

Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda and her View of the Colonial Past

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Nineteenth-century female writers played an important role in the cultural and political debates regarding the construction of the nation and their concerns with issues of education, female sexuality, and the future and progress of their homelands. But one topic that gained great attention from writers such as Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda, Clorinda Matto de Turner, Juana Manuela Gorriti, and Mercedes Cabello de Carbonera, to name a few, was the reconstruction and interpretation of the colonial past. For some of them, the views of their societies were filtered through their recollection of important figures and events. According to Fernando Unzueta, in the nineteenth century, “La historia es el tema predominante en los relatos de ficción de la época” (History is the predominant theme in fictional works of the time) and “esta tendencia expresa, además de una aguda conciencia histórica, el deseo de insertar las comunidades imaginadas nacionales en un proyecto histórico específico” (223) (this tendency expresses, beyond a sharp historical consciousness, the desire to insert a specific national project into the imagined national communities).¹ However, some of these narratives cannot be limited to an interpretation of the desire to find a construction of an imagined community. They should also be considered for their critical and many times ambivalent engagement with certain figures and events of the colonial past. This essay examines Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda’s reading of the colonial past through historical figures such as Christopher Columbus, Hernán Cortés, Guatimozín, and of prototypical characters such as the Spanish *visitador* (visitor) and the female black slave. I analyze the intertextual nature that characterizes her personal readings and the reasons behind her desire to reappraise historical moments such as the so-called discovery of America, the conquest of Mexico, and the colonization of New Granada. I would like to focus on her role as female *cronista* (chronicler)

and her use of female characters to present her view of the colonial past. The following works will constitute the focus of discussion: a poem included in *Descripción de las grandes fiestas celebradas en Cárdenas con motivo de la inauguración de la estatua de Cristóbal Colón* (1863), edited by D. R. Zambrana, and the legends “Una anécdota en la vida de Cortés” (1869) and “El cacique de Turmequé” (1869).²

The Colonial Past and Nineteenth-Century Spanish American Writers

The reappraisal of the colonial past by Latin American female writers in the nineteenth century is still an area of inquiry seldom discussed by critics. The role that prominent intellectual women played in the cultural and political debates regarding the construction of the nation and their concerns with issues of education, female sexuality, and the future and progress of their homelands have gained more scholarly attention. The manner in which female intellectuals reconstructed and interpreted the colonial past deserves serious consideration as it serves as a way to understand their social concerns of their own present as female citizens and authors writing and publishing in a male dominated world. Writers such as Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda (Cuba), Clorinda Matto de Turner (Peru), Juana Manuela Gorriti (Argentina), Soledad Acosta de Samper (Colombia), Mercedes Cabello de Carbonera (Peru), and Carmela Eulate Sanjurjo (Puerto Rico), among others, actively contributed to debates about the condition of women in their emergent nations. Many of them devoted essays, poems, novels, and legends to the reconstruction of particular moments or historical figures of the colonial past. For example, Christopher Columbus, Bartolomé de las Casas, Hernán Cortés, and mythical indigenous figures seem to emerge as characters that allow these writers to reappraise part of history from their respective female discursive positions.

In the case of Avellaneda, most critical studies on her historical writings center on her reconstruction of historical figures such as Cortés, Malinche, and Cuauhtémoc in her novel *Guatimozín, último emperador de México* (1846).³ However, I believe it is important to discuss Avellaneda’s lesser-studied works to emphasize her overall project of revisiting historical figures such as Christopher Columbus and Diego de Torre, cacique de Turmequé. What exactly is Avellaneda’s purpose in assuming the mask of a chronicler in order to talk about the past? What role do secondary prototypical characters play in her reappraisal of the colonial past? And finally, what type of reconstruction does she engage in and why? These all constitute some of the questions to be addressed in this essay.

Mary Cruz argues that Avellaneda's work can be considered "un todo coherente, enlazado como por un entretejido de vasos comunicantes que alimentan y retroalimentan cada una de sus obras" (xix) (a coherent whole, connected as if woven together with communicating veins that nourish and learn from each one of her works). For Cruz, Cuba as a *patria* is one of the themes that connects Avellaneda's works and life. Since leaving for Spain in 1836, Cuba becomes a vivid memory that permeates some of her most intimate poems, such as "Al partir." Other themes that are indelible in her work are women's education, love, friendship, women's moral and intellectual nature, marriage as an institution, and the social condition of the oppressed, including black slaves and indigenous people.

