

Article

Writing Belonging: An Antillean Conversation Between Luisa Capetillo and Ofelia Rodríguez Acosta

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Received: 12 October 2019; Accepted: 22 November 2019; Published: 3 December 2019



Abstract: This essay comparatively reads the intellectual contributions of Luisa Capetillo and Ofelia Rodríguez Acosta. I argue that Capetillo and Rodríguez Acosta offer unique and under-appreciated perspectives on what I term the assemblages of belonging that resist the regulatory normalization of sexuality and the reduction of the maternal body as the source of home and place making in the context of Puerto Rico and Cuba respectively. As the paper demonstrates, what it means to belong, in the context of Antillean women writers, is not entirely tied to a particular place or the identity of people. Rather, belonging is assembled through tactics that are always already decentered given the status of womanhood and its interpellations in the Caribbean at the turn of the 20th century, which was performatively accomplished through the acts of writing and reading. I argue that Capetillo and Rodríguez Acosta assemble notions of belonging through performative mechanisms that place them at the cross-roads between the affective, embodied, and relational dimensions of what it means to belong in a place that is not and continues not to be for any(body). Thus, they both betray the idea of being on one side or another.

Keywords: belonging; free love; sexual politics; Caribbean philosophy; Luisa Capetillo; Ofelia Rodríguez Acosta

1. Introduction

... Como me siento tan antillana
Me andan pidiendo definición
Y no es posible decir que siento
Que pertenezco solo a una de ellas
Porque borinquen, cuba y quisqueya
Son una sola en mi corazón
No debe haber separación
No puede haber definición. . .

(Lyrics: Marylin Pupo, Singer: Celia Cruz, “Soy Antillana”)

Women have historically held a problematic relationship to the modern nation-state (Alarcón et al. 1999, p. 1). In many capacities, the construction of the modern nation-state engenders a contradiction of belonging. On the one hand, it seeks to deny difference in order to construct its constituency. On the other hand, it universalizes difference whereby differences (e.g., race, gender, sexuality) are caught up with notions of equality, liberty, property, and individuality (Alarcón et al. 1999, p. 2). The role of women in the construction of belonging and nation is subsequently tenuous. As Alexander (1994) has argued, not any(body) can be a citizen because some bodies are marked by the state as non-procreative, thus posing a threat to the heterosexual imperative of the nation. In this context, attention to sexual politics highlights the ways in which sex and sexuality are powerful signifiers

of “appropriate” sexuality that imperil the nation and promotes citizenship. The construction of normative belonging is caught up with the regulation of bodies in difference that suit the production of particular nation-state-subjects. Furthermore, in the Caribbean intellectual tradition, one largely narrated by male figures, women’s bodies are often collapsed with the physicality of the maternal body: womb, birth canal, umbilical cord (Adjarian 2004, p. 1). The relevance of women as subjects of the state is threaded to their reproductive maternal capabilities, which, if disavowed, renders them in conflict with the normative models of sexuality that regulate national belonging. As Alexander (1994) has noted, sex matters, and here it matters not just in the construction of nation-state (or its failures), but it matters because it is a mechanism by which to regulate race and gender in the production of appropriate subjects of the state that often conceptually emerges through the discourses of the family. After all, not all heterosexual sexual practices are created equal; non-productive sexualities associated with prostitution, queer sex/love/kinship, or ideas about free love more broadly do not produce the normative family, which itself is often treated as a fundamental governing institution of society that must be regulated, guarded, and reproduced.

Yet, what happens when peripheral subjects construct notions of belonging through sexual politics that resist the normative and regulatory powers of the production of the modern nation-state? In this essay I demonstrate that such resistance requires the construction of different notions of belonging that change the subject’s orientation to the modern nation-state by the production of alternative articulations of place and home making. As such, the intellectual productions of Caribbean women, and in the context of this project: Cuba (Ofelia Rodríguez Acosta) and Puerto Rico (Luisa Capetillo) seek to create alternative emancipatory visions (some would say utopic) of home not predicated on reproductive normativity. Narratives of belonging seek to make the networks of relationalities we share legible, thus making belonging always already relational. Staging a conversation between Capetillo and Rodríguez Acosta aims to bring to the fore the ways in which the relations of nation-state building were imagined from the perspectives of those who could not simply belong in the project modernity, civility, and progress. Their imaginings of the role of women and their access to education, economic self-sufficiency, and plural possibilities of home/place-making invite us to consider alternative futures rather than those charted by a modernizing timeline that sought (and still seek) to move *las Antillas* from backwardness to progress. In charting different paths toward the development of Latinx philosophies, it is important to consider the role of the Caribbean as an intellectual stronghold in ideas about emancipation, liberty, home-place, and diaspora. As the lyrics from “Soy Antillana” reminds that the experience of being Antillean does not demand separation or definition, but rather eclipses borders through affective strategies that vision belonging differently.

