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In his image and likeness: The Puerto Rican jíbaro as political icon

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This essay explores the rhetorical power of the emblem of Luis Muñoz Marín's Partido Popular Democrático (PPD) during the senatorial campaign of 1940. The PPD's emblem functioned to invoke the archetypal myth of the jíbaro, along with associated cultural values and corresponding ideological commitments, thus gathering the rhetorical forces the PPD needed to shape and mobilize a constituency. In so doing, the emblem rendered "visible" a jíbaro subject, transforming the same into a political icon and enhancing the constitutive force of the campaign discourse.

[Key words: jíbaros, visual rhetoric, Puerto Rico, political rhetoric, Popular Democratic Party, symbols]

ABSTRACT

Left: Campaign postcard of the Partido Popular Democrático, circa 1940s. Note (top left) the "ghostly" figure of the jíbaro with the straw hat. The caption at the bottom of the card reads: "Your votes for the Partido Popular Democrático will NOT count as votes in favor of independence or statehood, nor will they count for any other future form of political 'status.' They will be counted, as in the past, exclusively as votes for continuing the programs for social and economic justice of the Partido Popular. This is the promise that Luis Muñoz Marín makes to all of you." The Postcards Collection, Archives of the Puerto Rican Diaspora. Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños, Hunter College, CUNY. Reprinted, by permission, from Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños.

For pictorial representation is made use of in Churches, in this reason; that such as are ignorant of letters may at least read by looking at the walls what they cannot read in

(SCHAFF AND WACE 1989, 23).

—Gregory the Great

Long before the Partido Popular Democratico existed, there were thousands of Puerto Ricans that were Populares, that were already subconsciously what only later came to be called [Partido] Popular Democratico, but for whom electoral ballot held no insignia through which to liberate that subconscious attitude, bringing it to consciousness and creating through it an instrument of power and action.
My purpose in this essay is to examine the manner in which the emblem, an essential part of the campaign's discourse, functioned to invoke the archetypal myth of the jíbaro, along with its associated cultural values and corresponding ideological commitments. Hence I analyze how the emblem gathered the forces the PPD needed to shape and mobilize a constituency. I also explore how the emblem rendered “visible” a jíbaro subject, transforming the same into a political icon and enhancing the constitutive force of the campaign discourse. Elucidating the emblem's significance and constitutive power, I examine the emblem not as mere pictorial representation but as sign, an imagetext that pulls to itself multiple associations, meanings, and identifications, and connections, in so doing allowing those who encountered it to be confronted with the associations, values, and principles that organized and gave cohesion to the party's political project. As a political party emblem, the emblem can be considered one of the centerpieces of the PPD's campaign. Designed to catch the eye, in motivating political action (Olson 1983: 22). In fact, widely disseminated visual images such as the PPD emblem facilitate individuals “seeing themselves” in the myth of the jíbaro, along with its associated cultural values and corresponding perceptions and beliefs” that underlie political action (9). Consequently, I take the PPD’s emblem to be constitutive of a new political order and not just representative of a pre-existing one.

In our day, the ubiquity of the jíbaro image ensured that it worked as leitmotif of the campaign discourse, helping to facilitate identification with the jíbaro as the “subject” of the campaign, further facilitating the electorates’ choice. Although symbols are used by political parties in order to increase recognition of materials and messages that sport the insignia, the emblem appeared in all party materials and publications. In fact, since the emblem was one of the centerpieces of the PPD's campaign. Designed to catch the eye, the emblem appeared in all party materials and publications. In fact, since the emblem appeared in all party materials and publications. In fact, since it was developed at the same time the party was founded, the emblem can be considered the first artifact of the new party. The PPD’s emblem was a pictorial representation that combined both image and text into a powerful sign that provided a primary means through which the campaign rhetoric achieved its ideological ends.

The emblem nowhere contained the party name, Partido Popular Democratico. To be sure, Muñoz Marín knew the symbolic power of the archetypal myth of the jíbaro and strategically sought to cover himself with the mantle of this figure. The image would also inviting Puerto Ricans from all walks of life to identify with the cultural myth it represented. tacos, tierra, libertad, as the symbol for his party, and rapidly entrusted the actual design work to Antonio Colorado, a friend and professor at the University of Puerto Rico (Córdova 1984: 66). As a member of the island's cultural and political elite, Muñoz Marín desired; the electorate, many of which were illiterate or poorly educated, would not only be recognizable to the cultural elite, but would also function as part of the party's representation of the jíbaro. As an essential part of the campaign discourse, Muñoz Marín wanted the party to be known as the “party of the pava,” an association that Muñoz Marín knew of great symbolic value. As an essential part of the campaign discourse, the PPD campaign did not rely solely on the force of the spoken word for its appeals. Along with these other artifacts, the party emblem was one of the centerpieces of the PPD's campaign. Designed to catch the eye, the PPD campaign did not rely solely on the force of the spoken word for its appeals. Along with these other artifacts, the party emblem was one of the centerpieces of the PPD's campaign. Designed to catch the eye, the emblem appeared in all party materials and publications. In fact, since it was developed at the same time the party was founded, the emblem can be considered the first artifact of the new party. The PPD’s emblem was a pictorial representation that combined both image and text into a powerful sign that provided a primary means through which the campaign rhetoric achieved its ideological ends.