A constant trait of Avellaneda's literary undertaking is to center her works on historical contexts away from her present *loci* of enunciation by situating her stories in past centuries; ranging from the sixth century a.n.e. (*Baltasar*), to the twelfth century in *Munio Alfonso*, and to the sixteenth century in *Guatimozín*. To situate some of her works in the time of the discovery and conquest of the so-called "New World" was not that strange at the time. Many famous nineteenth century authors, such as Andrés Bello, José Victorino Lastarria, José Martí, Simón Bolívar, José Joaquín Fernández de Lizardi, Eugenio María de Hostos, among others, engaged in political discussions about the colonial past and Spain's legacy in Spanish America. One of the most famous debates on this topic occurred between Bello and Lastarria in 1844 in which both authors discussed the need to reconsider the colonial past in order to understand the present.⁴ For Lastarria, knowing the past was equivalent to knowing the soul of the nation. However, for Bello, the soul and future of the nation lay in understanding the present. What becomes apparent in this debate is that the past can never be erased, and is ubiquitous in the rethinking of that present, especially when articulating what constitutes the nation. As Ernest Renan argued, one of the pervasive elements in any discussion about the condition of a nation is "the fact of sharing, in the past, a glorious heritage and regrets" (19). In the case of nineteenth-century Spanish America, the attitudes toward the colonial past range from total negation, reconciliation, nostalgic restitution, to admiration. The case of Avellaneda is quite fascinating because she does not approach the colonial past as a whole, but rather chooses to center on specific historical figures that she turns into characters. But is it possible to read the past through a particular historical figure? What is the reason behind choosing particular figures and ignoring others? How are these characters transformed to suit the author's personal political views?

For Avellaneda, historical figures come to represent aspects of the colonial past that need to be either retained or erased. Critics such as Mary Cruz tend to see Avellaneda's historical works such as her novel *Guatimozín* and the *tradición* "El cacique de Turmequé" as examples of Avellaneda's Hispano

American soul: “Y siendo *cubana*, tenía que ser *hispanoamericana*” (xix) (And, being Cuban, she had to be Hispanic American). However, I would like to propose a different reading of Avellaneda by emphasizing her European soul when revisiting a remote colonial past.

Avellaneda as a Chronicler: Remembering Christopher Columbus and Hernán Cortés

In 1862, the town of Cárdenas announced the celebration of the arrival of a statue in honor of Christopher Columbus to be placed in the Plaza de Recreo of the city. As part of the celebration that took place on December 26 in honor of the first statue of Columbus to be erected on Spanish American soil, Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda was invited to contribute a poem that was to be sung in the festivities. Her poem was subsequently published in 1863 by Ramón Zambrana as part of the volume entitled, *Descripción de las grandes fiestas celebradas en Cárdenas con motivo de la inauguración de la estatua de Cristóbal Colón*. This hymn praises Columbus as an ingenious man that opened the sea to another world: “Si en el vasto hemisferio arrancado / por tu genio al secreto del mar / Tu alto nombre no está vinculado/ cual la Gloria la supo grabar” (Zambrana 14) (If in the vast, uprooted hemisphere / through your genius of the secrets of the sea / Your highest name is not bound / which Glory knew to engrave). Columbus is a hero in need of recognition and only Cuba, or La Española as Gertrudis calls it, is capable of establishing justice to his deeds: “Hoy por fin de justicia la aurora / Ya en su cielo comienza a lucir” (Zambrana 15) (Finally, today, as justice the daybreak / In the sky begins to shine). Cuba, personified as a female tropical queen, is only capable of understanding Columbus’s contribution and relevance: “Que hoy la reina del trópico lava/ Por tu genio al secreto del mar” (Zambrana 15) (That today the kingdom of the tropics washes / Through your genius the secret of the seas). A telluric sense of maternal love toward Christopher Columbus emanates from this female figure: “Se alza digna la Antigua Española/ Que la sombra maternal abjuró” (Zambrana 15) (The Old Spanish Woman rises dignified / that which the maternal shadow retracted).

