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Bourgeois women in the early twentieth-century Dominican national discourse

Argues that in the early 20th c. a male elite in the Dominican Republic, in formulating a national project toward modernization and economic progress, projected on upper- and middle-class women prescribed roles as subordinate to men. She argues that working-class women were totally seen as unimportant to nation building. She describes how in different writings of the time bourgeois women were depicted as incapable to contribute to the desired progress independently, i.e. other than serving men.

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BOURGEOIS WOMEN IN THE EARLY TWENTIETH-CENTURY
DOMINICAN NATIONAL DISCOURSE

A resolute desire to “modernize” characterized the last decades of the nineteenth and the first years of the twentieth century in most of Latin America. In tandem with this pattern, a bourgeois intelligentsia of recent vintage dedicated its efforts to redefining the polity in the Dominican Republic. With unrealized economic potential, a history of corrupt politics, and enduring social dissension as backdrop, the formulators of the national project faced a daunting task. They nevertheless embraced the opportunities offered by the sugar boom of the 1880s and 1890s, the assassination of the dictator Ulises Heureaux in 1899, and the influx of progressive ideas regarding education and civic participation at the turn of the century. With all of the aplomb they could muster, Dominican intellectuals examined the national character and ventured predictions for the future. The outcome of their musings was the now much dissected “discourse of progress,” which – in defining the national – promptly placed immigrants from the British West Indies and Haiti, foreign and local cane workers, and titleless peasants on the margins of economic production, social intercourse, and political participation.

Newspaper and magazine representations of bourgeois women, one of the offshoots of this exercise in identity politics, similarly located citizenship beyond the reach of women. Upper- and middle-class women, I will argue in this article, invariably appeared in short stories, advertisements, or anecdotal columns as objects of men’s political schemes or as irrelevant players in the formation of the nation. The male elite who put out these publications projected onto bourgeois women formulaic roles in the pre-conceived social order they controlled. I shall show here that, as they set the limits of national difference, they also effectively forestalled working-class women from joining the polity.

THE ROLE OF "THE OTHER" IN THE DISCOURSE OF PROGRESS

The blueprint for change in the Dominican Republic, as in the rest of Latin America, rested on the notion that citizens could coalesce around a universal definition of progress. Agreement was imperative (and assumed) over the pivotal role of private property, the necessity of participatory democracy, and the capacity of individuals to contribute to the welfare of the country.¹ The writings of José Ramón Abad, Eugenio María de Hostos, José Ramón López, and Pedro Francisco Bonó, all men of stature politically and socially, duly recognized the tension caused by the co-existence of *terrenos comuneros* (communal lands) and a capitalistic sugar industry. Newspaper editors, political essayists, and educators – such as Hostos, Francisco Henríquez y Carvajal, and Américo Lugo – clamored for responsible government, for one attentive to popular needs and open to more than the dominant interest. In the social sphere, Bonó, Hostos, and Alejandro Angulo Guridi saw respect for the common folk, state-sponsored education, and immigration, respectively, as the building blocks of a cohesive Dominican nation. Though for the most part pessimistic regarding their country's endowment, turn-of-the-century intellectuals agreed that education, employment, democratic government, national sovereignty, freedom of the press, and private property held the promise of progress for the nation-in-the-making.

Not surprisingly, the ideology of progress propounded by these men ultimately attributed economic and social advances to the scientific cultivation of food crops and some export products, an enterprise they believed was the purview of Dominican males. The men who toiled on the soil, the discourse continued, were the owners of small tracts of land and, it finally concluded, were the symbols of the moral rectitude and physical endurance that characterized the Dominican people as a whole. References to women were aesthetic (they were like flowers; they cultivated beautiful gardens) or reproductive (land, like women, was fertile; the motherland, a woman, sought the welfare of her progeny). Sugar workers from nearby islands, and especially from Haiti, were suspect insofar as they were believed to introduce diseases; consorted with Dominicans, especially women; and took their wages home after the harvest. Some of the proponents of progress advocated the immigration of white settlers in family units, whose function was both to populate the vast expanses that remained unoccupied, and to strengthen through miscegenation the *raza*

1. The most succinct exposition of the discourse of progress can be found in González 1994, especially pp. 31, 34, 38, 64, 132-34. The works of all of the authors mentioned are readily available – collected and/or reprinted by several publishers. One author not mentioned above, who is probably representative of the intense pessimism characteristic of this period is Moscoso Puella (n.d.). Recently published, González *et al.* 1999 is the best analysis of these issues through time.

criolla (the Creole race), a term that underscored the national at the expense of the racial – the European, native, and African mix that characterizes Dominicans, much to their dismay.² Journalists and essayists, then, either embraced immigrants, women, and wage workers as contributors to the process of national development in predetermined roles or suspected their ability to participate in building a common sense of purpose.

THE ROLE OF BOURGEOIS WOMEN IN THE FORGING OF THE NEW NATION

Nobody doubted that the process of civic regeneration required the insertion of women in reformulations of the nation-in-the-making. As everywhere else, women were recognized first and foremost for their biological and social reproductive functions. As mothers, they were directly responsible for nation-building: they literally brought into the world the next generation of (male) citizens. As the companions of men (their husbands, brothers, uncles, cousins, male family friends), they offered the material and emotional support that allowed men to engage in the more public functions of state-building. Women of all classes managed households, raised children, cultivated the family's ties to the larger community, and comforted the men in their lives. Not expected to contribute much by way of their intellect, the female associates of upper- and middle-class men were particularly instrumental insofar as they reproduced the genetic pool and the social values necessary for the country's development. Working-class women, with fewer resources available for these tasks, were closely watched by their bourgeois sisters and their husbands.

