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“LA PATRIA ES NUESTRA MADRE”: FAMILY METAPHOR AND RACE IN THE LA GUAIRA CONSPIRACY*

“LA PATRIA ES NUESTRA MADRE”: A METÁFORA DA FAMÍLIA E A RAÇA NA CONSPIRAÇÃO DE LA GUAIRA

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Abstract

This paper explores the intersection of race and the metaphor of the national family in the texts generated during the *Conspiración de La Guaira*, a failed 1797 republican *independentista* revolt in colonial Venezuela led by Mallorcan enlightened intellectual Juan Mariano Picornell. Turning away from traditional representations of the dynastic state in terms of paternity, the La Guaira conspirators figure the nation as a mother and creoles and Afro-Venezuelans as brother citizens. Yet, at the same time that it indicates a transition from dynastic to republican paradigms, the conspirators' emphasis on revolutionary brotherhood serves to contain the radical notions of equality unleashed by the republican independence movement.

Keywords: Guaira conspiracy, Juan Mariano Picornell, slavery, family allegory.

Resumen

Este trabajo explora la intersección de la raza con la metáfora de la familia nacional en los textos que se escribieron durante la *Conspiración de La Guaira*, un fracasado movimiento republicano-independentista, del año 1797, liderado en Venezuela por el intelectual ilustrado Juan Mariano Picornell, de origen mallorquín. El artículo discute cómo los conspiradores se alejan de las representaciones tradicionales del estado dinástico en términos de paternidad para representar a la nación como una madre y a las poblaciones criolla y afro-venezolana como ciudadanos hermanos.

Resumo

Este artigo explora as relações entre a raça e a metáfora da família nacional nos textos produzidos durante a *Conspiração de La Guaira*, um movimento republicano e independentista falido, dirigido pelo intelectual ilustrado, de origem maiorquina, Juan Mariano Picornell, na Venezuela, no ano de 1797. O artigo analisa como os conspiradores se afastam das representações tradicionais do estado dinástico em termos de paternidade, representando a nação como uma mãe e aos venezuelanos-brancos nativos e afro-venezuelanos-como irmãos. Porém, se bem isto indica

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Sin embargo, a la vez que eso indica una transición de los paradigmas dinásticos a los republicanos, el énfasis que ponen los conspiradores en la fraternidad sirve como manera de frenar las nociones radicales de igualdad que el movimiento republicano-independentista había puesto en circulación.

Palabras claves: Conspiración de La Guaira, Juan Mariano Picornell, esclavitud, alegoría familiar.

uma transição dos paradigmas dinásticos para os republicanos, a ênfase que os conspiradores colocam na fraternidade serve também para frear as noções radicais de igualdade que o movimento republicano-independentista tinha posto na circulação.

Palavras-chave: Conspiración da Guaira, Juan Mariano Picornell, escravidão, alegoría familiar.

This paper explores the intersection of race and the metaphor of the national family in the texts generated during the Conspiración de La Guaira, a failed 1797 republican *independentista* revolt in colonial Venezuela led by Mallorcan enlightened intellectual Juan Baustista Mariano Picornell y Gomilla. Turning away from traditional representations of the dynastic state in terms of paternity, the La Guaira conspirators figure the nation as a mother and creoles and Afro-Venezuelans as brother citizens. Yet, at the same time that it indicates a transition from dynastic to republican paradigms, the conspirators' emphasis on revolutionary brotherhood serves to contain the radical notions of equality unleashed by the republican independence movement.

In 1795, the Mallorcan intellectual Juan Mariano Picornell led a rebellion aimed at overthrowing the Bourbon emperor Carlos IV (known in English as Charles IV) and reforming the decadent Spanish monarchy. Upon the discovery of the plan, Picornell and his fellow “Conspirador de San Blas” [“Saint Blaise Day Conspirator”] Manuel Cortés Campomanes were banished to the New-World colonies along with the other rebels.¹ Escaping from prison in Venezuela in 1797, they joined the republican Conspiracy of La Guaira, led by creole independence fighters Manuel Gual and José María España. This plot, which was characterized by a strong anti-slavery vein, also was discovered and stifled by the authorities.²

¹ On the Conjura de San Blas, see Zavala (1981: 199-254).

² Picornell's life following La Guaira proved colorfully conflictive. Facing execution, the Mallorcan fled to the French colony of Guadalupe, and later to the republican centers of Philadelphia, metropolitan France, and Martinique. He returned to Caracas in time to participate in Bolívar's 1810 independence movement (GRASES, 1982: 315). By 1812 he had once again fled to Philadelphia, where he became involved the first US filibustering campaigns in Spanish America (WARREN, 1942: 312). In particular, he participated in a conspiracy to invade Texas from Louisiana and liberate the northern interior provinces of New Spain from Peninsular rule with the understanding that he would be president of the new republic (GRASES, 1982: 320-322). After that conspiracy failed, in 1814, he recanted his former revolutionary positions,

