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Making the Revolution: The Young Lords and the Creation of a New Puerto Rican Identity

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Abstract: In this paper, I provide a critique of the Young Lords by dissecting how the Young Lords shifted Puerto Rican identity from an assimilationist perspective to a politicized and decolonial one. Using Anibal Quijano's 'coloniality of power', I argue that the Young Lords developed a dichotomy between good vs. bad Puerto Ricans, where good Puerto Ricans are legitimized as genuine Puerto Ricans, while bad Puerto Ricans are discredited and excluded from the movement. I identify four archetypes to show how the Young Lords divided 'good' and 'bad' Puerto Ricans: Revolutionaries, Passive Dissenters, Traitors, and Martyrs. I examined online archived newspapers published by the Young Lords in New York and Chicago in 1970 and found that Puerto Rican identity is formulated through a process of culturally and politically distancing oneself from "American" identity. This paper highlights the pervasiveness of colonialism as a driving factor in identity formation by centering the unique situation of Puerto Ricans -- what Ramon Grosfoguel calls 'colonial subjects.' Ultimately, this paper asks us to reflect upon how we put meaning behind our identities as we engage in movements of resistance and, by extension, builds upon other critiques of revolutionary movements within the United States.

“If Christ were alive today, he’d be a Young Lord” – Rev. David Kirk

Introduction

Just 54 years after the Young Lords Organization first came into being in 1969, many people today can no longer remember who they were or what they did. Still, their legacy lives on, influencing the relationship Puerto Ricans have with their identities even now ([Eaton-Martinez 2018](#); [Enck-Wanzer 2007](#)). In this paper, I examine the way that the Young Lords transformed and redefined Puerto Rican identity, and provide a critique of them as a revolutionary movement dominated by the coloniality of power (Quijano 2000).

While Puerto Rico exists as a modern colony under the United States, Puerto Ricans (both on the island and on the mainland) exist as colonial subjects (Grosfoguel 2020), blurring the lines between two dual identities: our status as naturalized American citizens, and our heritage as Puerto Ricans. We live as walking schisms: American but not; not from here, not from there. For many members of the diaspora, this is especially salient, as we face the age-old question ‘Who are you?’ Our identities, the one thing that we should be certain of if nothing else, are so often at the center of our internal crises – as if understanding these singular parts of who we are would then help us understand ourselves entirely.

What does it mean to be Puerto Rican? What does it mean to be American? Is it the blue-eyed, blonde-haired, mom-dad-two-kids-and-a-white-picket-fence dream that most of us could never live up to? Or is it the neighborhoods piled with garbage because the city will not come to pick it up, the deteriorating schools filled with outdated textbooks and hungry children, the brown kid staring out to another world just around the corner? These complicated questions of belonging that are experienced by diasporic communities captures similar sentiments found in DuBois’ double consciousness, as explored by Samir Dayal, who points out that “doubleness is

more productively conceived as the interstitiality of entering (or leaving) and destabilizing the border zones of cultures, as fracturings of the subject that resist falsely comforting identifications and reifications” (Dayal 1996:48).

I find that in mobilizing the diaspora (Fernandez 2020; Enck-Wanzer 2007; Velasquez 2014) as part of a transnational movement that actively opposed American cultural ideologies, articulated by the Young Lords as inherently capitalist, white supremacist, and individualistic, diasporic identity became politicized. Despite being set in the United States and partially focusing on local, community problems – this movement was built upon an emotional transnationalism that allowed for diasporic Puerto Ricans to explore their identity, learn about Puerto Rican history, and participate in activism that called for Puerto Rican independence (Fernandez 2020). Similar to others who have developed typologies for understanding identity and/or social movements (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005; Bhardwaj 2023; Latif et al. 2020), I describe how archetypes emerged as the Young Lords organized themselves within a moral hierarchy that determined modes of legitimacy within the Puerto Rican diaspora. Essentially, a moralized good/bad dichotomy is developed, where good Puerto Ricans are legitimized, while bad Puerto Ricans are discredited. Rather than viewing legitimacy as it is ascribed to or by the State (Weber 1919; Wolfe and McLean 2021), instead, I look at how legitimacy is ascribed within communities and by individuals through the ‘status quo’ (Johnson et al. 2006:54). I focus on the relationship between legitimacy and identity (Pailot et al. 2017) and the role that both play in identity construction within the diaspora.

I explore these modes of legitimacy through the use of four major archetypes that emerged as a result of the good/bad dichotomies created by the Young Lords: Revolutionaries, Traitors, Passive Dissenters, and Martyrs.

I continue previous conversations on diasporic identity formation (Dayal 1996; Ortiz 2022; Shu 2006; Schmidt 2004; Yamashiro 2009) by highlighting the pervasiveness of colonialism as a driving factor in identity formation amongst Puerto Ricans. Who we are and our connection to our heritage lands are reinforced through historical and generational traumas. As a result, our identities become entangled with this coloniality – whether we feed into it, reject it, or ignore it. With this in mind, I ask us to examine the meanings we put into our identities and reflect upon how we engage in movements of resistance.

The structure of my paper is as follows. First, I provide definitions for the key terms being used, and the historical justifications for why these terms are appropriate. Then, I will dive deeper into the larger theoretical frameworks that I rely on for my analysis, beginning with the ‘coloniality of power’ (Quijano 2000) and also looking at culture talk (Mamdani 2002), emotional transnationalism (Wolf 1997), and the role of gender. Next, I will define each of the four archetypes and explain how the Young Lords rely on these archetypes to develop a moral hierarchy that reproduces legitimacy within the Puerto Rican diaspora. I conclude by presenting the main empirical findings and contributing to sociological theories surrounding coloniality of power to provide a critique of the Young Lords.

Defining Histories

Even now, the question of whether Puerto Rico is a colony is still up for discussion. However, much of the work both within academia and in politics have ultimately concluded that it is (Grosfoguel 2003; Caban 2019; Jimenez 2020; Maldonado-Denis 1969). In 2021, the United Nations have recently conceded in defining Puerto Rico as a colony, amending previous resolutions stating the opposite (United Nations 2022).

To understand Puerto Rico's place as a colony under the United States, it is necessary to have a definition of colonialism as I will use it in this paper. Oftentimes when discussing colonialism, it is observed through its quantitative effects – the parts that can be measured (McKercher et al. 2007; Zwart et al. 2021; Anzanilufuno 2020). Colonialism is understood by its depletion of certain resources, the spread of diseases, the dissemination of labor, violence, changes in government, changes in economic systems, among others. These things are especially true for the case of Puerto Rico (Caban 2005; Ramos et al. 2022). Colonialism has been defined as “imperialism seen from below,” (Thornton 1962:341) which has an inherent quality that denies people “equal and reciprocal terms of cooperation” (Ypi 2013:158), and where “to be a colonialist is to be an exploiter” (Thornton 1962:335). While these definitions are essential in forming a complete picture of colonialism as an extractive force, I choose to draw on Grosfoguel's view of Puerto Rico as a modern colony (2003; 2006), approaching the pervasiveness of colonialism as a formative aspect of identity creation in order to understand how power structures influence notions of the self.

Traditionally, colonialism in Puerto Rico is often associated with the settler-colonialism of Boriken by the Spanish, which lasted roughly 400 years until the cession of Puerto Rico to the United States in 1898 (Bras 2011). These 400 years of colonial occupation were not only profoundly impactful in creating Puerto Rican culture (the spread of the Spanish language, as well as the cultural Latinization of the island), but also violent and extractive. It led to the almost complete wipeout and subjugation of the indigenous Taíno population, and became the forced home to thousands of enslaved Africans working on sugar plantations. The Spanish established not only plantations, but military forts and trading ports as well, cementing the Spanish's presence on the island (Duany 2017). Over time, like other countries in Latin America living

under foreign colonial rule, the distinct cultural and historical changes that emerged brought out a new nationalism amongst its people. No longer considering themselves Spanish, many Puerto Ricans dreamt of Puerto Rico becoming an independent nation (Bras 2011; Duany 2017).

When the government ceded Puerto Rico to the United States in the 1898 Treaty of Paris, Puerto Ricans consented only on the basis of America eventually granting them the sovereignty they longed for. Instead, they were greeted by their new occupiers. Similarly to the Spanish, the United States saw the potential of Puerto Rico as both a labor force and a fountain of resources. This occupation was part of a trend of imperialism – by colonizing Puerto Rico, Guam, and Hawaii, the United States was able to effectively cement itself as a formidable new world power in both defeating Spain and simultaneously displaying its colonial wealth (Bras 2011; Duany 2017). This power predicated upon the subjugation of other lands and people for money and resources. The United States informed enemies and allies alike that it was capable of domination, and Puerto Rico was simply one of the unfortunate consequences of this, becoming an unincorporated territory of the United States (Duany 2017).

