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Spring 2025, Volume 13

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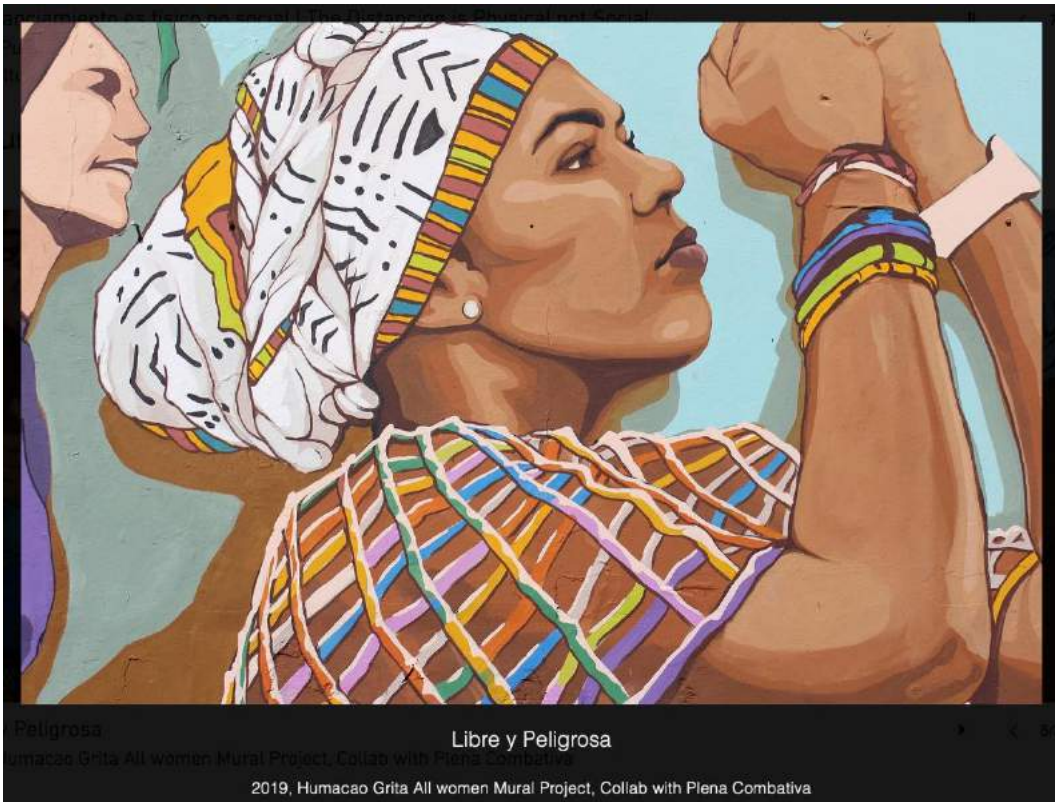
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CRÍTICA-ESSAYS



Imperfect Advocate: Edith Clarke's Flawed Anthropological Projects on Rural Jamaica

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Abstract: Edith Clarke, a local-born white Jamaican, went from a local celebrity to the first woman to serve in an independent Jamaica's Legislative Branch via stints at the London School of Economics and The West Indian Social Survey (WISS). Clarke started her journey as a social advocate supporting relief efforts during the Great Depression in Jamaica. To make the situation in the Caribbean even more fraught, the Subsequent Labour Rebellions reshaped the region's economic, political, and social orders. To evaluate the problems plaguing the British Caribbean, Clarke became a leading anthropological researcher with the WISS, forcing the British Colonial Governments to reevaluate issues of Afro-Caribbean poverty and "inferiority." Despite relying on racist tropes to claim that Afro-Caribbean folk inherently could not govern, data from the WISS showed that colonial disinvestment squarely contributed to the region's decline. Clarke followed up her work with WISS's 1957 *My Mother Who Fathered Me*. Although this book was once praised as identifying illegitimacy as a root cause of long-term Jamaican rural poverty, reevaluations of this text argued that Clark's conclusions still failed to understand the lack of economic power Afro-Jamaican parents had in building stronger families. Regardless of criticisms, this imperfect research provided Clark the opportunity to become an advocate for women's rights in independent Jamaica. Thus, this article examines the complicated legacy of Edith Clarke using archival research from the Edith Clarke Collection at the Woman's Library of the London School of Economics and published books and newspaper articles. This paper argues that the imperfect sociocultural lens placed by Clarke and her cohort of social scientists provided a better understanding of the realities of Jamaican Poverty but could not think of solutions that did not focus on Afro-Jamaicans adopting the belief systems of the island's white middle class.

Keywords: Race, Jamaica, anthropology, colonialism, illegitimacy.

Resumen: Edith Clarke, una jamaicana blanca nacida allí, pasó de ser una celebridad local a ser la primera mujer en servir en un poder legislativo independiente de Jamaica a través de períodos en la Escuela de Economía de Londres y la Encuesta Social de las Indias Occidentales (WISS). Clarke comenzó su trayectoria como defensora social apoyando los esfuerzos de ayuda durante la Gran Depresión en Jamaica. Para agravar aún más la situación en el Caribe, las rebeliones laboristas remodelaron el orden económico, político y social de la región. Para evaluar los problemas que aquejan al Caribe británico, Clarke se convirtió en una destacada investigadora antropológica del WISS, lo que obligó a los gobiernos coloniales británicos a reevaluar las cuestiones de la pobreza y la "inferioridad" de las personas afrocaribeñas. A pesar de recurrir a tropos racistas para afirmar que las personas afrocaribeñas no podían gobernar, los datos del WISS mostraron que la desinversión colonial contribuyó directamente al declive de la región. Clarke continuó su trabajo con *My Mother Who Fathered Me* de WISS de 1957. Aunque este libro alguna vez fue elogiado por identificar la ilegitimidad como una causa fundamental de la pobreza rural jamaicana a largo plazo, las

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reevaluaciones de este texto argumentaron que las conclusiones de Clark aún no lograban comprender la falta de poder económico que tenían los padres afrojamaicanos para construir familias más fuertes. Independientemente de las críticas, esta investigación imperfecta le brindó a Clark la oportunidad de convertirse en defensora de los derechos de las mujeres en la Jamaica independiente. Por lo tanto, este artículo examina el complicado legado de Edith Clarke utilizando investigaciones de archivos de la Colección Edith Clarke de la Biblioteca de la Mujer de la Escuela de Economía de Londres. Este trabajo sostiene que la lente sociocultural imperfecta colocada por Clarke y su cohorte de científicos sociales proporcionó una mejor comprensión de las realidades de la pobreza jamaicana, pero no pudo pensar en soluciones que no se centraran en que las personas afrojamaicanas adoptaran los sistemas de creencias de la clase media blanca de la isla.

Palabras claves: Raza, Jamaica, Antropología, Colonialismo, Ilegitimidad

Introduction to Miss Edith Clarke

Ground-breaking anthropologist Edith Clarke wore many hats in the early twentieth-century British Caribbean. Born in Savanna-la-mar in August 1896, Edith came from the Westmoreland Clarkes, a prominent white family deeply involved in the government (“Edith Clarke dies at 83”). Thus, Clarke became a mainstay in the sightseeing articles of the *Gleaner* newspaper, where reporters often documented her meals, travels out the island, and exploits as a golfer.² Yet, her second act as an anthropologist allowed her to shed the socialite image. As a lead investigator in the West Indian Social Survey from 1947 to 1948 and her 1957 publication *My Mother Who Fathered Me*, Clarke challenged previous studies of race in Jamaica. Generations of white scholars, usually from non-Caribbean spaces, saw places like Jamaica as ideal countries/regions to study pseudo-scientific views on race, ultimately to justify the inequality of people of color in the British Empire. The introduction of new waves of scholars like Clarke sought to break away from old examples of scientific racism rampant in early 1900s academia. Nevertheless, *My Mother Who Fathered Me*, once hailed as a book that broke away from the biological racism of academia, created new questions about the role of white researchers gaining prominence through work in Black spaces and how her conclusions did not entirely rethink the role of the white lens on Black poverty. By projecting ideal visions of Christian morality to rural Black Jamaican families shaped by illegitimacy, Clarke’s once-revolutionary anthropological research now has a label of being out-of-touch with the fundamental economic issues that Afro-Jamaica communities face.

Current Historiographical Record on Clarke’s Research in Jamaica

There are several critical historiographical works addressing Clarke’s position in the West Indian Social Survey and the publishing of her book *My Mother Who Fathered Me*. Christine Barrow’s 1998 article “Edith Clarke: Jamaican Social Reformer and Anthropologist” considers Clarke’s work critical for Caribbean anthropology. Barrow argues that Clarke was one of the first colonial administrators to realize that a major problem in colonial Jamaica was that leaders never came from the communities that they served (Barrow 18). Thus, part of Clarke’s importance was her dedication to the people of Jamaica as an island resident. Barrow argues that her patriotism pushed her to investigate the social woes of the island in ways that served to humanize the actions of those investigated. Previous ethnographers quickly labeled anything that they deemed negative as examples of “primitive and savage” behaviors (Barrow 20). As Barrow quipped: “It is

remarkable that, with this objective in mind, Edith Clarke avoided the prevailing stereotypes of Afro-Caribbean families incorporated into the prevailing crude, pre-determined social policy prescriptions which assumed a causal link between family structure and poverty” (Barrow 20). Nevertheless, Barrow pointed out that the weakness of Clarke’s work was that she could not wholly remove her class biases. Her viewpoints about the proper way for a family unit to function, which was a father living with the mother of his children, became the ideal lifestyle based on how she wrote *My Mother Who Fathered Me* (Barrow 26).

Tracy Robinson’s “Mass Weddings in Jamaica” (2020) adds to the literature on Edith Clarke by showing that her work in social reform intersected with the mass weddings movement in Jamaica. As Clarke concerned herself with how illegitimacy affected the formation of stable Jamaican households, women activists on the island in the 1930s, 40s, and 50s promoted marriages in “long-term heterosexual cohabiting relationships” to reduce the high rates of illegitimacy on the island (Robinson 70). However, Robinson documented that some Afro-Jamaicans were very comfortable in “common-law marriages” that provided flexibility in working-class households, and the mass wedding movement felt like another overreach by the white Colonial Office on the Black populaces (Robinson 72-73). For poorer Jamaicans, the Mass Weddings campaign ignored patterns of land acquisition by some women via family land rather than through male partners, and two poor Jamaicans who get married do not guarantee land access (Robinson 74). Robinson’s view of *My Mother Who Fathered Me* shows that 1950s white Jamaicans like Clarke had advantages in climbing the social and political ladders of now-independent Jamaican society, but being a woman still held her back. Despite being one of the first British social anthropologists from LSE, her academic did not receive much consideration from the male-dominated faculty at the University of the West Indies until after the publication became extremely popular (Robinson 78). Thus, Robinson argues that the mass wedding movement and *My Mother who Fathered Me* became spaces to discuss gendered issues in new ways in colonial Jamaica.

Huon Wardle’s “Ambiguation, Disjuncture, Commitment” (2002) article argues that *My Mother Who Fathered Me* is a “classic West Indian ethnography” that envisions the “idea of Jamaica as an independent nation-state” led by creative Creoles (494). Wardle argues that Clarke’s work demonstrated how optimistic locals were determined to lead Jamaica into a new era. For Wardle, the importance of *My Mother Who Fathered Me* was showcasing a “quality of Jamaican culture visible that had previously been invisible, and this is in contrast with many contemporary

delineations of Jamaican life” (495). Thus, Clarke is using WISS to challenge works like Frank Cundall’s 1910 *Jamaica Negro Proverbs and Sayings* and Charles Davenport’s 1929 *Race Crossing in Jamaica*, which had no intention of uplifting the Jamaican nation. Yet, Clarke’s evaluations of the communities of Orange Grove, which contained peasant landowners, and Sugartown, where the poor were mostly landless, still showed that she was an outsider to these rural communities. Clarke needed Orange Grove to be a model of Afro-Jamaican success, not just to admonish rural poor communities, but for Orange Grove to be representative of the ideals of a new independent Jamaican nation-state as it ceded away from the British Empire in 1962 (501). Thus, Clarke was stuck between changing the narrative about Afro-Jamaican people without recognizing the colonial structures that held Black Jamaicans back.

In contrast, M. L. Black, in 1995’s “My Mother Never Fathered Me,” rejected Clarke’s approach to the issue of illegitimacy in Afro-Caribbean families. Black argued that Clarke’s anthropological study became skewed as she only viewed “fatherhood” under a Eurocentric lens that did not consider the concept of “fathering” through “kinship events” (52). Black’s fieldwork conducted new interviews with Black communities in Antigua. What Black found alarming was that *My Mother Who Fathered Me* was still seen in 1993 as a critical resource in addressing the “social welfare ‘problem’ of too many impoverished women supporting – “fathering” - too many children. To Black, this concept was outdated and did not consider the complexities of Antiguan families and gender organization (52 and 57). One example of this complexity illustrated by Black is “visiting unions,” where unwed couples would live separately, and the father would “pass by” the mother and children’s home to establish bonds before considering living together. However, if the couple is no longer together, the father would still return to see his children in a similar pattern (Black 58). Thus, Black’s research in Antigua showed that “fathering” was less about physically living with kin and more about providing “certain specific behaviors, such as paying something for maintenance, school fees, and special items that are expensive like new shoes, a boy’s first suit, or a piece of jewelry to commemorate a girl’s confirmation (60). Although the co-partnering between a father and the mothers of his children may be fraught with tension, as poor familial connections can limit bonds between father and child, Black is clear that men play clear “fathering” roles in their children’s lives. There are clear responsibilities expected of fathers and mothers. Clarke’s goals with WISS and *My Mother Who Fathered Me* ignored those informal kinship networks for legislation to “force” a certain way of fathering (Black 55-57). Thus, Black saw

Clarke's work as important when recognizing a lack of prior understanding of the "critical links between kinship, community, and economy" in Afro-Jamaican communities, but her "middle class, colonial, and Christian-influenced research" did not allow identify "norms for parental behavior" in these communities (Black 66).

Barbara Bush (2013), in "Colonial Research and the Social Sciences at the End of Empire: The West Indian Social Survey, 1944–57," argued against Clarke's significance. Bush's article advanced the notion that Clarke's ambitions focused more on personal achievements than serving the public good (454). Bush noted that the completion date of the WISS was longer than projected due to bureaucratic infighting and dealing with the many enemies Clarke had developed during her time at the Board of Supervision (Bush 455). Bush also argued that the study had more significant faults than just the researchers' personal biases. She held that as white women entered Black spaces in 1940s Jamaica, the power dynamic between the researchers and the informants gave the workers of the WISS more influence in their interactions for the study. Rather than understanding the rural Jamaican peasants, Bush contended that the WISS only propelled ignorant views on Jamaican life and could not be seen as a success in improving the lives of locals (Bush 462). Instead, Bush considered that WISS only improved Clarke and Kerr's professional careers and did little to challenge colonial policies (Bush 467).

This historiography on Clarke is crucial to understanding the complicated view that Clarke currently has in Caribbean Studies. Barrow, Wardle, and Robinson placed Clarke as a product of her time who contributed considerably to Caribbean Studies. Bush and Black, on the contrary, focused on how Clarke's work failed to examine the realities of rural Jamaican life and focused more on placing white, middle-class, Christian values on communities that lacked social, economic, and political power. This paper seeks to explore this tension by recognizing that the work of the WISS and *My Mother Who Fathered Me* shifted the conversation away from disparting levels of pseudoscience that shaped research on Black bodies in the 1800s and 1900s. Despite this transition, the new issues focus less on "genetic failings" and more on correcting "immoral" behavior. Thus, Clarke's anthropological work in 1940s Jamaica shows the pains of progress in recognizing agency for marginalized communities.

Disrupting the Academic Order

Clarke attended the London School of Economics and University College (LSE) from 1926 to 1931, during which time she shaped her methodologies as a public servant. As an anthropology

student, she became a Research Assistant under Professor Bronisław Malinowski and received a Rockefeller Fellowship for fieldwork in West Africa. Her time in Africa established the principles she abided by as a researcher, as she resisted interference with the cultural practices of the people she interacted with but focused her work on observations. Her analysis focused on connecting local island traditions in Jamaica to practices still found in contemporary West African communities. Her field notes demonstrated a deep consideration of how historical cultural practices shaped the decision of the Afro-Jamaican community rather than relying on racist tropes of inherent Black inferiority that became accepted practices in early-twentieth-century academic research.

Clarke attended LSE at a time when academia transformed rapidly to adopt more progressive ideals and rejected the racial science that had become a prominent paradigm in prior decades (Barrow, 15). In the late 1800s, scholars at Colleges and Universities in industrialized countries like Great Britain and the United States continued to promote racist ideologies that argued that those from the Global South, but particularly those of sub-Saharan African background, were of lower social classes than Europeans. This racial hierarchy that was established under Atlantic World chattel slavery was reinforced during the expansion of empires into Africa and Asia. Thus, the British Colonial Office sent administrators worldwide to maintain the colonial order. At the intersection of education and empire, the Colonial Office recruited well-educated officials to relocate to the Caribbean to reestablish the virtues of British Culture over African, Asian, and Indigenous American societies. One example is English-born Frank Cundall, who served as Secretary and Librarian of the Institute of Jamaica from 1891 to 1937. Although Cundall has been seen as an architect of British Caribbean education through his work at the Institute of Jamaica, his influence also perpetuated negative stereotypes of Afro-Jamaicans. A recurring thesis Cundall's writings hinged on the idea that Black Jamaican culture and spirituality held no value and contributed to the impoverished condition (Cundall 87).

The academic racism promoted by Cundall was fostered by the emergence of eugenics in the late 1800s under Sir Francis Galton. Adapting Galton's cousin Charles Darwin's Theory of Evolution and Gregor Mendel's Theory of Inheritance, eugenicists contended that white, Nordic, Western communities needed reform from the "unfit." The unfit included "the insane, the defective, the alcoholic, and the diseased from birth or from excess" (Kevles 33). Eugenics promoted the ideas of positive eugenics, which were policies that encouraged those deemed to have good genes to procreate, and negative eugenics, which sought to restrict the reproduction of

individuals with undesirable traits, often with laws that restricted welfare to the poor, prevented immigration, stopped interracial marriages, and promoted sterilization (O'Brien 7). Infamous American eugenicist Charles Davenport promoted ideas of negative eugenics in his work in Jamaica. When Clarke started her stint at LSE, Davenport published *Race Crossing in Jamaica* in 1929. To prove his hypothesis that white gene pools must be protected from black genes, *Race Crossing in Jamaica* collected physical and mental data from white, Black, and Mixed-Raced Jamaicans to prove that white societies protect themselves from “denigrating their genetic material” (Davenport 123).

Yet, *Race Crossing in Jamaica* encountered challenges from many scholars in the early 1930s. Although Davenport claimed the data showed Black and Mixed-Race inferiority, the raw data from tests showed that none of the three groups excelled at all tests better than others (Davenport 168). Several of Davenport’s critics pointed this out in the academic journals of the day. Scholars that emerged from the mold of Franz Boas, a famed anthropologist at Columbia University, claimed that between the lack of objective analysis on the data collected, as well as a lack of consideration of cultural differences between the different races in Jamaica, Davenport, and the eugenicist movement at large, only intended to advocate for white supremacy rather than contributing valuable research. Maurice Krout’s 1932 article “Culture and Culture Change” showed that despite Black Jamaicans performing better than white Jamaicans on many of the tests conducted for the project, Davenport used language to skew the advantageous traits of the white population (Krout 253).

Although Clarke does not explicitly address *Race Crossing in Jamaica* or other works of racial science in her publications, the emerging literature by anthropologists and Sociologists of her cohort globally challenged the acceptance of pseudo sciences in different academic spaces. Although *Race Crossing in Jamaica* failed to have the impact that Davenport intended, this work demonstrated how scholars targeted communities to reinforce racist tropes and protect white superiority in the process. Thus, as Clarke returned to Jamaica to support social welfare initiatives, she must reckon with the racial politics of white researchers in Black spaces, especially when they upheld Davenport and others adhering to science racism.

Beginning of Social Advocacy

Before the social welfare projects of the 1940s, Clarke became involved in improving the lives of Jamaica’s poor in the 1930s. Christine Barrow referred to Clarke as being born into a life

of public service: “Her family background had a legacy of active social reform and advocacy on behalf of the poor... crossing the boundaries of class and colour to confront the realities of poverty and marginalization” (Barrow 15). Clarke became prominent in many relief efforts after several natural disasters impacted Jamaica. She was often on the frontlines, mobilizing various charity arms requesting support for relief after hurricanes, and she often donated first to the campaign to set an example. Clarke used her status to galvanize almsgiving, particularly to affected women and children, to assure access to safe drinking water and increase educational opportunities (“Speech At Sal-Va-Mar”).

In addition, Clarke became the face of Jamaica’s Anti-Tuberculosis (TB) movement. In a slum clearance campaign, it was reported by the *Gleaner* that nearly 100 percent of the residents had some lesions stemming from TB. The argument was that the close quarters in which they lived easily facilitated the spread of the “affliction.” Clarke, in 1935, led a toothpaste-tube recycling initiative competition for the island’s youth (“Forhan’s Toothpaste 1935 Christmas Competition”). This toothpaste tube project sought to collect silver scraps to fund a TB sanatorium to better care for those afflicted; the silver collected could be worth 38 pounds sterling a ton (“Scouts Called On To Collect Foiled Sliver...;” “A Charming Snapshot Of Miss Edith Clarke;” “Better Housing, Better Food, Means Less Tuberculosis:”). Although the slum clearances affected the already troubled housing availability for the poor, the government argued that it provided opportunities for persons such as Clarke to educate the public about the health risks faced by the socially disadvantaged. Thus, Clarke represented a group of upper-class white women who entered government via deals with local power brokers, such as Lady Denham, the then-governor’s wife (“Lady Denham’s Appeal”).

Upon her return to Jamaica from University College, Clarke entered the Jamaican civil service. She first started as a representative of the Board of Supervision, a government agency that advocated for the poor in Jamaica. She traveled to different districts to mediate issues that affected lower-class citizens. For example, in a dispute at a Poor House, she pushed for the removal of the former master from the Poor House for negligence towards the residents. Additionally, as a part of the Board of Supervision, she conducted a four-year study on poverty on the island, which preceded the WISS by a few years. Through this study, Clarke and the Board identified two main problems accelerating Jamaican poverty: juvenile pauperism and disease. Clarke’s study also argued that reducing the cost of poor relief never helped the disadvantaged because too many

organizations were involved, and none directly protected the poor. She believed merging three smaller poor relief agencies into a central institution would eliminate heavy overhead expenses and provide strong nursing and medical staff for chronic cases requiring long treatment (“Snags Seen In Govt Poor Relief Plan”). However, the government and agencies like the St Catherine Parochial Board often rejected her recommendations because such reorganizations would necessarily increase the amount of money sent to the government by taxpayers and take power away from non-government groups working in poor relief (“Caustic Criticisms Of Govt As St Catherine Bd. Reject Poor Relief Plan”). Clarke’s failure to convince the Parochial Boards of Jamaica to sacrifice their autonomy over the Poor Houses for the sake of government investment did not teeter. She sought to mobilize the populace “on the question of the housing problem as it affects the poorer classes in the Island,” as she wanted average Jamaicans to be involved in securing the well-being of others (“Talks On Housing Problem”). Another key concern was improving women’s lives by addressing illegitimacy and access to health care (“Illegitimacy Committee Head Doctor’s Evidence”). She often used her position as the Secretary of the Board of Supervision to bring issues of the masses to the forefront; she became the perfect candidate to lead the next wave of social welfare following the development of a royal commission to investigate social conditions on the island after riots nearly ripped the region apart (“Yesterday In Council”).

Commissioned Research on Colonial Development

Following the 1930s Labour Rebellions, the British Colonial Office had to reevaluate the perception of its government’s ability to improve societal conditions and relationships in the Greater British Caribbean. The decades of regional neglect, stemming from a lack of a diversified economy outside of agriculture and a lack of local landownership by the majority of the population, led to an outbreak of riots in many territories in the British West Indies. The rolling riots showed the evolution of the grievances from nonviolent demonstrations to chaos on the streets. The Jamaican Labour Rebellion, starting in 1935 but peaking in 1938, represented a period in which working-class Jamaicans rebelled against the capitalistic system of the island and sought massive improvements in the working conditions of the colony. This period was one of great upheaval; as labor leaders organized protests for higher wages, better working hours, and to operate unions, Jamaican/British entrepreneurs were slow to negotiate. These grievances affected many types of laborers on the island, from dockworkers in Montego Bay to store employees in Kingston, banana

pickers, sugar cane cutters, and other workers in agricultural Jamaica. A colony of roughly 1,122,000 in the late 1930s, Jamaica had about 400,000 wage earners, with most of these workers' total assets being their wages (Bolland 300). As many of these wage earners worked in sectors where employment was limited, the Great Depression deeply affected them (Bolland, *On the March*, 133). For example, it was estimated that the 1935-1936 sugar season witnessed a reduction in jobs from 31,000 to 19,000, a decrease of 12,400 workers (Bolland 133). When there was work, the wages were paltry. In some cases, workers were only employed for two to three days a week, earning 3 to 6 pence a day, far less than the roughly 21 pence necessary to survive a week (Bolland 133). The properties damaged and lives lost during the riots reflected the frustration that Caribbean locals felt, as they lacked the political and economic means to shape the trajectories of their territories.

The 1930s saw an even greater movement toward the independence of Caribbean states. A diverse cast of Caribbean radicals from middle-class origins used the written word to challenge the faults of colonial governance. Led by writers like Trinidadian CLR James, they left to bear all the issues of having foreign people govern from afar. In his prominent pamphlet "The Case for West Indian Self Government," James reflected his views on how colonialism drains the spirits of Trinidadians and looked towards the hopeful day when the Black residents of the British Caribbean would run their own countries without foreign interference (Grimshaw 49-62). James did not want to stay in the "comfort" of the upper classes of colonial society if it meant that other Afro-Caribbeans could not utilize their sovereignty. He often used his literary prowess to inspire the dismantling of imperialism. These words were not local to just his home nation of Trinidad, as the actions of labor leaders Alexander Bustamante and Michael Manley followed the same spirit to gain influence over working-class Jamaicans. The years of colonial ignorance by the British Metropole allowed local Caribbean actors to challenge the power structure. Thus, after 1938, the Colonial Office became more active in the operation of its Caribbean possessions. Without attempting to show concern over the day-to-day lives of their West Indian subjects, the Colonial Office could lose all respect for the region's masses. Such action was particularly pressing considering the much-weakened Caribbean economies during the Great Depression. Before further calamities occurred, officials needed to commit to a plan to aid the development of the colonies.

The British Parliament established The West Indian Royal Commission in 1938 to examine problems and consider the necessary improvements to secure the region's future. In February 1940,

the commission provided recommendations for addressing the situation in the West Indies, which included changes to education, access to public health, housing availability, protection of trade unions, and restructuring of agriculture (The West India Royal Commission 6, and 9-23). Thus, the commission recommended that the British Parliament infuse over £1 million yearly for 20 years to fund projects that build more schools and hospitals, provide land for local purchase, and promote better employment practices. The document singled out Jamaica as in the greatest need of dire changes (The West India Royal Commission 29). Yet, the outbreak of World War II delayed these ideas from fruition (The West India Royal Commission 8). It eventually released the document “Development and Welfare in the West Indies” in 1940, which presented recommendations for improving varying aspects of Caribbean life. The report, written by Sir Frank Stockdale, Comptroller of the Development and Welfare in the West Indies, noted that his office intended to invest £1,000,000 into “long term programmer of social reform” as a means to aid the Caribbean, with a particular recommendation encouraging the establishment of a health education office in Jamaica, as a major concern for many was access to health care in areas where the nearest hospital was not convenient for travel (Stockdale 1-5 and 15) People in the countryside were deemed more susceptible to viral diseases like malaria, “without a hope to aid them in these afflictions” (Stockdale 20 and 24). This office would create policies to aid newly established health units for people of the region to live in, particularly in rural areas (Stockdale 16).

The most highlighted aspect of “Development and Welfare in the West Indies 1940-1942” was social welfare reform. Although Stockdale commended the many years of “social welfare work performed on a voluntary basis in the West Indies,” he also argued that these uncoordinated separate programs should be integrated to improve relief and charity efforts in the region (Stockdale, 49). Stockdale stated that Jamaica officials successfully created proposals and programs under the Colonial Development and Welfare Act (Stockdale 49 and 53); hence, a recommendation called for an overhaul of social services in the region, where the Colonial Office improved coordination between existing public and voluntary social services (Stockdale 53-54). Nevertheless, Colonial Officials still concerned themselves with “the organized campaign against the social, moral, and economic evils of promiscuity” (Stockdale 55). Lord Lloyd Stockdale and the committee identified a lack of Christian morality as a core issue affecting sexuality and interpersonal relationships (Stockdale 55). Suggestions by the committee included reestablishing relationships with denominational Christian churches to improve the region’s morality (Stockdale

56). The report requested training of social workers in social studies departments of British universities. These administrators would exchange ideas between the British social work ideals and the realities of life in the West Indian colonies (Stockdale 56-57 and 59).

“Development and Welfare in the West Indies 1940-1942” represented a thorough report of West Indian issues without addressing the Colonial Government’s role in contributing to the inequitable economic system and uneven allocation of resources. Many of the issues investigated predated the Labour Rebellions, and similar promises were made with the same level of failure. When Sir Edward Dawson and Sir Francis Watts advocated for the construction of the Imperial College of Tropical Agriculture, there were hopes that the campus could also improve the “training ...of teachers [and medical officers],” as “The better the teachers are trained, the better they will be able to educate the people on ... instruction in hygiene and sanitation, because the question of better health conditions is one of the pressing problems of the West Indies” (“West Indian Problems”). The Recommendations from “Development and Welfare” showed the slow crawl of progress that institutions had to shape new governance in the region, sometimes being more of a stopover rather than pushing for dramatic shifts. Only white Colonial Officers conducted the study, a group that did not live in the same economic, political, and social conditions as most of the report’s subjects. From the end of slavery in the 1830s, Afro-Caribbean residents lacked land rights nor accrued enough generational wealth in post-emancipation employment to purchase valuable plots from absentee landowners in Europe. The British often sided with the white landowners in disputes that could widen property ownership. Lack of land also affected the lack of changes in the economy, as large landowners wanted agriculture to remain the dominant business and did not push to diversify the economy with the levels of industrialization seen in London, Birmingham, Liverpool, and Manchester.

Thus, it became natural for Colonial Officials to shift the blame for the disparities of the region to the morality of the non-white “non-Christian” Black masses. The leaders of the region maintained a level of white supremacy and scientific racism in their views, as they argued that Afro-Caribbeans inherited and embraced a non-productive culture, fitting in with the ideas of eugenics and social Darwinism of the time. For people like Stockdale, removed from day-to-day life in the Caribbean, pointing to the cultural traits of lower-class Caribbean residents, compared to the behaviors of the upper-class report writers, shows that the British wanted to spread the blame for the region’s failure on the residents. By claiming that promiscuity and illegitimacy contributed

to the poverty and crime of the region, some of the responsibility for the neglect of the island could revert to the groups most harmed by the Depression. This perspective provided a framework in which Edith Clarke could devise a plan for what was to become a watershed investigation of communities in Jamaica. With her concerns about the social structure of Jamaican family life, the work of Clarke focused on three main constituents: the youth, women, and the poor. Clarke's study provided opportunities for the Colonial Office to understand better why ordinary Jamaicans conducted themselves in certain ways while also pushing to the background some of the economic and political opportunities that hampered the region's development.

Conceptualizing the West Indian Social Survey

Clarke made critical decisions to ensure her influence in the design and purpose of the West Indian Social Survey. As the Secretary of the Board of Supervision, Clarke took leave to the United Kingdom to secure "a post which would provide a greater outlet for her training in social service work." She did not hide an ambition to join Sir Frank Stockdale's colonial redevelopment plans. She attended this trip to England to lobby to become an officer of the West Indies Development and Welfare setup ("Miss Edith Clarke May Get New Post"). In April of 1944, Clarke began promoting the benefits of Stockdale's report. She emphasized how Stockdale had given the organization of the Jamaican welfare plan high praise. She wanted the rest of the West Indies to emulate the style of the relationships and policies forged with voluntary social workers of the island. She also believed that Jamaicans ought to heed the criticisms of Stockdale and work with the Colonial Office to improve an already robust social welfare plan (Social Service Work for Jamaica: Plans For Its Development").

The clear objective for the WISS was to survey local respondents about Jamaican family structure. Rumblings about a West Indian Social Survey began in 1945, as the Royal Commission sought to apply research schemes previously used in the African Colonies and Protectorates in the Caribbean. The provisional approval allowed "for a comprehensive sociological survey of the peasant community in Jamaica, to be carried out by a team of workers who will make full use of the data collected in the Jamaican census of 1943" ("The report on Colonial Research"). As the project came to realization, responsibility for its execution fell on three leaders: Clarke as the director and anthropologist, Dr. Joseph Obrebski, a Polish sociologist who had undertaken work at The London School of Economics and Political Science, and Dr. Madeline Kerr, an English psychologist who had also worked with poor communities in England. Various assistants from

University College supplemented the data collection (Firth). Each of the leads in this project had separate goals. Obrebski wanted to use his WISS findings to produce a publication called *A Jamaican Rural City*, arguing that Jamaica’s “Peasant Community” is a product of continuous colonization movements after emancipation. Kerr’s book *Personality and Conflict in Jamaica* uses psychological methodologies to discover a “Jamaican personality type.” Of these three investigators, Clarke would have a greater long-term impact on Jamaican society. Although it is clear she was far from perfect in her assessment of Jamaica’s sexual and familial mores, reviewers of *My Mother that Fathered Me* stated that Clarke’s residence as a local Jamaican provides a more authentic attempt to understand Jamaican people versus foreign researchers with no prior ties to the island.

For her portion of the study, Clarke proposed to travel to remote regions of Jamaica to interview residents about their lives. Support for the project came from the Colonial Social Science Research Council, financed by the Colonial Office from funds provided for research under the Colonial Development and Welfare Act (Clarke xvi). An advisory committee of the London School of Economics, consisting of Professors Raymond, Firth, Glass, and Schapera supervised the fieldwork design (Clarke xvi). It involved the input of researchers Clarke, Kerr, and Obrebski, who conducted minor residencies in unserved areas of the island, gained the trust of the locals, and eventually got the residents to express their opinions on critical topics that affected their daily lives. Key questions for the survey involved education, sexual mores, economics, drug policies, and the island’s governance. One main goal of the researchers was to ensure that the subjects felt completely free to discuss taboo topics. Kerr and Clarke provided basic questions with some prodding, but for the most part, the subjects elaborated on the topics in eye-opening ways.

The West Indian Social Study’s Findings³

Researchers trekked to the Jamaican countryside with the WISS to acquire first-hand accounts from native Jamaicans to document the region’s understanding of poverty. The original intention of the WISS, as documented in the Recommendations from “Development and Welfare,” was a much more extensive survey of different islands and territories in the Grand British West Indies, but limited money once again got in the way. Thus, Clarke, Kerr, Obrebski, and their support staff focused first on studying Jamaica with the initial funding. The team identified schools, town halls, private homes, and other safe establishments for Jamaican subjects to express their views on the island’s issues, which ranged from poverty, sexuality, drug use, and racial

discrimination. Based on the interview responses, the people of Jamaica who took part in the West Indian Social Survey had a great knowledge of the liberation efforts by local political parties. The names of the leaders of the Jamaican Labour Party (JLP) and the People's National Party (PNP) were on the lips of the poor, as schemes by the JLP's Bustamantes and PNP's Manleys began to galvanize ideas of political independence and economic recovery for the groups to be most impacted by these changes (Clarke/9). The beginning of the political divide was apparent as socialist-leaning supporters of the PNP rejected the conservative JLP's goal of using English and American support to redevelop local industries (Stone 111-122). As stated by Carl Stone (1980): "While the J.L.P. has been wedded to ideological acceptance of the capitalist free enterprise basis of the economy, the P.N.P. has consistently articulated a Democratic-Socialist line supporting greater state ownership and intervention in the economy and nationalization of important foreign owned industries." Thus, adherents to the PNP approach rejected a big business approach to the reconstruction of Jamaican society, as they argued that the masses were not fed, did not receive health care at local hospitals, could not receive education at local schools, and generally did not have the resources to rely on outsiders to bring them justice.⁴

The people of the Blue Mountains lived separate lives from those of low-lying areas and the city, which shaped many lifestyle divides. The issue of race in studies loomed large as skin-color hierarchies fractured many communities. In the Blue Mountains, the local informants touched upon the issue of colorism in the community, as subjects desired brown, "fair-skinned" daughters perceiving that people with darker skin were treated less well. Internalized colorism led to some informants refusing to have photographs taken of them because people would see "two ugly black women." (Clarke/9, Mountain Pass). Furthermore, Marcus Garvey's Black liberation of earlier decades still inspired many of the darker-skinned Jamaicans to dream about a return to Africa, as life in the British Empire did not support their race. These internal fissures fostered mistrust based on ethnic and social backgrounds. "The persecution" of Marijuana/Ganja users also fostered anti-government sentiments. Marijuana was illegal to possess, but "few whips from the slugs" were still prescribed as a cure-all relief from illnesses. For informants, the criminalization of marijuana by the government served as the number one crime issue. Their outsider community felt overrepresented in the arrests, and for them, "stabb[ing] it out of existence" served as a method of controlling the Blue Mountains (Clarke/21). The Ganja controversy also touches upon widespread concern over health care, as local informants complained that free medicine was not

good, private practices were too expensive, and doctors committed many acts of malpractice. Hence, many rural Jamaicans turned to traditional medicine men because they knew community needs (Clarke/20).

Clarke noted in her files how these failures in social institutions played a role in shaping Jamaican identity. Skin color shapes much of the interactions between Jamaicans, as one's worth to the community can be shaped by lightness or darkness.⁵ The stark economic disparity between the groups in Jamaica was evident when one informant said that even wearing shoes to school at age 10 was a sign of higher wealth levels. Wealth disparity in rural areas was strongly linked to land disparity, as the "claim space race" led to conflicts between neighbors and residents of towns and rural areas. Inhabitable space led to the migration of men to locales outside of Jamaica, like Panama and Cuba, hoping to send enough remittances to support a family and purchase land. Additionally, the introduction of other ethnic or racial groups such as Arabs, Indians, and the Chinese affected the ability of Black Jamaicans to compete in the labor and land markets. There was, therefore, a growing tension between Asian groups and African groups, which was reflected in some of the targeted violence towards Chinese shop owners in the Labour Rebellions. ("Monday Night One to Be Long Remembered;" "Marchers Loot Shops in Country District;" "Disturbers Attack another Chinese").

Clarke's WISS notes also demonstrated a great mistrust between Jamaicans and the British Government. Locals feared that there would be no reinvestment into Jamaica unless the government removed Black people from valuable land. One informant in the Blue Mountains wondered "if it was true that the purpose of the survey was to take an inventory of the people's business so it might assist in the sending back to Africa of color peoples." (Clarke/28). Not all were impressed by Clarke as well, as one subject believed that they were only making a book about "the neggar race" so the government could justify the deportation of Afro-Jamaicans to Liberia (Clarke/28).

