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Engendering Race: (Mis)Representations of Blacks in Late Nineteenth-Century Puerto Rican Fiction (1890-1895)

A Puerto Rican fiction from the late nineteenth century shows a conspicuous absence of literary representations of women and men of black descent. This obliteration raises important questions regarding the reasons behind this overt cultural neglect. In this paper I examine literary representations (or misrepresentations) as well as the absence of African characters in the novels *¿Pecadora?* (1890) by Salvador Brau (1842-1912), and *La charca* (1894) by Manuel Zeno Gandía (1855-1930). I compare and contrast the mentioned novels with selected stories by Ana Roqué (1853-1933), namely, "El rey del mundo" and "El secreto de una soltera" (both included in her collection of short stories *Pasatiempos*, 1894), and her novella *Sara la obrera* (1895). These selected works date from the period between 1890 and 1895, years of central importance in the formation and consolidation of Puerto Rican national literature, before the United States military occupation of 1898.

My analysis includes Brau and Zeno Gandía because of their prominent position in the Puerto Rican literary canon. Their novels *¿Pecadora?* and *La charca* are emblematic of the nationalist values and of the race and gender ideologies which the Liberal Creole elite advocated in their writings. In turn, I examine the less well-known fiction of Ana Roqué against the intertextual background provided by the analysis of her contemporary counterparts. Each of the aforementioned texts convey different literary strategies for the representation of race and gender that reveal the political projects Liberal men and women sought to put forth in their fiction. Moreover, in the body of critical work on Puerto Rican late nineteenth-century writing there is a lack of literary analyses that examines texts of both men and women writers in light of the elite's contradictory assumptions on gender, race, and class.

Puerto Rican Creole intellectuals, positioned at the top of the social hierarchy, generated a series of contradictory statements that wove a network of relations among their shared views, their contradictions, and their divergences. It is the interplay between their conflicting statements that will be read in fictional texts, as they constructed discourses and systems of representations that in turn defined models of authority and leadership. Such representations are not static, but dynamic and in constant fluctuation, and by examining them it can be shown how they either promoted social change or perpetuated social roles based on fixed notions of race and gender.

Reflecting on the phenomenon of slavery, some Caribbean scholars emphasize that, historically, slavery has been a recurrent problem of humanity.¹ Ancient his-

¹ In one of the sessions of the Fifth International Conference on Caribbean Literature (Freeport, Bahamas, November 2003), Caribbean writer Jan Carew pinpointed the fact that part of the denial of Africanness in the Creolization process was one's reassurance that "you were not a slave". Carew argued that slavery is an intrinsic human problem that has always existed throughout the history of humankind.

tory shows that wars and conquests often ended with the enslavement of the dominated group. Under this perspective, slavery can be seen as a historical consequence of warfare that has always existed. However, the massive kidnapping of African people that took place during the colonization of the New World has no parallels in the history of humankind. This latter assertion poses a paradox with the former, since slave trade in the New World was not the result of any specific warfare, but rather it was a commercial enterprise chiefly guided by the economic growth of the Plantation system and that promoted the institution of human exploitation available to the (white) wealthy. The systematically forced mobilization of African people to the West brought about permanent material changes that had significant socio-economic and cultural effects. It transformed radically the demographic constitution of the world as it was known before the 16th century and it caused an irreversible process of transculturization. In the Caribbean, the Plantation system generated what Sidney Mintz calls a 'societal-area,' that is, the place of birth of a distinct Caribbean cultural identity and society. In this sense, cultural identity in the Caribbean - in a great degree - is the product of social relations of inequality and the hierarchization of ideologies within the system of the Plantation, the major force of the region's economic growth and development.

In the specific case of Puerto Rico, however, the Plantation system was not as central as in other islands, and by the late nineteenth century (1885-1897) the cultivation of coffee by free peasantry was an extended agrarian practice in the mountain region². Compared to its neighboring islands, Puerto Rico had a relatively small enslaved population, and there were many free blacks who lived in both urban centers and rural areas. The economic growth of the island was based not only on agrarian exploitation, but also on the trade and smuggling of basic goods, and the urban centers were in great need of artisan skills and commerce, crucial to their survival³.

