

Women, Gender, and the Puerto Rican Nationalist Party

Margaret Power

Lolita Lebrón led the Puerto Rican Nationalist Party's March 1, 1954, attack on the US Congress to bring world attention to US colonialism of the island.¹ She recounted, "[Pedro] Albizu Campos [Nationalist Party president] named Lolita Lebrón ... leader of the attack. He named me and I was Albizu Campos' top delegate in the New York chapter. No one was above me. That's how it was." She added, "I don't want to say I was a victim, but I was affected by machismo." The other members of the comando unit were male Nationalists, Rafael Cancel Miranda, Andres Figueroa Cordero, and Irvin Flores. For Lebrón, being a woman leader "was difficult. My compañeros were men and I was the only woman They felt under so much pressure thinking they were men; they were the ones who gave the orders. That really affected me. We just never agreed

I gratefully thank Jill Vickers for her help in editing and shortening this chapter.

¹A New York City-based unit of the Nationalist Party attacked the US Congress to alert the world that Puerto Rico was a US colony. They timed the assault to coincide with the OAS meeting in Caracas, Venezuela. Power, interview with Lebrón, Chicago, September 9, 2004.

M. Power (✉)
Illinois Tech, Department of Humanities, Chicago, IL, USA

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J. Mulholland et al. (eds.), *Gendering Nationalism*,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-76699-7_7

on anything. I love these men. They are magnificent...[but] they were from a time when men ruled supreme."²

Most literature on gender and nationalism assumes nationalism is fundamentally a masculine project. It ascribes secondary, gendered roles to women in the movements and struggles to liberate or create nations (Chaterjee 1993; Yuval-Davis and Anthias 1989; Anderson 1983). These presumptions reflect an overreliance on men's perspective and a failure to consider women's viewpoint. By accepting men's version of how the nation is formed and who contributes to its formation, the literature replicates a masculine vision and overlooks how women understand their participation in national liberation movements, the creation of nationalist rhetoric, and the development of nations.

In this chapter, I explore how Puerto Rican women members of the Nationalist Party conceived their roles in the struggle against US colonial rule. I draw on my interviews with them, newspaper accounts, their statements and writings, and FBI documents. This chapter examines the understanding of what nationalism meant to these women, why they were nationalists committed to securing national sovereignty, and what actions they engaged in to attain this goal. Far from considering nationalism a male endeavor, they voluntarily and forcefully entered and even led the struggle for national independence.

Most literature on the Puerto Rican Nationalist Party focuses on the thought and life of party president Pedro Albizu Campos. Whether it extols (see Rosado 2006; Bruno 1950; Torres 1975) or criticizes (Briggs 2002; Ferrao 1990) Albizu Campos' roles, it generally ignores or minimizes Nationalist women's roles and overlooks gender relations in the party. Olga Jiménez de Wagenheim's (2016) new book represents a notable and welcome exception. She tells the stories of 15 Nationalist Party women and demonstrates their critical role in the anti-colonial movement.

Albizu Campos unquestionably wielded enormous influence over the thoughts and actions of party members. Yet, I argue in this chapter that conflating the party with the male leader and ignoring the thoughts and

²Ibid. Capitol police arrested the four, who were found guilty of various charges. After serving 25 years in US prisons, President Jimmy Carter released them in 1979.

actions of female members is a mistake. The most prominent women members were and understood themselves to be important participants in the Nationalist Party.³ They dedicated their life to it and the independence fight, despite the risks this meant for their well-being. By participating in the Puerto Rican independence struggle, they transgressed prescribed gender roles, but as *independentistas* and Nationalists, not as feminists. Neither publicly nor, possibly, even consciously, did they challenge established ideas regarding womanhood, but they certainly did in practice. Prescribed gender roles dictated that women should be wives and mothers, or at least connected to a man. However, the Nationalist Party women I discuss chose politics over domesticity and dedicated themselves to their nation's freedom not the well-being of a husband or partner or the raising of children.

