

Gender, Race, Power, and Decolonization of the Transatlantic Secret Freemasonry in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries in Spain and South America

Claudia Salas-Forero

Joan Scott considers gender to be one of the basic fields in which power is articulated, in both the Judeo-Christian and Islamic traditions (Luna et al. 27). A paradigm of gender figures into the origin of inequality, but it also interrelates with other cultural categories, such as race, class, ethnicity, economics, culture, science, politics, and even literature (Luna et al. 28). A clear intersection of religion with other categories informs the history of the eighteenth century, when the beliefs imposed in the Americas by Spanish Catholic kings were crushed by the enlightenment movement of other countries in Europe, which were antithetical to the aims of the colonial crown of Catholic Spain. Aligned with the enlightenment and its value of reason or science, the “secret” male masonic movement began to grow in the Spanish empire. According to records, England’s Big Logia recognized Madrid’s Logia number 50 around 1729, under the name *French Arms* (Ferrer, *Bibliografía de la masonería* 48).

England’s Big Logia started in 1717, which is considered the birthdate of the modern Francmasonry (Ferrer, *Bibliografía de la masonería* 26). On the other hand, the adoption of female Freemasonry was born in France in 1774, with the Big Eastern of France that accepted them (Ortiz 78). However, the few women who joined the Freemasonry lodges came from families where husbands or brothers were already members who could pay their initiation fees, since not many of them in Europe had economic independence, even at the end of the nineteenth century (Ferrer, “Las mujeres y la masonería” 185). Also, the Freemasons sought in a way female empowerment, since they were the foundation of the family and society. Its mission was therefore the emancipation of women through instruction or education, but without dispensing with their responsibilities as mothers and wives (Ferrer, “Las mujeres y la masonería” 185).

In this context, the Freemasons can be defined as a form of social membership, a liberal-spiritual organization related to power, allowing practices that encourage

egalitarianism, although they did not always succeed, creating new links and networking (Codesido et al. 199). These “secret” links are transatlantic and transnational. As it is described in the historic novel, *La tejedora de coronas*, in which the main character, Genoveva, is a Masonic woman—an exception, influenced by the enlightenment movement in the eighteenth century, located in the colonial slave port of Cartagena de Indias, Colombia. She gets to travel to France, Italy, Spain and United States:

[P]ensé ... en el beso que Luis XIV estampó en mi mano, en el día de mi iniciación en la logia, en alguna rara mirada ardiente de Cipriano ... en el Juicio Final de Michelangelo, en la leprosa de la abadía de Holyrood, en mi baile en una plaza romana con Gianangelo Braschi ... pensé en Dios, pensé en satanás” (Espinosa 319)

Genoveva, within this historic novel entangles spaces, history, and times, as Blanca Inés Gómez Buendía, indicates in her essay:

Se entrecruzan dos historias y dos tiempos: la invasión y el saqueo de los franceses y filibusteros de la Tortuga acontecido entre el martes santo de 1697 y en el mes de mayo del mismo año, y el viaje de Genoveva iniciado catorce años antes después de la toma de Cartagena, esto es en 1711, y culminado en 1773 frente al tribunal de la Santa Inquisición. (Figuerola 62)

Europe and especially France, therefore, are an important part of this book from Colombia, since the last one, as already indicated, was the origin of the modern Francmasonry, and the enlightenment reached South America to influence later Americans and Genoveva, in *La tejedora de coronas*. This transatlantic relationship was complex and full of challenges, a colonialism that some accused of bringing even with it, and the enlightenment, modern racism to differentiate its population. Such differences highlighted not only place of origin or social class, but also skin color, since the latter placed ideas of “white” superiority over the former, an acculturation that supposed the conversion of a savage to a civilized man (Janis 70).