In 1917, well into War World I, United States citizenship was granted to all Puerto Ricans. By extension, it also made Puerto Rican men eligible for military draft – in which the United States government wasted no time in enforcing. Around 17,555 Puerto Rican men served, with hundreds of thousands serving in other wars since then. Citizenship became both a privilege and a detriment. While it presented the opportunity for easier labor migration and economic stability, it also cemented Puerto Rico's lack of independence. As the struggle for independence persevered, it consistently fell on deaf ears, and Puerto Ricans were forced to reconcile the new identity placed onto them: they were Americans (Duany 2017; Whalen 2005).

In contemporary times, the imperialist motivations of the United States still hold strong. Different from the Spanish settler-colonialism that preceded it, Grosfoguel refers to Puerto Rico as an ‘exploitation colony’ (Grosfoguel 2003:7), although both shared similar extractive qualities in regards to labor. American influence continued to spread over the island, establishing a long history of migration. Operation Bootstrap, a US-led, PR-backed initiative lasting from the late 1940s and through the 1950s, directly impacted the levels of migration from Puerto Rico to the United States by displacing farmers and transforming Puerto Rico from an agricultural/plantation economy to an industrial one (Fernandez 2020). This exodus of Puerto Ricans is referred to as the Great Migration, where one-third of the Puerto Rican population relocated to the United States, mostly New York, from the 1940s to 1970s (Fernandez 2020).

This migration brought about distinct changes both in the United States and in Puerto Rico. Puerto Rican migrants had to endure the rampant xenophobia and racism that came with living in their new home, accused of “abusing welfare rolls, carrying infectious diseases, exhibiting criminal behavior, and ‘suffocating the culture of their adopted city’” (Fernandez 2020:53). At the same time, 70.6% of Puerto Ricans living in New York had low-income jobs in the late 1940s. By 1966, 47% were unemployed, underemployed, or permanently out of the labor force, and 50% relied on jobs that were increasingly disappearing due to deindustrialization (Fernandez 2020:55).

With consideration to the complicated histories between Puerto Rico and the United States, and in attempt to clarify the language used here on out, I choose to refer to the occupation of Puerto Rico by the United States as an example of modern colonialism, drawing on the work of Grosfoguel (2003; 2006). To be specific, Puerto Rico is a colony of the United States, and Puerto Ricans are therefore colonial subjects.

Thus, I use the term ‘colonial subjects’ (Grosfoguel 2003) to highlight that Puerto Ricans were and still are being actively colonized by the United States. While coloniality transforms over time, its effects remain, structurally embedding itself into whatever it acquires. For Puerto Ricans, this means the United States’ literal ownership of land and resources, as well as inaccessibility to economic freedom where Puerto Ricans are ultimately forced to rely upon the United States (Caban 2019).

Finally, a discussion of the term *diaspora* is warranted. Often, when discussing diaspora, it goes hand in hand with an ultimate desire to return to a homeland or the idea that diaspora must be dispersed in more than one place (Brubaker 2005). However, alternative definitions reject these ideas, regarding diaspora as a transnational connection between an original homeland and an ‘adopted’ one (Berns-McGown 2007:6). While discussing the presence of Puerto Ricans in the United States, the term diaspora is used to refer to the long-standing tradition of migration from Puerto Rico to the United States, which has always exemplified the transnational networks of labor, community, and politics that exist concurrently (Aranda 2007; Duany 2002; Furste 2013; Shaffer 2020). This paper chooses to complicate definitions of diaspora by including all Puerto Ricans within the United States. Diaspora encompasses all Puerto Ricans (born in Puerto Rico or not) who live in the United States, all of whom have varying levels of familiarity to Puerto Rico, and regardless of whether they desire to return or not.

In the next section, I will show how the colonial status of Puerto Rico and the diaspora fit within the theoretical frameworks outlined below.

Theoretical Frameworks

The theoretical frameworks used to situate this critique of the Young Lords include Quijano's coloniality of power, hooks' margins of radical openness, Wolf's emotional transnationalism, and Einwonher et al.'s view of engendered social movements.

Quijano (2000) defines the coloniality of power as the racial stratifications that emerged from early colonialism in the Americas as a ruling factor in the modern world order. These stratifications led to the creation of racialized labor systems and markers of identity, birthing the confluence between capitalism, wealth, and whiteness which become tightly intertwined (Quijano 2000). This conception translates seamlessly into the status of Puerto Ricans.

In regards to the racialization of Puerto Ricans, the term 'Puerto Rican' is not a racial category, and yet, many Puerto Ricans choose to identify by their ethnicity over their race (Landale, Oropesa 2002). This could do with having been wholly racialized as occupying vague, colorblind categories of *non-white* due to colonial perceptions of who *is* allowed to be in power versus who is *not* (Rodriguez Dominguez 2005; Jimenez 2020; Bonilla-Silva 2010), as "Euro-American elites have historically deployed their symbolic capital, that is, the power of social prestige, to classify, racialize, exclude, and subordinate colonial subjects" (Grosfoguel 2003:156).

By classifying Puerto Ricans as non-white, the barriers leading to their lower status and lack of mobility were more easily upheld. While it does not adequately capture the multitudes of ways that Puerto Ricans self-identify and/or are perceived (many Puerto Ricans racialize themselves as white, Black, Asian, etc), this process by the State of racializing Puerto Ricans as non-white can ultimately be explained by their status as colonial subjects (Grosfoguel 2003), as it is intended to justify their lack of power and mobility (Quijano 2000).

Relatedly, while Puerto Rico remains an unincorporated territory, Puerto Rican people remain unincorporated into the American ideal. Regardless of their citizenship status, they are unable to participate in the established lifestyle of the stereotyped white American, and are purposefully excluded from the hegemonic privileges that come with identifying as such. I argue that the coloniality of power is not only enforced on those born and living on the island, but also for those Puerto Ricans who were born and raised in the United States, who are also kept from experiencing certain social privileges and opportunities for upward mobility. Grosfoguel (2003), who also explores Quijano's (2000) coloniality of power, reframes global decolonization movements by arguing that colonial forms of domination continue even after colonial administrations end (Grosfoguel 2003), not just in terms of the economic or political (Grosfoguel 2003; Grosfoguel 2006), but also in terms of knowledge production (Ndlovu 2018) and mentality (DuBois 1903; Fanon 1968; Fanon 1967; Chimezie 1975). These colonial dominations of the mind also have gendered meanings (Taylor 2001; Comas-Diaz 2021).

Furthermore, through employing colonial preconceptions of Puerto Ricans (racism and xenophobia), the United States was able to frame colonialism as a necessary means of supporting a third-world country on its last limbs. An 1899 political cartoon published in *Puck Magazine* illustrates it best. It depicts Uncle Sam in a classroom of America's newly acquired territories. In the back sat quiet, well-behaved white children labeled with United States states. In the front, brown children with angry, scared, frowning faces are labeled as Philippines (sic), Hawaii, Porto Rico (sic), and Cuba. Towards the back corner of the classroom, a Native American child sits with an upside down school book, and outside we see a caricature of a Chinese boy looking inside. By the window, a Black child wipes the window, grinning towards the class. The

that the Young Lords engaged in operated primarily within the margins, resisting the popular societal norms put in place – which the Young Lords understood as being inherently racist, sexist, and individualistic (Gonzalez, et al. 1972:38). The coloniality of power, as it is presented by Quijano, explains how these margins were created in the first place, giving the Young Lords and their members the room to engage in a revolutionary politic. In doing this research, it is revealed how the Young Lords relied upon a collective understanding of the place of Puerto Ricans and how those shared experiences of structural oppression and marginalization strengthened the movement to make it what it was.

In addition to contextualizing the status of Puerto Ricans within the United States, I argue that the coloniality of power is still deeply ingrained into the revolutionary movement that they participate in. As they attempt to deconstruct the “colonized mentality” (Gonzalez, et al. 1972:26-32) that the Young Lords attributed to all Puerto Ricans being conditioned with, they remain entangled in this coloniality, reproducing the same methods of control and legitimacy under a different ideological name. The moral hierarchy that became enforced by the Young Lords as Puerto Rican identity ends up becoming an exclusionary tool that divides the community.

