

Nationalism in a Colonized Nation: The Nationalist Party and Puerto Rico**Nacionalismo en una Nación Colonizada: El Partido Nacionalista y Puerto Rico****Margaret Power¹****Resumen**

Este artículo aborda el concepto de nacionalismo del Partido Nacionalista de Puerto Rico. El partido sitúa la nación tanto en la entidad geográfica de la isla, como en el área política-cultural transnacional de América Latina. Para establecer que Puerto Rico era una nación, el partido se basó en la cultura, la historia, el idioma y la religión que la isla comparte con América Latina. Los Nacionalistas también vincularon la isla a América Latina para convencer a los puertorriqueños de que su historia y su futuro estaban con América Latina, no con los de los Estados Unidos. Este artículo también establece que el Partido Nacionalista consideraba que tanto los hombres como las mujeres constituyen la nación y tienen un papel fundamental que desempeñar en el logro de su liberación. Pedro Albizu Campos, el líder del Partido Nacionalista, alentó fuertemente a las mujeres para que ingresaran al partido lo cual muchas hicieron.

Palabras claves: Puerto Rico, Partido Nacionalista, nacionalismo, Pedro Albizu Campos.

Abstract

This article discusses the Nationalist Party of Puerto Rico's understanding of nationalism. It located the nation both in the geographical entity of Puerto Rico and in the larger transnational political-cultural area of Latin America. To establish that Puerto Rico was a nation, the party drew on the culture, history, language, and religion that Puerto Rico shared with Latin America. Nationalists also linked the island to Latin America to convince Puerto Ricans that their history and their future lay with Iberoamérica. This article also establishes that the Nationalist Party believed that both men and women made up the nation and had an essential role to play in achieving its liberation. Pedro Albizu Campos, the leader of the Nationalist Party, strongly encouraged women to join the party and many women did.

Keywords: Puerto Rico, Nationalist Party, Nationalism, Pedro Albizu Campos.

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Introduction

Puerto Rico became a U.S. colony in 1898, following the Spanish-American War. In order to ensure its control of the island, the U.S. Congress passed the Foraker Act in 1900, which ended U.S. military rule in Puerto Rico. The U.S. government established a civilian government and appointed governors to rule the island until 1949. In 1917 the U.S. Congress enacted the Jones Act, which made Puerto Ricans U.S. citizens.

During the first three decades of U.S. colonialism in Puerto Rico, various political figures and parties called for independence. However, their demands, weakened by internecine political fights and the absence of a unified political strategy, were ineffective. Pedro Albizu Campos's ascension to secretary general of the Nationalist Party in 1930 radically altered the situation.² Under his leadership, the Nationalist Party transformed what had been inchoate dreams for independence into a determined fight to actually achieve it.

This article focuses on the Nationalist Party and Puerto Rican nationalism in the 1930s for two reasons. First, because Pedro Albizu Campos became president of the Nationalist Party in 1930. His vision shaped the party's understanding of the nation and nationalism. Second, because the 1930s were the decade when the Nationalist Party enjoyed the most support and therefore exercised the most influence among the Puerto Rican people.

In this article I explore how the Nationalist Party understood nationalism. I argue that they located the nation both in the geographical entity of Puerto Rico and in the larger political-cultural area of Latin America, what they referred to as Iberoamérica. The party constructed the national based, in part, on the transnational. It drew on the culture, history, language, and religion that Puerto Rico shared with Latin America to establish that Puerto Rico was a nation and should obtain sovereignty just as her sister republics throughout the Américas had done. Nationalists also did so as part of their efforts to convince Puerto Ricans that their history and their future lay with Latin America, not with the United States. As a result, they should reject U.S. colonialism, recognize Puerto Rico's rightful status as a nation, and integrate with the rest of Iberoamérica.

² The Nationalist Party formed in 1922.

I also show that the Nationalist Party believed that both men and women made up the nation and both genders had an essential role to play in achieving its liberation. Albizu Campos strongly encouraged women to join the party and many women did.

The Nationalist Party and Nationalism.

In 1933 Pedro Albizu Campos defined the party's four goals. They were:

1. La restauración inmediata de la República de Puerto Rico.
2. La Confederación antillana, incluyendo en ella a la República de Haití.
3. La Unión Ibero-Americana.
4. La hegemonía en el Nuevo Mundo de las naciones iberoamericanas.³

What do these four goals tell us about the Puerto Rican Nationalist Party's understanding of nationalism and the nation? Certainly, the party defined the Puerto Rican nation as a geographical entity, located physically in the three islands that constitute Puerto Rico (the main island, Culebra, and Vieques). However, the Nationalist's concept of nationalism was not strictly bound by nor limited to these geographic parameters. It extended beyond the physical borders of what constituted Puerto Rico to include the other island nations of the Caribbean in La Confederación Antillana. The Nationalists supported a confederation of Caribbean nations, not just the Spanish-speaking ones.⁴ They made a special point of including Haiti, due to the shared African roots, the close bonds of solidarity that Pedro Albizu Campos and the Nationalist Party felt for Haiti, and the role that Haiti played in the struggle for the independence of the Americas. An article in a Nationalist Party newspaper expressed the party's sentiments. "Haiti es la cuna de la libertad en