While historians used to consider the Conjura de San Blas as an early expression of republican sentiment on the Peninsula and the Conspiración de La Guaira (also known as La Conspiración de Gual y España) as its New-World counterpart, María Jesús Aguirrezábal and José Luis Comellas have suggested that the Madrid conspiracy was more interested in deposing the despotic Carlos IV than in abolishing the monarchy as an institution. Rather than seeking to replicate the French Revolution in the Iberian metropolis, they argue, Picornell and Cortés Campomanes would not be converted to the republican cause until they arrived in Venezuela and –perhaps operating under the influence of a group of imprisoned French soldiers from the revolutionary colony of Saint-Domingue (LÓPEZ CASTRO, 1955: 73)– entered into contact with creole conspirators Gual and España. Aguirrezábal and Comellas’s interpretation of events force a reconsideration of the traditional story of the development of republicanism in the Americas –disseminated by scholars such as Ernest Hobsbawm, Walter Mignolo, and John Chasteen, among others–, as they do not present republican ideology as travelling from the metropolitan European center to the colonial periphery. Rather, as historian Elías Pino Iturrieta suggests, the European thinkers’ ideas were shaped by their experiences with the New-World slave society of Venezuela (PINO ITURRIETA, 2007: 22).³

Yet, despite its importance as a New-World adaptation of republican philosophy, the La Guaira Conspiracy has received limited scholarly attention outside the fields of Colombian and Venezuelan historiography.⁴ Surprisingly, the texts produced by the conspirators –which include essays, verse, and translations– have not caught the eyes of the literary scholars, who long ago accepted the political writings of other *independentistas* such as the Venezuelan Simón Bolívar and the Cuban José Martí as part of their canon of study. The lack of attention to these texts has had the unfortunate effect of excluding the Gual y España writings from the important cultural studies research currently

pledged allegiance to Spain and began to collaborate as a spy for Spanish monarch Fernando VII, working to thwart other revolutionary movements in Spanish America (WARREN, 1942: 320-321). He spent the rest of his life in New Orleans and Panama before settling in Cuba four years before his death in 1824. On the importance of Philadelphia to Spanish American republican movements, see Castillo (2005).

³ In referring to the “center” and the “periphery,” I am making use of Marxist economic historian Imanuel Wallerstein’s vocabulary to describe the relations between the industrialized capitalist colonial powers of Europe and (later) the United States and the less developed, dependent economies of their formal and informal colonies. For a specifically Latin Americanist treatment of the phenomenon in terms of race, see Quijano and Wallerstein. For influential applications of the concept to the lettered sphere, see Rama (1982) and Casanova (1999). On the importance of European liberal travelers to Spanish American republican movements, see Mongey (2009).

⁴ Colombia and Venezuela were politically and administratively linked for much of the colonial and early republican periods. The Anglo-American academy in particular has had little to say on the Conspiracy. Notable exceptions include Warren, Lasso, and Coronado.

being produced by US, Latin American, and Caribbean studies scholars such as Hortense Spillers, Paul Gilroy, Michel Rolphe Trouillot, David Scott, Sybille Fischer, Jeffery Clymer, and Holly Jackson, in addition to those cited below, who –following in the anticolonial tradition of Martinican Frantz Fanon, Cuban Roberto Fernández Retamar, and North American David Brion Davis–, explore the constitutive relationship between racialized slavery and bourgeois republican thought in the Americas.

Hoping to introduce the La Guaira texts into this important conversation on the dialectical relationship between slavery and citizenship, this paper explores how New-World racial hierarchies influenced the development of the La Guaira conspirators’ republican project through an analysis of the evolution that the family allegory undergoes between the texts produced during the St. Blaise Day Conspiracy and those that were written during the Conspiracy of La Guaira. While, rooted in the European monarchical tradition, the St. Blaise Day Conspiracy explains royal power in terms of patriarchy, the New-World republican Conspiracy of La Guaira expresses the notion of popular sovereignty through the tropes of the maternal nation and republican brotherhood. This rhetorical shift from the vertical father-child relationship to the horizontal relationship among brothers suggests the change in the locus of power from the despot to the people following the creation of a republican citizenry out of the newly emancipated the feudal vassals of the *ancien régime*. Yet, while the La Guaira conspirators in their writings realize that the end of vassalage in colonial Venezuela would necessarily entail the abolition of African chattel slavery, the ambiguity of their texts, as well as the legal restrictions that they sought to place on the newly emancipated slaves, suggest that their anti-slavery ideology may have represented an effort to contain the more radical implications of their fraternal republican discourse during a period in which, as the 1793 Haitian Revolution makes clear, slave revolt posed a very real threat to the economic and political hegemony of the creole upper classes.

Citizen Blood and Social Death

While African chattel slavery traditionally has been regarded as an exception –or, at best, a blind spot– in early New-World republican programs, following the 1966 publication of intellectual historian David Brion Davis’s landmark *Problem of Slavery in Western Civilization*, which argues that “Negro slavery in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries posed a genuine moral problem that reflected deep tensions in Western culture and involved the very meaning of America” (DAVIS, 1966: 28), studies have begun to consider racialized non-wage labor as a constitutive other in the

formulation of New-World definitions of citizenship. Working within the US context, Edmund S. Morgan would identify “the American paradox of slavery and freedom, intertwined and independent, the rights of Englishmen supported on the wrongs of Africans” (MORGAN, 1972: 29). The historian argues that representative government was made possible for the United States’ white population because the presence of an abject Afro-descended laboring caste served to disassociate non-landholding whites from the phantom of mob rule that stalled liberal projects in Europe. Legal scholar Mark S. Weiner also explores this mutually constitutive relationship between slavery and citizenship, noting that, until the 1868 ratification of the Fourteenth Amendment following abolition, the US constitution did not define the category of “citizen,” instead contenting itself with a broad understanding of “citizen” as the semantic opposite of “slave.”