Given that not all women, even if upper class, were considered suited to carry out such consequential duties, Dominican literati pondered the elements necessary for the attainment of the correct social order. A sector of the elite had for decades been propounding the notion of universal secular primary and secondary education, from which some young women, notably Salomé Ureña and her students, had benefited. The founding of newspapers, and the publication of magazines presumably directed at a general readership, interested in politics, the economy, literature, and social events, was an added avenue for the dissemination of ideas of national import. The editors of these publications, men such as José Ricardo Roques, Raúl Abreu, Manuel Flores Cabrera (a Venezuelan political exile), Francisco Gregorio Billini, and Rafael Justino Castillo, and one woman, Petronila Angélica Gómez, were generally politically active (some even holding public office) and socially committed. As was the case in the United States and Western Europe, the Dominican press

2. For a comment on the significance of color in the development of nationhood, see Hoetink 1982:165-92 and San Miguel 1992.

became the instrument of the educated and the civic-minded, both to express their ideas and to influence others.³

Perhaps to assuage elite anxieties, local magazines and newspapers dedicated sections to the "fairer sex" and published pieces that presumably depicted universal human conditions and thus reinforced expected gender roles and denounced aberrant behavior. Some of the authors of essays and short stories were foreigners – most notably Emilia Pardo Bazán and Jacinto Benavente (Spanish), Froilán Turcios (Ecuadorian), Manuel Díaz Rodríguez (Venezuelan), and Catulle Mendès (French). But many of the plethora of short stories on the virtues and vices of women were written by Dominicans – writers who will never be remembered for their literary endeavors, but who were at the time certainly well connected socially and, more importantly, who boldly advocated for Dominican autonomy (from the United States) and economic development. In many cases, the same men who wrote passionate editorials on the suitability of alternative political and economic arrangements for the emerging state also published moving fiction and poetry meant to establish for the new nation a safe and moral social order.⁴

The stories and periodic columns these men wrote appeared regularly both in magazines directed at a general readership and in more politically minded publications. Most of the fictional pieces were set in faraway lands or times, although the men, women, and children in them were intended to be universally familiar. With only a few exceptions, good women inspired their mates with their obedience, persistence, understanding, honesty, and impeccable homemaking, or beautiful women ruined men because of their greed, vanity, ignorance, frivolity, and inconstancy. Men, in all cases noble beings whose sense of duty was their most transparent quality, either found solace in faithful female companions or were victimized by treacherous women.

3. The use of the press to disseminate particular ideas and images since the inception of printing up to the present has been well documented for the United States and Western Europe. See, for example, Doughan 1987, Cancian & Gordon 1988, Tinkler 1995, Burkhalter 1996, Behling 1997, Zuckerman 1998, Gadsden 2000. Similar work has been done for the Third World, but the effort has not been consistently sustained. See for example, Hahner 1978, Mendelson 1978, Minault 1988, Franco 1989, Seminar on Women and Culture in Latin America 1990. An excellent picture of the turn of the century in the Dominican Republic – especially of the role of women in education, gender relations in the so-called private and public spheres, and increased public discussion of matters of national import – from the perspective of a woman is Alvarez's (2000) fictionalized account of Salomé Ureña's life.

4. An in-depth investigation of the public lives of the authors and editors cited in this article, carried out by renowned historian Roberto Cassá (personal communication), shows that literati and political thinkers, if not one and the same, certainly moved in the same circles of Dominican high society.

The sole storyline that illustrated a nonconflictive relationship between the sexes emphasized a woman's nurturing role, and her limited but personally satisfying domain, and men's responsibility (and assumed capacity) to make women happy. Francisco and Josefa were scheduled to get married when Francisco disappeared. Ten years later, the author found him in Barcelona, where Francisco revealed the reason for eluding his commitment: he had fallen in love with his fiancée's sister, who was dying of tuberculosis. The honorable thing to do, he reasoned at the time, was to flee the situation. He felt certain that he had made the right decision, having learned that Josefa, who had worried about his change in temperament, continued to care for her sister until she died, and later married a man who made her happy (Forge 1912). In another of these accounts of harmonious family and love relationships, a young couple kisses passionately at an evening rendezvous; at 9 p.m., the woman goes home, kisses her sleeping grandmother warmly on the cheek, and goes to bed to dream of her loved one (Bobeá 1910). Domesticity, duty, innocence, loyalty – these were the forces that made women good.⁵

Women also served as nothing more than love objects of men in these literary pieces, although disappointment or hardship formed a part of the drama. Conventional wisdom averred that women “walk on this earth stealing the wills [of men] with the [red] carnation of the[ir] cheeks and the light of the[ir] eyes” (García Gómez 1903).⁶ Addressing a fictional woman, another romantic commented: “It's just that your eyes are a duplicate image of your soul, and the soul is that fanciful flare-up that burns in your body as does a lamp in a temple consecrated to the cult of Aphrodite in the inviolate secret of discreet offerings” (Herrera 1912). Not all women provided unequivocal desire, another author cautioned. “A woman is like a verse. A sonorous hexameter, a brilliant hendecasyllable. A dull line, composed by a poor lyricist. One can find anything” (Turcios 1912). But, another counseled, “to try to extinguish the passion for a woman one adores by leaving her is to want to quench your thirst without drinking.” The effect of failed relationships was such on men that “[they] avenge on tender women their not having been loved by the tramps. This,” the author lamented, “is what we call being very strong.”⁷ Relationships between men and women were in fact problematic: one writer bemoaned having passed up the opportunity to share life with a gypsy who silently observed his flirtations with other women (Díaz Rodríguez 1911). The only safe place for men, it appeared, was the male imagination: one poet shared with readers “brides of all colors who g[ave him] hopes in a life of misfortune, g[ave him] strength, warmth, [and] inspire[d him] with their caresses and kisses” (Ornes 1915). Real or not, the leads in these tales were

5. Another man-falls-in-love-with-fiancée's-cousin can be found in Toriko 1912.
6. All translations from the Spanish are my own.
7. *Renacimiento* 1(9) July 1, 1915. Sobre el amor.

men whose intentions were honorable and their longing for companionship, honest. The women characters who incited their introspection were, remarkably, exemplary of their gender: warm, pleasurable, modest, vigilant of their reputation.