Albizu Campos, the unassailable leader of the Nationalist Party, called on women to join the party and work for Puerto Rican independence. He proclaimed (1930), "Establishing the homeland is the duty of all, [both] women and men. We salute the woman liberator. The homeland wants to immediately incorporate her strength [into the struggle for independence]."

Instead of challenging patriarchal assumptions about women and politics, these nationalist women cited Albizu Campos' words to justify their political involvement. In a patriarchal society, such as Puerto Rico during the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s, a powerful male leader's encouragement of women's participation, as members or leaders, carried significant weight with both women and men followers. But does it stimulate women's political participation or shift women's subservience from fathers or husband to the male party leader? The Nationalist women I examine in this chapter used Albizu Campos' public declarations and personal backing to empower themselves and to engage fully in the struggle to free their homeland. I suggest that my understanding of women's role in the Puerto Rican nationalist movement offers new insights into women's participation in nationalist movements elsewhere.

³I focus on prominent women Nationalists because there are sources available about them and I interviewed three of them.

Puerto Rico and the Puerto Rican Nationalist Party

Puerto Rico has been a US colony since 1898, when the United States acquired it following the Spanish-American war. Albizu Campos was president of the party, founded in 1922, from 1930 until his death in 1965. The party enjoyed its greatest support in the 1930s, when the Great Depression intensified Puerto Ricans' poverty and revealed the hollowness of US promises to improve their standard of living. The 1930s also were a period of increased US repression against the Nationalists: the 1937 imprisonment and exile in US prisons of the party's top leadership (Paralatici 2004) and police killing of 19 and wounding of 115 during a peaceful Nationalist march in Ponce (Randall 1979). The US strategy of jailing leaders and repressing party members had its desired effect. Nationalist Party membership and activity declined during the 1940s.

The United States emerged from World War II as one of the two superpowers, determined to portray itself as leader of the Free World and eager to extend its political and economic rule across the globe. Aware that maintaining Puerto Rico as a colony undercut its claims to champion anti-colonial movements and newly independent nations, the United States worked with Luis Muñoz Marín and the Popular Democratic Party (PPD) to change Puerto Rico's status. The process included: the 1948 victory of Luis Muñoz Marín as the first elected governor; Puerto Ricans' 1952 vote to pass a new constitution that President Truman hastily approved; and the 1953 declaration of Puerto Rico as a Free Associated State; and the United States' successful petition to the United Nations to no longer consider Puerto Rico a colony.

Women and the Nationalist Party

During the 1920s, women attended Nationalist Party events, but men led the party, determined its policies, spoke at events, and were its public face.⁴ After Albizu Campos assumed the presidency in 1930, the politics and

⁴I have found no records of the number or gender of people in the party. But newspaper accounts and photos of the party's activities mention or show their presence.

strategy of the party changed. Instead of the party's earlier approach of promoting cultural identity, political and intellectual discussions, electoral politics, and an ambivalent but fundamentally friendly relationship with the United States, henceforth it demanded independence and used various means, including armed struggle, to obtain it (Ferrao 1990). Large numbers of Puerto Ricans responded favorably to the call for sovereignty, attended party activities, and sought membership. The party, eager to increase its membership, actively recruited women supporters, as exemplified in the 1930 opening of the *sección femenina* (women's section).

The first *sección femenina* started in Vieques, an island off Puerto Rico's east coast. Albizu's speech at the inaugural ceremony predates Yuval-Davis and Anthias' (1989) now classic description of women's relationship to nationalism but bears a startling resemblance to it. Yuval-Davis and Anthias (1989) maintain that women "biologically and culturally reproduce members of the nation; actively transmit, reproduce, and produce national culture" (p. 26). Some 60 years earlier Albizu proclaimed, "women are the physical and moral mothers of the nation. When men forget their patriotic duty and play the game of illegitimate politics, then it is the role of women to call them to fulfill their duty; women need to remind their husbands and brothers to carry out their debt of honor."⁵