Hence, the transatlantic history between the colonies in America and Europe has frequent and permanent encounters, in a complex and uneasy relationship, as described by Elliott, in which the colonizers felt superior in many ways:

Such complaints reflect the uneasy relationship normally to be found between a

metropolitan centre and its cultural provinces. The provinces receive, and seek to imitate, the high styles of the metropolis, only to find their efforts dismissed as 'provincial' and crude. Imitation, however, is only a part, and not necessarily the most important part, of a relationship that is often too complex to be summarily reduced to questions of mimesis and influence. Distance from the sources can inspire creative transformation, as the artistic achievements of colonial Hispanic America amply testify. (246)

Thus, in *La tejedora de coronas*, its main character, Genoveva, seems many times as America itself has been characterized: raped, violated in different ways, but always looking for her own identity and thought, as it is indicated in the presentation of the book by Espinosa Pérez, "El esfuerzo de Genoveva Alcocer por darse un rostro, por ser por conseguir autonomía de pensamiento, y al lograrlo, morir en la hoguera, es el agotante camino de América Latina por liberarse de yugos culturales, ideológicos y políticos" (18). She is a woman who has been denied the access to knowledge for centuries, and the enlightenment through the Freemasonry in her novel finally gave her the opportunity to transcend her own space and time.

Genoveva, moves around countries in Europe and America, influenced by the Enlightenment within this Colombian novel. But at the end, she is sentenced by the Catholic Inquisition of Cartagena de Indias. In the face of this religious and monarchical court, Genoveva remembers the main events in her life at the end of the seventeenth century and well into the eighteenth, as an old woman close to her death. She recalls the looting of Cartagena de Indias, port city in Colombia, by the French navy under the command of Baron de Pointis and the Tortuga filibusters in 1697. She also recalls the encounters with Voltaire in Paris, becoming his lover and a member of the Freemasons at his urging.

Moreover, Genoveva is also related, in her constant transatlantic travels, to other famous people in these centuries, such as Humboldt, Franklin, Jefferson, Washington, Louis XIV, and even Pope Benedict XIV. So, religion and power surround this imaginary character that travels through history, to end up accused as a witch and heretic by the Inquisition in Cartagena de Indias, Colombia. There is magic also in this history, because magic has been always associated with women, under what anthropologist's call long-cycle beliefs, a

transhistorical reality, occurring throughout the years, as Genoveva's story, due to its structure under the biases of the cultural world, so difficult to eradicate in thirty centuries (Vian 84).

On the other hand, this relationship between a woman and a witch has been represented for centuries, since witchcraft comes from carnal lust, and this last one is the word woman, as Valbuena notes in her article about the Inquisition:

The pursuit of female subversion that permeated witch trials in continental Europe found much of its authority in the widely read inquisitorial handbook *Malleus Malleficarum* ("Hammer of Witches"), written by the inquisitors Heinrich Kramer and James Sprengor in 1484. Providing the indispensable link between female carnality and male spiritual death, the authors of the *Malleus* assert that "all witchcraft comes from carnal lust, which is in women insatiable." (209)

The intersectionality of woman, magic, and witch, however, has taken female lives in history. It has also helped to see women as evil, the ones with the fault of other sins. Moreover, it has made women invisible, so they won't be able to provoke immoral acts, as we see in the Islamic tradition of the burka. It's gender as the basic field, in which power was articulated away from women, keeping them also in silence, as it was indicated at the beginning of this paper, in different religious traditions (Luna et al. 27). To support this argument, a sacred gender timeless theory, will help to explain the links that relate religion and the Inquisition with power and Freemasonry, the latter of which has not empowered women much throughout its history.

For this reason, characters such as Genoveva, a "criolla"—American native-born woman—in the eighteenth century who is educated, travels to Europe, and has liberal principles, enjoying sex and her own body, despite histories of rape, exists only in the literary imagination. In this case, the fantasy is that of a male writer, Germán Espinosa, with his *Tejedora de coronas*. The question then becomes how accurate the female is, by an author that places beauty as one of the main characteristics of a woman, as in the case of Genoveva. Also, she is most of the time surrounded by men in her learning process, with few exceptions, such as her *alter ego*, the San Antero's witch, full of wisdom like no else in the novel that she meets in the Inquisition's cells.