Ultimately, the WISS served as a colonial project to understand the economic and social situation of Jamaicans and develop ideas to improve the island under the British banner. Skin color shaped the interactions between highly educated European investigators and Jamaican rural poor, and the judgments about findings reflected two different worldviews. Despite attempts by the interviewers to reduce the role of race in their interactions with the Jamaican informants, there was always a level of consciousness of skin color in the ways information was passed on to Clarke and

Co. Their “Blackness” had a fundamental impact on life experiences, prospects, and quality of life in Jamaica. The setup of WISS also played a role in looking for “Blackness,” as the researchers needed to recount a “Jamaicanness” that was not visible to non-natives of these poor rural communities, namely upper-class Jamaicans and white colonial figures. There seemed to be an effort to focus more on the voices of informants based on qualifiers like being rich, poor, young, old, male, and female, with equal weight and understanding. This approach can be problematic, as the structural inequalities caused by a racist colonial power structure will affect how whites and Black actors interact, even when efforts were made to ignore the inaccurate notion of the inequality of races.

My Mother who Fathered Me

Clarke’s findings from rural Jamaican life became an influential book titled *My Mother Who Fathered Me*. Clarke adopted the title from George Lamming’s 1953 *In the Castle of My Skin*, where he said, “My father who had only fathered the idea of me had left me the sole liability of my mother who really fathered me,” hinting at the issue of absentee fathers in Afro-Caribbean households. (Robinson 78) The book was a critical moment for anthropological studies of communities in the British Empire. Clarke designed the book to compare three sites of the study, showing how local mores related to family lineage, sexual practices, and child illegitimacy had shaped the development of Jamaican communities. To maintain anonymity for the project and the informants, Clarke used aliases for the towns studied in the project (Clarke, xlii). Of the two years during which the project was conducted, nine months were spent in Sugartown, “which allowed us to observe the different pattern of life in the *tempo moto* as compared with the working season when ‘crop’ was on.” “Orange Grove” had the complete cycle of agricultural activities observed. “Mocca,” the smallest of the test sites, had the work completed in two months (Clarke xxv). Clarke wanted to make it clear that she had sought to contribute “to the scientific study of West Indian (Creole) society” without adding “partisan bias, value judgments, and over-simple theorizing.” (Clarke xxv). This work sparked a nationwide discussion on how Jamaican family structures affected the long-term success of those social units. She summarized the purpose of her book in this way: “This account of the family in rural Jamaica consists of a comparative study of three communities which reflect the different ways in which the rural population is organized, and attempts to show how these different ways of life affect patterns of family life, the relationship between the members of the family and the composition of the household.” (Clarke xvii). Clarke

built her work on other studies conducted in the Americas and the British Caribbean on “negro communities,” such as scholars such as R.T. Smith, Fernando Henriques, Franklin Frazier, and Melville Herskovits (Clarke xxix). Using a framework primarily drawn from R.T. Smith’s study of “negro families” in Guyana, Clarke argued that Black communities in the Americas shared similar characteristics around reproduction and familial practices.

There were a few key themes. One prevalent observation was common law marriage, which contributed to the illegitimacy “problem.” Clarke focused on the ways “alternative types of mating relations influence the constitution and stability of household groups, and how differences in the organization and character of local communities are associated with significant differences in their patterns of family organization.” (Clarke xxxv). She discussed how the sexual mores of the island affected long-term marriage rates, as there were constraints “by individual and social conditions to convert their non-domiciliary liaisons into stable consensual cohabitation.” (Clarke xxxviii). In addition, a central component of Clarke’s argument was economic, as she showed a correlation of marriage in contrast to concubinage based on economic status. In affluent areas like Orange Grove, “marriage . . . is part of the class structure,” while “in Sugartown and Mocca, there is, in fact, no apparent real association of marriage or concubinage with the economic status or class structure.” (Clarke xxxviii.)

Clarke utilized her field notes from “Mocca, Sugartown, and Orange Grove” to demonstrate her argument that illegitimacy in Jamaican culture played a role in the unstable family lives of communities on the island. When focusing on land tenure, Clarke argued that inadequate land redistribution to formerly enslaved people after emancipation served at the start of the issue. She emphasized that lack of access to property led men to squat on abandoned land to gain ownership through Statutes of Limitations, one of the only ways to house a family (Clarke 18). However, in the long term, courts only recognized children of legitimate birth as the successors, which now put children out of wedlock and in a unstable economic and social situation (Clarke 27). In another chapter, Clarke argued that many rural poor avoided marriage as “concubinage [allowed] the parties free to separate at any time should they so desire” and that “It is not considered correct for a man to propose marriage unless he owns a house and, preferably, a bit of land. . . . A man should not marry and live in a rented house.” (Clarke 50-51). Thus, it was easier for young men and women to justify cohabitation and other practices that avoided marriage if the couples could not meet these societal (and religious) demands (Clarke 53-54).

Much of *My Mother Who Fathered Me* compared the rich rural towns like Orange Grove to the poorer ones like Mocca and Sugartown (Clarke, 61). Sugartown, the largest and most impoverished of the three, was the center with the highest illegitimacy and concubinage rate and the lowest percentage of marriage (Clarke, 82-83). Orange Grove tended to have higher rates of marriage, and Mocca often had marriage and illegitimacy rates that mirrored the national average. Clarke argued that part of the success of Orange Grove was the higher percentages of marriages and lower percentages of illegitimacy versus in towns like Sugartown, where relationships between migrant working men and local women were intended to be temporary (Clarke 64). Clarke also noted “a Jamaican ideal of the natural balance between men and women” masculinity was defined by the ability to impregnate women, and femininity was defined by the ability to produce a child (Clarke, 65). Childlessness was lamented, as it proved that one was not an adult (Clarke 66). This delicate balance between the social mores of marriage and adulthood affected kinship, as illegitimate children could not be confident about the long-term status of their fathers. Rather, the great burden of raising children came down to single mothers, grandmothers, and great-grandmothers, as these groups were more likely to be the breadwinners in a single-parent household (Clarke 90 and 100).

Clarke elected to focus her book on families because, in her view, the family could be a focus for nation-building. *My Mother Who Fathered Me* positioned Clarke to champion herself as leader of illegitimacy and women’s rights in Jamaica, as a platform to address issues that affected the mothers raising the nation’s youth. Clarke presented a scenario where a household without both parents present could not be stable. As members of a patriarchal society where masculinity held great social worth, women were not guaranteed the same level of economic and political opportunities, from employment to retaining family land rights. Clarke believes this instability was passed on to the children as they grew up in environments that did not have visible male figures and overburdened female relatives. Clarke’s argument thus removed the biological element of why Black societies retain “issues” of development. Rather than arguing that Black genes led Black people to naturally make poor decisions and display erratic behavior as viewed by white actors, Clarke believed the internalized misogyny of Jamaican culture played a greater role in the island’s problems. Although women, whether mothers, aunts, or grandmothers, had to sacrifice to raise children, men did not need to reach that same standard. Thus, the issues of Jamaica hinged greatly on a gender divide, one that was reinforced by past political and economic actions. Examples of

this were the lack of land rights for the island's residents and the migrating/seasonal nature of employment. For Clarke, Black Jamaican men were not born to reject their roles as in-home fathers but rather became socialized from a young age to think that was normal.

Nevertheless, Clarke's viewpoint on families was problematic as she created "Jamaican archetypes" for her rural subjects. Women who had children without men in the day-to-day lives of their children were only victims of patriarchy, as Clarke implied that women could not be expected to truly "father their children" but overextend their motherly duties to care for their kin. Men who did not try to stay in the homes of their children were only using women for sex without assuming the responsibility of children rising afterward. In the view of Clarke, sex was something men did to gratify their manliness, and these kinds of men never planned to be fathers. Grandmothers and aunts who assisted in raising the children of family members took the responsibility of child-rearing away from the parents. By placing rural Jamaican community members in these categories, Clarke's assumptions made it difficult for her to notice how narrow her opinion of her fellow citizens was. By placing sexuality as a vital issue in the Jamaican family, Clarke upheld the idea that Black men and women focused on intercourse. Since Black people could not control their sexual appetites, they also could not control the number of children they would have to rear. The more children to raise, the more community assistance these families need to survive. Thus, the island's poverty was partially an issue of dividing a lack of resources among too many people. By putting the sexual mores of Jamaicans on trial for the nation's "lack of progress," a part of Clarke's "cultural argument" shames Jamaicans for rejecting their sexual practices to "modernize" their communities.

The work of Clarke and the WISS was not perfect, but studies of an anthropological nature inherently have issues of biases and the ability to understand cultures from the perspective of an outsider. It would be difficult for Clarke, as an upper-class white Jamaican, to fully accept and understand the entire culture of the island's socially disadvantaged Black communities in which she had not grown up. This chapter argues that her work nevertheless reflects an effort to understand those communities rather than to discard the traditions and realities of the nation's Black rural poor. Clarke's perspective seemingly showed an academic and political shift regarding discussing race. Rather than focusing on the physical/genetic/biological description of race, like in eugenics, Clarke's work subtly links race to psychology, even if it was unsaid in her work. Although the Colonial Government did not do enough for Jamaicans, the communities still had

internal generational issues that needed to be settled. By linking behaviors and mores to racial traditions, she partly assumed that re-education of Afro-Jamaicans to more acceptable sexual behaviors would become the key to “saving their communities.” By moving the research language away from a biological basis, Clarke did not exacerbate the eugenic language against Jamaicans but rather created a dialogue for more governmental action alongside a commitment to personal responsibility. Since she would continue her career in the Jamaican government after publishing *My Mother Who Fathered Me*, she became the perfect person to push these ideals.

Reactions and Legacy

Following its publication in 1957, *My Mother Who Fathered Me* received widespread academic acclaim. It took Clarke a few years after the end of the WISS to receive clearance from the LSE to make full use of the field notes (Bush, “Colonial Research and the Social Sciences at the End of Empire,” 455). Clarke’s greatest accomplishment was generating profound discussion among Jamaicans. Clarke received critical public respect, and the book deeply stirred Jamaican society. Many writers and readers of the *Gleaner* commented. Kitty Kingston, in her column, *Persona Mention*, promoted the book as an “account of the little-known customary and traditional system of inheritance and use of family land as it affects the family,” providing ideas on peasant and working-class attitudes toward sex, marriage, procreation, and long-term kinship based on economic and social conditions. (Kingston, 18). Clarke spurred a discussion on concubinage and illegitimacy on the island as locals sought to grapple with the conflict of children born out of wedlock and then to have long-term disadvantages in Jamaican society. Clarice Allen wrote to the *Gleaner* to say how pleased she was with “Edith Clarke tackling the problem of paternal responsibility,” as she called for more female leaders and the government to “rise to the cause of the children (“Illegitimacy” 8). Another reader, W.S. Duhaney, was happy that an advocate like Clarke would fight for amendments like the Registration of Births Law and other measures that supported women and families in the Legislative Council (“Illegitimacy” 15).

Edith Clarke used *My Mother Who Fathered Me* and her long service to Jamaica as a governmental worker to become Jamaica’s first woman member of the Legislative Council on 19 December 1956 (“Miss Edith Clarke given welcome”). Despite the *Gleaner* mentioning the attire in which Clarke dressed for work, without doing the same for her male colleagues in that day’s newspaper, Clarke went from “Miss” to “Her Honorable” (“Miss Edith Clarke given welcome”). In keeping with her advocate spirit, Clarke’s first action as a member of the Legislative Council,

or LEGCO, was to fight for the Bill for the Adoption of Children in Jamaica. She was an active member of LEGCO, fighting for laws that sought to address grassroots issues such as land ownership laws that hurt poor communities, universal adult suffrage for citizens over the age of 21, laws that gave children fundamental rights, and any legislation that would serve to improve the economic and social rights of women (“Facilities for Title Law amendment passed” and “MOST people will agree with the Hon: Edith Clarke”). The most controversial measure in her early years in LEGCO sought to separate a wife’s earned income from her husband for income tax purposes (“Separating incomes”). Clarke’s work in LEGCO and with *My Mother Who Fathered Me* encouraged readers to call on groups and organizations in Jamaica, like Christian groups and parishioners, to support legislation promoting better women’s and family rights (“My Mother Who Fathered Me”). Other readers agreed with Clarke’s plan that a registry of fathers of illegitimate children should be set up to track down these fathers and enforce responsibility (“Finding the father:” “Motion seeks to register father of illegitimate child:”). Some readers even went so far as to encourage laws fining men who did not marry the mother of their children (“Marry or be fined”). Ultimately, part of Clarke’s work in *My Mother Who Fathered Me* and in LEGCO led to The Status of Children’s Act of 1976, which “abolished the status of illegitimacy in law for hundreds of thousands of Jamaicans” (Clarke ix).

Part of the success of *My Mother Who Fathered Me* came from the period in which it was released. The book was released five years before Jamaican independence on 06 August 1962. Thus, Clarke added to the Caribbean Anthropological field when more local voices were heard regarding self-government. Although Clarke worked for the Colonial Office as a researcher and held close ties to the governors of the previous local regimes, her work endeared her to many middle-class Jamaicans who believed she was a different kind of colonial administrator. Her work in the WISS made Clarke aware of local issues and culture many previous white observers had not sought to understand. Her work rode an intellectual wave against the failures of colonialism in improving the living conditions of the Caribbean, as dissatisfaction with colonialism in the 1930s and 1940s was a theme shared by writers like CLR James and the *Beacon* group in Trinidad. In a push for self-government, Caribbean intellectuals argued that the repression of colonialism prevented residents from dispelling the notion that the racial arguments about social structure were false. By upholding eugenic arguments as factual, such as doctor Harland wanted to do in Trinidad, Black people would be held back in showing their capacity for self-governance because of false

ideas about genetics and behavior. Rather, once political actors considered the economic and cultural factors that the region's people had to live under during British Colonial rule, they realized that the will of the region's people was self-determination and the ability to charter their course in international politics. This situation made it easy for a person like Clarke to remain a member of LEGCO after transitioning from a colonial to an independent island. Her cultural arguments portrayed Black Jamaicans holding on to "cultural traits" like illegitimacy as problematic, but those behaviors were not innate. Clarke argued that Jamaicans could progress if exemplary leadership (including her) was in place, and the island deserved a right to improve its society via its sovereignty.

Conclusion

During the Great Depression, the Colonial Office failed Jamaica and other territories in the British West Indies, as their poor governance displayed the dire need for financial and social support for the region. The Metropole was unsuccessful in equipping Jamaica with the best political structure necessary to improve the conditions of the Great Depression for its residents. The Labour Rebellions of 1934-1938 showed the outrage residents had over the lack of support by their government. The rage expressed in the riots and the labor movement did not come from a single incident, as their demands for better employment, land, and social services were never on the minds of colonial administrators. Without local action, concepts like the Development and Welfare Commission and the West Indian Social Survey would not have come to fruition. These plans developed by the Colonial Office were both investigations that sought to understand how the lack of resources by the Metropole shaped the Caribbean during the Depression and image-boosting missions to display to the citizens of the region that the Colonial Office could make changes to their colonial practices that served the best interests of Caribbean subjects. The language of these policies reflected the disuse of eugenics as an explanation for the British Caribbean's socio-economic standing during and after the Great Depression. Based on high levels of governmental failure on the part of the Colonial Office, as well as a shift in the education of the officials that ran governmental organizations, to imply that Afro-Caribbeans were not biologically able to govern themselves would be a false notion. Thus, the WISS nevertheless, by targeting "Jamaican morality" as an additional problem with West Indian societies, the Colonial Office allowed the culture of the Caribbean to become a part of the reason why the region failed to succeed.

Clarke's role as a social reformer in Jamaica shows that even though there were great differences in the role of the researcher and the populace she investigated, studies on this scale could move past simple notions of pseudo-scientific biology as a tool to understand differences. Much of Clarke's framework developed in *My Mother Who Fathered Me* has become a part of modern Caribbean studies, even though recent scholars have rebuked some of the conclusions about the "issues in morality" of Jamaican culture. The situation where an affluent white researcher investigating a majority Black populace in hopes of publishing a work that examines a link between generations of illegitimacy and social progress is problematic, as some of the voices of the examined group were removed in an attempt to advance some political goals. As mentioned earlier, in comparison, Clarke's contemporaries, like the infamous American eugenicist Charles Davenport, "used Jamaicans as a laboratory" to denigrate the people of color living on the island. In *Race Crossing in Jamaica*, Davenport and his collaborators employed the dangerous rhetoric of scientific racism to call for a eugenic exclusionary method to "cure the genetic problems" caused by race mixing.

Clarke's primary motive was not to exploit her subjects for sole personal advancement. Rather than focusing on the imaginary innate rationale and employing pseudo-scientific biology as a be-all-end-all to assess Jamaica's perilous economic and social climate, Clarke tried to engage the Jamaican public in discussing culture and governance. She saw herself as a local and thought any means to improve issues holding back community members would only give Jamaica a better opportunity to claim its sovereignty. Based on her extensive findings, she sought to encourage the public to foster growth for the island rather than falsely assuming genes determine one's ability to participate in these critical conversations. Clarke was far from being a leading voice in the Jamaican independence movement. Nevertheless, she used her position as a scholar who disallowed eugenic logic to work with Jamaican subjects to improve their conditions, showing a change from assuming Afro-Caribbeans could not govern to becoming a part of their right to govern.

Notes

- 1.- The Gleaner has a reputation as one of the most respected newspapers in the British Caribbean. However, scholars complained that the newspaper in the pre-independence days heavily focused on upper-class issues and often did not include much of the lower-class viewpoints. Thus, by using the sources, there is an understanding that the audience may skew slightly affluent; thus, the issues addressed in the newspaper reflect that. “At “The Club “Were some keen golfers...” *The Daily Gleaner*, 26 January 1935, 39, Newspaperarchives.com. Since this took place in Clarke’s hometown of Sav-Va-Mar, this confirms she was also the local professional golfer mentioned in the Gleaner for the duration of the 1930s and 1940s.; *The Daily Gleaner*, 05 February, 1932, 39. There were many Edith Clarkes in Jamaica between 1930 and 1979, but *The Daily Gleaner* tried to refer to Edith Clarke as Miss Edith Clarke in this project. Other local Edith Clarkes did not have this title except for the athlete.
- 2.- Much of the information in this section comes from The Edith Clarke files at the London School of Economics. The files used in this section come from personal interviews conducted by Clarke and Kerr. The British government has deemed these sources sensitive because many study participants may still be alive and active. Thus, the collection of these materials involved handwriting, which caused me to lose some of the interviewers’ names for the interviews. It was unclear whether Dr. Kerr or Clarke conducted a specific interview in the records. Clarke completed many interviews, with Dr. Kerr playing a significant role in secondary interviews. They also conducted an interview together. I indicate to the interviewer wherever possible.
- 3.- “A keynote: The Clarke family shared a relationship with the Manleys,” For this reason, the presentation of these notes against the Bustamantes can be biased. These are raw notes taken by various informants, so one can be wary of the veracity of notations that use negative language about a political party.
- 4.- Clarke noted that the informant held prejudices against people not in their community, so one must take a grain of salt in how this person’s reaction to the social constructs of race and class affected daily interactions.

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Colectivo Moriviví: Reconfiguring the Puerto Rican Nation through Feminist Art Activism

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Abstract: This article analyzes national identity construction in Puerto Rico in terms of gender dynamics and how contemporary artistic production has questioned patriarchal constructions within the nation. I argue that by voicing the narratives of Puerto Rican communities in the public sphere, *Colectivo Moriviví* validates the active participation and contribution of women, Afro-descendant minorities, and LGBTQ+ groups within the national body, forcing the national discourse to re-envision its purpose, values, and mission.

Keywords: Puerto Rico, Moriviví, muralism, feminism, colonialism, national discourses.

Resumen: En este artículo se analiza la construcción de la identidad nacional en Puerto Rico en términos de dinámicas de género y cómo la producción artística contemporánea cuestiona las estructuras patriarcales que se (re)producen dentro de la nación. Por lo tanto, se argumenta que, a través de su arte, el Colectivo Moriviví amplía el discurso nacional al visibilizar las narrativas y contribuciones de las mujeres, las minorías afrodescendientes y la comunidad LGBTQ+, no solo permitiéndoles participar en el cuerpo de la nación, sino también obligando al discurso nacional a reimaginar su propósito, sus valores y su misión.

Palabras claves: Puerto Rico, Moriviví, feminismo, colonialismo, discursos nacionales.

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“The fight for justice never ends; the areas of concern merely shift.”

Jo Rippon, *The Art of Protest*, 2020

The long legacy of colonialism imposed on Puerto Rico makes its mode of government one of the most complex in the history of the Hispanic Caribbean. Puerto Rico does not possess a government of its own, as it has always been ruled by an imperialist nation. It was first a colony of Spain from 1483 to 1898 and then became a U.S. colony under the agreements established by the Treaty of Paris (1898) that ended the Spanish-American War (1898). Today, the island is defined as an unincorporated territory of the United States with a commonwealth status that is ambiguous, as it makes the island neither a sovereign nation nor a U.S. state. Likewise, Puerto Ricans have been U.S. citizens since 1917, but they lack the right to vote in U.S. presidential elections and have no voice in decisions made by the Congress of the United States.

Most Americans on the mainland are unaware of the political struggle faced by their fellow citizens on the island.¹ Only in 2017 did we see a growing national debate about the incongruent political relations between the United States and Puerto Rico as a result of the widespread media coverage of the havoc wreaked by Hurricane María and President Donald Trump’s failed response to the island. This debate has raised vigorous questions about the *Estado Libre Asociado* (Commonwealth of Puerto Rico) established in 1952, which grants the island limited rights over local issues related to health, education, culture, and housing. Nevertheless, the U.S. federal government exercises full control over the island’s political and economic affairs. As a result, Puerto Rico lacks self-government in matters of statehood, including finance, migration, citizenship, defence, transportation, and foreign trade.

Given these historical and political complexities, one critical undertaking by Puerto Rican intellectuals has always been to examine the effects of these entanglements on the development of national discourse and cultural identity. An excellent example of this project is the work of Puerto Rican artists. They have captured the island’s sociocultural imaginary in their art as a tool of resistance against imperialism, cultural defacement, and colonial hierarchies. Since the eighteenth century, artists such as José Campeche, Francisco Oller, Ramón Frade, Rafael Tufiño, Lorenzo Homar, Olga Albizu, Myrna Baez, Carlos Collazo, Antonio Martorell, and many others have portrayed the shaping of the island by depicting its rural world, the sugarcane plantation landscape, the injustices perpetrated against the slaves by the *criollos* (Creoles), and, subsequently, the

emergence of the national identity represented first by the figure of the *jíbaro* (mountain-dwelling peasant) and later expanded by Afro-Puerto Ricans and other minorities, such as women and the LGBTQ+ community.²

In this vein, the performative activism and artistic production carried out since 2013 by the women's art collective Moriviví is vital within the community of Puerto Rican intellectuals, artists, and activists. Moriviví is a street art collective that began working on large-scale art projects while studying at the Central High School for Visual Arts in Santurce. The group achieved national recognition by participating in the 2013 edition of the art festival Santurce es Ley (Santurce is the Law). Since then, they have painted murals in Puerto Rico, the United States, China, and Tasmania, and have been awarded grants from the Art Matters Foundation and the FRIDA Young Feminists Fund (both in 2018).³ On the one hand, Moriviví employs its artistic production to unveil the sociopolitical and economic struggles experienced on the island. Furthermore, it has contributed to democratizing the narratives of the Puerto Rican nation by rearticulating the active roles of women, Afro-descendant minorities, and marginalized communities, as well as inserting the LGBTQ+ communities into constructions of the island's national imaginary.

This essay analyzes how Moriviví is transforming Puerto Rico's national discourse by carrying out a community-led muralism initiative that transgresses against patriarchy, racism, gender and class inequality, and sexual violence. To this end, I first discuss the long tail of the myth of *la gran familia puertorriqueña* (the great Puerto Rican family) in terms of the nationalist discourse and the struggle against colonialism. Then, I observe how the artistic framework of Moriviví reconstructs this national vision established by the nineteenth-century sugar plantation landowners as a way to refashion today's national imaginary into a democratic and diversified one. Finally, through the examination of the murals *Paz para la mujer* (Peace for Women) (2015) and *Libre y peligrosa* (Free and Dangerous) (2019) in terms of their relation to the national discourse in Puerto Rico, my work seeks to answer the following questions: How has the foundation of the national discourse served the interests of the island's ruling class? How has this discourse established gender, class, and racial stereotypes? How do artists such as the collective Moriviví transgress this national discourse through muralism?

The National Discourse and the Myth of *La Gran Familia Puertorriqueña*

In discussing national identity, I refer to the definition established by Nancy Morris in *Puerto Rico: Culture, Politics, and Identity* (1995), which describes it as “an individual's sense of

belonging to a collectivity that calls itself a nation . . . that does or does not have its own territory, that does or does not have political autonomy” (14). Puerto Rico certainly exemplifies this case, as a self-defined community of people who share a common land, cultural heritage, and language despite the direct impact of colonialism. Given its political status, we cannot refer to Puerto Rico as an independent country like Cuba or the Dominican Republic. Nevertheless, we can certainly address its national consciousness. This sentiment of cohesion on the island has emerged throughout history as a response to external powers that control domestic affairs.

During the nineteenth century, for example, sugar plantation owners proclaimed themselves the fathers of the Puerto Rican nation and imposed on the masses a nationalist discourse in line with their own economic, political, and class interests. According to Ángel Quintero Rivera, this inter-class unification led by the sugar elite was a result of the fact that Puerto Rican politics in the nineteenth century revolved around the *hacendados* (landowners). “The colonial economic system allowed for the development of an island-based ruling class that gradually came to dominate the production process in the country” (Quintero Rivera 18).⁴ However, such colonial rule did not allow the *hacendados* (landowners) to build a genuinely autonomous Puerto Rican state. Therefore, the strategy of a democratic and solidifying discourse among all races and classes turned into a pivotal axis in forging the hegemonic class’s interests and overcoming its political and economic subordination. Through this nationalist discourse, the *hacendados* envisioned a self-government system with greater representation in the Spanish courts to gain institutional authority to control the profits generated by the sugar empire on the island. Likewise, their collective narrative served as a common thread among all Puerto Ricans, regardless of their class, race, or gender.⁵

However, the U.S. invasion of 1898 eradicated the landowners’ power by overturning the Autonomous Charter (1897) by which Spain allowed the *criollos* (Creoles) to assemble an autonomous government. The U.S. invasion also suppressed the landowners’ authority by imposing a two-year military government, devaluing the Spanish currency, and transforming the island’s mercantilist economic system into imperial colonialism. Consequently, the first years of the twentieth century in Puerto Rico were marked by the alienation of the landowners’ national discourse. The impact of U.S. colonialism spread across all socio-political and economic domains as it attempted to assimilate Puerto Ricans into American culture through the introduction of Protestantism, the imposition of English in education, and the banning of the display of the Puerto

Rican flag. In an expeditious effort against such impositions, the landowners once again insisted on a collective defence of the nationalist ideals they had built up over the previous century and promoted a “a unified, homogenous conception of the Puerto Rican culture” (Negron Portillo 54).

However, it is vital to recognize that this national discourse was fully anchored in the elite’s values. The landowners established themselves as the sole representatives of a national identity marked by classism, paternalism, and strong adherence to the Catholic Church. The national discourse revolved around the rhetoric of *la gran familia puertorriqueña*, “with the *hacendado* (landowner) as the paternalistic and benevolent head who provided his children with means by which to engage in productive labor for the good of the nation” (Torres 294). This national production entirely excluded the minorities’ civil and political concerns. Instead, the roles of *jíbaros* (mountain peasants), Afro-Puerto Ricans, and women were focused on executing the national consciousness fostered by the *criollos* (Creoles) but without the right to voice their opinions.

This vision of nationhood in terms of a paternalistic figure alludes to the theoretical claims of Joane Nagel, who, in “Masculinity and Nationalism: Gender and Sexuality in the Making of Nations” (1988), argues that hegemonic masculinity is the leading force of nationalism, as “the national state is essentially a masculine institution” (251). Therefore, this national perception embeds a cultural imaginary that not only “resonate[s] with masculine cultural themes” (Nagel 151) but also promotes a heteronormative and hegemonic-subordinate framework.

Likewise, in *Gender & Nation* (1997), Nira Yuval-Davis expands Nagel’s vision as she observes the repercussions of paternalist national discourses in relation to minorities. Yuval-Davis claims that this historical construction of power serves to “construct minorities into assumed deviants from the ‘normal,’ and exclude them from important power resources” (11). Within these parameters, the government structure responds to gender and cultural stereotypes where one collective naturalizes access to the ideological apparatus. In terms of the female experience as a minority within this national construction, Yuval-Davis claims that, based on the state’s priorities, “women are given the roles of the cultural reproducers of the nation” (37) and relegated to the domestic space and reproductive tasks. As a result, women are conceived as *madres de la nación* (mothers of the nation) to embody the paternalistic system’s values and ensure that the *hijos de la nación* (children of the nation) will comply with the standards set by the ruling power. Furthermore, such practices have coerced women’s participation in the national debate and have

allowed the state to control their sexuality. This trend within the national imaginary demonstrates that “women’s oppression is endemic and integral to social relations with regard to the distribution of power and material resources in the society” (Yuval-Davis 7).

In these terms, the foundational myth of *la familia puertorriqueña* (the great Puerto Rican family) was extended through the twentieth century as a weapon against Americanization. The solidification of this national allegory served not only to reaffirm paternalist ideologies of gender and class stereotypes but also to defend the traditional understanding of the nation. Marisel Moreno argues that this national symbolism predominated within all cultural expressions, especially literature. Therefore, the literary canon served to reproduce the “Hispanophilia and patriarchal values that the cultural and political elites defended as cornerstones of the nation. Deployed against the perceived threat of American influence on the island, the canon’s symbolic role as national bulwark was geared toward generating a sense of unity among Puerto Ricans” (Moreno 76). Likewise, Moreno observes that the national discourse initially promoted by the *hacendados* and later reinforced by Puerto Rican literary canon led to racism, homophobia, and androcentrism. As a result, “women, blacks, and Puerto Rican migrants in the U.S. [were] marginalized and symbolically excluded from the national imaginary as a result of this myth (76).

It was not until the 1970s that this paternalistic vision of the nation was questioned. The literary work by emerging writers such as Luis Rafael Sánchez, Rosario Ferré, Ana Lydia Vega, Manuel Ramos Otero, and many others in Puerto Rico and in the diaspora served to fracture the myth of *la gran familia puertorriqueña*. In these terms, Yolanda Martínez-San Miguel sustains that by incorporating topics related to race, gender, sexual identities, class, and migration, these authors expanded the literary scope of the island, “These alternative voices make the agenda of nationalism impossible, thus opening cultural space to other ways of ‘narrating’ the experience of the Puerto Rican community” (137).

Concerning the visual arts arena, the transgressions against *la gran familia puertorriqueña* during the 1970s prompted a collective awareness of women artists such as Olga Albizu, Myrna Baez, and Noemí Ruiz, who overturned gender biases caused primarily by the paternalist view of the national imaginary and the greater male representation in the local art industry. These artists took on the responsibility of reshaping the Puerto Rican visual landscape by redefining the role of women within the national discourse. This feminist enterprise of artistic transformation engages with Guisela Latorre’s assertion of the artist’s responsibility to articulate art as a vehicle of social

justice and decolonization: “Through the process of developing an individual and collective creative expression, which can also be regarded as a form of empowerment and emancipation, artist and community alike begin to shed the mechanism of a colonial system that has invaded their bodies, minds, and souls” (98).

Moriviví: The Alliance Between Muralism and Social Justice

According to Ulrich Blanché, street art “consists of self-authorized pictures, characters, and forms created in or applied to surfaces in the urban space that intentionally seek communication with a larger circle of people” (33). In Latin America, muralism has been fundamental to sociopolitical expression. For example, the murals of the Mexican artists José Clemente Orozco, Diego Rivera, and David Alfaro Siqueiros have served “to teach the history of Mexico from the Conquest to Independence; and to deal with national and international problems from the Reform to the contemporary period” (Goldman 53). From its origins in Mexico, muralism represents an inclusive and popular form of expression that promotes sociohistorical consciousness and political activism. From 1930, the movement has spanned Latin America, with intensive development in Brazil, Ecuador, and Colombia as an instrument of national identity.

Regarding Puerto Rico, Marvin Fonseca Barahona, in *Puerto Rico: Museo al Aire Libre* (2015), emphasizes that “in the last decade, urban art has evolved to unanticipated levels, reaching the entire country” (9).⁶ For example, festivals such as Santurce es Ley (Santurce is the Law) and Los Muros Hablan (The Walls Speak) stand out as mass events in which local and international artists reclaim abandoned urban spaces and incorporate muralism as a provocative artistic statement against the island’s socio-political and economic decline.

Specifically, artists testify through street arts to the suffering of the working class in the face of the unpayable \$70 billion public debt to the United States that Puerto Rico has accumulated over decades. The Puerto Rico Oversight, Management, and Economic Stability Act (PROMESA) was signed by President Barack Obama in 2016 after the U.S. Congress refused to grant the island a bailout. It established an unelected seven-member Fiscal Oversight Management Board that oversees local finances and negotiates directly with creditors. As it is popularly known on the island, “La Junta” (the Board) operates as an independent entity that is not subject to any supervision by the Puerto Rican government. Still, all of its operating expenses are paid by the island, provoking severe austerity measures that have led to a disproportionate increase in poverty rates as a result of dramatic tax increases. Muralists on the island are committed to fostering

awareness about the island's political status and the negative impact of local corruption and colonialism on the community, especially the most economically vulnerable, such as the poor and elderly, who cannot afford the high costs of gasoline, food, medical services, electricity, and water services. Circumstances have become even more dire in the aftermath of Hurricane Maria (2017), the earthquakes of 2020, and the ongoing health crisis caused by COVID-19.⁷

As a response to these multiple crises, street art fosters awareness regarding the island's colonial status, economic crisis, gender stereotypes, ecological consciousness, and theoretical reformulation of the national discourse. Moriviví is emblematic in this regard. Its murals defy the conservative national discourse founded by nineteenth-century *hacendados* by employing muralism as a vehicle for incorporating nonprivileged voices into the realm of local affairs. The predominant subject in Moriviví's artwork is Puerto Rican women in all their diversity: physical constitution, age, social background, gender identity, and ethnicity. Their female bodies are presented as catalyst agents of change on the island. This approach completely overrides the paternalistic vision held by the *hacendados* (landowners), for whom the female figure was a secondary entity within the island's national imaginary. In contrast, Moriviví's female representations decolonize women's idealization as mere muses that serve as a source of inspiration. This transformational stance is observed in the way these women are portrayed. Their body composition is not passive, as their postures display transgression against the establishment that has been disenfranchising them. They step away from the hierarchical and dichotomous allegory of *la gran familia puertorriqueña* to embrace gender equality, diversity, and collective solidarity.

The history of Moriviví goes back to 2013, when Sharon "Chachi" González Colón and Raysa Raquel Rodríguez García, along with six of their classmates at the legendary Central High School of Visual Arts in Santurce, came together to participate in the popular multidisciplinary urban art festival Santurce es Ley (Santurce is the Law). According to Rodríguez García, the group was formed with the idea of helping the community and addressing topics of social justice. They participated in festivals and collaborated with nonprofits and community organizations, embracing muralism as a community art expression.

It is impressive that, even at such a young age, these artists already had the artistic skills and, above all, the social sensitivity required to undertake a project involving such extensive community outreach. Alexis Bousquet, director of Santurce es Ley (Santurce is the Law), notes

that though his interest was initially sparked by the fact that the young women attended his alma mater, upon seeing their art the festival immediately assigned them a wall and provided them with supplies:

The mural turned out incredible and was one of the festival's most viewed walls. Thanks to the synergy established, we awarded them the principal wall for the upcoming festival. Since then, we have worked together. They have risen to a whole new level. Their work is increasingly neat, precise, and above all, poetic and critical. (Bousquet)⁸

Moriviví's art is a community-based mural project that generates a solid political and social message. Their work mobilizes communities to action while forging a strong sense of belonging. This undertaking echoes what Alan W. Barnett understands as the significant role of muralism. In *Community Murals* (1984), Barnett argues that murals are "mirrors that show us what we are, what could be, and how. They have indicted the racism, sexism, and economic exploitation of our society and helped bring people together to overcome them" (17). Thereby, muralism generates a transformative meaning on the walls of a specific community. A mural is not simply a large painting on a surface but rather a space grounded in human contact. As a result, with the artists' support, the community will articulate strategies for change.

For this all-women collective, muralism becomes a vehicle of social transformation, as their artwork represents an ongoing act of resistance to the political powers-that-be and the many social crises that have struck the island. The artists aim to provide art to disadvantaged neighborhoods to open up spaces for community interaction and dialogue. In this regard, Moriviví rejects national discourses that exclude the participation of marginalized communities.

One of the main objectives is to empower historically oppressed groups so they can present their perspective on social and political issues through art. One example is Santurce es Ley (Santurce is the Law), the art festival where they presented their work for the first time. The festival is held in El Gandúl, one of the forty *subbarrios* (subneighborhoods) that make up the metropolitan area of Santurce. Located in northwestern San Juan, the community has a long history of discrimination due to poverty, drug trafficking, and violence. The festival has served to dismantle negative stereotypes and recognize the richness of the *barrio* (neighborhood) as a community that has stood out for being home to many Afro-Puerto Rican and mulatto communities that began to settle there in the early twentieth century after the decline of the sugar *haciendas* (sugar plantations). In this way, urban art "provides a sense of control, authority to the

community—to change their own environment in a visible, colorful way—to leave a mark on their neighborhood, to occupy visual space—and learn about teamwork, compromise, and being responsible for one’s own decisions” (Schrader 526).

The collective is usually commissioned by a nonprofit organization that already works with a particular neighborhood. The artists confer directly with the residents about themes for the design and, more important, how the mural could address the community’s social needs. Rodríguez García describes the process of collaborative engagement:

There is an exchange on both sides. Our role is to be facilitators since communities often do not even have access to art, and it is through art that we help them communicate their identity as individuals and as a collective. By integrating the community in the conceptualization, we create a sketch that becomes the final artwork. At the same time, we foster a sense of ownership so that they feel owners of the mural. (González Colón and Rodríguez García)⁹

Likewise, it is common for the community to select the individuals who will be featured in the mural. Often, they are local members of the same neighborhood, which strengthens their feeling of belonging. Therefore, “people identify with the murals because murals tell the story of the people themselves” (Cockcroft, Weber, and Cockcroft 83). In this sense, the artists become allies of a community abandoned by a negligent governmental apparatus. Through muralism, Moriviví guides the community in building self-management, solidarity, and trust mechanisms that allow them to exert control over their surroundings, reconfigure community values, and convey their emotions through art.