However, women did not join the party at men's behest, define themselves in accordance with male expectations, or see their role limited to urging their men folk to act. Anti-colonial women worked with the Nationalist Party because they wanted to secure the independence of their homeland and believed they could and should play a part in doing so. Women stated why they should join the party. One wrote, "Women should join the Nationalist Party because it is seeking their contribution, not for [personal] advancement but for ideals."⁶ Another stated her understanding of women's role in the movement. "Women need to join the nationalist movement so that they will fulfill women's sacred duty and unify the homeland. Not only men are called upon to define the homeland, women are too. Women's [traditional] abnegation and sacrifice must contribute to the formation of our Puerto Rican nationality."⁷

⁵"Los actos nacionalistas de Vieques y Naguabo," *El Mundo*, November 15, 1930.

⁶"Pareceres," *El Mundo*, November 1930.

⁷"Adhesión nacionalista," *El Mundo*, June 1, 1931.

The writer affirmed the importance of women and their responsibility to “define the homeland,” and, drawing on a gendered definition of women’s “nature” and role, their “sacred duty” to do so. While she doesn’t deny women should be *abnegada* or self-sacrificing, a valued attribute for women in a Catholic society, she redirects that quality from household duties to the struggle for the homeland. Instead of challenging the traditional attributes of femininity, she draws on them to assert women’s role in the anti-colonial, nationalist movement.

Women’s sections opened in towns throughout the island.⁸ Sixteen women served as officers in the Nationalist Party Juntas, the local units of the party set up across the island.⁹ Some women were featured speakers at Nationalist Party events. That same year the party established two parallel, gender-distinct organizations: *Los Cadetes de la República* (the Cadets of the Republic) and *Las Enfermeras de la República* (the Nurses of the Republic).¹⁰

Angelina Torresola, who was an *Enfermera*, recalled: “We conducted exercises in the plaza dressed in white. A young man from the town trained us and we followed his orders. We dressed in white because we were supposed to be the nurses for the army. In a war there is an army and if blood is shed you need nurses for the wounded.” Torresola added, “we received military training, but that only lasted a little while.”¹¹ Blanca Canales, like Torresola, was from the small interior town of Jayuya and also an *Enfermera* in the 1930s. She led the uprising against US colonial

⁸ “Una Junta Nacionalista de Damas,” *El Mundo*, September 19, 1931; “Una sección femenina de la junta nacionalista,” *El Mundo*, October 3, 1931; “Grandioso Mitin Nacionalista en Río Piedras,” *La Nación*, December 30, 1932. I have been unable to determine how many women’s sections existed or how many women belonged to them.

⁹ I thank Luis Ferrao who shared his list of municipal officers between 1931 and 1934. For the names of women activists, see “Los Nacionalistas de Barranquitas,” *El Mundo*, May, 20, 1932; “Candidaturas del Partido Nacionalista,” *El Mundo*, September 20, 1932; “Candidaturas del Partido Nacionalista,” *El Mundo*, September 22, 1932; “Lares, Puerto Rico, 23 de Septiembre,” *El Mundo*, September 28, 1934.

¹⁰ Ferrao, *Pedro Albizu Campos*, p. 129. For a history of the Cadetes, see José Manuel Dávila Marichal, “Atención, firmes, de frente, marchen! Historia del Ejército Libertador del Partido Nacionalista de Puerto Rico,” Master’s thesis, University of Puerto Rico, Río Piedras, 2011.

¹¹ Angelina Torresola, interview with author and Janine Santiago, Guaynabo, Puerto Rico, October 26, 2013.

rule in Jayuya in 1950. In her memoirs she recalls that the group “raised money for the party’s work and to send delegations to carry out international work.” While gender divisions existed in the party, Canales circumvented them: “I never officially attended a party assembly, nor did I feature publicly in it since men made up the Juntas Municipales at that stage of the struggle. But, I conspired in other aspects of the struggle, about which I cannot speak at this time. No one ever forced me to do so. I acted on my own free will” (Canales 1997, p. 12).