³ Pedro Albizu Campos. "La bandera de la raza." En *Pedro Albizu Campos. Escritos*. Hato Rey, Puerto Rico: Publicaciones Puertorriqueñas, 2007. P. 28. In its publication *El Nacionalista de Puerto Rico*, the party lists its four "beliefs" slightly differently. They were (1) La Independencia de Puerto Rico; (2) La Confederación Antillana; (3) La union Ibero-Americana; (4) La Hegemonía Continental de las Naciones Latino-Americanas. *El Nacionalista de Puerto Rico*. En Año VII, Núm. 290. San Juan, 13 de diciembre de 1930, P. 1.

⁴ They shared the late-1800s view of the Antillean Confederation developed by Atenor Fermin of Haiti, José Martí of Cuba, José Maria Torres Caicedo of Colombia, and Eugenio de Hostos of Puerto Rico. See Keith Ellis. "Caribbean Identity And Integration In the Works of Nicolas Guillen." En *Caribbean Quarterly*, Vol. 51, No. 1. Marzo 2005, P. 1.

América.”⁵ However, the Nationalists’ vision of “Iberoamérica” extended beyond the Caribbean to embrace all of what we now refer to as Latin America.

The primary goal of the Nationalist Party was national sovereignty, which it linked inextricably to the existence of the nation. Albizu Campos made this clear when he said, “El nacionalismo es la patria organizada para el rescate de su soberanía.”⁶ Unlike the other Spanish colonies in the Americas, Puerto Rico, and only Puerto Rico, was not an independent nation. It was (and is) a colony of the United States. After 1930, when Pedro Albizu Campos assumed the presidency of the party, the Nationalists dedicated themselves to ending U.S. occupation of their homeland and to establishing the sovereign nation of Puerto Rico.

To obtain independence, the Nationalist Party needed to convince a substantial number of Puerto Ricans that Puerto Rico was a nation and should be a sovereign republic. To that end, the party sought to generate patriotic feelings by emphasizing Puerto Ricans’ historical struggle for independence. It worked to counter the U.S. government’s efforts to “Americanize” the island by asserting Puerto Rico’s historical, cultural, and “racial” ties to Latin America. And it attempted to offer Puerto Ricans concrete actions they could take that would both draw them into the independence movement and distance them from the United States.

Beginning in 1931, the Nationalist Party began to sell *bonos* to be drawn on the Treasury of the Republic of Puerto Rico.⁷ The first issue consisted of 35,400 bonds, valued at \$200,000 out of a total of \$5,000,000 authorized in a party congress.⁸ The purpose of the *bonos* was three fold: to raise money to “establish the Republic of Puerto Rico,” to

⁵ “Haití la Hermana Negra necesita Nuestra Ayuda,” *La Palabra*, 2 de diciembre de 1935. For a description of what Albizu Campos did in Haiti and who he met, see “Albizu Campos estuvo algunas horas en Puerto Príncipe, Haití,” *El Mundo*, 1 de octubre de 1927.

⁶ This is one of his most famous and repeated sayings and can be found many places. “Pensamientos de Albizu Campos.” En *La Nación*, 12 de diciembre de 1931.

⁷ Ramón Emeterio Betances, among others, had sold *bonos* to support the independence struggle of Puerto Rico and Cuba in the late 1890s. However, it appears that the most immediate inspiration for the Nationalist Party was the Irish Republican Movement, which had issued bonds during the 1920s. Ovidio Dávila Dávila. “Los bonos del Partido Nacionalista para la reconstitución de la República de Puerto Rico, 1930.” En *Revista de Instituto Cultura Puertorriqueña*. Año 6, Núm. 11. 2005, P. 33; 35.

⁸ *Ibidem*. P. 35.

educate Puerto Ricans about their history, and to encourage people to make a financial and political commitment to independence.⁹ One of the 1930s bonos pledged that the bond would come due “a los cinco años del reconocimiento internacional de la República de Puerto Rico.” The holder of the bond, which was valued at 5,000,000 million pesos and cost the buyer five dollars, would receive “a gold peso.”¹⁰

The faces on the *bonos* were all important figures in the independence movement. “The face of Mariana Bracetti, previously unknown among Puerto Ricans, appeared on the five peso bonos.”¹¹ Other faces included Francisco Ramírez, “the first president of the Republic of Lares;” José de Diego, Ramón Emeterio Betances, and Eugenio María de Hostos.¹² The bono caused a stir in Washington, D.C. According to one source, the printing of the bonos so outraged Washington, D.C. that “for the first time the U.S. government considered bringing charges against Albizu Campos,” whose signature was on the bonds. In 1932 the Nationalist Party bonds reached Wall Street, and members of the U.S. government again considered initiating legal proceedings against Albizu Campos. But the State Department, where apparently cooler heads prevailed, intervened and discouraged the idea.¹³

The original series of bonds were sold to “members of the Nationalist Party and sympathizers with the independentista cause.” As was true for many of the party’s campaigns, the Nationalists also planned to use the bonds to “universalize” the struggle for Puerto Rican independence. One specific aim was to distribute the bonos in the

⁹ “El Partido Nacionalista de Puerto Rico emitió los primeros bonos por \$200,000 de su ‘Emprésito de la Independencia.’” En *La Democracia*, 18 de abril de 1931.