Orlando Patterson would reach similar conclusions in his 1982 transcultural, transhistorical study of human bondage, *Slavery and Social Death*. Like the North Americans Morgan and Weiner, the Jamaican-born social scientist would view the slave as a non-citizen, that is, an individual who is not a rights-bearing subject. (In the New-World context, this lack of rights would be defined by Judith N. Shklar as the inability to vote and feudal subjection to a master.)⁵ This situation, which Patterson would dub “social death,” was achieved through the slave’s status as an outsider lacking in kinship ties which would enmesh him or her in the social network and guarantee respect for his or her rights.⁶

Some scholars, such as Malick W. Ghachem, view this denial of rights to certain individuals as endemic to the republican project, arguing that “to build a nation requires a decision about who should belong and who should be excluded from citizenship” (GHACHEM, 2003: 12). While Ghachem focuses on the United States, his ideas regarding the inherent exclusivity of nation-building can be seen in the Hispanic context in the 1812 Constitución de Cádiz, a forerunner to the nineteenth-century Spanish American liberal movements which excluded individuals “reputados o habidos por originarios del África” from citizenship (Article 22). Similarly, drawing on political scientist Benedict Anderson’s view that nations are not self-justifying, transhistorical

⁵ For a consideration of the Eurocentricity of this definition of citizenship, see Cooper, Holt, and Scott and Aching. Similarly, see Joan Wallach Scott’s *Politics of the Veil* for a discussion of the embeddedness of bourgeois liberal values in the notion of political citizenship and the implications that that has for the incorporation of non-Western others into the body politic in contemporary France.

⁶ Many contemporary scholars prefer to use the adjective “enslaved” instead of noun “slave” in order to emphasize the humanity of people forced into racialized non-wage labor, asserting that African bondsmen and women are not defined by their legal status and remain human despite their enslavement. While this is, of course, true, I have chosen to use the term “slave” in this article in order to consider the legal, social, and discursive categories of “slave” and “citizen” and not the individuals who inhabit them.

entities but, rather, “imagined communities,” French Marxist Étienne Balibar theorizes the exclusive nature of nation-building in his essay “Racism and Nationalism,” writing that, as all national “ethnicities” are ideological fantasies (what Anderson calls “imagined communities”), “racism [...] maintains a necessary relation with *nationalism* and contributes to constituting it by producing the fictive ethnicity around which it is organized,” marking the nation’s human borders (ANDERSON, 1983: 48).

Balibar’s notion of nationalism as a “fictive ethnicity” dependent on the imaginary blood bonds among citizens of common origin fits well with Patterson’s explanation of slavery as “social death” produced by the lack of sanguineous ties to the community. In the rest of this article, I want to use the kinship metaphor mapped out by Patterson and Balibar to analyze the place of Afro-descendants—described by the La Guaira conspirators as the creoles’ republican “brothers”—in the early Venezuelan independence movement. On the one hand, the inclusion of Afro-descendants in the republican plot’s familial discourse would seem to suggest the admission of black slaves and mixed-race *pardos* to the Gual y España conspirators’ imagined community. On the other, it is important to bear in mind that—as historians such as Marixa Lasso, Ada Ferrer, and Seth Meisel remind us—Spanish American independentistas often included Afro-descendants rhetorically while denying the group rights in the republics that they hoped to found. This article probes how the La Guaira texts negotiate these tensions between racial inclusion and exclusion in their formulations of republican citizenship.

Family Metaphors

Paternity, maternity, and fraternity in the La Guaira texts serve alternatively as allegories (one-to-one correspondences) and metaphors (polysemic signs from which several inter-related meanings radiate) at varying points throughout documents. More than distinct rhetorical figures, fathers, mothers, and brothers in the La Guira texts function in concert with one another as what George Lakoff and Mark Johnson theorize as a “conceptual system” (LAKOFF; JOHNSON, 1980: 3) in which authors and their audiences understand and experience “*one kind of thing in terms of another*” (5, italics in the original). The linguistic theorists offer the “conceptual metaphor” “argument is war” as an example of this system of rhetorical mediation. Though the sentence “argument is war” is not a cliché in English, the unspoken perception of disagreement as battle gives rise to a series of martial tropes that English speakers commonly use to discuss argument: one “wins” or “loses” an argument; one “defends” one’s position; one “attacks” another’s point of view, etc. According to Lakoff and Johnson, this deployment of the notion

of battle to structure discourse on argument leads English speakers to view argument in terms of hostility and aggression; in a culture in which the conceptual metaphor were “an argument is a dance,” the linguists contend, “people would view arguments differently, experience them differently, carry them out differently, and talk about them differently. But *we* would probably not view them as arguing at all: they would simply be doing something different” (5, italics in the original).

In much the same way, the La Guaira texts operate under the unstated conceptual metaphor “the country is a family,” which manifests itself in tropes such as “patriarchal state,” “paternalistic government,” “the motherland,” and “brother citizens.” These turns of phrase personify the state as both protective and strong and the nation as nurturing while encouraging “fraternal” cooperation among citizens. Originating in the European Enlightenment, the country-is-a-family conceptual metaphor has proven impressively elastic, adapting itself, *mutatis mutandis*, to both dynastic and republican forms of government. The conceptual metaphor of the family was, however, complicated by the multiracial reality of the New-World slave colonies, which were neither protective, nor nurturing, nor collaborative, but based on exclusion and exploitation. Deploying the family metaphor as the conceptual structure for republican nation-building, the La Guaira texts beg the question: how can socially dead slaves and their descendants, bereft of kinship ties and possessing a different “blood” than their creole counterparts, be adopted as full members of the republican national family?

