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Writing to be Heard: Recovering the Philosophy of Luisa Capetillo

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Abstract

Luisa Capetillo (1829-1922) has been heralded as the first feminist writer of Puerto Rico. She authored four books and embodied her emancipatory philosophical commitments, but has received scant philosophical attention. In this paper I recover the philosophy of Capetillo as part of a Latin American and Caribbean philosophical tradition centered on radical praxis places sexuality at the centerfold of class politics. At the intersection between gender equity and class emancipation Capetillo advocated for the liberatory possibilities of education, which served as the key to unlearning the social norms that engendered the marginalization of working people and working women.

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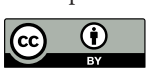

Introduction

Latin American and Caribbean philosophy is replete with a lack of women's voices. Their absence is notably felt in the lacunas of figures considered part of the philosophical canon that often justifies their omission by virtue of their absence. Notwithstanding, during the 1970's Latin American and Caribbean feminists started recovering figures that would come to function as symbolic mothers to the feminisms that evolved out of the decade. One outcome of the recovery has been the development of a historiography of feminist ideas that gives credence to the claim that feminist ideas have existed much longer than the feminist movement in Latin America and the Caribbean. The historiography of feminist ideas calls for centering the ideas of women in their historical context as a method of building a philosophical tradition recovered from absence (Gargallo 2005, 17). Within this context, this project seeks to situate the philosophy of Puerto Rican anarcho-feminist Luisa Capetillo (1879-1922) as one that can provide unique insights into the complex relationship between nationhood, gender/sexuality, and class. Having lived in Puerto Rico, Tampa, and New York City I hold that Capetillo functions as a bridge philosophical figure who articulated a politics of resistance built on the unlearning of social norms, which translated into the consciousness building of laboring classes across the Americas. Capetillo embodied her philosophical commitments. As a result, she sheds light on how philosophy can be a way of life; a claim reflected in the relationship between theory and praxis of many contemporary Latin American and Caribbean feminist theorists.

In the essay that follows, I first attend to the methodological question of centering women's writing in philosophical history. Following the arguments of Francesca Gargallo, I advocate for a feminist philosophical historiographical methodology that centers on the writing of women and defends the claim that feminist ideas of Latin America and the Caribbean are much older than the feminist movement. I situate the philosophy of Luisa Capetillo as part of an overlooked philosophical history that has not only excluded women, but also writers from the Caribbean. I then explore Capetillo's philosophy of emancipation grounded in her ideas about class politics that identified the possibilities of liberation at the nexus between labor empowerment and gender equality. In this context, I present her advocacy of free love and the dissolvement of the institution of marriage as part of a radical sexual politics that placed sexuality at the centerfold of political life. Finally, I discuss her commitments to education as a key to liberation from social norms that upheld the status quo keeping people in a perpetual state of ignorance. For Capetillo education was as a form of unlearning that had revolutionary possibilities since it peeled away the ignorance of women and laboring classes more broadly.

Reflecting on her ideas, I argue that Capetillo's thought provides a complex account of the way in which inter-subjective relationships, and communities more broadly, can be forged in absence of the nation. She demonstrates how the regulation of marriage, often read as the backbone of the nation, can be radically renegotiated through sexual ethics. By undermining the regulatory role of the nation in gendered relations as well as in the possibilities of emancipation, Capetillo's thought serves as an entry point into a broader vision of the political philosophy of the Americas that centers on the role that women have played in the production of thought.

Toward a Feminist Historiography of Latin American and Caribbean Feminist Ideas

The scholarship of Latin American feminist philosopher Francesca Gargallo explores the historicity of feminist ideas. To this end, she advances a two-dimensional argument in regard to the exploration of feminist ideas in Latin America. First, she maintains that feminist ideas in Latin America are older than their action in history. Feminist ideas are often noted to take root during the social movements of the 1960's and 1970's. However, Gargallo contends that feminist ideas are much older than the time framed by social movements. The use of social movements as a point of reference tends to overlook the existence of feminist ideas that may not have had profound historical impact during their times of inception. Further, it was not unusual for feminist ideas prior to the late twentieth century to intersect with other ideas about emancipation, education, and class consciousness. Therefore, feminist ideas may not have been necessarily linked to the emancipation of women, although women were notably impacted by them. Gargallo's second claim holds that the historical origin of feminist ideas is not bound to an external philosophical process, but rather tied to reflection on the conditions of alterity generated in relationship to a patriarchal ordering of the world that is itself heir to colonialism. As a result, she argues that women's reflections on alterity offer Latin American philosophy at large a vision of difference from a non-dominant position (Gargallo 2005, 18).

