

Feminism in High Heels?

Sila María Calderón

The First Woman Governor of Puerto Rico

Luz del Alba Acevedo Gaud



Introduction

Twenty-first century political history in Puerto Rico began with the election of the first woman head of government of the Island, Sila María Calderón. Governor Calderón was elected in November 2000 after a four year term as mayor of San Juan, the capital city and largest municipality of Puerto Rico. The election of Governor Calderón marked the first time that the citizenry of the Spanish-speaking Caribbean countries elected a woman Head of Government.

Governor Calderón was, however, neither the first woman to run for that office, nor the exemplary figure for women in Puerto Rican politics. The first woman to run for governor of Puerto Rico was Victoria Muñoz Mendoza, daughter of the founder of the Popular Democratic Party (PPD) and first elected governor of Puerto Rico Luis Muñoz Marín. Muñoz Mendoza ran for office

unsuccessfully in the 1992 general election. However, the icon of women in Puerto Rican politics still is former San Juan mayor Felisa Rincón de Gautier who occupied that office between 1944 and 1968.

The rise to political power of Governor Calderón was paved by the experiences and political paths opened by other women who slowly and laboriously made inroads into public life as party leaders and elected officials. However, the election of Governor Calderón represents a watershed in the gender struggle for public office. Her election to the office of Governor of Puerto Rico provides not only the opportunity to examine her specific path but also the possibility to study the conditions and outcomes of women's ascent to power in the age of globalization.

The objective of this work is to present a portrait of Sila María Calderón in order to understand the making of a woman leader and her ascent to political power. The personal ambitions and political motivations that led Governor Calderón to run for office and the opportunities and challenges confronted in party politics and public life are important factors that guide this research. As these factors are examined the leadership and government style of Governor Calderón are framed within the context of colonial politics in a non-independent Caribbean country. As the personal becomes political in this case study, the analysis of gender and politics begins to take shape in the study of political leadership, electoral processes, government and public policy both in Puerto Rico and the wider Caribbean by extension.

Political Background and Women's Representation in Politics

Puerto Rico is a non-independent country with a republican political system modelled after the United States. Various congressional laws provided a government structure organized in three branches: the executive, the legislative and the judicial. These laws did not recognize women's citizenship rights.¹ Initially, voting rights were only afforded to literate males. Universal Suffrage was not established in Puerto Rico until 1935, when the electoral laws were amended to allow illiterate citizens to vote. In 1929, Puerto Rican literate women had earned the right to vote and participated for the first time in electoral politics in 1932. The 1936 election was the first in which all citizens, male and female, literate and illiterate, were allowed to participate.²

Women's political representation received an important boost after the enactment of the Commonwealth Constitution in 1952. The Commonwealth Constitution provides equal rights to men and women. It promoted the affirmation of women's citizenship rights and the opening of political opportunities for women's representation in public life. The constitution explicitly prohibits gender discrimination.³

Since the end of the Second World War, three political parties have dominated electoral politics in Puerto Rico. The defining element of difference among these parties is their ideological stance on the political status question; that is, how to resolve the relationship of Puerto Rico with the United States: independence, Commonwealth (or free associated state), and statehood (annexation as a state of the United States).⁴

These three parties are highly centralized electoral machines where recruitment decisions are primarily made by male-dominated political elites. Primary elections are held only by the two major parties (PNP and

PPD) when two or more candidates seek party nomination for the same elective positions. This mechanism has become important for the nomination of women who aspire to run for elective office. In the last three elections of the twentieth century (1992, 1996 and 2000), the PPD ran with at least one female candidate at the top of its ticket: two for governor, 1992 and 2000 and one for resident commissioner, 1996. The PIP is notorious for its autocratic male leadership that nominates candidates 'a dedo' or 'finger pointing'.

The election of Sila María Calderón as Governor could be said to represent the pinnacle of the rising tide of women's participation and representation in Puerto Rican politics. In 1992, the Popular Democratic Party's ticket was led by the first woman to run for governor of the Island, Victoria Muñoz Mendoza. In 1996, Celeste Benitez, was nominated by the PPD to run for Resident Commissioner in Washington, the second top position in the electoral ticket. That same year, women's representation in the legislature reached its peak when 15 women were elected, nine to the House and six to the Senate, 18.5 per cent of all legislators. This was the first time that the number of women legislators reached double digits. And for the second time in history, a woman became mayor of San Juan in an all women's electoral race in 1996.

In November 2000, in addition to the 15 women who were elected to the Puerto Rican legislature, Mayor Calderón became the first woman to be elected governor of Puerto Rico.⁵ While the number of women mayors have fluctuated, that position of political leadership for women became established since 1960 when ten women were elected to head the political administrations of their towns. It was the election of Calderón to the top executive position of government in

Puerto Rico that shattered the political glass ceiling election in the country.