Paz para la mujer (2015): Gender-Based Violence and Racism within the National Imaginary

As part of its objective of denouncing political and social biases within the national discourse, Moriviví politicizes female bodies to address social justice issues. The artists pursue this aim by drawing energetic compositions of female bodies unprecedented in Puerto Rican visual arts history. One such example is the 2015 mural *Paz para la mujer (Peace for Women)*, produced in collaboration with the Puerto Rican coalition *Coordinadora Paz para la Mujer (Puerto Rican Coalition for Peace for Women)* in observance of the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women. To make the mural highly visible in a bid to trigger dialogue on gender-based violence, Moriviví painted the mural on the wall of the overpass of the José de Diego Expressway as it crosses over Manuel Fernández Juncos Avenue. This location was critical, as it

is a heavily trafficked area that visually impacts commuters who pass through the site daily. Rodríguez García explains that the mural was developed as part of the activities for a march protesting violence against women:

From the beginning, we decided to avoid clichéd or violent image, as we usually find in advertisements that, with good intentions, seek to eradicate violence but, in a way, provoke violence themselves. Instead, we wanted to portray women in their natural state, naked, as an act of respect for their diversity and authenticity. We believed that if a body cannot be respected in its natural form, it cannot be respected in any way. (González Colón and Rodríguez García)¹⁰

They created a mural depicting a naked woman, appearing twice, who covers her face in a protective gesture, “You can’t see her face, as we didn’t want to give her an identity. We wanted, even if it was a Black female body, that any woman or femme person could identify with her image” (González Colón and Rodríguez García).¹¹ Furthermore, to shatter common assumptions about feminine aesthetics, the collective portrays “women with various skin tones and different hair textures” (González Colón).¹² Therefore, their art undermines white beauty standards. In the mural, monarch butterflies cover both female bodies.

According to the artists, the monarch represents a duality “of being such a delicate insect but so strong at the same time. In addition, it is impressive how the butterflies survive weather changes throughout their journey from Mexico to Canada and can still lay their eggs” (González Colón and Rodríguez García).¹³ The female body on the left stands out for its large size and the dead butterflies on top of it. Contrastingly, in the mural background, the same woman stands out but is replicated in a smaller body facing a forest and surrounded by butterflies fluttering around her. Considering the metaphor of the monarch butterflies’ journey, the artists project the same resilience but this time through a Black woman, who moves from one stage as *víctima* (victim) to another one as *sobreviviente* (survivor). Just as one can be lifeless in a situation of powerlessness, the mural’s butterflies can evoke the transition of the battered Black woman, who survives and reemerges from the trauma of violence.

In this sense, Moriviví’s mural dismantles Puerto Rico’s traditional Hispanophilic and paternalistic discourse. On the one hand, it alludes to the issue of race by depicting a Black female body as the central representation of Puerto Rican women. On the other hand, however, it unveils the crudeness of the crisis of gender-based violence on the island. By taking the debate on racism

and violence to the streets, Moriviví confronts the state and its citizens by visualizing issues that have been disregarded by the national discourse, revisiting the ethnic interpretation fostered by the myth of *la gran familia puertorriqueña*. In an effort to achieve a conciliatory and homogeneous consensus, the traditional discourse highlighted an egalitarian fusion among Europeans, Africans, and Tainos. This homogeneous view neutralized the legacies of colonialism and, thereby, whitened the national identity. Consequently, the national imaginary has comprised a uniform vision of race in which “whiteness becomes the symbol of respectable cultural morality and standards of decency within Puerto Rican society” (Rivero 491). Within this framework, as Afro-Puerto Ricans do not share the aesthetics of superiority imposed by the *criollos* (Creoles), they have been segregated to an inferior class. Hilda Lloréns argues that as a result of this racial whitening, “the reproduction of blackness in Puerto Rico is framed within a complicated and sometimes contradictory web of social practices” (91). While whitening is associated with the advancement of the nation, Blackness evokes otherness, poverty, and violence.

The mural led to an observable rise in racial tensions, sparking a wave of criticism over the images, to such an extent that an anonymous group vandalized the mural by drawing white underwear on the naked Black bodies. Anastasia Valecce asserts that this backlash denotes the viewer’s discomfort at seeing what for centuries has sought to hide “the bodies of women, Black women, abused, raped, used and mistreated by both white men and Black men”. This attempt to neutralize the image to make it more suitable for particular audiences on the island reinforces the artists’ desire to evoke a reaction in the viewer related to racism and national identity.

In this way, the mural becomes a tool that denounces social injustice while reaffirming its provocative intention to confront the viewer with an urgent issue within the national imaginary. Consequently, it fulfills its mission to create tension and provoke a change that disarticulates discourses perpetuated by particular groups that do not represent the reality of the entire nation. In *Toward a People’s Art* (1977), Eva Cockcroft maintains that art plays a real role in a social struggle and changes. The main goals of contemporary muralism do not include the creation of comfortable art. Indeed, many artists want to spark controversy through their work: “The occurrence of conflict around a mural does not usually indicate a failure of the artists or inappropriateness of design. On the contrary, the tensions are already present; the mural only brings them to the surface” (Cockcroft, Weber, and Cockcroft 94).

Therefore, the defacement of *Paz para la mujer* (*Peace for Women*) not only reveals how the nation consumes images of the female body but also reveals its own prejudice and discrimination as well as the double standards perpetuated in the national discourse, especially when the victim is an Afro-Puerto Rican woman. “The implicit message,” Maritza Quiñones Rivera argues, “is that phenotypically, the dark-skinned body is defective, unattractive, undesirable . . . and therefore, a social embarrassment” (164). The whitewashing of the mural evinces not only resistance to naked female bodies but also racism. Moreover, the vandalism acts as a public device for reinforcing racial whitening and, therefore, constrains Black women’s participation in the discussion of gender-based violence.

Kadiri J. Vaquer Fernández, in her article “Los Muros Hablan: Protest and Provocation in Puerto Rican Feminist Muralism” (2020), asserts that the act of censorship contributed to the mural’s visibility, generating “conversations on forms of, and experience with, gender-based violence; they also reflected on masculine visual pleasure, on the social imposition of decency and shame on the feminine body” (165). In this way, the mural manifested various forms of tension while providing mechanisms for resolution, engagement, and cohesion.

As a result, several protests were held in front of the mural, including breastfeeding mothers with their babies and a group of topless women. These demonstrations represent deliberate tactics to not only challenge boundaries of acceptable bodily integrity and demand recognition, gender equality, and acceptance, but also to “publicly embod[y] the violence the mural represented and ma[ke] it their own collective experience” (Vaquer Fernández 164). Ultimately, Moriviví artists decided to keep a portion of the Black women’s vandalized bodies so that people would be confronted with the mural’s mutilation and reflect on it when they walked by. Chachi attests that the mural’s defacement caused great commotion on social networks, and news of it spread across Puerto Rico, leading to swelling protests. They ended up restoring the bodies and installed a set of photos that addressed the censorship of bodies and the protests that had taken place in front of the mural (González Colón).

In 2021 the collective completed a second restoration of the mural to emphasize the urgent need for the government to take clear and forceful measures against the rising incidence of gender violence against women on the island. Of this occasion, Chachi states:

We preserved the facts in our work instead of erasing them. The installation displayed a pixelated bust alongside photographic documentation of the protests in response to what

happened, some of which were half-naked protests. This resulted in “más tetas” (more boobs), something initially censored. The installation deteriorated more than the painting, so we chose to remove it and create a painted version that captured the same concept, although it was not identical. (González Colón)¹⁴

Likewise, some of the dead butterflies were removed to include the names of the victims of femicides in 2021 until November 25 as a commemoration of the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women. This action by the collective not only brought back the issue of the perception of the female body and issues of racism in the national discourse, but above all, it highlighted the increasing numbers of femicides on the island in the aftermath of Hurricane Maria and the lockdowns caused by COVID-19.

***Libre y peligrosa* (2019): Breaking the Walls of Paternalism and Gender Stereotypes**

The 2019 mural *Libre y peligrosa* (*Free and Dangerous*) offers another example of Moriviví's efforts to broaden female participation in the national discourse through the lens of visual arts. It was unveiled at the second Humacao Grita Art Festival (Humacao Shouts Art Festival) held in 2019 in the municipality of Humacao, on Puerto Rico's eastern coast. Like Santurce es Ley (Santurce is the Law), this festival disseminates the work of local and international artists within an urban setting, intending to enhance the lives of the community and its members through muralism. This second edition, led by the local chapter of the international all-female Altrusa Club, highlighted women as the festival's primary focus. Mariolga Vázquez Velázquez, organizer of the festival and member of the Altrusa Club, testifies:

Despite the multiple mural festivals on the island, there was none focused solely on women. So, we invited well-known female artists who responded affirmatively. It is the first exclusively female festival in Puerto Rico, with women as the central theme. All murals in the second edition were created by and for powerful women. (Vázquez Velázquez)¹⁵

Moriviví's mural both highlights the crisis of gender-based violence and demystifies the *la gran familia puertorriqueña* concept of (the great Puerto Rican family) by incorporating the LGBTQ+ experience into the national arena. Through its organic composition, the women in the mural are united through an irreverent stance that confronts the gender stereotypes perpetuated in the national discourse since the nineteenth century. The women in the mural represent a crucible of different depictions of Puerto Rican women within the national imaginary. First, they are not tied to heteronormativity and the passive role imposed on women by the *criollos* (Creoles). They

also represent a new metaphor of the national discourse where women have total control of their bodies; they are empowered by active agency, and celebrate a cultural harmony emphasizing gender and racial diversity. While honoring Black women as the driving force of this liberation, women stand together in a collective shout that shatters heteropatriarchal discourses as their community is made up of cisgender straight, lesbian, and queer women who proclaim their right to actively participate in the national discourse.

The energy of this mural alludes to powerful autonomous communities. Kenneth E. Pigg, in *Three Faces of Empowerment* (2002), asserts that “to empower is to help people realize, appreciate, and use their capabilities and resources to make things happen” (116). By asserting power to others, the community gives its own actions meaning. Empowerment also makes clear that actions based on self-agency lead to collective social actions. In this mural, the act of female empowerment clearly constitutes a form of provocation, a “violation of the norm, an offense to the prevailing order of things” (Vaquer Fernández 158). The mural transgresses the traditional vision of the nation as women redefine the boundaries of its body. They also include ethnic minorities as an indicator of a democratic reformulation of national consciousness. Therefore, the mural assists in breaking down bigotry and builds alliances that diminish pre-existing tensions within the community. This political viability feeds into a climate of transformation.

As an affront to the institutional apparatus, the mural also stands out for its feminist reinterpretation of the musical piece “Mataron a Elena” (Elena has been killed), painted by the legendary artist Rafael Tufiño (1922-2008), one of the Afro-Puerto Rican artists who contributed most significantly to the diversification of the national discourse during the 1950s. Teresa Tió affirms that during that decade:

Tufiño’s pictorial work manages to define itself within a popular or Creole scope, but foreign to the simplistic and folkloric. It is the time of an essentially Puerto Rican figuration, related to the traditional themes of art such as portrait, landscape, and still life, to which we must add urban spaces and interiors. This painting, which stems from the painter’s most intimate experiences, transcends the immediate. Although it constitutes the core of the national ethos, it starts from the particular to refer to the universal sphere. (52)

His very large (15’ x 30’) mural *Las plenas* (1952–1954) cannot be separated from the famous portfolio *Plenas* (1953–55) that he later painted in collaboration with his comrade Lorenzo Homar. This fundamental artwork validates the popular *plena* musical genre as an intrinsic asset

of the national cultural discourse. The *plena* is linked to black communities in southern Puerto Rico during the early twentieth century. According to Luis Manuel Álvarez and Ángel G. Quintero Rivera, it is a responsorial music composed mostly for a male soloist and a choir. It is known as the neighborhood newspaper, as it narrates the struggles of the workers in the sugar plantation industry. Álvarez and Quintero Rivera note, “Its historical link with the popular working class world is reiterated in the protest against injustice and corruption, against what is considered a social outrage, an abuse of power by the employer or the government. The linkage between the *plena* and strikes is evident. Nowadays it is a rare workers’ picket line that is not accompanied by *plenas*” (8).¹⁶

In the portfolio, Tufiño and Homar focused on *plenas* as a vivid portrait of the people’s reality. Each one consisted of six linoleum prints, with a total of twelve prints. All include an image and the title of the *plena* portrayed, along with several lines of the original lyrics and musical notations. The portfolio unifies words, music, and images while describing a diverse representation of the Puerto Rican cultural imaginary of the 1950s. “There are people of every kind: women, men—some are well dressed, others are wearing T-shirts, an ice cream vendor sells his product to the painter’s daughter, and others place the *panderos* [hand-held drum] in the presence of Manuel ‘Canario’ Jimenez, author of some of the *plenas* depicted” (Tió 201).

This cultural diversification can be seen in the vignette *Cortaron a Elena* (Elena was cut) where the spectators come together to witness the tragedy that has befallen Elena, a beautiful young girl who has suffered a brutal assault by a man who cut her face. While two men carry the victim in a chair through a crowd, people continue with their business, ignoring the girl’s misfortune: “In the rural scene, the ice cream vendor does not stop selling his product, a woman stands with an indifferent look, and a child sitting on his father’s shoulders points at the scene while his mother, rosary in hand, gesticulates expressively” (Tió 201).

Similarly, *Libre y peligrosa* (*Free and Dangerous*) utilizes the interplay between images, musical notations, and lyrics to decolonize the female body from the violence Elena has been subjected to. In this way, Moriviví’s mural develops a particular elasticity that suits the collective’s struggle against the criminalization of women as responsible for the physical abuse inflicted on their bodies. Whereas, in Tufiño’s work, the depiction of Elena is passive and voiceless, without any agency, in Moriviví’s work, she operates as a conduit to demand social justice for the victim.

This is accomplished first by portraying activists from the collective Ilé, an all-female organization focused on strengthening an antiracist and decolonizing movement on the island. Furthermore, the mural contains the song lyrics of the *plena* “Libre y peligrosa” (*Free and Dangerous*) composed by Plena Combativa, an all-female music group that since 2017 has inserted itself into the predominantly male world of *plena* to address sociopolitical issues that impact women and the queer communities on the island. They are frequently “critical of Puerto Rico’s colonial status, political corruption, and economic crisis. In one of their most popular songs, ‘Libre y peligrosa’ (*Free and Dangerous*), they underline the danger that free, autonomous women pose to the imperialist white supremacist heteropatriarchy” (Reichard).

On the one hand, Tufiño’s representation focuses on the colorful crowd that surrounds the victim, while the lyrics incorporated in his mural *Cortaron a Elena* (Elena was cut) dwell on the mother’s lament and the young woman’s face:

Her mother was crying
 And, why wouldn’t she!
 It was Elena, her daughter
 Who was at the hospital
 Elena was a very beautiful
 She was the queen of the slum
 And that mean liar
 Cut her precious little face¹⁷

On the other hand, Morivivi’s mural transforms Tufiño’s work by exerting pressure on the national narratives to eradicate gender stereotypes about survivors of gender-based violence. Therefore, the lyrics from “Plena combativa” in Morivivi’s mural call for the full force of the law to be deployed against perpetrators who threaten women’s lives and freedom:

I sing to the macho men who think they are in charge of me
 they are wrong because in my body I am the one who is going to decide
 Free and dangerous
 Free and dangerous I am
 Free and dangerous for those who don’t want me here¹⁸

Therefore, Morivivi’s artwork breaks with the expectations of heteronormative discourse since the female figures portrayed do not correspond to simple conventions of cisgender women

who live co-articulated by the gender dynamics of patriarchal society. Moriviví proposes an alternate cultural imaginary in which women with multiple gender identities cohabit together, surrounded by the company of autonomous communities where they can claim their right over their own bodies and, consequently, transform the culture of power.

Conclusion

As observed throughout this essay, the all-women artist collective Moriviví participates actively in the sociopolitical enterprise of transforming Puerto Rico. This effort has served to rethink how hegemonic power has articulated gender dynamics to reaffirm a national discourse that corresponds to the interests and values of the dominant class. In Puerto Rico, these genealogies are even more complex thanks to the legacy of colonialism. In this sense, the myth of *la gran familia puertorriqueña* has hijacked the national discourse through a sociocultural approach fed by paternalism, Hispanophilia, Catholic conservatism, and homogeneity. This cultural ideology gradually expanded at the present time, locking in gender and racial stereotypes that marginalized minorities, especially women, Afro-Puerto Ricans, and members of the LGBTQ+ community.

In this sense, Moriviví plays a fundamental role in transgressing the homogeneous structures proposed by national discourses. First, artists use muralism as a mechanism for female empowerment and rearticulate art as an expression of autonomous power that gives marginalized communities agency. Second, they decolonize traditional practices that limited women to being mere muses in visual art. Thus, the collective's art affirms that Puerto Rican women artists participate freely in articulating national discourses. As this essay shows, Moriviví proposes new approaches to nation-building in which the population excluded by the *hacendados*' (landowners) paternalistic ethos becomes an active protagonist in the democratic reconfiguration of the national discourse. The collective's evocative artwork symbolizes a rupture with the past to rearticulate a new national consciousness envisioned in opportunities for solidarity, empowerment, and social engagement through art.

Notes

1.- Regarding Puerto Rico's colonial status and its differentiated rights within the American national imaginary, see: Valle, Ariana J. "Race and the empire-state: Puerto Ricans' Unequal US citizenship" (*Sociology of Race and Ethnicity*, vol. 5, no. 1, 2019, pp. 26-40); Malavet, Pedro A. *America's colony: The Political and Cultural Conflict Between the United States and Puerto Rico* (New York U P, 2007); Meléndez, Edgardo. "Citizenship and the Alien Exclusion in the Insular Cases: Puerto Ricans in the Periphery of American Empire" (*Centro Journal*, vol. 25, no. 1, 2013, pp. 106-145); and Duany, Jorge. *The Puerto Rican Nation on the Move: Identities on the Island and in the United States* (U of North Carolina P, 2002). For sources on Puerto Ricans in American eyes and the lack of knowledge about the island's political status, see: Dropp, Kyle and Brendan Nyhan. "Nearly Half of Americans Don't Know Puerto Ricans Are Fellow Citizens" (*The New York Times*. 26 September 2017); Strauss, Valerie. "A New Example of How Little Americans Know About their Own Country" (*The Washington Post*. 28 Sept. 2017); and UAB Institute for Human Rights Blog. "How We've Failed Puerto Rico" (31 Oct. 2017).

2.- In relation to the study of the trajectory of visual art in Puerto Rico, see: Delgado, Osiris. *Puerto Rico: Arte e identidad* (Editorial Universidad de Puerto Rico, 1998). This text examines the most notable artistic representations from the eighteenth century to the early twentieth century. It emphasizes the relationship between national visual arts and the different historical processes in Puerto Rico. Despite the book's outstanding contribution to the field, I still see a need for a critical review of visual arts historiography on the island, extending the study into the twenty-first century and providing greater visibility to women artists' efforts.

3.- "The name came about in a very organic way. We did not plan it. Since we wanted to represent our school in the festival, we needed a name for ourselves. We did some brainstorming, and we did not like any of the names. Feeling oversaturated, we started playing I Spy. We saw a moriviví plant and Sara and I shouted 'Moriviví.' Then, as the years went by, we read about where that name comes from, and we also thought about how all Puerto Rican women like this name because it reminds us of our childhood since everyone on the island has played with the little plant, touching it to see it open and close. We also noticed that it is a compound word that means to die (*morir*) and to live (*vivir*). In addition, we learned that in Taíno mythology, the *Mimosa pudica* plant symbolizes women's reincarnation. Then our name made even more sense." (El nombre surgió de una manera muy orgánica. No lo planificamos. Como queríamos representar nuestra escuela en el festival, necesitábamos un nombre. Hicimos un *brain storm* para un posible nombre y ninguno nos gustaba. Estábamos saturadas de pensar en un nombre y comenzamos a jugar "veo, veo". Sara y yo vimos una planta moriviví y gritamos "Moriviví." Pasando los años, leímos más al respecto, de dónde viene, y también pensamos que a todas las puertorriqueñas les gusta ya que nos recuerda a la infancia. Todo el mundo ha jugado con la plantita tocándola para ver cómo se abre y se cierra. También, pensamos es una palabra compuesta que significa morir y vivir. También aprendimos que, en la mitología taína, la plantita moriviví es la reencarnación de una mujer. Entonces, nuestro nombre tenía aún más sentido.) All further quotes regarding Moriviví are from two interviews that I conducted with them on May 27, 2021, and February 22, 2022. Furthermore, all translations throughout are mine and have been edited by Andrea Rosenberg.

4.- "La política económica colonial permitió, pues el desarrollo de una clase, residente en la isla, que fuese progresivamente dominando el proceso productivo en el país."

5.- On the political and economic development of the Puerto Rican sugar elite and the absence of insular deputies' representation in the Spanish Courts, see: Martínez Soto, Ángel P. "Entre la Corona y la colonia: Los orígenes de la Banca Comercial en Puerto Rico, 1877-1888" (*Revista del*

Centro de Investigaciones Históricas, no. 22, 2013, pp. 173-214), and Collazo Flores, María Margarita. “Vulnerabilidad económica y política de la élite criolla del Puerto Rico del siglo XIX” (*Secuencia*, vol. 29, 1994, pp. 171-190).

6.-“en la última década, el arte urbano ha ido evolucionando a unos niveles insospechados llegando a todo el país.”

7.- Regarding the climatic effects of Hurricane María in relation to the current fiscal economic crisis in Puerto Rico, see: Bonilla, Yarimar, and Marisol Lebrón. *Aftershocks of Disaster: Puerto Rico before and after the Storm* (Haymarket Books, 2019).

8.- El mural quedó increíble siendo una de las paredes más vistas del festival. Gracias a la sinergia que se logró, para el próximo festival, nosotros le otorgamos la pared más grande. Desde entonces, hemos trabajado juntos. Han crecido a otro nivel. Su trabajo cada vez es más limpio, más preciso, más poético y más crítico. (This quote is from an interview that I conducted with Alexis Bousquet on June 3, 2021)

9.- Hay un intercambio de ambas partes. Nuestra función es ser facilitadoras ya que muchas veces las comunidades no tienen acceso ni siquiera al arte y es a través del arte que le ayudamos a comunicar su identidad como individuos y colectivo. Integrando a la comunidad en la conceptualización, creamos un boceto que se convierte en la obra final. A su vez, fomentamos el sentido de pertenencia para que se sientan dueños del mural.

10.- Desde el principio, decidimos evitar clichés y violencia gráfica en nuestro trabajo, como lo solemos ver en los anuncios, que con buena intención intentan erradicar la violencia, pero que de cierta manera provocan la violencia en sí. En cambio, queríamos retratar a la mujer en su estado natural, desnuda, como un acto de respeto hacia su diversidad y autenticidad. Creíamos que, si no se puede respetar un cuerpo en su forma natural, no se puede respetar de ninguna manera.

11.- “No se le ve el rostro, porque no queríamos darle identidad. Queríamos, que aunque fuese una *cuerpa* negra, que cualquier mujer o persona femme se identificara con su imagen.”

12.- “mujeres con diferentes tonos de piel y textura diferente de cabello.”

13.- “de ser un insecto tan delicado, pero a la vez es un ser tan fuerte. Al mismo tiempo, es impresionante cómo las mariposas sobreviven los cambios climáticos en su traslado de México a Canadá y aun así depositar sus huevos.”

14.- Preservamos los hechos en nuestra obra en lugar de borrarlos. La instalación mostraba un pixelado del busto con una documentación fotográfica de las manifestaciones en reacción a lo sucedido, algunas de ellas estaban semidesnudas. Esto resultó en “más tetas,” algo inicialmente censurado. La instalación se deterioró más que la pintura, así que optamos por eliminarla y crear una versión pintada que captara el mismo concepto, aunque no fuese idéntica.

15.- A pesar de los múltiples festivales de murales en la isla, no existía uno centrado en mujeres. Así que invitamos a artistas conocidas que respondieron afirmativamente. Es el primer festival en Puerto Rico exclusivamente femenino, con la mujer como tema central. Todos los murales de la segunda edición fueron creados por y para mujeres ponderosas. This quote is from an interview that I conducted with Mariolga Vázquez Velázquez on August 6, 2021.

16.- “Su histórica vinculación con el mundo obrero popular se reitera en la protesta contra la injusticia y la corrupción, contra lo que se considera un ultraje social, un abuso de poder del patrono, o del gobierno. La vinculación de la plena con las huelgas es evidente. Hoy en día es raro el piquete obrero que no esté acompañado de plenas.”

17.- Su madre lloraba / Y ¡y cómo no iba a llorar! / Si era Elena su hija / La que estaba en el hospital / Elena era preciosa, / Era la reina del arrabal / Y aquel malvado embustero / Su carita vino a marcar.

18.- Yo le canto a los macharranes que creen que mandan en mí / están equivocados porque en mi cuerpo soy yo que va a decidir/ Libre y peligrosa / Libre y peligrosa soy yo/ Libre y peligrosa pal' que no me quiere aquí.

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The Seeing I: Queer Desire in Rosario Ferré’s “When Women Love Men”

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Abstract: This essay analyzes how Rosario Ferré’s short story “When Women Love Men” (1972) challenges the division between self and other, desire and rejection, and fiction and real life. I engage in a close reading of the narrative double “I” presented in the characters of Isabel la Negra, a historical figure who was a prominent, yet controversial Black business owner from Ponce, Puerto Rico and Isabel Luberza, a fictional character who comes from the white, Eurocentric upper-class sugar aristocracy. I argue that a form of queer desire emerges in the racialized division of each character, as they are presented and described in the short story. Isabel la Negra is excessively sensual, sexual, and feminine, and these characteristics are emphasized in the racialized description of her body. Isabel Luberza is obsessively domestic, desexualized, and subservient to the mandates of her social class. Paradoxically, the narrative emphasis on the racialized dichotomy established between Isabel la Negra and Isabel Luberza opens a space in which each woman’s physical body becomes de-essentialized through the linguistic convergence of each narrative voice. This decentralization of the body engenders a space of queer desire and identification. It is in this space of desire that the two women challenge the patriarchal structure of Puerto Rican society in the mid-Twenty century by becoming business partners and owners of an upscale brothel and by narratively merging into one, thereby challenging the strict division among class, race, and gender.

Keywords: Patriarchy, racialization, queer desire, narrative doubles, Rosario Ferré.

Resumen: Este ensayo analiza cómo el cuento “Cuando las mujeres quieren a los hombres” (1972) de Rosario Ferré desafía la división entre uno mismo y el otro, el deseo y el rechazo, y la ficción y la vida real. Empleo una lectura minuciosa del doble yo narrativo presentado en los personajes de Isabel la Negra, una mujer negra histórica que fue una prominente pero controvertida propietaria de negocios de Ponce, Puerto Rico, e Isabel Luberza, un personaje ficticio que proviene de la aristocracia azucarera blanca y eurocéntrica de clase alta. Sostengo que una forma de deseo queer emerge en la división racializada de cada personaje, tal como se presentan y describen en el cuento. Isabel la Negra es excesivamente sensual, sexual y femenina, y estas características se enfatizan en la descripción racializada de su cuerpo. Isabel Luberza es obsesivamente doméstica, desexualizada y subordinada a los mandatos de su clase social. Paradójicamente, el énfasis narrativo en la dicotomía racializada establecida entre Isabel la Negra e Isabel Luberza abre un espacio en el que el cuerpo físico de cada mujer se desesencializa a través de la convergencia lingüística de cada voz narrativa. Esta descentralización del cuerpo engendra un espacio de deseo e identificación queer. Es en este espacio de deseo que las dos mujeres desafían la estructura patriarcal de la sociedad puertorriqueña de mediados del siglo XX al convertirse en socias comerciales y propietarias de un burdel de lujo y al fusionarse narrativamente en uno, desafiando la estricta división entre clase, raza y género.

Palabras clave: Patriarcado, racialización, deseo queer, el doble narrativo, Rosario Ferré.

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Identity, Narrative Doubling, and Queer Desire

The mobilization of identity politics requires organizing around various categories of identity in order to respond to particular-r social and historical situations. The Young Lords fought for Puerto Rican self-determination from 1968-1973. Since 1985, the anonymous collective The Guerrilla Girls have protested the representation and misrepresentation of women in the world of visual arts. In 2019, the Chilean collective LASTESIS employed a trans-inclusive and intersectional approach to their global protest anthem “A Rapist in Your Path” to denounce institutionalized sexual violence. And, as recently as 2022, Miari Taina Stephens has explored how Black feminist collectives, such as La Colectiva Feminista en Construcción (The Feminist Collective in Construction) and:

Various anti-racists, feminist organizations, and projects – including magazines (*Revista Étnica*), health centers (Taller Salud), news outlets (TodasPR), sex-positive online projects (Con el verbo en la piel, Con.Sentimientos PR), antiracist community organizations (Colectivo Ilé), and anti-violence organizations (Coordinadora Paz para las Mujeres) – have distinct projects and missions, yet work together toward a common goal of decolonial futures. (152)

A powerful element enacted by these various groups is how they mobilize the intersections of multiple identities to respond to different experiences of oppression, marginalization, and subjugation. Scholars including Kimberlé Crenshaw, Peggy Phelan, and Chandra Mohanty highlight the need for an intersectional approach to understanding identity and the various effects of marginalization experienced by different minoritized groups. Focusing specifically on Latin American feminist thought, the scholars Yuderkys Espinosa-Miñoso, Maria Lugones, and Ochy Curiel emphasize the effects of colonization, racialization, and the subjugation women, particularly Indigenous and Afro-descendant women in Latin America. The foregrounding of this intersectional approach in raising social consciousness is a strategy that goes beyond political activist groups, and can be seen in works of visual art, film, and literature.

The present analysis considers how the two characters, Isabel Luberza and Isabel la Negra, navigate a multiplicity of identities imposed upon them by a patriarchal society in the short story “Cuando las mujeres quieren a los hombres” (When Women Love Men; 1972) by Rosario Ferré (1938-2016). This story situates the two Isabels as part of a social and amorous triangle completed by Ambrosio, Isabel Luberza’s husband and Isabel la Negra’s paramour. Upon Ambrosio’s death,

he leaves half of his estate to his wife Isabel Luberza and the other half to his lover Isabel la Negra. The marital home of Isabel Luberza and Ambrosio becomes a brothel, run by female protagonists of the short story.

While Isabel Luberza and Ambrosio are fictional characters, Isabel la Negra was a real woman from Ponce, Puerto Rico named Isabel Luberza Oppenheimer (1901-1974). She ran a successful brothel in Ponce and became a powerful member of society, in terms of economic and social status. She appears in several fictionalized versions of her own life, such as *Nuestra Señora de la noche* by Mayra Santos-Febres (2006), “La última plena que bailó Luberza” by Manuel Ramos Otero (1979). It is notable that the fictional Isabel, a wealthy white woman from the decaying sugar aristocracy, holds the last name of the living Isabel Luberza Oppenheimer. Herein, Ferré enacts a narrative disembodiment in the fictionalization of Isabel la Negra (the historical person) and using her real last name for the fictional Isabel Luberza. This narrative turn demonstrates an important instance of the decoupling of the self from the body and of divisions between reality and fiction.

The narrative employs a double narrative “I” as the text shifts voices and perspectives with little warning to the reader. This double narrative “I” reveals the issues of race, class, gender, and desire that are at play in this short story. It is only through a careful consideration of these multiple identities that one can move beyond the subjugated position of women and understand the larger social and political implications of this text. Many scholars note the problematic and stereotypical representation of femininity and especially of Black femininity in this short story. I argue in this essay that through the intersection of racialized identities and queer desire the women in this narrative upset gender hierarchies in the rigidly structured patriarchy of Puerto Rican society. This stereotyped racial dichotomy questions sexual binaries based upon a coupling of masculinity with male identified bodies and femininity with female identified bodies. It is specifically by de-essentializing corporeality that the two Isabels enact a queering of the space of bodily identification.

Theoretical Framework

In order to situate this argument theoretically, it is necessary to briefly consider how intersections of race, class, and gender conspire to form the subject positions of the two Isabels. This essay applies and incorporates the theoretical framework of intersectionality as described by Kimberlé Crenshaw to the subject positions of both Isabels. Crenshaw points out that identity

categories are treated as vestiges of bias or domination, but that the real problem with identity politics is not that it fails to transcend difference, rather that it conflates or ignores intra-group differences, and ignoring these differences, according to Crenshaw, creates tension among groups (1242). As I will demonstrate, in “When Women Love Men” the differences between the two Isabels creates a friction that ignites a flame which leads to the corporeal dissolution between the two characters, fusing them into one.

Furthermore, the political and historical context of Puerto Rico as a colonial project is intrinsically important when considering the subject positions of the two Isabels, as sexuality, class, and gender are tied to the colonial legacies of Puerto Rico. In her analysis of Ferré’s writing, Vania Barraza Toledo highlights the critical breadth of Ferré’s work, stating that it goes beyond the representation of womanhood in Puerto Rico and “allows for boarder readings, such as those related to postcolonial, postmodern, deconstructionist and/or subaltern debates” (67).¹ Addressing the broader colonial projects of Latin America and the Caribbean, Curiel Ochy and Ruth Pión note “nation-states...imposed the idea of a nationalism that was only the reflection of the ideology of the elites: racist, patriarchal, segregationist, and classist. This ideology relies on the economic, social, and political exclusion of Indigenous and Afro-descendant populations” (487). In agreement with Rosalía Cornejo-Parriego, it is important to underscore how colonial ventures sublimate hierarchies of masculine/feminine to those of class and color. She argues that within pigmentocracy--the classification of hierarchies of power based on skin color that developed in projects of colonialism-- “...the racial component becomes the main defining factor of the relationships between the colonizer and the colonized, and rends the creation of female bonds based on sex difficult or impossible” (Cornejo-Parriego 116). As such, I argue that a reading of Ferré’s work requires an analysis of queer desire within the intersections of race, class, and gender. In this essay, I will integrate a reading of Judith Halberstam’s works *Female Masculinity* and *In a Queer Time and Place*, which allows the reader to consider the function of queer desire within this story and highlights how the problematically stereotyped racialization of Isabel la Negra challenges categorizations of masculinity, femininity, corporeality, and power.

It is necessary to consider how matrices of power project identification upon bodies, so that bodies are not identified, but rather in a constant negotiation with power and identification. I focus my analysis on understanding how the bodies of these two women move through matrices of power and identifying the forces that construct these matrices of power. The notion of matrices

of power is informed by Pierre Bourdieu's conceptualization of fields, which are, as described by Monique Nuijten:

The locus of relations of force and not only of meaning. Every field has its own logic rules and regularities which are not explicit, and which make it resemble the playing of games...In Bourdieu's field, agents and institutions constantly struggle, according to the regularities and the rules constitutive of this space to appropriate the specific products at stake in the game. (3)

Judith Halberstam articulates this notion within the field of queer theory and connects it to understandings of space, noting, "in queer renderings of postmodern geography, the notion of a body-centered identity gives way to a model that locates sexual subjectivities within and between embodiment, place, and practice" (*In a Queer Time and Place* 5). By interrogating the multiplicity of power structures that shape and identify the body, it is possible to pluralize issues of identification beyond the binary of normative versus non-normative and to consider the variety of factors which shape identification.

Sexuality, Recognition, and Desiring Women

An element of "When Women Love Men" that remains critically unexplored is the desire that emerges between the two Isabels. Cornejo-Parriego situates this desire within a psychoanalytic analysis of the desire for the Other, stating, "Ferré's narrative is the story of an obsession with the body of the Other, which both women can only imagine, since they have never met" (116). It is a desire for the Other brought on by obsession. However, few scholars have considered the queer desire that develops between the two Isabels. My use of the term queer in relationship to desire engages Diego Falconí Trávez, Santiago Castellanos, and María Amelia Viteri's conceptualization of queerness to expand the possibilities of desire and identification between the two Isabels. For the present analysis and in agreement with the authors, "lo *queer* funciona como una forma de ubicarse en los debates sobre sexualidades y género, para observar sus 'márgenes', normas y hegemonías..." (queerness functions as a way of becoming situated in debates about sexualities and gender, to observe its margins, norms and hegemonies...) (10). As such, I analyze the role of queer desire as it develops through and against the two Isabels, as they navigate and challenge entrenched structures of power.

The racialization of both bodies disentangles corporeality from femininity, instead pushing each character beyond a simplified embodiment of femininity, as represented through the sexuality

of each Isabel. Specifically, Isabel Luberza's performance of whiteness leads to desexualization, while the imposition of blackness onto Isabel la Negra's body sexualizes her into a space in which she is able, with the tacit agreement of the patriarchal structures of society, to embody a powerful female masculinity. Furthermore, class positions, specifically Isabel la Negra's desire to ascend socially, and Isabel Luberza's desire to live outside of the bonds of expected social behavior for a woman of her class also engender queer desire.

Isabel la Negra's sexuality is described in the text as empowering, to the point that she is positioned as an agent of masculinity. It is important to signal, however, that both masculinity and femininity are not essential to biology, but rather social constructs assigned to bodies. In *Female Masculinities*, Judith Halberstam notes,

...Far from being an imitation of maleness, female masculinity actually affords us a glimpse of how masculinity is constructed as masculinity. In other words, female masculinities are framed as the rejected scraps of dominant masculinity in order that male masculinity may appear to be the real thing. But what we understand as heroic masculinity has been produced by and across male and female bodies. (1-2)

Halberstam's articulation of female masculinity is apt for considering Isabel la Negra's subject position. Comparing herself to the young women her clients take as wives, Isabel la Negra states: "... because they couldn't have learned to do any of this with good girls ...they wouldn't have felt themselves to be machos, because the macho must always take the initiative, but someone must show them the first time and that is why they go to Isabel la Negra" (Ferré 264). This quote positions Isabel la Negra as one who initiates men into masculinity, and as one who occupies a role of masculine power. This is not to ignore however, Isabel la Negra's subjugation to Ambrosio. It demonstrates how, despite being bound by regulatory norms of patriarchal power, Isabel la Negra is able to position herself not as subjugated, but rather as an agent in her own social empowerment. Important for the present study is Halberstam's contention that traditional understandings of masculinity are intrinsically tied to race. Halberstam states, "...many other lines of identification traverse the terrain of masculinity, dividing its power into complicated differentials of class, race, sexuality, and gender...masculinity...becomes legible as masculinity where and when it leaves the white male middle-class body" (*Female Masculinity* 2). It is through Isabel la Negra's stereotyped and sexualized body that one can begin a productive queer reading into the social and political function of Isabel la Negra's corporeality.

While Isabel la Negra occupies a space of masculinity, Isabel Luberza, through her whiteness, becomes desexualized, and only recuperates her sexuality through the gaze of Isabel la Negra. White femininity is desexualized as demonstrated by Isabel la Negra's statement quoted above, but also any mention that Isabel Luberza makes to sexuality is in reference to Isabel la Negra. When describing how she imagines Isabel la Negra to look, she states, "...I imagined her to be bewitchingly beautiful, her skin so absolutely black as mine was white, ...I imagined her teeth, large and strong...hidden behind her thick lips, reluctant to show themselves unless it were a lightning of authentic happiness..." (267). It is important to signal, however, that Luberza's identification of Isabel la Negra's sexuality is couched upon their racial difference, as highlighted in the oppositional description of blackness and whiteness in the quote above.