This court and prison were religious and monarchical institutions, which also persecuted, alongside women or “witches,” the Freemasons, and the followers of the Enlightenment, during these colonial centuries. Hence, a secret has been kept about its presence in Latin American countries. However, even though its secret aspect is one of its main purposes, it is at the same time a concern, which is written in its archives from 1744. Desfontaine, an abbot, indicated in that year how the masonic members are brothers united by a secret that cannot be revealed (Ferrer 38).

Secrecy is therefore one of the bases of masonry, and under that shadow, especially in Catholic countries that were Spain’s colonies, the influence of this institution, and the leaders that created or were its members, with consequences that we continue to endure nowadays in the twenty-first century, is never clearly taught in history or social studies classes. The Cartagena de India’s Inquisition represented the law in those colonial times. It was created in the sixteenth century, by the King of Spain, on August 10, 1608, to start functioning on March 8, 1610, in the territory that was known as the New Kingdom of Granada, which included Colombia, Panamá, Ecuador and Venezuela (Medina 122).

These secrets were instruments of power, with a Freemasonry that grew thanks to its transnational connections, first in Europe, later in the Americas, to become one of the defining factors in the growth of the Enlightenment in the eighteenth century, or the independence movements in the nineteenth century (Arroyo 3). In the Caribbean islands of Haiti, Jamaica, and Guadeloupe, Freemasonry arrived earlier, as British, and French colonies, all thanks to the transnational Masonic connections in the Age of Revolution, including the American Revolution in 1776, and the Haitian Revolution, from 1791 to 1804 (Arroyo 3). Later, the last decades of the nineteenth century were the crucial ones, when nation-building, republicanism, and the fights between different empires (Spain, France, Great Britain, and the United States), shook the political structures of America (Arroyo 2).

History, Race, and Literary Entanglement

On the other hand, the era also focused on race, under an identity definition, based on physiological characteristics, including skin color, hair texture, body type, and facial features,

that vary across time and contexts (Allen 66). Colonial domination brought, as already indicated, the idea of race, a mental construction that expresses the basic dimension of global power, including its specific rationality: Eurocentrism (Quijano and Ennis 533).

This new feature of domination, however, where race is cast as an inferior identity, was not a serious challenge to becoming a Mason in America, compared with gender, since even the Afro-descendants' leaders in the Haitian Revolution were Masonic, such as François Dominique Toussaint Louverture and Jean-Jacques Dessalines (Ávila). This Caribbean Island was the first one to be successful in an insurrection by self-liberated slaves from colonial rule.

I will now turn to the importance of history and literature together. Hutcheon reminds us how before the rise of science in the late nineteenth century, both were considered similar for the purpose of interpreting experience (Tillis 172). Nowadays, even postmodern theory challenges this separation for a historiographic metafiction theory, that includes history as a fictionalized narrative, since it is the reflection of the ones that recorded it (Tillis 172).

Consequently, the two aforementioned Haitian military men, Toussaint and Dessalines, are main characters in the historic Colombian novel, *Changó, el gran putas*, or translated to English as, *Changó, Decolonizing the African Diaspora*. Both are confronted, at the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth century, with their blood, identity, rebellion, and the desire of freedom, as well as regrets:

“I see in you a sad imitation of Dessaline’s vanity. The Emperor’s crown is not always a symbol of greatness. Often it only hides the pettiness of those who wear it.”

He looked at me bitterly. Death cleanses us of vanity, leaving the resentment of our inability to deceive ourselves.

“It’s true, Toussaint.” His voice had lost the accent of those who in life spoke in the name of the Orichas. (132)

Toussaint, an Afro-descendant and a Haitian general, was at the time a prominent leader of the Haitian revolution. He was deported from Haiti and jailed in France in 1802, but his lieutenant, Dessalines, also Masonic, continued his efforts, to declare the island’s independence in 1804 (Ávila). However, the last one proclaimed himself emperor and was killed two years later. At the

end of the quote, “the Orichas” will be the gods or spirits brought from the Yoruba religion in West Africa to America (Zapata Olivella 132).