A qualitative leap in politics was thus made in the 1990s by women, as women moved from participation to representation.⁶ This tendency appeared to herald the beginning of the twenty-first century as the century of women in Puerto Rican politics. But despite this growing visibility women are still underrepresented in public life. While women constitute well over 50 per cent of the electorate and have consistent voting rates of over 80 per cent they represent just over 30 percent of legislators and a small percentage of mayors on the island (Comisión Estatal de Elecciones n.d.).

The Making of a Woman Leader

Sila María Calderón was born on September 23, 1942 the same day of the most important rebellion against Spain, the Grito de Lares of 1868. She is the oldest of three children born to César Augusto Calderón and Sila Serra. César Augusto Calderón was an influential businessman, owner of Payco Ice Cream Corporation and the Calderón Enterprises and President of the board of directors of the Puerto Sheraton Hotel. He was also a member of the board of directors of other entities such as Banco Popular, the Commonwealth Insurance Company and the International Investment Company, a local investment company.⁷

Sila María was raised in a nuclear family with traditional values and strict rules of behavior. She had an orderly and well structured childhood based on clear notion of what to do and what not to do regarding the etiquette to be followed in speech, dress code and appearance. Her family was small, 'we did not have uncles nor aunts, neither cousins, and our grandparents had died;

stated Calderón in a newspaper interview. Her father was an only child and her mother had three sisters that died at an early age. Her playground was her neighbourhood, Monte Flores in Santurce where she led the organization of games with and for other kids in the block. But her most important playmate was her father who taught her boxing. This was a skill that latter became handy in politics. In public life, Calderón said ‘you spend most of the time defending yourself with the left hand while striking punches with the right hand.’⁸

In the Calderón family education was at the center of family values and tradition. The educational path of Sila María Calderón reveals a formation in a highly structured and disciplined educational process based on a liberal arts curriculum where she acquired knowledge on culture, arts, literature and politics. During her primary and secondary years of education she was an intern in the Convent of the Sacred Heart in San Juan an all ‘girls’ school also known as the school of *Las Madres del Sagrado Corazón*. This school, founded in 1880 was a private institution run by catholic nuns for upper class girls. The educational philosophy of the Convent of the Sacred Heart was inspired by the,

Ratio Studiorum [Plan of Studies] of the Society of Jesus and was aimed to provide the students a classical education based on theology and articulated around philosophy, literature and history but also integrating science, practical knowledge and the arts of good manners.⁹

This type of education was directed at sparking a moral consciousness that stimulate people’s engagement in the construction of a Christian society based on justice and peace.

The education of Sila María Calderón was similar to that of the early suffragist leaders. They attended the same school as Calderon around the 1920s. This elite educational

experience provided the basis for her intellectual growth, the development of her leadership skills and the grooming of her feminine identity. It also contributed to unravel and sharpen the personal traits and character that would later characterized her leadership style.

After graduating high school as valedictorian of her class, Calderón moved on to New York to pursue studies in political science. In 1964 she graduated with honors from Manhattanville College in Purchase, New York, with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Government. Later she returned to the island and attended the Graduate School of Public Administration at the University of Puerto Rico, Río Piedras Campus but did not complete a graduate degree.

Not unlike many women who are the first to break the political glass ceiling, Governor Calderón was male-oriented and grew up within the ranks of the ruling political elite. In an interview during the 1999 campaign she declared that her father contributed the most to form her character and personality. From her close relationship with the father she ‘learned to see life from the perspective of men. That has help me a lot in my development (handling) as a woman and as a professional.’¹⁰ Father and daughter developed a special relationship that she described as ‘a society of mutual admiration’ with an ongoing dialogue about life and politics. At the center of their political discussion were the issues of national identity, culture and the relationship of Puerto Rico with the United States. In her words ‘my father taught me the importance and immense value of the changes brought by Muñoz; the social justice that he achieved.’ She became a strong believer and advocate of the commonwealth status, which she believed was the political formula that enabled the socio-economic transformation of Puerto Rico

envisioned by the PPD founder, Luis Muñoz Marín.

Her work experience acquired both in the private and public sectors contributed to her understanding of public management and government functioning. Similarly to her father's career path, Sila María Calderón's work experience has been a continuous journey between the private and public sectors. With an educational background in public administration Mrs Calderon entered public service in 1973 when she became Executive Assistant to the Secretary of Labour. Shortly after, she was appointed Special Assistant for Economic Development to the PPD Governor of Puerto Rico, Rafael Hernández Colón during his first term in public administration. In 1975, she worked for Citibank as product manager. At the time, Citibank in San Juan was one of John Reed's experimental marketing centers where she had the opportunity to design and market new and profitable financial consumer products. In 1978, she became president of Commonwealth Investment Company, a family real estate company that owned and managed industrial buildings.