The two Isabels begin to identify with one another, and importantly, the desire for one another resides in a particular desire for recognition. Isabel Luberza, speaking to her dead husband Ambrosio states: "...you had been manipulating us so that we began to merge, so that we began to fade into each other like an old picture lovingly placed under its negative, like that other distressed face we carry deep down, that one day will surface when we stand in front of that mirror someone removed from the wall" (258). Isabel Luberza also highlights how each woman's passion for Ambrosio as wife and lover causes the two women to grow so close that said passion "...had been blessing each other without realizing it, purifying ourselves of everything that defined us, one as a prostitute and the other as a lady. So that in the end, when one of us won over the other, it was our most sublime act of love" (258).

A moment of paralleling the two characters demonstrates the importance of recognition, specifically the physical attraction each Isabel shows for the other Isabel's us: "She was still so beautiful that I had to lower my eyes, I almost didn't dare look at her. I felt the desire to kiss her eyelids...I thought of how much I would have liked to lick them to feel them tremble, transparent and slippery over the balls of her eyes" (Ferré 262-263). Similarly, when Luberza narrates the encounter of their meeting for the first time, she states, "she was exactly as I had imagined her. I felt an irresistible desire to kiss her thick eyelids, half-closed over those soft pupils without luster, to press tenderly the balls of her eyes with the tips of my fingers" (268). This moment highlights not only a transgressive sexuality, as eyeball licking is usually out of the repertoire for acceptable expressions of affection, but also because desire is projected onto the eye, a primary tool for recognition. Furthermore, the significance of desire for the Other, as enacted through desire for the

eye is represented not through language, but through seeing. In agreement with Linda Craig, the text demonstrates “that which is beyond phallogocentric subjectivity,” signaling that “...on meeting, the women do not exchange a word, the patriarchal logos would appear to be inappropriate” (245). This moment is significant because it decenters the position of language, and rather the women seek recognition and definition in the gaze towards and of the Other.

However, this does not imply that the gaze is not racialized; on the contrary, Isabel Luberza’s reading of Isabel la Negra’s body is still racialized and racializing. When Isabel la Negra comes to Isabel Luberza’s house offering to buy her half of Ambrosio’s bequeathment, Isabel Luberza reveals “...I almost felt a desire to forgive her, thinking of how I had loved you. But then she began to sway her hips in my face, balancing herself back and forth on her red heels, her hand on her waist and her elbow extended to leave uncovered the smelly hole of her armpit” (268). Not only does Isabel Luberza’s gaze mark Isabel la Negra’s body with blackness, but it also continues to highlight her sensuality, through the description of the curves of her body and her stance. Even as the two characters merge into one, features of race are still highlighted.

This desire for visual recognition emphasizes not only the physical differences between the two Isabels, but paradoxically, the similarity of the desire projected upon the Other initiates the process of blending the two characters into one. The end of the story highlights the significance of visual recognition and the two characters becoming one:

Now I approach her because I want to see her face to face, see her the way she really is, her hair no longer a cloud of smoke, rebelling around her head, but thin and ductile, wrapped like an antique chain around her neck, her skin no longer black, but white, spilled over her shoulders like burning lime milk, without the least suspicion of a colored leap, swaying myself now back and forth on my red heels, through which come down, slow and silent like a tide, that blood that was rising from the base of my fingernails from so long ago, my blood soaked with Cherries Jubilee. (Ferré 268-269)

This final quote takes identity markers from each character and blends them into one. The queer desire for recognition hinges upon de-essentialized corporeality, which occurs through the discursive binding of the two characters. In the quote above it is evident that the narrative blending of characters through various shifts in subject position. For example, the narrative vacillates between a first person and third person perspective, evidenced through the varying use of “she” and “I”, which destabilizes the readers identification and distinction between one Isabel and the

other in a single sentence. This shift is evidenced in the following quote: “When Isabel Luberza opened the door, Isabel la Negra felt her knees weaken. She was still so beautiful that I had to lower my eyes, I almost didn’t dare look at her” (Ferré 263). The third-person narrator’s presentation of both Isabels presents the opportunity of either being the subject of the following description. The shift to “I” jars the reader and destabilizes their confidence in the narrative perspective. As such, the reader too experiences a form of corporeal displacement, an uncanny inability to recognize the other. This perspective plays in to the de-essentializing of the body throughout the text and is significant when considering the matrices of power that shape identity. When the two characters fuse into one, the forces that shape identification, such as racialization, socioeconomic factors, gendering, and sexualization are further complicated, as these factors modulate or change depending on what body (who) is moving through coded spaces. As such, when the presence of identifiable bodies is no longer foregrounded through the individuation of diametrically opposed characters, productive queer readings of the text begin to emerge. Furthermore, the queer desire that develops between the two characters causes a shift in heteronormative conceptions of time and space, as articulated by Judith Halberstam.

The Isabels’ Queer Time and Space

Judith Halberstam’s *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* (2005) analyzes how queer uses of time and space develop in opposition to heterosexual and reproductive notions of time and space. Halberstam proposes that time and space are gendered, and through this gendering are made normative and regulated by certain majority groups. In the context of “When Women Love Men,” this group is the decaying sugar monopoly controlled by white, heterosexual, cisgender Catholic men. As demonstrated in Ferré’s short story, time and space are also racialized and conditioned by socioeconomic factors. In opposition to heteronormative time and space, Halberstam proposes a queer understanding of time and space, defined as: “Queer Time represents specific models of temporality that emerge with in postmodernity once one leaves the temporal frames of bourgeois reproduction and family, longevity, risk/safety and inheritance,” (Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place* 6) while Queer Space designates the place-making practices in post modernity in which queer people engage and queer counterpublics enable a new understanding of space (Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place* 6).

One can see how traditionally gendered space becomes queered in Ferré's work, while still representing a problematically racialized embodiment. However, the blending of the two Isabels questions hierarchies of power that are regulated by normativizing social protocols. Within the narrative, there are many spaces that are regulated and surveilled. Particularly important is the space of the house, which is bequeathed in equal parts to Isabel Luberza and Isabel la Negra upon Ambrosio's death. It is through the sharing of property that the heteronormative space of the home is transformed. The domestic space of the home is converted into a high-end brothel catering to wealthy clients. The manipulation of the traditional function of the home also undoes socioeconomic strictures regarding acceptability of uses of space, as brothels are traditionally marginalized spaces, paradoxically on the edge of bourgeois visibility and intelligibility, while catering to said group. Isabel la Negra reveals the primary patrons of her brothel as "those friends of yours [Ambrosio's] that entered my shack every night...famished in front of the banquet of my body" (Ferré 258). In the narrative, Isabel la Negra muses on the privileged space of the house, noting, "sitting on the balcony of this house that will belong to both of us, to Isabel Luberza and to Isabel la Negra, of this house that will now become part of the same legend, the legend of the prostitute and the lady. Sitting on the balcony of my new brothel without anyone suspecting..." (Ferré 260). This quote is significant for various reasons. It demonstrates the narrative conversion of the house into brothel through the repetition of the structure "sitting on the balcony of..." (Ferré 260) It also indicates a space of futurity through the introduction of a "legend" (Ferré 260) surrounding the two Isabels. This section of the text also re-introduces to the house the trope of the mask, describing "the balustrade of long silver amphoras now painted shocking pink, aligned in front of me like happy phalluses, the white plaster garlands adhered to the façade, that gave the house that romantic air and feeling of excessive respectability..." (Ferré 260). This description highlights not only the façade of the structure, but also the beginning changes that transform the house from bourgeois respectability to a profitable brothel, specifically the bright colors and the description of the amphoras as "phalluses."

There are other gendered spaces in the text, specifically Isabel la Negra's brothel. However, this is also a space controlled by Ambrosio and does not represent a space of independence for Isabel la Negra. Furthermore, the brothel exists as both a public and private space. While both spaces are "gendered" female, this does not necessarily reinforce the binary of public space as masculine, and private space as feminine. Cornejo-Parriego argues "against what traditional

feminist analysis maintain, *public* and *private* do not equal male and female in Ferré’s story, since the black woman occupies the *masculine* position” (119, emphasis in original). Ferré’s story, while representing traditionally female-gendered spaces, questions the dichotomy between private and public spaces, undoing the division by blending the two characters into one and by merging the space of domesticity (the private home) with the space of business (the brothel).

It is important to consider how heteronormative conceptualizations of time are upended in this short story, and how these conceptualizations are tied to the spaces represented in the narrative. Regarding heteronormative time, Halberstam notes “the time of reproduction is ruled by a biological clock for women and by strict bourgeois rules of respectability and scheduling for married couples” (Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place* 5). Notably, within Ferré’s text, neither female-gendered space is in accord with the strictures of heteronormative time. Specifically, Isabel Luberza’s domestic space is not regulated by family time, because, within the timeframe of the narrative at least, there are no signs of reproduction. The heteronormative space of domesticity is not accompanied by a bourgeois logic of time, because the couple is childless. As such, the space of domesticity is rendered infertile, despite Isabel Luberza’s attempts to win her husband back through obsessive and excessive attention to domestic chores. This space can be tenuously read as queer, as it is not structured by family time. Ambrosio, who seeks sexual gratification outside of the space and time of domesticity, propagates the infertility of the domestic space. This is not to ignore, however, the patriarchal power imposed upon the space and the body of Isabel Luberza. It is, however, a space rendered queer after Ambrosio’s death. The narrative blending of both the protagonists and the protagonist’s spaces challenge heteronormative conceptualizations of embodiment and space/time.

The space of Isabel la Negra’s brothel can be identified as existing within queer time, as it goes against long periods of stability which are considered desirable by Western subjects, and rather promotes life in rapid bursts, which reveal the artificiality of our privileged constructions of time and activity (Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place* 4-5). However, Isabel la Negra’s brothel is also controlled by Ambrosio, as evidenced in the text by Isabel la Negra’s statement “Entering the house I couldn’t help but think of you, Ambrosio, of how you had me locked up for so many years in that shack of planks with a zinc room...” (263). It is only upon the blending of the two spaces into one that engenders queer space and time. The form of the domestic house and the function of the brothel become one, which is under the control of the two Isabels who merge into

one. As such, it is not only de-essentialized corporeality but also de-essentialized space that queer the subject positions of the two Isabels, rendered into one.

The narrative structure of the short story also engenders a queer reading, specifically because language is destabilized through a non-linear narrative, incongruous and confused narrators, and long sections of descriptive parallels that do not necessarily move the plot forward. The short story blurs recognition amongst the narratives of Isabel Luberza, Isabel la Negra, and the intermittent third person narrator. At times it is difficult to discern who is speaking, and the progressive evolution of each character's discourse furthers this complication. For example, Isabel Luberza's careful, affected discourse changes to direct, quasi-obscene discourse when she describes her interpretation of Ambrosio's encounters with Isabel la Negra. After describing her process of self-inflicted mortification, she states, "I imagined her then in the cot with you, adopting the most vile positions, letting herself be teased all over, lettering herself be fucked in front and from behind...letting you do things to her a proper lady would never allow" (Ferré 268). Furthermore, as demonstrated in the passages describing the desire for each other's eye, the descriptions of the two characters blend together, owing to narrative similarity. The similarity of descriptions of the two characters at the end of the short story demonstrates how the two Isabels merge into one, and effectively queer identification and imposed identities.

Corporeality and the Presence/Absence of the Body

A necessary departure for an analysis of "When Women Love Men" is the role of corporeality, or the presence and absence of the body. The representation of the body in this short story is essentialized and stereotyped, especially when considering how Isabel la Negra's body is racialized. However, in the totality of the story, her body becomes de-essentialized through the blending of the two Isabels into one. The story narrates the death of Ambrosio, a wealthy sugar magnate from Puerto Rico, who, upon his death, divides his estate between his wife, Isabel Luberza, and his mistress, Isabel la Negra. The narrative describes the two Isabels' obsession with one another, their eventual accord to work together, converting Luberza's stately house into a brothel, and their subsequent convergence as one character at the end of the narrative. The merging of the two characters throughout the text occurs both discursively and physically, and this textual and physical erasure of individual subjectivity de-essentializes the body of both Isabel Luberza and Isabel la Negra. Herein lies the paradox of the simultaneous presence and absence of the body in Ferré's short story: while Ferré's discursive emphasis of the corporeality of each woman

highlights physical presence, the narrative blending of the two women decenters their subjectivity and begets a sense of absence.

The text also emphasizes the racialization and feminization of both bodies. Throughout the story, each woman is situated in their femaleness, according to patriarchal standards; however, the processes of racialization condition their position as women. Furthermore, this racialized conditioning is enacted by specific uses of space. For example, Isabel Luberza exists within a realm of prescribed domesticity, trapped in her house. The knowledge that her husband Ambrosio has a lover drives her to express her sexuality in one of two extremes. Her first attempt to reclaim her husband's fidelity is through overly careful domestic chores, employing "...that ancient wisdom I had inherited from my mother and my mother from her mother. I began placing your napkin in a silver ring next to your plate, sprinkling drops of lemon juice in your water goblet...but everything was fruitless" (Ferré 266). When resorting to exaggerated domesticity does not entice Ambrosio's return to the marital home, she instead focuses her attention on Isabel la Negra, and begins, in the tradition of Catholic nuns such as Teresa de Ávila (1515-1582), Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz (1648-1695), and Teresa de Jesús de los Andes (1900-1920), to mortify herself to repent for Isabel la Negra's sins. Isabel Luberza states:

I, loving her more and more, began mortifying my flesh, at first with small and insignificant actions, to make her return to the good path. I began leaving the last teaspoon of meringue on my plate, to run a belt over my raw skin, to close my umbrella when I went walking through the streets so that my skin would be scorched by the sun. The skin that I had always protected with long sleeves and high collars because it is credible proof of my pedigree, evidence that in my family we are white on all four sides... (267).

These two strategies of obsessive domesticity and self-induced physical suffering demonstrate Isabel Luberza's relationship to corporeality as she interacts with her husband and with Isabel la Negra. Her prescribed role as a chaste, non-sexual woman negates any corporeal expression of desire for her husband. It is only in relation to Isabel la Negra that Isabel Luberza can express a corporeal, embodied form of desire.

The scenes of mortification demonstrate, as noted by the scholar Isabel Balseiro, Isabel Luberza's desired identification with the racialized Other. Balseiro notes that in the scene describing the intentional sunburning of her own skin, "in addition to renouncing the role of society lady, Isabel Luberza craves something her class deems most degrading: the skin color of the other

Isabel” (7). Significantly, this scene demonstrates the intersections of race, class, and femininity. Not only does the tanning of her skin bring her, at least visually, closer to the desired Isabel, this act also goes against the class and gender conventions of her day. Particularly transgressive is the exposure of Luberza’s skin, which Isabel la Negra previously describes as “...that body which nobody had ever seen exposed to this day in the smallest sliver of her white buttocks, the most tenuous shavings of her white breasts, her chaste skin that had protected her flesh...” (261). Significantly, as Isabel la Negra describes Isabel Luberza’s physicality she blurs the distinction between black and white skin describing Isabel Luberza’s body as “...naked and tintured in black, her sex covered by a small triangle of amethysts, including one the bishop had worn on his finger, her nipples trapped in nests of diamonds, fat and round like chickpeas...” (261). This description reveals a trope used throughout the story and more generally in Ferré’s *oeuvre*, the double and the mask. Linda Craig highlights that throughout the text, there is no one authentic identity, and that rather, describing Luberza “neither her whiteness nor her blackness is authentic, it is merely a play of masks” (241).

Conclusions: Ferré’s Problematic Representation of Black Femininity

While there is productive power in Ferré’s representation of both characters’ femininity in the short story, it is necessary to scrutinize the stereotypical, hyperbolic sexuality projected upon Isabel la Negra. As perpetrated by the narrative voice of the text and from the perspective imbued by the author in both characters’ perspectives, Isabel la Negra specifically is painted with the palate of a reductive, stereotypical vision of sexuality that has been historically ascribed to Black women. Both Cornejo-Parriego and Balseiro critique the hypersexualized representation of Isabel la Negra. While it is novel that Rosario Ferré represents an unbridled female sexuality, it is routinely questioned why she chose to embody this sexuality within a stereotyped version of Black femininity. Balseiro notes, “while deconstructing a one-sided portrait of Isabel la Negra as prostitute and pariah, Ferré retains the myth of the black woman as a source of sensuality” (6). Cornejo-Parriego and Balseiro have noted that Rosario Ferré’s subject position as a wealthy, upper class white Puerto Rican may shape and influence her rendering of Isabel la Negra. In an expository narrative describing the writing of this short story, the author herself notes “I’d heard of Isabel la Negra when I was a teenager in the late 1950s, and my memory of her remains connected to the mysteries of sexuality...I felt no admiration for Isabel at the time, but I do remember feeling a great deal of curiosity about her” (Ferré 149). Cornejo-Parriego signals that

“...the existence in the story of elements of sexual buy not racial subversion makes us wonder...in short, if the author’s own white location or subject position des not interfere with her writing” (118). Describing the dichotomy of sensuality and frigidity represented in the two Isabels, Balseiro notes:

In her depiction of Isabel la Negra, Ferré presents one of the ideological paradoxes of racial discourse. Isabel la Negra, because of her color, is perceived as a sex goddess whose erotic power...in this way, the story reaffirms stereotypical representations of the intersections of race and sexuality, casting the black woman as the uninhibited erotic temptress who unleashes the repressed sexual desires of others. (6)

Within the story, Isabel la Negra occupies a tenuous position between exploitation and power, in which she dominates men, but at the same time is subscribed to the structures of patriarchy. For example, she situates herself as a subject in power in her relationships with other men, wanting “...to show them that real women are not sacks that are left impaled against the bed, that the most macho man is not the one that allures the woman but has the courage to let himself be allured...” (263-264). This marks a significant moment in the text and in Puerto Rican literature more generally, as it is a defining moment of upheaval for women and their sexuality and explicitly questions the role of woman as a sexually passive being. Problematically, however, this contestation is inscribed upon the body of a stereotypically racialized female subject. In the text, Isabel la Negra is compared to Tongolele and Salomé, “her multitudinous cunt and her monumental ass, spreading misfortune on all the walls, through the streets, this confusion between her and her, or between her and me, or between me and me, because as time passed, from loving her so much, from hating her so much, it became more difficult for me to tell the story, it became harder to differentiate between the two” (260). While this quote furthers the exaggerated representations of sex and sexuality, it also demonstrates the de-essentializing of corporeality, as the two differentiated bodies begin to merge. This discursive and physical union of the two Isabels is central to my analysis, as it demonstrates how these two women who become one upset gender hierarchies through the convergence of their racialized, sexualized, and gendered subject positions.

Herein lies the significance of a queer reading of “When Women Love Men.” First, within the frame of Ferré’s narrative, queerness destabilizes other entrenched categories of identity and the notion of a stable and uniform subjectivity or self. Second, a queer reading of Ferré’s double narrative “I” shifts the primacy of identity and identification onto the experiential axis of

subjecthood in process. This narrative strategy challenges not only the stability of subjecthood as it is rendered in the short story, but also the reader's desire and capacity to uniformly shape each Isabel as a discrete whole. Through this narrative disruption, the reader also experiences the unsteady ground upon which processes of identification lay.

Finally, by challenging normative conceptualizations of time and space through Halberstam's framework of queer time and space, a frame of analysis opens for understanding how the two Isabels inhabit, challenge, and disrupt the established social norms and expectations placed upon women through centuries of colonization and imperialism in the Puerto Rican archipelago. While "When Women Love Men" problematically represents and imposes racialized identities upon the characters, reading how these imposed identifications uncouple bodies from gendered subject positions allows for a queer reading which opens a space for disidentification. This disidentification with racialized and gendered subject positions depends upon the de-essentializing of the body, and perhaps problematically, de-essentializing the body requires erasure of fixed and finite subject positions. However, by reading the text through the lens of queer studies, particularly through an analysis of queer time and space, it is possible to see how Ferré unsettles gender hierarchies in the rigidly structured patriarchy of Puerto Rican society during the middle of the Twenty century.

Notes

1.- “permite realizar lecturas más amplias, como las relativas al debate postcolonial, postmoderno, deconstruccionista y/o de la subalternidad.”

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Iniciación femenina en dos novelas de Claudia Piñeiro: *Catedrales* y *El tiempo de las moscas*

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Resumen: La escritora argentina Claudia Piñeiro ha cultivado el género detectivesco en novelas que fueron traducidas al inglés. En este artículo sugiero que en sus dos novelas más recientes, *Catedrales* (2020) y *El tiempo de las moscas* (2022), Piñeiro recurre a esquemas narrativos clásicos que se refieren a la dualidad bien-mal y están basados en mitos griegos, especialmente la tragedia de Medea. Estos esquemas sirven para describir la iniciación de las protagonistas femeninas de *Catedrales* y *El tiempo de las moscas* quienes atraviesan varias pruebas y desafíos y logran superarlos transformándose en heroínas. En este trabajo, me baso en nociones de Walter Burkert sobre la antigüedad griega y del folklorista Jack Ziper para ilustrar cómo Piñeiro recurre a la experiencia de búsqueda en sus dos novelas más recientes.

Palabras claves: *Catedrales*, *El tiempo de las moscas*, Claudia Piñeiro, heroínas, cuentos de hadas.

Abstract: Argentine writer Claudia Piñeiro has written detective or noir novels that have been translated to English. In this article, I argue that in her two most recent novels, *Catedrales* (2020) and *El tiempo de las moscas* (2022), Piñeiro resorts to classical narrative frameworks that deal with the duality good/bad and that they are based on Greek myths, such as Medea's tragedy. These narrative frameworks help describe the initiation of the female protagonists of *Catedrales* and *El tiempo de las moscas*, who endure several trials and manage to overcome them transforming themselves into heroines. In this piece, I rely on Walter Burkert's notions about ancient Greek mythology and those of folklorist Jack Zipes to illustrate the way in which Piñeiro resorts to the experience of search in her two most recent novels.

Keywords: *Catedrales*, *El tiempo de las moscas*, Claudia Piñeiro, heroines, fairy tales.

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Introducción

Desde la publicación de *Las viudas de los jueves* (2005), la novelista argentina Claudia Piñeiro se ha caracterizado por cultivar el género detectivesco y las novelas *noirs* con gran éxito editorial y cosechando numerosos reconocimientos internacionales. Con el lanzamiento de *El tiempo de las moscas* (2023), su décima novela, finalista (hasta el momento) de los premios Mario Vargas Llosas y Dashiell Hammett, su corpus narrativo no solo adquiere un volumen significativo (Anónimo “Claudia Piñeiro”) sino también relevancia cultural al indagar diversos aspectos sociales de la sociedad argentina contemporánea. Respecto a *Las viudas de los jueves*, observé que la misma “recrea una sociedad a punto de colapsar debido al peso de sus insostenibles prejuicios y expectativas financieras” (Rocha 124).¹ En *Elena sabe* (2007), novela finalista del *Booker International Prize* del 2022, Piñeiro “aprovecha las cuestiones de la maternidad y los derechos de las mujeres” y fue descrito por el *New York Times* como “un comentario penetrante de la relación madre-hija, la indignidad de la burocracia, las cargas del cuidado de otros y las imposiciones religiosas sobre las mujeres” (citado por Mango n. p.).² Más recientemente, María López y Stephen Hart afirmaron que la colección de cuentos *Quién no* (2018) “brinda detallados reportes de la sociedad contemporánea argentina que es en su mayoría conservadora, clasista y patriarcal” (18).³ Ciertamente, Piñeiro es una aguda observadora de la sociedad argentina y persistente crítica de las construcciones genéricas que limitan tanto a mujeres como a hombres.

En *El tiempo de las moscas*, Piñeiro retoma, por primera vez, a una protagonista de una novela anterior, Inés Pereyra, anti-heroína de *Tuya* (2005). Sobre esta novela, Jimena Bracamonte sostiene que “Piñeiro replantea el rol de la mujer en la familia y los mandatos culturales sobre los que se supone son ser esposa, madre y ama de casa ejemplar, en tanto modelos que condicionan y reducen a las mujeres a ciertos ‘cautiverios’ en cuanto expresión política de la cultura de los hombres” (119). Dada la común protagonista y temática de los mandatos culturales entre estas novelas, un primer impulso es analizar similitudes y diferencias entre ambas. Sin embargo, Piñeiro tuvo una intención concreta al recurrir a la misma protagonista. En una reciente entrevista con Carlos Olivares Baró, explicaba que *El tiempo de las moscas* constituyó un desafío que se impuso:

He regresado a un personaje y a un libro: quise medir mis fuerzas como escritora, dilucidé cambios que se reflejan en el uso del lenguaje y en las elecciones de la perspectiva del discurso narrativo. En *Tuya*, Inés era dueña absoluta del relato, todo nacía de su ánimo. Me

di cuenta que necesitaba otras figuraciones: recorro al coro en primera persona del plural. (n. p.)

El deseo de Piñeiro de probar su habilidad como narradora nos invita a explorar las estructuras narrativas a las cuales recurre como contadora de historias. En este ensayo propongo que en *Catedrales* (2020) y *El tiempo de las moscas*, Piñeiro se basa en esquemas narrativos clásicos: los que ejemplifican la dualidad bien-mal basados en mitos griegos, especialmente la tragedia de Medea para trazar la iniciación de las protagonistas femeninas de *Catedrales* y *El tiempo de las moscas*, las cuales superan una serie de pruebas y desafíos de las cuales emergen como heroínas.⁴ Me detengo, primero, en conceptos de narratología para destacar el talento de la escritora argentina para tejer historias atrapantes. Para ello, utilizo conceptos del especialista Walter Burkert sobre la antigüedad griega y del folklorista Jack Zipes sobre cuentos para ilustrar la manera en la que Piñeiro delinea la evolución de las protagonistas femeninas de *Catedrales* y *El tiempo de las moscas* a través de la experiencia de búsqueda.

Piñeiro: el arte de narrar

Gracias a la narratología es posible reconocer ciertos esquemas que informan narrativas tanto orales como literarias. Sobre los cuentos, Walter Burkert sostiene que son “forma(s) a través de las cuales la experiencia común aparece comunicable” (56)⁵ y que “muchos cuentos son bastantes similares, pareciendo ser variaciones de motivos o tipos generales subyacentes(s)” (57).⁶ La narratología es una disciplina abocada a descubrir esos patrones. David Herman aclara que “la premisa básica de la narratología es que un modelo común más o menos implícito de narrativa explica la habilidad de la gente para entender la actuación comunicativa y los tipos de historias” (13).⁷ Los esquemas narrativos cumplen un papel fundamental para la comunicación de narrativas que tratan con temas relacionados con el comportamiento humano. Por ejemplo, Helen Morales que se especializa en la interpretación de los mitos griegos sostiene que los mismos “exploran un tema difícil de abusos de poder y debilidades humanas” (xi).⁸

En la actualidad, la académica argentina Nora Domínguez prefiere el nombre de relatos para denominar “la forma por excelencia a través de la cual se vehiculiza un saber que admite una pluralidad de juegos de lenguaje y cuya transmisión obedece muy a menudo a reglas que fijan la pragmática y que constituyen el lazo social” (17). Respecto a las narraciones, tanto Herman como Burkert, este último analiza historias de la antigüedad clásica, y ambos coinciden en referirse a moldes sobre los que se construyen. Burkert destaca que las mismas poseen una estructura común

en la cual se evidencia una búsqueda: “la búsqueda está establecida como una forma de resolver problemas y es comunicada y representada a través del cuento” (65).⁹

Desde las primeras narrativas que se conocen, la búsqueda, asociada a la necesidad biológica de la caza para subsistir, implicaba la partida y el regreso del protagonista que enfrentaba distintos desafíos. También existían narrativas dedicadas a las doncellas con el objetivo de iniciarlas en etapas de la vida. Según Burkert, estos cuentos aparecen en distintas sociedades (70-71). A su vez, en las tragedias griegas y romanas, surgen representaciones culturales de la bruja, la hechicera y la maga, arquetipos femeninos, cuya vigencia—ciertamente con modificaciones—continúa hasta el presente.

Tan importante como lo que se relata es quién cuenta, su propósito y fórmulas. En *The Creation of the Sacred*, Burkert pregunta retóricamente quién narra los cuentos tradicionales para responder que eran las mujeres y explica que: “las mujeres saben sobre la secuencia de la menstruación, relaciones sexuales y el nacimiento, pueden instruir a los jóvenes tanto en una forma seria como juguetona” (78).¹⁰ De esta cita, me interesa recalcar el papel clave dentro de una comunidad de las narradoras a cargo de la transmisión de la sabiduría a otras mujeres, algo que también destaca Arthur Frank cuando afirma que “las historias trabajan con gente, para gente y siempre las historias trabajan en la gente, afectando lo que las personas ven como lo real, lo posible y como lo que merece ser hecho y es mejor evitar” (3).¹¹ El carácter didáctico de los relatos está estrechamente relacionado con ciertas matrices narrativas que han sido efectivas en transmitir valores y conceptos y que generalmente, se repiten. Jack Zipes, otro estudioso de historias populares clásicas, enumera las cinco etapas de las historias de iniciación de mujeres: 1- La aparición en la vida de una muchacha joven de causas que la separan de su familia y su hogar; 2- Aislamiento por un cierto periodo en un ambiente idílico; 3- Una catástrofe que expulsa a la muchacha fuera del ambiente idílico debido a la violación o una promesa que fue incumplida; 4- periodo errante en el cual sufre y paga por sus errores, y 5- el logro de una serie de tareas o el rescate que trae un final feliz (46).¹²

Como veremos, algunas de estas fases, aunque con ciertas modificaciones, estructuran *Catedrales* y *El tiempo de las moscas*. Entre las que aparecen en ambas novelas, se encuentran: a) las protagonistas enfrentan una crisis que las separa de su familia y hogar; b) durante la separación, viven en lugares donde no existen los conflictos que propiciaron su alejamiento de los suyos; c) se enfrentan a los problemas del pasado; d) prueban su fibra moral y ética, transformándose en

heroínas independientes y e) son “premiadas” con el interés que despiertan en jóvenes miembros de sus familias. Es importante destacar que la movilidad física de las protagonistas en estas dos novelas de Piñeiro las representa expuestas a un devenir “nomádico,” al cual Rosi Braidotti define como “ni reproducción ni solo imitación, sino una proximidad empática, una interconexión intensa” (27).¹³ Ese devenir nomádico caracteriza la iniciación de las protagonistas femeninas y las transforma en sujetos que se liberan de mandatos patriarcales (Braidotti 29). A continuación, analizo estas etapas y la influencia de narrativas clásicas en *Catedrales*.

Catedrales

Catedrales es una novela compuesta por siete personajes diferentes que pertenecen a cinco miembros de la familia Sardá. La pluralidad de voces narrativas ayuda a que los distintos puntos de vista de los personajes sean convincentes (Frank 31) y cada uno exponga su verdad. Sin embargo, los diversos personajes que aportan información para resolver el rompecabezas que conforma esta novela se dividen en “los buenos y “los malos.” Esta drástica división alude a los valores morales y éticos de este relato, como el narratólogo Arthur Frank explica: “las historias forman parte del sentido de las personas sobre lo que cuenta como bueno o malo, cómo actuar y cómo no actuar” (36).¹⁴ *Catedrales* presenta las cinco etapas de la iniciación femenina de Lía, de joven, criada en un ambiente conservador católico.

En *Catedrales*, Lía, la hija del medio de una familia católica de clase media inicia el relato. Su narración en primera persona abre la novela, contando su reacción treinta años antes cuando supo que su hermana menor, Ana: “la que dormía en mi mismo cuarto, la que me robaba la ropa, la que se metía en la cama para contarme los secretos que nadie más que yo podía conocer” (Piñeiro 14) había muerto y su cadáver había sido encontrado desmembrado en un terreno baldío. Dada la complicidad y el afecto entre estas hermanas, la muerte de Ana, quien entonces era una adolescente de 17 años, desencadena la crisis que Lía afronta. Como reacción ante esta pérdida, se separa religiosamente de su familia al afirmar “no creo en Dios” (Piñeiro 13-14). A pesar de que en un primer momento siente temor ante su osadía, el hecho de “confesarse” como atea también le depara otras emociones: “me sentí poderosa, dueña de mí a una edad en que todo eran dudas” (Piñeiro 15). La separación “religiosa de su familia” antecede a la partida de su hogar: al no sentirse cómoda con las reacciones de sus padres y hermana Carmen, fervientes practicantes de la religión católica, quienes “aceptan” la tragedia de Ana, Lía tomó la decisión de irse de “mi casa, de mi ciudad, de mi país, de mi vida anterior” (Piñeiro 20). Esta ausencia física inicia tanto su nomadismo como la

separación de las imposiciones familiares, particularmente las referidas a la religión católica y los roles tradicionales de género.

La partida física de Lía la lleva a encarar un viaje que se transforma en un autoexilio en un lugar idílico. Para ella, radicarse en Santiago de Compostela (España) supone honrar la memoria de su hermana fallecida quien “soñaba con que algún día hiciéramos juntas” (Piñeiro 20). Vicariamente, se instala en la ciudad que proyectaba conocer con Ana. Después de su hermana, el familiar más importante en la vida de Lía es su padre de quien también se aleja al irse a vivir al exterior “le había prometido que volvería cuando se supiera quién había matado a Ana” (Piñeiro 44). Aunque la separación física del padre se extiende por 30 años, durante ese tiempo, ambos mantienen una correspondencia superficial que, si bien es una forma de comunicación, es también un castigo que Lía se impone a sí misma y a su padre hasta que se clarifique la muerte de su hermana.

Curiosamente para alguien que rechaza el catolicismo, su exilio transcurre en un lugar reconocido para los católicos donde culmina El Camino de Santiago, sede de una impresionante catedral, y donde supuestamente descansan los restos de Santiago Apóstol. En este sitio de peregrinaje que para Lía es un espacio de reclusión, la protagonista se labra camino sola y por propio esfuerzo: de empleada de un hotel, pasa a trabajar en una librería de la cual termina siendo propietaria. Lía la describe como “mi lugar en el mundo” (Piñeiro 21), destacando el aspecto placentero de su trabajo, su orgullo por lo que ha logrado y la vida apacible que construyó en esa ciudad. También menciona las características de los peregrinos que visitan Santiago de Compostela con las cuales se identifica: “creen en sí mismos, en su perseverancia, en su fortaleza física y anímica para no abandonar antes de llegar” (Piñeiro 22). Estos rasgos la presentan como a una peregrina laica que, sin viajar físicamente, busca la verdad (llegar) y posee la determinación de auto-privarse de la compañía paterna hasta que se identifique al/a la culpable de la muerte de su hermana menor.

Como novela criminal, *Catedrales* busca desentrañar la autoría y el motivo del asesinato brutal de una joven y, al mismo tiempo, trata el tema de las víctimas de abortos ilegales. El deceso de Ana constituye una pérdida que sacude profundamente a la familia Sardá pero también aparece como una muerte en la que confluyen otras fuerzas sociales. La periodista cultural María Elvira Woinilowicz señala que “el tema neurálgico de la novela es el aborto” (n. p.). El derecho al aborto es un tema que movilizó a Piñeiro, cuyo activismo lo ha destacado López y Hart: “Claudia Piñeiro

fue una de las voces líderes de ‘Marea Verde’” (121; Anónimo “Marea verde” en Argentina).¹⁵ Marea verde es la agrupación feminista que luchó, entre 2018 y 2020, por la legalización del aborto en Argentina (“Marea verde”). Como activista, Piñeiro dio un discurso en la Cámara de Diputados a favor de la aprobación de una ley que lo legalizara. En *Catedrales*, los padecimientos de Ana como consecuencia de un aborto ilegal son descriptos paso a paso, mostrando el calvario físico que algunas mujeres, privadas de medios legales y seguros de terminar con un embarazo no deseado, pueden llegar a padecer. El aborto ilegal de Ana y su muerte impactan también en su mejor amiga Marcela, quien acompaña a la adolescente tanto al procedimiento ilícito como durante sus últimas horas, comprobando el intenso sufrimiento físico a raíz de un procedimiento clandestino, probando su amistad y siendo fiel a su pedido de no revelar su secreto (la terminación de su embarazo). Para Marcela, la muerte en sus brazos de su mejor amiga (Piñeiro 103 y 105) es una tragedia que la marca de por vida, especialmente cuando inmediatamente después de su deceso, sufre un accidente que le daña irreparablemente la memoria y la priva de dar un testimonio creíble y convincente sobre la muerte de la joven, demorando por décadas la resolución de esta muerte. Sin embargo, a pesar de su condición, Marcela “rescata” a Ana ya que “una persona se transforma en digna de ser reclamada por la virtud de ser narrable” (Piñeiro 75).¹⁶ El punto de vista de la adolescente muerte nos llega a través de Marcela.

En *Catedrales*, hay tres personajes que se encargan de alterar tanto la investigación como el cadáver de la joven, pero sobresale el de Carmen, delineado en base a mitos clásicos. El personaje del criminalista Elmer García Bellomo, encargado de brindar una hipótesis objetiva, afirma: “los que lo hicieron, porque para mí fue más de uno, plantaron evidencia como para que lo pareciera. Modificaron la escena del crimen muy burdamente (186). Uno de estos personajes es Julián, el joven católico que tuvo relaciones con Ana cuando estaba comenzando un noviazgo con Carmen, hermana mayor de la joven fallecida. Otro es el cura párroco Manuel “quien declaró bajo juramento de decir la verdad” (Piñeiro 121) es quien niega haber visto a las jóvenes en la iglesia para proteger a Julián exseminarista. El padre Manuel “tenía un lugar destacado en el operativo y, cada tanto, les daba indicaciones a los agentes” (Piñeiro 198), haciendo uso de su privilegiada autoridad para contribuir a oscurecer más la escena donde se encontró el cadáver de la joven. Trato por último a Carmen para detenerme en su caracterización: creyente “cabal, íntegra, apasionada. Brutal si es necesario” (Piñeiro 275), es la instigadora del aborto ilegal de Ana y quien desmiembra

y quema su cadáver, acciones que “habían tenido como objetivo disimular la verdadera causa de la muerte” (Piñeiro 206).

Carmen aparece contrapuesta a la figura trágica de Antígona quien es condenada a muerte por desobedecer y enterrar, en señal de respeto, el cadáver de su hermana rebelde. Carmen, presentada como una aberración que no vacila en desmembrar a su hermana, es la figura del monstruo que, según Caron Gentry y Laura Sjoberg se basan en el mito de los Gorgones (94). Los gorgones “son monstruos malos cuya arma más grande es la apariencia de normalidad y belleza” (95).¹⁷ Como los gorgones, Carmen posee una máscara social con una personalidad carismática que, no obstante, esconde una naturaleza vengativa y cruel.¹⁸ La caracterización de Carmen también debe bastante al mito de Medea: “una mujer violenta y malvada que comete actos de traición por su hombre” (Gentry y Sjoberg 70).¹⁹ Esta caracterización, de Carmen en la “amante despreciada” (Stratton 72). Al igual que Medea, la mayor de las Sardá se venga de la rival a quien Julián sedujo o por la cual fue seducido, Ana, mitad niña, mitad mujer, a quien no duda en quitar del camino de ambos. Por haber manipulado a Julián y Ana y destrozado el cadáver de su hermana, a Carmen se la puede considerar como “una perversión del ámbito privado” (Gentry y Sjoberg 72), o sea, una fuerza que divide de forma irreversible a su familia por sus celos y por su defensa “brutal” de valores religiosos.²⁰ Carmen derrama la sangre de su hermana fallecida y en esta acción encarnizada, su descripción es la de una mujer movida por la irracionalidad y el odio.