It seemed a more pressing matter, however, to portray the uglier aspects of the female psyche. The stories of scheming and alluring women not only outnumbered the ones referred to above; they were also more elaborate in plot, more selective in the use of language, rich in detail, precise in structure, and transparently didactic – none of which should suggest that they were “better” literature. An extreme example of this other depiction of women focuses on female lasciviousness and capriciousness. A man contemplates suicide because his wife, who is a prostitute, will not spend time with him unless he pays her. Eighteen and a virgin when they married, the reader learns, she was well versed in carnal matters. The couple now have two children, and he has spent his entire fortune on her whims; but she continues to live a decadent life (Mendes 1909b).

Oversexed females were a commonplace in these tales. In one of the few stories with a local setting, a young and eager wife of a seaman who tired from traveling constantly from Santo Domingo to San Pedro de Macorís took out her frustration by throwing a stick at a rooster that was not responding to the sexual advances of a hen in the yard – conceivably a duplication of the wife’s own situation (Egea Mier 1903). In more cosmopolitan surroundings, an equally sex-driven “little [European (?)] baroness” rushed to confess the previous night’s excesses to a priest, and apparently delighted so much in revisiting the experience that she forgot the corset she had been holding in her hand inside the confessional. As she left the church, a statue of Satan appeared to smirk at her predicament (Mendes 1909a). In a not entirely tasteless and very pointedly political humorous aside allegedly found scribbled on a statue in Rome, a farmer claims he supports the pope and the emperor; a merchant confesses he steals from the previous three; a lawyer deceives all four; a physician can drive the five to their deaths; a woman serves as temptation for all six; a priest absolves all seven; and the devil takes all eight to hell with him.⁸ Although men have no actual interaction with the female characters in the course of these stories, the reader has enough circumstantial evidence to condemn women’s behavior and speculate on its consequences.

Magnifying the danger of women’s uncontrollable sex drive, were their coquettish manner, fickleness, and capacity for deceit. Flor de Oro (Golden Flower), apparently so named for her blonde tresses, had set her sights on a New York millionaire (Mr. Love), to whom her uncle hoped to marry her sister off. Defying the contradiction between her objective and his name, she schemed to have the house cat attack her sister, who became blind and then

8. *Renacimiento* 1(14) September 15, 1915. Origen de los pasquines.

insane. Flor de Oro confessed her crime only when Mr. Love sent her uncle a telegram inviting him to his wedding (Mejía 1913). In another tale of disingenuousness, a thirty-year-old “Yankee” woman, married with two daughters, proposed to her Dominican tenant, the presumed author, that they have an affair. Although he initially embarked on this forbidden jaunt without any vacillation, he began to get jealous of her husband and suggested that they elope. The woman “fixed in [him] her deep and serene ocean blue eyes, laden with satisfied desire” and explained that their romance had only been a whim and that she loved her husband and adored her daughters (Abreu 1913). Although it is significant that the woman in the last story is American (and I will have more to say about that further on), the morale of both literary pieces appears to be that the female sex is untrustworthy and capable of the most inexplicable actions. Another not-so-family-bound woman and her lover, the reader learns in another trite story by Ulises Heureaux, the dictator’s son, were due to meet a ghastly fate at the hands of her indignant husband, a train machinist. He had plotted to speed to a crash the train they had taken to Le Havre for a two-day holiday. By killing himself and the treacherous pair, he simultaneously avoided the shame that would weigh down on him and punished his unfaithful wife (Heureaux 1903). Perhaps these lamentable outcomes would have been avoided if the male characters in these stories had been aware that women were duplicitous. The words of one writer are unequivocal:

The moon is a sham: it does not have the shape which it shows us at present, nor does it travel in the direction that it appears to be traveling in, nor is the light it sends us hers. Being feminine, being a woman, [the moon] is a liar: it looks at us sad, indifferent or joyful and its state is always the same, that of an immutable corpse!⁹

Those women who did show their true colors, moreover, exhibited traits that were totally undesirable and performed actions that harmed innocent people. In another “local” tale, for example, the wife of the minister of the Treasury pressured him to find jobs in government for her relatives: two fifteen-year-old sons, her father and grandfather, and fifteen cousins. She countered his reluctance by pointing out that a man who does not rule with his family is committing political suicide. Justifying her final request (to appoint their dog as doorman), she reminded her husband of the Roman emperor who appointed his horse to a senate seat (López 1903c). In a country notorious for nepotism, at the dawn of an era hopeful for integrity, blaming women for the practice was a wise move. A less directly relevant account of women’s disturbing behavior was a society woman’s habit of torturing oysters with lemon and fork before consuming them. The author, the woman’s husband-to-be, sus-

9. *Cuna de América* 1(9) May 31, 1903. *Mentiras de la luna*.

pected she would have liked to see their “faces” as they agonized in her hands (Diez de Tejada 1912).

Impulsive perhaps because they were unintelligent, inexperienced, or naturally gullible, these “transparent” women only caused trouble for men. In one case, a young woman purposefully spread rumors about another’s virtue in order to provoke a breakup between the man she loved and his bride, the subject of the slander. The peasant killed his betrothed, her alleged lover, and himself – all because of a woman’s reckless gossip (Millan 1903). In another instance, a daydreaming wife reflected on her situation – her husband was passionless, practical; her children, demanding; and her servants, untrustworthy. Although she knew her husband would dismiss her concerns by comparing her circumstances to those of others’ (less fortunate, one assumes), this incurable romantic (*la novelesca*) imagined other times: “when men walked around with empty pockets, but a chest filled with an enormous heart, a heart where passion and rapture dwelled, and where common sense and reason, which now want to rule the world, didn’t even have attic space” (López 1903b). Another fanciful wife begins to imagine her husband’s visits to a brothel are sexually motivated simply because her friend had insinuated it. Written in epistolary form, the story concludes with a letter that explained her husband and the madam were simply trying to arrange a marriage, an account of events the wife is apparently inclined to believe (Rodríguez 1903). In another story, an Italian nobleman, the Marqués de Vale Alegre, decided to marry the object of his affection, a lion tamer named Gilda, convinced as he was of her honorable parentage (*ascendencia digna*). A senator-friend warned him that “it was possible that beauty was the only atavistic bequest [Gilda had received from] Aphrodite.” On the wedding night, Azís, Gilda’s favorite lion, killed the groom when Gilda stepped outside the tent. Faced with the horrific scene, she rushed to embrace her lover, then lowered her head against the lion’s forehead, and stained herself with blood (Fiallo 1903). If only women would stay still and keep quiet, if they did not transgress their station, these stories imply, reasonable men could continue going about their business undisturbed and be happy – in one case, alive.