This geography of love turns into national love when Gertrudis proclaims that “Nuestro amor te lo brinda ferviente / Lo saluda el pendón nacional” (Zambrana 15) (Our love fervently toasts you / The national banner greets it).⁵ Cuba’s collective love shows in the statue erected in the plaza as a sign of recognition of Christopher Columbus. But what is Columbus’s major contribution that makes him worthy of such a tribute? According to the author, what makes Columbus a great man (“grande hombre”) is his influential role

in unifying two worlds: “Y dos mundos que llena tu nombre / Y te deben su próspera unión” (Zambrana 15) (and two worlds that fill your name / and owe you their prosperous union). Columbus is responsible for the union and exchange of two worlds that now are connected forever. Through the figure of Columbus, Avellaneda emphasizes the unequivocal tie that connects Cuba to Europe. The town of Cárdenas serves as a space and place in which such contribution is recognized in the form of a statue. The statue in this sense becomes an insignia, representing an abstract idea of Columbus as envisioned by Avellaneda and the town of Cárdenas. If sculptures are symbolic representations of people’s beliefs, for Avellaneda the effigy of Christopher Columbus epitomizes the recognition that she and other Cubans feel for the Almirante: “Que ya la efigie / del Almirante / pisó triunfante / su pedestal” (Zambrana 15) (Already the effigy / of the Admiral / triumphantly tread upon / its pedestal).

The invitation to compose a poem in honor of Christopher Columbus offers Avellaneda the opportunity to praise a historical figure that she sees as a facilitator of two worlds. His deeds contributed to the connection between the “old” and the “new” worlds, bringing culture and civilization to the Americas. For Avellaneda, Columbus represents Europe, and Europe equals civilization. The Admiral facilitated what Avellaneda considers to be a “colossal enterprise.” In a section of her literary journal *Album cubano de lo bello y lo bueno* (1860),⁶ devoted to “Galería de mujeres célebres,”⁷ Avellaneda discusses Columbus’s colossal enterprise:

Sí Colón desechado por todos los reyes, objeto de burla para todos los sabios, encuentra en Isabel la única inteligencia que le comprende y el único poder que le ampara. La reina ofrece sus joyas, si es menester, para los gastos de la expedición; parten las naves, surcan el océano encargadas de esperanza, descubren la América, y viene á rendir á los pies de una mujer la gloria de aquella empresa colosal, que produce una revolución sin ejemplo en el sistema de las potencias de Europa. (“Galería” 268)

(Yes, Columbus rejected by all the kings, and object of ridicule for all his knowledge, finds in Isabel the only intelligent being that understands him and sees in her the only power that protects him. The Queen offers her jewels, if necessary, for the expenses of the expedition; the boats depart, plough through the ocean filled with hope, discover America, and come to yield at the feet of a woman the glory of that colossal Enterprise, which came to produce an unparalleled revolution in the system of powers in Europe.)

It seems that Columbus’s magnificent enterprise can only be understood through the common sense and intelligence of a woman (“encuentra en Isabel la única inteligencia que le comprende y el único poder que le ampara”

[finds in Isabel the only intelligent being that understands him and sees in her the only power that protects him]). For Avellaneda, Columbus changed and revolutionized the world and Europe would not be Europe if it were not for him. It is in this sense that the town of Cárdenas and its citizens offer their utmost respect to a historical figure whom has been largely forgotten by Europeans and seldom recognized for his transformation of the world. Elise Bartosik-Velez, in her fascinating book *The Legacy of Christopher Columbus in the Americas*, explains that intellectuals such as Francisco de Miranda, Juan Pablo Viscardo y Guzmán, and Simón Bolívar praised Columbus for the great efforts and risks he took in discovering the so-called “new world,” and in the case of Bolívar, is perceived as “the creator of our hemisphere” (113, 129). According to Bartosik-Vélez, the figure of Columbus was instrumental “in the Creole narrative justifying independence” (Bartosik-Vélez 127).⁸ Although Avellaneda concurs with the aforementioned writers in granting Columbus his place in history, her reading is distinct, as there is no call for political action. The Admiral symbolizes a father figure who gave physical existence to the Americas as well as Europe.⁹