En *Catedrales*, la confabulación de creyentes y practicantes católicos, “los malos,” sirve para cuestionar la moralidad de estos personajes. Sus acciones ilustran la cita de Jean-Paul Gouteux que introduce el epílogo: “La violencia religiosa es diversa y multiforme” (319). Carmen, Julián y el párroco Manuel ocultan la verdad sobre el deceso de Ana como forma de protegerse y desviar la investigación de la iglesia y Julián. Aquí es fundamental mencionar que, como Frank, explica “la narrativa cristiana requería una dualidad entre los polos contrastantes del bien y el mal” (64).²¹ De acuerdo a esta narrativa fundacional para la humanidad, los tres personajes ocupan el eje del mal, que conspira contra la verdad. Opuesta a ellos, Lía, al declararse atea, intuye el rol que la religión católica y sus practicantes tuvieron en el deceso de su hermana y ocupa el eje del bien. Su padre, que actuó por su demanda de descubrir la verdad, se mueve desde el centro al polo del bien.

Entre los dos ejes, se sitúa Alfredo, el padre de las hermanas Sardá. Por ser instigado por Lía a cumplir el rol clave de investigar los sucesos que desencadenaron la muerte de Ana, a pesar de no ser la protagonista, actúa siguiendo la voluntad de su hija del medio. Por lo tanto, su

búsqueda representa la cuarta fase de la historia de iniciación de Lía. Tres décadas más tarde, el señor Sardá reanuda la investigación recurriendo al criminalista Elmer García Bellomo: “busco a quien, sin haber matado a mi hija, se sintió tan culpable de su muerte como para quemarla y descuartizarla” (Piñeiro 211). Para el padre, revivir el atroz desmembramiento del cuerpo de “su pimpollo” (Piñeiro 14) significa forzarse a aceptar indicios y declaraciones que fueron pasados por alto por las autoridades policiales. En este sentido la referencia a Raymond Carter que aparece en la novela alude a la ceguera temporal, al no querer saber: “hay mucha gente que no es ciega, y de todos modos, no quiere ver” (43). Como fiel creyente, la búsqueda de la verdad para Alfredo supone también un movimiento psíquico que lo lleva a alejarse de dogmas y silencios con el objetivo de resolver el misterio inscripto en el cadáver de su hija. De esta forma, Alfredo, ejecutor del espíritu indagador de Lía, también atraviesa un periodo de deambulación que lo lleva a reexaminar los detalles de la investigación policial y a entrevistarse con Marcela y García Bellomo, voces omitidas del informe oficial. Esta pesquisa hace de Alfredo un “nómade.” Braidotti expone que los “sujetos nomádicos son capaces de liberar la actividad de pensar del dogmatismo falogocéntrico, regresando el pensamiento a su libertad, vivacidad, belleza” (29).²² Al escudriñar la versión de la muerte de Ana (brindada por las autoridades policiales) y la religión católica, Alfredo se enfrenta a la verdad identidad de Carmen y Julián. *Catedrales* traza, entonces, tanto un paralelo entre la expiación del pecado de Alfredo (haberse negado a ver) y su dolencia física.

Alfredo también es clave en la quinta fase, en la cual la protagonista es premiada por su fibra ética cuando se revelan los responsables y los inocentes. Durante su tiempo de expiación, Alfredo escucha pacientemente a Marcela quien, a pesar de sus limitaciones, aporta detalles de relevancia sobre los últimos días de vida de Ana. Asimismo, se contacta con el criminalista para tener una opinión profesional. Sin embargo, otra misión del patriarca es la de instruir y contener a su nieto Mateo, hijo de Carmen y Julián quien se sentía huérfano y veía en sus padres “la sombra, lo que está mal, la mentira” (Piñeiro 58). El abuelo le aconseja “intenta ser feliz sin mentiras ni delirios” (Piñeiro 72) y lo encamina al encuentro con su tía en Santiago de Compostela. La reunión entre sobrino y tía, posibilitada por el trabajo amoroso de Alfredo, constituye el final feliz porque Mateo se salva del catolicismo apasionado y brutal de su madre que lo hacía dependiente y se acerca a una figura que va a respetar sus deseos.

Para Lía, el encuentro supone la reconexión con la parte positiva de su familia. Sobrino y tía, instigados por un mensaje final de Alfredo “van a poder hablar de lo que les pasó, para aceptar

lo irremediable de los hechos y, ahora sí, para empezar una vida nueva” (Piñeiro 323). Frente al rechazo que Mateo siente hacia su madre, Lía, liberada de la carga irresuelta del pasado, aparece como quien lo va a escuchar y apoyar sin imposiciones. Por su parte, Lía recupera en Mateo una de las virtudes de su padre: “de él heredé mi veracidad lectora” (Piñeiro 72). Si bien Mateo, otro “nómada” liberado de la tradición católica de sus padres, arriba a Santiago de Compostela, Lía ha llegado a un punto de madurez y logrado, con su sacrificio que la mantuvo alejada de su padre, conocer la verdad sobre el doloroso pasado familiar que se había propuesto como objetivo.

El tiempo de las moscas

El tiempo de las moscas gira en torno a Inés, una mujer de clase media quien, en *Tuya* asesinó a la amante de su esposo y no se dio cuenta del embarazo de su única hija adolescente. En *Tuya*, Inés era, ante todo, una mujer histérica a quien Carroll Smith-Rosenberg caracteriza diciendo:

la mujer histérica casi dejó de funcionar dentro de mi familia. Tan pronto como se dedicó a las necesidades de otros, actuando como una esposa y madre sacrificial: a través de su histeria pudo y de hecho forzó a otros a asumir esas funciones ... Consciente o inconscientemente, ella optó por abandonar su rol tradicional (208).²³

De acuerdo a esta cita, Inés era una mujer “peligrosa” aún antes de asesinar porque se negaba o no podía cumplir los tradicionales roles de esposa sacrificial y madre solícita y atenta. Cabe mencionar que el drama que compone *Tuya* parece ser una actualización de *Medea*, la tragedia de Eurípides, en la cual la protagonista homónima, consciente de la traición de su esposo Jasón quien se casaría nuevamente, en un acto de venganza, mata a sus propios hijos y a su rival. Desde entonces, han surgido diversas interpretaciones de *Medea* como una obra en la cual una mujer de gran carácter se rebela contra la sumisión y no recibe castigo. Si bien Inés no mata a su hija, su falta de amor materno es un rasgo en común con Medea quien prioriza la posesión de su marido sobre la vida de sus hijos.

Las referencias a *Medea* aparecen también en *El tiempo de las moscas* como epígrafes a los capítulos cinco, catorce, dieciséis, veintidós, veintisiete, treinta y siete y cuarenta. Volveré a la figura de Medea más adelante, pero por ahora es necesario señalar que en *El tiempo de las moscas*, Inés se transforma en una protagonista que pasa por las distintas fases de las historias de iniciación y, sobre todo, se transforma en un sujeto feminista, sobre el cual Braidotti advierte, “el sujeto

feminista definido en estos términos no puede y no debe en una forma teleológica de subjetividad” (132).²⁴ Mediante este tránsito arduo, Inés se redime y adquiere rasgos de una heroína.

El tiempo de las moscas comienza cuando Inés recupera su libertad después de cumplir una condena de quince años por el asesinato de Charo. En entrevista con Carlos Olivares Baró, Piñeiro expresa: “Abordo cierta hipocresía de la sociedad que sostiene que después de la condena el exrecluso serás aceptado socialmente; pero no es así: el que sale de la cárcel no tiene los mismos patrimonios ni posibilidades de trabajo. La rehabilitación es una proposición ilusoria” (n. p). Con el tratamiento de este tema, Piñeiro también toca otros que están relacionados: primero, la inserción laboral de la mujer de más de cincuenta años en una sociedad que valora la juventud y la estética; segundo, el amor lesbiano, la amistad y la solidaridad entre mujeres y tercero, la interseccionalidad, al incorporar un personaje de clase media baja, la Manca, amiga de Inés, ex convicta, ahora detective y su socia en MMM (Muertes, Mujeres y Moscas), agencia de fumigación—oficio de Inés— y detective—oficio ejercido por la Manca. Sobre la interseccionalidad, me baso en las afirmaciones de Mara Viveros Goya que plantean que

Los análisis interseccionales ponen de manifiesto dos asuntos: en primer lugar, la multiplicidad de experiencias de sexismo vividas por distintas mujeres, y en segundo lugar, la existencia de posiciones sociales que no padecen ni la marginación ni la discriminación, porque encarnan la norma misma, como la masculinidad, la heteronormatividad o la blanquitud. (8)

La interseccionalidad permite así descubrir alianzas entre mujeres así también como posiciones opuestas basadas en distintas formas de poder.²⁵

En *El tiempo de las moscas*, Inés, aparece en la segunda etapa del proceso de iniciación femenina. Sin contacto con las personas importantes de su pasado (esposo, hija, madre), vive una vida sin altibajos. Al recuperar su libertad, reconstruye su vida después de la crisis, propia de la primera etapa, desencadenada por su homicidio, y que desmembró a su familia ya disfuncional antes de su condena a prisión. Durante su reclusión en la cárcel, se distancia aún más de los lazos familiares y de su pasado: se divorcia de Ernesto y no mantiene vínculos con Laura, su única hija, ni con su madre viuda. Admite que “visitas no tuve ni ningún intercambio con el exterior” (Piñeiro 58). Esta ruptura total con su vida como esposa y madre puede verse con una forma de renacimiento. Una vez liberada, el único resabio de su pasado es su parte de su nuevo apellido, una invención de Inés que marca un después: Experey, que deriva de “ex Pereyra. Ex de Ernesto”

(Piñeiro 17), su exmarido. Al tomar una decisión sobre su identidad, Inés muestra su agencia y la conciencia de su nuevo estatus. Por un lado, afirma que “yo también soy otra, no la misma” (Piñeiro 18), su declaración carece de peso al tratarse de una antiheroína y expresidiaria cuyo amor “enfermizo” (Piñeiro 20) desencadenó un crimen pasional. Por otro, Inés aparece como una mujer pragmática que acepta su nuevo estatus sin pareja y sin relación con su hija, en relación a la cual se define diciendo “soy una mujer que parió” (Piñeiro 118). A diferencia de su pasión en *Tuya*, ahora reprime sus sentimientos: “Y la Manca que es una buena amiga; no me gusta halagarla y nunca lo digo delante de ella, pero reconozco que su compañía fue un sostén” (Piñeiro 48). Lo cierto es que habiendo cumplido su condena, Inés vive en una casa humilde comprada con el dinero que le correspondió del divorcio y desde allí opera su compañía de fumigación.

A pesar de su vida tranquila y en total legalidad, *El tiempo de las moscas* ubica a Inés en la tercera etapa cuando una clienta, la señora Bonar, la enfrenta a su pasado. Conociendo el prontuario criminal de su fumigadora, le propone que le consiga un veneno para asesinar a la amante de su esposo. Para Inés, esta proposición la lleva a recordar los sentimientos y el crimen que cometió cuando descubrió la infidelidad de Ernesto: “se le aparecen ráfagas de recuerdos superpuestos” y sufre un ataque de pánico (Piñeiro 39 y 74). El pedido de Bonar busca reactivar la Inés-Medea, especialmente su capacidad para deshacerse de otra mujer, pero esta vez mediante un veneno. Como lo explican Marcel Detienne y Jean Pierre Vernant, Medea es “la primera en una larga línea de mujeres que son expertas en el uso de venenos, filtros de amor y magia fascinante.” (189).²⁶ Diferente a Medea Inés que había asesinado con un revólver, un instrumento fálico, ahora tiene la oportunidad de transformarse en vengadora, envenenando a otra mujer y permitiendo que la Medea engañada deshaga de su rival. Sin embargo, a pesar de que la señora Bonar se presenta como víctima de un engaño conyugal, no logra despertar la incondicional simpatía de la expresidiaria ya que la “nueva” Inés intuye que hay algo más que su clienta no dice. Sin la impulsividad que la dominaba cuando asesinó a Charo, ahora procede más cautamente, confía en su socia y amiga la Manca y entre ambas examinan los pro y contras de la propuesta de la señora Bonar. En el proceso, tocan temas como las diferencias genéricas y entre clases sociales que afectan el funcionamiento de la justicia en Argentina.

En *El tiempo de las moscas*, las diferencias de género y clase social de los personajes femeninos hacen referencia a un esquema maniqueo entre buenas (hermanadas) y la mala que corresponde a la narrativa cristiana. La Manca proveniente de clase social más humilde que Inés y

condenada dos veces por narcomenudeo, explica sobre el sistema legal argentino: “ves un pelotudo al volante destruye la vida de un montón de personas en medio minuto, se va y seguro que cuando lo encuentran tiene abogado y la causa resuelta” (Piñeiro 91). La resolución de este caso se contrapone a la experiencia de mujeres como la misma Manca e Inés, quienes carentes de recursos económicos, no pueden pagarse un abogado que les “resuelva la causa.” La amistad entre Inés y Manca, basada en el respeto mutuo, la aceptación, la lealtad, el compañerismo, conforma entonces una alianza entre mujeres de distintas clases sociales. Es una verdadera hermandad, definida por Gloria Steinem como “profundas conexiones personales entre mujeres ...[las cuales] a menudo ignoran las barreras de edad, economía, experiencia mundana, raza, cultura—todas barreras que, en lo la sociedad masculina o mixta, habían parecido tan difíciles de ser atravesadas” (citado por Dicker 15).²⁷ La señal más evidente de la hermandad es la decisión de la poco demostrativa Inés de ayudar a la señora Bonar para que con el dinero que reciba, su fiel Manca pueda acceder a un tratamiento médico. Si bien las expresidarias forman parte de una hermandad—“las buenas,” según la Manca (Piñeiro 107)— la misma no incluye incondicionalmente a otras las mujeres— “¿por qué habría que sentir a todas las mujeres del planeta mis hermanas, porque tenemos vagina” (65)—, ya que ambas desconfían de Susana Bonar y planean aprovecharse de ella.

Para la caracterización de Bonar, Piñeiro recurre al estereotipo de la “mujer malvada” que surge en textos que datan del Imperio romano. Kimberly Stratton explica que durante el mismo, la magia atribuida a mujeres se volvió “grotesco, depredador, cruel” (70)²⁸ aunque seguía correspondiendo “al modelo del amante abandonado” (71)²⁹ proveniente de la literatura griega. El estereotipo de la bruja malvada surge de una minoría compuesta por mujeres de la elite romana (73) quienes, gracias a su independencia económica, eran descritas como “licenciosa, con ansias de poder y demasiado masculina” (72).³⁰ Con un buen puesto de trabajo, una gran casa, capacidad para contratar (y despedir) personal, gustos caros y disponibilidad de dólares, la señora Bonar goza de una existencia independientes con medios a su disposición, pero su soledad es síntoma de problemas para relacionarse con otros: despide a sus empleadas domésticas y en su entorno laboral es conocida con sobrenombre de Petra por su rigidez. La señora Bonar busca la complicidad de Inés a través de la manipulación.

La diferencia entre mujeres aliadas, Inés y La Manca, y la señora Bonar, mujer que no genera empatía expone la transformación de la Inés egoísta de *Tuya* a una que se abre a nuevas ideas. Inés confiesa “cuando atravesé el portón rumbo a mi libertad no tenía no idea de qué

significa ahora, entrado el siglo XXI, ser mujer” (Piñeiro 59). Su evolución de anti-heroína en heroína implica una gran actividad de su parte: “me dediqué a aprender a ser esa nueva mujer con esmero: observé, entendí, acepté, copié, sumé palabras, resté otras” (Piñeiro 59). El punto de partida de su cambio empieza con la conciencia de su rol de Medea en el cual: “Si un hombre te deja estás desterrada” (Piñeiro 155). Como señalé anteriormente, en siete capítulos aparecen debates corales entre numerosas mujeres anónimas. Piñeiro sostiene que:

En la tragedia griega el coro representa a la colectividad, testigo de los hechos y suerte de comentarista. El coro de mi novela es testigo de los actos de Inés y la Manca; testimonio que de lo personal transita a lo político. El coro funciona como razón, conciencia, y a la vez, espacio que resguarda y sustenta las alegorías ideológicas del relato. (Olivares Baró, n. p.)

Uno de los temas que debate el coro es si el rol de Medea le cabe a Inés, a la señora Bonar o ambas. Respecto a esto último, las dos mujeres se caracterizan por la violencia y esto las marca como malas mujeres: “mujeres violentas, entonces, son con frecuencia pensadas no solo como *malas* pero como *malas mujeres*—en el sentido que ellas son malas y son mujeres, y en el sentido que la violencia las hace malas como *mujeres*” (Gentry y Sjoberg 3).³¹ Sin embargo, Inés era una mala mujer antes de su nomadismo, iniciación y sacrificio en favor de su amiga, mientras que Bonar lo es: ambas revelan una relación problemática con la agencia que las conduce a la criminalidad. Entre las características que comparten Medea y Bonar, se encuentra el infanticidio (Stratton 81). Como madre que se negó a aceptar el cambio de género de su hijo y cegada por el afán de resarcimiento, planea una venganza para matar a un niño, Bonar representa a la Medea vengativa y cruel que sacrifica a su propio hijo. Nancy Sorkin-Rabinowitz explica que Medea “psicoanalíticamente hablando, es la amenaza que la madre matará a sus hijos en vez de criarlos” (127).³² La caracterización de la señora Bonar como madre castradora la contrapone a la nueva “Inés” quien, si bien no es demostrativa, no considera a la maternidad como una forma de posesión de su hija.³³

En la cuarta etapa de las historias de iniciación de *El tiempo de las moscas*, Inés y la Manca revelan su heroísmo, mostrando la fibra ética y moral. Ambas expresidarias investigan a la señora Bonar y se dan cuenta que no posee un marido, por lo tanto, no están seguras a quién busca eliminar. En este proceso, Inés se enfrenta con su pasado cuando se entera de la maternidad de su

única hija: se entera que Laura tiene un hijo pequeño y la Manca la informa sobre Guillermina, su primera nieta. Piñeiro dota a Inés con *metis*, una virtud especial virtud de los antiguos griegos:

un tipo de inteligencia y pensamiento, una forma de pensar y un modelo de conocer: implica un complejo pero coherente cuerpo de actitudes mentales y conductas intelectuales que combinan instinto, sabiduría, previsión, sutileza mental, engaño, inventiva, vigilancia, oportunismo, varias habilidades y experiencia adquirida a través de los años. Se aplica a situaciones que son temporarias, cambiantes, desconcertantes y ambiguas (Detienne y Jean Pierre Vernant 3).³⁴

Utilizando su ingenio y rapidez mental, Inés se da cuenta de que Bonar no era ninguna Medea dejada por un hombre, es la *sleuth* que se adelanta a la asesina y logra moverse de un rol donde Bonar la había encasillado: de asesina pasa a convertirse en protectora de su nieto al deshacerse de la mamadera envenenada y así aparta el veneno del niño. Inés presenta la cualidad positiva que se le atribuye a Medea como “nutridor de la juventud nurturer of youth” (Sorkin-Rabinowitz 132).³⁵ A la exasesina Inés, le sucede ahora la heroína que vela por el bienestar de su nieto, e indirectamente, la salud mental de su hija Laura.

Conforme a la última fase las estructuras narrativas clásicas, en el final de la novela, Inés mantiene intacta su independencia. Su acción heroica no reencauza milagrosamente una relación (inexistente) con su hija, pero es un primer paso en el mantenimiento y la construcción de otras relaciones. La transformación de Inés en heroína fue posible gracias a que la Manca le brindó piezas claves para entender el plan cruel de la señora Bonar. Inés entrega el veneno y cumple con la promesa de destinarlo a “salvar” a la Manca diagnosticada con cáncer de mama. Este gesto solidario que reafirma la hermandad entre las expresidarias. Por otro lado, la transformación de Inés en heroína fue posible gracias a que la Manca le brindó piezas claves para entender el plan de Susana. Gracias a su nuevo estatus, Inés “sale a la luz” en el ámbito familiar de Laura, cuando su hija le cuenta sobre ella a Guillermina. El interés de la adolescente por su abuela demuestra el comienzo de una relación intergeneracional basada no en la obligación sanguínea, sino en una libertad que permite la interconexión entre nieta y abuela. Liberada de un rol tradicional de género como esposa y madre, Inés puede vincularse con Guillermina, desde otra posición.

A modo de conclusión

Catedrales y *El tiempo de las moscas* presentan los relatos de iniciación de dos protagonistas quienes desafían mandatos religiosos y sociales para labrarse identidades femeninas

de acuerdo a sus propios términos. Lía de *Catedrales* e Inés de *El tiempo de las moscas* son presentadas como sujetos nomádicos que se separan de sus familias y los valores heredados para encontrar la verdad de un crimen en *Catedrales* y de uno por cometerse en *El tiempo de las moscas*. Estas novelas de Piñeiro se estructuran en el viaje iniciático de una joven y una mujer casada devenida asesina, respectivamente. En ambos casos, una muerte les causa una crisis que las separa mental y físicamente de sus familias. El deambular físico de estas protagonistas exterioriza la búsqueda interior de respuestas y de nuevas formas de ser mujer en el siglo XXI. Como forma de resaltar la fibra moral de Lía e Inés, Piñeiro las enfrenta a antagonistas: Carmen y Bonar, respectivamente, personajes cuya caracterización se basa en arquetipos de la mujer malvada para revelar los instintos monstruosos de ambas, la irracionalidad o la agencia para vengarse. Las “malvadas” que despliegan un poder que se traduce en afán de dominio son castigadas por la separación (liberación) de sus hijos: Mateo se aleja de Carmen mientras que Timoteo, se suicida. Esta dicotomía entre bien y mal conduce a plantear el desafío que las protagonistas en iniciación deben dilucidar. Ambas surgen victoriosas al desenmascarar a las malvadas y probar su calidad ética y moral, relevando que el nomadismo las condujo a una nueva forma de ser mujer con una comprensión de temas actuales, tales como el derecho al aborto legal, la interseccionalidad entre mujeres y las transiciones a géneros diferentes.

Recurriendo a esquemas clásicos y arquetipos literarios para delinear la evolución de las protagonistas, Piñeiro presenta, en sus dos novelas más recientes, una exploración de las relaciones entre mujeres, especialmente la hermandad y su cara opuesta, la violencia de mujeres hacia seres indefensos. Al hacer referencia a la genealogía de los relatos de la humanidad, Piñeiro solo ubica sus novelas en una continuidad cultural occidental sino que busca que sus historias de iniciación femenina de las protagonistas Lía e Inés, ambas sujetos nomádicos, sean formativas para las lectoras. De esta manera, la escritora argentina sugiere a sus lectoras abandonar estructuras limitantes y trazarse un camino propio de liberación que las convierte en heroínas y modelos positivos para la juventud, encarnada en *Catedrales* y *El tiempo de las moscas*, en dos adolescentes Mateo y Guillermina.

Notas

- 1.- “recreates a society on the verge of collapsing under the weight of its own unsustainable prejudices and (financial) expectations.”
- 2.- “taps into the issues of maternity and women’s rights regarding their own bodies, and was described by the *New York Times* as “a piercing commentary on mother-daughter relationships, the indignity of bureaucracy, the burdens of caregiving and the impositions of religious dogma on women.”
- 3.- “provides detailed accounts of a contemporary Argentinean society that is mostly conservative, classist and patriarchal.”
- 4.- Ana María del Gesso Cabrera sostiene que “[e]n la historia de la narrativa muchos personajes femeninos han sido protagonistas, han sido símbolos de épocas y espacios. Los papeles que jugaron las mujeres fueron variadísimos y configurados de maneras diversas que van desde seductoras vampiras hasta abnegadas esposas, madres e hijas” (n. p.). Julieta Astorino, Lucas Saporosi, Eugenia Zicavo desarrollan las matrices discursivas en torno al aborto en *Elena sabe* (2007).
- 5.- “form(s) through which common experience becomes communicable.”
- 6.- “many tales are quite similar to each other, appearing to be variations of general underlying patterns or types.”
- 7.- “narratology’s basic premise is that a common, more or less implicit model of narrative explains people’s ability to understand communicative performance and types of stories.”
- 8.- “explore difficult subject about abuses of power and human weaknesses.”
- 9.- “the quest is established as the means for problem-solving and it is communicated and represented through the tale.”
- 10.- “women know about the sequence of menstruation, intercourse and birth, they can instruct the young, both in serious and in a playful way.”
- 11.- “stories work with people, for people, and always stories work on people, affecting what people are able to see as real, as possible, and as worth doing and best avoided.”
- 12.- “an eruption in a young girl’s life that causes her to separate from family and home seclusion for a certain period in an idyllic setting a catastrophe that drives the young girl from the idyllic setting due to her violation or promise of her being violated a period of wandering in which she suffers and atones for her mistakes the accomplishment of a set of tasks or a rescue that brings a happy ending.”
- 13.- “neither reproduction not just imitation but rather emphatic proximity, intense interconnectedness.”
- 14.- “stories inform people’s sense of what counts as good and bad, of how to act and not to act.”
- 15.- “Claudia Piñeiro was a leading voice of the ‘Marea Verde.’”
- 16.- “a person becomes claims worthy by virtue of being narratable.”
- 17.- “are evil monsters whose biggest weapon is their appearance of normalcy and beauty.”
- 18.- Según Marcela, Ana “sentía un temor desmedido por Carmen que no era propio de hermanas. Le tenía más miedo a ella que a sus padres. Más miedo que a nadie. A mí me llamaba mucho la atención, porque conmigo Carmen siempre fue encantadora. Así era también con el resto de las chicas.”
- 19.- “a violent, evil woman who commits treacherous acts for her man.”
- 20.- “a perversion of the private realm.”
- 21.- “la narrativa cristiana requería una dualidad entre los polos contrastantes del bien y el mal.”

- 22.- “nomadic subjects are capable of freeing the activity of thinking from the hold of phallogocentric dogmatism, returning thought to its freedom, its liveliness, its beauty.”
- 23.- “the hysterical woman virtually ceased to function within the family. No longer did she devote herself to the needs of others, acting as self-sacrificing wife, mother, or daughter: through her hysteria she could and in fact did force others to assume those functions. . . . Consciously or unconsciously, [she] had thus opted out of [her] traditional role.”
- 24.- “el sujeto femenino feminista así definido es uno de los términos que no puede y no debe ser simplificado en una forma teleológica de subjetividad” the female feminist subject thus defined is one of the terms that cannot and should be not streamlined into a teleological form of subjectivity.”
- 25.- Rosi Braidotti no utiliza el término interseccionalidad pero explica que la importancia de la relación entre mujeres como forma de alcanzar un desarrollo de cada mujer: “del movimiento de las mujeres puede empoderar la transformación subjetiva de cada una de nosotras ‘yo-mujer’” (130; “the ‘we-woman’ of the women’s movement can empower the subjective becoming of each of us ‘I-woman’”).
- 26.- “the first of a long line of women who are experts in the use of poisons, love-philters, spell-binding magic.”
- 27.- “deep personal connections of women ...[which] often ignore barriers of age, economics, worldly experience, race, culture—all the barriers that, in male or mixed society, had seemed so difficult to cross.”
- 28.- “grotesque, predatory, cruel.”
- 29.- “to the model of the jilted lover.”
- 30.- “licentious, power grasping, and overly masculine.”
- 31.- “violent women, then, are often thought of as not only *bad* but as *bad women*—in the sense that they are bad and they are women, and in the sense that their violence makes bad at *being women*.”
- 32.- “psychoanalytically speaking, it is the threat that the mother will kill her young instead of nurturing them.”
- 33.- Marina Bettaglio examina el modelo de la madre castradora en otra novela de Piñeiro, *Elena sabe* (2007) afirma que esta escritora “cuestiona la idea no solo que la maternidad sea la misión suprema de las mujeres, sino también la noción de las madres como figuras siempre ‘responsables’ ‘afectuosas’” (415).
- 34.- “a type of intelligence and of thought, a way of knowing; it implies a complex, but very coherent body of mental attitudes and intellectual behavior which combine flair, wisdom, forethought, subtlety of mind, deception, resourcefulness, vigilance, opportunism, various skills, and experience acquired over years. It is applied to situations which are transient, shifting, disconcerting and ambiguous.”
- 35.- “nurturer of youth.”

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**FEMINISTAS UNIDAS GRADUATE STUDENT
ESSAY PRIZE “EMILIA PARDO BAZÁN”
Convocatoria 2023, trabajo ganador:**

Escatón con glitter: las protestas feministas en Ciudad de México en 2019-2020

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Resumen: El 6 de agosto de 2019, la presunta violación a una joven mexicana de diecisiete años resultó en una serie de marchas multitudinarias de mujeres. Estas marchas, acompañadas de pintas que cubrieron los monumentos de Ciudad de México, fueron leídas por la prensa con tintes apocalípticos pues la toma del espacio público desafió la jerarquía estatal. A lo largo de este texto, planeo establecer dicho movimiento como un apocalipsis contemporáneo, reapropiando y resignificando términos teológicos que han marcado la moral social mexicana. Propongo que la marcha del 16 de agosto de 2019 podría entenderse como un desborde escatológico, es decir, como nuevo orden ontológico. Relaciono el cuerpo colectivo de la marcha con el cuerpo angelical libre de las constricciones genéricas y le asigno potencia (o futurabilidad, en palabras de Franco Berardi) en la nueva figuración ontológica. Ante las políticas institucionales que truncaron dicha potencia, sostengo que es el cuerpo femenino y colectivo en el que se encarnan donde existe la futurabilidad. A su vez, propongo ejercer la lectura apocalíptica para leer las novelas mexicanas contemporáneas, *El invencible verano de Liliana* de Cristina Rivera Garza y *Feral* de Gabriela Jáuregui, mediante una nueva noción del término justicia.

Palabras clave: apocalipsis, México, protestas, feminismo, escatón.

Abstract: On August 6, 2019, the alleged sexual assault of a Mexican minor gave way to a series of protests in Mexico City. These protests, hand in hand with the graffiti that covered the national monuments, were understood by the press as an apocalypse, given the hierarchical defiance that they implied. Throughout this text, I read that movement as a contemporary apocalypse, reclaiming theological terminology that has defined Mexican moral society. I establish the protest of August 16, 2019 as an escathological overflow, that is, as a new ontological order. By relating the collective body present in the protest with the angelical body, free of gender limitations, I assign it power (futurability, in terms of Franco Berardi) in this new ontological order. In the face of governmental policies that have hindered the possibilities of change, I claim that the feminine and collective body is where futurability remains embodied. I then propose an apocalyptic reading of two contemporary Mexican novels: *Liliana's Invincible Summer* by Cristina Rivera Garza and *Feral* by Gabriela Jáuregui, through a new interpretation of the notion of justice.

Keywords: Apocalypsis, Feminism, Mexico, Protests, Eschaton.

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“—exhausta ya, harta ya, ya para siempre enrabiada— le lanzó diamantina rosa a la cabeza. El gesto, tan espectacular como inocente, le ganó un nuevo nombre al movimiento feminista”

Cristina Rivera Garza, *El invencible verano de Liliana*.

La escena: un grupo de mujeres de rostro cubierto rodeando la oficina de la Procuraduría General de la República y lanzando glitter.¹ El contexto: en 2019, la Organización de las Naciones Unidas, con información del Secretariado Ejecutivo del Sistema Nacional de Salud Pública (SESNSP), reportó que en México se registraron un total de 3,833 mujeres víctimas de homicidio. Esto corresponde a un promedio de 10.5 mujeres asesinadas cada día, la cifra más alta reportada hasta el momento en el país. Es entonces que se dieron las protestas feministas durante 2019 y 2020 en Ciudad de México, protestas que conmocionaron a la nación entera. A lo largo de este texto establezco dicho movimiento social como lo más cercano a un apocalipsis contemporáneo, donde entiendo la marcha del 16 de agosto de 2019 como un desborde escatológico. Me interesa ligar el escatón² (momento de trascendencia propia del apocalipsis teológico) a la liberación femenina, mediante un análisis del cuerpo en la ciudad pensado a través del concepto de vulnerabilidad de Judith Butler y la habitabilidad de la ciudad de Henri Lefavre. Es a partir de la violencia material (y simbólica con el uso de glitter) hacia los monumentos de la ciudad que se contradice la noción de pureza angelical con la que se asocia a las mujeres, y, por tanto, se disloca el imaginario social en términos apocalípticos. Durante la marcha se inaugura un cuerpo colectivo que refigura el cuerpo angelical propio del escatón. Propongo esta serie de marchas feministas como una producción y reinterpretación del espacio capitalino a partir del cuerpo femenino, donde se genera lo que Franco Berardi denominaría futurabilidad, es decir, una capa de posibilidades que podrían devenir en realidad. Esta potencia de escatón, que luego se ve truncada en la institucionalización del movimiento feminista, generó una serie de aperturas alrededor del movimiento y de la relación que tienen las mujeres chilangas con su ciudad. En la narrativa mexicana contemporánea, la presencia del escatón con glitter todavía apunta a una posibilidad latente: el cambio radical en la estructura patriarcal a partir de una reapropiación de la palabra.

La posibilidad del apocalipsis con escatón: el cuerpo angelical

En los estudios teológicos, el escatón se entiende como el momento de trascendencia entre el paso de lo terrenal a lo divino, es decir, el fin del mundo que abriría un orden nuevo. Este fin del mundo es entendido, según Joseph Flipper, como el cumplimiento del plan de Dios. Así, el

escatón propone un futuro donde la consumación será total con base en la palabra de Dios, lo que genera un espacio vacío en el presente, pues la vida se desarrolla entre “el cumplimiento del Viejo Testamento y la consumación final” (Flipper 212). Proponer las marchas feministas en México como un escatón implica asumir la apertura de un nuevo orden ontológico.

Llama la atención que el escatón, además de abrir una nueva realidad, también reconfigure las relaciones sociales que le sobreviven. En su texto sobre la infertilidad y el escatón (“Barrenness and the Eschaton”), Cándida Moss y Joel Baden establecen la injerencia del escatón en el modelo dominante de fertilidad femenina. Al citar a Juan 12:24-25, se aprecia cómo Jesús establece que la reencarnación en el cielo no está condicionada por el matrimonio y, por lo tanto, tampoco por la reproducción: “pues cuando se levantan de entre los muertos, no son casadas ni dadas en matrimonio, sino ángeles en el cielo” (Moss 226).³ Así, será la resurrección después del escatón lo que permita la libertad de las mujeres fuera de las construcciones y limitaciones del género. Moss y Baden también establecen que el cuerpo en la resurrección ha sido un motivo de discusión ético entre teólogos pues al erradicar las diferencias corporales se asume que existe sólo un tipo de raza y género donde se proyectan los ideales corporales que también son reflejos de nuestra propia realidad: “la problemática de las imágenes establecidas de salvación celestial no es sólo que son proyectadas sino también reflexivas. Inscriben y reinscriben la jerarquía social en la que ciertos cuerpos son celebrados sobre otros” (Moss 227).⁴ Mientras que la noción de un cuerpo ideal e imaginado plantea un conflicto ético al proyectarse hacia la divinidad, también existe una correlación entre este cuerpo divino y el cuerpo terrenal que depende de la conceptualización social de quien lo imagina. El escatón y la resurrección se convierten en la oportunidad para replantear el cuerpo que se regenera y las opresiones que lo atraviesan. Al pensar en la posibilidad de una resurrección, se abre también la posibilidad de replantear los cuerpos (y las estructuras sociales en las que se desarrollan) en cuya semejanza se renacería. Para ligarlo con la futurabilidad de Franco Berardi que se entiende como “una capa de posibilidades que pueden evolucionar o no para convertirse en realidades” (Berardi 13), el escatón plantea una futurabilidad de liberación femenina. Es decir, que la trascendencia de lo terrenal a lo divino implica al mismo tiempo una transformación de la concepción social que podría, a su vez, modificar retroactivamente las propias jerarquías previamente establecidas.

#NoMeCuidanMeViolan

Ahora bien, para entender la importancia de las marchas feministas en Ciudad de México y su relación con el apocalipsis es necesario conocer el proceso que las detonó. El 6 de agosto de 2019, una joven de 17 años denunció haber sido violada por cuatro policías mientras caminaba hacia su casa en Azcapotzalco, al norte de Ciudad de México. A ese caso se



Fotografía 1 (El Sol de México)

sumaron otras tres denuncias de violaciones policiacas en la misma ciudad en el transcurso de un mes. Fue entonces que la ola de indignación (y su representación digital por medio del hashtag #NoMeCuidanMeViolan) se trasladó a las calles el lunes 12 de agosto de ese año. Decenas de mujeres se congregaron fuera de la Secretaría de Seguridad Ciudadana para continuar la marcha hacia la Procuraduría General de la República, adueñándose de las calles Liverpool y General Gabriel Hernández. Un reportaje de *Plumas Atómicas* menciona que cuatro mujeres (ver *Fotografía 1*) se vistieron de policías con letreros que leen “Eres popó. Eres popó. Policía violador”, “¡Los policías no son tus amigos!”, “A mí me cuidan mis amigas, no la policía”, “#TodasDenunciamos” (Muñiz “Cientos...”). Estos cuatro disfraces de policía representarían a los cuatro policías que habrían presuntamente violado a una menor de edad el 6 de agosto de 2019. También se colocó una máscara de cerdo frente a las oficinas de la Procuraduría. Lo que distingue a esta marcha feminista de otras en la ciudad es que ésta fue dirigida específicamente contra el cuerpo policiaco que representa, a su vez, el cuerpo estatal. Las mujeres, entonces, no sólo tomaron las calles sino que impostaron al cuerpo masculino, policial y estatal para hacerlo. Este gesto inicia entonces el proceso de dislocación del imaginario social pues se empieza a romper con los preconceptos de los espacios (e identidades) que puede habitar la mujer en la ciudad. Así, que las mujeres se adueñaran de las calles ya no sólo como hombres sino también como policías, implicó un desafío a la jerarquía que acompaña el poder directo del Estado. El marco de la marcha y las posteriores protestas busca establecer la pregunta: “¿y de la policía quién me cuida?”, pregunta que cuestiona a su vez la violencia realizada y perpetuada por el Estado.

El entonces secretario de seguridad de la CDMX, Jesús Orta, se negó a entablar un diálogo con las mujeres que se encontraban protestando y, ante la impotencia por la falta de respuesta, una de las manifestantes le lanzó un puñado de diamantina rosa (glitter). Jesús Orta aseguró que había sido “atacado” por lo que se replegó en las oficinas de la Procuraduría y colocó un cerco policial



Fotografía 2 (Forbes)

en la entrada. El glitter, que Orta consideró como una afronta directa, se convirtió en símbolo indiscutible del movimiento y la lucha. El polvo rosa que fue entendido por las figuras estatales como un arma de ataque subraya la contradicción entre la violencia física a la que son sujetas las mujeres cada día contra las armas simbólicas con las que

habrían de responder. De este modo, las mujeres que protestan no se insertan en la violencia propia del Estado sino que descolocan la narrativa de violencia mediante el uso de elementos simbólicos como el glitter y las pintas.