Between the years 1985 to 1989, Sila María Calderón interrupted her private sector career to join again the ranks of public employees as Chief of Staff of Governor Rafael Hernández Colón. In 1990, however, she returned to the private sector, serving on the Boards of Directors of top entities such as Banco Popular de Puerto Rico, the leading financial institution in the island, as well as in Hispanic communities across the United States; Pueblo International, a private corporation and then the largest food distribution chain in the Caribbean; and Puerto Rico's Economic Development Council. As member of the Board of Banco Popular, Mrs Calderón was part of the bank's Credit and Investment Committees. As member of the

Board of Pueblo International, together with representatives of Metropolitan Life, First Boston and other owners of the entity, she was involved in the sale of this enterprise to the Cisneros Group of Venezuela in 1993. The sale, for the amount of \$420 million, was at the time the largest private sale ever done in Puerto Rico.¹¹ She left the private sector again when she began campaigning for the office of mayor of San Juan in the mid 1990s.

As a member of the socio-economic and political elite of Puerto Rican society, special events in Sila María Calderón personal life became important celebrations with extraordinary public resonance. This was the case of her first wedding in 1964. The extraordinary affluence, lavish, extravagant and fairytale celebration staged for this event put her at the center of the public eye. The wedding occupied numerous pages of important newspapers and social reviews constructing a public story and a persona that had a long lasting impression in the collective memory of Puerto Rican society.¹² This marked the beginning of a series of marriages, annulments and divorces that would follow Sila María Calderón through her public life. She had two daughters and a son. Both of her daughters, Sila Marie and María Elena González Calderón were important figures in her gubernatorial administration as they were in charge of the Office of the First Lady. Sila Marie González Calderón entered party politics and was elected Senator for the PPD in 2004 and 2008.

Her upbringing in a wealthy family, the early influence of her father in the development of her political ideology and the public celebrations of significant moments in her personal life are among the defining elements that shaped Sila María Calderón's political thinking, leadership style and public life. The interweaving of family political networks and

social and economic status facilitated her involvement in politics and rise to power.

Kinship, Class and Politics

Sila María Calderón is a controversial figure that combines political and economic power. The dynamics of class and kinship are important factors in the analysis of Governor Calderón political success. In Puerto Rican politics family ties and the socio-economic position of the members of party elites are determinant elements in negotiating positions of power within the party and in the selection of candidates to appear in the ticket. This has been the case in both major political parties particularly in the PPD.¹³

The PPD is the pro-commonwealth party that had the control of government for 24 consecutive years since 1944 under the leadership of Luis Muñoz Marín. This is the party that led the transformation of Puerto Rico from a poor agrarian economy to a middle income industrial one. After its first electoral defeat in 1968, the PPD alternated in the administration of government with the PNP.

Mrs Calderón father was one of the wealthiest businessman and contributors of the PPD in the 1950s and 60s. He was one of the leading members of the '600 Club', a group of entrepreneurs that financed the sweeping political victories of the PPD in that era. In 1947, he joined forces with one of the architects of Operation Bootstrap, Teodoro Moscoso, who appointed him commercial director of Fomento. Since then he participated in various government programs on industrial and economic development of Puerto Rico while keeping his position in the private sector.¹⁴

The economic power and political influence of the Calderon family within the ranks of the

PPD is a key factor in her political trajectory and public life. These circumstances provided Sila María Calderón with unique opportunities for participating in public administration, and eventually in electoral politics. Calderón grew up in the era of the PPD dominance and was the party of her family. She grew up among the inner circle of the party elite.

She became highly visible and gained a foothold in party politics when she was appointed the first woman Chief of Staff to the Governor of Puerto Rico in 1985. As such, she supervised the overall operations of more than 100 public agencies. In 1988, she was concurrently appointed Secretary of State, becoming the constitutional successor of the Governor. In addition, she served on the Board of the Government Development Bank for Puerto Rico, which is the fiscal agent for the Commonwealth. She became the most powerful woman in the country at the time.

The Road to Power: The Electoral Connection

The work, administrative experience and public exposition accrued to Mrs Calderón's performance in private sector projects served to propel her participation in electoral politics. Sila María Calderón's road to power began with her decision to run for Mayor of San Juan in 1996. Previous to running for office in San Juan, she had been director of the Proyecto de la Peninsula de Cantera. This was a major joint project between the private sector and community organisations to promote social reform and economic development in one of the poorest communities in San Juan. Using this as a 'launching pad', and without much experience in electoral politics she stepped into the 1995 nomination process for the candidacy of mayor of San Juan.

Her decision to participate in electoral politics was a well thought and calculated one that came after the electoral defeat of the PPD in 1992. In the 1992 election, the PNP won the governorship while the PPD captured the San Juan mayoralship by a slight margin. These electoral results revealed deep internal divisions in the PPD in the context of the party's inability to fill the vacuum left by the defeat of the undisputed party leader, former governor Rafael Hernández Colón.