These two organizations reflect typical assumptions about women and men’s gender roles. Men are the protagonists; they do the fighting and represent the vanguard. Women are their supportive helpmates; they take care of wounded men. Yet, the formation of these two organizations, the inclusion of women in an official and important capacity, albeit in a gender-defined position, represented a step forward for women, who saw themselves as Puerto Ricans who contributed to securing the independence of their homeland. Moreover, the party defined women as more than wives and mothers and formally recognized women as an important component of the anti-colonial, nationalist movement.

One task many women in the Nationalist Party performed was fundraising, as Canales noted. Angelina Torresola maintained that Nationalist women went “from business to business asking [for money].” They would approach the owner and “ask for a small amount of money for the party.” She explained their willingness to contribute this way: “Maybe because in the small pueblos we all knew each other, everyone liked me and the others [Nationalists], and we were honest.” (Angelina Torres). This brings to mind women’s fundraising for charity (see O’Connor 2014). Does it matter that these women were seeking funds for a political cause rather than for charity? Yes. Instead of fulfilling their Christian duty to help the unfortunate, these women chose to solicit contributions for a radical change in the political status of Puerto Rico. Instead of perpetuating the image of women succoring the poor, they worked as political actors whose mission was to end US colonial rule. In the process, they defined themselves as women responsible for the destiny of Puerto Rico and its inhabitants.

The 1950s

By the 1950s membership in the Nationalist Party and support for independence had fallen from its high point in the 1930s for four interrelated reasons.¹² First, the absence of party leadership (due to imprisonment and exile) from 1937 to 1947 and heightened repression against activists by the US government and Puerto Rican police took a toll. Puerto Ricans were fearful about belonging to or associating with the Nationalist Party, because it could lead to their imprisonment, loss of a job, or constant surveillance (Bosque-Pérez 2006). Second, more money flowed into Puerto Rico during World War II due to the higher prices paid for Puerto Rican products and remittances from Puerto Ricans in the US military or working in US mainland factories (Jiménez de Wagenheim 2016, p. 23). The Popular Democratic Party (PPD), with US backing, encouraged US manufacturers to set up factories on the island, for which they received substantial tax exemptions. The efforts proved successful, for a time. As Ayala and Bernabe note, "By 1950, 80 new industrial plants were in operation; by 1952...150" (Ayala and Bernabe 2007, p. 190). Increased government spending also boosted the standard of living for most Puerto Ricans from the late 1940s to the 1960s (Ibid, p. 181). These changes lowered dissatisfaction with US rule and undercut the demand for independence. Third, rural Puerto Ricans relocated to cities, then to the United States, in search of work during the 1940s and 1950s. In 1940, 100,000 Puerto Ricans lived in the United States; by 1960, 800,000 did (Jiménez de Wagenheim 2016). This unprecedented migration disrupted social and political networks presenting the Nationalist Party with new challenges, such as organizing in new locales and contexts, and opportunities, such as establishing or building bases in Chicago and New York City.

Fourth, the growing popularity of the PPD reflected and caused declining support for independence. The party promised enhanced sovereignty

¹²No membership lists exist, so I cannot quantify how many people belonged to the Nationalist Party. According to the FBI, however, "3000 people belonged to the party in 1936," but only "approximately 500" did in 1950. These figures underestimate popular support for the party but reveal the decline in support. FBI Files, "Nationalist Party of Puerto Rico" (NPPR) SJ 100-3 Volume 23, Report made at San Juan, July 31, 1952, 6, 42-44, 120.

and social, political, and economic reforms. The economic improvements mentioned above along with modernization projects, such as the building of hospitals in all of Puerto Rico's municipalities, convinced a majority of Puerto Ricans that life with Muñoz Marín as governor and as a Free Associated State offered hope for a better future. One indicator of this was that "life expectancy ... increased from forty-six to sixty-nine years between 1940 and 1960" (Ayala and Bernabe 2007, p. 181). It was in this context that the Nationalist Party launched the 1950 insurrection to tell the world that Puerto Rico was still a US colony and to prevent it from becoming a Free Associated State.