2. Assembling Belonging: Antillean Visions of Modernity

The geopolitical terrain of the Spanish Caribbean at the turn of the 20th century produced variable orientations to place, time and, subsequently, belonging. The plantation economies introduced by the colonial project whose impact was further truncated by imperialism created conditions where ideas about emancipation, liberty, and freedom were not mere conceptual abstractions, but rather reflective of material realities that sought to alter the paths of modernity. The Haitian Revolution (1791–1804), which yielded the first black state in the Americas, is one of the most important events that frames social and political ideas of the Caribbean more broadly. It was, and for many scholars remains, a location from which to critically reflect on the meaning of freedom (Buck-Morss 2009, p. 41). It is for this reason that the Haitian Revolution has been regarded as “... the crucible, the trial by fire for the ideals of the French Enlightenment” (Buck-Morss 2009, p. 42). Nevertheless, these histories of revolutions and emancipatory struggle rarely figure into the canonical histories of modernity (Fischer 2004, p. 17). Although the Caribbean plantation economy is in many capacities responsible for producing the wealth that made modernity possible, the social and political ideas configured to struggle against this system are seldom featured as part of the same articulable history. Hence, issues raised out of colonialism and slavery are often discussed as disturbances on the margins of history, in an otherwise linear progression

of individual liberty (Fischer 2004, p. 10). Even amidst colonial rule, the philosophical archives of these struggles often trail in deep silences and omissions (Fischer 2004, p. 11).

The social and political impact of slavery in the region profoundly shaped cultural articulations, which to be clear, were not homogenous. Hence, Fischer (2004, p. 23) argues that modernity must be understood “under the headings of colonial heterogeneity, displacement, and discontinuity; modernity as a hypothesis, modernity affirmed and disavowed; modernity as desire, as premonition or even as an idea that can be traced only in certain suspicions and fears.” To talk of modernity implies an epistemic orientation that considers the extent the colonial project shaped modernity and produced heterogenous modernities, which are multiple, diverse, and contradictory at times (Fischer 2004, p. 21). In the context of the Caribbean, the projects of emancipation, revolution, liberty, and freedom were reflective over struggles about what it means to participate in modernity. In other words, the emancipatory struggles of the Caribbean were projects that sought local articulations to the “modern” condition. Most notably, the challenges posed therein involved questions about what it meant to be modern, who could claim it, and importantly who could participate in it (Fischer 2004, p. 21). The ideas that emerge from these considerations invite critical reflection on the relationship between liberty and progress (Fischer 2004, p. 24). Subsequently, a crucial feature to reading the Caribbean as a philosophically rich landscape of emancipatory politics is a focus on the ways in which slavery and its resistant cultures have been routinely disavowed (Fischer 2004, p. 18).

During the 20th century the Caribbean became a border, boundary, and frontier of empire. At the crux between U.S. expansionism (as it distanced itself from Europe) and Latin American articulations of emancipation, the Caribbean emerged as the space through which the U.S. could materialize imperial projects. The more commonly referred to Spanish American War or rather Spanish-Cuban-U.S.-Philippine War in 1898 concretized U.S. imperialism with the annexation of Puerto Rico, the Philippines, Guam, and Hawaii. The war erupted in response to Cuba’s ten years war or Great War, which sought independence from Spain and generated political and economic instability in a region proximal to the U.S., but also of great economic interest; particularly with respect to the sugar industry. Sugar production would become the primary object of U.S. investment as it came to control the economic life of Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic, and Cuba under the auspices of the Platt Amendment (Ayala 1999). U.S. expansionism, in the wake of 1898, redefined imperialism on the back of the Caribbean, Hawaii, and the Philippines by cultivating an image of itself as an anti-imperial power whose interventions could be justified in the name of democracy and liberty (Ayala 1999, p. 115).

As a result, the geopolitical landscape of the Caribbean is plural and the philosophies that take up the project of emancipation are diverse and engage the problems of modernity from a variety of standpoints. Such pluralities make possible conflicting ideas about emancipation often imbued with racial and sexual presuppositions about who can participate said projects. The meaning of liberty, freedom, modernity, progress, and emancipation varies depending on the social and political nexus from which the ideas emanate. For this reason Fischer (2004, p. 37) notes that we must be attuned to the fact that there are conflicting emancipatory projects in the Caribbean, for instance: “conflicts between revolutionary antislavery and Creole movements for autonomy or independence; between moderate and radical abolitionism; and between those who felt that liberty meant securing racial equality, those who identified it with having a lot of land for themselves; and those who felt that it meant keeping the state at bay.” However, just because there are plural coeval conceptualizations of emancipation, some of which are at odds with others, does not entail that the theories themselves did not attempt to do unificatory work. In fact, for emancipatory projects to materialize they require unificatory mechanisms to mobilize people toward a particular goal. One said mechanism is the performative practices of writing and reading that articulated belonging in the production of nation through the modern the assemblage of the state, which at this moment in time was experiencing states of re-assembly. The writings of Luisa Capetillo (1879–1922) and Ofelia Rodríguez Acosta (1902–1979) emerge at the crux of Antillean shifts in the projects of modernity, which are already imbued in the imperial articulations of the U.S. Situated at a crucial moments of transition both authors took