San Juan, "la ciudad murada", was an isolated city that functioned primarily as a military garrison in which colonialism generated a divisive loyalty toward Spain that was accentuated by continuous waves of loyal immigrants (Quintero Rivera 1988; González 1989). The discordant divisions between native-born Puerto Ricans, immigrants, and Spaniards caused internal conflicts regarding allegiance or anti-colonial positions that gave rise to a social hierarchy strongly guided by race and class biases. The white Creole elite developed a virulent "Negrophobia" which contributed to a sort of institutionalized racial prejudice. This Negrophobia prevailed throughout the nineteenth century, and it was aggravated by the fear of black insurrection. The Haitian revolution in 1804 reinforced racist positions and none of the subjacent colonies wanted to experience what they regarded as the horrors of slave uprising. New forms of control and exploitation were created by the dominant elite to ensure their power and to keep African slaves under strict surveillance.⁴

² See Chapter 4 of Laird Bergad's *Coffee and the Growth of Agrarian Capitalism in Nineteenth-Century Puerto Rico*.

³ Félix V. Matos Rodríguez provides substantial historical evidence about the ever-increasing need for domestic help and other type of trade jobs in the growing cities of San Juan and Ponce that created a working class of free men and women of color (Matos Rodríguez 59-83).

⁴ See Isabelo Zenón Cruz's *Narciso descubre su trasero* for an excellent cultural study that

The Puerto Rican elite experienced a strong sense of class, characteristic of a rigidly stratified society. Those of European descent occupied the upper echelon, followed by the insular rural class, and the slaves. After the abolition of slavery in 1873, the incorporation of the slave minority into the wage-earning labor-force shook the basis of the plantation economy and of the island's social structure. Slavery left behind a shameful stigma on those who suffered it, and even worse, it passed this stigma onto their descendants. Despite the fact that the rural population also was racially mixed with Africans, and that there was a significantly large free black population long before the abolition of slavery, the white Creoles repudiated them. The "black stain" haunted Puerto Ricans' racial heritage for centuries, to the extent that African cultural contributions were neglected. Having black blood was associated with the institutionalized system of slavery and its consequent moral degradation. The powerful methods of domination and control exercised by the white dominant class contributed to develop strong racial prejudices of white superiority. The rhetoric used by slaveholders sustained that blacks were primitive savages devoid of a Christian soul, thus slave-trade and its inhuman methods and practices were justified. Not surprisingly, it was the rural class represented by the mountain folk - although also despised - that provided the intellectual elite with the most enduring nationalist symbol of cultural identity, that of the *jibaro*.

To a greater or lesser degree, the political positions of intellectuals and writers such as Brau, Roqué, and Zeno Gandía were sympathetic to the Liberal Autonomists or *Reformistas*, whose tenets promoted a peaceful process towards autonomy from Spain without violence or social revolts. They all articulated in their respective intellectual projects the Liberals' rhetoric of "La Gran Familia Puertorriqueña", which positioned the Hispanic Creole intellectuals as the morally superior fathers and mothers who were meant to guide and control the racially mixed masses. The contradiction of the Liberal Autonomist Creole elite was that they accused their counterparts of the Conservative Party - or *Incondicionales* - of exploitative labor practices and a retrograde vision detrimental to progress in the island, while simultaneously, looked upon the lower urban and rural classes - composed of blacks, mulattoes, and *jibaros* - as dangerously racially mixed, weak, apathetic, and lacking the necessary energy and spirit to attain progress. The Liberal Creoles' rhetoric of "La Gran Familia Puertorriqueña" replaced the blatant exploitation of slavery with a benevolent and hierarchical paternalism.

The white Creole elite in their writings established correspondence between skin color and sexual morality, and claimed that the darker the skin, the more promiscuous and sexually degenerate the person would be, since they believed that the brutality of the slavery regime left blacks to grow into a kind of unintelligent, dull people (Findlay 1999:56; Lewis 1983:173). Men and women who bore the "African stain" represented a sexual threat and a social disgrace in the eyes of the white Creoles. The failure in recognizing blacks and mulattoes as genuinely Puerto Ricans was a generalized cultural rejection generated in part by fear to slave uprising and

traces the roots of the overt neglect of African heritage in Puerto Rico, and of its eventual vindication in the official history.

in part by European colonial bias based on notions of racial superiority. The white Hispanic Creole elite was privileged, and although repressed by colonial control and censorship, their point of view was the one that prevailed as representative of Puerto Rican nationalist sentiment and culture. The upper-classes did not want to have any connection with, or relation to, the shame of slavery. The abyss that separated Puerto Ricans by social class and race was reproduced in the exclusionist vocabulary of the elite: the upper-class was called "patrician" and the lower-class "plebeian." These radical racial and class perceptions must be taken into serious account when reading Puerto Rican fiction of the late nineteenth century in order to contextualize and understand the political positions of their writers.