Gargallo's argument is of import for the study of ideas and figures that emerge at the margins of body politics. Whether it be the study of feminist ideas themselves or closer analysis of women writers that have not been featured as part of the philosophical canon, her argument reminds readers that to study feminist ideas entails digging deeper than the recorded pages of philosophical history. Taking her argument to seriously, I advocate the importance of reading the Caribbean as part of Latin American philosophical history precisely because it provides unique perspectives on alterity. The Caribbean is often overlooked because of its complex history and intersecting relationships with Europe *and* the United States. The case of Luisa Capetillo sheds light on the complexities that emerge at the nexus between the nation and the development of social identity as she

herself becomes a transnational migrant that resides in the United States for some time. Further, Capetillo's feminist ideas trouble the conceptualization of otherness as she does not direct her political efforts at recognition from a nation or an imperial power. Rather, her situation as a Puerto Rican subject orient her ideas and actions toward the laboring classes, and more specifically laboring women, on the fringes of a never-to-become, state as well as on the margins of a hierarchical social order introduced by colonialism and maintained through a quick ushering of capitalism to the island.

Capetillo is also testament to Gargallo's claim that feminist ideas of Latin America are much older than the social movements of the 1960s. Living from 1879-1922, she predates the frame of the feminist movement. Furthermore, Capetillo complicates the idea of national or regional identity. Embodying her anarchist ideas lead to her becoming a transnational labor migrant residing exiled in Tampa and New York City. Reading Capetillo insists that we ask "Where is Latin America?" or maybe one step further "What is Latin America?" Hence, I contend that one of the implications of reading Capetillo as part of Latin American philosophical history is the attention she forces to bridging across national and regional borders. Capetillo is a bridge figure whose ideas methodologically emerge from her Puerto Rican material conditions of the early twentieth century, but come to link across the length of the Americas, and never collapse into a discussion of a shared national or regional identity. There is no shared America like that found in the work Simon Bolivar or José Marti. To this effect, she complicates the very identity Latin America and the Caribbean in productive ways as neither her anarchist philosophical foundations nor her Puerto Rican situation give recourse to national or regional identity.

Of last methodological import is Gargallo's (2005) identification of varying styles for enacting a feminist historiography. The first style is attributed to the work of scholars who have introduced women topically into the studies of politics and economics, and deploys the use of gender as a central concept to situate women historically. The second method questions the utility of the use of gender for historically understanding the relationships among women. The last methodological group involves those who confront a historical period from the perspective of women by placing the role of their contextual difference in the center of analysis without aiming to give a totalizing historical account (17). Following Gargallo's insights, I take the latter historiographical methodology as one of most significance for this project. The philosophical labor of recovering the ideas of Luisa Capetillo in this essay are not intended as an analysis on gender per se or as a feminist vindication of her thought. Rather, I methodologically situate Capetillo front and center of philosophical production from her historical position in order to elucidate the uniqueness of her ideas and her importance as a philosophical figure. In so doing, Capetillo emerges as a lost figure of Latin American and Caribbean social and political

thought that merits further scholarly attention.

Embodying Resistance: Situating Luisa Capetillo

Luisa Capetillo was born in Arecibo Puerto Rico on October 28, 1879. Her mother Margarita Perón arrived to Puerto Rico at a young age from France. Her father Luis Capetillo Echevarría came to Puerto Rico from Spain. Both initially emigrated to Puerto Rico with social status afforded by wealth, but it was quickly lost as economic circumstances on the island forced entry into proletariat employment (Valle-Ferrer 2006, 22). When their lives joined they shared an ideological influence from the aftermath of the French Revolution. Moreover, Margarita was influenced by the writings of George Sand, which advocated for the abandonment of marriage and all social contracts that regulated human relations (Valle-Ferrer 2006, 20). In this context, Luisa Capetillo was born the "illegitimate" daughter of Margarita and Luis who never married. Her parents' education and ideological commitments had unique impact on her. She was afforded a carefully designed home education uncommon to women during her time. She was exposed to the writings of Stuart Mill, Kropotkin, Malatesta, and Bakunin. Capetillo was given the room to develop her own ideas about resistance and liberation, which subsequently influenced her ideas about anarchism (Courtad 2016, 25).

Capetillo comes of age during a time of radical labor politics in Arecibo, Puerto Rico. Her first articles appear in local newspapers in 1904. In 1905 Capetillo worked in garment factories that put her into contact with the most popular labor union of the times: *Federacion Libres de Trabajadores de Puerto Rico* (FLT), which was founded in 1902 (Valle-Ferrer 2006, 35). She made her political debut, at the age of 26, at an agricultural strike led by the FLT of Arecibo that covered the northern region of the island. Her role in the strike had dramatic impact on the direction of her life as her involvement precipitated a labor activism that would take her across the island, to neighboring Cuba, and eventually New York City as a union leader dedicated to organizing workers through the dissemination of her feminist, anarchist-syndicalist ideas.