concern with the role of women in the assemblages of belonging from a perspective that deeply appreciated the fact that regulation of sex and sexuality had profound implications for the construction of the nation-state and, thus, resisted the production of nation that collapsed women into bodies for nation-state reproduction.

Both Capetillo and Rodríguez Acosta develop intellectual projects centered on emancipatory politics. At the heart of their ideas are visions of ideas about more equitable futures grounded in resistance to their liminal embodied situations as women. Both projects, I contend, are oriented around the assembling belonging in way that challenged the normative productions of place and home-making where the nation required no territory to exist just readers (Cámara 2008, p. 6). In Puerto Rico and Cuba, the rise of the modern nation state, like in many other places, entailed the use of women's bodies as the material and symbolic body of and for the nation. The collapse of women to reproductive capacities meant they could only participate in the project of nation-state formation to the extent that they could reproduce appropriate citizen subjects. In this context, sexual practices and norms as well as their regulations are subsequently pivotal in understanding racial and class meanings of belonging. The regulation of sexuality through marriage, consensual unions, prostitution, and infidelity is inextricably linked to racial and class meanings that ground the production of particular social orders as well as who can participate in said orderings (Suarez-Findlay 2000, p. 8).

The juxtaposition of Capetillo and Rodríguez Acosta is not methodologically intended to be exhaustive as we know all too well that comparison is rarely neutral and can construct the differences it seeks to analyze, or it can produce further omissions by ranking units of comparative analysis. In other words, comparison can construct the illusion of coherence and distinctness and overlook moments of exchange or difference. I follow the methodological reflections of Hooker (2017) in noting that the work of juxtaposing Capetillo and Rodríguez Acosta is intended to place two disparate figures, whose writings overlap temporally, in conversation with one another not with the goal of collapsing them into each other, but rather to appreciate the way that they are both distinct and yet simultaneously formed in relation to the construction of modernity in Las Antillas. The "staging of a dialogue that did not actually take place" serves to forge a conversation that centers alternative models for the assemblages of belonging (Hooker 2017, p. 18). However, that is not to suggest that such dialogue collapses their philosophical differences, but rather orients us toward different emancipatory projects woven with similar goals. In this capacity, I also echo Cámara (2008, p. 6), when she notes that her readings of Rodríguez Acosta offer "certain ways of reading, not models to read with certainty."

3. Staging a Dialogue: Luisa Capetillo and Ofelia Rodríguez Acosta

Luisa Capetillo has been heralded as one of the first feminist writers of Puerto Rico. Self-avowed anarchist, she authored four books: *Ensayos libertarios* (1907), *La humanidad en el futuro* (1910), *Mi opinión* (1911), and *Influencias de las ideas modernas* (1916), worked as a reader in tobacco factories, and embodied her emancipatory philosophical commitments until her death in 1922 as a result of tuberculosis she contracted upon her return to Puerto Rico from New York. As with many by anarchist thinkers, her philosophical ideals were threaded into her way of being in the world (Valle-Ferrer 2006, p. 41). Like many Latin American and Caribbean feminists of her times her feminist ideas were rooted in larger projects. Capetillo's social and political thought saw emancipation as a problem that stretched beyond the nation-state and was constructed in and through the dynamics that regulate inter-subjective relationships. Hence, marriage, love, class, futurity, education, and religion became sites of critical philosophical intervention.

Her unforgiving and unrelenting commitment to anarchism engendered a system of emancipatory thought while simultaneously making her a trans-Antillean subject. This claim is notably reflected in the events of 24 July 1915 when Capetillo stylistically embodying her ideas, stepped out into the streets of Havana dressed in shirt, necktie, trousers, jacket, and a brimmed hat. She was subsequently 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, p. 52). She further defended that wearing pants like men was justified on the grounds of her civil rights (Valle-Ferrer 2006, p. 52). Capetillo's use of stylized resistance reflected her commitment to anarchism as a way of life. Capetillo actively reflected the relationship between theory and practice whereby wearing clothing that defied gender norms symbolically reflected the defiance of traditional institutions, social dogmas, moral standards, and bourgeoisie ethics (Valle-Ferrer 2006, p. 52).