The Liberal professionals and landed elite insisted that women from all classes needed to be morally transformed so as to reinvigorate and "whiten" society. Liberal men posited a benevolent but hierarchical paternalism to ensure their leadership and whiteness. Men from the Liberal elite articulated a language of honor intended not only to control women's sexuality, but also to construct a white Hispanic Creole national identity that neglected the Afro-Antillian cultural component. In their turn, patrician women reaffirmed their status of racial and moral superiority over plebeian women, and in particular against women of color. Despite the fact that the Liberal elite advocated the abolition of slavery, the virulent Negrophobia felt by many within the white Creole elite remained unchallenged. With a few exceptions, it was a taboo subject that prevented the representation of people of African descent as main characters or topics in nineteenth-century literature. It was preferable to portray blacks not as of "pure blood" but of whiter and even Indian (Taíno) racial mix. Thus, race and class were associated with sexual morality, producing an exclusionist, moralistic discourse within the elite. Therefore, it is neither strange nor surprising that the writings of the white Creoles celebrated the Hispanic and the Taíno cultural heritage, but despised the African (Findlay 1999:53-76).

Brau's *¿Pecadora?* and Zeno-Gandía's *La charca* illustrate the Liberal Creoles' imaginary which saw the rural area as inhabited by an eminently white peasantry in grave need of moral reform. The anxiety about the moral dangers carried by blacks and miscegenation resulted in fictional representations of an ideally white society, as is the case of *¿Pecadora?* and *La charca*. These novels are emblematic of the moral anxiety that the Creole elite felt about race, and the role that women played as the reproducers and keepers of the imagined Puerto Rican nation as of white Hispanic descent. Writers deliberately focused on the representation of the *jíbaro*, giving rise to a distinct literary tradition based on what was considered authentically indigenous. In this context, the literary representation of the rural classes - both landlords and peasants - acquire special relevance in the formation of a Puerto Rican literary identity.

Influenced by late nineteenth-century Positivism, and the nascent discipline of sociology, *¿Pecadora?* and *La charca* represent the rural peasantry as the embodiment of the island's sociological problem. The underlying message of these narratives is didactic, as they were intended to describe the need to educate the rural masses, especially women, in order to improve their lives, and therefore, that of the island at large. Both novels illustrate the values and ideologies that the "progressive"

patrician class upheld in terms of racial superiority and paternalism in relation to the plebeian. These texts are devoid of any trace of miscegenation between African and white Hispanics which affirms the Liberals' imagery of an ideally white Puerto Rican peasantry, represented, however, as a weak and anaemic social body. Brau's character of Dr. Bueno and Zeno Gandía's Juan del Salto mirror the authors' paternalist attitude and moral superiority portraying white Creole elite men, educated and professional. Dr. Bueno is the good-natured physician, and Juan del Salto is the benevolent *hacendado*, and both studied in Europe. They are observers and protectors of the tragic drama that seems to be the life of the Puerto Rican peasantry. Dr. Bueno and del Salto are represented as single males, and both are carefully removed from any sexual desire or contact with plebeian women. The antagonists, Padre Calendas and Galante respectively, have white women as their concubines. Their immoral behavior is severely censured, for these characters represent two negative sides of Puerto Rican society condemned by the Liberals' political ideology, namely, the corrupt clergy (Padre Calendas) and the exploitative *hacendado* (Galante).

¿Pecadora? and *La charca* offer a representation of the peasant girl, not yet a woman, as the main female character in their fiction. The heroines of these novels, Cocola and Silvina respectively, are represented as white girls from the rural class. Predominantly light skinned, these peasant girls embody a vulnerable target available for sexual assault that results in a paradox of gender power. Cocola and Silvina are not entirely innocent, they are potential seducers even when they do not acknowledge their own sex appeal, and the white male will succumb to their charms in violent ways. Thus Dr. Bueno justifies the behavior of Cocola's cousin, José María, who lives in concubinage with her: "esa mujer vivía bajo tu mismo techo, provocando tus apetitos sensuales" (*¿Pecadora?* 1999). By the same token, Zeno Gandía bestows Silvina, a girl of fourteen years, with strong sexual appeal: "Su cuerpo delgado, esbelto, lucía galas encantadoras, mostrando el atractivo de finas líneas curvas en el dorso, en los brazos y en el cuello, en donde la redondez despertaba la tentación de los besos. Movíase con elegancia, con innato donaire, como mujer que sabe que es hermosa y se complace en mostrarlo" (*La charca* 60). Silvina's physical description clearly corresponds to that of a white girl more in tune with a romantic representation of the fragile female beauty rather than a naturalist description of a farm worker. Her features all speak to an idealized representation of a Puerto Rican *campesina* that only inhabits Zeno Gandía's imagination. Both girls suffer sexual abuse also by white men. In the case of Cocola, her seducer is a boy educated abroad, a character without name. The case of Silvina is even more pathetic, since Zeno Gandía plots the girl's own mother, Leandra, as an accomplice to her rape. However, Leandra's crime against her daughter is a desperate measure to keep the economic well-being and protection of the powerful *hacendado* Galante. This desperate act of allowing sexual abuse by plebeian women to hold the interest and financial support of the male was a true fact that Liberal men overlooked in their heated discourses on women's moral education, although represented in fiction. These literary gendered representations of peasant girls being dominated and sexually abused by white Creole men reveal the political agenda of their authors. The aggressive sexual behavior that the male characters display was assumed "normal" in the fictional representa-