¹⁰ Partido Nacionalista. 16 de noviembre de 1930.

¹¹ Juan Antonio Corretjer and Consuelo Tapia Lee. “Mariana Bracetti y Albizu Campo.” En *Re: Mujer, A reproduction of writings by Juan Antonio Corretjer and Consuelo Tapia Lee*. Ciales, Puerto Rico: Casa Corretjer, 1997. P. 8 s. Mariana Bracetti participated in the Grito de Lares uprising and designed the flag of Lares.

¹² Ovidio Dávila. “Los bonos.” *Op. Cit.* P. 36. In the 1800s José de Diego advocated independence for Puerto Rico and the formation of the Antillean Confederation. He is frequently referred to as the father of the Puerto Rican independence movement. Ramon Emeterio Betances worked to end slavery and Spanish colonialism in Puerto Rico. He organized the armed expedition that led to the Grito de Lares. Eugenio María de Hostos also supported Puerto Rican independence and the Antillean Confederation.

¹³ Juan Antonio Corretjer and Consuelo Lee Tapia. “Mariana Bracetti y Albizu Campos.” En *Re: Mujer*, *Op. Cit.* P. 8 s. Teddy Roosevelt also opposed pursuing the Nationalist Party on the issue of the bonos.

Américas, “to obtain the moral support of the *repúblicas hispanoamericanas*.”¹⁴

One of the historical events that the Nationalist Party emphasized was the Grito de Lares, an uprising that other political parties and the general public had largely ignored.¹⁵ In 1868 Puerto Ricans had joined with Cubans, the two remaining Spanish colonies in the Americas, to fight for independence. Both uprisings failed. Nevertheless, the Nationalist Party used the Grito de Lares, named for the mountainous town in the interior of Puerto Rico where Puerto Ricans had proclaimed the Republic of Puerto Rico, to symbolize the past and ongoing struggle to create the nation. In 1934 Pedro Albizu Campos explained why the Nationalists considered Lares such a significant event. “El 23 de septiembre de 1868, los héroes de Lares nos enseñaron que la historia se escribe con la sangre más noble de la nacionalidad, y que la independencia, que es el supremo bien de un pueblo, se conquista solamente con valor y sacrificio.”¹⁶

In 1930 the Nationalist Party held a “Pilgrimage to Lares.” The event featured several elements that were central to the Nationalists’ ideology and efforts to generate nationalist sentiment. The call that went out a few days before the activities informed supporters that they should meet at 5:00 a.m., at which time reveille would be played and guns fired. Participants would then walk to Lares, where the mayor and other municipal dignitaries will meet them. From there they will walk to the Plaza de la Revolución, singing the Himno de Lares.¹⁷ The attendees will then celebrate mass in memory of the “Martyrs for Independence,” after which they will silently place flowers for the Heroes of Lares in the obelisk in the Plaza de la Revolución. The announcement asked everyone to bring flowers so that “the heroes and martyrs will receive a floral offering from the whole

¹⁴ “El Partido Nacionalista de Puerto Rico emitió los primeros bonos por \$200,000 de su ‘Empréstito de la Independencia.’” En *La Democracia*. 18 de abril de 1931.

¹⁵ To this day the Puerto Rican independence movement continues to hold events in Lares to commemorate the historical struggle against colonialism. And, in what can only be considered a slap in the face of Puerto Rican nationalism, the FBI assassinated Filiberto Ojeda Ríos, a leader of the pro-independence clandestine group Los Macheteros on September 23, in 2005, the day of the 1868 uprising.

¹⁶ Pedro Albizu Campos. “Proclama sobre el aniversario de la Revolución de Lares: 1934.” En *Pedro Albizu Campos. Escritos*. Hato Rey, Puerto Rico: Publicaciones Puertorriqueñas, 2007. P. 32.

¹⁷ Para escuchar la canción vaya a <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MECct7cxh3U>.

nation.”¹⁸

Several aspects of this event contributed to fostering and celebrating Puerto Rican nationalism. The program began with a military salute to the fallen to remind participants that the dead of Lares had died fighting Spanish colonialism. The party defined them as heroes and martyrs because they had bravely sacrificed their lives for the nation. Remembering those who died to create a nation that did not yet exist served to establish the roots and longevity of the struggle for independence, honor those who had fought for Puerto Rican nationalism, and call on the living to continue the battle they had begun but not finished.

