared a common view of the struggle, and it involved confidentiality issues which I was aware of and tried to guard against, as addressed in the methodology chapter. Nevertheless, the 'selection' of residents left in the towers was already quite reduced when I arrived and, given the kinds of pressures faced by those who remained, I found it best- in terms of trust- to approach those who had been recommended by other friends, or who I met during a community meeting. The framework of their everyday battle against authorities gave me a distinct sense of not wanting to impose myself except if invited or recommended.

Interviews and informal meetings were also held with other actors who were either directly or indirectly involved in the case of Las Gladiolas. To make these connections, I either telephoned directly to request a meeting (and telephoned repeatedly); wrote electronic letters (sometimes had to send the same one a few times before getting any response, if at all); spoke in person if there was opportunity in some event; or drew on family connections. Given the importance of the Puerto Rico Public Housing Agency in shaping and enforcing urban housing policy as well as being the institution behind relocation directly impacting Las Gladiolas, I interviewed three of the high-levelled officers in that organization: the Public Housing Administrator, the top aide to the administrator; and the Director of the Public Housing 'Sales' Division. I also interviewed the manager at the time of the private 'American Management' maintenance company who was in charge of the day-to-day tasks of the towers' upkeep, as well as collecting rent. The other individuals considered 'collaborators' of 'Gladiolas Vive' who were interviewed were: the three social workers from COPADIM directly involved with the children of Las Gladiolas through an after-school program and extracurricular workshops; two social workers from the UPR who had been marginally connected with the protests but were also active in other social rights movements in the island; the founder of 'Iniciativa Comunitaria' who had worked with the community for years in a range of social efforts, including training for communitarian leadership and mediation amongst neighbours; an activist and a video artist committed to helping the grass roots activities; two lawyers who led the class-action lawsuit, one who worked for the clinic during the first stages of the case, and one who was active with the cause and represented Mirta on a personal level pro bono; five academics either directly supportive and active

with 'the cause', or with specialist knowledge of public housing development (a historian, three sociologists, and a women's studies professor); and finally, two professional architects, one of which was also a university professor, both interested in the politics of architectural design and the construction practice more generally.

For the interviews with residents and housing authorities I always brought a set of broad thematic questions which I kept close at hand (to provide myself with cues) in case they were not the type to go off-script (See following section). However, the interviews with collaborators, I tended to only scribble a few notes down about areas they could speak about, rather than having a script from where to work. Since their areas of expertise or experiences were so different, I found that maintaining this spontaneous framework helped them flow more easily. For all respondents, it was important to frame the questions in broad terms and to incorporate the most natural conversation possible. Irrespective of their 'affiliation', I would try to get them to speak to me about what they felt was most important about what was happening in Las Gladiolas with questions revolving around how- according to their field of expertise or experience- they envisioned what was happening there, with public housing, or with San Juan's urban transformation more generally. With the few persons with whom I conducted follow-up interviews, I brought up more direct questions regarding their opinion of a particular event or common theme which had either just occurred, or which I had already categorized into a certain pattern from previous interviews.

While I voice-recorded and/or took simultaneous notes in most interviews carried out with 'outside actors', I only taped very few of the ones with residents, as they expressed feeling uncomfortable with a recorder. I soon learnt to simply take scant but indicative notes rather than even ask about taping, as this immediately conferred a threatening status to my presence which I wanted to avoid. Many times, I made both oral recordings and written summaries after each conversation held- including telephone calls- so that I could later combine those two recorded memories in my analysis. I also had many informal discussions while 'on my way' to a meeting or waiting to be let in to an interview, which I recorded in my subsequent not-taking as part of the context of the interview scenario.

With residents, interviews took place within that space of the towers, which I visited frequently, mainly in their apartments. On a few occasions, close neighbour/friends who happened to be hanging about would also become part of the process and children or grandchildren of various ages tended to walk in and out of the living room spaces where these conversations invariably took place- enacting the palpable fluidity and open character of those domestic home spaces. Two of them were carried out in the common 'play' area downstairs. These were interrupted on occasion by neighbours who would pass by and stop for a chat. One was held in the moment we met, introduced by another neighbour, and therefore had to be held in the waiting area of the maintenance office, which we happened to be close to. The combination of the spontaneity and 'official' environment of the interview setting proved uncomfortable for both of us and the conversation was marked by a distinctive lack of trust from his part towards me. With the other respondents, interviews were held in domestic, social and institutional locations ranging from offices and restaurants, to bars and homes.

### **Themes and Guidelines by Broad Interviewee Category**

- **Residents (general) of Las Gladiolas**

#### *Everyday*

What does a normal day look like here?

How do you feel living here, under the circumstances?

Is there much movement in and out of the towers?

How do you manage your children's care? Division between school and home time?

What do you consider to be man's role in your house? In Gladiolas? And women's?

#### *Buildings*

Tell me what you consider to be the process of change of Las Gladiolas and its physical characteristics.

Have you moved from apartments internally, within the tower?