For this analysis, I draw on Mamdani’s concept of ‘culture talk’ to understand how The Young Lords’ politicize identity. Culture talk is defined as “the predilection to define cultures according to their presumed essential characteristics, especially as regards politics” or, in other words, “the tendency to think of culture in political – and therefore – territorial terms” (Mamdani 2002:767). While Mamdani uses culture talk mostly to explain how outsiders have mis-contextualized Islam and created their own narrative of ‘genuine’ Muslims and ‘bad’ Muslims, I find it a good starting point for understanding how the Young Lords’ not only created

a good/bad dichotomy, but also how this dichotomy legitimized Puerto Rican identities. Unlike Mamdani, who argues that culture talk lacks the historical context which gives agency to individuals, I find that the political meanings attached by the Young Lords are deeply embedded within the context of United States colonialism and the colonality of power which has historically placed Puerto Ricans into the margins of society.

As I construct a critique of the Young Lords, where the colonality of power continues to be reinforced within their own movement, I take on a feminist perspective, arguing that the exclusionary and colonial practices displayed by the Young Lords are enforced by masculinist views of what legitimizes revolutionary movements (Desai 2021; Einwohner et al. 2000). The Young Lords engaged in various forms of activism, often advocating for reproductive justice issues like abortion, birth control, and against the coerced sterilization of women in Puerto Rico (Fernandez 2020; Soares 2021). Still, even with the prominence of feminist discussions featured in the Young Lords' publications, the movement itself relied upon patriarchal notions of power, aka 'revolutionary machismo' as it's called by the Young Lords in their 13 Point Program, to create legitimacy within the movement. This critique presides upon previous assertions that "movements, their activities, and the arenas in which they operate are all gendered" (Einwohner et al. 2000:694). The emerging archetypes then begin to take on gendered representations of how one should act, be, and perform as part of a revolutionary movement.

Lastly, I explore discussions of transnationalism to understand how new diasporic identities formed. Transnationalism refers to the relationships, ideologies, and activities that span across borders (Aranda 2007; Takeda 2011). These barriers trickle down across generations of the diaspora into feelings of guilt, sadness, or confusion over questions of belonging, home, family obligations, and more. For the children of immigrants, this is especially true, as they sit

between two or more conflicting perceptions of where they belong. These struggles encapsulate Diane Wolf's conception of emotional transnationalism, defined as the emotional and psychological responses of engaging in transnational networks (Wolf 1997; Aranda 2007; Gu 2010; Takeda 2011).

I use emotional transnationalism to contextualize how the Young Lords used politics as a way to not only redefine the diaspora, but also to create a safe space where people could reconnect with their culture through activism. In providing purpose and meaning for Puerto Ricans of the diaspora, The Young Lords also necessarily react to their status as colonial subjects, the margins being a space in which one can explore and empower, while also inevitably excluding those who chose not to engage with these explorations.

The Young Lords in Chicago and New York

The Young Lords were an exciting case, with a brief albeit fascinating history that I will discuss in this section. Continuing the long history of Puerto Rican political activism in the United States, they dedicated themselves towards Puerto Rican independence and fought against the oppression and discrimination experienced by Puerto Rican communities (Fernandez 2020). More interestingly, they were exemplary of the transnationalism that had historically begun to define Puerto Rican communities (Haub and Kay 2012; Duany 2002; Perez 2002). Their cultural and ideological legacy influenced entire generations, existing alongside movements such as the Nuyorican Art Movement, and helped envision a community of love and self-empowerment (Fernandez 2020; Goergen 2015; Morales 2020). Their work during such a precarious moment in time – the Civil Rights era – helped to redefine Puerto Rican identity and notions of belonging

by providing a space for the diaspora to engage with their communities, history, and culture (Fernandez 2020).

They began in the early 1960s as a street gang from Lincoln Park, Chicago (Fernandez 2020; Gonzalez 2013). Little is known about the Young Lords during this period of time, except how in late 1968, Jose “Cha Cha” Jimenez rebuilt the Young Lords Organization with a new goal in mind. He turned them from an everyday street gang into an activist organization dedicated not just towards Puerto Rican independence, but towards the liberation of all oppressed groups. They built their model after the Black Panthers, another Chicago-based organization centered on the fight for Black liberation (Fernandez 2020; Gonzalez 2013). The Black Panthers were viewed not just as another leg of the movement, but revolutionary elders (Interview with Morales, Nov. 2022) as they were one of the first to put into effect community programs that would later be implemented by the Young Lords and other related groups.

Much was done during the early beginnings of the Chicago Lords, with the majority of their activism being in response to gentrification and ‘urban renewal’ projects happening in Chicago at the time (Moser 2018). One of their most famous demonstrations was the McCormick Takeover, where the Young Lords organized a siege of the McCormick Theological Seminary in protest of them acquiring several Lincoln Park properties with intentions to renovate. The Young Lords Organization and other activist groups occupied one of the institution’s administrative buildings for a week in order to protest the gentrification of the area. They demanded \$601,000 for low-income housing, the creation of a 24-hour daycare center, a Puerto Rican cultural center, and more (*YLO* May 1969:4; Okeke; Grossman 2018; Fernandez 2020:47). After intense community pressure, the Seminary agreed to their demands, pledging nearly \$700,000 to the community. This event was a defining moment for the Young Lords as it gave substance to their

cause. In their words, “Control and power must be won thru [sic] force – the rich will never give up anything peacefully” (*YLO* May 1969:15). Other notable acts include the development of free breakfast programs, health clinics, and parks.

As they continued to hold demonstrations, the Chicago Lords quickly gained a reputation for getting things done, and were popular for providing support to their communities that the city government did not (Interview with Morales, Nov. 2022). Gaining notoriety, their message spread further and further, and it didn’t take long for chapters to open in other cities like Milwaukee, Philadelphia, and most notably, New York – which would eventually grow into the largest and perhaps more well known chapter of the Young Lords.

The New York chapter of the Young Lords Organization began in May 1969, with Felipe Luciano appointed chairman. They were initially based in East Harlem (also called ‘El Barrio’), before continuing to spread out to the Bronx and other largely Puerto Rican burroughs (Fernandez 2020). Similar to the Chicago Lords, they focused on community organizing and dismantling the gentrification of their neighborhoods with infamous demonstrations ranging from their Garbage Offensives (where they shoveled piles of garbage into the middle of the street and set it on fire in order to call out the city’s neglect of their sanitation laws), the People’s Church Takeover, door-to-door lead poisoning and tuberculosis tests, and the Lincoln Hospital Takeover (Fernandez 2020; *Palante* July 1970).

Over time, the New York chapter of the Young Lords Organization split off into their own, becoming the Young Lords Party in June 1970 while still retaining their identity as Young Lords sporting their purple berets and characteristic slogan, “Tengo Puerto Rico En Mi Corazón.” (Fernandez 2020; *Palante* June 1970)

Despite the split, both groups still shared many of the same common goals and views. The most notable difference between the two, and the reason for their split, were severe rifts between each group's class and education. The New York Lords were led by college-educated youth who often put education at the center of their platform. Although many members of the Young Lords were also in high school and/or did not go to college, education was deeply valued. While the Chicago Lords had a similar age demographic of youth, some as young as 14, they were not necessarily a 'student movement' in the way that the New York Lords were. Despite the Chicago Lords efforts to increase public education, often pushing for the development of cultural centers where Puerto Rican history could be taught, this was still not to the caliber expected by the Young Lords in New York. Many of the Chicago Lords did not have the same access to higher education that those in New York – even founder Cha Cha Jimenez did not attend college until later in life, receiving his Bachelor's degree in 2013 (GSVU 2023). Despite the fact that both branches of the Young Lords had members from similarly disadvantaged, lower-income communities, the New York Lords' access to higher education ultimately created a big difference in the mobility they achieved later in life.

This was perhaps the most significant difference between both groups. In all other aspects, they were incredibly similar. Both engaged in youth-led, community activism, and enacted many of the same protest initiatives – fighting against gentrification, advocating for Puerto Rican independence, and adopting a more militant, leftist view in order to position themselves against the State.

Additionally, both groups appeared to have a predominantly male central committee during the time period discussed in this paper (Fernandez 2020; Gonzalez 2013). The New York Young Lords was led by Chairman Felipe Luciano along with Juan Gonzalez, Pablo Guzman,

Juan Ortiz, and David Perez at the time of the split, although they were eventually joined by Denise Oliver-Velez and then Gloria Gonzalez. Later, Luciano would be demoted as Chairman, an event briefly discussed in *Palante*, their bi monthly newspaper. Meanwhile, the Chicago Young Lords were led by Cha Cha Jimenez, with several members in leadership identifying as male (Gonzalez 2013). Overall, women composed roughly a third of the New York Young Lords's membership (Gonzalez 2013), with little known about the gender demographics of the Chicago Lords.