Catholic symbolism and rituals infused the program, as they did many of the Nationalist Party's activities. Pedro Albizu Campos and many of the Nationalist Party members were deeply Catholic. Their events typically included mass and the eulogization of national martyrs. Catholicism embodied more than the Nationalists' religious affiliation and beliefs. As a shared legacy of the Spanish empire, it linked them to the rest of Iberoamérica. Furthermore, it was not Protestantism, the religion of the U.S. occupiers. As was true in the Irish independence struggle, wherein a largely Catholic movement confronted a Protestant colonizer, the Nationalist Party combined religion and politics to generate nationalist sentiment and to exalt the martyrs who died.¹⁹

The Nationalist Party firmly believed that Puerto Rico was part of Iberoamérica. It shared a language, culture, religion, and *raza* with the peoples of the continent. To explore how the party understood and used its identification with Latin America to build support for independence I next discuss its annual call to commemorate the *Día de la Raza*.

In his discussion of the *Día de la Raza*, Ilan Rachum points out that commemorations of

¹⁸ “Programa para la Peregrinación de Lares.” En *El Nacionalista de Puerto Rico*. 20 de septiembre de 1930.

¹⁹ George Sweeney. “Irish Hunger Strike and the Cult of Self Sacrifice.” En *Journal of Contemporary History*. Vol. 28. 1993. P. 421. Sweeney refers to this as “religio-political martyrdom.” For a discussion of the influence of Irish nationalism on Albizu Campos and the Nationalist Party see Juan Angel Silén. *Nosotros Solos: Pedro Albizu Campos y el nacionalismo irlandés*. Río Piedras, P.R.: Editorial Librería Norberto González, 1996. and Samuel Silva Gotay, “Desarrollo de la dimension religiosa del nacionalismo en Puerto Rico: 1898-1989.” Río Piedras: Universidad de Puerto Rico: sin fecha.

Spain's "Discovery" of the "New World" began in Latin America in the late 1800s and obtained popularity during World War One. They gained support only after Spanish colonialism had ended and when "the United States was acquiring, in the eyes of its southern neighbours, the image of a rapacious plunderer."²⁰

Rachum explains how much of the Spanish-speaking world understood the word *raza* in the early part of the twentieth century. At that time, he notes, the word "carrie[d] the meaning of an extended community bound by cultural ties in addition to that of a people belonging to the same stock and carrying similar physical traits."²¹ The Nationalist Party used this interpretation to express its belief that the peoples of Spanish America -- including colonized Puerto Rico -- were one. "Para el nacionalismo de Puerto Rico, es indiscutible la necesidad de una Bandera de la Raza que sintetice la unidad de las naciones ibero-americanas, su patrimonio territorial y su civilización."²²

However, Puerto Rican Nationalists expressly rejected any links between *raza* and physical appearance. "Para nosotros la raza nada tiene que ver con la biología. Ni tez lunada, ni cabello hervido, ni oblicuidad de ojo."²³ Race had nothing to do with one's physiognomy and everything to do with a people's historical and cultural background. Race for the Nationalists meant the "raza Iberoamericana," which included peoples of all skin colors and ethnic backgrounds. Indeed, as Albizu Campos explained, the *raza* Ibero-Americana "Nos distiguimos por nuestra cultura, por nuestro valor, por nuestra hidalguía, por nuestro sentido católico de la civilización."²⁴

The party used the idea of race to evoke a sense of shared history, identity, and values that inexorably linked Puerto Ricans to Latin Americans.²⁵ As Juan Manuel Carrión

²⁰ Ilan Rachum. "Origins and Historical Significance of Día de la Raza." En *Revista Europea de Estudios Latinoamericanos y del Caribe* 7. Abril 2004. P. 63.

²¹ *Ibidem*. P. 61.

²² Albizu Campos. "Concepto de." *Op. Cit.* P. 26.

²³ *Ibidem*. P. 27.

²⁴ *Ibidem*.

²⁵ It is not clear how the Nationalist Party conceptualized what we understand as race today. This is an area that has not been studied. Albizu Campos was mulatto, the son of a Basque landowner and a slave of African descent. Party members hailed from all the racial and ethnic groups in Puerto Rico. In her exhaustive study of the 1950 uprising in Puerto Rico, Miñi Seijo Bruno examines the racial composition of the participants. She finds that Puerto Ricans of African decent "had a greater degree of representation in

notes, the nationalists' emphasis on a common Hispanic identity served to consolidate a Puerto Rican identity. "La defensa de lo hispánico que se da a principios del siglo fue un paso necesario en la consolidación de nuestra identidad étnica." It also created an "Other," in this case the United States, against which Puerto Ricans could unify. "El 'otro', en el caso de la nacionalidad puertorriqueña, va a ser el 'americano.'"²⁶ In the face of the colonizing colossus from the north, the Nationalists sought to create an "imagined community" with the South that would reinforce both the national identity of Puerto Ricans and draw the island ever closer to its neighbors.²⁷ The party's support for the *Día de la Raza* illustrates how it used the idea of raza to simultaneously foster Puerto Rican nationalism and Puerto Rico's inclusion in Iberoamérica.