In 1906 Capetillo became a reader or *lectora* in an Arecibo cigar factory. As a reader she was employed by the workers and functioned as an intellectual and cultural intermediary by reading workers everything from news to political theory. Her employment as a reader served as an important locale from which to cultivate worker's consciousness of trade unions, socialism, anarchism, and women's rights.

Capetillo's role as a reader and labor organizer placed her at the nexus of a transnational movement. The labor movement of Puerto Rico initiated in the 1890s has been

characterized as transnational, reflected in its ties with anarchists in Cuba, Spain, and the United States, specifically, Tampa and New York; both cities in which she eventually resided (Courtad 2016, 25). The FLT maintained contact with tobacco workers in Florida, Panamá, the Dominican Republic, and Cuba (Valle-Ferrer 2006, 35). However, Puerto Rican anarchism was unique because the fight for workers' rights occurred under the colonial rule of Puerto Rico as opposed to the post-colonial status found in other Latin American and Caribbean anarchist correlates (Courtad 2016, 25).

Capetillo became a reader at a time when forty percent of the tobacco workers and eighty-seven percent of the agricultural work force of Puerto Rico was illiterate (Capetillo 1992, 14). Nevertheless, the presence of readers, like Capetillo, made the tobacco labor force one of the most socially conscious (Ramos 1992, 21). Although readers were positions typically reserved for men, it was not uncommon to find women in cigar factories as the cigar-making industry modernized and became the second largest industry in the first decades of the 20th century (Ramos 1992, 29). As U.S. rule swept the island and accelerated capitalistic production of sugar and tobacco women entered the waged labor workforce in masses. Between 1904 and 1920 the tobacco industry was the largest single employer of women, who worked primarily as stem-strippers (Suárez Findaly 1999, 138). It is not accidental that some of the first feminist ideas of Puerto Rico emerged in cigar factories and in the proletariat presses significantly before the suffrage movement that came later in the century (Ramos 1992, 30).

In this context, Capetillo is often heralded as Puerto Rico's first feminist writer. Her ideas are expansive and situated as part of a larger body of thought that understand emancipation to occur at the nexus between labor empowerment and gender equality (Ruiz 2016, 13). She authored four books during her life. In 1907 she published her first book, *Ensayos libertarios*, in which she espoused her ideas about a just and egalitarian Puerto Rico in which workers of both sexes would enjoy the rights denied to them by the exploitative labor system (Valle-Ferrer 2006, 36). In 1910 she published her second book *La humanindad en el futuro*, which contained two essays: "La humanidad en el futuro" and "La educación moderna." In these essays Capetillo sketches her ideas about an egalitarian society with the dissolution of legal contract and religious doctrines, and further details her anarchist philosophy and vision for the world (Valle-Ferrer 2006, 41). In 1911 she published *Mi opinión,* which notably presents her positions on gender equality. *Mi* advocated for the education of women in order to secure intellectual and financial independence. Moreover, it is here that her critical ideas on the institution of marriage and the endorsement of free love emerge. She advocated that women learn about sexuality in order to be able to distinguish between marriage, love, and desire thus empowering women's independence (Valle-

Ferrer 2006, 47). Finally, in 1916 she publishes her fourth and final book: *Influencias de las ideas modernas*, which contained several plays, short stories, letters, and memoirs. Here she refined her ideas about women's emancipation and dedicated a good portion of the book to the enhancement of readers' lives (Valle-Ferrer 2006, 55). She advocated vegetarianism, meditation, exercise, drinking and smoking only in moderation, and the development of personal hygiene (Valle-Ferrer 2006, 55).

Capetillo embodied her philosophical commitments. Her recommendations for readers were practices that she engacted. One of the reasons she was attracted to anarchism in the first place was because she saw it as a way of life. Like many anarchists during her time, she saw it as a political philosophy put into action. Therefore, her writings and her life were very much intertwined (Courtad 2016, 25). To this effect, her involvement in labor activism and her role as reader as well as a union organizer took as its central commitment the education of laboring classes. Moreover, her commitments to her positions on gender equality were very much reflected in her personal relationships as she never married despite the fact that she had three children.

In 1897, on the brink of the U.S. invasion of Puerto Rico, Capetillo fell in love with Manuel Ledesma, the son of the leader of *El Partido Incondicional Español* and marquis of Arecibo (the pro-Spain party). Heir to his father's fortune and title, Manuel Ledesma took Capetillo as a lover while still living in his parents' home (Valle-Ferrer 2006, 28). In 1898 Capetillo gave birth to their first child Manuela, and two years later, at the age of 22, Capetillo gave birth their second child Gregorio.