The focus on Chicago and New York specifically, as opposed to other branches of the Young Lords, is due to their historical importance. Chicago was the founding city from which all other branches emerged – they set the precedent for the movement, establishing many of the initial goals which other branches followed. Meanwhile, New York was perhaps the largest and most well-known chapter of the Young Lords (Fernandez 2020). Both branches were deeply impactful in their respective communities, and define how we view the Young Lords today. In addition to the complicated and interesting history between the two, I believe that both groups are more historically relevant to this research due to the impact on their surrounding communities.

Regardless of their differences, the Young Lords in both cities practiced similar methods of legitimizing and excluding identities within the Puerto Rican community, which this paper focuses on. Both cases present an opportunity for critique to be explored – of which can hopefully be extended to other branches of the Young Lords in future research.

Methodology

To study the ideals held by members of the Young Lords, I analyze newspapers published by the Young Lords themselves. At this point, only three newspapers published by the Young Lords are known. Two of the newspapers were utilized for this process: *YLO* (later named *Pitirre* in their last issue), published monthly by the Chicago Young Lords Organization from June 1969 to Summer 1970, and *Palante*, published bi-weekly by the New York Young Lords Party from May 1970 to July 1976. The third newspaper, not discussed here, was *El Young Lord: Latin Liberation News Service*, published in Milwaukee. However, only two issues of this paper were published as the Milwaukee branch quickly declined (Gonzalez 2013). Both the *YLO* and *Palante* newspapers were bilingual publications independently produced by the two different branches of the Young Lords, both accessed through publicly available digital archives provided by DePaul University (*YLO*) and New York University (*Palante*).

I focus the majority of this research on the first year of the Young Lords' activity. *YLO* had only 6 issues available, and all 6 were used in the research process in order to collect as much information as possible. While *Palante* was released for 6 years, only the first 24 issues, published from May 1970 to May 1971, were used. The research focused specifically on the Chicago and New York Young Lords' first year of activity due to this being a significant period of time. In 1970, as the Young Lords were just beginning to figure out who they were and what kinds of statements they wanted to make, they enacted some of the most defining initiatives of their career (Fernandez 2020; Gonzalez 2013). It was also during this time that they experienced significant structural and leadership changes which are discussed later in the paper.

The process of doing textual analysis consisted of reading through each issue and paying particular attention to regularly appearing sections, notable images, and editorial spreads. Three of the regularly appearing sections include Pig of the Month (*YLO*) and Pig of the Week

(*Palante*), as well as Letters to YLO (*YLO*). Language and terminology used by the Young Lords were also accounted for, and at times, even spelling and capitalization. For example, choosing to spell ‘America’ as ‘amerikkka’, as well as the choice to not capitalize the A.

Capitalization was one way that the Young Lords, particularly in *Palante*, legitimized individuals. Whether or not someone’s name was written in lowercase letters (ie. the young lords) versus properly capitalized (ie. The Young Lords) easily reflected how that person or thing was viewed. Capitalization has often been used to emphasize some form of legitimacy or importance, as seen in other, similar discussions over whether certain racial identifiers, like Black, should be capitalized (Tharps 2014; Coleman 2020; Laws 2020). Some scholars, such as bell hooks, deliberately choose not to capitalize their name so as to willingly draw attention away from themselves (McGrady 2021). As such, the choice to not capitalize the names of politicians or ‘amerikkka’ reflects legitimacy in a more Weberian sense – it represents the lack of authority given by the Young Lords to the State. Meanwhile, capitalizing names showed legitimacy in the form of validating existence, displaying respect, and displaying solidarity – hence why names like Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seale (of the Black Panthers) were capitalized.

The kinds of sections included in each issue were also analyzed. Regularly appearing sections and editorial spreads/cover stories were given special attention due to their emphasis and presentation. In both issues, a section declaring a ‘pig’ was included. In *YLO*, this was Pig of the Month, and Pig of the Week in *Palante* – where the Young Lords called out those that they perceived as being against them. Editorial spreads were also significant material. *Palante* had a center spread in each issue – ranging from a variety of topics. Some were art spreads which included drawings, poetry, and photography. Some were historical in nature, documenting particular moments in either Puerto Rican history (on and off the island) or in the Young Lords

history. One editorial spread featured in *Palante* was a notice of their break up from the Chicago Young Lords, detailing the circumstances and reasons for them choosing to branch off. While *YLO* did not have editorials in the same way that *Palante* had, their cover stories served much of the same purpose – expressing a level of importance to the subject matter being discussed.

Both publications also utilized a plethora of photographs, drawings, and motifs. While these were not necessarily the center of attention in this research, they did reflect interesting components of the Young Lords' ideology, for example, the depiction of cops as pigs, and the usage of commonly recognized symbols of Puerto Rican culture, such as the *jíbaro* (typically refers to someone who lives in the rural parts of the island, like a farmer. Jibaros can be identified by their straw hats and machetes), the Puerto Rican flag, the revolutionary flag of El Grito de Lares, and the Young Lords logo which featured an outline of the island.

In conducting this research, trends in the way Puerto Rican identity was discussed and legitimized became gradually clearer. There was a distinction between who was valued and respected, and who was not. What seemed to be the most interesting and important thread tying each aspect of the publications together was choice. Why did the Young Lords choose these images and symbols? Why did they make the editorial spread or their cover story the way they did? Why did they have a Pig named in every issue? Why did they capitalize some names and not others? The message that the Young Lords attempted to share is evident in every facet of their publications.

The fact that these serve as primary sources is what makes them so special. Being created and reproduced by the Young Lords ensured a sense of control over what was being shared and how it was being shared. Those who worked on the publications were also central members of the Young Lords committee. Even the chairman of the New York Young Lords Party himself,

Felipe Luciano, often contributed by writing articles, announcements, or poetry. The layout and art featured in *Palante* was put together (and sometimes even done herself) by Denise Oliver-Velez, Communications Secretary of the Young Lords, and the newspaper's main editor was Pablo "Yoruba" Guzman, the Minister of Information.

More importantly, what was shared in the newspapers would have been intended to stand the test of time. Published thoughts and ideas have a distinct sense of permanency to them. People might be able to forget what is shared in passing, but it is much harder to bury what gets written down on paper. The fact that these newspapers still exist today is an example of that. The permanency of the Young Lords sharing their stories (which later became a documentation of their histories) also gives permanency to their influence, and helps give substance to the formation of a collective diasporic identity among Puerto Ricans.

Due to the higher quantity of source material, much of the research involved *Palante* more so than *YLO*. While this presents the risk of potentially presenting conclusions that applied to *Palante*, but not necessarily to *YLO*, I find that both groups engage in a similar process of exclusion and identity creation due to shared ideologies that developed within masculinist social movements, as discussed in the following sections.

"The Duty of a Puerto Rican is to Make the Revolution": *Archetypes within the Young Lords' Movement*

During the next half of this paper, I will highlight four archetypes that developed within the Young Lords' movement. These four archetypes include the Revolutionary, Traitor, Passive Dissenter, and Martyr. By identifying how these four archetypes emerged, I argue that the Young

Lords developed a moral hierarchy where certain expressions of Puerto Rican identity became legitimized over others due to judgments about what makes a *good* versus a *bad* Puerto Rican.

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In the September 11, 1970 issue of *Palante*, Marisol Malaret – the first Puerto Rican Miss Universe – is featured smiling while wearing her crown. However, she is not being celebrated or congratulated for her achievements. Instead, she is presented with a new title – Pig of the Week.

“Marisol, a native [Puertorriqueña] herself, is not in any way showing the world the true nature of the Puerto Rican woman [...] While most of us are fighting for our survival, our oppressor has Marisol parading around the world enchanting people with her smile and ‘universal beauty.’ She is presenting an incorrect picture to the people of what we are really about [...] For allowing yourself to be used by our oppressors, Miss Universe, Plastic Goddess of the Antilles, you deserve this week’s award.” (*Palante* September 1970:11)

Marisol Malaret, Miss Universe 1970, was not the only one to be granted the esteemed ‘Pig of the Week’ awards by the New York Young Lords Party. It was like a tradition, a new winner announced for every issue. The award was not exclusive to only Puerto Ricans. Most of the time, it was just an opportunity to call out shady or violent police officers and American politicians. But in some issues, it was an opportunity to hold members of their own community – fellow Puerto Ricans – accountable, regardless of their status. The tradition was honored even by *YLO*, although it was awarded on a monthly, rather than bi-weekly, basis. *YLO*’s very first issue, published March 19th, 1969, calls out Pete Rivera, a regular person from their own neighborhood. Opening with “This pig is not wanted in our community but as burned bacon...” the short blurb goes on to describe that the reason unlucky Pete gained the title of ‘Pig of the Month’ was because “he is fully committed to working for the rich rather than for his people.” The passage coyly ends with “It has been heard that he is passing himself [off] as Italian: no more rice and beans for him, just Pizza [sic].” (*YLO* March 1969:4)

The Pig of the Week/Month award was only one means of the Young Lords enforcing an expected behavior of fellow Puerto Ricans. The expectation was a living and breathing part of the movement – integral to everything the Young Lords prided themselves on being, and they expressed it every opportunity they had.