My purpose in this essay is to examine the manner in which the emblem, an essential part of the campaign's discourse, functioned to invoke the archetypal myth of the jíbaro, along with its associated cultural values and corresponding ideological commitments. Hence I analyze how the emblem gathered the forces the PPD needed to shape and mobilize a constituency. I also explore how the emblem rendered “visible” a jíbaro subject, transforming the same into a political icon and enhancing the constitutive force of the campaign discourse. Elucidating the emblem's significance and constitutive power, I examine the emblem not as mere pictorial representation but as sign, an imagetext that pulls to itself multiple associations, meanings, and identifications, and connections, in so doing allowing those who encountered it to be confronted with the associations, values, and principles that organized and gave cohesion to the party's political project. As a political party emblem, the emblem can be considered one of the centerpieces of the PPD's campaign. Designed to catch the eye, in motivating political action (Olson 1983: 22). In fact, widely disseminated visual images such as the PPD emblem facilitate individuals “seeing themselves” in the myth of the jíbaro, along with its associated cultural values and corresponding perceptions and beliefs” that underlie political action (9). Consequently, I take the PPD’s emblem to be constitutive of a new political order and not just representative of a pre-existing one.
Alcazar made sure he included a pava (Álvarez Nazario 1990: 19). Hence, the pava facilitated identification, and made the emblem instantly recognizable as a representation of a jíbaro, enhancing the audience's ability to “read” the emblem. Quite a few years after the campaign, in 1955, Earl Hanson Parker described the pava as similar in significance to the French revolution's liberty cap (Hanson Parker 1955: 175).

The words pan, tierra, and libertad, were critical to the emblem. Much like a caption, they were integral to the image itself, effecting an indubitable connection to the jíbaro and to the collective identity to which the campaign's discourse was addressed. The emblem gave presence. As a call for social justice this was not the first appearance of these three words in Puerto Rico. Muñoz Marín had already uttered these words in the speech he gave at his father's grave on July 17, 1938. In that speech Muñoz Marín promised his father that there would be “pan, tierra y libertad para este pueblo” (bread, land, and liberty for our people) (Muñoz Marín 1999). Moreover, the words pan, tierra, and libertad were centrally connected to the PPD's call for agrarian reform, as the party recognized the disastrous economic and social conditions facing the island. Thus, the words were ineluctably connected to Muñoz's campaign.
the connection to the jíbaro as important to the way this elite viewed itself. Muñoz Marín of course, recognized much more than just class issues. Seeing as a potentially redeemable part of the island’s cultural heritage, Muñoz removed the negative frame in which the jíbaro had so far been represented as a potential political mobilization strategy. As a result, he proceeded to charge the emblem with decidedly political content, and reformulated a new conceptualization of jíbaros’ persona as oppressed, and politically marginalized, but with power. Hence by virtue of depicting a strength, most definitive branch of our jíbaros and connection to a point of origin, to a noble Puerto Rican past. So conceived, jíbaros became prevalent in various symbolic. Depicted as a white rural type, by 1938 jíbaros stood for an authentic and connection to a point of origin, to a noble Puerto Rican past. So conceived, jíbaros were, according to Antonio Pedreira, “[the] strongest, most definitive branch of our own distinctiveness” (Pedreira 1968: 10). The jíbaro theme became prevalent in social domains; moreover, the ascription, which in earlier depictions had been the jíbaro, the PPD invoked the cultural values, and the mythology associated with
(1975: 243). This perception of a “people” as a collective was powerful and was used by the PPD to “warrant social action” (McGee 1975: 239). The PPD used the emblem to ratify a myth of a people. The image of the jíbaro in the emblem was the “dangling” of a particular myth of peoplehood, with the goal of encouraging recognition of membership in such a collective in this particular juncture, for the specific purposes of the party. The relationship between the emblem and the party was easy enough to envision propositionally. The Partido Popular Democrático was the party that sought to represent the interests of the jíbaros. Consequently, since jíbaros were an essential component of national identity, the party, in effect, claimed to represent the interests of Pueblos. The jíbaros would thus gain political expression through the PPD. Yet this simple proposition hardly captured the power of the emblem to resonate with an audience of people that up until the campaign had been marginalized and represented as lacking a sense of political agency. The power of the emblem as social cue to engender an identity of self-recognition as a political agent stemmed from its ability to foster a dialectical relationship between identity and identification with the cultural values and associations it mediated. This negotiation between the jíbaros seeing themselves...
subservience to the United States” (1993: 193). The fate of the coffee haciendas and their industry became a clear symbol of the fate of the land. As isolated peasants, jíbaros were firmly tied to the interior of the island, where the coffee industry was established. Hence, economic annihilation of the coffee plantation meant increased destitution for the jíbaros. As a result, “tierra” held powerful nationalistic, and identity connotations for Puerto Ricans by the time of the campaign. As Concha Meléndez stated in her prologue to Laguerre’s Solar Montoya, cited by Fernández Valledor as evidence of the significance of the land, “in the sierra our past is condensed” (1993: 194).

