

**MAKING NATIONAL CITIZENS:
GENDER, RACE, AND CLASS IN TWO WORKS BY
CLORINDA MATTO DE TURNER**

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In December of 1895, shortly following her exile from Perú, Clorinda Matto de Turner read an essay, "Las obreras del pensamiento en la América del Sur," at the Ateneo of Buenos Aires. Earlier that year, in Perú, she published *Herencia*, a sequel to her popular novel *Aves sin nido* (1889). These two works, the essay and the novel *Herencia*, are the focus of this paper.

Contemporary discussions of discourses of nationalism, and the notion of the nation in general, have tended to highlight their ambivalent nature. As Homi Bhabha states:

For the nation, as a form of cultural *elaboration*. . . is an agency of *ambivalent* narration that holds culture at its most productive position, as a force for subordination, fracturing, diffusing, reproducing, as much as producing, forcing, guiding. (3-4)

Essays and novels of national foundation in nineteenth-century Perú participated in the politico-literary project of the formation of a national culture and national aesthetic through the articulation of the national space, its inhabitants, its collective values. In producing and guiding, on a cultural level, who and what constituted proper national representatives, these nationalist narratives set up boundaries between we and they, serving to subordinate and divide certain national subjects and ways of being.

As narrative participants in the Peruvian nationalizing project, both of Matto's texts address, in particular, women's roles within the national community, especially with regard to their contributions to national progress and the development of a proper national ethos. While the essay articulates the specific situation of women of the privileged classes, and provides alternative models to the nationalist category of 'republican motherhood,' Matto's novelistic production presents a dialogic problematization of nationalist and feminist notions of female desire: love, sexuality, marriage, the family. Female bodies and female souls provide central points of contention in the elaboration of Matto's discourses of nationalism and feminism.

In this paper I examine first, Matto's essayistic denaturalization of established discourses concerning women's proper roles in national development. In the essay Matto presents an argument for women's

access to full citizenship within the intellectual sphere. And second, taking into consideration the dialogic tensions represented in the novel, I examine interruptions in Matto's totalizing nationalist ideology of gender, class, and race. The novel presents Matto's construction of the "good mother of the *patria*," invested with the responsibility of the production, both biological and spiritual, of "good national citizens." Thus, the making of national citizens is at once a physical and cultural task, embodied in the female subject as mother of the family, mother of the nation, and intellectual.

1. Making national citizens: The female intellectual.

In the first sections of her essay Matto makes an urgent call to women to "take possession of their rights," to reject the chains of their past oppression, and to assume the position of the "true heroine" in the struggle for freedom and wholeness. She proposes this be done through education, the writing of books, pamphlets, and periodicals, all informed by the ideal of feminine progress. Through this struggle women will not only liberate themselves, she states, but they will serve society, all of humanity, and the nation or *patria* as well.

In the final sixteen pages of the essay Matto develops a list of women who have courageously combined traditional female roles with their intellectual endeavors. These women are important not only as mothers, wives, and sisters of well-known or heroic men, but famous and equally heroic in their own right for their intellectual labors. They are the writing women of the Americas, the "obreras del pensamiento," models of enlightened female national service.

Matto's radical call for women's legitimate and recognized access to the intellectual sphere provides a response to institutionalized discourses concerning women and their proper place within the "national imaginings" of nineteenth-century Latin America. Her female-centered language contests, yet does not destroy, the culturally established notion of 'republican motherhood.' In Mary Louise Pratt's discussion of the Latin American republican era she emphasizes the particularly masculinist ideologies that marked early conceptualizations of nationhood. She states: "women inhabitants of nations were neither imagined as nor invited to imagine themselves as part of the horizontal brotherhood" of the nation, nor to participate in its characteristic language of fraternity (48-51).

By contrast, Matto's essay provides a feminist counterdiscourse of female national service, a language of transnational *sorority*, that reveals the incapacity of the official category 'republican motherhood' to totalize female experience or potentiality. In opposition to the gender

hierarchy of national brotherhood, Matto not only imagines women's participation in nation-building, but provides a long list of concrete female models from across the continent. Nationalist patriotism becomes subsumed by a feminist celebration and promotion of women's intellectual production and its potential for human redemption.

On the other hand, within the novel the issue of 'republican motherhood' as an official nationalist category takes on a differently inflected tone. Rather than openly contesting its limits and inadequacy for privileged women of the creole ruling class, my reading of the novel will show that the code of 'republican motherhood' is not only inadequate but inaccessible to women of different social classes and races. Like the essay the novel places women at its center, though not as potential writers, but as the familial locus of the construction of a viable national ethos. Matto's novelistic narrative of nationhood subsumes the essay's feminist agenda within a female-centered nationalist agenda. Yet the issue of which woman can provide the model of national female subjectivity, the "good mother of the nation," is destabilized by the multiplicity of female experiences presented in the dialogic discourse of the novel.

Keeping in mind Bhabha's notion of the ambivalent nature of nations and their narratives, the multivocality of the novel offers a revealing manifestation of socio-literary tensions. As Timothy Brennan states:

It was the *novel* that historically accompanied the rise of nations by objectifying the 'one, yet many' of national life, and by mimicking the structure of the nation, a clearly bordered jumble of languages and styles. (49)

This "jumble of languages and styles" that characterized the national space and found its way into the novels that narrated it, leads Brennan to Mikhail Bakhtin's concepts of 'heteroglossia' and 'dialogism.'