In the 1996 governorship race, the candidate for governor was the PPD Mayor of San Juan, Héctor Luis Acevedo. As Mayor of the Capital City, Acevedo succeeded Hernández Colón as party President and following tradition became the party's candidate for governor. However Mrs Calderón did not consider the PPD's choice for governor a winning candidate. Hence, she stepped up to the electoral road and launched her aspiration to become the PPD candidate for Mayor of San Juan. This was her way to counter balance the possible defeat of the PPD while holding the party control of the most important township, San Juan. Mrs Calderón was confident that she could bring a sweeping electoral victory to the PPD as a candidate for mayor of San Juan in the 1996 election and in the process consolidate her leadership position in the PPD.

Her aspiration to the candidacy for Mayor of San Juan was challenged by two male candidates, Jorge de Castro Font and Nicolás Gautier. Primary elections were held to decide the nomination and she scored a wide victory over her male opponents. This sent a clear signal that she was a force to be reckoned with.

The campaign strategy in San Juan was different from that of the party in the rest of the Island. Calderón distanced herself from the party mainstream in search of unity

among the ideologically different and socially diverse sectors of San Juan population. In an all women's race, Calderón was able to secure the political support of diverse social sectors based on identity traits such as, gender, age, socio-economic condition and sexual preferences rather than on traditional ideological party preferences. The most obvious distinction in her campaign was the use of the color yellow instead of the traditional red emblematic of the PPD. This strategy, which encouraged the crossing of party lines, proved to be a winning formula. She became mayor of San Juan and the leading vote getter of the PPD while the PNP won the governorship election by a landslide.

Two other political events paved the way to Sila María Calderón's ascending path to the governorship. The plebiscite of 1998 and the results of the political surveys conducted by the PPD in search of a candidate for governor that could secure an electoral victory in 2000.¹⁵ After the landslide victory of the PNP in 1996, Governor Pedro Roselló proposed a plebiscite on Puerto Rico's Status question.¹⁶ Support for Statehood, by then had increased from 39 per cent in 1967 to 46.3 per cent in 1993. The PNP leader calculated that his landslide victory would translate into a majority support for Statehood. To ensure this outcome the PNP legislature enacted a law for the plebiscite that split the Commonwealth vote in two alternatives defined as 'ELA colonial' (colonial commonwealth) and 'free association'. A coalition of PPD and pro-independence leaders successfully challenged the law to include a fifth alternative, 'none of the above'. This turned out to be the winning alternative with 50.3 per cent of the vote while statehood gathered 46.5 per cent similar to 1993. In this event the PPD leadership was supported by the mayors of four of the largest cities, San Juan, Ponce, Caguas and Carolina

and the PPD Senate minority leader. Sila M. Calderón emerged as the leading figure in the coalition and capitalized on the outcome to gain the nomination of the party and become its second woman president.

Mrs Calderón became the PPD uncontested candidate for governor despite criticism from the male dominated members of the party's political elite. Her critics tried to derail her candidacy undermining her authority and leadership by portraying her gender and authoritarian working style as a weakness. However, she out maneuvered them. Unlike other candidates for governor, who announced their aspirations in party meetings and conventions, Mrs Calderón declared her aspirations in a meeting of the Association of PPD Mayors, which reflected a broader party opinion. Moreover, the results of party polls and media surveys showed that her candidacy for governor enjoyed wide support among the electorate. Based on these poll's numbers she was able to demonstrate that she could head a winning ticket in the midst of a stern political opposition and a harsh socioeconomic crisis. In the end, Mrs Calderón's nomination was not challenged by any member of the PPD and was announced in a public rally, where she was endorsed by the full party leadership.¹⁷

Having become the most popular figure in the PPD, Calderón would face yet another challenge from which she emerged again victorious. In 1999, she picked minority Senate leader Aníbal Acevedo Vilá as her running mate for Resident Commissioner in Washington. This selection was challenged by the male dominated old guard of the PPD elite. The son of former governor, Rafael Hernández Colón, José Alfredo Hernández Mayoral was nominated to compete with Acevedo Vilá. The conflict was resolved through a primary in which Calderón equated

a vote for Acevedo Vilá to a vote of confidence for her. She campaigned vigorously and prevailed in the end.¹⁸

The final leg in the rise to power was the November 2000 election. Calderón tried to change the campaign style from mudslinging to a debate on policy issues. After eight years of PNP rule marred by numerous investigations and convictions of public officials for corruption the focus of Calderón's political debate was a call for a change to a 'clean and honest government.'¹⁹ She campaigned for an 'open government for the people', a vision for 'the modernization of public administration' and the reinstatement of section 936 of IRC to restore economic development.²⁰ Her camping began with an invitation to her PNP opponent to have lunch at a popular working class restaurant in Santurce to discuss the basis for a clean campaign.²¹ The event was a short-lived public relations success. It was followed by a dirty and sexist campaign on the Internet and on the streets portraying Calderón as an old witch accompanied by derogative slogans such as 'a mi no me, gobierna una mujer, ¿y a tí?' (no woman rules me, what about you?), and 'ninguna mujer aguanta un periodo de cuatro años' (no woman can stand a four year 'period').²²

In midst a political vacuum both in the country and the PPD, Sila María Calderón emerged as the leader with the qualities and qualifications to lead the country in a new direction. As Mayor of San Juan and one of the key leaders of the 1998 plebiscite campaign, she was able to demonstrate her leadership and undisputed ability to campaign and win highly competitive elections. The electoral connection paved her road to power.

