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**Que Bonita Bandera!**

*Viva, Space, and Identity as Expressed with the Puerto Rican Flag*

**Hema Martínez**

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*Que bonita bandera, que bonita bandera!*

*Que bonita bandera, que bonita bandera!* (que bonita bandera, que bonita bandera!)

*Que bonita bandera, ¡hazla volar, puertorriqueña!* (que bonita bandera, hazla volar, puertorriqueña!)

*Qué bonita bandera vuela, sobre mi Beri (o) guía.* (qué bonita bandera vuela, sobre mi Beri (o) guía)

*Qué bella bandera, qué bonita bandera!*

*Qué bonita bandera!*

*Qué bonita bandera!* (qué bonita bandera!)

*Qué bonita bandera!* (qué bonita bandera!)

*Qué bonita bandera!* (qué bonita bandera!)

*Qué bonita bandera!* (qué bonita bandera!)

*I would like to see it waving over my beautiful Puerto Rico.*

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*—Florencio Morales Ramos (Ramito), set to a traditional Puerto Rican plena tune*

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**When I Returned to New York in 1997 I was amazed to see Puerto Rican flags everywhere I looked—on cars, windows, and bodies. I had just spent a few years in Oregon and had never seen any flag or symbol employed in such a manner. So I started documenting the flags, which eventually led to an exhibit. In the summer of 2013, after over a decade of attending, documenting, and researching the history of the Puerto Rican parade and flag, at last I formally participated in the pinnacle of flag-waving glory, the National Puerto Rican Day Parade, down Fifth Avenue in Manhattan. A friend invited me to take part in a group that would represent Camaradas, a bar/restaurant located in East Harlem, that is a central spot for the local young traditional Puerto Rican and Dominican musicians involved in the roots music scene. The theme for our contingent depicted important political and cultural***
figures in Puerto Rican history. Instead of flags, we all held up painted images of historical Puerto Rican personages and walked behind a group of musicians playing traditional Puerto Rican plena (as opposed to the loud, amplified music of salsa and reggaeton roaring from the parade's floats). Two large flags were at the head of the contingent: one was the official Puerto Rican flag but with a light blue triangle (as opposed to the dark blue field more common in the mass-produced flags), and the other was the historical Lares flag (more on this later). Instead of wearing the red, white, and blue of the Puerto Rican flag, we were all asked to wear black and white, these being the colors of the island's Nationalist Party flag.

All these decisions about particular colors and specific flags were not intended to make la bandera monoeselvada (single-star flag) invisible or downplay its significance; they were responses to the way the flag, and the culture it represents, is commodified in the parade and elsewhere. That year the parade also included another controversy. The parade has sparked past incidents—fictionalized and actual—including the notorious 1998 Seinfeld episode that featured Kramer stomping on a burning Puerto Rican flag while attending the parade, which led to protests in front of the NBC office; and the 2000 criminal incident called a “wilding” by the media when young women were groped and assaulted at the parade. The community outcry this time concerned a representation of the flag placed on beer cans by Coors, one of the parade’s endorsers, which was seen as particularly egregious since the theme of the parade that year was health and the community (the offending beer can was later withdrawn). So when activists such as the group we marched with in the parade use other historical flags and different colors to represent and honor Puerto Rican culture, they are conscious acts meant to subvert the flag’s commodification as well as to honor the flag’s legacy.

THE PUERTO RICAN FLAG ON DISPLAY

The display of la bandera puertorriqueña is pretty common all year long throughout the five boroughs of New York City—waving from car antennas, painted on wall murals, and draped from windows, fire escapees, and car hoods—but from the end of May until the middle of June, prior to and during the National Puerto Rican Day Parade in Manhattan (always the second Sunday in June), it reaches its peak. It is hard to walk anywhere in the city without seeing the image proudly displayed or worn. Any item or apparel imaginable is adorned or decorated with the image: umbrellas, shorts, ties, finger nails, hats, jewelry, sunglasses. This was especially true from the late 1990s through the early 2000s. It appears that the custom may have peaked a few years ago, and during the last few years the flag seems to be less visible in the time period leading up to the parade. Whether this latest trend has to do with grassroots and official campaigns intended to make sure the flag is used only in a respectful manner or just represents declining interest remains to be seen.