What did the 'modernization' of the 1990's consist of?

What was most affected by those changes?

What do you think about the security cameras and other such measures?

What does the maintenance company do in LG?

How does LG compare to other public housing projects that you know of?

*Community and process*

How has LG changed?

How do you feel about relocation, on both personal and community levels?

Do you want to leave or stay? Why?

What kinds of networks are/were in existence in LG?

How have children been impacted by the changes in the towers?

How does the current condition compare to what there was here before? How have things changed or stayed the same?

Was change in LG sudden or gradual?

When, more or less, did things change definitively here? What marked the change?

Have/how thefts affected you?

What do you believe will happen to the future of LG?

*Organization and politics*

How do you see the struggle going on in LG? How would you describe it and what is your position on the matter?

Do you feel GV represents your interests?

Have you been part of GV?

Who are the main actors involved in the struggle; who are friends and foes in that sense?

Do you think politics play a role in what is happening? If so, how and to what extent?

What do you think about American Management and PRPHA- and their roles in what is happening?

Do your being a woman (or man), influences your role in the community or in the organization? How so?

• **Resident leaders/representatives of Las Gladiolas**

Who are the main actors of this battle and what are the main strategies being used to implement it?

How do you see the process of displacement/relocation and the future of that government plan?

What is the history of LG ad GV, and how did you become a part of it?

How autonomous is GV?

When/how/why did you become a leader?

What kinds of opportunities/obstacles did you face in that process?

What support networks are there for you and for the organization?

How do you see the role/participation of women in the community struggle?

How has the physical condition of the towers affected the community struggle; the literal movement of residents within the tower; the resident to resident dynamic; the ability to make connections with externals?

Ask specifically about links between changing character of community, Mano Dura, modernization, and maintenance issues.

- **Private Management authorities**

*Organizational*

What is your relationship with AM and with PRPHA?

How autonomous is AM from PRPHA?

Is there a relationship between AM and other maintenance companies in the island? How would you define those exchanges?

Tell me more about the nature of work here: how people are recruited, trained, learning organized, etc.?

When there is an institutional or regulatory change, like the recent contract replacements, what is the process involve in bringing those about? How do you find out and how do you then disseminate to others?

What formal or informal mechanisms of protest exist for residents to challenge those changes?

Did you know someone that worked here before being manager?

*Community*

What was the state of LG when you started working here?

How has it changed?

What kind of relationship do you have with residents?

How do you see your position in relation to residents and what is happening in LG? How do you manage personal/institutional divisions?

How do you see the relationship between AM and relocation of residents?

Does AM play a role in the same?

Do you see a division between those who want to move out and those who want to remain? How would you define it?

In your opinion or experience, what is the role of women within AM? What positions do they hold? And, does gender impact organization of company and relationships between workers?

If this was demolished, where would you go work and why? What is the mechanisms of exchange within the company itself?

Specifically, ask about links between changing physical condition of towers and experience of work.

- **Housing Authorities**

*Institutional*

History:

Tell me a bit about the PHA, how it came about and what it does.

How did the decision to demolish tall buildings like Las Gladiolas come about?

What is PHA's relationship to HUD? To the local government? What scope is there for autonomous actions?

How are these relationships managed?

Are there pressures? Of what type and how are they managed?

What changes are being brought in at the moment?

Who manages the archives here?

How does the PHA respond to community issues such as health, education, and violence?

*Private companies*

When did privatization come about?

How did it affect your work?

What is the hierarchy involved?

How is their work/efficiency measured?

Who and how is it determines that one company changes to another in a particular project?

What other companies managed LG, and what was the experience with them?

Did they affect the standards of maintenance? How?

What is the current relationship with American Management?

*Modernization*

What does 'modernization' mean? What does it consist of?

What alternatives for upgrading buildings exist when modernization does not occur?

What are the institutional and financial mechanisms of modernization?

How do you see security playing into aspects of the modernization agenda?

How have past modernizations been taken into account in the decision to demolish Las Gladiolas?

#### *Urban/Architectural*

How is architectural design of projects decided upon?

Do you see a 'social agenda' in the way urban spaces are being redesigned? i.e., do you believe public housing is being displaced to the periphery, or what are the terms of geographical engagement as you see them at the moment?

#### *Community*

What is it, according to PHA?

What measures are taken to support and strengthen public housing communities?

How much is self-management by part of residents allowed?

What is the relationship between institutional and community management?

What are communities' problems?

How do you deal with them?

How do you address the disintegration of a community like Las Gladiolas?

What mechanisms of support are offered by AVP for individuals and groups who are displaced?

#### *Las Gladiolas*

What is the history of PHA's and Las Gladiolas? With its leaders?

What is happening in/with LG? What particular situations have been encountered with that community?

What do you think about residents' refusal to leave?

How political is all of this?

Are there plans for the future of those lands?

Are there gender differences in that community? How would you describe them?

How does AVP address women's concerns therein?