The fictional exchanges between Electricity, a woman, and Thomas Edison captured best men’s problematic associations with women. Electricity is introduced to the reader as a negative and a positive force, capable of both curing headaches and taking lives (through electrocution). Edison’s relationship with her is, not surprisingly, conflictive – he accuses her of having passed through many (men’s) hands – Italian, German, French – and resorts to caressing her with the purpose of “taming” her (*domarla*). It is with Edison, the author tells us, that:

this traitor has a frenzied love affair [*amores rabiosos*]. Notice that he treats her as a wretch, he makes her work from six to six as if she were black,

exploits her, lives through her effort, and yet that shameless scoundrel does not rebel against her loved tyrant. For him only, she engages in obsequious debauchery, incredible weaknesses. She is a degraded and submissive slave.¹⁰

In a moment of empowerment, Electricity charges Edison with trying to force her “to do something filthy,” but he retorts she has no moral grounds to complain because she is a “flirt and an idler.” The piece concludes by making fun of some of the applications of electricity (growing legumes in less time) and starkly stating: “Edison wanted a vulgarity, it’s true, but the human species lives on vulgarities.”¹¹

Despite this allegory’s enormous potential for psychoanalysis, it is more prudent to focus, for the purposes of this article, on the uniquely Dominican variants of eminently universal themes. Electricity possesses female character traits: she is disloyal and coquettish, and must be forced to perform productive work. Even under a man’s supervision, she only produces vulgarity. That man, however, is a foreigner, and for that reason, not a very reliable character himself. He treats her like an African slave, something the reader is expected to immediately reject as unthinkable, unless of course the woman is a shameless slut (the oversexed female). In that case, her unbecoming behavior strips her of any claim to respectable womanhood, and the reader can, if not justify, certainly suspend judgment on Edison’s actions. Giving in to eminently national insecurities about race, gender, and the outside, the author chooses to disassociate from the unworthy turn of events, which he labels as “vulgar” – the product of the collaboration of a domineering foreign man and a weak racialized woman.

Fortunately for men, other stories collectively suggest, most women were plain stupid and their actions were of no consequence. In one fanciful plot, two princes who were rivals for a princess’s love consulted a fairy for advice on how to discern her preference – the princess had apparently given both some hope. The fairy arranged for the princess’s thoughts to be visible, and when the two young men returned to palace, they saw coming out of the princess’s head countless butterflies of all colors, “fluttering with lively charm,” “swaying delicately [on flowers due to] their light weight” – restless, palpitating, inconstant, vivacious, fickle (Gaal 1912). In another tale conceivably illustrative of women’s capacity for judgment, a woman allowed a stranger into her home indefinitely. He mistreated her, but always asked for forgiveness. One day, he announced his departure and explained he had never said he was there on a permanent basis. It was Love. “And Martha remained calm, mistress of her home, free of frights, fears, or apprehension, and devoted to the company of grave and excellent reflection.” Still, the narrator tells the

10. *El eco de la opinión* 683, July 9, 1892. Correspondencias del exterior.

11. *El eco de la opinión* 683, July 9, 1892. Correspondencias del exterior.

reader, she hoped Love would knock on her door again (Pardo Bazán 1903). In another victim-of-love parable, a woman stopped a man on the street, spit on his face, and told him she hated him. Realizing it was the wrong man, she apologized, but immediately reneged when she confirmed that he in fact looked like "him" (Perdomo 1915). To close this segment on inane women, a prostitute dies at the hands of one of her clients, a young and inexperienced man who had fallen in love with her. He found her door closed one day, and forced it – to find her with another man. As she agonized, she found relief in thinking that he killed her only because he loved her (Pellerano Castro 1903). Airheads, hopeless romantics, irrational lovers, tender-hearted tramps – these women were nothing to worry about.

If these examples were discouraging, others served to establish that men's expectations were not unreasonable, and the outcome of their efforts held some promise. Olimpia, a princess, was almost perfect: she had a beautiful face, blond hair, and skin like ivory. Despite these conspicuously feminine qualities, she had no compassion, a feature of her personality that men approached as a challenge, in one case dying in an effort to provoke some emotion in her. There are other details that made her an anomaly of the female gender. She was amused by "satirical writing" that ridiculed humanity, and did not read romances. Her room had no flowers or birds – only mirrors. When her mother died, she did not cry, and instead fell mysteriously ill. The fairies the king consulted only indicated the use of a mirror, a handkerchief, and a pair of scissors to break the spell. Doctors advised her to cut her hair so that her head would clear up, but she refused. While the princess slept, however, her governess carried out the instructions. Only then did she cry, repenting for having been cruel. Those tears redeemed her, the author interjects for the benefit of the reader, and rid her of her sins. Conveniently, Olimpia is now perfect: beautiful, white, blonde, *and* emotional (Ferraz Revenga 1912). Conceivably, she also likes flowers and birds, and loves humanity – a paradigm of womanhood.

Another mechanism used to reassure men that everything was in order was the conviction that women were a known quantity. A Hindu tale of creation published at the time confirms this notion. The myth explained how Twashtri made the first woman after he had spent all of his creative material on the first man.

He took from the moon its roundness, the undulating curves of the serpent, the graceful interweaving of a vine, the velvety softness of flowers, the lightness of a feather, the sweet look of a gazelle, the tears of clouds, the sweetness of honey, the cruelty of a tiger, the heat of fire, the coldness of snow, the chatter of a parrot, and the murmur of a dove.¹²

12. *Renacimiento* 1(4) April 7, 1915. Como fue hecha la primer mujer.