The Puerto Rican flag, like all flags, is obviously a political symbol representing the government and political entity of a specific country or nation-state (except in Puerto Rico’s case, without sovereignty). However, for Puerto Ricans on the island and the diaspora communities elsewhere, the island’s colonial history and current ambiguous status endows the flag with an added significance—that of representing the culture and the essence of puertorriqueñidad (Puerto Rican-ness). Since Puerto Rico’s colonial status makes the recognition of national identity as belonging to a discrete geographical entity difficult, it is culture with which the community identifies (one can live in San Juan or New York and still be a Puerto Rican). Every ethnic group or nationality attaches importance to the flag representing the country of its origin. Attend any one of the multitude of New York City’s ethnic parades and you will see flags incorporated into the processions and floats. Yet Puerto Ricans and their flag obsession have transformed this cultural expression into an art form.

THE PUERTO RICAN FLAG AS FOLK ART

Innovations in folk art genres have included the flag’s image created and embedded in traditional art such as mendiño (bobbin lace) and painted on the masks of the carnival vejigantes. However, during the Puerto Rican Day Parade, one sees not only T-shirts and bandanas emblazoned with the flag but whole arrangements of flags that transform people, cars, bicycles, and baby strollers into mobile works of art. In fact, the Puerto Rican flag when used in this manner can best be understood as folk art arising from a community signifying shared values or aesthetics and confirming group beliefs. It is not the object itself that connotes “folk” but its meaning and practice within the community. Folklorist Elliott Oring explains the changing nature of folk arts: “As reliance on craft processes in the twentieth century diminishes, forms increasingly arise that stress arrangement. As the economy comes to stress consumption of ready-made items, the folk response is to alter and arrange such items into new, unofficial forms ... The arranger is exorcizing control and emulating the making of objects by creating a new appearance and use from pre-fabricated materials ... [and] commercially manufactured materials to create folk environments which make personal and collective statements” (1986, 216).
of a variety of symbolic elements within a single frame, and the creation of a single aesthetic entity by grouping together disparate things” (1986, 159). These ideas have their precedents in the work of anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss, who discussed in The Savage Mind the concept of bricolage, the idea of implementing systems that “are capable of infinite extension because basic elements can be used in a variety of improvised combinations to generate new meanings within them” (Hebdige 1979, 104). Scholars of semiotics would later use the concept of bricolage to discuss subcultural styles that also inform the flag and the flag assemblages as political symbols within the Puerto Rican community. J. Clarke states: “Together, object and meaning constitute a sign, and within any one culture, such signs are assembled, repeatedly, into characteristic forms of discourse. However, when the bricolleur re-locates the significant object in a different position within that discourse, using the same overall repertoire of signs, or when that object is placed within a different total ensemble a new discourse is constituted, a different message is conveyed” (Hebdige 1979, 104).

Participants at the Puerto Rican Day Parade and other events celebrating or focusing on Puerto Rican culture take commercially manufactured items, such as flags, T-shirts, and bandannas (most likely manufactured halfway across the world), and arrange them in unique ways to adorn their bodies, cars, homes. These arrangements at times subvert the historical meaning and intended uses of the flag, especially in light of the flag’s unsettled past.

THE HISTORY OF THE PUERTO RICAN FLAG

What explains this attachment to the flag? Why has it become such a powerful symbol of Puerto Rican cultural identity and cultural nationalism that Puerto Ricans of any political persuasion, race, or class proudly honor it? The reasons for its significance can be explained by the political history of the island and the flag itself.

The first flag representing Puerto Rico arose out of the first significant attempt to end Spain’s rule over Puerto Rico. This event, El Grito de Lares, occurred on September 23, 1868. Prior to this time, while in exile many of the island’s intellectual leaders had fled to the Dominican Republic, where rebels there were also struggling to depose the regime. Therefore, the Lares flag looks very similar to the Dominican flag to honor the anticolonial forces there and to recognize an Antillean Confederacy: four squares, of which two are red and two are blue, with a white star in the top left corner. This flag was designed by Dr. Ramón Emeterio Betances and sewn by a member of the uprising, Mariana Bracetti (for which she spent time in jail).
Most Puerto Ricans display la bandera monoeestrellada, but the Laredo flag has come to signify independentista supporters today and can also be seen at events, especially those of a political nature.