The Context of Governance

At the time of the election of Sila M. Calderón, Puerto Rico was marred by corruption scandals, economic uncertainty, tensions in Puerto Rico – US relations and pressures for women's participation in government.²³ More than 20 top ranking officials of the Rosselló administration had been imprisoned for corruption including the Secretary of Education, the Speaker of the House and the governor's personal secretary.

There was a growing opposition to the US Navy's presence on the island municipality of Vieques as a civilian employee of the US Navy, was killed, during a bombing exercise. This accident triggered a wave of protests and social unrest that gave the impression of an anti-American sentiment in Puerto Rico.²⁴

On the economic side the repeal of section 936 in 1996, created anxiety about the economic future, especially concerning the closing of manufacturing plants and the loss of jobs in that sector of the economy. These concerns were not misplaced. Upon being sworn in as governor of Puerto Rico, Calderón had to confront the crisis created by the closing of 936 plants. As it turned out, outgoing Governor Pedro Rosselló had negotiated with '936' executives so that they would not close plants during the election campaign 'to avoid influencing the election outcome'. In the first seven months of governor Calderón's term, 78 manufacturing plants closed, laid off 8,944 workers. Between 2001 and 2002 manufacturing employment declined by 20,000.

Calderón's policy priorities centered on issues geared to respond to the context in which she became governor. She created the Special Communities Program proposing to invest one billion dollars in urban renewal and economic development centered on the needs of the poor; developing community leadership and empowering the poor. This was to be done through a neoliberal financial

mechanism the Fideicomiso de Comunidades Especiales (a privately managed trust fund) and leadership development programs that emphasized self reliance. The wave of corruption that preceded the Calderón administration, where high government officials routinely required kickbacks in exchange for government contracts, led the governor to propose the creation of the School of Ethics in the Public Sector.

To address issues of women rights and feminist issues Calderón created the Office of Women's Affairs (Oficina de la Procuradora de las Mujeres) and gave it cabinet rank.²⁵ Under her administration important amendments to Law 54 of Domestic Violence were introduced and new legislation concerning mothers and children rights was passed by the Legislature.²⁶ She appointed the first woman to become president of the Supreme Court of Puerto Rico, Honorable Miriam Naveira Merly. Two other women were appointed as well to join the ranks of Supreme Court judges. Governor Calderón's record of women inclusion to the executive and top rank positions in government administration, however, remained similar to that of her predecessors (three out of 15 members of the executive cabinet were women appointed to the positions of the Secretary of Justice, the Secretary of the Family and the Secretary of Housing).

The administration of government and the implementation of public policies during Governor Calderón's tenure were marked by both resistance to differences in ideological views and 'machismo' from her party's male dominated leadership in the legislature and cabinet. In an interview with Governor Calderón when asked about this subject she replied, 'It is understandable that the nature of such resistance comes from the power game between branches of government. Each

wants to impose their will and vision over the other.²⁷ However, when members of her cabinet are enquired about the nature of such resistance they attributed it to machismo. In the words of her Secretary of Education,

I witnessed discrimination in different ways: through vicious attacks at the personal level, at the level of the administration, the legislature and the media. Puerto Rico is a conservative country and perhaps we were not prepared to see government run by the hands of a woman.²⁸

A similar perception is shared by her Secretary of State Ferdinand Mercado.

Seducing Politics: The Gender Advantage

Her leadership style could be described as having the toughness and resilience of a man's, enveloped in the charm and coquettish smile of a pleasant looking woman. To use her own image, boxing with style as her father taught her. Governor Calderón is a very dynamic, energetic and persuasive person, always conscious of her appearance. She describes herself as 'bien fajona' (a workaholic), an assertive and competitive person.²⁹ She is convinced that there is a distinct advantage to being a woman in a man's world. A feminine identity constructed and nourished in a family with traditional values and through a sophisticated process of education in an all women's college may lie behind her perception of gender roles in politics. The feminine identity expresses itself through a self perception of a women's advantage shown or reflected in their character, appearance and coquettish ways of behavior and persuasion. She does not believe that her gender is a disadvantage. On the contrary, she believes that,

...being a woman gives an advantage [over men]...I believe that women have grace, we

have a way of looking at things, of speaking... When you participate in an [election] debate, all the men are dressed similarly, but one [as a woman] is dressed more attractively. Generally, people trust women more than they do men. They believe that women are more sincere [honest] than men. I believe that there is a great advantage in being a woman. Off course, it has to be an intelligent woman, with the talent to do the job; I am not talking about politics only but I believe [being a woman] is an advantage. Being a woman could only be a disadvantage when women think of themselves as targets of gender discrimination.³⁰