Historians long have been aware of the importance of family allegory to the political thought of the *ancien régime*. As François Xavier Guerra notes, after the centralizing Bourbon dynasty ascended to the throne in 1700,⁷ the “Spanish nation,” both in the Peninsular metropole and overseas, came to be seen as “una gran familia que tiene al rey como padre y múltiples hijos, diferentes, pero igualados en el mismo deber de defenderlo y asistirlo” (GUERRA, 1995: 21). A sort of enlightened benevolence, despotic government in this schema is analogous to the:

Dominio que ejercía el *paterfamilias* sobre los hijos y toda la familia, gobierno que se deriva de una ley natural y no necesita del consenso; y también es semejante al gobierno del tutor sobre el incapaz, destinado fundamentalmente a su protección. Al igual que el poder del padre o el del tutor, el gobierno del déspota puede justificarse por una inmadurez temporal del gobernado y por ser ejercido en beneficio de éste (REY, 2007: 129).

⁷ Of French origin, the Bourbons came to power in Spain with the ascension of Felipe V [Phillip V] after the last Habsburg emperor, Carlos II [Charles II], died childless in 1700. The transition from Habsburg to Bourbon rule marked a gradual centralization of state power in Madrid, to the detriment of local elites—a change that produced great discontent among Spanish American creoles and helped to precipitate the independence movements of the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries.

Just as, in the patriarchal family, the father, by virtue of his supposedly greater strength and understanding, exerts authority over the other members of the household, in enlightened despotism, the king's sovereignty over his "incapable" and "immature" subjects is considered a "natural" consequence of his superior wisdom.

Juan Carlos Rey argues that this understanding of royal authority as "la ampliación y extensión de la autoridad paterna" (REY, 2007: 50) has its origins in the Baroque-era Salamanca School of philosophy.⁸ In his 1612 *Tratado de las leyes y de Dios legislador* (originally published in Latin as *Tractatus de legibus ac Deo legislatore*), for example, Spanish Jesuit philosopher Francisco Suárez argues that, just as wives in the patriarchal family are subordinated to their husbands and children to their fathers, so, too, are servants to their lord (SUÁREZ, 1612: 10):

Sólo se podría decir que Adan al principio de la creación tuvo por naturaleza el primado y consiguiente el imperio sobre todos los hombres, y así que pudo derivar de él, o por el origen natural de los primogénitos o por la voluntad del mismo Adan. Así, pues, [...] que de un solo Adan todos los hombres han sido formados y procreados, para significar la subordinación a un príncipe (22).⁹

In this quote, Suárez rhetorically equates the masses with children and the monarch with a father by postulating the origins of sovereignty in the subordination of the sons of Adam to the prince. Picornell, for his part, would use similarly paternalistic language in his 1789 "Sobre un plan de educación de la juventud," in which he suggests that teachers should overcome "todos aquellos obstáculos que se oponen a nuestra felicidad, y diri[gir] los hijos de la monarquía conforme a los grandes designios [...] de nuestro benéfico monarca" (501). Here, Picornell—still a monarchist—readily adopts Suárez's terms for enlightened despotism by referring to the people of Spain as "los hijos de la monarquía."

The allegorization of the father as a figure for dynastic sovereignty operated within the cultural framework of feudal, aristocratic societies, in which wealth and influence were invested in the patriarch and inherited down the male line. As nineteenth-century French social and political theorist

⁸ The Escuela de Salamanca was a group of sixteenth and seventeenth-century Catholic humanist thinkers associated with the University of Salamanca in Spain and the University of Coimbra in Portugal.

⁹ The antiquated spellings appear in the translation that I consulted. Though it is not necessary for the argument that I am making here about the paternal metaphor as an organizing trope of despotism, it is important to note that Suárez considered government to be a binding contract between the ruler and the ruled. "Así como un hombre privado se vende y se entrega a otro en servidumbre, aquel dominio procede absolutamente del hombre; pero, supuesto el contrato, por derecho divino y natural es obligado el siervo a obedecer al señor" (40). For Suárez, the people may choose to surrender their sovereignty, but, barring certain extenuating circumstances, not to reclaim it.

Alexis de Tocqueville writes, “amongst aristocratic nations, social institutions recognize, in truth, no one in the family but the father; children are received by society at his hands; society governs him, he governs them. Thus the parent has not only a natural right, but he acquires a political right, to command them: he is the author and the supporter of his family; but he is also its constituted ruler.”¹⁰ In Suárez’s seventeenth-century Spain, in which the *paterfamilias* functioned in many ways as the sovereign representative of his family, the patriarch seemed a natural figuration for the monarch.

Suárez’s patriarchal allegory, however, would prove unserviceable to proponents of republicanism, who did not assign the same political importance to fathers as did the supporters of aristocratic and dynastic rule. “In democracies, where the government picks out every individual singly from the masses, to make him subservient to the general laws of the community, no such intermediate person is required; a father is there, in the eye of the law, only as a member of the community, older and richer than his sons” (de Tocqueville 727-728). Reducing the centrality in public life accorded to the *paterfamilias* by aristocracy and dynasticism, bourgeois republican thinkers of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries would find it difficult to harness the patriarchal allegory of sovereignty to their political project.