This emphasis on endowing historical significance through the eyes of a woman is also evidenced in her tale “Una anécdota de la vida de Cortés” published in 1869.¹⁰ Avellaneda, in her role as a chronicler, highlights the heroic figure of Hernán Cortés stating that he is “una de las mayores figuras que puede presentar la historia; Hernán Cortés, que quizás no ha sido colocado a su natural altura ni aun por desacertados encomiadores, que han alterado la verdadera fisonomía del hombre queriendo deificarlo; Hernán Cortés, tipo de su nación, en aquel tiempo en que era grande, heroica, fanática y fiera” (“Una anécdota” 161) (one of the greatest figures that History can present; Hernán Cortés, who perhaps has perhaps not yet been placed at his natural height due to mistaken worshippers that have altered the true physiognomy of the man while wanting to deify him; Hernán Cortés, a representative of his nation, in that time was great, heroic, enthusiastic, and ferocious). For Avellaneda, Cortés symbolizes the great Spanish nation and is a figure that lacks the recognition that he deserves. As one of the “genios superiores” (superior geniuses), she later adds, Cortés was a victim of traitors and enemies who fought hard to discredit him. She mentions some captains such as Villafañá and Olid who, in the last stages of the conquest of Mexico, betrayed Cortés for their own personal greed. It is this historical point in time in which Avellaneda situates her story about Cortés.

Avellaneda depicts the ability of Cortés in overcoming the indigenous conspiracy that he confronted before finally conquering Mexico. The scene she recreates is the punishment that Cortés decides to impose upon the indigenous leader of the insurrection, Guatimozín, and his cousin Netzalc, in the center of town. Members of the population hurry to the plaza to witness the spectacle of

punishment to be imposed by the Spaniards. Two witnesses in particular call our attention: a Spanish woman named Guiomar from Andalucía and doña Marina, better known as La Malinche. These two characters became micro chroniclers who shared their respective views about the event to take place. Avellaneda's voice splits into the voice of two female characters that function as *cronistas* (chroniclers). The Spanish woman angrily comments about "la perversidad de estos indios" (the depravity of these Indians), justifying the punishment. Although acknowledging that the indigenous leader responsible for the insurrection deserves to die, Malinche instead questions the fact that a conspiracy indeed took place and that Guatimozín indeed was in charge.

Marina's view seems to coincide with the version given by Bernal Díaz in his *Historia verdadera de la conquista de la Nueva España*, when he states that Guatimozín denied the charges. Avellaneda quotes a passage from Díaz del Castillo that shows evidence of this fact. The passage reads, "E fue la muerte que les dieron muy injustamente dada, y pareció mal á muchos de los que aquella jornada hacíamos" ("Una anécdota" 165) (It was a death that was given most unjustly, and it seemed wrong to many of them who had made that trip).¹¹ But why choose Guatimozín to be the protagonist of what might be considered Cortés's injustice? It is interesting that physically, the indigenous leader is described as almost as white as the Spaniards. Guiomar comments "distinguiéndose entre todos los naturales hasta por su color, tan blanco que lo hace parecer europeo" ("Una anécdota" 166) (differentiating himself amongst all of the natives even in his color, so white that it made him appear almost European). Although Bernal Díaz, in his *Historia verdadera*, does not exactly mention that the *cacique* looked almost European, it is relevant that Avellaneda as a chronicler adds this information. For example, Bernal Díaz does mention that, "era de edad de veinte y un años, y la color tiraba su matiz algo más blanco que a la color de indios morenos" (388) (he was of the age of twenty-one, and he was a shade whiter than the color of the bronzed Indians).¹² For Avellaneda, Guatimozín is not an ordinary Mexica Indian; he is a native who more closely resembles the Spaniards.

There is a double sorrow expressed by both women in the event of the execution. For Guiomar, it is sad that an Indian so different from his own people (Aztecs) and so close to her own people (Spaniards) is about to be executed. For Marina, it is tragic that his execution will represent the end of the Aztec empire, "que no puedo menos de trastornarme al considerar que va a perecer en ignominioso patíbulo el ilustre descendiente de los héroes de Atzacapuzalco" ("Una anécdota" 166) (I can't help but get upset thinking about how the illustrious descendent of the heroes of Atzacapuzalco is going to appear in the insulting gallows).¹³ What both women seem to agree upon is the fact that Cortés had no choice but to conquer the Aztecs so that Spanish power and civilization could be instituted. Marina even acknowledges, "Hay

necesidades que hacen inevitable crueles sacrificios” (“Una anécdota” 165) (There are necessities that make cruel sacrifices inevitable). What seems to cause sorrow for the death of the indigenous leader is his closeness to the Spaniards, at least in appearance and in character. Guatimozín reiterates his innocence to the very last moment, consequently accepting his death in order to save the rest of his people from violence and starvation. However, it is the presence of another woman who represents a distinct point of view about Cortés; Guatimozín’s wife. It is ironic that this woman, named Cualcazintla is introduced as “la loca triste” (the sad, crazy woman). Cualcazintla is devastated by the imprisonment and suffering of her husband. Avellaneda introduces a third female voice to complete her portrait of Cortés.