What is now commonly known as the Puerto Rican flag came into being in 1895 at a meeting in New York City for the Puerto Rican branch of the Cuban Revolutionary Party. This assembly was composed of political exiles and patriots from Puerto Rico who joined with Cuban exiles to fight for independence from Spain for both islands. The most commonly accepted narrative records that on December 22 at Chimney Hall at 57 W. Twenty-Fifth Street, a meeting was held to try to close the schism between the section's intellectual and working-class members. It was here that the idea for la bandera monoeestrellada was conceived. The proposed flag was similar to the Cuban flag (the colors of the two are inverted) to show their solidarity and allegiance in the struggle to break free of colonial rule. The idea of inverting the colors of the Cuban flag supposedly was suggested by Manuel Besosa, who then had his daughter Maria Manuela Besosa sew it (she became, like Bracetti, a Puerto Rican Betsy Ross). This flag was raised during a second revolt against Spain in 1897 known as the Intentiona de Yauco.

With the end of the Spanish-Cuban-American War in 1898, the United States occupied Puerto Rico and claimed it as a colony, making the Stars and Stripes the official flag of the island. Soon the Puerto Rican flag became associated only with left-leaning politicians or those favoring independence for the island. In 1917 legislation made Puerto Ricans U.S. citizens without a change in the colonial relationship. Four years later, in 1921, the flag became a subversive political symbol after the appointment of F. Montgomery Reilly (a Texas/Missouri politician) as governor of the island. During Reilly's term, the importance of the Puerto Rican flag to the people grew in proportion to his opposition to it; his administration maintained the attitude that only the U.S. flag should be displayed in Puerto Rico, while the Puerto Rican flag was seen as the “enemy flag.” The governor was concerned about the Unionists, a political party that favored independence and held meetings where “they have spoken under one star flags and have indicated that Puerto Rico should control its own affairs” (Fernández 1996, 90). Reilly later sparked public outrage when during a parade that displayed more Puerto Rican flags than U.S. flags, he commented that the local flag was un trapo desgastado (a worn-out rag) (Rosario Natal 1980, 60). While a public apology was later issued, the damage had been done, and the display of the flag became a clarion call for those who demanded an end to the island's colonial status.

The Nationalist Party was formed in 1922 and in 1924 Pedro Albizu Campos became its vice president. Though he had gone to school at Harvard, his political ideology was resolutely against U.S. policies. He began his political career as a member of the Unionist Party but left when that party dropped the island's independence from the its platform. In 1930 he made the Puerto Rican flag the symbol of the Nationalist Party. In 1932 the Puerto Rican legislature passed a law making the flag the official emblem of the island, possibly in an attempt to render the flag less controversial. Albizu Campos, outraged that the flag would become the symbol of a colony and not a free nation, led a procession to the capitol building in protest. The flag, since it was so connected to Nationalist Party identity, was indirectly affected in 1948 by Public Law 53, la ley de la mordaza (muzzle or gag law). La mordaza stated that “it was a grave felony, punishable by a maximum of 10 years in jail or a maximum fine of $10,000 to encourage, plead, advise, or preach the necessity, desirability, or suitability of overthrowing, paralyzing, or destroying the insular government, or any political subdivision of this by means of violence.” It was also a felony to “print, publish, edit, circulate, sell, distribute, or publicly exhibit any writing or publication which encourages, pleads, advises, or preaches the necessity, desirability, or suitability of overthrowing the insular government” (Fernández 1996, 178). Therefore, any outward expressions of anticolonialist sentiments, including singing the national anthem “La Borinquena” or displaying a Puerto Rican flag—no matter how minuscule—were outlawed. This was soon followed by a series of incidents that gave a voice to the opposition to U.S. colonial rule, which included the Jayuya Uprising in 1950 and the attack on Congress in 1954 where four Nationalists carried the flag as they entered its chambers. For non—Puerto Ricans who are surprised by how ubiquitous the flag is in Puerto Rican communities, these past incidents may shed some light on the obsession with it, bordering on nationalism. Scholar Juan Flores notes, “Today many remember being arrested and harassed for exhibiting a flag on their cars or shirts. What is new isn’t the intense nationalistic feeling but its open expression” (1999, 2).