Perhaps not surprisingly, then, after his conversion to republicanism in Venezuela, Picornell in his writings would resignify the metaphor of paternity, presenting the dynastic colonial state not as a father protecting his young children, but as an abusive parent denying his sons legal adulthood. In his “Discurso preliminar dirigido a los americanos,” which appears as a preamble to the author’s Spanish translation of the 1793 Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen, the Mallorcan revolutionary asks his Venezuelan readers if “¿no encontramos en cada audiencia, en cada gobernador, comandante, corregidor, alcalde, o teniente, en lugar de un padre que nos defienda y proteja, un hombre malvado, corrompido, que vende la justicia, oprime al inocente y sacrifica al pueblo?” (Discurso 194).¹¹ A far cry from the benevolent father “directing” the “children of the monarchy” that Picornell describes during his Madrid years, here the state patriarchy—the governor, the commander, the corregidor, the mayor, and the lieutenant—is presented as a selfish and corrupt tyrant who has forsaken the people, his children. A few lines later, Picornell writes: “los hijos de la Patria ¿somos atendidos para cosa alguna?”

¹⁰ While de Tocqueville originally wrote *De la démocratie en Amérique* in French, the work was long ago adopted as part of the US literary canon and is today most commonly read in English, the language in which I have chosen to quote it.

¹¹ Colombian historian Gonzalo Hernández de Alba claims that Pedro Fermín de Vargas drafted parts of the *Discurso* (23).

Nuestros fueros y privilegios ¿se nos han guardado?” (195).¹² Disinherited of their *fueros* and traditional privileges by the centralizing Bourbon monarchy, the people, according to Picornell, must substitute the patriarchal dynastic state with a new conception of the national family.¹³

Still working within the framework of the, the-country-is-a-family conceptual metaphor, Swiss philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau in his 1755 “Discours sur l’économie politique” would furnish the new language for discussing republican society for which Picornell’s critique calls. Rejecting the dynastic notion of the state as a patriarchal family, Rousseau argues that, while the family, much as Suárez described, is organized on the principle of reciprocity among members, the Republic represents a contract among citizens, the fulfillment of which depends upon the virtuous conduct of all parties (5-6).¹⁴ This virtuous conduct can only be guaranteed, the political theorist argues, if “la patrie se montre [...] la mère commune des citoyens” (27). Thus, while Suárez mobilizes patriarchy, the bedrock of aristocracy, as a metaphor for dynastic allegiance in his preferred mode of government, republicans such as Rousseau –and the La Guaira conspirators, as I will show– deploy maternity to explain civic relations in their model society.

Picornell, for his part, would mobilize both Suárez’s paternal and Rousseau’s maternal allegories of government in order to elaborate his own republican philosophy. In his October 24, 1789 letter to Spanish Secretary of State Count Floridablanca, the Mallorcan writes that children should be made to love the nation and:

Mamar [...] con la leche el amor a su política, para que de este modo se les hagan más familiares y naturales; se les da una verdadera idea de lo que es la patria y de los muchos y grandes beneficios que nos preocupa para que la amen tiernamente de lo que es bien público para que se interesen vivamente por él, y de todas las obligaciones en que se hallen constituidos como vasallos y miembros del Estado, para que las puedan desempeñar y cumplir dignamente (503).

On the one hand, the revolutionary’s words mobilize Suárez’s father metaphor by invoking the notion of the vassal, a “member of the state” bound in patriarchal relations to the monarch. At the same time, however, his suggestion that love for the *patria* can be imbibed with a mother’s milk, even as it represents the masses as children, relies on a maternal –as opposed to a

¹² Originating in Medieval Iberian law, the *fueros* were a form of local rule.

¹³ On family relations and the paternal metaphor of government in colonial Spanish America, see Dore (2000).

¹⁴ On Enlightenment counterdiscourses to feudal paradigms, see Terdiman (1986).

paternal– metaphor.¹⁵ In this fragment, then, Picornell deploys two distinct family tropes in order to explain his notion of civic organization: while the state to which childlike “vassals” owe allegiance is allegorized as a father, the nation, which provides her children with nourishment, is represented as a mother.

This dichotomy between the patriarchal state and the maternal nation would become central to the La Guaira writings. In his propagandistic “Canción americana,” which urges the sons of the nation to defend the motherland from her tyrannical ruler, co-conspirator Manuel Cortés Campomanes would counterpoint patriarchal and maternal images of government against one another:

La Patria es nuestra madre,
Nuestra madre querida,
A quien tuvo el tirano
Esclava, y afligida:
A ésta es a quien debemos
Hasta la misma vida;
Perezcamos, pues, antes
Que ella se vea oprimida
(CORTÉS CAMPOMANES, 1797: 227-228).

Insisting upon the dichotomy between the maternal nation and the paternal state established in Picornell’s letter to Floridablanca, here the republican *independentista* Cortés Campomanes suggests that the colonial state has proven harmful to the New-World nation by presenting the latter as a “dear mother” who has been “enslaved” by state “tyranny,” coded in Picornell’s “Discurso” as patriarchal.¹⁶

Brotherly Love

In the “Canción americana”’s call to arms, the sons of the *patria* become locked in an almost oedipal struggle to free the New-World motherland

¹⁵ Though the Spanish word *patria*, like its Latin cognate, is obviously derived from the Latin word *pater*, or “father,” the noun is feminine in both Spanish and Latin, proceeding from the phrase *terra patria* (the land of one’s forefathers), in which it modifies the feminine “land.” In this article, I have chosen to translate “patria” into English as “motherland” in order to preserve the maternal connotations present in Picornell’s image of the nation nursing her children. The same comments apply to Rousseau’s use of the French “patrie,” which, he claims, must function as the “*mère commune des citoyens*.” That said, I would be remiss not to point out the recent coining of the term *matría* by feminist studies scholars in order to contest the patriarchal values that they find in official nationalist discourses.