Regardless of whether there was indeed a Hindu legend that recounted this process or not, it is significant that a Dominican magazine saw this literary piece as interesting or useful to its readers. With two exceptions, women's physical attributes derive from the inanimate world and their character traits, from animals. Women as nature motivated by instincts, to be exploited or domesticated by men – an eminently turn-of-the-century Western European trope applied to inferior peoples.

In some exceptional stories, individual women acted on their own with the valor and clear-headedness characteristic of men. Margarita de Ruysac, daughter of dukes, promised her mother she would marry the Count of Meridor. A friend of her brother fell in love with her and provoked the count to a duel; if he lost, he figured, he would at least die thinking of her. During the duel, the two adversaries did not seem to want to kill each other. At some point, the count told his foe he did not want to be haunted by his death as he married Margarita, to which the unsolicited suitor responded with a deadly offensive, only to realize that “the count” was Margarita. In despair, Margarita's admirer buried his own sword in his chest, so he could die with her, as they kissed (Heureaux 1910). Although the storyline in this case parallels the others insofar as a woman is the cause of tragedy, including her own, remarkably, the real hero in this story was Margarita. The count disappeared from the plot, the smitten family friend ruined his own chances of quite literally “getting the girl,” but Margarita was as good as any man in that she was noble enough to know what her duty was (keep her promise even though she loved another) and saw the incident through to its logical conclusion.

Another positive representation of women, not surprisingly, results from the intertwining of the destinies of woman/mother and fatherland (*patria*), a connection that works better in Spanish because the word *patria* is feminine. A short story about a dying man and a baby who both await the stroke of 12 midnight to depart this world and celebrate life, respectively, concludes with the author's words:

Yes, let us salute him [the baby, and by extension, his mother], may he be prosperous, fecund, full of light, but of that light that will illuminate the patriotism of those who rule our destinies, for the greatness of the Fatherland [purposefully equivocally, the baby's mother *and* the country]. (Olga 1901)

Holding that women are more virtuous than men, another writer labeled women “the heroines of the fatherland,” intimating that for women fatherland (country) was family and home. Because women were weak beings, he explained, they gravitated toward strength (protection – in the form of the state, one surmises), so that if the country collapsed, women, the keepers of home and family, were eminently vulnerable – a veritable predicament

(Lamartine 1915). Despite the positive role identification, one is sad to see, only males can make women great or effect their downfall.

In contrast to the majority of women protagonists, men leads in all these stories are rational, responsible, and above their peers. In a first person short reflection, the author bid a final goodbye to his lover, who “belong[ed] to another.” He lamented man’s cowardice in the face of “the despotic laws he himself composes to torment himself [monogamy? marital fidelity?].” Painfully conscious that he and his loved one have done the right thing, he resigns himself to loneliness (Rodríguez Embil 1903). Another dutiful citizen, this one in an exotic land, is equally accepting of his fate. Ahmed and his love, Fátima, had been strengthening their relationship, when Fátima was whisked away to the sultan’s harem, “where innocence bow[ed] its forehead and die[d] between the lascivious and defiling arms of some crowned satyr.” Ahmed, in desperation, “commits the sacrilegious act of professing a threat against the sacred life of the Son of the Prophet,” for which faux pas he is stabbed and found on the banks of the Tigris (Logroño 1910). Although the reader is called on to feel pity for Ahmed, his transgression against the state is undoubtedly worthy of the punishment he received – understandably, Ahmed’s soul must find solace in wandering through the world searching for his beloved.

As living vehicles of respectability, men thought of family and state first, as opposed to women, who behaved as if their actions had no consequences. A woman proposed to her rich and unattractive husband that he allow her to have an affair with a man who awaited her company outside the door. She would pretend to love her husband in public, but would secretly consume her passion with the other man. If her husband forced her to have sex with him, she would threaten to find thousands of lovers. Although early twenty-first-century readers are denied the denouement of this dilemma (the pages are missing), it appeared the husband was ready to accept this proposition for the sake of appearances (to save his manly honor).¹³ Likewise, the author of what appears to be an op-ed piece, vehemently appealed for a reprieve of the sentence for a Cuban woman “of modest extraction” who shot the father of her daughter, a high-society young man who did not legally acknowledge their baby. The mother, who lived in penury, ran into her former lover one day and shot him. Although the court sentenced her as lightly as it could, the article advocated a full pardon for “the unfortunate avenger of her honor.”¹⁴ In both of these cases, men uphold notions of honor that hold society, and the state, together.

There is only one exception to this pattern of men who do right by women and women who are either demanding ingrates (which is bad) or accepting of their fate (which is good) – the amusing story of Teresa, who was “pretty as

13. *Blanco y negro* (39), 1909. Date, volume, and title missing.

14. *Blanco y negro* 4 (180) March 2, 1912. Tragedia pasional.

an angel and painted like a pig.” Teresa directed her feminine charm, always in a most decorous manner, toward a group of artists at the seashore, who showed their appreciation by giving her some of their paintings. On one occasion, she persuaded each of them to fill in a part of the canvas she was working on – sea, clouds, waves, rocks, some nude female figures. The following year, she entered the painting in a competition, and received an honorable mention, primarily because the three men who had contributed to her composition were part of the jury and could not help but admire their own work (Montegut 1901). Although the woman in this story was as deceitful as others in this genre and her only visible asset was her beauty, she is different from other female characters in that she manipulated men in a way that is intended to be funny, and exposed what comes across as a male flaw, vanity.