tions of this type of gendered power relations. Although Brau and Zeno Gandía depicted white male sexual aggression against peasant girls and condemned the extended practice of concubinage, most upper-class Liberals refused to acknowledge in their writings multi-racial sexual encounters between men of their class with plebeian women, particularly if the women were of African descent.

Most nineteenth-century Puerto Rican writers did not dare to represent the racial conflict between blacks and whites in their writings, and authors such as Brau and Zeno Gandía limited themselves to portraying the tribulations of an ideally white peasantry. Not surprisingly, when Puerto Rican writers sought to represent racial social conflicts between blacks and whites, they resorted to setting their plots in Cuba. Cuba was a place whose devastating ten-year war mobilized the black masses to fight for independence side by side with the white Creoles. Cuba's incorporation of the black masses into the wars for independence, and therefore into the new social order, was seen as an undesirable and violent step by the Puerto Rican *Autonomistas* and *Incondicionales* who were suspicious of interracial relations between whites and blacks, as they thought blacks would bring about moral degradation and corruption. A case in point is Alejandro Tapia y Rivera's drama *La cuarterona* (1867), set in Havana, the most acceptable background against which to stage an overt racial intrigue for the Puerto Rican white Creole audience. Arguably, the play is the earliest creative work in Puerto Rico that dared to represent the racial and social conflicts arising from the impossible love between a girl of African descent, Julia, and a white Creole aristocrat, Carlos. Even though they love each other, Julia commits suicide to not harm Carlos' social reputation. *La cuarterona* reverses the cliché of the girl that must marry an undesirable man for financial convenience. In this case it is Carlos who must marry an unwanted woman to save the family's fortune. Julia, the quadroon girl, is portrayed more white than black: "es casi blanca o lo parece, es bonita, fina y elegante; si no supiésemos que es hija de una mulata esclava, según se dice, tal vez la admiraríamos como a otros que tratan de disimular su origen entre las personas bien nacidas" (p. 47). The antagonist, Carlos' mother, sees Julia as a threat to her aristocratic lineage. This idea of portraying people of African descent as sexually dangerous also appears in Roqué's "La serenata de los ángeles."⁵ Roqué uses an interracial relationship to portray the problem of male infidelity, depicting a married white Creole man trapped by the sexual wiles of a Cuban mulatta: "aquella cubana que tenía el poder magnético de la boa, y en los labios la voluptuosidad de las odaliscas de oriente, cuya ocupación única es el placer" (69). These literary representations of blackness do not necessarily portray black people. Rather, these characters are what I call misrepresentations of blacks as they are diluted with white blood and defined as *cuarterones* or *pardos*. They embody a negative sensuality and uncontrollable lust that the Puerto Rican white elite saw as a threat against morality and the reproduction of "pure" white Creoles.

Elite women also condemned plebeian women's sensuality as the cause of much of the adultery committed by the men of their class, as Roqué portrays in "El

⁵ "La serenata de los ángeles" is included in Roqué's collection of short stories *Cuentos y Novelas* (1894).

rey del mundo". This short story is about honor, decency, and social respectability, the basic values that the Liberals advocated in their writings. Roqué's gendered racial agenda is inscribed in the moral of the story that sustains that money cannot buy honor and respect, and highlights the importance of the social position, the education, and the respectability of white Creole women. "El rey del mundo" is a sentimental story about the frustrated love between a Creole girl of English descent, Luisa Bernet, and her cousin and fiancée Leopoldo Aromal, a young lawyer. Luisa is portrayed as the ideal white Creole educated girl: "Diez y ocho años acababa de cumplir la bellísima hija del Sr. Bernet y era una criatura adorable; blanca, alta, de ojos negros en que se dejaba traslucir el fuego de un alma vehemente y tierna; su andar era majestuoso, su sonrisa celestial, su educación distinguidísima" (p. 22). Luisa and Leopoldo represent the ideal young white Creole couple that has the possibility of succeeding in life by combining their economic status - the wife's dowry and the husband's profession. They embody the new economic order based not on agriculture, but on professional work. Luisa's and Leopoldo's lineage is clearly European: she is of English and he of Spanish descent, and, in addition, both have been educated in Madrid; yet this does not guarantee imperviousness to misfortune. Leopoldo is a new lawyer in need to create his clientele; he gets a job as an interim judge in Isabela where the action takes place. The story introduces the family of Don Jaime Riosco and Juanita Kulper and their daughter Rosita is Luisa's rival.