Another famous Afro-descendant, “zambo”—son of a Wayúu native in Colombia, and an Afro-descendant man, a “mulatto”—will be named José Prudencio Padilla, a mason, who was known as the Admiral (chapter four, “Rediscovered Bloodlines”). He also was accused of treason by another mason, the Liberator, general Simón Bolívar (Codesido et al. 197). Several historical writers mention that Padilla was persecuted and shot for his complexion, due in part to the white elite’s terror about a new race war, since he fought for the vindication of the ones with less rights, such as “mulattoes,” Afro- descendants, natives or “zambos” like him (Díaz). As *El Getsemanicense* indicates, Padilla was pursued by the creoles in his city Cartagena de Indias, due in part to the color of his skin, and for this reason, was executed:

Then, standing before me, he discovers the bloody sparks on my uniform. “These are the decorations I granted you for your great victory at Maracaibo?”

“No, my General,” I answer, “they are the scars that the firing squad will leave on me.”

He counted them and then notices my forehead.

“These are bleeding even more.”

“The coups the grace. Either the soldiers did not shoot to kill, or their hands trembled.”

We were able to talk dispassionately. Death removes from us the weight of action. Our gaze projects toward the past and the future. Only the living suffer the anguish of the present. He stretched out on the cot and, not looking at me, listens to my complaints:

“Your white forbears demand you to impose slavery on our blacks.” (213)

In this imaginary conversation between Bolívar and Padilla, the last one close to his death, and the first one, who died two years later than the Admiral, in 1830, the sadness of the events in which two American independence heroes are at odds, with one being sent to execution, due in part to the color of his skin, and his ideas against a lifetime constitution by the Liberator, is poignant. Moreover, the last phrase on page 213, is a permanent claim that Zapata Olivella made to the Liberator in his most famous book, *Changó*. The fact that Bolívar could not gain the freedom of all the slaves in South America, or at least in the territory known as the New

Kingdom of Granada, or later, Great Colombia, is indicated in this historic novel:

“Freedom!” That word I hear repeated daily in the blood of my Ancestors and in that of my future offspring. My illusions still burn, and I ask her: “Will be free someday?”

The waters grew dark. At the bottom of the trough, two serpents devour each other’s tails, despite Mother Yemaya’s efforts to separate them.

“They are Shadows of your master Simón and Admiral José Prudencio. They will fight together for the Independence of their countries, but they cannot agree on giving us freedom.” (Zapata Olivella 180)

The two heroes, Bolívar and Padilla, will fight against each other, as was indicated before, but none of them will be alive to see the complete freedom of the Afro-descendants’ slaves in America. Additionally, in the last quote, Yemaya will be another Oricha, or Yoruba god from Africa, the mother of all. Hence, spirituality, memory, migration, family, and politics were significant legacies of slavery and colonialism, linked to Masonic affiliations from black men and white Creoles, regardless of social power (Arroyo 4). Consequently, an intersectionality, described by Gaetane et al., acts as a crossroad that provides a deeper understanding of ways that racism, sexism, classism, or even religion, with other social realities, can affect how an individual and a community interact (578).

A common society who shared its ancestry, a group memory which is also constructed orally, under multiple voices in distant lands in America, is imagined to build a community identity and daily life. An oral culture that expresses ancestry, even in the traditional African language nago (yoruba), as a thread that weaves history and human existence (Lima 48), indicates, as in other parts:

En realidad, aplicamos en este ensayo el concepto de oralidad secundaria añadido a los rasgos de las tradiciones orales africanas presentes en la narrativa de Zapata Olivella, Además de eso, miramos también para otra noción que es clave en el análisis del *Changó, el gran putas*, es decir, la ancestralidad insertada en la historia y su representación textual. De forma más específica observamos la escritura de la novela del escritor colombiana tejida por una expresividad interlineal con la historia y voces de los ancestros.