¹⁶ For a general study of the use of family metaphor in Spanish American independentista rhetoric, see Felstiner (1983).

from Spanish colonial patriarchy. When they win the battle, the aristocratic allegory of sovereignty as paternity is superseded not only by the republican emblem of nation-as-mother, but by the notion of brotherly relations among citizens, as the locus of political activity passes from the abusive metropolitan father to the *americano* sons who have banded together against him to save their motherland. Thus, at the same time that the transition from dynastic to republican rule introduces the figure of the mother as an allegory of the nation, it also entails a discursive shift from paternity to fraternity as tropes for sovereignty, as government ceases to be considered in terms of the patriarchal relations between ruler and ruled and begins to be conceived of as a Rousseauian contract among brother citizens.

This fraternal trope occurs repeatedly throughout the La Guiara texts; the “Máximas republicanas,” which Picornell published along with his “Discurso” and translation of the Rights of Man and Citizen, for example, proclaim that “los republicanos virtuosos están siempre unidos como hermanos y amigos” (225). Yet, while obviously inspired by the Jacobin¹⁷ triptych of *liberté, égalité et fraternité*, upon crossing the Atlantic to the slave colony of Venezuela, the French-Revolutionary discourse of fraternity would have no choice but to confront New-World racial hierarchies.¹⁸ After all, even if the white creoles are subordinate “vassals” of the Spanish dynast, these very same creoles exercise patriarchal rights over their own “vassals” among the colony’s African chattel slaves. Which children born in the Americas, then, will the motherland recognize as her sons?

All of them, according to Picornell and Cortés Campomanes. Later on in his “Canción americana,” after inciting the New-World brothers to free the motherland from patriarchal despotism, Cortés Campomanes writes that:

Todos en esta empresa
Somos interesados
unámonos al punto
como buenos hermanos
Fraternidad amable
estrecha entre tus brazos
los nuevos Pobladores
Indios, Negros y Pardos
(CORTÉS CAMPOMANES, 1797: 228).

¹⁷ Normally juxtaposed with the more moderate Girondins, the Jacobins represented the radical wing of the French Revolution.

¹⁸ Alejandro E. Gómez (2008), for his part, notes the influence of «el nuevo régimen de ‘fraternidad inter-étnica’ que supuestamente había sido instaurado en casi todas las Antillas Francesas, tras un decreto que otorgaba ciudadanía a los mulatos de 1792, y otro que abolía la esclavitud de 1794» on Picornell’s adoption of the fraternal metaphor of civic organizatio.

It is a specifically interracial group of republican brothers, then, that the republican revolutionary interpellates to save the Venezuelan nation from colonial patriarchy. Similarly, in his “Discurso,” Picornell declares that:

entre blancos, indios, pardos y negros debe haber la mayor unión: todos debemos olvidar cualquier resentimiento que subsista entre nosotros, reunirnos bajo un mismo espíritu, y caminar a un mismo fin. Por falta de esta buena armonía, hemos experimentado un sinfín de males. [...] reconozcamos que todos los excesos que hasta ahora hemos cometido los unos contra los otros, son efecto de las perversas disposiciones del gobierno que ha hecho nos mirásemos, no como próximos, sino como de naturaleza distinta; cesen de una vez los odios, los desprecios, los malos tratamientos, y reine entre todos la fraternidad (1797, 198).

Here, it is the colonial patriarchy that keeps these interracial brothers apart, preventing them from joining together to save Cortés Campomanes’s “madre querida” of the nation from the Spanish imperial state. In this passage, interracial fraternity is deployed as a corrective to the race hatred that Carlos IV has sown among his New-World children. Not surprisingly, then, upon searching the plotters’ homes after the discovery of the La Guaira Conspiracy, colonial authorities found “instructions to use a cockade of white, blue, yellow, and red” (Warren “Early” 68) emblemizing the interracial republican brotherhood that the conspirators invoke in their texts.¹⁹

Antislavery

The place of African chattel slaves and their descendants in the body politic proved a fraught issue for New-World republicanism. As theorists Michel Ralph Trouillot and Sybille Fischer explain, fear of another Haitian Revolution, which had brought an end to creole economic and political hegemony on Saint Domingue, moved thinkers in many other slave colonies, such as Cuba, to reconsider their republican ideals. The La Guaira conspirators are thus exceptional in professing a desire to overcome colonial race hierarchies through the discourse of interracial brotherhood. This antiracist brand of republicanism necessarily begged the question of abolition in the Venezuelan slave colony, which had recently experienced a series of Haitian-inspired slave rebellions in areas such as Caucagua, Capya, Carayaca, and Coro (LÓPEZ CASTRO, 1955: 116). More radical than their republican counterparts in the following generation –who, upon receiving independence from Spain, would

¹⁹ On the participation of free blacks in the La Guaira Conspiracy, see Gómez (2008), “The *pardo* Question.”

renege on Simón Bolívar's promise to Haitian president Alexandre Pétion and refuse to abolish slavery—, the La Guaira conspirators embraced emancipation openly (if not fully, as I will explain below). As historian Vanessa Mongey writes, “*queleques aient étaient leurs véritables convictions, ces révolutionnaires européens ont fait preuve d'égalitarisme envers les Créoles de couleur tout en restant attachés aux esclavage*” (17). Picornell, Cortés Campomanes, and—especially— the creoles for whom they wrote would prove no exceptions.