Feminist contributions to Bakhtinian theory have brought issues of gender, race, and ethnicity into the dialogue among discourses as socially-grounded struggles that he elaborates. In the novelistic zone of dialogic contact different social voices can be heard, especially those of dissent. It is at the intersection of Matto's novelistic projection of nationalist desire and the marginalized counterlanguages that present interruptions to its attempts at monologism, that I propose to situate my reading of *Herencia*. In examining the dissenting voices of representations of subaltern female national subjectivity presented in

the text, the ambivalence of nationalist discourses can be discerned and the simple binary opposition between patriarchy and a feminist response, problematized.

II. Making national citizens: Nationhood and motherhood.

Produced during a period of national crisis and transition, *Herencia* provides both a critique of Peruvian society and its system of values, as well as prescriptive remedies to its social malaise. The novel follows Margarita - the orphaned *serrana indígena* revealed to be *mestiza* in *Aves sin nido* - to Lima where she has become sufficiently creolized to "pass" in the urban "marriage market" of high society. As the title suggests, *herencia* is the critical category that organizes the narrative, invoked throughout the text for its biological connotations as well as its spiritual or environmental meanings. The text implies that spiritual *herencia*, or upbringing, can overcome poor biological *herencia*. Within the nationalist logic of the narrative this points to the necessity of good 'republican motherhood' invested with a proper national ethos. At the same time the precedence of environment over biology reveals the socio-culturally constructed nature of not only the "good national citizen," but gender and race as well. Margarita's transformation from *serrana* to urban creole is brought about by good upbringing which serves to displace her ethnic or racial "otherness." Thus she is symbolically elevated from her subaltern status and textually positioned as a model of national female subjectivity.

The plot develops through the opposition of two families, each with a daughter entering into the urban "mercado del amor." The trajectory of this opposition presents a moral confrontation between the high ethical values of the "good" Marín's of the liberal bourgeoisie and the Aguileras of the decadent upper class. Initially, both daughters are good, spiritual virgins. But it becomes apparent that Margarita Marín's counterpart Camila Aguilera is destined for failure in love and marriage due to her poor *herencia*, her mother's lack of proper moral values.

The development of Margarita's romance precedes through a purely spiritual language. She provides the good moral example, product of good *herencia*. Margarita's marriage to Ernesto, as the desired conclusion to the novel, completes the traditional marriage trope of nineteenth-century novels of national foundation.

Yet the social destinies of the two young women of the bourgeois class, placed at the center of the problematic addressed in the text, are interrupted and intersected by other young women, also members of the Peruvian national community. If Margarita's racial-ethnic sacrifice can be erased by her happy union with Ernesto, the tensions created

by the dialogue of partial heteroglossia present in the novel demonstrate the ambivalence of a nationalist morality that attempts to displace economic and racial injustices. These marginalized voices make claims on a system or ideology that, although naturalized as totally good in the logic of the text, becomes objectified by the socio-cultural location of these national subjects, and reveals that ideology to be inadequate, incapable of containing the heterogeneity of "other" female experiences. They are the *mulata* single mother, the unwed orphaned *criolla* of the lower-middle class, and the lower class creole mother of the fallen aristocracy.

Espíritu Cadenas, a poor *mulata* who inhabits the margins Limeñan official society, is a narrative representation of pure materiality. While other women described in the novel are bodily constructed and socially positioned by way of their clothing, Espíritu is described only on the basis of her body. A single mother, living by her wits, her labor, and the system of *compadrazgo*, her fate is death by unknown causes. She leaves behind two small daughters, orphans at the mercy of an indifferent society. While Espíritu's precarious social situation is naturalized within the textual logic as the destiny of those unfortunate ones of her class, "women like her," her narrative presence gives testimony to her social milieu and their collective destiny. Thus forcing a narrative space for the voice of dissent and calling into question an ostensibly monologic discourse of positivist social correction.

Adelina, a poor, orphaned, middle class young woman, lives in a rarefied enclosed space described simultaneously as bedroom, receiving room, workshop, and livingroom. She is the female embodiment of flowers, poetry, embroidery: pure spirituality. The reified space she inhabits presents the extreme of the relegation of women to the private sphere and serves to objectify that nationalist and literary female trope. She leaves that private space only at her death. Due to her poverty, lack of family, and her excessive adherence to culturally sanctioned spacial divisions of gender and class she is removed from the daily workings of official society. She presents a muted critique of established definitions and prescriptions of female ways of being.

Finally, the novel presents a nameless poor creole woman, who, due to her family's exclusion from the "official" system of favors marking Limeñan economic life, is forced to ask for help to save her family. Ironically, Lucía Marín solves their economic problems with a short-term loan and her *own* connections with a local business owner. Unlike the doubly marginal Espíritu and her daughters as poor *mulatas*, the creole family will be saved. Yet, without the patronage of the Marín's, the overarching nationalist discourse of the text would be

meaningless to the poor creole women.

While the dominant discourse of the novel privileges the life plots of the two marriage-age women of the creole elite, the life stories and social destinies of marginalized voices provide a dialogic intervention into the text's homogenizing project. At the same time, Matto, as a writing woman in nineteenth-century Peru, articulates a counterlanguage to male-centered narratives of national foundation. Matto's double-consciousness as *woman* of the dominant class, both inside and outside of official systems of power, is further problematized by her novelistic introduction of subaltern women marked by race and class. The dialogic nature of the novel objectifies not only nationalist notions of 'republican motherhood' but the ideology underlying Matto's feminist discourse, her attempts to produce and guide the nation. The essay as well as the novel are participants in the politico-literary construction of the nation, the cultural articulation of a national we and they, and are marked by its characteristic ambivalence.

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