The relationship between Capetillo and Ledesma was framed by disparate class differences. Capetillo's status as a lower class lover meant that she had no economic or moral rights in their relationship, but full responsibility of rearing the children. The gendered expectations of their relationship demanded fidelity and exclusive performance of motherly duties that cloistered her in the home while Ledesma continued to enjoy his freedom. Ledesma eventually left Capetillo with no financial support. When Capetillo began her public career as a labor activist Ledesma took her children away, and she was not able to maintain direct contact with them (Suárez Findlay 1999, 160).

With that said, the arrangement between Ledesma and Capetillo was not unusual. The codes of intimacy during the late 19th and early 20th century Puerto Rico cut across class lines. For working poor women or women of the popular classes serial monogamy was perfectly acceptable, and at times preferable to marriage (Suárez Findlay 1999, 20). Economic stability was the key to survival. Partnership flexibility afforded women more than doctrines about marriages and virginity, which dominated the moral codes

of the wealthier classes. Capetillo would fall in love one more time with a married pharmacist in Arecibo with whom she had her last child Luis, born in 1911 (Valle-Ferrer 2006, 41).

Capetillo's relationship experience with Ledesma was influential in the development of her feminist philosophy. References of her love for Ledesma as well as the nature of their relationship are found throughout her work. What remains clear is that Capetillo did not regret falling in love. Quite to the contrary, her thought advocated free love, which was the union of two people without any legal contract, family conventions, marked by respect and mutual support (Valle-Ferrer 2006, 46). She argued against the double standard she experienced in her relationship with Ledesma, which conditioned her regrets of not having lived more freely. She advocated that the union between two people should be foundationally based on love and, if one of the people falls out of love, they should be able to dissolve the union with integrity and freedom for both parties. Under these conditions women should not only retain the right to dissolve unions, but they should also be able to seek the education necessary for employment in order to provide economic stability.

Capetillo elucidates the manner in which early 20th century Latin American and Caribbean feminist ideas were grounded in the lived material conditions of their times. After the relationship with Ledesma fell apart, Capetillo joined the work force, exemplifying the ideas that she advocated for women. Her gendered embodiment and class conditions framed the development of her ideas, which were consistently grounded in her anarchist-syndicalist class politics. Central to her political ideas was the role of education, which she believed should be a priority that was accessible to everyone. In this context, her role as a reader was meaningful not just because she was a literate, educated woman, but because she could serve as a bridge to those who had no access to education (Tinajero 2010, 145). Stylistically, her writing bridged the gap between the working people and the dominant genres read by the wealthier classes (Courtad 2016, 26). She wrote to connect with her audience, and although her ideas were grounded in anti-establishment claims, she used popular genres (such as prose, drama, and plays) to disseminate her ideas widely (Courtad 2016, 26). Her plays often featured a strong female protagonist that longed for a multidimensional equality that cut across gendered and class lines (Courtad 2016, 27). Therefore, Capetillo's writing, both in idea and material form, embodied the struggle of working people while at the same time subverting hegemonic forces (Courtad 2016, 26).

As the workers' movement expanded and connected with workers in the United States, so did Capetillo. In many capacities, she became a transnational American thinker

through the political process. In 1913 in solidarity with the movement she moved to Ybor City to continue working with the cigar factories, which put her in contact with workers from Cuba, the Dominican Republic, and Puerto Rico. Her time in Ybor City witnessed the reworking of ideas foundational to *Influencias de las ideas modernas* as well as a revised second edition of *Mi opinión.* Ybor City afforded Capetillo the space and time to dedicate herself to what she loved the most: reading and writing (Tinajero 2010, 148). In 1915, on the heels of an anarchist crackdown in Puerto Rico, she moved to Cuba where she briefly resided in Havana and Cárdenas interacting with tobacco workers and leaders of the anarchist movement (Valle-Ferrer 2006, 52). On July 24, 1915 Capetillo, stylistically embodying her ideas, stepped out into the streets of Havana dressed in shirt, necktie, trousers, jacket, and a brimmed hat. She was arrested for immorality and causing a scene. When she was brought before a judge she argued that it was her understanding that wearing pants was more hygienic, comfortable, and appropriate for women in their new role (Valle-Ferrer 2006, 52). She further defended that wearing pants like men was justified on the grounds of her civil rights (Valle-Ferrer 2006, 52). Capetillo's use of stylized resistance should not be taken lightly. Defining anarchism as a way of life, Capetillo actively reflected the relationship between theory and practice. Wearing clothing that defied gender norms symbolically reflected the defiance of traditional institutions, social dogmas, moral standards, and bourgeoisie ethics (Valle-Ferrer 2006, 52).