The Nationalist Party first commemorated el Día de la Raza in 1924. In 1930 the party celebrated it again, in the southern coastal town of Ponce. The announcement for the event read, "Leal a nuestras vinculaciones raciales y culturales, el Partido Nacionalista de Puerto Rico, conmemorará la magna fecha del Descubrimiento, con un solemne acto cultural en Ponce."²⁸

The Nationalist Party did not extol the "Discovery" or the glories of Spain because it longed to return to the days when it was a Spanish colony.²⁹ Rather, it used the image of Spanish colonialism as a unifying reference to a shared past, common language and religion, and collective identity. "El Partido Nacionalista de Puerto Rico, depositario en esta parte del continente de todos los valores espirituales de la raza e incorruptible colectividad patriótica que lucha tesoneramente por la conservación de las tradiciones

the insurrection than the white race." Miñi Seijo Bruno. *La Insurrección Nacionalista en Puerto Rico – 1950*. Rio Piedras, Puerto Rico: Editorial Edil, 1989. P. 243. Hers is the only study that I am aware of that has examined the racial composition of the party.

²⁶ Juan Manuel Carrión. "Etnia, raza y la nacionalidad puertorriqueña." En *La nación puertorriqueña: ensayos a torno a Pedro Albizu Campos*. San Juan: Editorial de la Universidad de Puerto Rico, 1993. P. 10.

²⁷ Benedict Anderson. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism*. London: Verso, 1991.

²⁸ "El Partido Nacionalista Celebrará el Día de la Raza." En *El Mundo*, 8 de octubre de 1930.

²⁹ Arlene Dávila writes that the party's "emphasis on national liberation over any other issue . . . along with its Hispano-centered conception of nationhood and petit bourgeois political base [] limited the scope of its popular support." Her observations overlook what I consider to be the party's political, philosophical, and pragmatic reasons for highlighting the legacy of Spain and its links to Spanish America that I discuss in this article. See Arlene Dávila. *Sponsored Identities. Cultural Politics in Puerto Rico*. Philadelphia, Temple University Press, 1997. P. 27.

heredadas de nuestro tronco ibérico.”³⁰ It referenced the legacy of the (former) Spanish empire to contrast it with the United States, the current one. “Frente al caminar de los modernos imperios, resurge el imperio espiritual indioespañol.”³¹

The celebration of *El Día de la Raza* allowed the Nationalist Party to exalt the culture it shared with the rest of Latin America --- and to lament its condition as a militarily occupied colony of the United States. The party emphasized the contrast in its 1933 call to commemorate the event.

*El Día de la Raza, que en el continente hispanoamericano como en España, entraña una significación ilumina de libertad y regocio espiritual, tiene en la oprimida tierra puertorriqueña, el sentido doloroso de la obra irrealizada, de los destinos aun incumplidos. Hay todavía esclavitud en la tierra Americana: la esclavitud en que mantiene a nuestro pueblo la barberie extranjera.*³²

El Día de la Raza served to remind Puerto Ricans and the rest of Latin America that the sister republics had the duty to support Puerto Rican independence. “El Día de la Raza en Puerto Rico significa la invocación ardorosa de nuestro pueblo a toda la raza hispanica en solicita demanda del caldo y el apoyo necesarios para el triunfo final de la nacionalidad portorriqueña.”³³

The Nationalist Party knew that in order to end U.S. colonialism in Puerto Rico it needed to secure the support and solidarity of the world community in general and Latin America in particular. It devoted a considerable amount of time, energy, and resources to obtaining both.³⁴

³⁰ “El Partido Nacionalista Prepara Dos Actos.” En *El Mundo*. 10 de octubre de 1931.

³¹ “El Partido Nacionalista Celebrará el Día de la Raza.” En *El Mundo*. 8 de octubre de 1930.

³² “El Día de la Raza en Ponce.” En *El Mundo*. 9 de octubre de 1933.

³³ *Ibidem*.

³⁴ Although this article emphasizes the Nationalist Party’s connections with Latin America, the party had a “global strategy” that was “founded on the premise that the struggle against U.S. imperialism was an unequal battle that could not be exclusively undertaken nationally.” See Carlos Rodríguez Fraticelli. “Pedro Albizu Campos: Strategies of Struggle and Strategic Struggles.” En *Centro Bulletin* 4, No. 1, 1992. P. 27.

Puerto Rico, Latin America, and Transnational Solidarity

Puerto Rican Nationalists understood nationalism in a transnational context. They defined Puerto Rico as part of the "Latin American family" and sought sovereignty anchored in the joint history and future of what they perceived to be a shared transregional reality. The Nationalist Party knew that Puerto Rico was a small Antillean nation confronting the redoubtable imperial power in the region. Both philosophically and politically, the Nationalists defined Puerto Rico as part of Latin America. Pragmatically, they realized that in order to achieve national independence, they needed the support of their sister republics in the America. The Nationalists consciously sought—and received—solidarity from democratic, leftist, anti-colonial, and anti-imperialist individuals, organizations, and governments across Latin America.