How has 'security' impacted the terms of the relationship with Las Gladiolas: its buildings and residents?





**Appendix C. Archival material  
By Sources, Type and Location**

<b>Archival Sources</b>
<b>Physical and digital archives/collections</b>
Archivo General de Puerto Rico (AGPR)
Colección Puertorriqueña (UPR)
Departamento de Vivienda de Puerto Rico: Centro de Datos e Información Estadísticas (CDIE)
Departamento de Vivienda de Puerto Rico: Secretaría de Planificación Estratégica y Servicios Técnicos, Sistema de Información Geográfica.
El Mundo Newspaper Digitalization Project
Fundación Luis Muñoz Marín
Jafer Construction: photographic archives
Proyecto Corporativo de Indización de Periódicos de Puerto Rico (EL Mundo: 1957-89)
Transportation and Public Works Department: Aerial Photographs Unit
<b>Puerto Rico libraries</b>
Biblioteca Junta de Planificación
UPR: Biblioteca de Departamento de Planificación
UPR: Biblioteca de Departamento de Leyes
UPR: Biblioteca de Departamento de Arquitectura
UPR: Colección Puertorriqueña
<b>Institutional/organizational web-sites and data-bases</b>
Administración de Vivienda Pública, Puerto Rico
Asociación de Constructores de Hogares de Puerto Rico
Asociación de Contratistas Generales de América, Puerto Rico
Asociación de Organizaciones Comunitarias para el Desarrollo de Vivienda de Puerto Rico
Cámara de Comercio de Puerto Rico
Centre for Urban Policy Research
Colegio de Abogados de Puerto Rico
Colegio de Arquitectos y Arquitectos Paisajistas de Puerto Rico
Comisión Económica para América Latina y el Caribe
Estudios Técnicos, Inc.
Fundación Ángel Ramos

Fundación Comunitaria de Puerto Rico
Grito de los Excluidos
Instituto de Acción Urbana e Integración Social
Instituto de Derecho Urbano
International Alliance of Inhabitants
International Federation for Housing and Planning (IFHP)
Lincoln Institute of Land Policy
Oficina de la Procuradora de las Mujeres, Puerto Rico
Oficina del Censo, Junta de Planificación de Puerto Rico
Planners Network
U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development
Urban Institute
Urban Land Institute

<b>Types of documents</b>
Budgets, where available
Campaign/Advertising Leaflets
Census
Company/Organizational/Project Brochures
Correspondence (personal and organizational)
Legal documents
Magazines
Meeting notes (minutes)
Newspapers
Opinion Surveys of public housing
Organisational Reports
Photographs
Policy Documents relating to public housing, urban development and Las Gladiolas
Regulations
Rental contracts
Statements of organisational philosophies/visions
<b>Newspapers consulted</b>
Claridad (online and physical)
Cucubano (physical)
El Mundo (online and library)
El Nuevo Día (online and library)
El Vocero (online and library)
Indymedia (online)

Planos y Capacetes (online)
Primera Hora (online and library)
Sunday San Juan Star (archive)
The Chicago Sun (online)
The Miami Herald (archive)
The New York Times (online)
The San Juan Star (library)
<b>Newspaper Search Terms</b>
American Management
Calle Quisqueya
Cámaras seguridad/vigilancia/electrónicas
Caserío/ Residenciales/ Vivienda
Ciudad Modelo
Congreso de Calidad de Vida
Crimen/asesinato/robo
CRUV/ ARUV
Departamento de Vivienda
Hato Rey
HUD
Laboy
Las Gladiolas
Mano Dura
Ocupación policíaca
Plan 8
Privatizadoras
Realojo
Residenciales Públicos/ Vivienda Pública
Seguridad
Urbano/ Urbanismo

<b>Legal Documents</b>
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2008. Alfonso García, R. and M. Morales-Cruz. Amended Opposition to Amended Motion for Summary Judgment and Memorandum of Law in Support Thereof. Civil No. 06-1578 (CCC). University of Puerto Rico School of Law- Legal Aid Clinic. San Juan, Puerto Rico, United States District Court for the District of Puerto Rico: 1-36.
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V	1	171 (7)
V	7	269 (1),272 (2), 273 (8,12),274 (2), 309 (1)
VI	4	59
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<b>Colección Doña Felisa Rincón de Gautier, 1947-1981</b>		
		5-23-68 caja 137, foto118.
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<b>Aerial Photographs</b>					
<b>Date of flight</b>	<b>Date of Processing</b>	<b>Approximate Scale</b>	<b>Area</b>	<b>Roll Number</b>	<b>Photo Number</b>
1-24-77	3-13-07	1:20000	Hato Rey	77-11	213
1-24-77b	3-13-07	1:20.000	Hato Rey	771A	82
2-16-1962	3-13-07	1:20.000	Hato Rey	GS-5	85
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3-19-81.	3-13-07	1:20.000	Hato Rey	81-3	212
8-20-95.	3-13-07	1:20.000	Hato Rey	95.2	90