On July 25 1952, the anniversary of the 1898 invasion of U.S. Marines at Guanica Bay, the U.S. Congress approved a referendum that declared Puerto Rico a commonwealth or estado libre asociado (free associated state) of the United States. Some of the more excessive restrictions of Public Law 53 were relaxed by Luis Muñoz Marín, who was the first elected governor. The flag from 1895 was officially adopted, though with slight adjustments: the blue was matched to that of the U.S. flag (Denis 2015, 301n34). No longer a subversive or partisan symbol of the struggle for independence, the flag was now the official symbol of the island.
THE PUERTO RICAN FLAG AS ICON

Four centuries of Spanish colonial rule made Puerto Rico a Spanish-speaking country that shares many aspects of culture with other Latin American and Caribbean nations, yet it is separated from most of Latin America by a century of U.S. colonial presence. The estado libre asociado status and U.S. citizenship, however, do not benefit Puerto Ricans politically (except insofar as they can move freely between the United States and Puerto Rico) since they do not have representation in Congress. After the 1952 referendum, one of the most popular newspapers on the island, El Mundo, wrote:

From now on there will be no fear of raising the single-star flag as Puerto Rico’s official flag. In the future our athletes abroad will not have to face the incomprehension of other peoples when our country’s representatives attend competitions with fellow countries. Tomorrow Puerto Ricans who excel in all walks of life will be able to attend meetings and conventions with satisfaction and their hearts overflowing with pride under the same flag that unofficially was accepted by all Puerto Ricans and by all the countries of the world as the Puerto Rican flag... The entire Puerto Rican people would never have forgiven the adoption of a national symbol other than the one that has been recognized since that historic December 22nd of the year 1895. (Morris 1995, 51)

Today, in official situations, the flag is allowed to be openly displayed, but only if accompanied by the U.S. flag (note the inference implied in the lyrics given as an epigraph to this chapter). This political ambiguity has placed focus on the flag not so much as a symbol of an independent nation, which Puerto Rico is not, but as emblematic of a Puerto Rican national culture and identity. So while the history of the flag was as a contested political symbol, political nationalism has given way to a politicized cultural nationalism. Puerto Ricans can’t identify with their homeland as a sovereign nation from a political perspective, so it is la cultura that is honored and celebrated. Even for those not born on the island, and regardless of whether one is pro-statehood, wishes to maintain the status quo, or is an independentista in favor of the island’s independence, the island itself and its traditional culture, as symbolized by the flag, are revered. Even pro-statehood Puerto Rican politicians have said that should the island become the fifty-first state, it would be an estadidad jibara (jibaro statehood) and would not lose its cultural distinctiveness.5

Nonetheless, the flag has not completely lost its political significance. In the past decade, events have featured Puerto Rican flags on display everywhere, whether on the island or in New York, such as rallies held for the former Puerto Rican political prisoners, opposition to the presence of the U.S. Marines on Vieques (a small island off the coast of Puerto Rico), protests against the Via Verde gasoducto (pipeline to supply natural gas to part of the island). It is at events such as these that participants tend to wave the Puerto Rican flag that has the lighter blue triangle. The official U.S.-sanctioned flag uses a dark blue triangle, but originally it was a turquoise blue. This change occurred after 1952 as Puerto Rico’s association with the United States led to a merging of the colors of the U.S. flag. At political events the Lares flag is also seen among the other flags on display. But it is an emblem of cultural nationalism and cultural pride that the Puerto Rican flag takes its most varied forms. And this flag obsession seemed to reach its peak in the 1990s when the flag assemblages were seen everywhere and “when flag mania reached all social sectors” (Negrón Muntaner 2004, 169).

THE FLAG DEMARCATES PLACE

What are members of the Puerto Rican community in New York City today saying with these flag assemblages? The flag is highly visible in the city, but under everyday circumstances the flag has a continued presence in Puerto Rican communities. The image is seen in countless murals (community as well as graffiti murals) throughout neighborhoods as well as waving in the community gardens alongside casitas (little houses). The murals and casitas, as well as the flags themselves, literally “plant a flag” or claim ownership—they define and demarcate a tangible place for the Puerto Rican community. They are physical manifestations created by individuals to appropriate a place and establish the connection between that place and the people residing there. For a community that feels ignored politically and left out economically from the mainstream, the murals, the casitas, and the flags transform the geography and cry out, “We are here and we will remain here!”