As her Secretary of State observed,

Being a woman allowed her to see and react to things that a man would probably not notice....It allowed her to be more affectionate and caring, for example, in dealing with the elderly. She could approach the elderly in ways that, I nor any male politician could.... She was coquettish....She would put on lipstick in front of the press, not because she was a woman but because she was histrionic....³¹

But the goal oriented and quick and effective results minded leadership style had its downside. One of Calderon's great weaknesses was her proneness for micro-management. She directly intervened in the functioning of different government agencies even scolding some of her cabinet members publicly when not achieving a goal or dealing effectively with a problem. This was especially obvious in the problems she had with managing the police, where she appointed four Superintendents in four years in office. Two of the cabinet members that served her full term, the Secretaries of State and Education, agree that she is a very determined and persuasive person that does not accept no as an answer. She twists arms with a charming smile and will call you up at any time, day or night.

Another trait that proved to be a weakness was her love life. A divorce and a very public

wedding to one of her cabinet members was a major distraction and provided munitions to her critics. One year into her term a scandal broke that her husband was being unfaithful. Although the husband denied it and won a slander suit against the TV gossip character that broke the story, the incident led to the divorce between Governor Calderon and her third husband. She was also accused by a political analyst of being involved with a member of her cabinet while married. In 2003, she did marry her former Secretary of Economic Affairs in a very public wedding, where champagne was served to well wishers (mostly mature women according to the TV live coverage) outside of the Governor's Mansion. But the scandal was not limited to the divorce and the wedding. It was compounded by the fact that the management of the one billion dollars trust fund for the special communities project was awarded to a company with links to Governor Calderon's new husband.³² These personal events clearly affected her legitimacy and authority in public life.

Legacy, Contribution and Lessons

Calderón self expectations about the legacy she wanted to leave after her term as governor was based on a desire for the reconciliation of the big Puerto Rican family, proud of its identity. In an interview before her election Calderón said,

I would like to think that, after my term as governor, in the XXI century my legacy is achieving a better understanding among Puerto Ricans; less divisions and frictions in the fiber of the country. The most important thing that Puerto Ricans have is their identity as a people. As we move forward this is what should prevail.³³

However, this desire was immediately shattered by the crude reality of party politics and the deepening of the ideological fragmentation of the Puerto Rican people. Within her party, the divisions around the definition of the Commonwealth formula for the resolution of the status question remained and deepened. Political conflicts based on kinship within top rank members of the political elite concerning the successor for the PPD presidency and candidate for governor in 2004 constantly challenged this personal desire for a legacy of reconciliation. As former Secretary of State Ferdinand Mercado describes,

...when taking decisions Calderon would consider its impact on her public image. Her assessment of decisions was not necessarily based on whether they were right or good or if they would resolve a problem. What worried Calderón was the legacy, the way she might be judged.³⁴

After a four year term as governor, Calderón's legacy was not that of national reconciliation. Instead, her most important contribution to Puerto Rico's public life is in the area of party politics, the formulation of public policy to benefit the poor and her gender identity as the first woman governor of Puerto Rico. Ferdinand Mercado, states that Calderón's contribution to politics was that of 'rescuing the PPD, which at the time, was a disorganized and amorphous structure, without loyalties and philosophy' to turn it into a viable alternative to win an election.³⁵

Another significant contribution of the Calderon administration was in the area of social work with the implementation of the Special Communities Program. The implementation of this programme brought to the forefront the alarming problem of poverty in twenty-first century Puerto Rico. A total of 687 communities throughout the

island were targeted for this program thus bringing attention and resources to marginalized sectors of the Puerto Rican population. This legacy, however, is on the verge of extinction. Successive government administrations have not shown the political will to continue with the program and began its dismantling. Governor Calderón reacted to this policy reversal by creating her own philanthropic foundation in 2009 to work for the empowerment and development of special communities. The building of the foundation is located in Río Piedras in the same location where her grandparents established the first family business, an ice plant.³⁶

Aside from the special communities program, the fact that Calderón was the first woman governor of Puerto Rico is in and of itself her most important contribution to the political history of the Island. Her gender identity became the most important and controversial feature of her public life. As former Secretary of Education, César Rey, states,

...the fact that a woman assumed the leadership of the island with all the risks involved in the administration of government is a historic legacy. The country did not understand the gender dynamics of a woman in the office of the governorship.³⁷

Secretary of State Ferdinand Mercado concurs,

...it was extremely positive to have a woman as governor. Women needed examples role models...opinions are divided among those who think that a woman proved they can become governor and those who think that a woman proved they cannot govern.³⁸

Governor Calderón does not describe herself as a feminist, nor does she had what could be labeled a 'feminist agenda' for government. Feminine, well groomed, and charming, she is as tough as any man and sees politics as a boxing ring. But her very presence

at the helm of government generated changes. During her tenure women occupied positions that they never occupied before, such as the Secretary of Justice and President of the Puerto Rico Supreme Court, to which she appointed two women Justices.³⁹ Her legacy will be debated by generations to come. But it is clear, that the generation of women born before they had a right to vote lived to see a woman become governor, while a generation of Puerto Rican boys and girls grew up knowing that women can be governor.