Women, Gender, and the Nationalists in the 1950s

After Albizu returned to Puerto Rico in 1947, he divided the party into military and political wings. He appointed seven military commanders, all men; men also led the party's political organizations, with a few exceptions (Rosado 2006). This reflected both his and prevailing ideas regarding appropriate gender divisions. Yet actions before and during the 1950 uprising and the 1954 attack on the US Congress suggest a more complicated reality.

Blanca Canales was one woman who rose to a prominent position in the party. A college-educated social worker, she was a political activist from an early age (Canales 1997). In her memoir she recounted, "One of my favorite things ... when I was between nine and eleven years old was to go up on the big balcony behind our house and make a podium out of a chair. From there I would make political speeches to the kids in the family and my young neighbors, imitating the [speeches] I had heard in meetings" (Canales 1997, p. 5). Canales joined the Nationalist Party in 1931, becoming an important member of the Jayuya branch. She raised funds, was active in the *Enfermeras*, and participated in both the military and political wings (Canales 1997). "Albizu organized a body of men and women willing to engage in armed struggle. This group replaced the

Cadetes, only we didn't wear uniforms and we worked in secret."¹³ Political commitment and choice, not gender, determined who joined this clandestine organization that formed the military core of the 1950 revolt against US colonial rule.

The rebellion began on October 30, when Nationalists attacked seven towns in Puerto Rico, the Governor's House in San Juan, and, on November 1, Blair House in Washington, D.C. where President Truman was staying.¹⁴ It ended on November 1, after the United States National Guard strafed Jayuya and Utuado and the Puerto Rican police and the National Guard retook Jayuya. Of the 140 Puerto Ricans who participated, three were women (Seijo Bruno 1950). Twenty-five Puerto Ricans, 16 of them Nationalists, were killed, dozens wounded, and 1106 arrested (Ayala and Bernabe 2007; Seijo Bruno 1950).¹⁵

From a prominent family, unlike many Nationalist women, Canales had a large house where she stored party munitions in her basement and launched the 1950 uprising in Jayuya. After the Nationalists took over the town, she mounted the stairs to the balcony of the main hotel, "unfurled the [Puerto Rican] flag ... waved it many times, shouted Viva Puerto Rico Libre, and invited the people gathered below to join the revolution" (Canales 1997, p. 39). She later recounted, "I had been reading stories of heroines and imagined myself off to a crusade" (Zwickel 1988, p. 26).¹⁶ She carried a medallion with a picture of Joan of Arc and the words "Saint Joan of Arc, intercede for the independence of Puerto Rico."¹⁷ Canales was arrested, convicted of burning the Jayuya Post Office, and given a life sentence, commuted in 1967. Her jailers wrote, "we give up with her," and "she is impossible to rehabilitate" (Zwickel 1988, p. 27).

¹³ Candida Cotto, "Entrevista a Blanca Canales," *Claridad*, October 30–November 5, 1987, p. 17.

¹⁴ Griselio Torresola died in the attack on Blair House and Oscar Collazo spent the next 29 years in prison. *El Mundo* November 1 and 2, 1950; *New York Times* November 2, 1950. For a detailed description, see Seijo Bruno, *La Insurrección Nacionalista*.

¹⁵ José Enrique Ayoroa Santaliz, "La Insurrección Nacionalista del año 1950," unpublished, October 29, 2000, p. 51. Different sources cite different numbers of wounded. See Paralitici, *Sentencia Impuesta*, pp. 106–07.

¹⁶ Canales identified with Joan of Arc because she too was a Catholic woman who fought to free her nation from the Protestant invaders.