Capetillo (as well as Rodríguez Acosta) developed her thought in an intellectual moment in Latin America where ideas about science (claims about natural life) and religion (claims about moral and social life) had been severed from each other. In this context, positivism, primarily through the writings of Comte, took intellectual hold as it upheld the importance and primacy of science and rational thinking. Similarly, spiritualism, primarily through the work of Kardec, gained traction as a system of thought that could account for spiritual life without the edifice of organized religion. Against this intellectual backdrop Capetillo's anarchism sought to provide a unifying theoretical framework that could account for social and political life as well as claims about spiritual and natural life. The result was a patchwork of ideas centered on emancipatory politics amidst broader labor movements that sought to ameliorate the plight of the working poor, which was understood as the outgrowth of the colonial labor force. However, the story of anarchism in Puerto Rico more specifically included staunch anti-clericalism directed at the Catholic Church, critiques of the island's political economy as well as anti-authoritarian claims directed at both the U.S. and the Puerto Rican political elite (Schaffer 2013, p. 2).

Puerto Rican anarchism understood economic self-sufficiency, sexual autonomy, and education as key features of liberty for both men and women. However, sexual politics was largely secondary to broader anarchist concerns. For Capetillo (1992), education, specifically women's sexual education, as well as the possibilities of economic self-sufficiency through education, could not be understood as secondary, but were rather woven into her ideas of liberty more broadly. More specifically, a central feature of her emancipatory politics understood women's ability to leave unworkable relationships and not succumb to economic vulnerabilities as a necessary condition for class/gender equality. The ability to leave unworkable relationships was undergirded by claims about economic emancipation that subsequently became the touchstone of her ideas on free love. As Suarez-Findlay (2000) notes, for Capetillo sexual autonomy was as key to women's emancipation as economic self-sufficiency. Hence, non-virginal women and non-monogamous women were, for her, exercising their right to sexual autonomy. Moreover, love, Capetillo maintained, was a relation that should not create duties, rights, or obligations as those unnaturally imposed by the state through marriage. Capetillo then intervenes on multiple aspects of women's concerns: economic vulnerability, the ability to exit abusive relationships, and women's ability to experience sexual pleasure in their own right (Suarez-Findlay 2000, p. 163). In the Puerto Rican context, economic vulnerabilities were the same types of vulnerabilities that created the icon of the working poor woman that paternalistically required labor politics to ensure her return to ideal domesticity (Schaffer 2013, p. 237). Imbuing herself in a discussion about sex and its codifications implied that Capetillo was taking concern with bodies that were not deemed "fit" "honorable" and "decent" for reproductive national belonging both at the level of the labor dissent as well as within conversations amongst political elites. Political elites saw prostitution, and the conditions of working poor women, as something that needed to be cleaned and regulated from the body politic of an evolving, but not yet emancipated, nation-state (Schaffer 2013, p. 111). Here, rather than collapse into a discourse of the nation-state for the future of the well-being of working peoples Capetillo turns toward other intellectual resources.

Capetillo threads her own intellectual patchwork on the project of liberty by centering sexual politics in her emancipatory project and interrupting norms of intimacy that regulate how belonging with others is produced. She is not merely responding to the failures of her colleagues and peers to take sexual politics seriously, she, herself, is also articulating her own system of thought, one I contend is largely concerned with assembling a notion of belonging through liberty where the body is always

front and center of resistance and transformation. By placing sexual politics at the heart of liberatory struggle, Capetillo ensures that the body (raced/sexualized/sexually oriented/classed) is always at the center. Liberty in this context is material, embodied, and not a means to end, but rather an end in itself. To engage in practices that yield more free conditions for the working poor of Puerto Rico meant, and I would argue still means, ensuring that liberty seeking practices be tactical toward place and home making. Here the context of Puerto Rico matters immensely. Capetillo witnessed the shift from colonial rule to imperial rule as well as the intimate relationships between these two modes of economic production that left the islands working people devastated. Moreover, Puerto Rico has yet to witness conditions of national self-determination in the modern sense. In light of the production of a nebulous nation-state Capetillo charted a system of thought that sought more free conditions, but also assembled mechanisms through which to form community. As a result, when Capetillo (1992) famously states that “Mi patria es la libertad” or “My homeland is liberty” she does more than merely rhetorically make statements about freedom. Rather, I suggest that she is ensuring that home-making and place-making be central features of the process of seeking liberty and the centerfold of this process must be the bodies that have worked and labored to produce the subjects of modernity: women.