According to research by the Bronx Council of the Arts Casita project in 1987, there were sixty-five casitas in New York City, most of them located in Manhattan’s Lower East Side, El Barrio (East Harlem), and the South Bronx, with a few in Brooklyn (Garfinkel 2014). These casitas are based on vernacular housing from Puerto Rico’s countryside—the balloon-frame shanty houses constructed in the 1520s and 1930s when many were forced off their lands by the large sugar companies that were set up after the U.S. takeover of the island in 1898. These houses tended to be constructed of scrap material and were easily put up and taken down. This
colonial history is reflected in the casitas that dot the vacant lots throughout New York. Originally they were not funded by any organization or institution but consisted of whatever material the community member could afford or find. The transitory nature of the structures echoed their ephemeral quality, since many had been abandoned or relocated to make way for development. The casitas emerged in New York City at the same time as the community gardens, in neighborhoods where local institutions had broken down and experienced extreme neglect and the brunt of the economic and social crises of the 1970s. For community members, these structures provided a refuge and evoked the Puerto Rican landscape. In his study of casitas Luis Aponte-Parés writes that by constructing them people choose “to take an active role in reshaping landscapes of despair into landscapes of hope . . . The key to this attachment is the ability to take possession of the environment simultaneously thorough physical orientation and a more profound identification” (2000, 98). The lots upon which they are built and the structures themselves are symbolic: “The casita, like the ubiquitous Puerto Rican flag, becomes a vehicle through which its builders articulate and define their national identity and their imagined community” (Aponte-Parés 1994–1995); and so too the assemblages of Puerto Rican symbols at the casitas—flags, musical instruments, the structures themselves—“transform this place into a space of cultural production and resistance” (Enck-Wanzer 2011, 345). Or as Juan Flores states: “The combination of being ‘from elsewhere’ and being socially disadvantaged in the new setting conspire to challenge the hegemonies engendered by these asymmetries, and to devise alternative lines of communication and community as forms of conscious and unconscious resistance” (2009, 19).

New York City’s landscape is also dotted with murals of various types. Some are commercial murals, some are public art murals created by students, others are graffiti-style murals, which serve as memorial walls. These murals are created by artists from diverse ethnic backgrounds, but murals by Puerto Rican artists in Puerto Rican neighborhoods usually have a few things in common. They become assemblages since they include the flag as one motif among many that are used to represent Puerto Rican culture, a vocabulary that includes the coqui (a small frog only found in Puerto Rico and Hawaii), roosters, panas (straw hats worn by jibaros), the machete used by sugarcane cutters, and a watchtower from El Morro (the colonial fortress in San Juan). They are “a pastiche of images relevant to nationalist memory and identity” (Cashman 2008, 3729) that work because they are identifiable and can be decoded by the community. James de la Vega, an artist from East Harlem who created various public artworks in El Barrio, many of which utilize the image of the Puerto Rican flag, described the flag as a “dictionary” of Puerto Rican culture, with other symbols like the jibaro as components of that dictionary. He believes that in our everyday, complex lives, the flag is a simple symbol with a direct message—by displaying it on the streets or on walls and mailboxes, people feel a sense of ownership and connection to the community—the flag reminds them that this is a Puerto Rican community (personal communication 1999). By adorning the environment with a symbol that holds so much resonance to the community, the display becomes an appropriation of space in a landscape inclined to ignore the community. The flag may also work as a better folk symbol than the jibaro because although the jibaro doesn’t imply the negative race and class connotations it once did, the flag serves as an all-inclusive representation for Puerto Ricans, including Nuyoricans (those of Puerto Rican descent born or raised in New York City).

Whether a part of the decorations on casitas or in murals, where many of the symbols are from the island’s countryside, the easily identifiable symbol of the flag acts as a bridge between the rural symbols of the island and the urban environment of New York City. Since the casitas are usually situated in lots that also contain community gardens where roosters may amble among the plantings, the rural nature of the lots give the flag an additional subversive meaning. This agricultural element is in opposition to the dominant consumer culture—“gardening translates as a component of a resistive ethnic identity, where Puerto Rican-ness is defined in opposition to American society” (Martínez 2010, 48). And the temporal nature of murals and casitas gives them a quality of being in the moment. The painting of murals and the audiences attracted by this action, as well as the musical performances that take place at the casitas, give the community a constant sense of interaction with these places affirming a cultural identity (Cresswell 2004; Miller 2007).