¹⁷ Ayoroa Santaliz, "La Insurrección Nacionalista," p. 26.

Blanca Canales was not the only woman involved in the 1950 uprising. Isabel Rosado also played an important role in the days before and during it. Isabel Rosado, like many members, was from a poor, rural family. Nonetheless, she obtained a college education and worked as a social worker.¹⁸ Atypically for most Puerto Rican women, she never married, nor did she have a partner or children. Instead, she dedicated herself to the independence movement, defying gender expectations.

Rosado joined the Nationalist Party following the 1937 Ponce Massacre.¹⁹ She subsequently obtained a position of high trust and responsibility within the party. According to FBI reports, she was a member of the national leadership.²⁰ In 1950 she called on Nationalists to prepare for the coming insurrection. She was arrested in 1951 and convicted of violating Law #53, which made it a crime to belong to a subversive organization, which the US government considered the Nationalist Party, or to call publicly for independence.²¹ Despite 13 months in prison and the loss of her job, she continued to participate in Nationalist activities after her release (Jiménez de Wagenheim 2016, p. 171).

Rosado, Albizu Campos, and three other Nationalists, Doris Torresola, Carmín Pérez, and José Pepe Sotomayor were in Nationalist Party headquarters in San Juan on March 6, 1954, two days after the Nationalists, led by Lolita Lebrón, attacked the US Congress.²² When the police arrived, Rosado and the other Nationalists exchanged fire with them but were subdued when the police lobbed tear gas into their room. Rosado was convicted of attempted murder, violation of Law #53, and the illegal possession of arms.²³ She served ten years in prison.²⁴

Like Rosado, Nationalists Carmín Pérez and Doris Torresola never married nor had children, instead they worked to end US colonial rule.

¹⁸ Isabel Rosado, interview with author, Ceiba, Puerto Rico, March 20, 2006.

¹⁹ Isabel Rosado, interview with author, Ceiba, Puerto Rico, May 16, 2008.

²⁰ FBI, File Number 105-11898, Section XI, "Pedro Albizu Campos," p. SJ 3-1.

²¹ For more on Law #53, see Iyonne Acosta 1987.

²² Mildred Rivera Marrero, "Un siglo de lucidez," *El Nuevo Día*, January 30, 2007.

²³ According to FBI reports, Rosado had delivered Albizu Campos' message to Lolita Lebrón and two other US-based Nationalists that the party should attack the US Congress, Jiménez de Wagenheim, *Nationalist Heroines*, p. 173; 174–175.

²⁴ José E. Ayoroa Santaliz, "Doña Isabel Rosado Morales," *Claridad*, August 6–12, 1993, pp. 24–25.

They were, like Rosado, part of Albizu Campos' inner circle. Pérez joined the Nationalist Party in 1949, at age 20 (Jiménez de Wagenheim 2016). Torresola was from Jayuya, a cousin of Blanca Canales, and part of the Torresola family.²⁵ Like Rosado, they were in the Nationalist Party headquarters when the police arrived to arrest Albizu Campos in 1950. Torresola was shot, "the only Nationalist woman ... injured during the Nationalist uprising."²⁶ Both she and Pérez were arrested and imprisoned.²⁷

By 1954, the Free Associated State was a *fait accompli*, Muñoz Marín was a popular governor, and the economy improved. Support for independence and membership in the Nationalist Party plummeted. Although most of the Nationalists arrested in 1950 had been released, US government surveillance of the party and harassment of its members continued. Increasingly isolated yet as determined as ever to end US colonialism in Puerto Rico, Lolita Lebrón led three members of the New York Nationalist Party to attack the US Congress on March 1, 1954.

After the Washington D.C. police arrested them, a reporter asked a very self-possessed Lebrón whose idea it was to carry out the assault. She replied, "it's my idea, and our idea, the four of our[s] idea" nodding at Rafael Cancel Miranda, one of the male Nationalists who accompanied her. Another reporter asked her if the four had "shot to kill" the Congressmen. She replied, "not to kill." To the question, "Are you sorry for what you did?" Lebrón answered, "I am not sorry to come and ask freedom for my country any place."²⁸ Lebrón, and the three men, spent 25 years in US prisons.