By ensuring that the body stay at the heart of emancipatory politics Capetillo is further methodologically intervening on intellectual strategies of the time that sought to push the racialized working poor out of the articulations of the nation as hopes for a new era in Puerto Rico were unfolding at the turn of the century. The U.S. invasion of Puerto Rico abruptly interrupted ongoing discussions of nation-building elites who for a time after invasion were happy to subordinate their roles in hopes of higher profits (Suarez-Findlay 2000, p. 110). The occupation of Puerto Rico entailed that the family and sexual relations become a focus in the reshaping of Puerto Rico for U.S. interests. As Suarez-Findlay (2000, p. 111) writes: “They endeavored to homogenize their new colonial subjects sexually, to reduce diverse popular sexual practices and morals to a unified standard of heterosexual marriage and two-parent families, thus instilling Anglo-Saxon, bourgeois social and cultural ideals in the islands populace.” The paternalism of occupation materialized in new definitions of marriage and divorce. As a result, when Capetillo writes about the abolishment of marriage as well as the expansion of ideas about free love and women’s sexual autonomy she is articulating a vision of nation from the perspective of those who were made subjects of the laboratory of modernity at the border of empire.

Ofelia Rodríguez Acosta was born in Pinar del Río Cuba in 1902. She died in 1975. Her place of death remains controversial as some have argued it to be Mexico City, while others Havana, Cuba. Each account of her death, however, concurs on the fact that she died in an institution (Cámara 2008, p. 25). Unlike Capetillo, Rodríguez Acosta came from a higher social class that framed her upbringing. She was the daughter of a judge, a graduate of the Institute of Havana, a traveler, and most importantly a publicly independent and controversial woman (Cámara 2008, p. 25). She authored seven novels, two books of short stories, one of crónicas, three short essays, and one play as well as numerous articles in journals (*Bohemia*, *Carteles*, *Social*, and *Grafos*) and newspapers (Cámara 2008, p. 25). From 1923 to 1928 she was an active member of the “Club Femenino de Cuba,” (The Feminine Club) one of the most important feminist organizations in Cuba. Furthermore, she briefly belonged to a women’s labor union and was staunchly opposed to the Machado dictatorship (1925–1933). To draw links between Capetillo and Rodríguez Acosta is not difficult to do. As Cámara (2008) has argued Rodríguez Acosta was the most radical voice on the topic sexuality in her times and one of the most competent given her embodied commitment to agency and political activism. To this effect, she directly links Rodríguez Acosta and Capetillo by stating that her reading of Rodríguez Acosta has led her to “tentatively conclude that, within the Caribbean arena, only Luisa Capetillo seems to compare with her in terms of the original fusion of spiritualism and social activism that both women displayed” (Cámara 2008, p. 26).

Rodríguez Acosta is writing during a time filled with political unrest that subsequently made nation identity an ever-present sentiment-much like the case of Puerto Rico when Capetillo is writing post U.S. occupation. However, Rodríguez Acosta’s context, women were already very much a part of

the political moment. By the mid 1920s the feminist movement in Cuba had gained wider support from Cuban society as the general public was growing weary of the Machado dictatorship (Ortiz-Loyola 2015, p. 599). Women's involvement in the development of the Cuban national project exceeded the traditional linking of women with motherhood. However, a lot of these discourses were often framed through the performance of nationalism. To this effect, Rodríguez Acosta's positions can be read as subordinating her feminist discourse to an agenda set by reformist modernity that identified a faith in social progress via conditions of democracy, which can be seen more clearly in her later writings (Cámara 2008, p. 27). However, Rodríguez Acosta's intellectual role in the feminist movement cannot be overlooked. Most notably, in 1930 *Bohemia*, the largest circulating Cuban magazine (with a weekly print of approximately 50,000 copies) became the medium for the circulation of the feminist agenda. "La campaña feminista" as it was termed consisted of a weekly article by Rodríguez Acosta that sought to answer questions about the inequities that hindered women's lives as well as the virtues that women possessed (Cámara 2008, p. 28). Rodríguez Acosta had a different platform from which to articulate her positions that Capetillo simply did not. Notwithstanding, the fact that her platform was so public makes her public intellectual contributions all the more interesting. While Capetillo was writing to be heard through her direct style of writing for oral dissemination, primarily in tobacco factories, Rodríguez Acosta is to be writing to be read; thus constructing a different archive of ideas both in production and dissemination.

Much like Capetillo, Rodríguez Acosta understood the importance of economic liberation as central to the possibilities of more equitable conditions for women. This point is most identifiable through the main character of *La Vida Manda*, Gertrudis, whose emancipation is, first and foremost, tied to economic independence (Cámara 2008, p. 29). Her feminist positions were complex and predominantly centered the intersections between class and gender. In this capacity she is indebted to socialist and Marxist thinking that appreciated the importance of class for equality. For her, however, the nexus of gender, sexuality, and class did not directly incorporate race. Although embedded in a national context that had been articulating the problems of race her thought does not directly incorporate it into her analyses (Cámara 2008, p. 31). As a result, most analysis of her work tend to focus on these dimensions. In a similar vein, Capetillo has been noted to fail to consider the topic of race directly in her writings. However, I think her attentiveness to gender, class, and sexuality does implicitly do this type of work because in order to engender race one must appreciate the mechanisms by which race is produced. In other words, to talk about race is to talk about sex and sexuality. Here I would follow a similar line of argument with Rodríguez Acosta and note that her lack of direct attention to race in her writing does not necessarily mean that she is not discussing race. Rather, she is drawing attention to particular mechanisms that produce race. One of the most notable examples of this attentiveness can be found in centering of sexual politics as part of her system of thought.