**CREATING A PUERTO RICAN SPACE AND IDENTITY:**
**THE PUERTO RICAN DAY PARADE**

As mentioned earlier, in New York City the visibility of the flag reaches its peak every June prior to the Puerto Rican Day Parade. Women paint their fingernails with the flag image, people of all ages can be seen wearing the flag as a cape, and even more cars than usual are decorated with the flag, often stretched across the hood. And what better metaphor for the Puerto Rican community, known as a “commuter nation” due to the heavy migration back and forth between the island and the mainland, than a symbol
of mobile identity? Migration to the mainland reached its peak after World War II and the implementation of the industrialization and economic plan known as Operation Bootstrap, and the 1970s saw a rise in reverse migration back to the island. Now with the current serious economic situation on the island, there is an outward flow from the island once again (though mainly by the professional and middle classes and to new regions on the mainland).

The parade, the pivotal event to demonstrate cultural pride, started out as a modest procession of over seventy hometown associations. The clubs helped maintain cultural ties to the island and provide services for the new migrants, such as housing and employment. These groups were organized under an umbrella group called El Congreso de Pueblo (Council of Hometown Clubs) that was instrumental in starting the first Puerto Rican Day Parade in April 1958 (Estades 1980). There had been a Desfile Hispano (Hispanic Parade) that originated in 1956 to represent all Latinos in New York, but since Puerto Ricans were the largest group to take part in the parade, they finally seceded to form their own a few years later.

Even though there are Puerto Rican parades in other boroughs, the June parade on Fifth Avenue in Manhattan is the central event that brings Puerto Ricans from all over the northeast and the island together to celebrate their culture—80,000 marchers and 2 million spectators (Hu 2013)—and the flag plays a central role in this celebration. A view down Fifth Avenue on this day presents a blur of thousands of waving flags. In fact, the idea of the flag literally "taking up" space began quite early. In 1963, when activist Hilario Gerena Valentín was president of the Puerto Rican Day Parade, he and others who owned a textile factory invited him to take a look at the flag his workers, many of whom were Puerto Rican, had created—a flag with a navy blue triangle measuring fifty by thirty-five feet. Gerena Valentín writes how thousands of Puerto Ricans at the parade that year cried with emotion to see that huge flag being walked through a main thoroughfare of the city. Many even broke through the police cordon to touch the flag, "From here forward, the presence of the flag in the Puerto Rican Parade was inevitable" (Gerena Valentín 2013, 126–27).

**COMMODIFICATION OF THE FLAG**

However, does this display of cultural nationalism have any benefits to the Puerto Rican community in terms of social or economic justice? After the parade is over and the flags have been waved, the Puerto Rican community continues to experience high rates of unemployment, discrimination, low wages, and poor education. For those within the Puerto Rican community, it may be a symptom of **sindrome de la bandera** (flag syndrome), whereby "Latinos become fervent defenders of the homeland" (Alméstica 1999, np) for a day or a week only. And the parade itself, although a highlight of Puerto Rican culture in New York City, does have its critics. One of its biggest controversies remains the issue of corporate sponsorship and the commercialization of the parade. Commenting upon this, Angelo Falcón, the senior policy executive of the Puerto Rican Legal Defense Fund, noted that the community rarely comes out in large numbers. The community can mobilize itself and the parade is the prime example of this; but there were no large gatherings of that proportion marking noteworthy events such as the centennial of the Puerto Rican invasion by the United States. Unfortunately, the community is only mobilizing itself for corporations like Goodyear and Budweiser during the parade. And this was brought to light again in 2013 with the controversy concerning the Coors Light beer cans that featured a likeness of the Puerto Rican flag (a red and blue apple with a star, a border reading, "National Puerto Rican Day Parade Inc." wrapped around the bottom of the can). Many local politicians and local activists called out MillerCoors and the parade's organizers, commenting that the ad's image was wrong for many reasons, and quite ironic as well, particularly in light of the parade's theme that year—which was Salud, Celebrating Our Health—and that Puerto Ricans have the highest rate of alcohol dependence among
displays of the flag during the parade are not conscious acts of disrespect; for the majority of Puerto Ricans the flags are expressions of cultural pride and statements of cultural identity that sometimes carry a political message. Nonetheless, respect for the flag means it should not be worn or have symbols printed on it. The official regulations for how the flag should be handled and displayed are quite specific. According to the Rules for the Use of the Flag, it should not be displayed on the hood or trunk of a car or other vehicle (article IX), used for commercial purposes, or marked with any inscriptions or design (article XXXII), among others directives (Los símbolos nacionales de Puerto Rico, n.d.). In 2000 Jaran Manzanet, president of the Salinas Hometown Club, organized to get consumers to be more respectful by not wearing flags or purchasing flags with other symbols on them, such as the rooster or roosters. Manzanet made a commitment that when he saw a flag with those symbols on it he would replace it with an undorned one (Maria Román, cofounder and former chair and honorary member of the National Puerto Rican Day Parade, Inc., personal communication). The organizers of the parade actively supported Manzanet, and through a board-approved resolution have also adopted this campaign. The Coors controversy bought out protestors against the profaning of the flag once again.