Doña Marina consoled Cualcazintla after having witnessed the death of her husband. Feeling sorry for the widow, Marina invites her to come and live with her under the protection of Cortés: “¿Quieres vivir conmigo, bajo la protección del grande y victorioso general don Hernando Cortés?” (“Una anécdota” 168) (Do you want to live with me under the protection of the great and victorious general Sir Hernando Cortés?). Ironically, it was Cortés who ordered the death of Guatimozín, her husband. Cualcazintla refuses Marina’s offer and calls her a “slave” of the man who condemned their own race, “¡Y tú, su esclava, su manceba!” (“Una anécdota” 168) (And you! His slave! His concubine!). Marina responds angrily and calls Cualcazintla a crazy woman who needs to come to her senses and forget about the irreversible past “Es menester resignarte con las disposiciones del cielo y olvidar para siempre lo pasado” (“Una anécdota” 168–169) (It’s necessary to resign oneself to the wills of the heavens and forget once and for all the past). Surprisingly, Cualcazintla accepts Marina’s invitation and decides to live under Cortés’ protection. When the widow arrives at the house, Cortés feels sorrow and guilt for what he did to her family to the extent that Marina feels jealous of the attention given to Cualcazintla.

The tale ends when Cortés, unable to fall asleep, walks out of his room to find himself attacked by what he refers to as a black ghost. He realizes that the attacker is Cualcazintla who tells him that she has come to take revenge. She managed to hurt him but he is able to take the weapon away from her. After being succumbed by Cortés, Cualcazintla loses consciousness and is taken by Cortés to Marina’s room. After witnessing the lovely manner in which Cortés carries Cualcazintla and places her on bed, Marina reacts with the utmost anger and jealousy. Cortés insults her and tells her that she is “la verdadera loca, ¡incurable celosa!” (“Una anécdota” 173) (the truly crazy one, incurably jealous!). To Cortés’s dismay, Marina confessed to him that she has drowned Cualcazintla to death so her soul can be reunited with her beloved Guatimozín. Cortés reacts with horror and anger pushing Malinche to the ground but drastically changes his tone and acknowledges that thanks to Marina, the woman

who attempted to take his life, Cualcazintla, is dead. Marina to a certain extent has saved his life. Acknowledging his faults in his decision to execute Guatimozín, Cortés does reiterate that his actions against the indigenous leader aimed to bring religious civilization to this part of the world: “como me cuesta la Gloria de plantar la cruz del Gólgota en el suelo de estas vastas regiones, abiertas de hoy más a la civilización Cristiana” (“Una anécdota” 174) (how much the Glory of planting the cross of Gólgota on the grounds of these vast regions, today so much more open to the Christian civilization, has cost me).

Avellaneda portrays Cortés as a hero whose mistakes can be forgiven because he brought Christianity and civilization to Mexico. The author uses the voices of three different women (Guiomar, Marina, and Cualcazintla) to construct an image of the conquistador as someone who sacrificed his reputation in order to defend Christianity. The only character who had attempted to question Cortés’s actions ended up dead in the hands of another indigenous woman. Avellaneda reiterates that those who question Cortés’s actions would be forever silenced. Violence is justified if it entails the spread of Christianity and civilization to a barbaric world. Cortés, as is the case of Christopher Columbus, is praised by Avellaneda because of his role in transferring European ideals to the so-called “New World.” The tale (“anécdota”) of a quotidian moment in Cortés’ life serves as an opportunity to recognize his contribution. To this extent the voices of the marginalized indigenous women are silenced and eradicated. Both women are considered by Cortés as irrationals or “locas” (crazy) and only the European man is able to make sense of this new historic era.¹⁴

Avellaneda transforms Bernal Díaz del Castillo’s opinion about what was bothering Cortés after Guatimozín’s death and turns the story into a romantic view of the Spanish conqueror. For Bernal, Cortés was worried about all the vicissitudes he had gone through to subdue the Aztecs as well as his decision to order the execution of Guatimozín. Avellaneda concludes her tale by citing directly from Díaz del Castillo’s *Historia verdadera* again; a quote that serves as the reason for the creation of the tale. She quotes:

Andaba Cortés, mal dispuesto y pensativo después de haber ahorcado a Guatemuz y a su deudo el señor de Tacuba, sin tener justicia para ello, y de noche no reposaba; e pareció ser que saliéndose de la cámara donde dormía, a pasear por una sala donde había ídolos, descuidóse y cayó, descalabrándose la cabeza; no dijo cosa buena ni mala sobre ello, salvo curarse la descalabradura, e todo se lo sufrió callando. (“Una anécdota” 174)

(Cortés kept on going, in a bad mood and pensive after having hanged Guatemuz and his relative, the gentleman from Tacuba, without putting them on trial, and at night he didn’t rest; and it seemed to be that he was taking leave of the room in which he slept, to meander through a room

where there had been statues of idols, and, not paying attention, he fell, injuring his head; he didn't say a good or bad thing about it, save for tending to his wound, but suffered through the whole thing in silence.)¹⁵

The uncertainty of what caused Cortés's injury ("pareció ser" [it seemed to be]) is what prompted Avellaneda to write her tale.¹⁶ Consequently, her tale offered the author the opportunity to praise, to recognize, and to defend the figure of Cortés as a kind and unselfish man. Both Columbus and Cortés represent the best of the old world. The death of Guatimozín is used as an opportunity to defend Cortés against accusations that he betrayed Guatimozín and that what he did against the indigenous leader was unjustified. In Avellaneda's work the erasure of the indigenous power rectifies the good character of Cortés. However, what happens when Avellaneda revises historical characters that are lesser known? What is her agenda when recapturing an anecdote from a chronicle almost unknown at her time such as *El carnero*? What does she want the reader to remember about that particular colonial past? The legend, included in her last volume of complete works, "El cacique de Turmequé," offers us some answers.

The Unknown Heroes of the Kingdom of New Granada

"El cacique de Turmequé" is based on *El carnero*'s account of a 1582 episode that occurred in the capital of the Viceroyalty of New Granada that involved Don Diego de Torre, known as the cacique de Turmequé.¹⁷ In the real historical event, Don Diego de Torre along with Don Alonso de Silva, Cacique of Tibasosa, were involved in a judicial process against Spanish authorities that resulted in removal of Diego de Torre's *cacicazgo* (chiefdom) and sending him to exile in Spain. Diego de Torre was indeed a mestizo son of a Spanish conqueror and *encomendero* (encomienda holders) and an indigenous woman whose brother was governing Turmequé.¹⁸ Diego de Torre inherited the *cacicazgo* in 1551 after the death of his uncle. After becoming cacique of Turmequé he denounced the colonial authorities for the imposition of *tributos* (taxes) and the abuse committed against the Indians in the *encomiendas*. Alonso de Silva, cacique of Tibasosa, accompanied Torre in his demands to the Spanish authorities. Both were incarcerated and destituted of their *cacicazgos* on the basis that they were both *mestizos* (mixed race). However, Don Diego de Torre managed to travel to Spain to present an official complaint to the King. As a result, the Crown decided to send Juan Bautista de Monzón as a *visitador* (visitor) to resolve the alleged abuses committed against the cacique and the indigenous people. Don Diego de Torre returned to Nueva

Granada with Monzón and they became great friends. Monzón engaged in a campaign to punish those members of the Royal Court (Real Audiencia) who committed all the abuses. The friendship between Diego de Torre and Monzón caused great animosity between the members of the Royal Court to the point of accusing Torre and Monzón of planning an insurrection against the Spanish government. They managed to imprison Monzón, but Diego de Torre was able to escape. The Spanish crown found out about the situation and sent another *visitador* (visitor) to resolve the problem. As a result, Monzón was liberated and Diego de Torre turned himself into the Spanish authorities who sent him to Spain where he continued to defend his innocence and his right to the *cacicazgo*. He died in Spain in 1590.¹⁹