Don Jaime Riosco, is a Catalán, landlord of a magnificent *hacienda de azúcar* and he lives with Juanita Kulper, the daughter of a mulatta and an Englishman, out of wedlock. Therefore the anti-heroine, Rosita, although she passes for white, is tainted with African blood. Rosita is represented as a beautiful and seductive woman, but she is also vulgar, frivolous, and ill mannered. As the narrator implies, it is Rosita's African blood and illegitimate origin, coupled with her lack of education that makes her a socially dangerous and hateful person:

Ni Rita la vieja ama de llaves, ni su madre, podían darle esa educación especial, que formando al corazón, inspira o hace nacer la bondad, dignidad, aprecio de sí mismo, y la infinita delicadeza de las almas puras. Para eso hubiera sido necesario que Rita no se hubiera criado en la abyección de la esclavitud, ni Juanita hubiera nacido como la misma Rosita, en la hediondez del concubinato. (p. 25)

The author leaves no hope for the vindication of Rosita, she is simply the representation of everything that is considered wrong for a young woman of the upper-class. Even her beauty is so extremely sensual that it is repulsive: "no le faltaba hermosura, aunque un tanto repulsiva por lo sensual" (p. 25). Her father's riches empower Rosita to do as she pleases: "su educación moral era deplorable; como sabía que era rica se permitía toda clase de abusos contra la decencia y contra las costumbres" (p. 25); the emphasis on education is a strong point. While Luisa possesses "una educación distinguidísima", Rosita totally lacks any. Rosita's favorite way of amusing herself is to dress like a man and carouse in the town's streets after midnight, without her father's knowledge. Through the author's conservative eyes, Rosita's transvestism is a degradation of the representation of femininity, since a girl dressed like a man transgresses the social-moral codes. She not only cross-dresses, but also uses questionable language: "Su lenguaje era siempre de lo más soez y va-

sallesco que pudiera emplearlo cualquier mujer de mal vivir; y tenía tan poco pudor que se divertía diciéndole insolencias a los jóvenes del pueblo" (26). Consequently, Rosita is a nineteen-year-old girl whom none of the young men in town wishes to marry. She is represented as devoid of morality, fitting the negative imagery of Africanness as excessively sexual and degenerate. With regard to moral and racial attitudes, Roqué's ideology is in consonance with Brau's social Darwinism and biological determinism. Rosita's *mestizaje* is categorically represented as a genetic defect, a degeneration by which her immoral behavior and overt sexuality is determined, thus making her social and moral redemption impossible. Leopoldo cannot resist Rosita's extreme sensuality and they inevitably fall into a fatal and passionate love-affair. Rosita's moral degeneracy and sexual availability function as the necessary counterpoint to underscore Luisa's angelical purity and respectability: "No podía olvidar a su angelical prima a quien tan de veras había amado, y cuya imagen plácida y suave se aparecía a sus ojos en las horas de insomnio como un remordimiento" (29). When Leopoldo decides to end their love affair because he will marry his cousin Luisa, Rosita contrives to ruin Leopoldo's engagement. Rosita's father tells Leopoldo: "Mi hija es mestiza descendiente de esclavos, ya lo habría adivinado usted; pero 500 mil duros ya son bastante cantidad para purificar su sangre" (59). The racial stigma impacts on Leopoldo's awareness of his social status: "El, hijo de un peninsular distinguido e ilustrado que viniera a Puerto Rico con un alto empleo, iba a casarse con la nieta de una negra esclava. ¡A que extremo le había conducido su locura!" (65). Thus, the marriage between Leopoldo and Rosita cannot have a happy ending. Their interracial union is doomed to fail: "su vida era un infierno, ambos se despreciaban mutuamente, y podía considerárseles presidiarios unidos a una misma cadena" (71).