THE FLAG AND CIVIC DUTY

But can we look at the parade-goers’ actions in another light? The assemblages demonstrate that the community’s members are more than just passive consumers; they are actively creating new material expressions. The flag is seen as something that belongs to the entire community, to everyone. Individuals do have an active role in their use, whether in the parade or when the flags become part of the landscape: “The flags are erected and flown because people feel an affinity for them and value their role both as a means of defining their identity and asserting a right to place... In practice this means that they are not fetishized as objects, but rather quite the opposite. They will be left to decay and when the time is right they will be replaced with new ones. The logic and rationale of the consumer society which is heavily ritualized and full of symbolism has been extended to include elements of the ritual and symbolic culture” (Jarman 2007, 100).

While it is true that the parade organizers could find alternative sponsorship for the parade and parade-goers could purchase historically correct flags, the parade remains an important part of the community because it provides the release that festivals and other carnival-like events do, making this celebration more than just entertainment. The dual quality of the

Latinos, according to the National Institute of Health (National Institute for Latino Policy Network 2013).

The sale of flags and various mementos with the flag’s image borders on crass commercialism. One can see flags printed with images such as roosters and conga drums among the many being waved or worn. The various
Puerto Rican Day Parade (and other parades, protests, and public events attended by large contingents of the Puerto Rican community) is best described using Santino’s classification of the “carnivalesque” and the “ritualasque, the former describing the festivity aspect of the event and the latter the “performative use of symbols—images, music, movement—to effect social change” (2011, 62). Santino discusses how the festivity aspect is usually emphasized at the expense of the ritualasque, but it is the latter that, in the case of the Puerto Rican Day Parade, will continue to have an effect on the community outside the space of the parade. Sociologist José Ramón Sánchez calls it a “coming-out party” addressed to the city’s public officials; and as a way to become involved in New York’s civic tradition of ethnic parades, the parade allows the Puerto Rican community “to proclaim its distinctive, separate existence. But it is also true that a parade makes this proclamation through a benevolent, even entertaining medium. Ultimately, parades assert not separation but integration into the wider society (Sánchez 1994, 115–16). In terms of creating a space for the performance of culture, the act of flag waving itself is part of a “collective ritual . . . to inscribe the presence of the Puerto Rican subject in the US public space and to institutionalize our visibility” (Aparicio 2007, 165), and this performance depends on the recognition of specific symbols—like flags; and in some cases the resistance occurs even when the symbol is deconstructed.7 Pineda and Sowards discuss the use of flags in immigrant protests: “Flag waving is a visual argument through which immigrants and their supporters express cultural citizenship, civic virtue and democratic participation. The flags represent pride and remembrance, unity, and participatory civic virtue . . . Immigrants and their supporters seek not to subvert the system by opposing it but, rather, to practice the democratic principles of expression that are celebrated and protected in the United States” (2007, 167).8

And while social and economic problems still plague the Puerto Rican community, cultural nationalism should not be disregarded, as it plays a strong role in promoting group unity. Puerto Ricans’ identity vis-à-vis nationalist perspectives has been discussed thoroughly (Duany 2002; González 2000), and the parade historically has been a means of promoting a political identity as well. In fact, the emergence of the Puerto Rican Day Parade was an important expression of solidarity within the Puerto Rican community as it was growing and beginning to assert itself and express its social and political needs and interests in the 1950s. For the organizations originally involved in sponsoring this event, it “secured a visible foothold in the affairs of the City and proudly unfurled the full vitality and potential power of the community” (Sánchez Korrol 1983, 226).