Gloria Gonzalez, Field Marshal of the Young Lords Party, summarized their ideology best, stating that “wherever a Puerto Rican is, the duty of a Puerto Rican is to make the revolution” (Gonzalez, et al. 1972:2). For the Young Lords, being Puerto Rican in and of itself was political. As colonized people, one could not detract from the inherent weight that Puerto Rican identity had – one could not *be* Puerto Rican without existing as a colonized person. Because of this, it was imperative that Puerto Ricans work towards decolonization. This singular fact united the Young Lords – both in Chicago and New York, and in other chapters of the Young Lords – together in the first place.

Building upon Mamdani’s concept of ‘culture talk’, I argue that the Young Lords engage in something similar, where notions of good, and therefore, ‘genuine’ Puerto Ricans preside upon the connection between politics and identity.

In exploring these distinctions of good and bad, I developed four archetypes for understanding how the Young Lords weighed legitimacy, formulated after textual analysis of the respective newspapers of the Chicago Lords and the New York Lords, *YLO* and *Palante*:

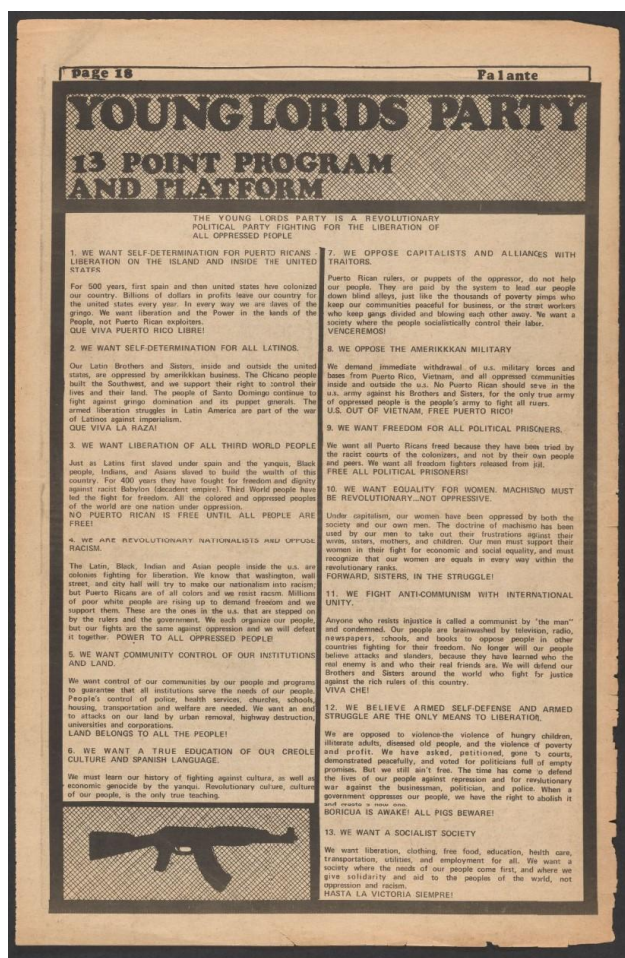
Revolutionaries	<i>Martyrs</i>
Passive Dissenters	
Traitors	

These archetypes provide a means of justifying who gets to be included in the Young Lords’ definition of ‘true’ Puerto Ricans. Being ‘good’ in the eyes of the Young Lords meant

going against the status quo by fighting for collective liberation, and therefore made you a ‘true’ or worthy Puerto Rican by centering your communities’ interests over that of the State’s. I explore these archetypes further below by exploring the purpose of each role and how they help uphold the Young Lords’ hierarchy of goodness and legitimacy.

Revolutionaries

I begin with the Revolutionaries – the *ideal*. Revolutionaries are the embodiment of who and what a Young Lord should strive to be. They are the idealized freedom fighters, the selfless and determined bringers of justice – who strove for the liberation of all oppressed peoples in direct opposition to the State. Revolutionaries are not only in support of the movement, but carry it on their back, oftentimes adopting an anticapitalist worldview. These points are exemplified within the Young Lords’ 13 Point Program, as seen below:



Being a Revolutionary meant more than simply supporting the Lords in their work. It required an ideological metamorphosis. The prerequisites for Revolutionary status thus involved an entire spiritual and political change within a person, and those who went through that period of transition into total radicalization were referred to by the New York Young Lords Party as *cadres*. “What is a cadre? A cadre is a person in the Party who has gone through a change in himself or herself from just another Puerto Rican to leader of the people, a revolutionary [...] This is a big change in the whole life of the individual.”

What follows is one clear example of how the New York Lords defined a revolutionary. Being a Revolutionary meant “[f]irst, losing the bad traits from the class they originated from, individualism, machismo, sexism, racism, intellectualism, superiorities and inferiorities. This is

called ‘de-classizing’ [...] Second, is the big change that the individual has in getting rid of the scars that capitalism has left in the person’s mind, like liberalism, pessimism, and the biggest of all, colonized mentality [...] We call this change ‘de-colonizing’” (Gonzalez, et al. 1972:38-39).

This not only revealed what the Young Lords positioned themselves against, but allowed one to measure whether or not they achieved revolutionary status in the way they understood it. If being a revolutionary meant rejecting certain ideologies like machismo, intellectualism, and capitalism, did the Young Lords themselves fit into this construction, or were they also entangled in the ‘colonized mentality’ they wished to shed?

For those living in the margins of society, this change (while requiring effort and intention), was much more seamless. Members weren’t only encouraged to abandon who they were before radicalization, but rather to learn from and reflect upon it. “You have that background, but what you are is able to organize best that class that you came [*sic*] from because you understand it best, have dealt with a lot of the negative parts of it, and have recognized the good parts” (Gonzalez, et al. 1972:39).

While Traitors refer specifically to Puerto Ricans who were against the Young Lords and their movement, the Revolutionary archetype could potentially apply to anyone regardless of ethnicity or organizational allegiance. Even so, the application of this archetype differed as certain expectations were made depending on identity. Essentially, those of marginalized identities were expected to undergo the transformation into a Revolutionary, while those with privilege were only cautiously encouraged.

For example, white people seeking to be involved in radical leftist movements would have been received with more apprehension. In describing the purpose and existence of the Young Lords Organization, one article published in *YLO* states that “it is not clear yet how

whites will fight in this just struggle. White students and workers are rebelling, but these struggles only amount to maintaining their white supremacy in the colleges and in the factories.” (YLO October 1969:6) Still, the Chicago Young Lords Organization was one part of the Rainbow Coalition, which included groups like the Black Panthers and the Young Patriots Organization (a group predominantly made up of Southern white people). Together, these groups along with the Brown Berets, the Red Guard, and the American Indian Movement, organized joint protests in the name of antiracism and anticlassism (Serrato 2019).

The idealized figures portrayed in *Palante* and *YLO* were various. Examples of the typified Revolutionary include Lolita Lebron, Pedro Albizu Campos, and Ramon Emeterio Betances – all of whom were prominent Puerto Rican nationalists and *independistas* who fought for Puerto Rican independence. Lebron, Campos, and Betances are depicted in several issues of *Palante* and *YLO*, with their words and images treated with extreme reverence.