While the lives, actions, and thoughts of these women do not represent all women Nationalists, they do offer insights into women, gender, and the Nationalist Party. None of the most active Nationalist Party women married or cohabited with a man while politically active. Lebrón,

²⁵ Her brother, Elio, led the 1950 uprising in Jayuya and another brother, Griselio, attacked Blair House. See Seijo Bruno, *La insurrección nacionalista*, pp. 121; 207–209.

²⁶ FBI, File Number 105–11898, Section XI, "Pedro Albizu Campos," p. SJ 3–1; "La Secretaría de Albizu en Hospital Municipal," *El Mundo*, November 1, 1950.

²⁷ Paralitici, *Sentencia Impuesta*, p. 129.

²⁸ YouTube, "Lolita Lebrón ataca el Congreso 1954," www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pom5ijIVLrk, accessed August 3, 2016.

who had two children, was divorced. Isabel Rosado had had a fiancé, but he left the struggle to work in Mexico. When he asked her to accompany him, she refused; instead she dedicated her life to freeing Puerto Rico.²⁹

Ideas about gender in 1940s and 1950s Puerto Rico consigned married women to the home as wives and mothers. It would have been difficult if not impossible for these women to both marry and have children and commit themselves full time to the Nationalist Party. Nor would it have been easy for them to lead the relatively independent lives they did.³⁰

Conclusion

This chapter examines nationalism from the perspective of women nationalists, not male leaders, activists, or scholars who have adopted men's viewpoints of nationalism. It examines how women nationalists understood and performed their role in the anti-colonial movement. In so doing, it presents a new and useful way of understanding the relationship between women, gender, and nationalism. Although male Nationalists occupied most leadership positions, female Nationalists carved out significant roles for themselves in the struggle to end US colonialism of the island, albeit with the backing of Albizu Campos. Wanting an independent nation, they transgressed gender ideas about proper female behavior. They eschewed marriage or cohabitation and the more conventional life most of their countrywomen experienced. They largely ignored gendered ideas about womanhood, dedicated their lives to securing Puerto Rican independence, and secured for some women prominent roles in the Puerto Rican nationalism movement.

Although many scholars have studied women's involvements in nationalist movements, many scholars as well as much of the general public retain the idea that both the nation and nationalism are masculine constructs. To challenge and counter this erroneous assumption, it is critical

²⁹ Isabel Rosado, interview, March 20, 2006.

³⁰ Another possibility is that some were not heterosexual and had no desire to marry or live with men.

that future research include a study of women's understanding of their roles, participation in, contributions to, and impact on nationalist movements. We can no longer accept an analysis of nationalism that relies on the study of men's involvement and perceptions, even if they are the leaders, major ideologues, public voices, or record keepers. Their interpretation is inevitably skewed and precludes the development of an accurate understanding of how and why women belong to, contribute to, lead, or reject nationalism.

One unsavory and extreme example that cries out for analysis is women and ISIS, which is simultaneously a national, transnational, and religious movement. Despite the perception shared by many around the world that ISIS is a masculine movement par excellence, one, in fact, based on the oppression of women, women are part of ISIS. Certainly, many women have had no choice because they live in areas ISIS has conquered. But other women have voluntarily joined. Why have they? What difference has it made to them or to ISIS or to women in ISIS-controlled areas to have women in it? The fact that these questions are seldom asked reflects the ongoing assumption that it is possible to comprehend a movement without assessing women's involvement in it. I hope this chapter contributed to demonstrating why, in fact, it is not possible.

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Jon Mulholland
Nicola Montagna
Erin Sanders-McDonagh
Editors

Gendering Nationalism

Intersections of Nation, Gender
and Sexuality

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