Therefore, to discuss the life of Capetillo is to trace the development of her ideas. As with many thinkers influenced by anarchism, her philosophical ideals were threaded into her way of being in the world (Valle-Ferrer 2006, 41). Capetillo developed her ideas about equality, emancipation, and education by practicing them. She embodied her philosophical commitments until her death in 1922. Like many Latin American and Caribbean feminists, her feminist ideas were rooted in larger projects. Capetillo's social and political thought saw emancipation as a problem that stretched beyond the nation, and was constructed in and through the dynamics that regulate inter-subjective relationships. Hence, marriage, love, class, education, religion became sites of critical philosophical intervention.

A Radical Sexual Politics: The Social and Political Thought of Luisa Capetillo

Luisa Capetillo's ideas were forged at a time of fervent labor activism heavily influenced by anarchist ideas. However, Capetillo's ideas were very much her own and did not spring solely from the influence of European texts or her political experiences with the male dominated labor movement (Suárez Findlay 1999, 160). Rather, as she notes in the prologue to *Mi opinión,* the task of exploring the social situation of women is one under-

taken through life experiences, mistakes, and incidences in a social system contrary to her ideals (Capetillo 2005, 4). She forged her ideas using her experience as a touchstone from which to open critical social reflection. The tension between who Capetillo was as a workingwoman and the utopic ideals she strived for set the stage for her criticisms of gendered norms. A few lines earlier in the prologue she reflects on her fervent commitment to her ideas, which she recognizes are utopic, but not impossible. She writes: "I do not believe anything to be impossible; nor am I amazed by any invention or discovery, which is why I do not find any idea utopian. What is essential is that the idea be put into practice…Wanting is doing!" (Capetillo 2005, 4). And chief among these ideas was the liberty of women as part of human civilization.

While women came to occupy a central role in Capetillo's social and political analysis they were not the only area of concern. Rather, she took gender and class to be co-constitutive of exploitative conditions from which women and men, collectively, must seek emancipation. Class exploitation plays a central role in how Capetillo understands the conditions of women and shapes how her ideas were historically received relative to other claims about women circulating at the same time. To this effect, in "My Profession of Faith" from *Mi opinión,* she writes the following:

> I am a socialist because I want all the advances, discoveries, and inventions to belong to everyone, that their socialization be achieved without privilege. Some understand this to mean that the State regulate this socialization, I see it without government. That does not mean that I will oppose a government that regulates and controls wealth, as it needs to do, but I maintain my position in being decidedly against government per se. Socialist anarchism. (Capetillo 2005, 110)

Interestingly, she never directly discusses racial differences in her writing, although references to slavery emerge in discussions about capitalism and exploitation (Suárez Findlay 1999, 160). Furthermore, it has been argued that largely anarchist writings from Capetillo's time took racism to be an attitudinal feature of the world, so it did not require the type of structural readjustment as class or gender (Suárez Findlay 1999, 143). I would further stipulate that the perspectives on race and racism from working peoples of Puerto Rico of this time are going to have a radically different type of perspective given that many were Afro-descended. Therefore, it is a rather unsurprising fact that racism does not warrant the same attention as labor exploitation in the work of Capetillo, and further that labor exploitation would be understood as an heir to systems of slavery. She speaks to this point when she writes the following:

> Peasants! From generation to generation you have seen things pass by without greater abundance in your homes. Your slavery has not disappeared; before your master maintained you, depriving you of your will. Now he has left your will free, but he deprives you of the means of using that will. It is the same type of slavery with different methods (Capetillo 2005, 114).

Although Capetillo was grounded in her class politics she placed women's sexual autonomy in the center of emancipation. Sexual autonomy was a key feature to emancipation akin to economic independence undergirded by access to education. She was the first to place sexuality at the centerfold of politics by calling into question the social norms around sexual politics (Suárez Findlay 1999, 160). Specifically, she maintained that women are slaves not because of their lack of intelligence or work capabilities, but because of their sex. Being a woman entailed not being able to love honestly and with complete freedom (Capetillo 2005, 101). Capetillo developed a sexual politics that was groundbreaking because sexuality, although featured in working class writings on free love and illegitimate children, was never considered to be a primary point for emancipation. Rather, sexual politics were secondary, at best, to the central concerns of male-led worker groups that understood production, patriotism, and political parties to be the true concerns politics (Suárez Findlay 1999, 161). In a context dominated by a male-led labor movement, Capetillo emerged loudly in defense of a position that understood sexuality as political and central to the revolutionary agenda (Suárez Findlay 1999, 161).