Sostengo que la marcha se inauguró como una máquina de guerra en términos de Deleuze y Guattari en cuanto se hizo uso del glitter como arma simbólica. Para estos filósofos, “todo lo que lanza o es lanzado es en principio un arma” (398), por lo que el lanzamiento del glitter inaugura también la configuración de la máquina de guerra. Contraria al aparato del Estado, la máquina de guerra funciona como “una pura forma de exterioridad” (362) donde el glitter no sólo representa una reconfiguración de las armas de guerra, sino también todo aquello inaprehensible por el Estado. Fuera de la sobredecodificación propia del Estado, el glitter (inaprehensible física pero, en este caso, también conceptualmente) logra decodificar la herramienta de organización del Estado (402). Al tomar en cuenta que el Estado “no tiene de por sí una máquina de guerra; sólo se apropiará de ella bajo la forma de institución militar” (362) se entiende que los altos mandos estatales hayan elegido replegarse ante las mujeres feministas, pues no sólo se mostraron como máquina de guerra en una confrontación decodificada con polvos rosas, sino que atacaron directamente a la institución policial capitalina. Finalmente, las compañeras lograron romper el cerco y entrar en la Procuraduría, donde pintaron la fachada y rompieron los cristales. Ese mismo día, la jefa de gobierno, Claudia Sheinbaum, definió a las protestas como “una provocación” y

aseguró que abrirían carpetas de investigación contra las mujeres manifestantes, con lo que se inició una criminalización de las protestas feministas que continúa hasta el día de hoy.

El 9 de agosto de 2019, Ernestina Godoy, procuradora de la Procuraduría General de Justicia declaró que los policías señalados de violación de una menor podrían llegar a salir libres debido a la falta de imputación directa (Robledo). Godoy estableció que “[s]i no podemos integrar la carpeta y no hay una imputación no hay razón para que los separen (de su cargo)” (Ramírez). Cabe mencionar que en los días posteriores a la denuncia, la carpeta de investigación fue desaparecida, lo que obligó a la menor de edad a volver a interponer su denuncia. A esto se agregó la filtración de una serie de videos que cuestionaban su versión de los hechos, pues se presentaron con desfases de horarios. Aunque se estableció que “[l]as imágenes no muestran con claridad que [sic.] es lo que sucedió. Un poste, en particular, impide ver la escena donde los policías se acerca [sic.] a ella” (Sin Embargo Staff), dichos videos lograron poner en duda la versión de la menor. A esto se le agregó la filtración de datos personales por parte de la Procuraduría, lo que obligó a la joven a retirar su denuncia: “[e]l 9 de agosto, el vocero de la Procuraduría de la Ciudad, Ulises Lara López, reconoció que desde esa dependencia se filtró la información de la joven de 17 años [...] y que eso generó la pérdida de confianza de la víctima y por lo cual decidieron no seguir en el caso por el momento” (Gándara). Esta serie de filtraciones impidió que la menor continuara con el proceso. El caso, hasta el día de hoy, permanece cerrado.

El 16 de agosto, cuatro días después de la manifestación frente a las oficinas de la Procuraduría, en relación con la postura del gobierno y como respuesta ante el mal manejo de la denuncia de violación que inauguró las protestas, se convocó a otra protesta masiva en Ciudad de México. Debido a la amenaza previamente recibida por la jefa de gobierno, muchas de las manifestantes llevaban la cara cubierta con distintos paños negros. La cobertura del rostro en contraposición con la visibilidad del cuerpo, un cuerpo además desnudo y expuesto, descoloca a su vez el régimen de la visualidad.⁵ La oposición entre el cuerpo desnudo y la cara cubierta refleja también el cambio de jerarquía donde la identidad no está dada por la visibilidad del rostro, sino que se da en colectivo por el cuerpo plural de las mujeres desnudas (que se reconocen como mujeres en tanto cuerpos y no en tanto rostros). La identidad queda expandida, compartida entre quienes marchan como un mismo cuerpo desnudo, se expande de manera colectiva y no personal, horizontal.

La restructuración y toma de la ciudad por parte de las mujeres mexicanas cobra especial impacto al pensar en las políticas públicas que se han desarrollado en los últimos años respecto a la libertad y agenciamiento de sus cuerpos. Me interesa pensar en las marchas del 2019-2020 como una resignificación del espacio, especialmente por las limitaciones a las que se ven sujetas las mujeres día con día en Ciudad de México. Ya que la amenaza constante las obliga a limitar los espacios que habitan, así como los horarios en los que pueden hacerlo (sin tomar en cuenta las vestimentas específicas que deben usar para protegerse del acoso), el hecho de ocupar las calles implica también una libertad y una nueva forma de experimentar la ciudad. Por ejemplo, como respuesta a las denuncias de acoso recibidas en el transporte público, desde julio del 2000 el Sistema de Transporte Colectivo Metro (STCM) designó los dos primeros vagones como exclusivos de mujeres. Aunque esta medida reduce el espacio donde se posibilita el acoso, es también un limitante para la cantidad de espacio que las mujeres pueden ocupar en su ciudad. Por tanto, las mujeres pueden ocupar espacios acotados sin el temor de ser violadas, desaparecidas, agredidas o acosadas.

Resignificación de la ciudad: las pintas

Como la mayoría de las manifestaciones de la capital, ésta inició en la Glorieta Insurgentes para dirigirse hacia el Ángel de la Independencia. A lo largo del trayecto no sólo se rompieron los vidrios de varias tiendas de la zona, sino que se realizaron pintas en diversos locales, estatuas y monumentos. Por supuesto, las pintas con mayor impacto fueron las del Ángel de la Independencia debido al peso simbólico que tiene en relación con la historia de México.⁶ Frases como “México feminicida”, “con nosotras no se juega,” “se va a caer,” “la policía mata,” “amigas vivas,” “no se va a caer, lo vamos a tirar,” “policía nos viola,” “policía violadora,” “Claudia traidora” cubrieron el monumento más representativo de la capital (ver fotografía 3). Deleuze y Guattari consideran que “los afectos atraviesan el cuerpo como flechas, son armas de guerra” (363), por lo que en esta marcha los afectos serían las armas que se ponen en juego. Interesa apuntar que ambos se basan en la Teoría de la ética de Spinoza para entender los afectos y, a su vez, Spinoza define a las emociones o afectaciones a partir de un entendimiento de la sustancia en relación con Dios. Si la percepción sensorial, para Spinoza, está ligada a la naturaleza de Dios, resulta entonces adecuado que los afectos se hagan visibles durante el apocalipsis contemporáneo llamado por las mujeres feministas. Los afectos, visibles a través de las pintas, muestran el hartazgo de miles de mujeres y

esta indignación no sólo se hace presente, sino que se materializa en las estatuas rayadas e intervenidas que configuran el espacio ciudadano.



Fotografía 3, de Santiago Arau

La doctora Selma Rodal Linares establece que, debido a la carga simbólica original de los monumentos, existe una doble metáfora con la presencia de las pintas donde la rearticulación funciona como una reapropiación de los monumentos y del régimen estético que los interpele. Dichas pintas constituyen una “sobre-escritura” en donde el soporte se transforma con la escritura en un monumento estético y se modifica su condición de escultura original: “[e]ste cuerpo que es el monumento se vuelve pasible de un sentido y sufre un cambio cualitativo: la primera escritura lo lleva de ser un monolito de piedra a un monumento; la segunda escritura lo transforma en agenciamiento” (230). Así, la piedra original que adquiere un sentido nacional mediante su configuración como estatua, se vuelve a configurar mediante las pintas y permite, a su vez, la expresión antes contenida de las mujeres que han crecido rodeadas de estatuas que no les dicen nada. A partir de pensar en las pintas como una reescritura de la ciudad es posible pensar en la materialidad de los monumentos como parte de la ciudad habitable, donde la redistribución de lo sensible abre a su vez una serie de posibilidades futuras. Rodal Linares establece también que: “en las pintas se reconoce que el soporte y lo escrito son elementos heterogéneos que articulan un disenso estético, cuyo ensamblaje trastorna el consenso del reparto policial y produce una

redistribución de lo sensible que puede promover una transformación de la comunidad” (230). Es entonces que mediante las pintas se promueve una transformación de la comunidad mediante la redistribución de lo sensible a partir de un disenso estético. La redistribución de lo sensible, que Jacques Rancière entiende como una distribución del ser que afecta al régimen estético, transforma la habitabilidad de la ciudad.

Los afectos que se materializan en las pintas se convierten en una demanda política del espacio público y la habitabilidad de éste. Contrario al monumento que funciona como obra acabada que establece y reproduce el discurso oficial, el espacio social corresponde a un producto inacabado en constante transición. Henri Lefebvre afirma que la ciudad funciona como un producto que comprende las relaciones entre las obras, en su relativo orden y desorden, “[e]n tanto que resultado de una secuencia y de un conjunto de operaciones, no puede reducirse a la condición de un simple objeto [...] el espacio social permite que tengan lugar determinadas acciones, sugiere unas y prohíbe otras” (129). Es decir, la ciudad entendida como espacio social habría de cambiar y transmutar como parte de las relaciones que se posibilitan en su espacio. Es bajo este precepto que sería posible pensar no sólo en la injerencia de las marchas feministas dentro de Ciudad de México sino en la posibilidad de escatón que surge de la toma de la ciudad a partir de la reestructuración del ordenamiento simbólico que la rige.

Así como en la marcha se reconfigura el espacio social mediante la redistribución de lo sensible a partir de las pintas, también existe un cambio material del espacio a partir de la reconfiguración de su habitabilidad mediante la presencia encarnada de cuerpos vulnerables que se adueñan del espacio. En un país donde 10.5 mujeres son asesinadas cada día y donde en un mismo mes se denunciaron cuatro presuntas violaciones por parte del cuerpo policiaco, ser mujer y salir a la calle es un acto de resistencia. Las mujeres, además, marcharon desnudas incrementando así el sentimiento de vulnerabilidad pero, a la vez, descolocando doblemente al régimen patriarcal que rige la ciudad (y que sólo permite el desnudo cuando es conveniente para la mirada masculina). Judith Butler en “Rethinking Vulnerability and Resistance” establece que la calle no es sólo la plataforma de la demanda política pero un bien en tanto infraestructura. Por lo tanto, cuando las protestantes se reúnen en el espacio público para luchar contra problemas relacionados a la infraestructura, esa misma plataforma es parte de la agenda política (13). Sin embargo, esta noción se ve exacerbada cuando lo que se demanda no son bienes infraestructurales sino la habitabilidad de esa misma infraestructura. Es decir, las mujeres no marchan por sus pertenencias o bienes, sino

por sus vidas. Las calles, entonces, ya no serían la plataforma de la agenda política, sino un espacio encarnado de la política de vida.

Recuperando el escatón y la posibilidad de resurrección, ambas abren la posibilidad de replantear los cuerpos y las estructuras sociales que los constriñen. Es aquí donde el cuerpo de la marcha apunta hacia nuevas posibilidades relacionales pues el cuerpo de la máquina de guerra funciona como un rizoma. El rizoma, como apuntan Deleuze y Guattari, es un modelo no jerárquico, horizontal. Así, las mujeres que marchan en un mismo cuerpo social (con las identidades desdibujadas por los rostros cubiertos) replantean la jerarquía vertical que marca el sistema patriarcal que rige la ciudad. Butler afirma que, al considerar al cuerpo como dependiente de otros cuerpos, también se define a partir del otro: “lo que estoy sugiriendo no sólo es que este o aquel cuerpo esté constreñido a una red de relaciones, pero que el cuerpo, a pesar de sus claras fronteras, o tal vez precisamente en virtud de esas mismas fronteras, se define por las relaciones que hacen su propia vida y su propia acción posible” (16).⁷ Si se aplica esta noción del cuerpo pensando en un cuerpo colectivo como el que presenta la marcha, un cuerpo horizontal y rizomático “por oposición al tipo arborescente que se concentra en órganos de poder” (Deleuze y Guattari 365) entonces el cuerpo al que se apunta es un nuevo cuerpo deslindado de las jerarquías heteropatriarcales. El cuerpo colectivo de la marcha es el cuerpo angelical al que se aspira con el escatón.

Ahora bien, aunque la mayoría de las manifestantes llevaban la cara cubierta con paños negros para evitar la criminalización, varias de ellas iban sin camisa. Acostumbradas a protegerse de la mirada masculina, desnudarse dentro de la marcha conlleva un re-agenciamiento del propio cuerpo a la vez que una re-estructuración del cuerpo social. Esta doble significación, aunada a las pintas y las canciones con las que se marchó a lo largo de la ciudad, se convirtió en la representación del escatón (como posibilidad de futuro dentro de la violencia apocalíptica diaria) para la mujer chilanga. No existe un conteo oficial del número de manifestantes, pero en la marcha del 8M⁸ de 2020, se estima que más de 80 mil mujeres tomaron las calles. Rodeadas de cuerpos ajenos, las mujeres mexicanas por fin se sintieron libres de caminar en su ciudad. El desnudo durante la marcha no sólo es una afronta a la mirada masculina que diariamente las constriñe, sino que es una muestra de vulnerabilidad que genera resistencia. Butler también establece que: “existe una resitencia corporal que es plural y performativa y que muestra cómo los cuerpos están siendo afectados por políticas económicas y sociales que afectan sus vidas. Pero estos cuerpos, al mostrar

su precariedad, también resisten a estos mismos poderes; ejercen una forma de resistencia que presupone una vulnerabilidad específica y se opone a la precariedad” (15).⁹ Al mostrarse desnudas y vulnerables, las mujeres exponen su propia resistencia. Así, ellas marcan cuándo y cómo habrían de desnudarse y se adueñarían de la ciudad bajo sus propios términos. Al mostrar su precariedad, se resisten a ella, resignificando el sentido del desnudo ya no como un objeto abstracto en manos del deseo masculino, sino como una relación directa con la ciudad que las acoge. Las paredes se visten de pintas, mientras que las mujeres se desnudan.

La prensa y el apocalipsis

Ahora bien, para terminar de situar las protestas feministas en Ciudad de México durante 2019 y 2020 como un apocalipsis contemporáneo habría que recurrir a las notas periodísticas que realizaron los grandes medios nacionales. Es mediante la cobertura machista del movimiento que éste termina de configurarse como una total transgresión, una muestra de calamidades infinitas que prefiguran el estrago de la capital y apuntan a su destrucción. El interés en los daños materiales de la ciudad, sin pasar por el legítimo enojo de las mujeres representa una priorización del espacio por sobre sus habitantes. Por ejemplo, el artículo del periódico *Reforma*, “Protesta, furia y vandalismo”, comienza diciendo “[l]a marcha para repudiar el acoso y la violencia contra las mujeres terminó con la estación del Metrobús Insurgentes destrozada, al menos cinco patrullas dañadas, un reportero golpeado y la base del Ángel de la Independencia grafitada” (Ahedo). Existe entonces una tensión latente entre la violencia simbólica y material realizada durante las marchas y la noción de pureza angelical con la que las mujeres son asociadas. El regaño velado del presidente Andrés Manuel López Obrador llamando a las mujeres a “portarse bien” refleja la actitud paternalista hacia el legítimo enojo femenino que se contrapone con las notas periodísticas donde el foco está en la violencia material hacia la ciudad y no en las presuntas violaciones que dieron lugar a las marchas. Igualmente, el reportaje de *La Jornada*¹⁰ “Convierte en furia protesta contra la violencia hacia las mujeres” se enfoca en la violencia: “integrantes de diversas organizaciones feministas se manifestaron ayer en el centro de la Ciudad de México para exigir el esclarecimiento de violaciones recientes y vinculación al proceso de los responsables, lo que devino en pintas de edificios públicos y destrucción de estaciones del Metrobús” (Bravo).

Otros títulos incluyen “Marcha de mujeres se sale de control” por parte de *Milenio*, “Otra vez, la violencia se impone en la marcha” por *Excelsior*, “Violencia tiñe marcha de las mujeres” por *El Universal*. La narración periodística y el uso de palabras como violencia, destrucción, fuera

de control, furia, estallido y vandalismo adquieren tintes apocalípticos. Este final de los tiempos al que apuntan los medios mexicanos se significa doblemente: no es la violencia la que marca el apocalipsis, sino la violencia ejercida por las mujeres que la sociedad asume como “vulnerables”. El apocalipsis se da a partir de la conversión femenina en máquina de guerra inaprehensible por el Estado, atacando con glitter y pintando en las esculturas que representan la nación. Las mujeres son planteadas como victimarias y no como víctimas y en ese cambio de roles es donde se establece gran parte de su transgresión. ¿Será esto el apocalipsis: un espacio donde las mujeres no se ciñan a las reglas del heteropatriarcado? Es esta posibilidad apocalíptica la que a su vez se relaciona con el escatón, una destrucción total que obligaría a una reconstrucción de las estructuras sin seguir los parámetros patriarcales. Un nuevo futuro posible, sólo alcanzable mediante la destrucción total.

Lo interesante de pensar el apocalipsis es que, si dentro de la historia éste ha aparecido como el final de los tiempos y la terminación de la historia humana (Verdú 25), entonces pensarlo a partir del feminismo permitiría aplicar el apocalipsis a la concepción patriarcal al tiempo que el escatón se sitúa dentro del argumento feminista. Bajo este precepto, la noción de apocalipsis en torno a las marchas feministas de Ciudad de México no apunta a un fin del mundo catastrófico sino a una refiguración del espacio público y, por tanto, una transformación de la ciudad así como el escatón apunta a la bisagra que se abre en torno a una nueva configuración de la ciudad y la manera de habitarla. Es decir, sostengo que los medios mexicanos de mayor alcance (medios conocidos por sus alineaciones y prácticas machistas) enmarcaron las marchas en torno al apocalipsis pues consideran que aquello que propone el feminismo mexicano es, precisamente, la total destrucción de las jerarquías de opresión y violencia de las que ellos se alimentan. Por lo tanto, es un apocalipsis feminista lo que se requiere en Ciudad de México.

Las feministas Verónica Gago y Raquel Gutiérrez Aguilar en “Somos las nietas de todas las brujas que nunca pudieron quemar” establecen que existe “una revolución [que] está curso, una corriente de insubordinación, una fuerza rebelde que apuesta a cambiarlo todo” al hablar de los movimientos feministas en América Latina.¹¹ Donde ellas dicen revolución, yo digo apocalipsis. Donde dicen cambiarlo todo, yo digo escatón. El uso de terminología religiosa no es fortuito pues reapropiarse de este discurso implica, a su vez, recuperar agenciamiento ante la influencia moral católica en la sociedad mexicana. La religión católica consideró por años a la mujer y su corporalidad como muestra de impureza. San Agustín establece que en la mujer la carne se subordina al espíritu y, en esa limitación terrenal es que la mujer es también superditada ante el

hombre que puede alcanzar lo celestial. Sin embargo, propongo que el apocalipsis con escatón abre una futurabilidad encarnada en el cuerpo femenino. Al reconocer la corporalidad femenina a la que la mujer fue relegada en el catolicismo como un aspecto no sólo positivo sino potente se abre entonces la posibilidad del escatón contemporáneo. Es en la destrucción apocalíptica que el nuevo cuerpo angelical podrá levantarse de los escombros fuera de las restricciones patriarcales.

Martin Jay define ocluarcentrismo como la dominación visual que ha sido imperante en la cultura occidental durante los últimos años. Me interesa específicamente el enfoque en el ocluarcentrismo porque limita la habitabilidad de la ciudad al rango de lo visible. La cobertura de medios y su enfoque en las pintas por sobre la violencia sistémica que hubo de generar las pintas en primer lugar, habla de un ocluarcentrismo que parece dominar las reacciones gubernamentales en torno a la violencia hacia la mujer. El propio Henri Lefabvre hace alusión al carácter visual de los espacios en la ciudad: “[s]e los fabrica para ser concebidos en el plano de lo visible [...] La vista y la visión, figuras clásicas que en la tradición occidental personificaban lo inteligible, se vuelven tramposas: permiten en el espacio social la simulación de la diversidad” (132). En esta simulación es donde las políticas públicas se enfocan, mientras el descontento no se haga visible, entonces tampoco es real. Así, la ciudad habría de priorizar los espacios visibles sobre los espacios habitables, especialmente en torno a las mujeres.

Butler también afirma que los medios funcionan como parte del soporte infraestructural pues aparecen en la esfera pública de manera visible: “los medios funcionan como parte de una infraestructura cuando facilitan nuevos modos de solidaridad y establecen nuevas dimensiones espacio-temporales de la esfera pública” (14).¹² De este modo, los medios también configuran la ciudad pues llenan las calles con las notas que publican. El espacio público se convierte en un lugar hostil para las mujeres pues, mientras son físicamente borradas del espacio público al ser desaparecidas, violadas y asesinadas, sus imágenes llenan las calles. Sus cuerpos violentados son la primera plana de los miles de boletines que empapan la ciudad.¹³ El ocluarcentrismo prioriza a las mujeres sólo mientras ellas estén muertas. En este sentido, las protestas no sólo implican tomar y resignificar las calles, sino que apuntan a una nueva forma de apropiarse del espacio: mediante las pintas, dejar una huella para nombrarse y forzar al ojo público a volver a verlas.¹⁴

Sin embargo, es este mismo ocluarcentrismo el que marca las acciones gubernamentales. La constante y veloz borradora que se hizo (y se continúa haciendo) de las pintas marca la prioridad que le da el gobierno a la visualidad de la ciudad sobre su habitabilidad. Es interesante contraponer

la velocidad para borrar las pintas con la funcionalidad del Estado respecto a la respuesta ante denuncias de violencia. Mientras que una respuesta del Estado en torno a una denuncia puede tardar semanas o meses, gran parte de las pintas realizadas el 16 de agosto ya habían desaparecido para el día 17 del mismo mes. Algunas de las pintas leen “ojalá fuera monumento” como una referencia al cuidado que se le da a las estructuras estáticas en contraposición a la falta de interés sobre las mujeres vivas.¹⁵ Ante las descalificaciones públicas hacia el movimiento feminista que surgieron debido a las pintas en el Ángel de la Independencia, un grupo de mujeres formó el contingente “Restauradoras con glitter” cuyo interés es establecer que:

Las pintas son un mero síntoma de la violencia desorbitada en la que vivimos, y como tal deberían socializarse por los medios para promover la atención al problema de fondo. Sostenemos que su permanencia debe ser un recordatorio palpable de la condenable situación de violencia en nuestro país, y que por ende ninguna deberá ser removida hasta que no se atienda y se dé solución al problema de la violencia de género en nuestro país. (@RestauradorasConGlitter)

Fueron las Restauradoras con glitter, al posicionarse de manera contundente a favor de las pintas desde su gremio, quienes también reconocieron el fuerte impacto histórico que las marchas tendrían en la sociedad mexicana. Su concepción del patrimonio cultural como restaurable, en contraposición de los daños irreparables a los que se enfrentan las mujeres, habría de marcar muchas de las manifestaciones siguientes. Sin embargo, en el caso del Ángel de la Independencia, después de las pintas del 16 de agosto, las autoridades decidieron “reestructurarlo” por lo que fue cercado. Aunque hubo pintas realizadas en los cercos, éstos fueron pintados en los días posteriores, intentando así borrar toda evidencia de la inconformidad feminista. Desde entonces y hasta el 4 de octubre 2021, el Ángel de la Independencia fue cercado para una restauración, un proyecto cuyo costo asciende a cerca de 24 millones de pesos.

Potencia narrativa

Finalmente me interesa contraponer el escatón y la posibilidad escatológica que se planteó en esos dos años, con los procesos de institucionalización que los acompañaron y el consecuente deterioro del movimiento. Por un lado, en un intento por apaciguar a las manifestantes, la jefa de gobierno tuvo una junta el 18 de agosto del 2019 con “las feministas”. Según el medio *Plumas Atómicas*, ese domingo Claudia Sheinbaum se reunió con cerca de cincuenta feministas y activistas de la Ciudad de México. Sin embargo, a pesar del aumento en políticas públicas que surgió de

estas reuniones, también se rompió la horizontalidad que hubo caracterizado al movimiento rizomático durante la marcha. Aunque la reunión inauguró un diálogo entre el gobierno y la población, no hubo una convocatoria abierta para asistir ni se hicieron claras las razones por las cuales ciertas mujeres fueron invitadas y otras no (Muñiz “Nuevo...”). Mientras que muchas de las presentes prefirieron mantenerse en el anonimato, otras fueron ganando popularidad en el ámbito público, lo que generó disidencias dentro del movimiento. Igualmente, mientras que en esa reunión se priorizó y aplaudió el diálogo por sobre la represión, marchas consecuentes como la del 8M en 2020 estuvieron marcadas por la presencia de granaderos y policías que encapsulaban a las manifestantes, como reportó *Pájaro Político*. Por otro lado, la pandemia obligó a las mujeres a replegarse en sus casas, lo que implicó un detrimento en la libertad que se había ganado en relación a la ciudad. No sólo las mujeres fueron impedidas de la habitabilidad de la ciudad sino que su casa se convirtió en un espacio de lucha por la supervivencia, donde las denuncias por violencia doméstica aumentaron hasta un 45% con respecto al año anterior, según la Organización de las Naciones Unidas (ONU).

A pesar de que parte del impacto de las marchas se vio truncado por la institucionalización del movimiento, mantengo que el apocalipsis y su escatón generaron una serie de posibilidades que podrían entenderse junto a lo que Franco Berardi denomina futurabilidad. Él lo define como “una capa de posibilidades que pueden evolucionar o no para convertirse en realidades” (Berardi 13). Sostengo, entonces, que las marchas del 2019 y 2020 hicieron visible la futurabilidad de una nueva forma de relacionarse dentro de CDMX, cuya inmanencia está inscrita en la actual conformación social. Mientras que esta futurabilidad pudo haberse convertido en realidad de no ser por la institucionalización y la pandemia, es mediante la futurabilidad latente que habrá una nueva posibilidad en el futuro, a partir del siguiente escatón.

Igualmente, para Berardi, la noción teológica de la historia sería prescriptiva en tanto el futuro está escrito en el presente y, en contraposición, “la concepción materialista de la inmanencia se basa en la convicción de que la realidad actual contiene al futuro como un amplio espectro de posibilidades, y que la selección de una de las tantas posibilidades no responde a una prescripción determinista del proceso de morfogénesis” (24). Ahora bien, me interesa pensar en el escatón como la posibilidad de transformar la noción teológica prescriptiva en la concepción materialista a partir del cuerpo. El propio Berardi establece que “[p]ara que la posibilidad pase de la virtualidad a la realidad, es preciso que encarne en un sujeto, y que ese sujeto tenga potencia” (17). Como se ha

demostrado, las mujeres mexicanas serían ese sujeto encarnado en el cual la potencia transformaría la virtualidad en realidad. De este modo, el escatón, como reinicio ontológico, implicaría una nueva corporalidad en tanto cuerpo colectivo vulnerable y, por lo tanto, capaz de generar una nueva posibilidad en torno a la futurabilidad feminista. Es mediante la corporalidad y la potencia de las mujeres mexicanas que se logrará el escatón en el que la futurabilidad devenga en realidad.

Mientras que la potencia apocalíptica de las marchas se vio truncada, la futurabilidad se mantiene latente en la corporalidad. Aquí quisiera también insertar las narrativas mexicanas contemporáneas como un archivo literal donde la potencia narrativa encuentra un repositorio material. Es decir, la inexorable presencia de marchas feministas (que hacen referencia a las marchas de 2019 y 2020) en las novelas mexicanas contemporáneas guardan también la futurabilidad latente propia del apocalipsis contemporáneo.¹⁶ Una lectura apocalíptica de la literatura contemporánea mexicana permitirá entender en la inauguración de un nuevo orden ontológico distintos acercamientos a la noción de justicia, por fuera de la estructura estatal. El escatón aparecería no en la pérdida, el asesinato o la muerte, sino en la potencia de rearticulación narrativa. En pocas palabras, una lectura apocalíptica sería aquella en la que se instaure un nuevo orden ontológico. Donde, mediante el cuerpo o, en el caso de la narrativa, la palabra, se aperture la futurabilidad propia del escatón: todo podría ser distinto. Es en esta posibilidad que entiendo una nueva concepción de la justicia, una nueva forma de narrar y nombrar y una forma colectiva de experimentar el duelo, la rabia y la lucha.

El invencible verano de Liliana (2021), por ejemplo, se sitúa inicialmente en la Procuraduría General de la República, mismo lugar que fue apenas dos años antes “atacado” por el glitter: “no hace mucho, a inicios de agosto, un pelotón de feministas furibundas se congregó frente a este mismo edificio blanco con ribetes de color verde para exigir justicia. [...] la violación de una adolescente, perpetrada por miembros de la policía local dentro de las mismas patrullas oficiales, desató la indignación de nueva cuenta” (Rivera Garza 16). La misión en la que se embarga Cristina Rivera Garza, exigir justicia por el feminicidio de su hermana, pareciera reconocer el influjo de las marchas de 2019 como fuente de inspiración. Así, inicia una genealogía post-revolución del glitter en la que destaca la búsqueda de justicia, el nombramiento de aquello que antes quedaba escondido y la amistad entre mujeres propia del cuerpo colectivo que surgió en la marcha.¹⁷

En un video publicado sobre los avances del caso legal, Cristina Rivera Garza establece que la justicia no puede ser reducida a una sanción penal y que debe incluir a la verdad y la memoria en la reparación del daño. En su blog, Rivera Garza escribe:

Compartí con la oficina de Alicia Rosas Rubí, subprocuradora de procesos de la Fiscalía de la Ciudad de México, toda esta información, incluyendo fotografías y más. Su equipo quedó de contactar a la Interpol y de emplear todo recurso disponible para confirmar los datos ofrecidos con sus pares en Estados Unidos. De eso hace ya un año y medio. No he recibido ninguna información al respecto. Solo silencio. El silencio adusto, diríase que eterno, de la impunidad.

La novela, sin embargo, contrarresta el silencio estatal con el nombramiento, la historia y la memoria de Liliana. Así, la genealogía apocalíptica apunta al nombramiento (a la pinta, la mancha, la raya), al trabajo colectivo y afectivo, a la potencia narrativa de la posibilidad. Es el escatón con glitter en el que podemos encontrar otros acercamientos a la noción de justicia.

Publicada en 2022, *Feral* de Gabriela Jáuregui narra la reacción y búsqueda de justicia de Diana, Saratoga y Yunuen al enterarse del asesinato de Eugenia. La relación entre estas mujeres se describe como una mezcla de amistad y hermandad, una relación que parece imposible contener y hasta nombrar dentro de los conceptos parasociales, una relación que los sobrepasa. Todas viven, además, en una comuna –un espacio mantenido y sostenido por los afectos–. En un uso del lenguaje que remite al propio apocalipsis, el día del asesinato de Eugenia es considerado El Peor Día o el Día 0. Parece lógico leer el asesinato de Eugenia en términos apocalípticos, donde la consumación final sería también la muerte. Esta lectura, sin embargo, niega la potencia narrativa del texto. Al leer la novela entera a partir del apocalipsis con escatón, será posible acercarse al día 0 y a la deslocación temporal con la esperanza de la potencia. Es decir, el rompimiento que presenta el asesinato de Eugenia inaugura un orden ontológico en el que sea posible la reestructuración social. Constantemente el texto de Jáuregui apunta a la potencia del cuerpo colectivo (aquí llamado cuerpo angelical, en *Feral* llamado manada) mediante la experiencia afectiva compartida. Así, la novela inicia con un manifiesto canino en el que se llama a habitar, dibujar y manchar a la ciudad que es, a la vez, Ciudad de México: “[a]cá en el centro, en el ombligo de lo que alguna vez se llamó Nueva España, o Deefe, o CedeEmeEquis [...] Dibuja los límites de esta isla en tu corazón, luego pinta esas calles con tus meados, con tus cantos floridos. Que se manchen de sangre” (Jáuregui 19). Una lectura apocalíptica de *Feral* permitiría entonces reconocer en el descubrimiento del nombre del

asesino, Adalberto Reyes, una reestructuración de la estructura judicial y la concepción de justicia. No es gratuito que durante la novela se presenten no sólo otras víctimas de violencia en búsqueda de justicia, como la abuela que teje en la Fiscalía, sino las trabas institucionales para alcanzarla (el viaje del Ministerio Público, a la Fiscalía y al Servicio Militar Forense para recuperar el cuerpo, por ejemplo), pues ante el incumplimiento estatal es sólo la potencia colectiva la que permite acercarse a la justicia.

Finalmente, establezco que la re-estructuración del cuerpo social que se inauguró en las marchas feministas de 2019 y 2020, cuya futurabilidad se vio truncada consecuencia de la pandemia, se encarna en las relaciones parasociales que se presentan en los personajes femeninos de la literatura mexicana posterior. Es posible leer estas novelas mediante el apocalipsis con escatón para destacar la potencia narrativa ante la búsqueda de justicia (reconfigurada fuera de los marcos estatales), el nombramiento (la insistencia en la memoria que refiere a la pinta) y la amistad que refiere al cuerpo colectivo y angelical. La potencia apocalíptica y la futurabilidad del escatón queda entonces latente, como un llamado coral que se repite en la narrativa contemporánea mexicana, esperando finalmente volver a potenciarse en el cuerpo de la mujer que marcha.

Notas

- 1.- Este texto surgió durante el seminario *City in Disarray: Apocalyptic Imaginaries* impartido por la profesora Natalia Castro Picón, a quien agradezco por las enseñanzas, la lectura y la complicidad.
- 2.- El uso de terminología religiosa no es gratuito, pues, como ha indicado Kirwin Lee Klein, el pensamiento postmoderno introduce lenguaje semi-religioso (términos como “aura”, “mesiánico”, “sublime”) en la producción contemporánea. Según Jean Franco, es precisamente debido a la inabilidad del secularismo para dar cuenta de las prácticas de horror actual (238), que nos vemos forzados a retomar terminología religiosa para nombrar lo inefable. Ante la violencia que sobreviven las mujeres mexicanas día con día, retomar esta terminología (en un país cuya adscripción al catolicismo ha marcado la moral social) implica una rearticulación del discurso y un agenciamiento ante la figura de víctima, en el marco de la revolución del glitter.
- 3.- “[f]or when they rise from the dead, they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven.” De aquí en adelante todas las traducciones son de la autora.
- 4.- “[t]he difficulty with these homogenized cookie-cutter portraits of heavenly healing is not solely that they are projected but that they are also reflective. They inscribe and reinscribe a social hierarchy in which certain kinds of bodies are more highly prized.”
- 5.- Me interesa pensar en el régimen de la visualidad a partir de Nicholas Mirzoeff y el derecho a la mirada. Para el teórico, la visualidad ha estado siempre ligada a la colonización. Mientras que Mirzoeff se enfoca en la relación entre las plantaciones, la esclavitud y la visualidad del capataz, me parece que su argumento bien podría trasladarse a un régimen de visualidad mayor que mantenga estructuras jerárquicas de poder mediante el control de lo visible, en este caso, el régimen patriarcal.
- 6.- El presidente de México, Andrés Manuel López Obrador convocó a todos los mexicanos a cuidar el patrimonio nacional. Sorprende que, dado que se dirigía a las mujeres protestantes, AMLO establece que “todos estamos llamados a portarnos bien” (Rodríguez). La convocatoria a “portarse bien” refiere no sólo a una actitud paternalista, sino que busca regresar a las mujeres a un espacio controlado y tutelado.
- 7.- “[w]hat I am suggesting is that it is not just that this or that body is bound up in a network of relations, but that the body, despite its clear boundaries, or perhaps precisely by virtue of those very boundaries, is defined by the relations that make its own life and action possible.”
- 8.- Mientras que en México las marchas del 8M llevan años sucediendo, fue el influjo de las marchas y protestas de agosto de 2019 lo que inspiró a miles de mujeres a salir a la calle a protestar durante 2020 con un número nunca antes visto de asistentes.
- 9.- “there is plural and performative bodily resistance at work that shows how bodies are being acted on by social and economic policies that are decimating livelihoods. But these bodies, in showing this precarity, are also resisting these very powers; they enact a form of resistance that presupposes vulnerability of a specific kind, and opposes precarity.”
- 10.- La nota fue eliminada después de una serie de críticas al mal manejo de la cobertura en la que se demoniza a las mujeres y no se centra la atención en el problema sistémico.
- 11.- Como establecen estas dos académicas, las marchas feministas en México se dan en conjunción con marchas feministas a lo largo de toda América Latina. Estas manifestaciones que van desde Ciudad Juárez hasta la Patagonia se han conocido como la “marea verde.” El uso de la terminología “marea” responde también a la noción de tsunami, que también da título a tres libros hispanoamericanos sobre feminismo. El color verde representa la lucha por la legalización del aborto. Según Gago y Gutiérrez Aguilar, desde 2014 las marchas empiezan a ganar fuerza “a través

de movilizaciones, plantones, veladas, acampes organizadas de manera horizontal, difusa y sintonizada por miles y miles de mujeres” (10).

12.- “[m]edia can function as part of ‘infrastructural support’ when it facilitates modes of solidarity and establishes new spatio-temporal dimensions of the public sphere.”

13.- El caso más sonado sobre el impacto de la cobertura de medios respecto a un asesinato fue en febrero de 2020 cuando el periódico *La Prensa* publicó en primera plana el cuerpo de Ingrid Escamilla, quien había sido degollada y desmembrada por su esposo. El cuerpo de Ingrid en primera plana y a lo largo de la ciudad representó la falta de respeto que se le tiene a los cuerpos de las mujeres, aun después de muertas.

14.- En su fotolibro, *Aún te espero*, Anaí Tirado Miranda recupera las intervenciones en las vallas metálicas que rodearon el Palacio Nacional en vísperas de la manifestación del 8M en 2021. El gobierno niega, con las vallas metálicas, la visualidad que las mujeres exigen mediante las pintas; ellas, sin embargo, la reclaman aún en los cercos. La carga simbólica, por tanto, se traduce en la valla cuando no en el monumento, otorgando una tercera capa de significado.

15.- La fotógrafa y artista Diana Cano publicó en 2020 el libro *Borré las paredes de las pintas* en el que recupera varias de estas pintas antes de que fueran desaparecidas por el gobierno. Con base en las marchas de 2019, Cano busca “invertir entre lo que se elige quitar y lo que se queda.” El fotolibro muestra la fuerza política de la borradura y las posibilidades de resignificación dentro del ocularcentrismo.

16.- Además de en *El invencible verano de Liliana* y *Feral*, las marchas feministas también aparecen en *La hija única* de Guadalupe Nettel. En la novela, aparecen las críticas masculinas (entre las que destaca la palabra “alboroto”), las pintas y la figura del cuerpo colectivo/angelical: “—Es por la manifestación— nos dijo un hombre vestido de traje y corbata, con cara de fastidio—. Otra vez las feministas armando su alboroto [...] Un río interminable de mujeres con pancartas y megáfonos había tomado la calle. Las había de todo tipo: jóvenes colegialas en uniforme, madres de familia, oficinistas y mujeres mayores acompañadas por sus nietas. Algunas llevaban la cara cubierata con pañuelos verdes, otras con paliacates tradicionales y pasamontañas como las zapatistas. [...] Algunas chicas se acercaron a la puerta y a los ventanales de una estación de policía con tubos de pintura en aerosol para escribir las palabras ASCO, HARTAZGO, NO + VIOLENCIA, ASESINOS y BASTA, mientras otras gritaban: ‘Hay que abortar, hay que abortar a este sistema patriarcal’, con una mezcla de furia y de entusiasmo” (Nettel 229).