Covers of Palante featuring Lolita Lebron, Ramon Emeterio Betances, and Pedro Albizu Campos

Each of these examples made huge sacrifices for what they believed in. Lebron, who stormed the United States Capitol in 1954, was sentenced to 50 years in jail, although served only 25 years due to receiving commutation from President Jimmy Carter (Martin 2010). Campos was arrested several times throughout his life, and experienced deteriorating health over

time due to the alleged radiation experiments conducted on him in prison, which eventually took his life. Betances lived his life in exile from Puerto Rico due to his abolitionist views and later for his role in leading El Grito de Lares, where the Puerto Rican town of Lares was sieged from the Spanish by a group of Puerto Rican rebels. They were seen as more than just key figures of the revolution. Rather, they were everything that a Young Lord should strive to be. The Revolutionary gives more than what is asked of – they are willing to risk their life and their freedom in the name of liberation. Finally, a Revolutionary is not just treated as an individual, but as part of a whole. To be a Revolutionary is to serve the collective people – “No one can defeat the people. For every revolutionary who dies, 1000 take his place. “ (*YLO* October 1969:4)

Traitors

Next, is the antithesis to the Revolutionary, the *Traitor*. Traitors are perhaps the simplest yet more interesting case to look at. They are the cops, the politicians, the sellouts, and the criminals who the Young Lords perceive as being the detriment and outright enemies of their community. Called everything from pigs to *lombrices* (worms), Traitors were publicly villainized and disparaged by both *YLO* and *Palante* regularly. In both publications, it was not uncommon to see a lot of the same names brought up more than once, alongside a barrage of carefully crafted insults and critiques. Of those ‘lombrices’ who were considered against the Young Lords, many were not even Puerto Rican, and so I use the term ‘Traitors’ to refer specifically to Puerto Ricans, as they are viewed as ‘betraying’ not only the Young Lords, but their *people* as well. It is more than just disinterest or lack of involvement – Traitors were viewed as threats, actively working against the ‘good’ that the Young Lords strove to bring.

What it means to ‘actively work against’ the Young Lords varies. Like Marisol Malaret and the unfortunate Pete Rivera, it could be associating with shady politicians to participating in harmful practices. Most often, Traitors were Puerto Ricans with powerful platforms who put their influence into oppressive institutions. Luis Muñoz Marin, former Governor of Puerto Rico, is another example – as he pushed for Operation Bootstrap, which industrialized the Puerto Rican economy and increased unemployment rates across the island, consequently leading to the mass migration of Puerto Ricans to the United States (Fernandez 2020; Grosfoguel 2006).

While these examples of Traitors are easier to identify, arguably, there were others who were viewed as committing a betrayal. Some characterizations of the Traitor included selling drugs and/or partaking in drug use, stealing, and other activities that were considered immoral. Examples of this can be seen in the May 8, 1970 issue of *Palante*, which opens with a poem by Chairman Felipe Luciano titled “Message to A Dope Fiend.” The poem closes with the lines;

And when the revolution comes/ very, very soon.
 You shoot and I’ll shoot, and
 You shoot and I’ll shoot
 You shoot and I’ll shoot
 And unless you shoot straight
 I’m gonna get you
 Before you get yourself!

Drug use was heavily discouraged amongst the Young Lords, and viewed as part of the downfall of their communities. Those with addictions were disparaged with names like ‘dope fiend’ and ‘junkie’ and were shamed for being unable to move past their addiction. Members of the Young Lords who were found using or possessing illegal drugs were immediately expelled, as per rules 3 and 4 of their ‘Rules of Discipline’ printed in all of the earlier issues of *Palante*:

3. Any Member found shooting drugs will be expelled.
4. No member may have any illegal drug in his or her possession or in their system while on duty. No one may get drunk on duty.

Drug use was a question of morals for the Young Lords, and to choose drugs over one's own community was a huge offense.

Other crimes, such as stealing, were not excluded from this. In the same issue of *Palante*, a section calls out Luis Nuñez, who allegedly presented himself as a member of the Young Lords (sometimes by impersonating member Juan Gonzalez, Minister of Education of the Young Lords Party) while asking for donations for their free breakfast program. The section tells readers to “beware” as he is a “thief who steals from the people” (*Palante* May 1970:9).

In this case, it can be argued that it is not actually the stealing itself which is the problem, but rather, who is being stolen from. Still, this act is treated as a moral problem – ‘How can you steal from your own people?’ Putting a bad light on the Young Lords through impersonating them and one of their members is simply another aspect of this. Admittedly, stealing food and/or money (it is never specified what exactly he has stolen) from innocent people who think they are donating to feed hungry children isn't necessarily the most defensible crime, and warning the public about it is an expected response. The question here isn't whether Luis Nuñez did something wrong, it is whether he is a Traitor.

Does using or selling drugs constitute a betrayal? Does stealing from your own people, even if it means feeding yourself or putting clothes on your back, make you a Traitor to your own community? In the New York Young Lords Party's manifesto, *Ideology of the Young Lords* (1972), lumpens (“men and women who are unemployable, on drugs, prostitutes, welfare mothers, people in jail” (Gonzalez, et al. 1972:40)) are recognized as oppressed human beings who are victims of the social conditions inflicted by a corrupt government. The Lords also include themselves in this definition of the lumpen – stating that, “We are waking up and uniting as a class with the rest of our people to destroy the real enemy – the yankees [sic]” (Gonzalez, et

al. 1972:41). At the same time, the reception of lumpens in publications by the Young Lords appear to contradict this, as those who were addicted to drugs and/or resorted to crime were looked down upon as bringing harm into their communities.

Behaviors were judged through not just a political lens, but a moral one. To be a Young Lord was to do good for your community. To do anything in conflict with that meant to abandon who you were. It was more than just a slight against the Young Lords, it was a disrespect to your own people – and *that* was the transgression against which Traitors were judged, regardless of the reasons why.

Passive Dissenters

Situated between Traitors and Revolutionaries are the Passive Dissenters, or bystanders of the movement. They are the neutral ground – not fully invested in the exhausting workings of carrying out a revolution, but also not exactly committing the egregious offense of ‘selling out.’ Many of those who fit into this archetype were regular, everyday members of their communities. They worked, took care of their families, paid their bills, and got through each day one by one, simply trying to stay afloat:

“We don’t like to get into trouble, because we might lose our job, or our project or our casserio apartment, or our children might suffer. We are the housewives and the working wome[n], who are oppressed not just on the job but at home by our own husbands, who beat us or mistreat us because they don’t know any better” (Gonzalez, et al. 1972:40).

In many ways, they would have benefited from the work that the Young Lords did in their neighborhoods, while also continuing to participate in the status quo, upholding American cultural ideologies regardless of intention.

Passive Dissenters are viewed with an understanding that remaining neutral is only of benefit to the oppressor. Put simply, with the words of Ramon Emeterio Betances quoted in

Palante, “Qué le pasa a los Puertorriqueños que no se rebelan?” (What is wrong with Puerto Ricans who don’t rebel?) In this sense, they are looked down upon as lacking the critical thinking necessary to radicalize. At the same time, they are part of the group that the Young Lords attempt to speak out to. In distributing their newspapers, holding various community demonstrations, creating cultural centers, and presenting free classes on the history of Puerto Rico – the Young Lords sought to radicalize people through education and mobilization, appealing to shared experiences of oppression and identity. “First of all, YLO is a propaganda machine that is committed to educating the masses of people. Our primary task is informing and showing the people why they are being exploited and oppressed, who is responsible, and how they can eventually eradicate the many injustices committed against them” (*YLO* October 1969:6). Essentially, the Passive Dissenter (who dissents by not actively participating in the movement and taking on a ‘neutral’ position) is encouraged to ‘wake up’ and join in on the revolution.

It should be noted that not all Passive Dissenters should be viewed as the same. As with the other archetypes, different people fit into these categories in different ways. Many of those who would fall into this archetype could have supported the Young Lords’ work. They, too, could have recognized that change was necessary – and could have wished for a liberated Puerto Rico. However, for various reasons, would not have been able to show up in the same way the members of the Young Lords or other revolutionary movements did. Not everyone could give their life up to the movement in the same way that Revolutionaries did. As stated earlier, they were simply regular people trying to survive. Some Passive Dissenters would also not have had access to the higher education that much of the Young Lords did (especially the New York chapter). To assume that Passive Dissenters were all unaware or disinterested would be a huge underestimation of their agency and capability, and so their lack of involvement with the

movement on a large scale should not purely be seen as a flaw on their own part, but as a lack of capacity and accessibility caused by the same structures that the Young Lords sought to dismantle.

Martyrs

The final, and perhaps most complicated, archetype is the Martyr. Martyrs are those who have lost their lives to the system, such as being wrongfully murdered by the State. Their deaths serve as motivation for resistance, and are often the faces of the movement. Many of the demonstrations organized by the Young Lords were in the name of their lost comrades. One of the most notable examples of this is seen in the murder of Manuel Ramos, whose death was the final push towards the Chicago Lords' radicalization: "The people have been angry for years. They got even angrier when Manuel Ramos, a member of the Young Lords, and a Puerto Rican revolutionary, was shot to death by an off-duty cop in May, 1969" (*YLO* October 1969). This led to their first major act: the takeover of McCormick Theological Seminary. During the takeover, the building was named the Manuel Ramos Memorial Building by the Young Lords.