Rodríguez Acosta disavowed the roles imposed by the patriarchal order of the family that identified marriage and motherhood as the pinnacles of a woman's life (Cámara 2008, p. 33). Critical of marriage and motherhood, she argued that these practices imposed roles that worked against women's potentials (Cámara 2008, p. 33). Furthermore, she was attentive to the fact that marriage was underpinned by economic necessity. People stay in marriages out of economic need or convenience that enslaves them to the institution. Her skepticism of marriage seems to be largely rooted in her concerns for economic stability for women as well as her understanding of marriage as a myth of harmonious union upheld by the institution. Rodríguez Acosta's argument for women's economic independence is clearly established in an essay titled "Rebasando el feminismo" published in *Bohemia*, 1922 in which she argues: "Tan es así, que una mujer no es absolutamente independiente por mucha libertad moral, intelectual y social que goce, y aunque lograra su plenitud política, si no esta principalmente liberada

del yugo de la esclavitud económica.” (Rodríguez Acosta 2018, p. 176).¹ Later in the essay she further elaborates that the right to vote will not solve the economic predicament of women and should not constitute a triumph for the feminist cause. Thus, for her the feminist project centered the importance of economic independence for the liberty of women in that it created the conditions for social and political life.

As a result, the key problem for Rodríguez Acosta is the socio-economic underpinnings that make heterosexual normative marriage meaningful and desirable in the first place. Here the echoes of Capetillo reverberate deeply as she was staunchly critical of the institution of marriage. She argued that marriage was the “prostitution of love” that contractually positioned women into conditions of resignation with little recourse for exit (Capetillo 2005, p. 31). However, the authors diverge in the reasons why they held their critical stances. Capetillo was against marriage because it was an imposition from the state. To the extent that the state intervened on social relations, and in this instance through the regulation of marriage, it was unnatural and as such should be abandoned. Rodríguez Acosta on the other hand arrives at her critique of marriage through different concerns that do not disavow the role of the state, but rather the social norms that make marriage meaningful; this of course can be reformed within the framework of the nation-state. However, and I speculate here, it seems as though a critique of marriage is always already a destabilization of the modern nation-state given that that marriage is a mechanism of regulating the subjects of the nation-state and their reproduction. Again, if the body is the nation, and the body’s union with others is regulated then so is the futurity of the nation. Nevertheless, Rodríguez Acosta will ultimately frame her project through reformist possibilities.

As an alternative model to the confinements and ills of marriage Rodríguez Acosta takes on the discourse of free love. Free love, much like the case of Puerto Rico, was conceptually circulating Cuba during this time (Menéndez 1997, p. 179). Free love was premised in the belief of the possibilities of free unions that were grounded in desire, reciprocity, equitability, and honesty (Menéndez 1997, p. 179). This position is most notably embodied in Rodríguez Acosta’s work through the main character of *La Vida Manda*: Gertrudis. Gertrudis, whose name itself pays homage to an earlier Spanish-Cuban feminist figure: Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda, never expresses a desire to follow the traditional route of marriage and domesticity available to women at the time. On the contrary, she represents the possibilities of free love, in all of its complexities, as the protagonist comes to realize that even free love does not necessarily counteract the conflicts of unions. Fervently reflecting on what it means to be a woman of her times, Gertrudis states: “Pero, en fin, una mujer que trabaja, lucha, es pobre, y al mismo tiempo sabe pensar, está, de hecho, dentro del momento histórico. Una mujer que practica la libertad de amar, una mujer que es feminista, una mujer que no está afiliada a ninguna religión, es una mujer de la época” (Rodríguez Acosta 2018, p. 87)². To this end, Capetillo also uses the discourse of free love in the development of her thought. Framed through the anarchist tradition, Capetillo presented free love as the alternative union model to marriage whose potential for success was largely found in the economic independence of women to leave unworkable relations and to unapologetically seek pleasure. It is for this reason that she argues: “Freedom in love for women the same as for men is nothing other than a great act of justice” (Capetillo 2005, p. 34).