From 1927 to 1929, Albizu Campos traveled throughout the region in a "patriotic pilgrimage" to meet with "the people of our race."³⁵ As the party newspaper reported, he would begin his trip in the "heroic Dominican homeland from where he will continue his travels through Ibero-América." (During his travels, Albizu Campos visited the Dominican Republic, Haiti, Cuba, Mexico, and Peru.)³⁶ Albizu Campos undertook this trip to inform Latin Americans about "the protests of a country that refuses to accept the shameful enslavement that the imperialists from the north have imposed on it." He and the Nationalist Party wanted the peoples of the continent to learn about "the island's tragedy"; they also hoped to expose the "false Yankee democracy so that [Latin Americans] could better prepare themselves against the imperialist economic policies from the North."³⁷

Albizu Campos's mission bore fruit. During his 1927 visit to Cuba, illustrious Cubans such as Dr. Enrique José Varona, Dr. Emilio Roig de Leuchsenring, Dr. Enrique Gay

³⁵ "La cruzada nacionalista." En *El Nacionalista de Ponce*, 24 de junio de 1927.

³⁶ For a description of his trip, whom he met, and what he did in these various countries, see Ramón Medina Ramírez. *El movimiento libertador en la historia de Puerto Rico*. Vol. 1. San Juan: Imprenta Nacional, 1964. P 73 ss.

³⁷ "La cruzada nacionalista." En *El Nacionalista de Ponce*. 24 de junio de 1927; César Ayala and Rafael Bernabe. *Puerto Rico in the American Century: A History since 1898*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007. P. 107.

Galbó, and Juan Marinello Vidaurreta, among others, formed the Junta Nacional Cubana pro Independencia de Puerto Rico.³⁸ Strong bonds of mutual support existed between many Cubans and Puerto Ricans, which had remained Spanish colonies long after Madrid's other American possessions had achieved independence. United in a common struggle, they had organized joint pro-independence committees, such as the Junta Revolucionaria in New York City, and fought together on the battlefield to end colonial control of their nations. This common heritage explains why anti-imperialist Cubans committed themselves to securing the independence of their sister Antillean nation. However, Cubans were not the only Latin Americans to form organizations and conduct campaigns in opposition to U.S. colonialism and repression in Puerto Rico, as events during the 1930s made clear.

During the 1930s, conflict between the Nationalist Party and the U.S. government increased. The Nationalist Party garnered greater popular support and stepped up its militant activities against U.S. colonial rule in response to increased U.S. government repression against the party. Across Latin America, anti-imperialist and antifascist forces took up the cause of Puerto Rico and the Nationalist political prisoners. In 1936, leaders of the Nationalist Party were accused and convicted of seditious conspiracy and sentenced to between six and ten years in the federal penitentiary in Atlanta, Georgia.³⁹ Pro-independence events were held in Mexico, Peru, and Uruguay in support of the Nationalists.⁴⁰ In Argentina, in 1936, the University Federation of Argentina sent a petition to U.S. Secretary of State Cordell Hull "demanding the release of the Nationalist leader Juan Antonio Corretjer." They also demanded "an end to the unjustified repression by the North American regime against the Nationalists."⁴¹ And, in Costa Rica, the

³⁸ "El caso de Puerto Rico es el atentado más grave que ha hecho Estados Unidos contra Ibero América." En *El Mundo*. 26 de noviembre de 1927. Enrique José Varona was one of the founders of the Junta Revolucionaria pro Independencia de Cuba y Puerto Rico in New York, along with José Martí and Ramón Emeterio Betances. Roig de Leuchsenring was the famous historian of Havana, whose support for Puerto Rican independence continued into the 1950s and beyond. See also Medina Ramírez, *El movimiento*. Op. Cit. P. 78 s.

³⁹ Luis Nieves Falcón. *Un siglo de represión política*. San Juan: Optimática, 2009. P. 96; Ché Paralitici, *Sentencia impuesta. 100 Años de Encarcelamientos por la Independencia de Puerto Rico*. San Juan: Ediciones Puerto, 2004. P. 66 ss.

⁴⁰ "Gran mitin en Uruguay por la independencia de Puerto Rico." En *La Palabra*, 16 de marzo de 1936.

⁴¹ "La Federación Universitaria Argentina Solicita." En *El Mundo*. 20 de mayo de 1936.