Emancipation for women and men required a reorganization of the social norms surrounding marriage, which for Capetillo was "the prostitution of love" (Capetillo 2005, 31). Marriage was a contract that positioned women into conditions of passivity and resignation without any recourse for exit. Instead Capetillo advocated free love. However, her vision of free love was one that placed women's sexual autonomy and education at its center. She asked: "Why reproach women a natural life? Why make love an exclusive need of men?" (Capetillo 2005, 32). Her articulation of love was premised on the distinction between desire, love, and marriage. She definied the whims between two sensualities. Love is the union between two people that can only exist under free conditions. Otherwise, if the conditions of freedom do not hold, love becomes prostituted. In fact, for Capetillo love was the type of union that could not be governed by immutable law. As a result, love should not create duties, rights, or obligations between two people. Rather, love is conditioned by the retention of autonomy across gendered lines: "Freedom in love for women the same as for men is nothing other than a great act of justice" (Capetillo 2005, 34).

At the heart of Capetillo's notion of free love is the right to leave unworkable relation-

ships (Suárez Findlay 1999, 162). In many capacities, her ideas about free love overlapped with her fellow workingmen's critiques of the institution of marriage found in anarchist writings. However, unique to Capetillo's concept of free love was the importance that she placed on its implications for the economic situation of women. She consistently emphasized the importance of education for the development of women's economic self-sufficiency, and insisted on men's economic responsibility for children (Suárez Findlay 1999, 162). However, she held tightly to the position that women were responsible for being their own advocates. In her own words: "The woman who feels wounded in her rights, liberties, and her womanhood, has to recompose and reclaim herself, change her situation no matter how high the cost" (Capetillo 2005, 18). Hence, the right to leave that underscores free love recognizes women as free agents without recourse to dogmas or customs in framing their life situations. At the intersection between the right to leave and women's economic independence is education, which for Capetillo was a process, unlearning the dogmas of the social fabric.

Placing sexual ethics at the centerfold of politics also entailed advocating for women's sexual autonomy through education. For Capetillo, women had the capacity for sexual pleasure and, more importantly, the right to experience it (Suárez Findlay 1999, 162). She advocated for an understanding of the sexual life of women as natural as hunger, sleep, and all other physiological embodied phenomena (Capetillo 2005, 40). However, women are not taught to learn about their sexual desires. To this point she writes: "Currently, with the defective education that women receive, she is seen as bad, judged from the point of view of sensation and desire. She does not analyze her interior life and frequently suffers without knowing why" (Capetillo 2005, 33). Capetillo intruded on the norms of sexuality while simultaneously seeking to disrupt the economic dimensions that constituted women's vulnerability (Suárez Findlay 1999, 163). Although her project was one that directly targeted working women she is explicit about the possibilities of cross-class allegiances between women. Wealthy women could be redeemed in the anarchist project by abandoning their wealth and joining in the fight for workers emancipation. Moreover, Capetillo calls on women collectively to respect each other's sexual liberties. She writes: "Women should not tolerate that others speak badly of women, and if it happens among a group of women, we should isolate that person if they persist; and we should do likewise to any young or old woman who criticizes another woman with regards to her sexual freedom, of which she alone is responsible" (Capetillo 2005, 101). Capetillo sets the stage for the possibilities of cross-class solidarity among women, but only through the rejection of bourgeoisie definitions of womanhood that centered on virginity, marriage, and monogamy. To the extent that women's sexual autonomy was placed at the center of politics, the choices made on the basis of sexual desire had to be respected by all.

Capetillo's sexual politics were radical beyond her years. As a result, she fought a feminist uphill battle on the margins of political life. Her claims on free love, the right to leave, and women's autonomy were most likely frightening and intimidating to other working women of her times (Suárez Findlay 1999, 164). Further, she was a marginalized voice within the left political stream given that her ideas were staunchly critical of the norms of sexual discourse and male domination. In fact, Capetillo often complained about the resistance she garnered (Suárez Findlay 1999, 165). Furthermore, her radical feminist project emerged concurrently with bourgeoisie feminism in Puerto Rico, which unsurprisingly declined to engage with her ideas as it required the abandonment of material privilege. Early twentieth century feminist politics of Puerto Rico had two ideological currents: the reformist and workers currents (Valle-Ferrer 2006, 48). The reformist current was promoted by bourgeoisie women and was primarily concerned with the empowerment of women through education and subsequently women's suffrage. On the other hand, the workers current was primarily concerned with economic and human rights that emerged with the changing landscape of labor in Puerto Rico. The workers group was comprised of working women from the tobacco, agriculture, and sugar industry seeking better wages and protective rights for women and children through unionization (Valle-Ferrer 2006, 48). Luisa Capetillo belonged to the later, and, although she supported women's suffrage, it never emerged as a focal point of her political thought or activism. During the Fifth Workers Congress of the FLT in 1908, she defends suffrage, arguing for suffrage for *all* women through the lens of workers' rights. Her position deviates from that of the reformist current, which sought suffrage only for literate women. Capetillo advocated for the right of women to vote regardless of their literacy, which for many working women (and men) was not yet accessible.