Capetillo argues for a position we might now characterize as sex positive to the extent that it centered the importance of women’s capabilities for sexual pleasure, which for her could be taught through sexual education. However, the undertones of her writings never center the possibilities of same gender pleasure or lesbianism. She has one critical mention of lesbianism in her writings that

¹ Author Translation: “A woman is not fully independent no matter how much moral, intellectual, and social liberty she may enjoy; even if she achieves political plenitude; unless she is principally liberated from economic slavery.”

² Author Translation: But in the end, a woman that works, fights, is poor and at the same time knows how to think is within her historical moment. A woman who practices free love, a woman that is a feminist, a woman that is not affiliated with any religion, is a woman of the times.

identify the same gender sexual orientation as contrary to nature. Subsequently, Peña-Jordan (2004, p. 67) has argued that her naturalistically founded positions on same gender orientation undermine her politics of style enacted through her use of men's clothing that some have suggested yields a more anti-essentialist theoretical foundation of her gender and sexual politics. As a result, one of the unique things that garnered from the work of Rodríguez Acosta is the willingness to explore the implications of same gender love through a lens of free love that is at once possible and liberatory for a sense of place-home making that does not require the imperatives heterosexuality.

It should be noted that Capetillo's position is not surprising given the influence of naturalism found throughout the body of her thought; an influence that she shares with Rodríguez Acosta. Nevertheless, Rodríguez Acosta comes to a different conclusion in regard to the natural dimensions of sexual freedom. Specifically, she questions the norms of sexual agency within a heteronormative paradigm. Once again, through the character of Gertrudis from *La Vida Manda*, Rodríguez Acosta is able to produce a sub-text of lesbian identity and homoeroticism that provides a subversive alternative within a largely heterosexually framed text (Menéndez 1997, p. 180). It is for this reason that Menéndez (1997) argues that the presence of this theme in the book posits an alternative viable path for women seeking self-realization. Moreover, Rodríguez Acosta presents the possibility of lesbianism as an alternative to the alternative of free love, as it produces a space of possibility for erotic fulfillment devoid of duplicity and sexism found in the heterosexual relationships Gertrudis has in the novel (Menéndez 1997, p. 181). Delia, the subject embodying homoerotic desire in *La Vida Manda*, is portrayed as an autonomous sexual agent whose love for Gertrudis is declared in the following words: "Yo nunca he amado a una mujer como a usted, hasta la renuncia, hasta la pureza de los sentidos, con estar los sentidos tan pendientes de ella ... " (Rodríguez Acosta 2018, p. 90)³.

Unfortunately, Delia's advance is not an option of loving self-realization that Gertrudis cannot accept. Although the relationship between Delia and Gertrudis remains unfulfilled, Menéndez (1997, p. 186) reminds readers, that the lesbian subtext of the novel is utopic; not tragic. In fact, through the creation of Delia, Rodríguez Acosta signals to her readers the possibilities of lesbianism as a liberating identity for women, and possibly the most liberating one at that. Although it remains unmaterialized in the novel its mere positing points readers toward a vision of a possible future, unfulfilled, but rife with liberatory potential, utopic in the sense that it is not here yet, but possible all the same. Building a bridge to Capetillo (1992, p. 74) here proves insightful as she delineates a sense of being in the world where nothing is utopic; or in her words "querer es poder." Hence, Rodríguez Acosta's positing of Delia reminds us of the liminal possibilities of desire that exist just out of reach, but within the realm of action.

4. Interrupting the State: A Nation of Women

Gloria Anzaldúa (2015) opens *Light in the Dark, Luz en lo Oscuro* with reflections on the practices of writing. She notes that writing is an embodied practice, a gesture of creativity, grounded in corporeal realities. It is a practice that is centered on and through the body. The body is the ground of thought and through writing we make the world (Anzaldúa 2015, p. 5). Through the production of narrative we come to understand and know ourselves in the world. In other words, writing is a sense making process whereby we come to make sense of the self in the world and as a result it can interrupt the social narratives of identity that we inherit and open paths toward other identity possibilities (Anzaldúa 2015, p. 7). As she writes: "My job is not to interpret or describe realities but to create them through language and action, symbols and images" (Anzaldúa 2015, p. 7). Anzaldúa reminds readers that writing is a performative act that creates alternative embodied realities. Writing is not merely an act of translation, but rather an active creative process whereby the body gestures toward the creation

³ Author Translation: I have never loved a woman like you, until resignation, with the purity of the senses, with the senses so attentive to her ...

of different ways of being that at their core are rooted in the active creative work of the imagination. “Without imagination, transformation would not be possible” (Anzaldúa 2015, p. 44). In fact, in order to revise our realities we need imagination in order to choose different futures and bring them into being. For this type of project to materialize we must first be able to imagine otherwise. Acts of writing then function as the types of practices that shape and transform what we are able to imagine, perceive, and live (Anzaldúa 2015, p. 44).