There were other, more direct ways, to tell bourgeois women what their station was, and what society’s expectations were for them. Like today, advertisements and advice columns emphasized appearances and health. Tocologic pills, for example, restored health lost “for reasons peculiar to [women’s] organisms” – one assumes menstruation, pregnancy, menopause – which diminished the requisite fresh complexion, firm body tissue, and healthy countenance. The pills also “cured the most inveterate disorders” – one can only surmise what these were.¹⁵ It comes as no small comfort to some of us today that women were esteemed in this time period for the “soft roundness of their form.” But “if nature, who does not always distribute favors according to human desire, denies this rotundity, or worse, replaces it by a superabundance of angles and impertinent bones, only the seamstress can calm the desperation of Eve’s daughters” and happily, so can the application of the creams and lotions recommended.¹⁶ Other products augmented breasts and lightened skin color.¹⁷ Advice columns were for the most part “modern” in outlook, and so, if they did not value health over beauty, they at least made them synonymous. An article explained how in the past men and women wore garters below the knee for aesthetic reasons and to denote wealth through elaborate designs and their skillful execution. Recent scientific advances had shown that this practice could cause circulation problems, so that women should place their garters 7-8 centimeters above the knee.¹⁸ Tight or heavy dresses, corsets, and narrow shoes were shown to cut circulation, cause indigestion, and prevent the development of muscles.¹⁹

15. *El eco de la opinión* 57, June 18, 1880. Píldoras tocológicas.

16. *El eco de la opinión* 684, July 16, 1892. Gacetillas.

17. *Renacimiento* 1(6) May 7, 1915. Receta para desarrollar el busto; *Renacimiento* 1(18) November 15, 1915. Para las damas.

18. *El eco de la opinión* 681, June 25, 1892. Las ligas.

19. *Renacimiento* 1(13) September 1, 1915. Los vestidos estrechos.

In addition to achieving beauty and health, women were expected to excel in the more important function of managing households and raising children. One advice column told the story of a woman "not very young nor pretty, with an average education but intelligent, who loved her husband and knew how to admire his qualities and intelligence." She decided that her calling in life was to make the home a refuge for her husband, and dedicated her time to preparing healthy and elaborate meals, to have in the house the magazines he liked, to smile when he got home from work, to not talk to him when he brought work home from the office, to keep the house clean. One day, he recognized her efforts, telling her that her outstanding quality was "to find time for everything."²⁰ Another writer advised:

Woman is only fulfilled when she knows love [in the biblical sense?]. Her achievements are in the home, where she functions as the heart and the man as the head. To form her children's characters is a mission more worthy than men's and certainly more admirable than that of famous women who are recognized in world history texts.²¹

Adding legitimacy to Dominican expectations, U.S. president Theodore Roosevelt corroborated this arrangement in a short paragraph, to the effect that men formed homes and brought the bread; women supported men, raised children, and managed domestic aspects. Although Roosevelt acknowledged that there were wives who fought "in the lonely heights of a serene and totally selfless heroism" (Roosevelt 1915), it is not clear whether they were part and parcel of the conventional scheme or exceptions to the rule.

Not all of the efforts to locate women on a plane agreeable to bourgeois male intentions were as transparent and as alien to early twenty-first-century readers as the ones discussed above. There were very serious reflections on women's subordination especially through the institution of marriage, that resonate even today because of the inevitably negotiated nature of unions between men and women worldwide and because of the continuous inflexible position of the Catholic church with respect to civil divorce. Male and female writers lamented that although the legal system gave women civil and political rights, they were incapable of exercising them because of the way they were educated both at home and in schools. "Slavery" was not too strong a word to describe the relationship that existed in a sexual union, a term the author uses to refer to marriage.²² Another writer went further: not only had women not been taught that a man's psychology was a function of his physiology (that men's sexual organs governed their behavior) so that "matrimony ... [wa]s a bag containing 99 snakes and one eel," but in addition divorce

20. *Renacimiento* 1(9) July 1, 1915. Su talento.

21. *Renacimiento* 1(6) May 7, 1915. El carácter de la mujer.

22. *Renacimiento* 1 (9) July 1, 1915. Condición de la mujer.

was not really an option, because women's only "career" was marriage (López 1903a). The debate over divorce must have been so significant, that it prompted one woman to write a booklet entitled *La mujer: Lo que es y lo que debe ser el feminismo: Mi modo de pensar sobre el divorcio* (Woman: What Feminism Is and What It Should Be: My Thoughts on Divorce). The title of this publication, however, should not suggest that the author was not very much a woman of her time. She explained, for example, that working women should not be looked upon with suspicion, since a woman would never abandon her other duties, because equal rights "did not excuse her from what is natural law, reinforced by custom." The author was more than conciliatory; she believed that the development of women's intellect in childhood and puberty would allow them, as adults, to examine their marital problems and find a solution, thus guiding men, who like other human beings after all "ha[d] a heart and [were morally] upright." If divorce existed as a necessary contingency, as a way of avoiding other harmful paths (an abusive situation, an unhappy marriage), "[male] superiority would end and mutual respect would shine in the home." Nevertheless, she emphasized, marriage was a contract, and if broken, each partner should be able to enjoy his own free will (García 1913:32-33, 42-43).

Along the same lines, other authors advocated measures that ameliorated the situation of women. Latin American young women, one article lamented, became wives and mothers without adequate preparation. They indulged their children by allowing them to do whatever they wanted, and this lack of discipline resulted in a generation poorly equipped to lead the country responsibly. Children in the United States, on the other hand, were raised by both parents, and women had some contact with the world outside the home through work.²³ In a U.S. contest covered in a Dominican magazine, the winning entry to the question "what should we do with our daughters?" was highly praised: provide them with primary schooling, teach them domestic labors, teach them to save, explain that a hardworking husband is better than an elegant one, teach them to tend to gardens and flowers and to reject false appearances, instill in them that in choosing a husband, morality is more important than wealth.²⁴ A local female author added that women's calling extended beyond the strictly domestic and should reach out to things sublime, useful, and good – through the reading of history (López Penha de Senior 1913). Since women were physically limited to the domestic arena, a well-known Spanish writer argued, journalists had a special responsibility to bring the world to them. By reading the newspaper, women could experience "history" vicariously and acquire knowledge without compromising their virtue. Husbands should be grateful that their wives' imaginations were being stim-

23. *Revista Escolar* 1(3) October 31, 1910. La enseñanza oficial extranjera.