17.- En su artículo “La trayectoria emocional del duelo en *El invencible verano de Liliana* de Cristina Rivera Garza y *Punto de cruz* de Jazmina Barrera,” Selma Rodal Linares establece que ambos libros retoman lenguajes propios del marco feminista a partir de la experiencia afectiva comunitaria. Este artículo, así como otros del dossier de *Feminismos, luchas antipatriarcales y transformaciones materiales de la literatura mexicana contemporánea* (coordinado por Francesca Dennstedt y Laura J. Torres-Rodríguez), investiga más a fondo la encarnación de la futurabilidad post-apocalíptica en la literatura mexicana contemporánea a la que apunta este texto, aunque con otros términos.

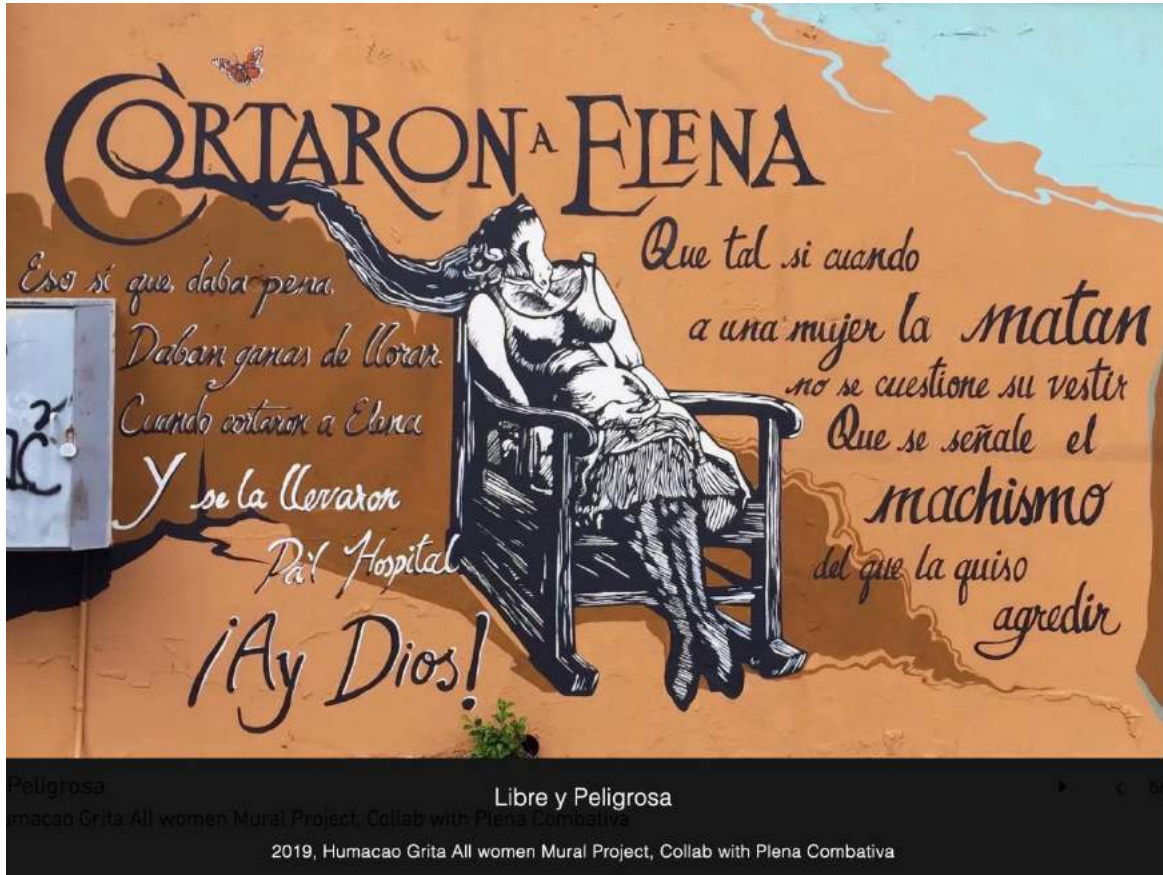
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TRADUCCIÓN-TRANSLATION



Princesas naufragadas de Tessa Yang

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Nota de la traducción

Tessa Yang es autora de la colección de relatos *The Runaway Restaurant* (7.13 Books, 2022). Sus obras de ficción se han publicado en las revistas *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction*, *CRAFT*, *The Cincinnati Review* y *PRISM International*, así como en las antologías *Flash Fiction America* (W.W. Norton, 2023) y *A Flame Called Indiana: An Anthology of Contemporary Hoosier Writing* (Indiana University Press, 2023). Yang es Profesora Asistente de inglés en Hartwick College de Oneonta, Nueva York. “Princesas naufragadas” fue publicado por primera vez en *SmokeLong Quarterly*. Este cuento subvierte los tropos comunes de los cuentos de hadas, y explora las posibilidades que se les presentan a unas princesas cuando se ven asediadas por un desastre.

Princesas naufragadas de Tessa Yang

Los monstruos se han fugado con los botes salvavidas. Sus aletas agitan la superficie del agua mientras voltean y arrastran las balsas perforadas hacia las profundidades. Sobre la playa, somos una catástrofe extendida de zapatillas mojadas y vestidos enarenados. No obstante, no olvidamos ser atentas. —*Discúlpeme, ¿me permite, acaso, que la ayude quitándole esas algas del pelo? —Parece que se le ha perdido la tiara ¿le gustaría usar la mía por un rato?* En momentos agobiantes es fácil recurrir a las lecciones de la escuela de señoritas, y a las memorias de institutrices enderezándonos la columna de a golpecitos.

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Nos disponemos a explorar la isla. La playa da paso a un bosque, que da paso a la roca de un acantilado imponente cuya sombra afilada se arroja sobre los árboles. Buscamos los elementos básicos para la supervivencia: comida, agua potable, refugio. Pero siendo quienes somos, también nos afanamos por encontrar algo bello y perdido. A lo largo de nuestras cortas vidas hemos estado siempre envueltas en hermosura. No nos reconocemos sin ella. Rastrillamos arena y nos zambullimos en cavernas y trepamos hasta las ramas más altas y frágiles, dejando atrás tiras de encaje que cuelgan como estandartes. Cuando el sol arde en lo alto del acantilado, volvemos a la playa enriquecidas con frutos de palma y conchas desbordadas de agua dulce y fresca. Sin embargo, nos encontramos feas y vencidas.

La noche rodea el círculo luminoso de nuestra hoguera. Desde el mar nos llega el sonido de un chapoteo frenético y un feroz y baboso crujido. Alguien comienza a sollozar, y pronto todas estamos llorando. Nuestras lágrimas dejan lunares grises en la arena. No hacen brotar flores. No convocan a un hada madrina. Las lágrimas de las princesas son simplemente lágrimas. Agua y sal. Extrañamos a nuestros novios guapos. Extrañamos a nuestros animales parlanchines. Extrañamos los colchones de plumas, los patios de adoquines, las cucharas de plata, los caballos blancos, los banquetes, los espejos, la música, y las varitas mágicas.

Lloramos hasta que nos agotamos. De pronto, alguien se pone de pie. Lanza una brazada de leña sobre el fuego casi extinguido. Su pelo es un sendero oscuro que se alarga hacia la playa.

—Les digo lo que no voy a extrañar, —dice.— Esas habitaciones frías en lo alto de las torres, dónde no hay nada más que hacer que mirar fijamente por la ventana todo el día.

El fuego crepita. Las chispas se posan sobre nuestros vestidos, resplandecen, y se apagan. La chica, desafiante, nos mira una a una fijamente hasta que una voz tímida ofrece —¿Madrastas?

Un murmullo de asentimiento.

—Definitivamente no las extrañaremos a esas.

— Son personas totalmente desequilibradas.

La chica del pelo largo inclina la cabeza, alentándonos. Alguien tira unos palos más sobre la fogata. Las llamas emiten un rugido alegre mientras consumen la madera reseca y salada. Extendemos las manos y sentimos el calor en las palmas.

—Bueno, no echaré de menos los estados de coma hechizados, — dice una chica de vestido amarillo y sucio, — eso de dormirte sin saber si van a pasar años y años antes de que te despiertes.

—Mi novio enviaba un equipo de rescate a buscarme cada vez que me iba a dar un paseo.

—Mis pajaritos parlanchines siempre me interrumpían.

Nos reímos. Bebemos de a sorbitos el agua de arroyo que juntamos en las conchas de mar. La chica del pelo largo se agacha y se quita un cangrejo de la melena. En nuestras vidas anteriores este tipo de criatura nos hubiera repugnado. Ahora admiramos los ojos negros en el rostro azul radiante, los delicados pelitos blancos de sus patas articuladas.

—Hermoso— susurra alguien. El cangrejo flexiona las patas. Comenzamos a cantar al unísono, —Hermoso. Hermoso. Hermoso.

Después de eso, la isla se abre ante nosotras. Nos deleitamos en sus secretos. Hay gusanos de ojos encantados enlazados en las ramas como aretes. Una savia púrpura y pegajosa de sabor agridulce, rezuma y chorrea por los troncos de los árboles. En lo profundo de las cavernas, en los manantiales hirvientes de fango verde, libélulas incandescentes se posan sobre las burbujas aceitosas, revoloteando cuando estallan.

Como tenemos los vestidos hechos harapo, construimos faldas con hojas y ramitas, pero las algas que usamos como hilo se escapan de los nudos, y pronto estamos desnudas. Tenemos las barrigas hinchadas de tanta fruta de palma. Las usamos como tambores, produciendo a golpes ritmos huecos que reverberan entre los árboles. Nos quemamos al sol y se nos pela la piel. Los cangrejos huyen con los trocitos de piel muerta y construyen castillos sobre la arena. Nos reímos al observar sus labores, más aún cuando sube la marea y arrastra esos fragmentos de nosotras hacia el mar. Hemos olvidado nuestros temores y tristezas. Hemos tomado nuevos nombres que representan lo que más nos gusta hacer.

Yo soy La Pescadora.

Yo soy La Recoge Frutas.

Yo soy La Aplasta Serpientes.

Al acantilado le llamamos Madre, y nos acurrucamos en sus innumerables cavernas cuando el viento sopla una lluvia tibia y punzante sobre la playa.

Es a Madre a donde huimos cuando los marineros rastrean la isla. Sus sonrisas parecen muecas a la luz de la luna. Las velas de sus barcos arden como llamas blancas. Corremos, las libélulas alumbrándonos el camino hacia la estrecha franja de playa que yace bajo la sombra de Madre. Empuñamos nuestras lanzas de pesca y las piedras aplasta-serpientes. Los marineros dan voces, repitiendo nombres de flores y piedras preciosas. Intentamos no pensar en sus grandes huellas sobre la arena. Pronto se habrán ido. Se irán sin haber visto nada hermoso. Nos agachamos

en la oscuridad, sincronizando nuestra respiración lenta con los ritmos de la marea. Los monstruos se deslizan desde el agua, descansando sus barbillas puntiagudas sobre nuestros pies.

Princess Shipwreck¹

Tessa Yang

Monsters have absconded with the lifeboats. Their fins ruffle the ocean's surface as they wheel and tug those punctured rafts into the depths. On the beach, we're a splayed catastrophe of waterlogged slippers and sand-streaked gowns. Nevertheless, we're polite. *Pardon me, could I perhaps assist you in removing the seaweed from your hair? It seems your tiara's gotten washed away—would you like to wear mine for a while?* During times of stress it's easy to fall back on the old finishing school lessons, the memories of governesses tapping our slouched spines straight.

We set out to explore the island. Sand gives way to forest, which gives way to rock, which rises in a towering black cliff that throws a blade-like shadow over the trees. We're looking for the usual staples: food, fresh water, shade. But being who we are, we're also on a quest for some stray, beautiful thing. Our young lives have been bound up in beauty. We don't know ourselves without it. We comb sand and plunge through caverns and climb to the highest, frailest tree branches, leaving shreds of lace that dangle like flags. When the sun flames at the top of the cliff, we return to the beach, rich in palm fruit and hollow shells that brim with cold creek water. Yet we are ugly and defeated.

Night creeps around the bonfire's circle of light. From the ocean comes the noise of frantic splashing and a fierce, slobbering crunch. Someone begins to weep, and soon we're all weeping. Our tears make gray freckles in the sand. They sprout no blossoms. They summon no fairy godmothers. Princess tears are just tears. Water and salt. We miss our handsome boyfriends. We miss our talking animal friends. We miss feathered mattresses, cobbled courtyards, silver teaspoons, white horses, banquets, mirrors, music, and magic wands.

We cry until we're all dried out. Then someone stands. She tosses an armful of driftwood on the dying fire. Her hair is a dark road running out into the beach.

"I'll tell you what I *won't* miss," she says. "Those high cold tower rooms where there's nothing to do but stare out the window all day."

The flames pop. Sparks land on our dresses, flare, and fade. The girl stares brazenly at each of us until a hesitant voice offers, “Stepmothers?”

A murmur of assent.

“Definitely won’t miss them.”

“Seriously unbalanced people.”

The long-haired girl nods encouragingly. Someone tosses more sticks onto the fire. It emits a merry roar as it eats through the brittle, salty wood. We hold out our hands and feel the heat against our palms.

“Well, I won’t miss all those enchanted comas,” says a girl in a filthy yellow dress. “Every time you fall asleep, wondering if it’ll be years and years before you wake up.”

“My boyfriend sent out a search party whenever I went for a walk.”

“My talking birds always interrupted me.”

We laugh. We sip creek water from our shells. The long-haired girl stoops and pulls a sand crab out of her tresses. In our old lives, it was the sort of creature that would have repulsed us. Now we admire the black eyes in the radiant blue face, and the delicate white hairs on its jointed limbs.

“Beautiful,” someone whispers. The crab flexes its legs. We take it up as a chant. “Beautiful. Beautiful. Beautiful.”

The island opens itself to us after that. We revel in its secrets. There are worms with charmed eyes strung from branches like hoop earrings. Sticky purple sap oozes down tree trunks and tastes bittersweet. In the boiling springs of green mud deep within the caverns, glowing dragonflies alight on the greasy bubbles, then flit away when they pop.

With our gowns reduced to tatters, we construct skirts out of twigs and leaves, but the kelp we use for thread slides free from its knots, and soon enough we’re naked. Our bellies are bloated from the palm fruit. We play them like drums, slapping out hollow rhythms that echo between trees. Our skin burns and peels. Crabs make off with the dead bits and build miniature castles on the sand. We laugh to see their labors, laugh harder when the tide comes in and drags these fragments of ourselves out to sea. We’ve forgotten our fears and our sadness. We’ve taken new names after what we like to do best.

I am Fisher Woman.

I am Fruit Fetcher.

I am Snake Crusher.

The cliff we name Mother, and nestle in her innumerable caves when the wind drives a warm stinging rain up the beach.

It's to Mother we flee when the sailors come searching. Their grins appear clownish in the moonlight. The sails of their ships blaze like white fire. We run, the dragonflies lighting the way, to the shallow strip of beach beneath Mother's shadow. We clutch our fishing spears and snake-crushing rocks. The sailors call out names of flowers and precious stones. We try not to think about their big shoeprints in the sand. They'll be gone soon. They'll leave without ever seeing a single beautiful thing. We crouch in the darkness, timing slow breaths with the tide's rolling. Monsters glide from the water and rest their spiked chins at our feet.

Notes

1.- Published with the permission of the writer.

SECCIÓN LITERARIA-LITERATURE



The Subjugation of a Ghost

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Only crocodile women, Khmer slang for “whores,” sleep at someone else’s house. There were no Cambodian laws prohibiting girls and women from leaving the home unchaperoned, but it was not acceptable behavior. My maternal grandmother had ten children one after the other and they always left the house in pairs to go to school, the store, or wat (Buddhist temple). Although many women help prepare foods for Buddhist festivals at the local wat, it is well-known that girls and women can’t stay at the Buddhist temple. Khmer boys, like elsewhere in Theravada Southeast Asia, are often sent to study with Buddhist monks for years at a time. For some, this is their only chance to get an education. Girls have no such opportunity because the lineage of Theravada Buddhist nuns is broken. It would be inappropriate for girls and women to live with monks.

Most Khmer women who want to devote their lives to Buddhism often occupy a space between a householder who has responsibilities to their biological family and a monk who renounces ties to the world. Theravada women who want to devote themselves fully to the study of Buddhism and the path of a renunciant often face frustrating hurdles. Monks rely on community members to provide them with financial support and material donations through almsgiving. Buddhist women have a much more difficult time finding patrons. In rare cases, Theravada women seeking an alternative to the householder life become possessed by a malevolent spirit or an angry ancestor. Sometimes their agitation would get to be so great that they could not continue in their

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roles as householders. Only then do their families agree that their mothers, daughters, or sisters should take in the healing powers of Buddhism by living in a wat full-time.

I knew that good girls stayed with their families, but I would still occasionally ask for permission to go to slumber parties. My mom was completely baffled when I told her that I was invited to a camp-themed party where we'd cook hot dogs in a fire pit and sleep in a tent outside. She could never have imagined that Americans would find these activities to be fun. I did not manage to convince her with all my exhortations to let me go to the outdoor slumber party. She responded with annoyance, "Why you don't want to sleep in a bed? Americans are such a stupid."

She got tired of my complaining and declared that we would be going to my eldest aunt's house for the weekend instead. When I arrived, I saw my mom's older brother and one of her younger sisters were also there. The little two-bedroom apartment outside Washington D.C. housed, in total, four adult couples and nine children. My aunt apologized to the kids for having to sleep on the mat in the living room. My mom patted me on the shoulder and replied in Khmer, "Don't worry. It's a treat for her to sleep on the floor."

Invitations for more slumber parties came, but my parents' answer was always the same: no. In a compromise, they allowed me to invite the camp girl to sleepover at our house. My mom made a traditional Cambodian chicken stew and pork eggrolls. I told her, too late, that the girl was vegetarian.

"But you said you were going to eat sausages at her house," she snapped in Cambodian.

"They were tofu hotdogs," I had to explain in English because I didn't know the words for "tofu" or "hotdogs" in Khmer.

"What?! Americans are so strange." She continued in Cambodian, "Oh well, there are plenty of vegetables in the chicken stew. Just scoop those out for her."

I had to explain further to her that any meal that is cooked with meat is no longer vegetarian. My friend smiled and simply said, "It's ok. I can just eat the plain white rice you made."

After that, I understood that I was not to bring up slumber parties of any sort for a long time.

I wasn't allowed to go to drive-in movies either. My parents had seen one too many reruns of *Happy Days* where people make-out in their cars while the movies simply flashed before them. Things only got worse when my mom found out which movie we planned to watch: *Silence of the Lambs*. A normal negative response from an American parent might have been: "No, you can't go.

That movie is too scary and will give you nightmares.” Instead, she forbade me to see the movie because she found the premise disgusting.

“Do you know what happens in that movie? He eats people.” She continued, “Raw! Americans no sense.”

I didn’t know how to respond to her, but I had to tell my friend and her parents that I could not go to the movies. At least, they didn’t invite me to a sushi restaurant either.

I have always had trouble sleeping. As a child, I asked my parents why I sometimes wake up and am unable to move or speak. They told me that a ghost was sitting on me, as if the experience weren’t frightening enough. Western medical research labels the phenomenon “sleep paralysis.” Being conscious before entering the dream state or regaining consciousness after the end of a REM (rapid eye movement) cycle allows the mind and body to work in unison. A disconnect occurs between the mind and body when the dreamer becomes conscious while entering or exiting REM sleep. Sleep therapists treat this condition in much the same manner as other sleep disturbances. To promote better sleep, people need to establish regular patterns. They should get up at the same time every morning and go to sleep at the same time every night. They recommend not drinking alcohol or any other stimulant too close to bedtime. Watching television in the bedroom should be avoided. All electronic devices should be turned off at least 30 minutes before going to bed. These steps cannot fully prevent these episodes and there is nothing to be done to conjure away the demon once the hallucination begins. The dreamer can only wait for the moment to pass.

The semi-scientific explanation does not make the experience any less scary. Western medicine also ignores the elephant in the room. Health care studies conducted in the U.S. have no explanation for the common hallucination of a malevolent being pressing down on your chest and windpipe, so you can’t move or speak. Why do these figments of imagination arise so consistently? I might take some solace if sleep paralysis gave rise to various visions and fantasies. It doesn’t make sense, and no one is trying to explain why so many have the same hallucination. The Incubus Phenomenon, as sleep experts call it, matches what my parents had told me. So, maybe a ghost *is* sitting on me while I wander between dreaming and waking life?

Perhaps I am the one intruding upon the liminal spaces of ghosts. As a refugee myself, I should have more sympathy for ontological refugees who exist between the material and spiritual

world. So many died during Pol Pot's reign. They remained unburied with their eyes open to the sky even in death. Maybe they did not know that they had died. No one could give traditional offerings of rice or incense to help them cross over to the world of the dead. There was no rice for the dead because there was not enough rice for the living. Maybe they recognized that they were no longer among the living and wanted to comfort those who would also soon enter the realm of the dead.

The line was tenuous. I, too, teetered between life and death due to stubbornness. My mother often tells of her struggle to give me enough food and the meat tooth that I've had since I was a baby. I would not eat plain rice. In addition to gathering rice for me, she would have to catch frogs or snakes. She showed me that each bite of rice included a tiny morsel of meat alongside it. When I opened my mouth to eat it, she would take away the bit of frog and only give me the rice. She used the same sliver of frog meat over and again. My mother did not mix the frog meat with the rice until she gave me the last bite of rice. It was a trick she needed to employ many times over to keep me alive.

It is possible that I lingered too long between life and death as a toddler in labor and refugee camps. Did hungry ghosts travel with me when I fled the Khmer Rouge in my mother's arms? Do they cling to me as tightly as I did to my mom? When I am in-between consciousness and dreaming, do I become more attuned to their fear and need for comfort?

The solution that Cambodians and many in Southeast Asia prescribe for dealing with hungry ghosts is not to develop better sleep hygiene. It is to recognize them as beings, recognize their pain, and offer them prayers or material tokens in their honor. The common mix of Theravada Buddhism and animism expresses itself through festivals throughout the region to feed hungry ghosts. These national holidays are opportunities to share what we have with those less fortunate than us. All major celebrations within the Khmer community have this element of sharing food with the dead. When I got married, we had to prepare a special dish of rice and a whole chicken with its beak and talons still attached. It was, of course, fully cooked. Once the boiled chicken meat was picked clean and mixed with rice and seasonings, the women in my family took turns calling out names of those who have already died and invited them to partake in the food and celebrations.

Ghosts live among us. My mother doesn't understand why Americans resist this idea. That I don't accept this as *prima facie* true is a sign that I am not as Cambodian as she would like me

The Subjugation of a Ghost

to be. She told my husband and me that she has known this fact ever since she was a child in Cambodia. She and her sister once saw giants in the countryside. When my husband suggested that they might have seen statues in the distance, she quickly told him that it couldn't be. They were walking and statues don't move.

“So, you're saying that they were ghosts?” asked my husband.

“Of course, they were ghosts. There are no such things as giants!” my mother proclaimed.
“Americans no sense.”

Invisible Labor

*Paola Ehrmantraut**

University of St. Thomas, St. Paul

Creative work received on April 4, 2023.

Creative work accepted on September 30, 2023.

1. Male Feminist

did you know

that me, male, yes

white, yes

educated and middle class

ok, yes

once, I said

women have been

objectified in film and

/pause, measure the effect/

/eyes closed, then, slowly open/

they looked at me weird

when I said I was a feminist

/content smile/

me thinking

as they should have

you need to have

impostor syndrome

you need to have your old colleague's eyes

on your waistline

* Dr. Paola Ehrmantraut, Endowed Chair in the Humanities, is director of the Women's, Gender and Sexuality Studies Program at the University of St. Thomas (Minnesota) and an executive member of the American Men's Studies Association. Her research focuses on the constructions of masculinity that operated during the last Argentine civic-military dictatorship and in the transition to democracy. She has published articles in specialized magazines and has participated in national and international conferences presenting on post dictatorship culture from a gender perspective. As part of her service to the community, she chairs the Race Equity Advisory Council (REAC) for Hennepin County.

you need to be told *diversity hire*
from where I am sitting,
academia is not your ted talk
clapping, little mic on your face
people going crazy
they love you!
no
you are the problem
I see your thin lips tense on a line
when you see me
and your audience is not there
you need to
stop
the feminist male
the crusader no woman of color ever asked for
the bullshit doctor
you need
to stop
talking
because
you
lie

2. Campus tour
in the middle of the day
there is a time
to talk about diversity
roundtable workshop
how we need to be
diversity
hot topic, cool talk

Invisible Labor

how we need to be inclusive
all kinds, even you
last night they spray painted
the n-word
on the library's
front door
the other day a poster said
it's ok to be white
in the middle of the day
nobody says
we have a problem
they were suspended
they were expelled
last week they posted
my borders, my choice
no means no
this concludes
your campus tour

3. Add it to your academia shit list
they are now
hired
older
I knew them back then
when they fucked a girl who
her classmates thought she was coarse
limping prey
there was nothing I could do
they left her, like that
for me
to eat

and I ate
now, they say,
I have a daughter
I am a father
years ago
the doctorate candidates
circled her, dizzying
the poets
sharp claws, bad breath
the literature scholars
who will suspect these dads today?

Clotheslines

in the Borderlands

*Juana Moriel-Payne**

Mount Saint Mary's University-Los Angeles

Creative work received on April 20, 2023.

Creative work accepted on October 10, 2023.

It's her fault

as she walks
naked she leaves
the compound.
murmurs from the hut
a black widow from the window

The wind combs her hair
following
the rhythm
of her feet
in quicksand.

She doesn't know where but goes
without looking back
at the clothesline
where her dress
the one she left hanging at dawn
remains.

* Juana Moriel-Payne born in Ciudad Juárez, in the beautiful state of Chihuahua, México. She is a historian, novelist, and poet. She has published two novels in Spanish that received literary prizes in México and in The United States, *Trigueña* (2013) and *La caza del venado* (2016). She is a professor at Mount Saint Mary's University-Los Angeles, where she teaches Latin America, Latinx, AfroLatinx, and Bordex creative studies. Currently, she is writing a memoir titled "I too am a Border Woman." Her research focuses on cultural history in Northern New Spain. Her book, *Drama Under the Skin: Baroque Catholicism in Northern New Spain*, will be published by Texas Tech University Press by the end of 2023.

It's your fault

you descend
from a branch
your progeny
sowed
by this river.

Your males arrived wanting
to be the first
again
and harvested
thanks to the strength of figs.

But nothing matters anymore
because of the wind
drought
because of the sand.

Because when He asked your father for a word
caught in the rip
of your mother's dress
remained silent

He condemned your lineage to extinction
giving him a series of dusty paths
and to her
a hollow house

*and the mute
polka dot dress
you just hung.*

It's my fault

Clotheslines in the Borderlands

the sun drank the dark sky
with all moons and threads
of what used to be
my dress
rotten it
scatters swings
from a rope
trying
to weave
itself in vain.

A group of crows arrives

some perch next to it approaching its shoulders seized by two tarnished brooches.

in flight they sting the flat bust going
down
the waist
to the belly

trying
to make a nest

*attracted
by the persistent smell
of abandoned figs*

puncturing enlarging

the break through which scorpions
stones and
saltpeter
slipped.

Two pious crows unleash it.

What's left of me

falls
lies
beneath
the flapping

over the sparse shadow.

It's our fault

Sand pours in through windows out through doors
taking tender men

and now a days women

between its shacking legs.

At the table

where anomalous fruits
were conceived
we all sing
adieux

and packed

and await.

Damsels hide

a fig
in their braids

*just in case one
lucky day*

they flee.

Aged ones

howl
archaic pains

while they sleep.

Insomniacs

bathe
nightly

Clotheslines in the Borderlands

to dilute
the wild smell of harvest

we
the penitents

keep in cupboards.

In our town

overcrowded cupboards
rusty trunks crammed
will enlarge our houses and
 endless clotheslines
with polka dot dresses
 will replace the departed.

in processions

Flower Ladies and Cloud Women

*Ellen Mayock**

Washington and Lee University

Creative work received on September 21, 2023.

Creative work accepted on November 16, 2023.

*

Fat red cardinals
alight on gold forsythia,
whistling their work.

*

Turkey vultures perch
on broad branches of a tree
next door. They sit, wait.

*

The turkey vultures
wear their wings like flamenco
dancers flap their capes.

*

The flower lady
sells her wares—two dollars per
bloom. Perfect orange.

*

* Ellen Mayock is the Ernest Williams II Professor of Spanish at Washington and Lee University, where she teaches courses in Spanish, Latin American and Caribbean Studies, and Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies. In 2019, Georgetown University Press published Mayock's co-authored (with Mary Ann Dellinger and Beatriz Trigo) textbook, *Indagaciones. Introducción a los Estudios Culturales hispanos*. Author of *The 'Strange Girl' in Twentieth-Century Spanish Novels Written by Women* (2004) and *Gender Shrapnel in the Academic Workplace* (2016), Mayock focuses her research on workplace fairness, Title IX, gender-based violence, and historical memory. She is co-editor of three volumes of essays: *Feminist Activism in Academia* (2010); *Toward a Multicultural Configuration of Spain: Local Cities, Global Spaces* (2014); and *Forging a Rewarding Career in the Humanities: Advice for Academics* (2014). In 2019, Georgetown University Press published Mayock's co-authored (with Mary Ann Dellinger and Beatriz Trigo) textbook, *Indagaciones. Introducción a los Estudios Culturales hispanos*. Mayock writes poetry and creative non-fiction in both English and Spanish. Her work has appeared in such venues as *Ámbitos Feministas*, *Letras Femeninas*, *Rise Up Review*, *Raising Lilly Leadbetter: Women Poets Occupy the Workplace*, *Fronteras de lo imposible*, *Public Books*, *CTXT*, and *El Salto*. She is currently working on a memoir titled *Small Town Feminist* and on a translation project of the works of Spanish great Carmen Laforet.

Gigantic orange
swelling at sunset over
the Blue Ridge Mountains.

*

I see my mother
in the configuration
of my face wrinkles.

*

Wrinkle: a fine word
and interesting concept.

History face folds.

*

Hefty bumblebee
clings to porch netting, neither
coming nor going.

*

I wonder about
bird communities. Do they
have cliques and gossip?

*

Intricate nest built
on our gutter, its stuffing
a Rapunzel flow.

*

The ocotillo
tree waves its scarlet hands--
its flamenco dance.

*

Old friends have seen your
basement. They know of your
heart's clutter and dust.

Flower Ladies and Cloud Women

*

Electric skies burn
and crackle not far from us.
Divine fireworks.

*

Our backyard is like
an urban disco for skunks.
Smell orgies each night.

*

Even the salt lamp
is crying as it gathers
moisture on wet days.

*

Fireflies light up
the midnight sky. Our gift is
their insomnia.

*

Lisbon beckons like
a fierce Roman goddess, all
chaos and laughter.

*

Azulejo means
tile, shines in blue. Verdejo
is wine, comes from green.

*

The tallest tree in
the yard has layers of arms
embracing the air.

*

Sherbet streaks in
the sunset sky. Dusk calls

in other colors.

*

Like a child's game,
all ye, all ye, in come free,
colors fly, night sets.

*

A skate crashes through
a wave with me. It's a large,
live carpet with eyes.

A navy-blue cloud
cuts through the bright orb, making
it a bandit moon.

*

Our dog and I were
close before I got sick. Now,
she and I are wolves.

*

The clouds push each other
along the slate sky. They are
busy commuters.

*

A hummingbird sits
upon the electric wire, its
tail like a dancer's toe.

*

Palm fronds fall from trees
like so many prosthetic
limbs. Arms, legs on ground.
Desert life: dead mice,
live snakes, howling coyotes,
a domestic dog.

Flower Ladies and Cloud Women

*

A great irony:
liberal arts colleges
killing humanities.

*

The murder of a
camel cricket so large it
could take Manhattan.

*

Gracias a Alfonsina Storni

Besar a una
atleta profesional
sin que lo quiera
es violarla
en público para
engrandecerte,
hombre pequeñito
que no sabe ser hombre
sin perjudicar.
Campeona mundial,
celebra la victoria;
no al hombre pequeñito.

*

My son and I watch
a man my age get out of
his car. He creaks, groans.

*

Not all birds sing well.
The ones in our yard need a
choral director.

*

Five crows in a row
don't know where to go and so
they squawk, squawk, and squawk.

*

I wish Emily
Dickinson were a member
of my department.

*

Clouds like quilts hang in
the night sky, calling upon
weavers, seamstresses.

*

Empty nest pros: clean
house, full fridge. Empty nest cons:
little loves are gone.

*

Street lamps light our way,
and the sky turns from Goya
blue to pearly hues.

Viajero vespertino

Olga Rivera*
Kent State University

A Mariano Feliciano Fabre

Desde el azul intenso de mi profunda melancolía
contemplo la estela de tu faz gallarda retornar con el ocaso
por la senda itinerante del sol de los viajeros vespertinos.
Desde el rojo fiero de los rayos de tu luz crepuscular
el destello luminoso de tus picaros ojos grises me mira
convocando la jubilosa complicidad del instante irrepetible.

La mirada frontal de Eurídice

A Jimmy (Jaime Colón Meléndez), *in recordātiō*

27 de septiembre 2022

Silencia, Orfeo, tu conmovedora lira
y no oses rescatar sus acordes inaudibles
de la cadencia del tempo que no envejece.
Escucha atento, Orfeo, el eco lejano
y desvanecido de aquella que antaño fuera
merecedora brevísima de tu dulce amor
y del gemir plañidero de tu triste cítara.
Moradora precoz en las sombras silentes
en el olvido inapelable del inframundo

* Olga Rivera es catedrática de Literatura Peninsular y Latinoamericana en el Departamento de Lenguas Modernas y Clásicas en Kent State University. Es la autora de *La mujer y el cuerpo femenino en La perfecta casada de Fray Luis de León*, (Juan de la Cuesta, 2006). Ha publicado artículos sobre identidades de género y raza en *Hispanic Journal*, *Hispanic Review*, *Symposium*, *La Torre*, *Hispania*, *Letras Femeninas* y *Ámbitos feministas*, entre otras revistas académicas. Sus artículos más recientes incluyen: “Esa esquina del paraíso: la mulata como subjetividad escindida entre el deseo de inclusión y las prácticas discriminatorias que la marginan”. *Revista crítica multidisciplinaria anual de la coalición Feministas Unidas*. Volume 11, Spring 2023, pp.10-28; “La mulata como sujeto alienado: la internalización del racismo en dos cuentos panameños”. *Cincinnati Romance Review*. 51 (Fall 2021): xx–xx. pp. 1-18; “Propiedad agrícola, ordenamiento jurídico y justicia social en *Maldito amor*”, *Romance Notes*. Vol, 61, 2021, pp. 89-100; “Amor se escribe con G”: Representaciones irónicas del “blanqueamiento” y las aspiraciones de autoinclusión en la sociedad estadounidense”. *L’ Erudit Franco-Espagnol*. Volume 15, 2021, pp.1-14.

,por la mordedura vil de una serpiente,
 he sabido, Orfeo, tu inmerecido infortunio
 y resuelta por la audacia de mis propios pasos
 he venido a soldar la desolada dispersión de tu ser
 y a saldar con creces mi vasta deuda con tu duda.
 Porque no se puede ser humana sin dudar
 sin asumir la tentación de volver la vista atrás
 he venido a derogar las jurisdicciones de los dioses
 a mutilar las maldiciones tiránicas de sus anáthēmas.
 He venido a restituirte tu antigua impaciencia de verme
 a ofrendarte el acerado desafío de mi mirada de frente
 para que te mires largo y de fijo en la niña de mis ojos
 para que contemples íntegra tu imagen constelada
 en el iris de mis recuerdos, en la cuenca de mi pena.

Salmo 4

¿Dónde está el brazo extendido desde tu corazón
 que cortó el filo de la muerte del centro de mi garganta?
 ¿Dónde está el brazo extendido desde tu corazón
 que previno el despedazamiento atroz de mi primogénita?
 ¿Dónde está el brazo extendido desde tu corazón
 que interpuso su escudo frente a las espadas de mis enemigos?
 ¿Dónde está el brazo extendido desde tu corazón
 que alumbró mi ciego caminar por las oscuras tempestades?
 ¿Dónde está el brazo extendido desde tu corazón
 que suplió mis carencias, me dio peces, me dio panes, me dio vino?
 ¿Dónde está el brazo extendido desde tu corazón
 que esculpió la victoria en las cortezas frágiles de mis sueños?
 ¿Dónde está el brazo extendido desde tu corazón
 ahora que un revés inmisericorde me ha derribado?

**FEMINISTAS UNIDAS Unpublished Creative Writing award
Call for 2023 submissions, winning work:**

Poetic Tributes to “las Sinsombrero”: The Legacies of Modern Spanish Women

Ángela Acosta*
Davidson College

When I Happen Upon Queer Death

Too optimistic I was, shuffling through old photographs as if I knew what closeted meant in the context of fascist, authoritarian, patriarchal Spain, the sunny Spain of 1960s tourism. All the slogans pointed to just how different Spain could be for a nation of time travelers stuck in the nineteenth century wearing the mantilla over their heads and shunning the bikini they only tolerated for the tourists and their money. Did I paint too rosy of a picture of women who fell in love amidst a Civil War? Carmen Conde lamented how Amanda Junquera was her sole solace, a sunny vacation in a sky riddled with bombs and ash destroying the capital and her largest university. What do I do with the ending of their stories? I was born but six months after Carmen succumbed to the same fate Amanda suffered ten years earlier, losing her stroke of genius in a care home. They wanted more life and lives to live, haunting me with the tendrils of queer futures yet to be conceived, of a push against reproductive futures, of the happenstance that worked against happy endings. When I happen upon queer death, I can only see life whispering the epistemic shifts of their queer theories, sending me deep into the footnotes of carefully curated research papers. Yet, I set that all aside, all the detritus of my investigations and just feel. The affect flows between them, even now, the love and companionship they shared, the friendships forged never waned. They showed what a sapphic kind of love could mean in a time of book censorship, and marriages only in name. I see the parts of themselves that weren't catalogued, the undefinable emotions that tinge the edges of photographs of these couples. I take photos too, almost haphazardly, and I wonder if I too will be forsaken not to death but to an unhappy ending.

* Ángela Acosta, Ph.D. (she/ella) is a Visiting Assistant Professor of Hispanic Studies at Davidson College. She is a 2022 Somos en Escrito Extra-Fiction Contest Honorable Mention and Rhysling finalist (SFPA). Her writing has appeared in *Pluma*, *Copihue Poetry*, *Apparition Lit* and *Radon Journal*. She is author of *Summoning Space Travelers* (Hiraeth Publishing, 2022) and *A Belief in Cosmic Dailiness* (Red Ogre Review, 2023). She has published on female life-writing, poetry, and literary personas in *Persona Studies*, *Ámbitos Feministas*, and *Feminist Modernist Studies*, and she is co-editor of a special issue of *Feminist Modernist Studies* on Spanish Sapphic Modernity with Dr. Rebecca Haidt (summer 2024).