This commitment to antislavery can be seen in Picornell's Spanish translation of the 1793 Jacobin Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen,²⁰ in which the Mallorcan revolutionary translates Article 18, “*la loi ne reconnaît point de domesticité*” [the law does not recognize servitude], as “*la ley no conoce esclavitud*” [“the law knows nothing of slavery”]. While the change is slight, the implications are significant for a slave colony contemplating republican independence, indicating that liberty will extend to all members of the national body and not—as in the case of the United States, which infamously had enshrined slavery in Article 1, Section 2 of its 1787 Constitution—to a limited number of creole inhabitants.²¹ This domesticating translation²² points to an effort on the part of the conspirators to rethink the European Enlightenment notion of citizenship from the standpoint of a New-World society in which the labor force was not comprised of freely engaged servants, as in eighteenth-century France, but of coerced slaves.²³ In the Americas, Picornell seems to realize, freedom from the vassalage of feudal patriarchy necessarily means the abolition of African chattel slavery in favor of interracial brotherhood and allegiance to the motherland, that is, on including all of the nation's heterogeneous inhabitants within the “fictive ethnicity” with which Balibar identifies the nation glued together with blood. With this imperative in mind, the La Guaira conspirators included a program for manumission with restitution paid to slave owners as part of their republican independence project.

While this plan for emancipation suggests a degree of commitment to abolition on the part of the conspirators that was atypical among the Spanish American independentistas of the era, references to slavery and antislavery

²⁰ The 1789 Girondin Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen was translated in 1794 by Colombian liberal Antonio Nariño, who, according to popular legend, destroyed all copies of the document when threatened by the Inquisition.

²¹ The so-called “three-fifths clause” of the US Constitution establishes that, for purposes calculating the number of delegates that a state may send to the House of Representatives (based on a state's population), a slave was to be counted as three-fifths of a man.

²² On “domestication” in translation, or the adaptation of the translated texts to the cultural, linguistic, and aesthetic norms of the target language and society, see Venutti (1995).

²³ On the role played by translation in Spanish American independence movements in general see Bastin, Echeverri and Campo (2010).

in the La Guaira texts are often ambivalent. As Davis has shown, Enlightened reformers frequently protested dynastic patriarchy through the metaphor of slavery—of social death, or non-rights bearing status—, perhaps most famously in Rousseau’s sweeping pronouncement at the opening of his 1762 *Du contrat social* that “l’homme est né libre et partout il est dans les fers” (1). In the Americas, similarly, thinkers such as the Peruvian Jesuit Juan Pablo Viscardo y Guzmán and the British-born North American colonist Thomas Paine would represent New-World creoles as “slaves” of their metropolitan sovereigns. As we already have seen, Cortés Campomanes would deploy slavery as a stock metaphor in this way in his “Canción americana” when he states that the maternal patria is being held “esclava y afligida” by the colonial patriarchy; the motherland is not really an African chattel slave; rather, she is, according to the republican author, exploited as though she were one.

Picornell, for his part, often mobilizes slavery in both the literal and metaphorical senses on the same page—with ambiguous results. In his proclamation “Habitantes libres de la América española,” for example, the Mallorcan revolutionary instructs the people of Venezuela to banish “las odiosas distinciones con respecto a la sangre parda,” clearly acknowledging the racialized *castas* system as a real and “odious” force in colonial society. Yet, in the following clause, he asks his readers to relegate “a la obscuridad de sus autores la infame doctrina que vale más la esclavitud en que uno ha nacido que un Gobierno libre, independiente y administrado por unos hombres virtuosos elegidos por vuestro sufragio, y responsables de su conducta,” a juxtaposition that posits “slavery” as a metaphorical opposite of “free government,” that is, as a form of rightless social death (181). In this way, even as it notes the existence of African chattel slavery, the document advises Venezuelan creoles to discard their color prejudice in order to liberate themselves from their own “slavery,” understood as the despotic father-child relationship in which the Spanish sovereign holds them and not as a racialized system of non-wage labor based on group exclusion.

A similar tropological ambivalence exists in the “Discurso preliminar,” which appears as a preface to Picornell’s antislavery translation of the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen. After enumerating the offenses committed against the people of Venezuela by Spanish colonial patriarchy, Picornell exasperatedly asks “¿puede llegar a más el exceso de la tiranía y del despotismo? Confiécese que nuestra suerte es más desgraciada que la del esclavo más mísero” (195), deploying slavery as an indirect simile: the *americanos* are more unfortunate than “the most wretched of slaves.” As in Campomanes’s “Canción americana,” here, the possibility of comparison between the *americanos* and the slaves suggests that, while the colonial subjects are *like* slaves, they are not *actually* enslaved in the strict sense of the term; though unfree, they are not literally held in bondage. On the one

hand, Picornell's simile avoids the epistemic violence rendered against Afro-descendants by contemporaneous proponents of New-World independence such as Viscardo y Guzmán or Paine by acknowledging that, while some people are held in chattel slavery, the creoles' lack of rights takes another form. On the other hand, by claiming that creole plantocrats are "more unfortunate" than enslaved Africans, the Mallorcan republican betrays a lack of sensitivity towards the nonwage laborers at the base of the colonial economy, as though he had not really considered the "unfortunate" situation in which the creoles that he aimed to emancipate from the Peninsular patriarch's "slavery" held their own racialized vassals.