24. *Renacimiento* 1(16) October 15, 1915. ¿Qué haremos con nuestras hijas?

ulated in a controlled setting, and not by activities women themselves devised in the loneliness of the home (Benavente 1915).

Unfortunately, and notwithstanding their limited scope, the solemnity of these columns, was counterbalanced by the lightweight misogyny of regular contributors. One writer published a daily listing of women who should not get married, among which were flirts, who “provoked men in a scandalous manner,” and jealous women, who “imagined” their husbands were unfaithful.²⁵ In Hungary, another columnist informed his reading public, bigamists were disciplined by forcing them to live in the same house “with all the women.” This would be an even more terrible punishment, the writer added, if mothers-in-law were included in the package.²⁶ Another commentator captured men’s expectations of women best in his advice to newly married women, coined as the ten commandments – 1) to love her husband above all things; 2) not to promise love in vain; 3) to arrange celebrations for him; 4) to love him more than her father and mother; 5) not to torment him with demands, whims, and tantrums; 6) not to trick him; 7) not to nag him, or spend money on frivolities; 8) not to speak behind his back, or pretend a nervous attack, or anything of the sort; 9) not to desire another other than her husband; 10) not to covet others’ luxuries, or to stop to look at store fronts. These should be placed in the make up drawer and read twelve times a day.²⁷ The facetious demands of these authors remind readers of the aplomb and self-assurance that is synonymous with male privilege.

To be fair, men might really have feared the consequences of the empowerment of women: the loss of male privilege or equality – which ironically, took on a ludicrous configuration. One journalist reported that there had been cases in Madrid of women killing their husbands for adultery. His voice thundered out of the newspaper’s pages in the face of this injustice:

So be it: If a man whose honor is injured, who runs the risk of educating [another man’s] children, who is mocked in the most violent way possible given society’s conventions, requests a jail sentence [for his cheating wife, one assumes], when the deceitful heart of the woman who stole his hopes, happiness, and honor, what punishment should a woman receive who without losing her honor (a husband’s infidelity lends a certain aura of victimization to the woman who far from losing her dignity is elevated) because he doesn’t love her as much as she wishes him too?²⁸

25. *El eco de la opinión* 34, January 5, 1880. Las que no deben casarse; *El eco de la opinión* 35, January 10, 1880. Las que no deben casarse.

26. *Renacimiento* 1(8) June 12, 1915. Contra la bigamia.

27. *El eco de la opinión* 34, January 5, 1880. Mandamientos.

28. *El eco de la opinión* 685, July 23, 1892. Correspondencias del exterior.

Another columnist notified Dominicans of scientific experiments carried out in Denmark, that measured hair loss in men and women. Since women at present preserved their thick hairlines through old age, the writer figured, they will be able to grow mustaches in a hundred years.²⁹ One detects a certain uneasiness with respect to what is understood as a threat to patriarchy.

There were other, oblique ways, to place bourgeois women in pre-determined roles that were ancillary to men's actions. Curiously, the beautification of the urban core came to be described in feminine terms, as the transformations in the cityscape were ostensibly promoted precisely for the benefit of the young ladies of the upper class, who allegedly wished to stroll about and circulate with decorum.³⁰ One newspaper article made the connection between the manipulation of the environment and women, reinforcing the nature vs. culture dichotomy that subordinated them to men. Beauty in vegetation (without any purpose or practical application), the piece explained, was synonymous with femininity:

The cultivation of flowers is a very important part of the education of women. We think the teaching of floriculture should begin ... in girls' schools, to direct them to love natural beauties and to obtain from that love sublime comparisons for life itself. We believe that a woman who does not enjoy flowers is a rarity, an untamed animal, a spell, whom we cannot approach without evil consequences. The beauty of a woman and the beauty of a flower are complementary: one was created to be confused with the other.³¹

In an article arguing for the utility of trees, the author explained that farmers consider trees their enemies because branches attract birds that eat their crops, and because trees occupy land that could be used for planting. What they don't understand, the writer continues, is that trees produce rain, protect against cold winds that would delay vegetation, defend against warm winds that cause erosion, increase the production of dew, provide wood for the home, and produce leaves that fertilize the soil (Pérez Argemi 1911). Trees, like women, do not produce anything; but they are naturally good and can be used by men.

The short stories, advice columns, advertisements, and opinion pieces I examined coincide in their representation of ideal gender roles: dutiful and selfless women should stand by their men, who toiled in government, agriculture, trade, and so on, thus strengthening the body politic. Under the watchful eye of attentive husbands or vigilant fathers, bourgeois women were entrusted with the task of raising the new generation of citizens. If not them-

29. *Renacimiento* 1(18) November 15, 1915. Las mujeres tendrán bigotes.

30. Archivo General de la Nación, Santo Domingo, Ayuntamiento de Santo Domingo, nuevo 2842 (no month given).

31. *Revista de Agricultura* (July 1909):265-72. Parques, jardines y árboles ornamentales.

selves naturally the vessels of rationality, responsibility, common sense, morality, and virtue, women could be shaped by male creative energies into useful vehicles for the transmission of certain national attributes – diligence, uprightness, selflessness. Implied in the characterizations of women deployed by these periodicals, good and bad, was an unavoidable message regarding the behavior that was conducive to the desired social order. For a bourgeois woman to hold the admiration of Dominican patriarchs, it was essential that she be obedient, patient, constant, virtuous, maternal. As these writings attest, enormous pressure to conform was applied to those who deviated.