In "El secreto de una soltera" Roqué reverses the gender representation regarding the voracity of African women's sexuality, by portraying a man of African descent who exudes sexual power over Amalia, a well-off white Creole woman. Amalia, in a rather stoic move of self-denial chooses not to marry the man she truly loves for he is stigmatized with the "black stain" thus she remains single for the rest of her life. Through the character of Amalia - a wealthy and respectable single woman over forty years of age - Roqué vindicates the sad reputation that single women had in the nineteenth century, particularly when they grew old. It is interesting to note that *El escándalo: novela naturalista* by Matías González García also portrays a young mulatto who passes as white and sneaks into the world of high society. His personality is described as degenerative and perverted: he steals money, seduces honorable women, and threatens the respectability of the social order.

In contrast to the eminently white representations in Brau's and Zeno Gandía's novels, Roqué's *Sara la obrera* is concerned with denouncing not only white men's sexual harassment of women of color, but also the widespread practice of domestic violence. The Patrician class praised their women greatly for their reproductive role in the preservation of a ruling class of white Hispanic descent. Patrician women were aware of their value as wives and mothers of the upper class men and believed they were morally superior to plebeian women, mainly blacks, *pardas* or *jibaras*. Roqué's fiction is a significant example of these ideologies that pervaded the Hispanic Creole women's narrative from this period, although kept at the mar-

gins of the Puerto Rican literary canon. Strictly from the point of view of their fictional representations of gender relations and sexuality, *¿Pecadora?* and *La charca* focus on denouncing concubinage as the major evil that affected rural areas, while Roqué's *Sara la obrera* condemns the brutal sexual lust of white men for innocent *parda* girls, thus introducing the variable of race omitted by her writer counterparts. *Sara la obrera* represents the struggle of gender and race relations between a *parda* girl and a white Creole, contradicting the alleged promiscuity of women of African descent. Paradoxically, *Sara la obrera* offers a different perspective from that of "El rey del mundo" and "El secreto de una soltera" in which the mulatto characters are inherently degenerate, extremely sensual, and without morality.

Sara, the protagonist, is a girl of African descent, who is drugged and raped by Nicolás Marrero, a despotic man and a womanizer who physically abuses his wife, also a black woman. Sara loses her sanity and ends up as a recluse at "La Beneficiencia" dying there shortly after. The bourgeois feminists' project - laid out in "Nuestro Programa"⁶ - sought to provide lower-class women with manual trade skills so that they would not depend on their sexuality for their subsistence. Patrician women believed in both sexual and class divisions of labor as a means to prevent plebeian women from competing with them for the financial support and sexual attentions of upper-class men. *Sara la obrera* illuminates how Roqué articulated these types of controversial issues that could not be openly addressed in the articles of her newspaper, *La mujer*. Thus she resorted to fiction as a safe space from which to denounce the unspeakable. Sara, the protagonist, embodies the ideal working-class *parda* girl, who fits the representation of plebeian women as imagined by men such as Gabriel Ferrer and Salvador Brau in their proposals for women's moral reform.⁷ Sara is a poor girl - *una hija del pueblo* - yet honest, virtuous, and hardworking:

Sara era la joven más bella en su clase que había en la población, y también la más trabajadora y entendida. Huérfana desde muy niña, vivía con su madre, a la que sostenía con su costura y sus bordados. Siña Mercé aún fuerte y sana, planchaba desde la mañana hasta la noche para proporcionarse lo necesario a fin de pagar el alquiler de la pequeña casita que habitaban; pero como muchas veces el trabajo escaseaba, las dos tenían que imponerse muchos sacrificios para sostenerse con la decencia que habían acostumbrado siempre, desde antes de morir su padre, Mister Rubert, herrero tortoleño que murió dejando a su familia enredada en pleitos que dieron al traste con la pequeña fortuna que había podido reunir después de algunos años de constante labor. (p. 11, emphasis added)

⁶ See Ana Roqué "Nuestro Programa," *La mujer*, Feb. 2, 1894, qtd. in Findlay 237.

⁷ Gabriel Ferrer Hernández (1848-1901), like Manuel Zeno Gandía, was a physician and a political activist of the Partido Autonomista. In 1880 Ferrer submitted to a national contest a suggestive study bearing the long title of *La mujer en Puerto Rico: sus necesidades presentes y los medios más fáciles y adecuados para mejorar su porvenir*. Ferrer's essay won first prize and was published in 1881 in the form of a booklet, having a great impact on the public opinion of the time. Ferrer's ambitious project dictated norms of decorum and behavior not only for girls of the Creole elite, but also for the lower urban-class mulattas and poorer white girls (*las hijas del pueblo*), thus breaking the fine line between class and race, a step no one had taken before. In contrast, Salvador Brau switched his interests to the rural areas. In an answer to an alarming statement made by the island's governor, General Despujol, on the lack of schools and instruction for rural girls, Brau wrote his sociological essay *La campesina* (1886).