Although the history and symbolic importance of Diego de Torre has been widely discussed in the last decade by critics and scholars, such as Luis Fernando Restrepo, Joanne Rappaport and Santiago Villa Chiape, to name a few; it is important to keep in mind that this was not the case in the nineteenth century.²⁰ The only reappraisal of the figure of the cacique of Tumerqué was the one included in the recently published nineteenth-century first edition of *El carnero* in 1859. Avellaneda's reading of Diego de Torre is obviously influenced by her reading of Freyle's comments about the cacique in chapters thirteen and fourteen of his book. As Luis Fernando Restrepo states with regard to Freyle: "En esta crónica, don Diego es una figura marginal en una historia de adulterios y corrupción" ("El Cacique" 26) (In this chronicle, Sir Diego is a marginal figure in a history of adultery and corruption). Restrepo adds that Don Diego appears totally different in the legal petitions placed by Diego himself to the Spanish crown especially in the *Memorial* of 1584. However, it is on Freyle's version that Avellaneda bases her reappraisal of the *mestizo* and what at the time was not a well-known book. For some critics like Restrepo, Avellaneda's legend can be understood as a national romance in which the Cuban author "offers a positive yet idealized view of don Diego and of *mestizaje*" ("Don Diego" 105). For Carolina Alzate who mistakenly refers to the legend as a novel, Avellaneda questions Freyle's misogynistic view of women to propose "una perspectiva esencialmente feminista" (207) (an essentially feminist perspective) of the female character Estrella, portraying her as a victim of her lover's corruption and not as an instigator and passionate woman who engaged in an illicit relationship despite being married.²¹ However, I would like to propose a different reading of Avellaneda's reconstruction of this episode of the colonial past. My discussion does not center on Estrella as the primary character that Avellaneda is trying to defend through her questioning of the role of woman in colonial society. Instead, I choose to underline the roles that primary and secondary characters play in Avellaneda's view of the circumstances surrounding Diego de Torre.²² These characters are emblematic of key figures of the colonial past.

As Restrepo observes, in the original work of *El carnero*, Diego de Torre was a marginal character (“El Cacique” 26). The story has to do mainly with a description of Alonso Orozco, a married man and a corrupt colonial administrator, and his affair with a married young lady. The illicit relationship, according to Freyle, contributes to the animosity that Orozco developed against the Spanish judge Juan Bautista Monzón who came to Santa Fe to impose law and order in a city where the Royal Court (*Audiencia*) was dominated by Orozco and his corrupt friends. Freyle mentioned that Orozco was responsible for the rumor that spread that Diego de Torre was organizing an insurrection with the help of “indios caribes de los llanos, mulatos, mestizos y negros” (205) (Caribbean Plains Indians, Mulattos, Mixed Breeds, and Blacks). The rumors continued when a letter written by Diego de Torre, and addressed to Monzón, is intercepted causing Monzón’s arrest. The cacique is eventually arrested and sentenced to death. Freyle’s story is one of good versus evil in which, according to the author, “los buenos bien conocían el engaño y la falsedad; los malos, que era el mayor bando, gustaban del bullicio y alzabanlo de punto” (206) (the good men were well aware of trickery and falsehoods; the bad men, which was the larger side, enjoyed the racket and built it up). At the end, Freyle denounces that the reason for all the corruption and false rumors against Monzón was due to the illicit relationship between Orozco and his lover: “mucho ciega una pasión amorosa” (218) (much blinded by an amorous passion). Of course, for Freyle, the female lover is the major instigator of Orozco’s corrupted actions and the real cause of the social disorder that erupted in the capital city.²³

There is no doubt that the historical figure of Diego de Torre serves Avellaneda as an excuse to read the colonial past including its prototypical characters. I am referring to the figures of the Spanish judge Juan Bautista Monzón, Alonso Orozco a member of the *Audiencia*, and the female character of *la negra* (black servant). All of them serve to praise the character of the Spanish crown or *madre patria* (motherland) as Avellaneda refers to it in the introduction of the legend. From Spain, order and control will emanate. She mentions that Felipe II will send to Nueva Granada a judge “cuya honradez, integridad y energía pudiera detener los progresos de aquel mal, que amenazaba hacer para siempre odiosa la administración de la madre patria en sus ricos dominios del vasto continente americano” (“El cacique” 229) (whose honor, integrity and energy could detain the progression of that evil which threatened to make the motherland’s administration a hate-filled presence once and for all in its rich possessions on the vast American continent). Spain is introduced as a mother who aims to guide and protect her children (“ricos dominios” [rich possessions]) from chaos and disorder. The *madre patria* is also in charge of cleaning her territories of “bastardas pasiones” (“El cacique” 230) (illegitimate passions) that have emerged in the urban centers of the colonies. The

judge to whom she is referring is Juan Bautista Monzón. I would argue that this legend is as much about the Spanish judge as about the *cacique* Diego de Torre. The administrators controlling the Royal Court (Real Audiencia), such as Orozco and his friends, are the ones responsible for the different social disorders taking place in Santa Fe de Bogotá along with his lover Estrella. They represent those evil forces that the wise and honest Monzón has to fight against in order to restore social and moral order.