Notes

1. The Foraker Act of 1900, the Jones Act of 1917, and Law 600, the Federal Relations Act of 1952.
2. For a historical account of women's suffrage in Puerto Rico see Barceló Miller, *La lucha por el sufragio femenino en Puerto Rico 1896-1936*. (Río Piedras, PR: Centro de Investigaciones Sociales / Ediciones Huracán) 1997, and "Halfhearted Solidarity: Women Workers and the Women's Suffrage Movement in Puerto Rico During the 1920s." In *Puerto Rican Women's History: New Perspectives*, ed. Félix V. Matos Rodríguez, and Linda C. Delgado. (New York: M.E. Sharpe), 1998, pp. 126-142. See also Gladys Jiménez Muñoz, Gladys, "Literacy, Class and Sexuality in the Debate on Women's Suffrage in Puerto Rico During the 1920s". In *Puerto Rican Women's History: New Perspectives*, ed. Félix V. Matos Rodríguez, and Linda C. Delgado. (New York: M.E. Sharpe) 1998, pp. 143- 170.
3. See Luz del Alba Acevedo Gaud, Gender and Democracy: Women in The Puerto Rican Legislature. Paper presented at the XXVIIth Caribbean Studies Association Conference "Coping with Challenge, Contending with Change," Nassau, The Bahamas, May 27 – 1 June, 2002.
4. The *Partido Popular Democrático* (PPD) favors the current Commonwealth status. The *Partido Nuevo Progresista* (PNP) advocates Statehood. The *Partido Independentista Puertorriqueño* (PIP) promotes Independence for Puerto Rico. The two majority parties are the PPD and the PNP. Among them they have captured at least a combined 90 percent of the votes since the 1968 elections,

- leading to the characterization of Puerto Rico's electoral system as a bipartisan one (Anderson, 1965, Anderson and Passalacqua, 1998). The PPD and PNP take turns in the administration of government. The reduced electoral support of the PIP confines it to the role of a *watchdog* and a moral voice on issues of corruption and the abuses of United States military in cases such as that of Vieques, an island municipality in the east of Puerto Rico used by the U.S. Navy as a target range, which created serious environmental and health problems. For key studies on Puerto Rico's political parties and changes in the party system, party politics and the status issue see Robert W. Anderson, *Party Politics in Puerto Rico* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press), 1965; "La Ley Electoral" in *Política Electoral en Puerto Rico*, ed. Robert W. Anderson. San Juan, PR: Editorial Plaza Mayor, 1998, pp. 59-82 and Robert W. Anderson and Juan M. García Passalacqua "Electorado, sufragio y sistema político" in *Política Electoral en Puerto Rico*, ed. Robert W. Anderson. (San Juan, PR: Editorial Plaza Mayor), 1998, pp. 339-388. In addition, the works of Edgardo Meléndez Vélez, *Partidos, Política Pública y Status en Puerto Rico*. (San Juan, PR: Ediciones Nueva Aurora), 1998, provides a comprehensive review of the literature on political parties in Puerto Rico.
5. In 2000 election 15 women were elected to the Puerto Rican legislature, 8 to the House of Representatives and 7 to the Senate, holding 19% of all legislative seats. In the election of 2004 the number of women in the legislature remained at 15 and in 2008 increased sharply to 24.
 6. See Luz del Alba Acevedo Gaud. "De la participación a la representación: el reto de la mujer en la política puertorriqueña." *Diálogo*, 2003. March: 16-17.
 7. Calderón, César A. 1968. Letter to Luis E. López, *El Mundo*. (San Juan, Puerto Rico) January 31: 3-4.
 8. *Revista Domingo, El Nuevo Día* (Puerto Rico). 1999. "Sila Calderón Genio y Figura". November 28: 15.
 9. For a characterization of the educational philosophy of the Convent of the Sacred Heart, see Barceló Miller, María de Fátima. 1997. *La lucha por el sufragio femenino en Puerto Rico 1896-1936*. (Río Piedras, PR: Centro de Investigaciones Sociales / Ediciones Huracán.) pp.21-22.
 10. For further details see *El Nuevo Día, Revista Domingo*, (Puerto Rico). 1999. "Sila Calderón Genio y Figura". November 28: 15.
 11. Calderón, Sila M. 2007. *Résumé* and Calderón, Sila María. 2007. Interview by Luz del Alba Acevedo Gaud. Tape recording. December 4. San Juan, Puerto Rico.
 12. For detail of this social event see *El Mundo* (Puerto Rico). 1964. "Con bendición Papal, en Santa Teresita: repercuten en San Juan los detalles de la suntuosa boda González-Calderón". June 18:13-14 and Dávila Colón, Luis. 2000. *God Sila*. San Juan, Puerto Rico: Editorial El Mundo
 13. Carlos Romero Barceló, former president of the PNP and governor of Puerto Rico from two terms, 1977 to 1984, was the grandson of Antonio R. Barceló, legislator and President of the Partido Liberal in the 1930s, his daughter Melinda Romero, is currently a senator. Two other children of former governors are also currently senators, Sila Marie González and Juan E. Hernández Mayoral, son of former governor Rafael Hernández Colón.
 14. Calderón, César A. 1968. Letter to Luis E. López, *El Mundo*. (San Juan, Puerto Rico) January 31:2.
 15. *El Nuevo Día*, (Puerto Rico). 1999. "Complacida Sila con el sondeo". August 26: 32.
 16. This would be the third plebiscite on Puerto Rico's status since 1967. The previous two plebiscites showed majority support for the Commonwealth formula.
 17. *El Nuevo Día*, (Puerto Rico). 1999 "Sila da el salto." May 22:26.
 18. *El Nuevo Día*, (Puerto Rico). 1999. "'Gasolina' para la ruta de Acevedo Vilá". November 5:27; and "Emotivo llamado de Sila Calderón." November 8:17.
 19. *El Nuevo Día*, (Puerto Rico). "Gobierno Limpio". March 13, 2000: 109.
 20. *Revista Domingo El Nuevo Día*, (Puerto Rico). November 28, 1999, 15; Michael Casey. 2000. "Calderón's Success in Puerto Rico Rides on Tax Credits First Women to Head Island Sees Overturning 1996 as Crucial Goal". *The Wall Street Journal*, December 26.
 21. *El Nuevo Día*, (Puerto Rico). 1999. "Compromiso de honor campaña limpia". August 14: 1- 26.
 22. *El Nuevo Día*, (Puerto Rico). 2000. "El machismo acecha a Sila." January 23: 26 and "Sucumbe la tregua." February 29: 22. For an analysis of a