This quotation reveals many of the ideas that the author expressed in her early feminist agenda. Roqué's hierarchical and maternal view portrays an exemplary "obrero" who strives to support herself and her mother through hard and honest work, even if it entails the imposition of tremendous sacrifices. The call to "la decencia" implies avoiding the greatest mistake that the Liberals' rhetoric identified in their moral prescriptions for women, that is, to seek the protection of a wealthy man, either through a marriage without love or through concubinage. In this respect, Sara's representation partially follows the rhetoric epitomized in Ferrer's influential essay *La mujer en Puerto Rico*. For Ferrer, "las hijas del pueblo"⁸ should be provided with basic instruction in some type of skilled labor or artisan trade, so they would be able to support themselves through their own honest work. In this way, they would be self-sufficient and, most importantly, they could then be expected to protect their virtue at all costs, even if it meant to live single and in misery for the rest of their lives. Liberal men viewed this ultimate sacrifice as the most logical answer for lower-class women's economic problems. It was a unilateral solution that forbade lower-class women to resort to masculine protection in exchange for sexual favors. This unrealistic measure was thought to be effective to control the high level of adulterous relations, since these men saw only women as accountable for acts of infidelity:

Nunca tendremos razón bastante para justificar el quebranto de la fidelidad prometida en el matrimonio, porque, adoradores ciegos de la honra inmaculada, no queremos encontrar argumentos que atenuar puedan la falta, el delito imperdonable de que hablamos: pero, ¿no es también una verdad, tristísima verdad por cierto, que si la mujer hallase en su ilustración los medios de combatir la miseria, el adulterio habría de disminuir notablemente? (Ferrer, *La mujer...*p. 17)

Ferrer articulates a negative representation of gender roles in which plebeian women are blamed for the existence of adultery in society. Unlike Brau, he does not consider that the extended practice of concubinage - which constituted long-term relations - is made effective by men's consent. Nonetheless, Brau and Ferrer agree that ending adultery is a matter of women's moral responsibility, and can only be achieved through proper elementary Christian education for girls. In general, Liberals did not acknowledge male sexual incursions outside of marriage - men were exempted from any responsibility - and it is on this point that Roqué disagrees with the Liberals' masculine moral prescription. We have to remember that the sexual abuse portrayed in *La charca* shows the immorality of lower-class men, since Galante and Gaspar are uneducated, and Galante is a landowner who acquired his lands through questionable methods. Only Juan del Salto represents a morally superior member of the Puerto Rican landed gentry, who has no sexual contact with plebeian women. What Roqué claims in *Sara la obrera* is that the social moral problem has its roots not on the plebeian girl herself - even if she is a *parda* - but in the lusty, brutal sexu-

⁸ It is of interest to note that the Liberals never addressed the lower-class women as "women" but as "las hijas del pueblo" (Ferrer 7, 47) or as Findlay points out, as "campesinas" or "obreras". The term "woman", and furthermore, "la mujer española", was used only for the "ladies" of the upper classes (Findlay p. 74).

ality of the married white man. Nicolás Marrero represents a white man from the merchant class, "comerciante detallista hijo de un estanciero de Yabucoa" (14) married to Luisa, a woman of black descent. Nicolás is described as "un déspota; mal-humorado, amigo de faldas; y entre días solía tomar sus *turquitas*, maltratando entonces sin compasión a la infeliz Luisa que sufría todo aquello con resignación" (14, italics in the original). It can be inferred that there is a certain masochism on the part of Luisa, but she does not know any better, since she married Marrero when she was very young and thought to improve her social status.

In the context of the overt racism against people of black African heritage that reigned on the island, Roqué's description of Sara is important for understanding how the reading public would accept a *parda* heroine and feel empathy for her. Sara's father, Mister Rubert, is described as "un herrero tortoleño," an adjectival phrase that indicates he was a locksmith from the island of Tortola, historically known as having a mostly black population. Even though the narrative does not describe Mister Rubert's racial features, it is his trade (a locksmith) and his foreign name (which could also indicate that he was a former slave) which reinforce the idea that he was a man of both European and African heritage. Sara's mother is a *mestiza* who, as the author suggests, may even descend from the legendary Puerto Rican Taíno Chief Loguillo: "Quizás [Sara's mother] era descendiente del cacique *Loguillo* que por tantos años resistió al empuje de los españoles en las cumbres del *Yunque*, en la sierra de su nombre" (p. 13, italics in the original). The description of Sara deliberately dilutes any features that could indicate her black heritage:

[Sara] Era esbelta y airosa, y parecía más india que parda; esto quizás era debido a que su madre no podía negar el tipo especial de nuestros aborígenes, ya un poco desvanecidos por el cruzamiento (...) Sara tenía la tez ligeramente bronceada, aunque fina, y sus ojos extremadamente hermosos y bellos, tenían un tinte supremo de melancolía, como si su alma presintiera una vida de tribulaciones y de penas crueles. Su cabello lacio y largo con ligeras ondulaciones recordaba el de la célebre Loisa, cacica que viviera junto a las márgenes del Río Grande y que se desposó con un hijo de Castilla. (p. 13)

Despite the fact that Sara is "tainted" with African blood, Roqué makes sure to emphasize that she looks more Indian than *parda*, thus diminishing her Africanness. This representation of desirable whiteness corresponds to the Liberals' writings. The careful description of Sara - her slightly tanned complexion and her straight and long hair - dilutes her blackness. In addition, the representation of Sara's mother evokes Puerto Rican Taíno heritage and *mestizaje*, thus bestowing on the protagonist a more nationalist character, which would appeal to the nineteenth-century Puerto Rican reader.

As a narrative strategy, the author resorts to the artifice of drugging Sara in order to denounce her rape as without any doubt a real act of violence. In this way, the narrative assures the reader that Sara's rape is not the result of her seductive power and sensuality, which might have been seen as a mere sexual provocation. In *Technologies of Gender*, Teresa de Lauretis discusses the difficulty of proving cases of rape in the context of sexual power relations, and the assertion of constructs that are relatively new such as "family violence," and "battered women" (pp. 36-37). This is what de Lauretis calls "the violence of rhetoric," as she problematizes to

what extent these acts of family violence and rape are within the realm of the social and outside of the sexual, when it comes to matters of law that require them to be defined as crimes. According to de Lauretis, the issue of "spousal abuse" or "marital violence" began to acquire importance and centrality as real social problems around the 1870s, with the increasing interest in social science and in sexual pathology, such as child abuse and incest (de Lauretis 33). While these issues have always existed in the nineteenth century they were treated as a novelty, if not as an entirely forbidden topic.

Roqué's fictional discourse oscillates between different racial standpoints. While in "El rey del mundo" and in "El secreto de una soltera" any trace of blackness is represented as evil and degenerate, it is vindicated in *Sara la obrera*, though with terrible consequences for the mulatto girl. White men, such as Nicolás in *Sara la obrera*, are guilty of excessive sexual lust, and while Leopoldo in "El rey del mundo" succumbs to Rosita's sensuality, he still allows himself to be driven by his lust. The disturbing story of *Sara la obrera* denounces white male sexuality as predatory and bestial, strategically confirming the sexual political agenda undertaken by the bourgeois proto-feminists that were voiced in the newspaper *La mujer*. Bourgeois women's rhetoric turned Liberal men's proposals for moral reform around - those in need of moral education were the men themselves, not women, or at least not the educated women of the elite. Plebeian women's social and moral inferiority provided the necessary counterpoint for the women of the elite to define their own hierarchical status. Even if a woman of African descent was in a position of power, like Rosita in "El rey del mundo", her literary representation still functioned as the counterpoint to define white Creole educated women, in this case embodied in Luisa. Puerto Rican bourgeois feminists claimed that white Creole women were morally superior to the men of their class and, therefore, they were entitled to tame males' vices. The ultimate goal of the early feminists was to transform marriage through the elimination of male extramarital affairs. They claimed that both male and female chastity and monogamy were crucial to the betterment of the foundations of Puerto Rican society (Findlay 199:73).

The moral anxiety felt by the Creole elite was channelled through fiction representing the evils of colonialism through immoral characters. Contrary to the happy endings and moral allegories of the early Latin American romances, Puerto Rican novels in the late nineteenth century were engaged in representing the crude aspects of reality and did not provide happy endings. The eclecticism and the variety of styles and topics developed by these writers, their contradictions and ambiguities, and their mixing of literary techniques all represent the rupture of the coherent, continuous, and homogeneous discourse of European literary movements (Martínez San-Miguel 1997:132). The tensions between colonialism, slavery, and patriarchy coupled with the eagerness of the elite toward the modernization of the island, are at the core of the writings that I describe. Further studies and analyses of literary works, which have been neglected or forgotten, are needed in order to bring them back to life in light of the socio-historical conditions of their production. Hopefully, my analysis will cast some light on the ways in which Puerto Rican authors' contesting and contradictory representations of race and gender reflected the crisis of a

country that struggled for progress and development on all fronts without succeeding in becoming an independent nation. In sum, examining literary works from this period of literary formation using gender analysis as an approach, may reveal the mechanisms through which socially dominant groups conveyed their positions of power or their desire for social change.

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