Martyrdom within revolutionary movements has been long documented. What defines the Martyr is the fact that they have lost the most valuable thing about themselves – their lives – to an oppressive force. Their death did not occur out of altruism or with the intention of making a statement, but was a punishment, an *execution*, by the State. Oftentimes, political martyrdom is seen with those who were revolutionaries in life. Joan of Arc, Che Guevara, and John Brown are three examples of this phenomenon described in DeSoucey et al (2008). All three were idealized Revolutionaries of their time and space, and all three were executed as a result.

DeSoucey et al. concludes that “Ultimately, the role of the martyr is fundamentally social in that it depends upon recognition of bodily sacrifice within the form of particular scripts.”

These scripts are used to reinforce certain values and norms that create unity through collective memory (2008:114). While DeSoucey et al. look specifically at the role of the physical body in martyrdom, they provide an interesting baseline for understanding who and what a Martyr is.

They...

“[...] operate in spaces of social change and upheaval, typically situated at historical action points. Martyr stories are marked by personal agency, violence to the body, institutional execution, and, often, final words or actions that articulate the martyrs’ commitment to tightly held beliefs and identification with a cause” (2008:101).

The most notable distinction that is made about the creation of the Martyr is the perceived acceptance by the individual in their death. While they do not necessarily choose to die in the symbolic sense of altruistic suicide or self-immolation, they accept the risks that come with committing to their beliefs. They recognize the possibility that they may lose their lives, and still choose to fight (DeSoucey et al. 2008:101).

Manuel Ramos could arguably fit into this definition of martyrdom, as he himself was a Young Lord who would have realized that he was treated as a threat by the State. Many of those martyred by the Young Lords embody these characteristics: Revolutionaries in life who were executed for their involvement in revolutionary movements. Another figure fitting into the Martyr archetype includes Julio Roldan, a Puerto Rican activist who died in jail. Official reports state that his death was a suicide, to much contention from the Young Lords and their allies. Roldan, who was believed to have been murdered (and subsequently have his murder covered up), exemplifies the Martyr almost perfectly, even having final words recorded just hours before he was found in his cell: “Power to the People.” His death was just one of many alleged hangings

of Black and Latino inmates that occurred around this time in New York City (Quarles 2017; *Palante* November 1970; *Palante* December 1970).

What complicates the Martyr archetype is that, despite the examples of Manuel Ramos and Julio Roldan, the effects of police brutality held true no matter who they were perpetrated against. Ramos' and Roldan's involvement with the Young Lords and the movement certainly made their deaths more recognizable and impactful, but the wrongful deaths of Black, Latino, and other marginalized people were all collectively martyred:

“As young people, Latin Americans, Afro-Americans and their friends, we know from personal experience what it is like to be treated by police as their enemies, as people who are just ‘guilty’ for just being on the street, hanging with our friends, walking down an alley, standing on a street corner [...] The police protect property, not people” (*YLO* March 1969:11).

The fact that police brutality was so rampant is arguably one of the reasons groups like the Young Lords arose in the first place – as a way of protecting their communities, evidenced by their belief in militarization as a means of self-defense and that “the only way to liberation is through armed struggle” (*Palante* June 1970). While the names and faces of Manuel Ramos and Julio Roldan will continue to live on, collective memory of these traumas expand beyond that. They build upon a widely accepted history of violent oppression against communities of color. For these reasons, I do not believe that one has to match the description of Ramos and Roldan in order to be martyred, even if those elements play a large role.

Rather, it is their death and the circumstances of their death which defines the Martyr. In being martyred, they are turned into symbols – proof of the State's fear and devaluation of their communities.

Each of these archetypes emerged as the Young Lords redefined notions of what it means to be Puerto Rican. This new expression revolved around politicizing identity in a way that applied a dichotomy of good and bad. In the following section, I will discuss the role of these archetypes in upholding a moral hierarchy that determines legitimacy amongst the Puerto Rican diaspora.

The Good, the Bad, the Ugly: *An Analysis of How Revolutionary Archetypes Reflect Moral Hierarchies*

In developing a typology for how the Young Lords organized themselves, each archetype reflects imposed moral statuses which correspond with modes of legitimacy, similar to Mamdani's culture talk where distinctions between good and bad are made. Traitors are 'bad', Revolutionaries are 'good', Passive Dissenters are 'neutral', and Martyrs occupy a different space entirely – not necessarily 'good', but still legitimized as true Puerto Ricans due to the ultimate sacrifice of their life.

I place Martyrs separately from the other three archetypes because in many ways, it didn't matter who they were in life. While Manuel Ramos and Julio Roldan were specifically impactful because of their connection to the Young Lords, the collective understanding that Black and Brown people were often targeted by the State regardless of their political leanings meant that martyrdom was not always exclusive to Revolutionary figures. Instead, the Martyr could have been anyone – any Puerto Rican, any marginalized person, whose life was not valued or whose existence itself was seen as a threat.

In developing a moral hierarchy where Revolutionaries sit at the top, the Young Lords are able to reframe the way that the diaspora connects with their Puerto Rican identity through

radical mobilization efforts which directly oppose American cultural ideologies. Using the language of the Young Lords, I interpret these as inherently capitalist, white supremacist, and individualistic, and therefore exclusionary to marginalized people who are victimized by those who uphold these ideologies. This interpretation is one outlined by the Young Lords themselves, who often express their view of the State as being one designed for oppression, viewing the constitution as “‘crums’ [sic] to keep the people down, is an accumulation of laws that deprive poor people of its basic human rights. It is a document designed to put a certain type of people in power and keep them in power” (*Pitirre* 1970:11). One article in *Palante* reads, “Whenever amerikkka has come into contact with non-white peoples, it has responded in its true animal fashion – by killing,” later stating that the “soul” of “amerikkka” is “shaped like a \$” (*Palante* July 1970:4), revealing how the Young Lords viewed the State as deeply white supremacist and capitalist.

Revolutionaries, who actively defy the status quo through community work and activism, and Martyrs, whose deaths are symbolic within revolutionary movements, are legitimized as genuine Puerto Ricans. Meanwhile, Passive Dissenters and Traitors have their Puerto Rican identities delegitimized. Moral distinctions between different political attachments begin to influence how Puerto Rican identity gets produced. It moves beyond ethno-cultural meanings and instead transforms into a socio-political space of self-exploration.

This process of creating legitimacy through notions of good and bad builds upon Mamdani’s concept of culture talk. While Mamdani uses culture talk to explain why some Muslims are legitimized over others by the State, I observe it from within. The Young Lords’ ability to influence diasporic identity came from their shared experiences of discrimination and exclusion from upward mobility with the rest of their community. In addition to being able to get

things done, the Young Lords affirmed that it was not the *cultural* aspects of Puerto Rican identity that really made someone Puerto Rican, but rather, their commitment to the homeland itself.

In many ways, the Young Lords made legitimacy more accessible by creating a space for the diaspora to reconcile questions of identity and belonging. This was a crucial part of what made the Young Lords so successful. Within the diaspora, many would not have had access to ethno-cultural markers of identity like the ability to speak Spanish, be born in/visit Puerto Rico, or grow up in the culture. Rather, being born and living each day carrying the struggle of the Puerto Rican is what *truly* mattered. The coloniality of power, which had long justified the oppression of Puerto Ricans and other colonial subjects, made it so that being Puerto Rican was a political act in and of itself. One did not have to *be* anything more in order to experience the violence and neglect of the State – for who they were was reason enough.

Wolf's conception of emotional transnationalism becomes salient in this manifestation of identity as The Young Lords help to resolve feelings of belonging by reconnecting the diaspora with their Puerto Rican heritage through transnational activism. While much of their activism focused on local issues such as gentrification, racism, and class struggle – they united under a transnational politic which advocated for Puerto Rican liberation through pro-independence, decolonization, and socialism, and a large part of their activism involved instituting Puerto Rican cultural centers and educating communities about Puerto Rican history. Their slogan, 'Tengo Puerto Rico en mi corazon' (I have Puerto Rico in my heart) reflects this emotional transnationalism, as their activism is motivated by the central desire to reconnect with Puerto Rico.

At the same time, the dichotomy of good and bad that emerged was problematic for many reasons. While identity and belonging became accessible in some contexts, they also became far more exclusive in others, mainly due to the extreme weight placed upon education. Many members of the Young Lords were college students, able to interact with academia in a way that those without access to higher education did not. Members of the Young Lords Party were required to attend ‘political education classes’ and “read at least one political book a month, and at least two hours a day on contemporary matters” (*Palante* June 1970:17). Access to higher education also made it easier to achieve upward mobility, and many former Young Lords went on to become journalists, politicians, professors, and writers.