- sexists campaign see Acevedo Gaud, "La cara multiforme del sexismo en la contienda electoral del 2000." *Diálogo*, Octubre 23, 2000: 23 and "Género, política y primarias: ¿hará el género la diferencia en las elecciones del 2000?" *Panorama* 21, 2, no. 2: 46-50.
23. For more details see Acevedo Gaud, Luz del Alba. 2006. "Can Women Rule? Gendered Power Structures in Puerto Rico." Paper presented at the XXVI International Congress of the Latin American Studies Association, 15 – 18, March.
 24. Calderón expressed opposition to the U.S. Navy's presence in Vieques as this was a violation of human rights and not an anti-American or anti-military issue.
 25. The Office of Women's Affairs was established by Law 20 of April 11, 2001 and replaced the Commission for Women's Affairs instituted in the 1970s.
 26. Among these laws are: Law 155 regarding breast-feeding in the workplace, Law 165 establishing "paternity" leave and Law 177 regarding violence against children.
 27. Calderón, Sila María. Interview by Luz del Alba Acevedo Gaud. Tape recording. November 9, 2009. San Juan, Puerto Rico.
 28. Rey Hernández, César 2009. Secretary of Education. Interview by Luz del Alba Acevedo Gaud. Tape recording. November 9. Río Piedras, Puerto Rico.
 29. Calderón, Sila María. 2007. Interview by Luz del Alba Acevedo Gaud. Tape recording. December 4. San Juan, Puerto Rico.
 30. Calderón, Sila María. 2007. Interview by Luz del Alba Acevedo Gaud. Tape recording. December 4. San Juan, Puerto Rico.
 31. Mercado Ramos, Ferdinand. Secretary of State for Puerto Rico Interview, by Luz del Alba Acevedo Gaud. Tape recording. November 3, 2009. San Juan, Puerto Rico.
 32. Melissa B. González Valentín, 2003. "Gobernadora: No hay conflicto de intereses con Cantero Frau." *Puerto Rico Herald*. <http://www.puertoricoherald.org/issues/2003/vol7n20/Media1-es.html> (October 16, 2009).
 33. *Revista Domingo, El Nuevo Día* (Puerto Rico). "Genio y Figura." November 28, 1999:16.
 34. Mercado Ramos, Ferdinand. Secretary of State. Interview, by Luz del Alba Acevedo Gaud. Tape recording November 3, 2009. San Juan, Puerto Rico.
 35. Mercado Ramos, Ferdinand. Secretary of State. Interview, by Luz del Alba Acevedo Gaud. Tape recording November 3, 2009. San Juan, Puerto Rico.
 36. *El Vocero* (Puerto Rico). 2009. "Con sede la Fundación Sila M. Calderón." September 7.
 37. Rey Hernández, César. Secretary of Education. Interview, by Luz del Alba Acevedo Gaud. Tape recording November 9, 2009. Río Piedras, Puerto Rico.
 38. Mercado Ramos, Ferdinand. Secretary of State. Interview, by Luz del Alba Acevedo Gaud. Tape recording November 3, 2009. San Juan, Puerto Rico.
 39. A third woman was appointed in 2009 to the Supreme Court by the PNP government.