The fact that Capetillo insists on suffrage for all women brings to the fore the fact that her ideas about gender equality were very much grounded in her class politics. Moreover, it should not be surprising that Capetillo underemphasized the issue of suffrage. Her class politics were forged through anarchist ideals, which took the nation-state to be an unnatural development responsible for the vulnerable economic conditions of working people. The right to vote first and foremost presumes the viability of the nation-state, which Capetillo never really bought into in the first place. In addition, Puerto Rico was not a sovereign nation. The political times that Capetillo witnessed saw Puerto Rico transition from the hands of the Spanish to the United States. However, sovereignty was never, and has never been an achieved status of Puerto Rico. In effect, Puerto Rico has never known a "post-colonial" condition, but it was ushered into capitalism at the hands of United States. Hence, the labor conditions that Capetillo so vehemently fought for were created by the precariousness of the never-to-be state of Puerto Rico and its relationship to the United States. Under these conditions, Capetillo turns her efforts

toward the prospects of education for improving working people's life conditions. Education was not yet entirely funneled through the state. As a result, it served as a point of critical intervention for the amelioration of the economic conditions for working people, and especially women.

For Capetillo, education grounds the possibilities of emancipation, and it does so in very particular ways. First, it is a process akin to enlightenment; a term she regularly used to describe education. In her words: "That is why women must become enlightened or educated, because being enlightened encompasses all fields of human science: Physiology, Geology, Geography, Chemistry, Physics, Astronomy, Engineering, Agriculture, Geometry, History, Music, and Painting" (Capetillo 2005, 15). Second, being educated is distinguishable from being learned. She states: "…a person can be learned but not educated…" (Capetillo 2005, 15). Her position on being educated and its distinction from being learned suggests a critical awareness of how education can yield negative social outcomes and maintain problematic life conditions for working people. For instance, in a chapter written to her daughter, Manuela Ledesma, in *Mi opinión*, she writes: "You won't forget that we are all susceptible to the environment in which we live, and if there are differences between humans, be it of character, behavior, or appearance, these are the result of life-style and education, of those habits acquired or forced upon them by society or by a system of exploitation" (Capetillo 2005, 60). Capetillo saw the power and influence education could have on people, and as a result advocated for a critical educational process that attended to both the state of education, as well as its content and participants. Part of her critical stance on education comes from her insight into the formal education process of the time, which was a tiered system. Subsequently, she was deeply critical of formal education as well as the critiques it may have produced of her ideas. She notes: "I care little about the criticisms from those who have been able to procure a formal education that allows them to present better written observations, protests, or literary narrations" (Capetillo 2007, 60).

Further, education was not just a descriptive endeavor, but rather a process by which people could un-learn the social norms that justified the exploitation of working people and working women. Her robust conceptualization of education requires two processes of unlearning. First, it requires the unlearning of social norms and institutions that yield oppressive social structures (Bird 2007, 163). For instance, one imperative of education as unlearning requires letting go of the idea that the state can ameliorate the exploitation of working people. To this end she writes: "My ideals remind me that these things should not be asked for but that people should be educated so that they take what they need without recourse to false and incomplete measures. Why ask that the wealthy and the State to provide alms to the children of those who have provided the wealthy with their capital, and who sustain the state. It is ridiculous!" (Capetillo 2005, 21).

Second, formal models of education themselves must be unlearned (Bird 2007, 163). She argues that traditional models of education teach women and working people subservience and ignorance and must be abandoned. Education should be oriented toward re-articulating the norms of social positions to create more free conditions between and among individuals (Bird 2007, 168). In other words, "Education is the mother of liberty…" (Capetillo 2007, 61).