But this type of mobility, which some Traitors who sought to assimilate (within the limits of coloniality) may have had better access to, was even harder for some Passive Dissenters to participate in, as it was more imperative for them to survive each day rather than start a revolution. The same sentiment that made the Young Lords so impactful – that Puerto Ricans were a historically marginalized group victimized by powerful institutions – is the same reason why enforcing legitimacy through moral hierarchies was so problematic. It did not take into account a person’s agency or humanity, and instead, upheld an idealistic vision of who a Puerto Rican should be, rather than who they really were.

Education was so important that it played a major role in the split between the Chicago and New York chapters of the Young Lords, which was surmised as being due to ‘different goals’. Essentially, the Young Lords in New York implied that the Chicago chapter was nothing more than a group of ‘street gangsters’ and therefore incapable of leading an organized, *educated* movement. Despite the impact of the founding branch of the Young Lords, education was seen as

the main determinant of success, and therefore justified feelings of superiority that the New York chapter had over Chicago.

These strict views of how to be a Revolutionary extended beyond just education, as judgements were made on even the most personal levels. One example of this is seen in the demotion of former Young Lords Party Chairman Felipe Luciano due to his supposed ‘weaknesses’ (*Palante* September 1970:2). These weaknesses are never explicitly outlined, but nevertheless reflect how much weight was given to their political capacities, where anything less than perfection became proof of inferiority. While they may not have used the language of ‘good’ or ‘bad’, one’s commitment to the cause was directly correlated with their goodness. Those who did not align with the very strict standards in being a Revolutionary, in many ways, had no place in the movement at all.

The American cultural ideologies that the Young Lords attempt to displace then become unintentionally reinforced as perfectionism is encouraged. The elevation of education above all else and the exhaustive expectation that one had to dedicate every facet of their life to the movement was inevitably entangled within the same colonial mindset the Young Lords tried to liberate themselves from, one which valued production over livelihood. Essentially, in seeking to question and obstruct the coloniality of power which has historically kept Black and Brown people at the margins, the Young Lords ended up reproducing it within their body politic.

This analysis displays the flaws in movements centered in masculinist perspectives. These ‘masculinist perspectives’ do not exist in opposition to the many feminist issues the Lords speak to, as they exist alongside them. In discussing sexism, it has often been referred to by women in the Young Lords as the “revolution within the revolution” (Enck-Wanzer, ed.

2010:170)¹. Patriarchy (Stucky-Abbott 1988) impacted what roles women could hold in the movement – despite taking up about one third of the New York Lords (Enck-Wanzer, ed. 2010), women were initially left out of major leadership positions and were instead delegated to menial tasks such as fetching coffee (Fernandez 2020), until the women of the movement united together during weekly women’s caucus meetings where they would talk through their frustrations and grievances, as well as build sisterhood. (Fernandez 2020)

After Denise Oliver-Velez joined the central committee, becoming the highest ranking woman in the New York Lords, the New York Lords shifted away from the ‘revolutionary machismo’ originally highlighted in their 13 Point Program (Fernandez 2020; Enck-Wanzer, ed. 2010). Women in the movement were the ones predominantly writing about the feminist perspective, and were the ones fighting to be seen within a predominantly male movement.

Even so, the central committee remained mostly male – with the highest leadership positions being reserved to men during the period of time analyzed. Although making great strides in centering women’s liberation, the archetypes outlined above inevitably reflect gendered meanings of what it means to be a Revolutionary, Traitor, Passive Dissenter, or Martyr.

The Traitor example of Marisol Malaret highlights this as her status of beauty queen becomes weaponized against her. The Pig of the Week article written about her was written by a woman, yet still contains sexist language that demonizes her femininity, referring to her as the “Plastic Goddess of the Antilles” and stating that she is not “showing the world the true nature of the Puerto Rican woman” (*Palante* September 1970:11). While figures like Lolita Lebron were lauded and revered, the patriarchal language of ‘father’ was still reserved towards male figures,

¹ This quote was taken from an article originally published in the September 25th, 1970 issue of *Palante* by the Central Committee of the Young Lords, which can only currently be read in an outside source due to archival damage.

such as referencing Ramon Emeterio Betances as ‘Padre de la Patria,’ ‘Father of the Homeland’ (*Palante* July 1970).

Feminist tactics of social movements which centered motherhood, caregiving, and sexuality (among others) (Einwonher et al. 2000) were not included in the Young Lords vision of the Revolutionary, although the Revolutionary was often characterized as being encouraged by ‘love’ of the community and one’s people (Gonzalez, et al. 1972). Instead, militarist, action-oriented approaches were taken (Fernandez 2020), where the “expectation within the group that everyone would ‘throw down’ revealed a tendency within the male-dominated organization to rely on brawn rather than strategy” (Fernandez 2020:237). In the end, ideas of the true Puerto Rican became engendered as certain tactics in the movement were given more power over others. Choosing to not engage with the movement in the way that the Revolutionary was ‘supposed to’ provide justification for being viewed as a bad Puerto Rican.

As I show above, Puerto Rican identity becomes impacted in transnational, diasporic contexts. Diasporic Puerto Rican identity becomes politicized in such a way that an engendered moral hierarchy is applied, limiting access to legitimate Puerto Rican identity. In this case, legitimate Puerto Rican identity refers to being seen as a true, genuine Puerto Rican who ‘knows oneself’, knows where they come from, and has a deep love and commitment to the liberation of Puerto Rico and all oppressed peoples.

“Pa’lante, Siempre Pa’Lante!” – Young Lords Party

Conclusion

Long after the Young Lords’ end, their impact on generations of Puerto Ricans remains (Eaton-Martinez 2018; Enck-Wanzer 2007; Fernandez 2020). With all their faults, they showed

what was possible, what marginalized communities were *deserving* of. They did what cities and governments had either failed to do, or did not care enough to do anything about. Through their activism and message, they united Puerto Rican communities together under a vision of freedom that many had never thought possible, redefining Puerto Rican identity as more than just an ethnic category, but as a movement in its own right.

Understanding the good/bad dichotomy allows us to recognize the problematic nature of placing identities on a spectrum of legitimacy, where some are validated over others. What colonialism does with and beyond the physical extraction of resources, is leave behind the margins which provide us with the language and tools we need to enact resistance. However, while these margins force us to make new meanings of ourselves and teach us to survive within a world that has been actively positioned against us, it can also cloud our views. The archetype of the ‘perfect Revolutionary’ that the Young Lords strove for never existed. One couldn’t be a perfect revolutionary because people aren’t perfect, and in acting in opposition to this fact, the Young Lords unintentionally replicated the colonial conditions which they strove to reject, creating more margins and inhibiting participation in their own spaces. Traitors and Passive Dissenters who were excluded from legitimate Puerto Rican identity were then not granted their own agency, nor were they given the space to advocate for justice in their own way. By defining Puerto Rican identity based on a singular view of the ‘Revolutionary’, other forms of resistance became overshadowed. Traitors and Passive Dissenters who either could not, or did not want to, engage in the Young Lords’ movement were then excluded from Puerto Rican identity, looked down upon as bad or fake Puerto Ricans. The different conceptions of each archetype also extend various gendered meanings, where masculinist tactics define the movement, overshadowing

much of the feminist work that the Young Lords supported. Moving forward, I hope that these critiques are extended to other revolutionary movements and institutions.

In identifying a hierarchy of ‘good’ and ‘bad’, I hope we question how it is that we define ourselves, and unravel how coloniality pervades even the most personal parts of who we are. This paper builds upon the coloniality of power by asserting that these colonialities impact even those who work to dismantle it. Despite confronting hierarchies of class and gender, as a movement, the Young Lords were unable to prevent themselves from reproducing the same hierarchies. These reproductions made way for affirming certain expressions of identity over others. Legitimacy became ascribed by asserting who gets to be included into these constructions of good and bad, for example, by viewing masculinist tactics of activism over feminist ones as markers of being a good Revolutionary, and therefore, a good Puerto Rican. These were then enforced upon the self as those part of the movement attempted to fit into the Revolutionary archetype in order to have their identities affirmed and be seen not just as genuine activists, but as genuine Puerto Ricans. Ultimately, as we attempt to reject coloniality, we potentially reinforce it, posing the risk that what motivates these movements ultimately becomes what tears these movements apart.

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