Cultural nationalism also remains a powerful force because the United States has not resolved the island’s political status (or allowed its population to do so); this “further reinforces cultural nationalism and the perceived distinctions between ‘Puerto Ricans’ and ‘Americans’” (Aranda 2007, 21). Yet cultural nationalism, which sees the “nation” as a community sharing a history and traditions—what Anderson has called an “imagined community” (Anderson 2006)—starts from small grassroots movements, thus making it accessible to a wider range of people, many of whom will never meet, and the flag becomes a narrative that brings all them together regardless of political beliefs. It is cultural nationalism that has led Puerto Ricans in the diaspora to return to their roots—whether it is performing the island’s traditional music, such as bomba, plena, and la música jibara, or the celebration of its literary and historical figures, as the Camaradas parade contingent continues to do each year in the parade—as a source of community building (Rivera 2007, 217).

Expressions of Puerto Ricans identity are closely associated with the historical and political situation of Puerto Rico and its relationship to the United States. Many of the Puerto Ricans who display la bandera proudly throughout the year may not be aware of its history, but in the acts of wearing the flag, painting it on murals, and draping it on buildings and cars, there is an appropriation of space and validation of community identity. The flag, as a symbol all Puerto Ricans can relate to, connects disparate members of the community.

CONCLUSION

The flag has had different meanings over time—symbol of the Nationalist Party, symbol of the Commonwealth, at times subversive, and always controversial. Folklorist Barre Toelken discusses how the cultural and artistic codes of a particular community can be expressed in a variety of different artistic and material representations: “The real tradition is not the artifact itself, for it is a particularized statement of traditional premises and assumptions. The tradition is that dynamic process by which these premises are shared, performed, understood, and transmitted through time and space among members of a close group” (1996, 293). In the case of the Puerto Rican flag, we can take these codes to include the nationalistic sentiments of the community. So whether one is singing a plena about la bandera, creating its lace image in mundillo, or wearing a costume made entirely of commercially made flags, one is proudly and clearly declaring one’s participation within the community.
NOTES

1. Puerto Rico is by decree a commonwealth or territory of the United States called a free associated state. Puerto Ricans became citizens of the United States through the Jones-Shafroth Act on March 2, 1917.

2. The Cry of Lares; Lares is a town in the Puerto Rican countryside.

3. Another narrative says that in 1891 Antonio Vélez Alvarado, a close friend of José Martí and a founding member of Club Borinquen, came up with the idea of inverting the Cuban flag colors while at his office at 29 Twenty-Third Street. He designed this new flag and gave it to his daughter Micaela Dalmay to sew.

4. Attempted Coup of Yaouco; Yaouco is a town near the southwest coast of the island.

5. Jibaros are the rural farmers of the island and are sometimes idealized as embodying the spirit of puertorriqueño.


7. Members of the Filiberto delegation at the anderson Folklore Festival had to use clever means to incorporate the Philippine flag when they were told that national flags weren’t allowed on the Mall; they used its colors only in their display at the festival. For them “the absence of the flag as unthinkable … How can we celebrate without the flag?” (Trujillo 2008, 68).

8. Puerto Ricans, of course, are not immigrants, in that U.S. citizenship was imposed on them by the Jones-Shafroth Act of 1917, but their experiences are often similar.

REFERENCES


The Lives of Processions in Bali and Lombok, Indonesia

David Harnish

Processions serve myriad purposes in Indonesia and beyond and may stand alone or be one public part of a larger event, such as a festival (see Peterson 2007 and Harnish 2006 for examples). Most processions can be considered a moving theater as actors, ritual attendants, clowns, musicians, and others traverse through selected space (Dibia 1985), often wearing varied and colorful costumes and working to promote or to subvert the social order. The sound element—marching or other loud processional music to activate political or spiritual indices—moves groups forward, defines their missions, and announces their significance; in fact, a general rule is that the more instruments and ensembles and the louder the music, the more important the procession. The visual element may represent status (e.g., royal processions), martial power (military processions), orientation, and historic narratives or be juxtaposed to express parody, humor, or religious or political positions.

Processions may be public displays of religiosity or pageants and carnivalesque as a community tells "a story about itself and for itself" (Gunkel 2003, 7; see also Geertz 1973) and members "perform an elaborate public display of faith, ethnic affiliation and neighborhood" (Gunkel 2003, 7). Some societies have had processional "seasons" carved out of a year, with specific music to specify purpose (Page 1999)—through many instruments manufactured solely for this use (Roos 1979)—and clearly some cultures (such as Bali) organize many more processions than others. Subcultural or countercultural processions may arise to counter dominant ritual expressions, and migrant or diasporic groups may organize processions to celebrate