With this semantic ambiguity in mind, I would like to return to the question of racial justice in the Gual y España Conspiracy. Given the frequent (if often insensitive) references to antislavery in the La Guaira writings, as well as the reverberations that the Haitian Revolution was making at the time in Venezuela and throughout the Atlantic World, it is not odd that colonial authorities looked on the republican independence movement as a slave revolt (López). More intriguing, however, is the fact that many of the creole co-conspirators also seemed to have felt uneasy with the radical racial energy unleashed by the movement. According to scholar Ramón Aizupara Aguirre, "la desconfianza que muchos de los blancos conjurados tenían de sus compañeros pardos se transformaba en terror cuando escuchaban que José María España contaba con "aliados" negros, reclutados en la costa al este de La Guaira, y tal situación pronto dio paso a la creencia de que con la revolución se corría el riesgo de que se desencadenase una revuelta de negros" (283-284). This belief, the historian argues, led some creoles to join the revolutionary ranks solely in order to conserve their places in society in the face of a possible black victory. For example, in his July 24, 1797 testimony to colonial authorities following the discovery of the conspiracy, Martín de Goenaga claims to have attended a meeting in which Gual paradoxically invoked the frightening memory of the Haitian revolution in order to advocate for the participation of mixed-race *pardos* in the independence movement:

De resultas de la pricion de los soldados pardos [por la fuga de Picornell y sus compañeros tras el descubrimiento de la Conspiración] se hallan los de este color en un fermento temible, y respecto a que no deben ustedes ignorar que las ultimas noticas de España nos anuncian fatales concecuencias a este pais, a imitacion de los que sucedió en el Guarico, soy de parecer y espero que convendrán vuestras mercedes, en que tratemos de unirnos con esta gente, para que no parezcamos todos al furor de ellos (*In: AIZUPURA, 2007: 264*).

Picornell's revolutionary call for creole and pardo brothers to take up arms together against the colonial patriarchal state is missing from Goenaga's

recollection of Gual's words. Rather, the declaration presents pardo political mobilization as "a terrible ferment" reminiscent of "what happened in Guarico" (now Cap Hatien, Haiti) –hardly the most respectful terms for Afro-Venezuelan participation in the republican movement. In a far cry from the lofty discourse of interracial fraternity deployed by Picornell, here Goenaga claims that Gual encouraged the creoles to "unirse con esa gente [...] para que no parezcamos todos al furor de ellos." Once again conjuring the specter of Haiti through the threat of death at the hands of revolutionary slaves (to whom he refers disdainfully as "these people"), Goenaga's Gual is not as concerned with interracial fraternity as he is with fratricide.

This Cain-and-Abel-like vision of brotherly love on the part of the creole elites is reflected in the emancipation decree included in Article 34 of the Revolutionary Constitution:

Queda desde luego abolida la esclavitud como contraria a la humanidad. En virtud de esta providencia, todos los amos presentaran a la Junta Gubernativa de sus respectivos pueblos cuantos esclavos tuvieren con una razón Jurada, de su nombre, patria, edad, sexo, oficio, coste que le tuvo, y años que se sirve, con más una nota de su conducta, y achaques si los tuviere para que en su vista en la Junta general se determine y mande abonar a sus respectivos dueños de los fondos públicos lo que merezcan en justicia, pero los esclavos permanecerán en el actual servicio de sus amos hasta la disposición de la Junta General (*In*: MICHELENA, 2010: 525-526).

The decree grants slaves the right to freedom, but also preserves the property rights of their masters. In this variation on fraternalism, Venezuelan pardos figure as the younger, dependent brothers of the creoles, and their conduct must be recorded so that the Junta General (presumably comprised of creoles) may decide whether or not to grant them legal adulthood one day. A perpetual minor, the free black in the imagined fraternal republic differs little from the feudal subject in the paternalistic dynastic state. In this way, the rhetoric of fraternity and the nominal resurrection of the socially dead as children of the motherland become devices to conserve creole hegemony in the republican imagined community.

Conclusion

In his 1913 *Totem and Taboo*, psychologist Sigmund Freud tells the story of a mythical group of prehistoric brothers who, after killing their tyrannical father, begin an anarchic and fratricidal struggle to see who will take his place and gain exclusive control of the women of the tribe –including their mother. Contemplating Venezuelan independence in the wake of the racially explosive

Haitian Revolution, the creoles of La Guaira may have reappropriated the European conceptual metaphor of the country as a family in order to avoid a similar struggle between white and Afro-descended “brothers” over control of the republican motherland. In the Americas, where fratricide was a daily occurrence on the cacao plantations of Venezuela and –to the creoles’ horror– the cane fields of Haiti, a reaffirmation of brotherly bonds between the races may have been necessary if those in bondage were to collaborate with their masters in freeing the motherland from colonial patriarchy.²⁴

²⁴ According to Mona Ozouf, the discourse of fraternity enjoyed a similar fate in Europe as a means of reconciling the tensions between moderate Girondist and radical Jacobin interpretations of the French Revolution, that is, between political and social understandings of the meaning of “equality.” For a theoretical discussion of the differences between political and social equality in the North American and French Revolutions, see Arendt.

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