Abecedario de las Sinsombrero

Me atreví a crear una lista, asumiendo que no habría más de veinte nombres, que no habría más de veinte historias para mis estudiantes, pero me salieron nombres de España, México y hasta el noreste de EE. UU. que llenaron las páginas de mi programa de curso.

Mercedes de Acosta, la quien no habló castellano, escribió versos siendo amante de las actrices de Hollywood de antaño.

Carmen Baroja y Nessi, autobiógrafa no de los grandes logros de su hermano, sino de las casas donde habitaban las grandes pensadoras de su generación.

Clara Campoamor, cuya escultura se encuentra en Sevilla, mientras se nota su legado en todas partes, pionera del feminismo como tantas otras como Carmen Conde, Luisa Carnés y Zenobia Camprubí.

Victorina Durán, dramaturga lesbiana muy atrevida, que “era así,” tanto en España como Buenos Aires.

Concha Espina, dedicada a su profesión como traductora, se reconoce como la casi Premio Nobel en literatura.

Margarita Ferreras, uno de los muchos peces del mar de poetas que podían publicar gracias a Concha y Miguel.

María Goyri, la hispanista que seguía el Camino del Cid mientras abría espacios para las mujeres en la educación.

Matilde Huici Navaz, cofundadora de la Asociación para la Enseñanza de la Mujer, no dejó de educar a los niños aún durante su exilio en Chile.

Carmen Isern, una de las muchas pedagogas de la Residencia de Señoritas, encargada de la iluminación de toda la ciudad de Madrid de la Edad de Plata.

Amanda Junquera, nuestra Isabel de Ambía que divisó un hueco en la luz desde la domesticidad franquista.

Victoria Kent, que, a pesar de ser contra el sufragio femenino, trabajó como funcionaria de la Segunda República.

María Teresa León, la gran luchadora antifascista que se preocupaba en la melancolía de dónde iba a morir estando en tierras extranjeras.

Poetic Tributes to “las Sinsombrero”

Maruja Mallo, la quien quitó su sombrero en la Puerta de Sol,
tal como Margarita Manso y muchas otras de su letra,
como Concha Méndez, Federica Montseny y Elizabeth Mulder Pierluisi.
Margarita Nelken, escritora e intelectual feminista,
Isabel Oyazábal, destacada por ser multifacética
como periodista, actriz y diplomática
similar a Mercedes Pinto, activista.
Quienes no se nombran, flotan por las corrientes
de la historia queriendo ser recordadas.
Matilde Ras, buena amiga y colaboradora de Elena Fortún,
también formó parte del Círculo Sáfico.
Ángeles Santos pintó Un Mundo
y Lucía Sánchez Saornil luchó con su pluma
sabiendo que las artes plásticas pueden vencer el fascismo y la misoginia.
Josefina de la Torre pensó que iba a ser olvidada
mientras Encarnación Aragonese y de Urquijo
escribió bajo el seudónimo de Elena Fortún,
trazando los mundos de Celia y lo suyo,
abriendo nuevos caminos en Oculito sendero.
Carmen Tórtola Valencia bailó a su ritmo,
adoptando a Ángeles Magret-Vilá por no poder casarse con ella.
María de Maeztu Whitney, la quien creó un faro para mujeres en la capital,
un lugar de colaboración, aprendizaje y tacitas de té.
Margarita Xirgú interpretó su papel trágico
en el teatro romano de la plaza que ahora lleva su nombre, anclada al pasado y al futuro.
La Condesa de Yebes, hija de la nobleza,
dejó que su educación la guiara en la posguerra,
renovando su espíritu intelectual con nuevas investigaciones y traducciones.
María Zambrano, una de las voces sabias de su generación,
presagió todas las posibilidades de las mujeres del porvenir.

Velintonia, 2023

Al querer vencer la nostalgia de un pasado que nunca viví,
bajé el metro en la estación de Vicente Aleixandre,
tal como hacía diariamente durante estas estancias en Madrid.
Me saludó el cartel de Aleixandre, orgullo del poema destacado,
pero al caminar a su casa, la Velintonia de los vecinos poetas,
I realized no poem could fix a dilapidated house.
Years before, I wrote an ode to the tree in the garden
Aleixandre had planted himself, nearly a century strong,
yet it remains hidden, choked out by vegetation.
Ahora se notan los olores desagradables de la ciudad,
la forma en que se han hecho grafiti en la verja y que las ventanas
ya no están iluminadas por las luces de las tertulias nocturnas.
Carmen Conde y Amanda Junquera hacían tertulias
allí arriba en Velintonia 5, leyendo las obras escritas juntas
y conversando con sus amigas poetisas.
The Velintonia I knew was full of boisterous conviviality,
whole generations of writers passing through Aleixandre's room,
formando los lazos de amistad que sobrevivieron medio siglo.
The Velintonia I knew contained Aleixandre's biblioteca personal,
photographs, and even cats scurrying around Velintonia 5,
a poetic ecosystem surviving through times of hardship and change.
Hoy en día, Velintonia no deja que los poetas entren por sus puertas
ni que alguien pueda devolver todos los muebles sacados ya hace décadas,
y así se ha convertido en la tumba del modernismo español.
The home appears almost unrecognizable, a silent phantom
of a bygone era rather than a Bien de interés cultural,
a future hub of cultural activity for all ages and mediums.
One day those doors will open again, smiling in fresh green paint,
beckoning students and writers to partake in gatherings of new voices,
an endless chain of tertulias echoing between the generations.

RESEÑAS-BOOKS REVIEWS



Paz para la mujer 1 y 2.

Joni Boyd Acuff, Amelia M. Kraehe, and Gloria J. Wilson, editors. *A Love Letter to This Bridge Called My Back*. U of Arizona P, 2022, 340 pp. ISBN: 9780816544080.

If you are a woman of color and are familiar with the original *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* (1981), then you have likely experienced a feeling of recognition, a relief in the understanding that you are not alone, that your concerns and doubts are shared, and that you have a community. Your own lived experiences of subalternity and intersectional identity-seeking are both unique to you, and recognized and understood by others who have had similar and dramatically different experiences. I only learned about this text a few years ago when, in preparation for a keynote by Cherríe Moraga, I bought and read it and felt understood. As a child immigrant living in the liminality of my parent's cultural context and the indecipherable historical, political, and pop-cultural landscape of the DC suburbs where I grew up, I have always felt like I was wearing a tight, itchy sweater—it doesn't fit, it's impossibly uncomfortable, it distracts me and makes me doubt myself and feel as if I don't fit anywhere at all. *This Bridge Called my Back*, edited by Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa, was like taking off the sweater and recognizing that there is nothing wrong with me, and there is no need to come to an artificial and static definition of myself. Indeed, identity is evolving and can legitimately be conceived of in different ways depending on different circumstances. This new book, *A Love Letter to This Bridge Called My Back*, edited by gloria j. wilson, Joni G. Acuff, and Amelia Kraehe, delves even deeper into the conversation of identity and brings it to the present day and our current surreal social and political circumstances.

This new text constitutes a continuation of the work begun by Moraga and Anzaldúa at a time in which the challenges are ongoing, new challenges have arisen, and updated perspectives need to be considered. The editors carefully curated a broadly diverse collection of essays, poems, stories, scholarly articles, and visual art from a group of writers that represents the Black and Latinx women whose realities largely dominate the original text, and incorporates new voices from communities that had not been sufficiently represented in the 1981 volume. There is a more international feel, with some contributions from writers and artists outside the US, and a concerted effort to decolonize which honors the work of the writers in the original volume, who underlined the complexities of indigenous and multiethnic communities. *Love Letter* recognizes Moraga and Anzaldúa's broad understanding of what is scholarly and creative. We find in this new text a mix of genres that reflects the mix of authors and their diverse perspectives and defiance to unjust

systems. The common approach among all the writings in both books, is the human element—the pushback against oppressive and dehumanizing social structures by bringing individual stories and multiple cultural perspectives to light.

In their “Postscript,” the editors point to an ongoing and even more urgent need to hear the voices in this work, pointing to the current geopolitical realities such as the devastation caused by the coronavirus, which disproportionately devastated communities of color. Decades of climate change denial and capitalist greed are having a tangible destructive effect, especially on underserved communities. Violence against Black Americans, the persistent rise of white nationalism, and the suppression of the voices of people of color combine to make this work an essential read. This book confronts the censorship and exclusion of anything that challenges the white patriarchy (including, for instance, Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands* (1987)). The many writers variously express frustration with how little we’ve progressed, and how much we’ve regressed—censorship, attacks on education, a full-on assault on truth and on alternative narratives to the white conservative agenda. Kraehe points out that this book, along with the original, should be considered as “part of a movement—and maybe not just part of a movement, but a movement unto itself” (295).

Because of the diversity of genres, this book is best read slowly, in parts, recognizing that each contribution both stands alone and communicates a unique perspective, and each one can be aggregated to create a more complete picture. Like a pointillist painting, a close examination can be enlightening, but in looking at the whole it begins to form a more complete picture. In the short essay “Toward a Politic of Preemptive Care,” writer Tahereh Aghdasifar expresses what I believe is the ultimate goal in this collection: “I am interested in a collective and coalitional politic that can care for parts of others that we cannot see, understand, or relate to—a feminist mode of care that does not rely on legibility within a liberal framework to necessitate care or love” (186). The undefinable, the recognition of moving identities and realities, is largely the point of this collection.

Saba Fatima and Sana Rizi, in their essay “Karachi, ‘First Worlds,’ and the Spaces in Between,” explore the wrenching choices made through emigration, describing the sense of loss and guilt experienced when they changed their citizenship. Speaking of her children, Fatima wishes liminality for them, as a way of keeping them from losing their Pakistani culture: “I fear that they will become subjects of this oppressive empire, or worse, they may absorb the neoliberal capitalist mindset. I pray that they land in the spaces in between” (111). In its defiance of traditional

Western aesthetics and oppressive systems of expression and its recognition of the many liminal spaces inhabited by women of color, *Love Letter* honors and updates the original text's focus on *choosing* identity, on identity as a journey, an evolution throughout a person's life, and as a defiance in the face of oppression. The book is a triumph both as an homage to *This Bridge Called My Back* and as a continuation of this important movement.

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Nuria Capdevila-Argüelles. *El regreso de las modernas*. La Caja Books, 2018, 142 pp. ISBN: 97884174996166.

Desde la primera página hasta la última, el libro *El regreso de las modernas* es eso, un regreso de mujeres, y no solo de ellas, sino de libertad, de feminismos y en definitiva de movimientos políticos y culturales que estuvieron capitaneados por mujeres con feminidades diversas y plurales. Como a lo largo de las menos de doscientas páginas que componen esta monografía, su autora, Nuria Capdevila-Argüelles insiste en que estas modernas siempre han estado con nosotras pese a los esfuerzos de silenciarlas, olvidarlas y menospreciarlas. Por eso las estrofas con las que Capdevila-Argüelles abre esta investigación que forman parte de la canción titulada, "Déjame vivir con alegría", del dúo musical Vainica doble, son eso, la enfatización de que siempre estas modernas han estado y que ellas teniendo muy poco y casi todo en su contra, con ese "dátil" al que se refiere la canción habían hecho mucho, tanto que lo último que querían era que alguien las tuviera "compasión" (7).

Con esta monografía, Capdevila-Argüelles ha conseguido dos objetivos, por un lado aporta contenido para completar el hueco que existe en la historia global del feminismo en relación a la aportación e impacto sobre él de las mujeres españolas. *El regreso de las modernas* es el testimonio de cómo estas mujeres contribuyeron a esa modernidad global que azotó al mundo en el primer tercio del siglo XX. En este trabajo, la manera de plantear este acercamiento es mostrar a estas modernas a nivel individual, pero hacerlo en conexión con el hueco tanto real como simbólico que dejaron cuando, por ejemplo, al tomar una fotografía de ese pasado del que formaron parte se las excluye de estar allí, aunque queden rastros suyos evidentes en ella (33-54). Algunas de las mujeres de las que trata la autora en este trabajo son: Chechu Álava, Elena Fortún, Carmen de Burgos, Carmen Laforet, Adelaida García Morales, Leonora Carrington, María Campo Alange e Isabel Oyarzabal de Palencia. El segundo objetivo logrado con este trabajo, es que sirve de referente

metodológico para aquellas personas que estén pensando en poner en marcha una investigación sobre mujeres que tuvieron y jugaron con la ambivalencia, además de esconderla, o como dice Capdevilla-Argüelles atesoraron un armario o bien lo heredaron de otras para dar un espacio a esta disidencia (117-118). También hay que destacar el esfuerzo que la autora ha hecho aquí al aportar en cada capítulo un análisis del pasado de España, sobre todo desde la Segunda República (1931-1939), pero enfatizando las reminiscencias que presenta respecto al presente del país en el siglo XXI (54).

Este libro está dividido en ocho capítulos y ojeando sus títulos rápidamente es palpable la insistencia de Capdevila-Argüelles en cómo esas mujeres modernas existieron y no solo esto, sino que además fueron ellas mismas las que también decidieron ocupar otros lugares, pero nunca irse (19). *El regreso de las modernas* cuenta con un prólogo firmado por la escritora Elvira Lindo que insiste en cómo el avance de las mujeres después del final de la dictadura franquista (1975) ya había sido un futuro que estas modernas de la primera mitad del siglo XX habían tenido que posponer, pero que nunca consiguió destruirse porque aunque se fueron, lo hicieron sabiendo que regresarían (9-14). Lindo también subraya la importancia que tiene el trabajo de recuperación que hacen investigadoras como Capdevila-Argüelles en que los nombres y los legados de estas modernas vuelvan al lugar de donde nadie las tuvo que sacar apelando a excusas en relación al canon o la ideología.

La idea general que se desprende de *El regreso de las modernas* es que el pasado de estas mujeres al recuperarlo lo que desencadena es el futuro que ya ellas intuían que iba a existir. Esta búsqueda en atesorar referentes es un acto de rebeldía en sí tanto para quienes se enfrentan a tan ardua tarea como aquellas personas que siguen en vida ya que con su presencia contrarrestan el pacto de silencio que envolvió el paso de la dictadura franquista a la democracia en el Estado español (1975-1978). Para la autora, el mensaje que sobresale del regreso de estas modernas es su vigorosa acción feminista que incluye una llamada a la transformación (19).

Entre las ideas y los enfoques metodológicos en relación a la historia de las mujeres, los estudios de género y de perspectiva *queer* que Capdevila-Argüelles desarrolla en este monográfico está el de hacer una reflexión colectiva, y también invitar a hacerlo, acerca de cómo a las mujeres les ha podido afectar y afecta eso que actualmente nombramos como discriminación e incluye el silenciar voces, experiencias e incluso las propias muertes ya que “nuestras modernas tienen una historia que comunicar” (18-19). Capdevila-Argüelles también marca tres conceptos que sirven de

guía para quienes decidan embarcarse en rastrear el regreso de estas modernas: el análisis de la idea de modernidad, el regeneracionismo como parte fundamental de la identidad española finisecular y el concepto de armario (26-27). De estos tres planteamientos, este último, el del armario, la autora señala que hay que tener en cuenta que se materializa tanto en función de cuestiones de género como también por disidencias dentro de la modernidad, como a través de la idea de ambigüedad. Lo que estas modernas incluyeron en sus armarios derivados de ambas experiencias son un conjunto de secretos, que en algún momento serán revelados como parte de ese legado futuro (28). Entre las obras literarias que Capdevila-Argüelles usa para aportar ejemplos acerca de estas cuestiones, está *La casa de Bernarda Alba* (1936) de Federico García Lorca, que le sirve para mostrar cómo los progresos legales en materia de género de la Segunda República que colocaron a España en puestos de vanguardia, no calaban en el interior mismo del país, tal y como muestra esta obra de teatro (57-71).

Además de todo lo que ya se ha subrayado en relación a esta obra, *El regreso de las modernas*, para finalizar hay que destacar lo imprescindible que es su lectura para plantear investigaciones sobre mujeres que han pasado a nuestra contemporaneidad dentro de categorías algo peyorativas como autoras secundarias, cursis, románticas, católicas, etc. De la mano de Capdevila-Argüelles caemos en la cuenta de que estas etiquetas están señalando abiertamente a feminidades fuera de cánones patriarcales y nos llevan a esos armarios que describe la autora en su investigación. El hecho en sí de señalar la rebeldía que existió en las mujeres que ostentan esas marcas y portaron esos armarios, lo que provoca, según la autora de este libro, es generar genealogía.

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Maia Fernández-Lamarque. *Cinderella in Spain: Variations of the Story as Socio-Ethical Texts*. McFarland, 2019, 199 pp. ISBN: 9781476637068.

Maia Fernández-Lamarque's *Cinderella in Spain: Variations of the Story as Socio-Ethical Texts* examines how the fairy tale genre has been reshaped to adapt to changing social standards, cultures and audiences. It consists of eleven chapters that analyze ten versions of Cinderella's story from Spain with the aim of repurposing the different images of Cinderella's fairy tale in order to provide insight into Spain's landscape and society.

The selection of Cinderella as the representation of Spanish women of the 20th and 21st centuries is intriguing as this figure embodies both the traditional standards of beauty -fair skinned, attractive, and kind hearted- as well as the spirit of rebellion all while defying her stepmother's commands in pursuit of her own happiness. Even though the versions proposed by Fernández-Lamarque are unique in their retellings, they all challenge patriarchal norms of femininity in their portrayal of protagonists that advocate for their own rights or suffer by not doing so. The only Cinderella version that does not follow the foretold structure is the first story, "Estrellita de Oro," the themes of which connect the story with Medieval Spain and focus on "the enemy branding" ritual, which involves portraying individuals who appear or behave differently as a shared enemy (20). "Estrellita de Oro," an orally transmitted story, is a story that revolves around a young girl who receives a star-shaped mark on her forehead as a gift from an old lady. While this mark was intended to be a blessing, it incited jealousy and hatred from her stepmother and stepsister, becoming the "enemy branding." This depiction intends to reflect on the history of medieval Spain, where marks defined enemies and/or possessions.

Fernández-Lamarque goes onto analyze two stories that indirectly criticize patriarchy, in which the protagonist suffers for adopting the feminine standards that society forces upon them; *Cenicienta siempre quiso un Wonderbra* (2009) by Noé Martínez and *Cenicienta en Pensilvania* (2010) by Cristina Cerrada. Both versions recount stories of physical and mental pain, the first by introducing three protagonists desperate for love, so much so that they endure multiple cosmetic surgeries and partake in restrictive diets to please men, while the second is of an abused and depressed protagonist, who ends up killing herself.

Many of the Cinderella versions actively rebel against machista ideas, but the most obvious ones are the picture books such as: *La Cenicienta que no quería comer perdices* (2009) by Nunila López Salamero with illustrations by Myriam Cameros Sierra, the comic book *Idiotizadas* (2022) written and drawn by Moderna de Pueblo, and *Cenicienta en Chueca* (2003) by María Felicitas Jaime. López Salamero's protagonist is the opposite of Martínez's because she embodies a strong feminist voice. In fact, her story intertwines with the classic fairy tale ending "vivieron felices y comieron perdices" which alludes to the notion that Cinderella doesn't desire what's expected from her and that "happy endings" do not have to imply marriage (101-102). This Cinderella is unhappy in her marriage and believes she can do better without a less-than-qualified prince charming.

De Pueblo's comic cleverly employs parody to offer a critical perspective on the societal expectations imposed on women. *Idiotizadas* features four iconic protagonists - Snow White, Cinderella, Sleeping Beauty, and The Little Mermaid - all of whom live in a modern city where they strive to break free from the societal spells that have been cast upon them. Cinderella's spell for instance forbids her from being touched, lest she be labeled a whore. As the story progresses, we learn that Cinderella defies this rule by having a sexual encounter with the prince at a ball where she is labeled the derogatory term "zorra," while the prince is praised for his conquest. This double standard highlights the patriarchal nature of society that Cinderella rebels against by adopting the name Zorrocienta. One can also assume that the name "idiotizadas" is also a form of rebellion; according to Maia Fernández-Lamarque, it combines the words "idiotas" and "encantadas," an indication that these protagonists are not the typical princesses, but rather unconventional ones (128).

Lastly, we have the *Cenicienta en Chueca*'s protagonist, who is an unnamed queer Peruvian girl who moves to Spain in search of social freedom but who instead faces ethnic discrimination. She becomes enslaved by her racist boss, yet at the same time, finds solace in sexual encounters with a woman she meets in the Chueca neighborhood. Sexuality becomes her weapon to freedom and the loss of her shoe represents a loss of inhibitions. This unusual Cinderella still experiences anonymity and invisibility, yet she discovers solace in the vibrant Chueca neighborhood where she can freely express her queer identity.

Maia Fernández-Lamarque's selection of stories is intriguing because of her willingness to explore various artistic mediums such as comics, movies, picture books, and oral traditions. This book promises, as indicated by the title, an overview of Spain's cultural evolution in its recounting of various adaptations of Cinderella's fairy tale. This study stands out because of its uniqueness as it delves into Spanish society through the lens of a fairy tale, a timeless method of evading reality. Moreover, what sets it apart even further is its role as a cross-cultural comparative piece. Fernández-Lamarque compares Cinderella's versions with those from different countries along with other fairy tales, such as *Snow White*, *Aladdin*, and *Peter Pan*. This in turn broadens the book's appeal, capturing the interest not only of those who appreciate the social and cultural influence of fairy tales in literature, movies, and comics, but also fairy tale enthusiasts from around the globe.

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Rosita Scerbo. *Latinas en los márgenes: QueerARTivismo y TRANSdisciplinarietà: hacia una politización de la autobiografía visual de mujeres invisibles*. Peter Lang, 2021, 183 pp. ISBN: 9783631845028.

De acuerdo con Sidone Smith y Julia Watson en *Reading Autobiography* (2010), a partir del 2001, el género de la autobiografía se redefinió con la incorporación del espacio virtual y del arte visual. La construcción del sujeto autobiográfico se debe a la exploración del medio y a la hibridación de las narrativas de vida, por ejemplo, con la inclusión de la instalación, el performance, la fotografía, el blog, el documental o las redes sociales. Smith y Watson argumentan que “we cannot do justice to the burgeoning arenas of self-presentation in myriad visual and online forms that are transforming self-inscription through identity, relationality, agency, and embodiment” (168). Precisamente, el estudio de la Dra. Rosita Scerbo, *Latinas en los márgenes: QueerARTivismo y TRANSdisciplinarietà: hacia una politización de la autobiografía visual de mujeres invisibles*, analiza narrativas visuales contemporáneas de la década de los cincuenta hasta la actualidad. La Dra. Scerbo, Assistant Professor de Georgia State University, recorre narrativas personales de Argentina, México y Estados Unidos que examinan temas como la homofobia, la identidad lesbiana, la maternidad, la soberanía nativa, el cuerpo y, en sí, la identidad política y cultural de grupos marginados.

El libro está compuesto por cinco capítulos y una conclusión que recorren la autonarración de mujeres en medios como cine, fotografía, pintura y producciones digitales. En el primer capítulo, que funciona como introducción, Scerbo incorpora el término de QueerARTivismo político para redefinir la posición de la mujer en el campo de lo visual. Históricamente, el cuerpo de la mujer ha sido explotado como objeto en el arte y precisamente, la autobiografía visual ha propiciado la reconstrucción de la identidad y subjetividad femenina. Para esto, incluye teorías exclusivamente producidas por mujeres, como lo es *HERstory* (Ashby y Gore 1995), *Autohistoria* (Anzaldúa 1999), *Pathography* (Hawkins 1999) y *Feminography* (Abrams 2017), y crea un punto de encuentro transnacional entre las voces latinoamericana y chicana, especialmente, por enfrentarse “a diferentes formas de represiones y [estar] motivadas por un deseo de reconocimiento social” (12).

El segundo capítulo se enfoca en los ensayos fotográficos y la visibilidad del cuerpo y la monstruosidad desde una perspectiva queer con la intención de desafiar lo normativo. La autora inicia con la exploración del cuerpo obeso en el trabajo de la chicana Laura Aguilar y la

transgresión de los constructos sociales de belleza al visibilizar un nuevo modelo de feminidad. La artista “negocia el tropo ancestral del cuerpo femenino como paisaje que no puede ser atravesado o conquistado por la mirada masculina” (30). De esta forma se desvanecen los límites entre lo humano y lo no humano al considerar el cuerpo obeso como parte del paisaje natural. Asimismo, este desvanecimiento lo vemos reflejado en los autorretratos de la mexicana Graciela Iturbide, ya que modifica su imagen con la incorporación de animales. Scerbo analiza el uso de la serpiente y el pájaro desde el post-humanismo para criticar el imaginario de la mujer tradicional y la religión católica. El capítulo cierra con la exploración del cuerpo enfermo o discapacitado con la obra *Recursos humanos* (2000) de la fotógrafa argentina Gabriela Liffschitz. A partir del desnudo y del cuerpo con cáncer se enfatiza la discusión de las políticas y la atención médica, así como la invisibilidad corporal y el estereotipo en torno al cuerpo discapacitado.

La autobiografía audiovisual se examina en el tercer capítulo a partir del concepto “autobiografilm” de Paola Lagos Labbé, que implica el rescate de la memoria a partir de la exploración del yo. En este caso, vemos el viaje de dos cineastas que reconstruyen la historia de un familiar ausente. En el caso de la chicana Lourdes Portillo, el tío asesinado y la homosexualidad en el documental *El diablo nunca duerme* (1994). Mientras que vemos el caso de los desaparecidos y la Guerra Sucia en Argentina en *Los Rubios* (2003) de Albertina Carri. Scerbo continúa con el cuarto capítulo y su análisis en la pintura y el muralismo, en el que podemos apreciar a la mujer como una figura central. Por un lado, tenemos a la “mujer fatal” con la obra de la artista surrealista argentina Leonor Fini, y por el otro, al de la abuela como un lazo con las raíces culturales en los murales de la tejana Verónica Ortegón y la chicana Judy Baca.

Finalmente, el último capítulo se centra en el “ciber-arte” y la incursión de la autobiografía en las humanidades digitales. El espacio virtual brinda una mayor libertad para la reconstrucción de la subjetividad femenina y por lo tanto, de su visibilidad. En particular, el análisis en torno a la Virgen de Guadalupe como un elemento de transgresión es lo más valioso de esta sección. Esto lo vemos en la obra de Alma López (conocida como “la Diva Digital”) y la reinterpretación de deidades prehispánicas, así como la búsqueda de la santificación de la chicana en las piezas de Yolanda López. En conclusión, *Latina en los márgenes* presenta un amplio recorrido de la nueva autobiografía contemporánea de mujeres. Personalmente, he trabajado con este texto en la clase *Reading the visual* para estudiantes subgraduados, y considero que teóricamente es muy accesible y brinda un amplio panorama sobre la producción de mujeres. Scerbo retoma el concepto de la

“nueva mestiza” de Gloria Anzaldúa (164) para hablar sobre la transgresión de las barreras sociales y la colectividad que nos lleva al análisis comparativo del “Yo” femenino marginalizado entre Argentina, México y Estados Unidos.

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Ana I. Simón Alegre. *Concepción Gimeno de Flaquer (1850-1919): Her Personal Letters, Short Stories and Journalism*. Vernon Press, 2023. 283 pp. ISBN: 9781648896767.

In 2023, Assistant Professor Dr. Ana I. Simón Alegre at Adelphi University (New York), published the book *Concepción Gimeno de Flaquer (1850-1919). Letters, Short Stories, and Journalism* with the intention of gaining deeper insight into the figure and work of this remarkable writer, not only for academics but also for anyone else interested in delving into the life of one of the pioneering women of mid-to-late nineteenth-century Spain. This work has also been published in Spanish, *Concepción Gimeno de Flaquer (1850-1919): Cartas, cuentos cortos y artículos periodísticos* (Vernon Press, 2023). This volume does not aim to be an anthology of all of Concepción Gimeno de Flaquer’s work but rather an updated and annotated edition, with significant critical apparatus, of some of the writer’s correspondence, short stories, and a selection of her most representative journalistic articles. Simón Alegre selected these works considering the perspective of the modern reader and based on two fundamental criteria. Firstly, as her production is less well-known, it needed an update to bring it closer to the modern audience; and secondly, most of these works could help understand the socio-political and, above all, feminist perspective defended by Gimeno de Flaquer.

Concepción Gimeno de Flaquer (1850-1919). Letters, Short Stories, and Journalism thus offers a detailed overview of the evolution of Gimeno de Flaquer’s thought from her early professional beginnings in the 1870s, through the different stages of her life and the various regimes and places where she lived until her death in Buenos Aires, Argentina in 1919. Furthermore, the editor’s work revalues the network of contacts that Gimeno de Flaquer maintained with a multitude of creators of her time and underscores the manifold problems that women of that era had to face when dedicating themselves to the world of literature, a theme that the writer herself uninterruptedly addressed throughout her work (“Networks in the Trajectory of Gimeno de Flaquer” 43-53).

The book consists of a very comprehensive introduction where Simón Alegre analyzes biographical and literary aspects of Gimeno de Flaquer, “Activist, Editor, Journalist, Intellectual, and Writer” (1-82) and three distinct sections: “Ten Letters from Concepción Gimeno to Manuel Catalina” (89-108), “Short Stories of Concepción Gimeno de Flaquer” (109-142), and “Selected Journal Articles by Gimeno de Flaquer” (143-240). Each of them is organized following a chronological order and faithfully collects the transcriptions of the original texts, although some syntactic modifications have been included (such as placing personal pronouns before verbs) to bring the language closer to modern style. The letters to the actor and theatrical entrepreneur Manuel Catalina (whose responses, unfortunately, have not survived) are preserved in the National Library of Madrid, Spain, despite Concepción Gimeno expressly asking the actor to destroy them (93). These letters discuss joint projects (selection of plays to be performed, rehearsals, etc.) and show us a young writer on an equal footing with an established actor, although this correspondence also suggests that the relationship may have gone beyond the professional aspect (58-63).

The seven short stories have a predominantly realistic style, with some of them being based on real events. For example, the story titled “For Not Loving” is inspired by a female patient hospitalized in the newly inaugurated Carabanchel asylum in Madrid in 1895 (113-118). Of all of them, only “The Magic Mirror” unfolds in a world different from the author’s present, as it takes place in Renaissance Venice and Gimeno de Flaquer uses it to introduce the theme of the double face revealed by the charity exercised by women of the upper class (138-142).

As for the journalistic articles, they are grouped into three thematic sections: “Disaster Drawer: A Little of Love, Some Good Luck, and A lot of Conversation” (143-167), “Concepción Gimeno de Flaquer’s Encounters with México and Mexican Women” (167-196), and “The Evolution of Concepción Gimeno de Flaquer’s Feminist Thought” (197-240). The first of these sections is composed of texts on various topics, with the standout being the one titled “The Quill” (153-162). This is followed by the section of articles she published during her stay in Mexico City, between 1883 and 1890, where the text “The Quetzal” stands out (185-189). Finally, the third section, which is the most extensive, contains the articles that showcase her highly interesting evolution within early twentieth century feminist thought. In this part, it is challenging to choose just one article, so I decided to highlight these two: “The Women of Madrid” (207-216) and “49,913 Women” (233-239).

The book is the result of Simón Alegre's personal endeavor to recover the figure and work of Gimeno de Flaquer, one of the many creators of the nineteenth century who were underestimated for being women and modern, both by their contemporaries and subsequent critics, excluded from the canon and practically forgotten until a few years ago. Simón Alegre has carried out an exhaustive compilation effort that has helped locate the majority of her writings between 1873 and 1909, thanks to which she has been able to bring together a good part of her work for the first time. This allows us to get an idea of Gimeno de Flaquer's personal and political evolution throughout her life. Simón Alegre's perseverance in this task and the care she has taken in editing are one of the great achievements of this publication.

The attractive and revealing introduction, the interesting comments on the originals, and the fact that the book has appeared simultaneously in Spanish and English will also serve to relate Gimeno de Flaquer's work to that of many other authors of her time. This will allow for a more accurate overview of their life and professional trajectories and their shared advocacy for women's rights, regardless of where they resided or published, helping to paint a much more precise picture of the role played by women writers of the nineteenth century. On the other hand, the book will undoubtedly be an invaluable aid for both academics and the new generations of students specializing in nineteenth century Spanish Literature to broaden their horizons to the research of highly valuable but underrepresented female writers. And thanks to them, we will be able to gain a different perspective of the Global Hispanic world of that time, by gaining a true overview of the literary world.

In conclusion, hand in hand with Simón Alegre, both in the first part of this work and in the writings she has carefully recovered and edited from Gimeno de Flaquer, we discover an author with a transatlantic profile. This label means that although the writer was born in Alcañiz, Spain, her travels through Central and South America, the Iberian Peninsula, and Europe require us to understand her and her work in the global context of the Ibero-Latin-Hispanic world. Simón Alegre shows us this characteristic of Gimeno de Flaquer, for example, in the way she addressed the situation of women in Spanish-speaking countries: "As a result of her stay in México from 1883 to 1890, Gimeno de Flaquer realized that the problems women had in México were similar to those in Spain, and vice versa" (56).

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Susy J. Zepeda. *Queering Mesoamerican Diasporas: Remembering Xicana Indígena Ancestries*. U of Illinois P, 2022, 198 pp. ISBN: 9780252053535.

In *Queering Mesoamerican Diasporas: Remembering Xicana Indígena Ancestries* (2022), Susy J. Zepeda explores alternative methods to recover lost connections to indigenous-queer ancestries. Zepeda's research enters into spiritual and ceremonial conversation with Gloria Anzaldúa to approach and build upon recent Xicana/x scholarship in an effort to decolonize and trace narratives of power that have continued into the present. At the heart of this book is the question of how to identify oneself as Xicana/x within a context of dislocation. Historical traumas, continued *susto* (soul loss), and imposed silences have provoked ruptures and discontinuities within individual and communal ancestries. To overcome these challenges, *Queering Mesoamerican Diasporas* looks to build upon new epistemologies of recent scholars, particularly the legacy of Gloria Anzaldúa, to produce spiritual, ceremonial, and archival methodologies that engage those undergoing re-Indigenization and (re)discovering heritages that have been obscured by repeated colonial processes. To this end, Zepeda asks, "how do Xicana/x do the work to carve an autonomous pathway toward re-Indigenization in solidarity with Native American, Indian, Indigenous, and original peoples across the hemisphere and beyond?" (4). Zepeda furthers this inquiry by looking at how detribalized people, particularly those whose ancestors have undergone processes of colonization and *mestizaje*, honor "the current existence and continued struggles for sovereignty, autonomy, and recognition among Native and Indigenous communities" (5). Zepeda argues that such processes must be understood, analyzed, and meditated upon to heal and recover from colonial *susto* with indigenous ancestries, particularly the silenced ancestries of LGBTQ2S communities.

The first chapter, "Decolonizing 1848: Unraveling Conflicting Colonial Histories of Land and Race to Trace Queer Ancestry," critiques the notion that the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo—in which Mexico ceded over half of its northern territory to the United States to end the Mexican American War (1846-1848)—was the most critical historical juncture as it pertains to colonization for Chicana/x people. While recognizing that 1848 is a historical trauma, Zepeda also asserts that colonial history and historical wounds predate the treaty by hundreds of years. Emphasis on this historical trauma refocuses the legacy of colonization in North America from a power struggle between two colonizing forces to its impact on indigenous people. This theme guides us to her next chapter in which Zepeda enters into ceremonial conversation with Anzaldúa's altars, along

with her book, *Borderlands/La frontera* (1987) which Zepeda looks upon as a textual narrative that centers decolonial ancestral epistemologies.

The next chapter, “Queer Indígena Art: Visual Prayers for Remembering Grandmother Earth through Oral and Visual Storytelling,” analyzes queer indigenous artwork as it meditates on the past, present, and future. The artists discussed in this chapter strive to understand their heritage through visual and oral representations. As Zepeda notes, these artists’ “visionary work signals a direct intervention into colonial and racist logics that aim to uproot and disconnect people from their cultures, communities, philosophies, and practices” (86). One such artist, Gina Aparicio, engages in discourses of decolonization in addition to healing historical trauma. Aparicio “created this artwork to remember the trauma experienced by the ancestors of ‘detrribalized’ and ‘de-Indigenized’ Xicana/x and Latina/x” (98). One such sculpture is *Cuica Maquixtia* (2004), which portrays a nude woman blindfolded with a long braid crucified upon a cross. Zepeda argues that this visually portrays the interruption with “grandmother Earth, spiritual practices, and ways of life that threaten extinction of the people and land through forced disconnection” (98). Zepeda goes on to illustrate how another artist, Dalila Paola Méndez, maps and connects ancient knowledge through her art, particularly in the painting, *Diosas enamoradas* (2005), which displays two older women loving one another, a method of remembering and recording what came before by “tapping into ancestral knowledge systems” (109).

Zepeda’s fourth chapter, “Tracing Latina Lesbiana Historias of Resistance, Solidarity, and Visibility: Genealogical Archives of a Generation of Gatherers and Guardians of Knowledge,” focuses on recent historical attempts from the 1970s and 1980s that archive important LGBTQ2S narratives. This chapter endeavors to bring visibility to an entire generation of cultural producers, such as Laura Aguilar, Gloria Anzaldúa, Jeanne Córdoba, among many others. The oral histories elicited through formal and informal interviews and conversations look to approach “Latina lesbianas whose praxis is reflexive of women of color feminisms, a collaborative methodology” (119). Zepeda provides an extensive overview of previous discourses related to this topic along with the various ways of envisioning diverse feminisms. Further interrogated are the concepts of women of color feminisms and the methodologies through which these conceptual frameworks are implemented to “challenge the systems that keep power moving in its current patterns” (122).

The epilogue brings a more personal touch that demonstrates the practical utility of the spirit-infused methodologies described in Zepeda’s research. Zepeda reflects on a moment in her

teaching career in which she was asked by students in the Chicana studies department to teach “a whole class focused on decolonial-centered knowledge” because they felt “frustrated, confused, and at a loss” (143). As a professor, Zepeda sought to discover an educational pathway for students from a variety of indigenous backgrounds to better orient them in relation to the course materials. As Zepeda herself reiterates, students have been forced to overcome existing colonial frameworks that “insist they are hybrid, mestizo, at an institution that is aspiring to be a Hispanic-serving institution” (144). This experience led Zepeda to question how a field that has a “foundational myth that has settler colonial tendencies with Aztlán as a homeland” can be reimagined to help her students find their way (144). Zepeda further argues that homogenization of such ancestries should be avoided in favor of more individualized journeys that are conducive to “unraveling truths that need to be spoken” (141). Vocalizing these experiences is key to rediscovering these histories.

Zepeda’s work is a thorough analysis of important historical archives that provide pathways for readers to further study diasporic Xicana and Indígena communities. Moreover, Zepeda’s valuable and nuanced research reflects upon an array of cultural productions that help to build and accomplish the goal of finding, sourcing, and exploring connections to indigenous queer ancestries.

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