Among the norms that must be unlearned are those that revolve around gender and sexuality. Her radical sexual politics requires the unlearning of the norms that teach femininity to be passive and subservient. Unlearning required women to see things as they really are in their hierarchical and inequitable structure and dispose of the ideas that sustained them (Capetillo 2005, 23). Conforming to a status of subordination, particularly for women, was scornful. She judged women who participated in their own oppression, often calling them stupid or idiots. However, given the framework that she proposes, conforming to subordination was the equivalent of being willingly ignorant, which was not a rational position to take if you have knowledge of how things could be improved, no matter how difficult those changes might be. The de-stabilization of gendered norms was not a trivial matter. The project of the nation is rooted in normative concepts of the family and regulative sexuality. By suggesting an alternative model for gendered-sexual interaction, Capetillo radically uproots the idea of a nation founded on a stable nuclear family. The key to success was education. Although women were the bearers of education, a condition that in retrospect might seem historically circumstantial, Capetillo's articulation of inter-subjective conditions built on the preservation of autonomy and economic independence suggest a different model for articulating equality (gender, class, sexuality) that does not hinge upon the nation-state. Rather, she places the onus on people themselves to create more free conditions by unlearning the ideas that justify inequality and thus destabilize social mores.

"Mi patria es La libertad…"

Capetillo's project of a more just and equitable society transcended nation building. By placing sexuality and class at the centerfold of politics without recourse to the nation-state she provides a different mold from which to think about justice. She pushes us as contemporary readers of social and political thought to consider what the conditions of an ambiguous nation-state imply for the assemblages of sexuality, class, gender, and the family. In other words, Capetillo much like the contemporary state of her *patria*, call us to consider other alternatives for reading the problems of inequity. The advent of United States involvement with Puerto Rico during Capetillo's life created a unique migratory context that deviates from our normative models of citizenship, borders, and nation-

states. As a result, a look back to the work of Capetillo places these concepts front and center of critical reflection and demands that we examine how we have learned what it means to be a citizen, a workingwoman, a migrant, or a border-crosser from the impossible yet very real situation of Puerto Rico. Not only does she exemplify Gargallo's claim that feminist ideas of Latin America and the Caribbean are much older than the feminist movements of the late twentieth century, but she demonstrates radically different conditions from which to think through with alterity that do not rely on the recognition of the state for their enrichment. Seated in a Latin American philosophical tradition that seldom addresses the Caribbean, Capetillo emerges as a figure that disrupts the narrative of a shared or *nuestra* America from her position as a transnational American migrant. The Spanish Caribbean is seldom recognized as the geopolitical location where ideas about borders and migrations should be considered, but Capetillo demonstrates that there is a lot to learn from a place where the sovereignty of the nation-state cannot be taken for granted.

In the wake of a deep economic crisis as a colony of the United States and on the heels of Hurricane María, the situation of Puerto Rico demands attention. Rather than collapsing into a narrative around statehood or independence, Capetillo's work yearns to be heard as a moment from which to think about what it might mean to "…not feel a nostalgia for borders and only long for infinity…" (2007, 64). Under these conditions the projects that emerge as viable are ones that might look closer at Capetillo's own ideas about critical education and the unearthing of ignorance. "…Ignorance is the origin of all evil. We should then contribute so that all are enlightened and that no one becomes the victim of ignorance" (Capetillo 2007, 64). Hers is an activism on the part of people that not only takes education as a central feature of more just societies, but puts that process in a transnational, coalitional frame. After all, Capetillo was a person who bridged gaps between classes, nations, states, genders, and roles through her actions and in her writing.

For many the status of national identity becomes important precisely because of its absence; Puerto Rico is no different. However, Capetillo highlights that what is at stake in the project of the nation-state is a project of home-making that clearly has alternative models. To note that her *patria* or homeland is liberty, signals that there are important political projects that can be enacted in the name of more freedom or just conditions, but that do not require the nation-state as a regulatory force. Moreover, these are the types of projects that ought to be framed in spite of national borders. In this context, it is no surprise that education is central to the project of building community especially if all we have learned about each other is maintained through ignorance. Here the case of Puerto Rico is very instructive given the fact that the average United States citizen knows very little about its colonial status, which often stands in contrast to presumed privileges

afforded by citizenship. However, it is clear that the status of citizenship in the United States does not constitute equality. Puerto Rico has had to develop different tactics for dealing with social and political challenges under conditions of colonial rule, a forced capitalistic and exploitative economic structure, and without recourse to the law for enacting change. For this reason, Puerto Rican political thought has had to navigate an ambiguous state status through the development of a different for approaching local social problems. One such method has been the development of a politics of small problems that recognizes that the totalizing project of nation is not enough (Negrón-Muntaner 2007, 14). The evolution of a politics of small problems links us back with the politics of Luisa Capetillo, who asserted that the negotiation of class, gender, and sexuality is the heart of a freer *patria*. In this capacity, Luisa Capetillo ought to be read as uniquely Caribbean feminist figure whose radical politics still offer contemporary readers much to consider about the nature of liberty.

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