Communist Party dedicated one week to "the struggle for Puerto Rican independence." It called on its members to "raise money to send cables to the governor of Puerto Rico to protest the abuses that North American authorities have carried out against Puerto Rican Nationalists."⁴² The Confederation of Anti-Imperialist Students of America, which was meeting in Mexico, wrote to President Franklin Delano Roosevelt in 1937 "to bring to your attention the immense clamor of protest that has risen in our hearts over the unjust incarceration of Pedro Albizu Campos, Juan Antonio Corretjer, and other leaders of Puerto Rican Nationalism, now banished to the Federal Penitentiary at Atlanta, Georgia, accused of the most honorable act which any man could accomplish—to struggle for the Independence of his country."⁴³

Gender and Puerto Rican Nationalism

For Puerto Rican Nationalists, the establishment of the Puerto Rican nation was not a masculine project. Instead, it demanded the participation of both women and men. The primary goal of the Nationalist Party was to secure the independence of Puerto Rico, to redeem the nation. Beyond nationalism, no single creed united members of the party.⁴⁴ Given this, the Party welcomed all irrespective of race, religion, gender, or class. However, the call to all patriotic Puerto Ricans to join the party did not translate into gender blindness. Men made up the political and military leadership of the Party. Luis Ferrao's study of the membership of the Junta Nacionales from 1930 to 1939 confirms the virtual absence of women in the top positions of the party. According to him, "solo una mujer [Isolda Rondón] sirvió como secretaria y tesorera en los años 1937 y 1938 respectivamente."⁴⁵ However, as Ferrao points out, this was hardly atypical for the time.

⁴² "La fraternidad Iberoamericana en acción." En *La Palabra*. 8 de junio de 1936.

⁴³ Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños. City College of New York. Ruth Reynolds Papers. Carta de Natalio Vázquez, Secretario General de la Confederación de Estudiantes Anti-Imperialistas de América al Presidente Roosevelt. Ciudad de Mexico, Mexico 24 de junio de 1937. Caja 4, Folio 2.

⁴⁴ Ayala and Bernabe. *Puerto Rico*. Op. Cit. P. 106.

⁴⁵ Luis Angel Ferrao *Pedro Albizu Campos y el Nacionalismo Puertorriqueño*. San Juan: Editorial Cultural, 1990. P. 87. The Junta Nacional was the highest leadership body of the party. Juntas Nacionalistas Municipales existed on the local level in forty-four of Puerto Rico's seventy-seven municipalities during the 1930s. P. 125 ss.

“Se trata de una característica propia de la época, pues en los demás partidos insulares la presencia de la mujer en los cuerpos directivos era también escasa.”⁴⁶

Nonetheless, Albizu Campos encouraged women to become active in the party. In 1933 Pedro Albizu Campos delivered a lengthy speech for el Día de la Raza. In it, he specifically refers to los hombres and las mujeres; he does not subsume women into los hombres. He recognized women were vital to the struggle for Puerto Rican independence. Not only this, he promoted solidarity among women, and recognized that the unity of Puerto Rican women, regardless of religious beliefs, “race,” or class was essential for the Puerto Rican nation to emerge. “Puerto Rico será soberano e independiente, cuando la mujer puertorriqueña se sienta libre, se sienta soberana, se sienta independiente.”⁴⁷

However, the words of Pedro Albizu Campos or those of any other male leader cannot explain how women understood nationalism or their relation to the party. To comprehend that we must turn to the women themselves.

Women joined the Nationalist Party because they wanted to secure the independence of Puerto Rico. They saw themselves as important actors who could and should contribute to the creation of the Puerto Rican nation. Instead of passively waiting for men to ask them to join or to take leadership, they boldly did both themselves. As one woman wrote in a letter to Albizu Campos,

*la mujer tiene que ingresar en el movimiento nacionalista para que así cumpla con el sagrado deber de mujer y unifique la patria. No tan solo el hombre esta llamado a definir a su patria sino que tambien la mujer, cuya abnegación y sacrificio es tradicional se pondra en favor de la obra constitutive de nuestra nacionalidad puertorriqueña.*⁴⁸

Women formed and joined Secciones Femeninas Nacionalistas across Puerto Rico. In November 1930 the party established its first Women’s Section in a ceremony in

⁴⁶ Ibidem. P. 88.

⁴⁷ Pedro Albizu Campos. “Discurso por el Dr. Pedro Albizu Campos.” En *Nacionalismo Enarbola la Bandera de la Raza en Lares*. San Juan: Partido Nacionalista de Puerto Rico, 1971. P. 35.

⁴⁸ “Adhesión nacionalista.” En *El Mundo*. 1 de junio de 1931.