Beyond its function as affirmation of national consciousness, the tierra was a provider of sustenance, of “pan” for the people, and so losing it had quite profound consequences. Not having land meant not being able to provide for self or family; thus, tierra was tied to the jíbaro as a source of sustenance. This sentiment is expressed in Manuel Méndez Ballester’s El clamor de los surcos, through the character of Don Álvaro, who states:

“It would be inconceivable for a hard working man to give up the calluses, and the sun has burnt his face (1970: 50). Where he himself and his children were born and where he has lived: the land that he has inherited from his parents, the land on which he has worked and which has reaped the benefits of his labor. The land is his inheritance, the land he sows, the land that sustains him” (1970: 50). The repetition of such depictions, as Michael Osborn has noted, can “imprint the political vocabulary of the campaign and the island, a leitmotif if you will. Beyond its function as affirmation of national consciousness, the tierra was the ‘icon’ of the campaign discourse to take up their appointed role in the islands’ history, jíbaros, and the project of national survival” (1997: 290).
abstractions, to a different symbolic plane. These characteristics gave the emblem a "spread of emotional quality," a wider expanse of signification (Sapir 1934: 492). As a visual ideograph, the emblem derived its power from its ideographic transformation of the metaphors of the party into imbrications of symbols, as mediator of a myth, and not just as representation of an idealized type. Making the case for images as visual ideographs, Janis and Carol Winkler conclude that it is neither the visual form nor the metaphoric properties of the image but rather its representative form that grants it its effectiveness in its context. Representative form is defined by them as the form by which an image transcends its visual references, and through a condensation and metaphor process "rhetorically identifies and delineates the ideals of the body politic." (Edwards and Winkler 1997: 290). The PPD emblem definitely transcended elements and mediated much more than an idealized type. However, what Janis and Winkler call representative form is perhaps best understood as constitutive force, for in its delineation of the ideals of the body politic, it was not resem- 
opose alone, or its denotative function, but rather its condensational and associational facility that made it powerful in defining the principles by which a politic
by virtue of their power of condensation images are not limited in the number of
mythologies on which they can draw" (1996: 174). Obviously, the multiplicity of
options and possibilities? Wouldn't images, bearing witness, silently exacerbate
connotations cause anxiety in presenting for public consumption such a diverse array
of heroic human experience, thus encouraging emulation (Goethals 1978: 25).

This confusion, especially since, as political theorist Christopher Flood has indicated,
emblem symbolized an order that transcended the individual, provided answers to
the homologies established between the jíbaro and pan, tierra, and libertad, and the
within a specific context. To wit, the invocation of the archetypal myth of the jíbaro,
existential questions, and presented an image of the jíbaro as concrete model of
heroes. Hence, Muñoz liberated the jíbaro from the deep interiority within which his own
political icon was, in fact, the material site for locating a purified national character.

The jíbaro symbolized the national character, and itself as political actor, and also to identify with a larger whole, the Partido
salvation of the people themselves" (El Batey March 1939). The PPD emblem as icon transfigured the terms of political community and
and poor houses of Puerto Rico.... Out of the will of the people will emerge the
boundaries qualified the type of subjects that could be constituted and the types of actions such subjects
could undertake. Hence the emblem as sacred icon of the nation resolved ambiguities
that subconscious attitude, bringing it to consciousness
electoral ballot held no insignia through which to liberate
viewer, as well as legitimation and validation of the PPD's agenda (Flood 1996: 35).

The rhetorical force of the emblem as political icon rendered visible and
presence to a political myth that provided temporal and spatial guidance for
viewers, as well as legitimation and validation of the PPD's agenda (Flood 1996: 35).

Hence, Muñoz Marín was able to contend:
was the transformation of the word, the host of the constitutive campaign discourse. As political icon the jíbaro occupied a place between past and present, that is, between the origins and the destiny of the island, and provided the transhistorical continuity Maurice Charland considers an essential feature of constitutive discourse (1987: 220).

Citing Sorel, McGee states that myths are not descriptions of things but expressions of a determination to act (1975: 244). The myth of a “people” promulgated in the campaign discourse and embodied in the figure of the jíbaro, through the PPD’s emblem represented such a determination to act, for the purpose of the campaign was to induce its constituency to vote. Voting as ritual, then, was intimately tied to the premyth, and was presented as actualization of the possibilities promised by the emblem. The ideas embodied in the emblem formed part of the campaign discourse; and so the manipulation of the emblem proved itself as an inscribed symbol in the ritual of voting.

NOTES