Few did. Although the number of articles and advice columns directed at women would make one think the social order had been turned on its head, travelers' passing comments and in-depth news coverage of middle-class women's activities in Santo Domingo point to an idyllic conformity to the desired mold. Upper-class women rarely left their homes, where they gathered to sew and knit. In public, they mostly seemed to grace picnics celebrating the opening of a sugar mill, generously offer their time and money to charity, serve as "ambassadors of good will and virtue" in patron saint parades, go to church or the park, always accompanied by a vigilant husband, father, mother or trusted servant. Even the most "politically" active women fit the mold imposed by the country's elite – training to be teachers, organizing against U.S. intervention, writing inspiring essays or poems to be read by other women committed to family and nation.³²

THE CLASS, GENDER, AND RACE OF CITIZENSHIP

It would not be far fetched to assert that male Dominican intellectuals and popular writers placed the future of the Dominican Republic in the hands of bourgeois women. As biological and ideological reproducers of the collectivity and replicators of its culture, bourgeois women had an important role to play in the selection of appropriate political paths and the realignment of social forces. Their recruitment to the task of nation- and state-building was consonant with the generalized desire to position the country auspiciously. Unlike their working-class sisters, upper- and middle-class women possessed the physical attributes and had access to the material wherewithal – education, money, property – that made possible the continuation of the Dominican "race." Although obliquely, political and literary figures at the turn of the century recognized bourgeois women's value as transmitters of characteristics ascribed to their class.

32. The prototype here is Salomé Ureña, poet, essayist, founder of the first school for girls, wife of Francisco Henríquez y Carvajal, and mother of Pedro, Camila, and Maximiliano Henríquez Ureña.

The need to reconceive the nation in order to shape the state, however, made necessary the surveillance of precisely these women, as they began to operate in new circumstances in urban centers. Almost as if to forestall the appearance of “unmanageable women” (women with the will and the resources to contribute to the polity in their own right), writers in this period engaged in the ideological construction of women as good wives and mothers (and therefore not as students, workers, citizens) and the deployment through literature of images of women as adversaries of men who, motivated by “irrationality and eros,” subverted male agendas. Men, conceiving of themselves as symbols of “respectable manliness” and the only ones worthy of the task of state-building, were called upon to control bourgeois women so as to assure themselves the continuity of their actions.³³

The carefully prescribed roles for bourgeois women in building the Dominican nation serve as good examples of the political uses of patriarchy. At its most elementary, feminizing the nation, has been used repeatedly to mobilize patriotic emotions on “her” behalf. The woman being represented as worthy of being saved from the invaders’ violations, naturally, had to be faithful, motherly, chaste, dutiful. Further imbuing politics with the rules of patriarchy, this iconography had to be made real. To belong to the nation, then, virtuous women had to be joined with respectable male citizens – quite literally, because a single woman had no economic or political space, and a very limited social space, in which to act. Indeed until quite recently and in many countries across the globe, women who married foreigners automatically lost their citizenship in their country of origin as they took on their husband’s. In the Dominican Republic, marrying “well” was without a doubt a probable course for upper- and middle-class women, and a possible occurrence for a number of working-class women (who might marry or settle into a permanent relationship with the paradigms of Dominicanness described earlier). But those who failed to do so – sexual workers, single mothers, economically independent women – fell per force outside the pale of Dominicanness. In order to maintain nationality within male elite boundaries, then, worthy men situated bourgeois women under their guardianship and dismissed working-class women as unimportant to nation-building. In denying women, even those of their own class, the capacity to promote the goal of national development on their own reconnaissance, bourgeois men in turn-of-the-century Santo Domingo

33. The ideas in this and the following paragraph flow out of comparative and theoretical readings on gender, ethnicity, and national identity. See Anthias & Yuval-Davis 1989:7; Masiello 1990:31, 34; Moghadam 1994:18; Stasiulis & Yuval-Davis 1995:19; Baud 1996:145; Williams 1996:8-9. Baud explains mid-twentieth-century visions of Dominicanness as a denial of the social consequences of modernization. I disagree in that I hold that it is precisely an ambivalence toward modernization in the late nineteenth-early twentieth century that is the moving force behind shaping Dominicanness.

effectively monopolized citizenship. Women, then, became symbolic of the limits of national difference between men.³⁴

In an even more perverse twist, the discourse of progress racialized the gender of working-class women – seamstresses, laundresses, domestic servants, itinerant sellers of food or small wares, and the like. In their occupations and their racial composition, these were the urban female complements to the hard-working, agriculturally-based Dominican male, and conceivably shared the emblems of nationality with their working-class male counterparts: the capacity to work, the transparent honesty, the unwavering commitment to build a better future, and so on. As a function of their limited sphere of action, one could even argue, working-class women may have stood a better chance of preserving Dominican values for, unlike men, they stayed in the home plane, consorted only with “their own,” and returned to the hearth with the products of their labor. When they did not, however, they instantly evoked the dangers of contagion from outside sources. Insofar as they were not men (who lose nothing when they engage in any kind of intercourse with outsiders, because they cannot unequivocally pass on socially valued attributes) or upper-class women (who are under the constant supervision of “their” men), working-class women were the likely culprits (or victims, depending on the slant) of association with the feared outsider, Haitians or West Indian immigrants. Laundresses who moved freely about city and suburbs; prostitutes who offered their services to all men alike; and domestic servants who went in and out of private homes – all of whom were probably women of color – became a problematic population by virtue of their occupation and gender, and were consequently ostracized. Whether or not somatically darker than their employers or than working-class men, the combination of gender and class subordinated working-class women, and they became the racial inferiors of bourgeois women, who could easily have been of the same race/color, and of men of their own class.

The neutralization of the actions of working-class women and the insidious manipulation of the roles of their bourgeois sisters ultimately secured for white elite men their position at the helm of decision-making processes. At a turning point in Dominican history, when the most industrious and most inspired minds of the country believed that political, economic, and social change was indeed possible, limiting the courses of action to a few controlled alternatives became crucial. Targeting women, by definition responsible for passing on socially desired biological and cultural traits, seemed logical enough. Ironically, the instrumental role assigned to women in elite imaginings of the future served only to *exclude* them from citizenship, as the construction of national boundaries remained effectively a white male prerogative.

34. These ideas are collected from Kerber 1986, Parker *et al.*, 1992, Baud 1996, Smith 1996, Burgett 1998.

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