Vieques.⁴⁹ Another women's section opened in San Lorenzo in September 1931.⁵⁰ In October 1931, women in Lares also constituted a women's section.⁵¹ Seventy-five women established a women's section in Arecibo in 1932. Both women and men spoke at the inauguration on the theme of women in the colony. At the end of the program, the assembly elected four women to serve as leaders of the newly formed organization.⁵²

Women were featured speakers in Nationalist Party events. Trina Padilla de Sanz (known as *La Hija del Caribe*) gave a major speech at the 1931 commemoration of Lares.⁵³ The title and subject of her presentation, "La Mujer Puertorriqueña en la gesta heroica de la Proclamación de la República," established the historical importance of women in the movement.⁵⁴

Women creatively developed programs that would enhance the role of women in the party and advance their fight for national independence. Dominga de la Cruz joined the Nationalist Party in 1933, shortly after she heard Albizu Campos speak in the city of Mayaguez.⁵⁵ Later that same year she attended the party's National Assembly. While there she met with other women in the party who encouraged her to "escribiera algo acerca de la mujer nacionalista." She thought about women's role in the party and decided that they needed "un puesto mayor" so she proposed they form the Enfermeras del Ejército Libertador. The organization would "adelantar más como mujeres en sí, no imitar al hombre sino destacarse como mujeres en sí dentro del Partido." The Enfermeras were part of the Cuerpo de los Cadetes de la República, which up until then had consisted solely of men. The (male) Cadetes marched in Nationalist parades, exercised together, and received military training, but only with wooden guns. Dominga de la Cruz wanted women to participate in the fight for Puerto Rico's independence "siendo enfermeras, aprendiendo los primeros auxilios, para auxiliarlos a ellos (los Cadetes) si algún día había

⁴⁹ "Los actos nacionalistas de Vieques y Naguabo." En *El Mundo*. 15 de noviembre de 1930.

⁵⁰ "Una Junta Nacionalista de Damas." En *El Mundo*. 19 de septiembre de 1931.

⁵¹ "Una sección femenina de la junta nacionalista." En *El Mundo*. 3 de octubre de 1931.

⁵² "Grandioso Mítin Nacionalista en Río Piedras." En *La Nación*. 30 de diciembre de 1932.

⁵³ For background on her, see Luis Ángel González Pérez. "Trina Padilla de Sanz: hallazgos de una colección." En *Cuatro Propio Revista Cultural*, No. 5. Septiembre de 2009.

⁵⁴ "Programa de los actos que celebrara mañana." En *El Mundo*. 22 de septiembre de 1931.

⁵⁵ Margaret Randall, *El pueblo no solo es testigo. La historia de Dominga*. Río Piedras, Puerto Rico: Ediciones Huracán, 1979. P. 34 s..

algo y caían heridos.”⁵⁶ According to an FBI report, 1,000 women were Enfermeras and 2,000 men joined the Cadetes at the organizations’ height, in 1936.⁵⁷

Nationalist women, like Nationalist men, were imprisoned for their politics. Candita Collazo was sentenced to four years of hard labor in the district jail in Ponce in 1938. She had been convicted of “possession, storage, use and transportation of explosives.” Her imprisonment made her, “possibly the first woman Nationalist prisoner of the twentieth century.”⁵⁸

Conclusion

This article advances the idea that it is not possible to draw a sharp line between the formation of the nation and the transnational context. Puerto Rican nationalism was shaped by its rejection of U.S. imperialism on one hand and its embrace of Iberoamérica on the other, at least during the early part of the twentieth century. To paraphrase the poet John Donne, no nation is an island, not even Puerto Rico! To understand how a nation forms, we must always examine what extra-national forces and political entities it constructs itself in opposition to and with what forces it allies itself.

The Nationalist Party utilized what it classified as its shared Hispanic culture to convince Puerto Ricans that they were part of Iberoamérica. For that reason it celebrated el Día de la Raza every year. It sought to link Puerto Rico to Latin America in people’s consciousnesses.

To build a nationalist consciousness it sought to teach Puerto Ricans about their own history. The tradition it emphasized, if not created, was the one of Puerto Ricans fighting for independence. It located the beginning of the nation in the 1868 uprising against Spanish colonialism. Every year it celebrated the Grito de Lares to honor those who had

⁵⁶ Ibidem. P. 37-41. For a fuller discussion of the Cadetes and the Enfermeras see, José Manuel Dávila Marichal. “Atención, firmes, de frente, marchen! Historia del Ejército Libertador del Partido Nacionalista de Puerto Rico.” Master’s Thesis. University of Puerto Rico, Rio Piedras, 2011.

⁵⁷ FBI FILES “Nationalist Party of Puerto Rico” (NPPR) SJ 100-3 Volume 23 Report made at San Juan. P. 96.

⁵⁸ Ché Paralitici. *Sentencia Impuesta*. Op. Cit. P. 74 ss. Virginia Torres, also a member of the Nationalist Party, was sentenced to serve for two months, although no specific charges were brought against her. Ibidem. P. 416.

fallen and to encourage Puerto Ricans to continue the fight they had begun in the previous century. The party issued the bonos to generate funds for itself and to educate Puerto Ricans about important leaders of the independence struggle in the 1800s.

The Nationalist Party's conception of nationalism included both men and women. Pedro Albizu Campos publicly encouraged women to become members and to play a role in ending U.S. colonialism. Women joined the party because they wanted to fight for the independence of their nation. The fact that they joined indicates that they believed in independence, they knew they could and should contribute to the struggle, and they felt welcome in the party.

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