De esta manera, la ancestralidad se entiende como “um tecido produzido no tear africano: na trama do tear está o horizonte do espaço” (Oliveira 245). En este sentido la ancestralidad está relacionada con la memoria, con el espacio de existencia. En otras palabras, hay una concepción de tiempo que está entrelazada con el lugar y forma, pues hay en el texto una estampa donde múltiples identidades son entrelazadas. Así, se puede afirmar que “o espaço ancestral é uma geografia de relevos, onde tuvo que se evidencia é menos evidencia que mistério. O mistério é a estampa impressa no tecido da existência.” (31)

At the end, besides the Afro-descendants in America, all the freedom heroes from the empires, even Simón Bolívar, became shadows in *Changó: Decolonizing the African Diaspora*; like living-dead, as are the human slaves when are considered property (Arroyo 21). The political independence, or the change from monarchy to republic, did not change the social stratifications and barriers from the previous period (Codesido et al. 139). Some historians have indicated that while the independents fought for Creole supremacy, the “mulattoes” (sometimes called “pardos”), and slaves fought for their liberation, as was the case with Padilla or the Admiral (Codesido et al. 139).

In conclusion, Zapata Olivella presents in his novel the great geographical, regional, and cultural diversity of Colombia—even the transatlantic world—but also under the perspective of the subaltern, the marginalized, the Africans and their descendants in America (Mohamed 128). Thus, the reading of *Changó: Decolonizing the African Diaspora*, is heterogeneous, far from a hegemonic and canonical vision (Mohamed 118).

Several historical events are mentioned in Zapata Olivella’s novel, including the beginning of slavery in America and Cartagena de Indias, Colombia, and the history of Benkos Biojón, a slave in the seventeenth century who started a rebellion in this Caribbean colonial port city in order to found San Basilio de Palenque, the first free Afro town in America. The novel also refers to the history of the Haitian Revolution, already described in this text, and then jumps to the Trafalgar battle, a naval engagement in the Atlantic Ocean in 1805. This fight occurred in the southwest coast of Spain, between the British Royal Navy and French forces, together with Spain. The novel’s narrative ends in the twentieth century:

Cuando leemos *Changó el gran putas* notamos inmediatamente, todos los lugares, regiones, países y continentes citados en el texto. Pasamos desde las costas africanas a las costas colombianas, luego Haití, México, Venezuela, Brasil y por fin los Estados Unidos. Y en cuanto al tiempo, pasamos de los años 1530 con la llegada de los primeros negros a América, a la revolución Haitiana, luego la batalla de Trafalgar, los años sesenta y por fin, se cierra el libro con la muerte de Malcom X. (128)

Decolonization, an entangled history or interconnected one, influencing one another, with the intertwined processes of mutual construction, occurred in the transatlantic relationship between the Spanish empire and its colonies, as in other parts of America (Gould 766). As Williams indicates, decolonization was a project of reordering the world that sought to create a domination-free and egalitarian international order (507). The Freemasonry as the enlightenment with all their limitations started this project, a language of multiculturalism that Zapata Olivella wrote in his novel, an era of postcolonialism.

Also, a multiethnic unequal community, under the intersection of different categories, such as race, ethnicity, gender, social position and class, place of origin, religion, or power, along with transatlantic regional beliefs, helped to shape a conflictive transculturation, between two or more cultures, in the slave port of Cartagena de Indias, Colombia, described by Zapata Olivella. This term of transculturation originated in Cuba, with the ethnographer Fernando Ortiz (Beverley 2), and it refers to a culture under constant negotiation and hybridization, across multiple ethnic, political, and economic divides.

Meanwhile, the radical transatlantic, transnational, transracial alliances of the Masonic brotherhoods, under the new neocolonial states or the US empire, made memberships more local in America (Arroyo 169). A Masonic intersectionality with less power and still mainly led by men is still shaping our society today in the twenty-first century.

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