Capetillo and Rodríguez Acosta participate in writing practices that seek to sediment different realities through their imaginings of more equitable worlds. Their work imagines their emplacements in capacities that interrupt or rather create friction with mechanisms of state production that sought to regulate and control the production of citizen subjects through the regulation of race and gender by sexuality. However, I want to resist a reading of both writers as superficially “emancipatory” or “resistant” because it could not sit squarely within normative state governmentality. Both Capetillo and Rodríguez Acosta are literally writing themselves (and other women) into a relational existence that figures the bodies of women, including their own, at the crossroads between state and nation. Here the distinction between the state/state peoples and nation/nation peoples stemming from the perspective of Fourth World Theory proves helpful for understanding the performative tactical work of writing as part of the belonging both theorists seek to assemble. A nation is a community of self-identifying people who share culture and historically common territory the sharedness of which is assembled through history, ancestry, language, ideology, and/or religion (Nietschmann 1994, p. 226). The state on the other hand is produced through the annihilation of nation through strategies of occupation, acculturation (deculturation), and repression (Nietschmann 1994, p. 232). As a result, state building implies nation destruction.

In the context of Puerto Rico and Cuba the state building project was made possible by practices of reading, publishing, and writing that sought to create a new history and geography that made it appear as though the birth and expansion of the state precluded all other claims of self-identified peoples (Ramírez 2018, p. 40). These practices were entrenched in ideas about progress that circulated amongst the intellectual elite of the late 19th and early 20th century that saw the practice of forging nation through modernization and the production of particular types of state subjects. Said subjects were then made objects of foundational myths that often romanticized an indigenous past that linearly progressed toward a miscegenated future with “traditional” cultural values cashed out in the ostensibly race neutral language of “honor” and “respectability” (Ramírez 2018, p. 41). The entanglements between race and sexuality made discussion of moral respectability a state producing strategy for asserting itself through the regulation, annihilation, and ghosting of particular peoples in the wake of colonialism. Both Capetillo and Rodríguez Acosta are writing at the crossroads of the production of the state as it tactically sought to produce a national narrative of integration and modernization. The nation must performatively be written into existence even amidst the violent and murky project of state production. Hence, when Capetillo and Rodríguez Acosta launch projects that center the role of women and imagine alternative ways of being that defy the state, specifically through ideas of free love and queer desire, they are not simply resisting gendered norms. Rather, I suggest that their projects are offering alternatives to being with and belonging with others that do not hinge on the tactics of the state. They are writing their own narratives of the nation, but it is not the same self-identified nation that the state is seeking to produce through the regulation of race, class, and sexuality. Rather, both authors seem to recognize that the heart of writing themselves into being entailed placing sexual politics at the centerfold of their projects. Hence, discussions on free love allowed them to curtail the boundaries of the state and think past ideas of borders toward other possibilities of belonging that did not require the regulation of the state for emplacement. Thus, a vision of a nation of women is made possible. Hence, it seems all the more fit to title one of Capetillo’s first translated texts to English: *A Nation of Women* (2005).

5. Conclusions

I opened this essay with harkening to sound, *el ser Antillana*, that many of us might know through the voice of Celia Cruz. Such reminder to the reader serves to flag a tradition of women writers performing home-tactics that generated ideas about different ways of being-with and relating-to others. *Ser Antillana* is to be an ambiguous subject vis-à-vis the state and its myths of nation production, and as Cruz's voice tells us, *no debe de haber definicion*, there should be no definition or separation *por que son unas en su corazón*, because they are one in her heart. The heart, the symbolic affective location of love, links us to the projects of Capetillo and Rodríguez Acosta both of which resisted the regulatory power of the state to produce normative woman subjects collapsed into domesticity and maternity. They produced ideas of futurity by assembling notions of belonging that sought to forge new mechanisms for home-place making that necessitated required the re-arrangement of the social and political order. Both sought to transform their contemporary understandings of belonging by placing the women's bodies at the centerfold of social life through a careful analysis of sexual politics. Ultimately, they both engendered alternative visions for futures where more than some(bodies) can belong *en un corazón*.

Funding: The research for this essay was made possible by the Summer (2019) Faculty Fellowship Grant sponsored by Marquette University.

Acknowledgments: I would thank Adriana Novoa, Madeline Cámara, Mabel Cuesta, and Monica Simal for their unrelenting support in my bridging into Cuban research. Andrea J. Pitts, thank you for always linking me to sound and sharing "Soy Antillana" with me. Julio Covarrubias, thank you for the conversations that gave this project depth. Finally, I would like to extend my gratitude to the Latin dance community in Milwaukee who continues to remind me that music, dance, and writing are all ways of being Antillana: Kristen Uribe, Darcy Curwen-Garber, Abigail Cecilia Favela, Angel Montoya; mil gracias.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

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