The character that will connect the lives of Monzón, Orozco, and the *cacique* Diego de Torre is Estrella. Estrella is an accessory to demonstrate the moral weaknesses of the local prosecutor (Orozco) and of Diego de Torre. Both men fell for her love despite knowing that she was a married woman. It is worth noting that her husband is also a Spanish man who is depicted as a noble gentleman. However, if Orozco is depicted by Avellaneda as a corrupt and evil man; the *cacique* (leader) is portrayed as an honest and innocent *indiano* (indian) who succumbed to passion. If the illicit relationship between Orozco and Estrella is summarized as “vulgar crimen de adulterio” (“El cacique” 234) (the vulgar crime of adultery); the relationship between Estrella and Diego de Torre is conceived as unavoidable due to the attractiveness of the *cacique*. He is described as, “príncipe indiano [. . .] elegante talle, de negros y fulgurantes ojos, de tez ligeramente bronceada—pero admirable por su juvenil tersura—y de profusa cabellera rizada [. . .] prestándole cierta gravedad melancólica—una frente altiva y espaciosa, hecha al parecer expresamente para ostentar una corona” (“El cacique” 234–235) (an indian prince [. . .] of elegant waist, of black and shining eyes, of lightly-bronzed skin—but admirable for his youthful smoothness—and of profuse curly hair [. . .] which lent him a certain melancholy seriousness—a raised and spacious forehead, made to appear so in order to better carry a crown). The exotic representation of the *cacique* endows him with a sense of otherness that is perceived attractive. Diego de Torre represents a colonial past that, although alluring, should be preserved as a distant memory. Estrella and the *cacique*’s relationship has no future as it is illustrated at the end of the story when Estrella dies and Diego escapes to Spain; another sign of what Unzueta refers to as tragic romance (195).²⁴

The characterization of the corrupt Orozco versus the idealized Diego de Torre serves to underline the respected character of Estrella’s husband to whom Avellaneda refers as a Spanish captain. His reputation as a distinguished citizen is intact and Avellaneda refers to him as a victim and an example of the “fatal tendencia de todos los maridos condenados por la suerte a ser víctimas de una desgracia que tarda o nunca conocen” (“El cacique” 238–239) (fatal tendency of all the husbands condemned by luck to be victims of a disgrace that they come to realize late, or perhaps never). The love triangle between Alonso de Orozco, Estrella, and Diego de Torre serves to highlight the integrity of the betrayed Spanish husband. The fates that Orozco and Diego de Torre

suffered in Spain, where punishment and forgiveness are imposed, underline the notion that only in Spain order can be restored. Estrella's husband at the end also left for Spain to take revenge against the two men that contributed to the damage of his reputation ("limpiar su honra" [to clean his honor]). This further emphasizes that resolution can only emanate from the *madre patria* or can be found there. It is also important to remember that it is the King who sends new Spanish administrators to the capital of Nueva Granada to restore social order and justice. It is the arrival of a new *visitador* to Santa Fe that makes possible the release of the Spanish judge Juan Bautista Monzón. The dementia that Orozco suffers once he is imprisoned in Spain and the fact that Diego de Torre was reduced from being a *cacique* to work in the royal stables point out that no future was awaiting them (280). They have both been symbolically punished by the loss of his mental faculties in the case of Orozco, and by the loss of social status in the case of Diego de Torre. Both punishments are exemplified at the end of the story when Estrella's husband realizes that in the case of Orozco "no le toca al hombre tomar venganza del hombre: hay invisible mano justiciera, que ningún delito deja impune jamás" ("El cacique" 281) (it's not the man's job to take his revenge upon his fellow man: there is the invisible hand of justice, which doesn't let any crime go unpunished). In the case of Diego de Torre, it is Avellaneda herself who acknowledges the punishment when she says, "¿Qué pena podría imponérsele, mayor de la que sufre, al joven príncipe indiano, reducido á adiestrar los caballos del rey por el salario de una peseta al día?" ("El cacique" 281) (What greater punishment could impose itself than that which the young Indian prince already suffers by being reduced to training the King's horses for a salary of one *peseta* a day?). A providentialist view of justice helps Avellaneda to portray a colonial past in which Spain is synonymous with order and justice.

"El cacique de Turmequé" does not necessarily see in the character of Diego de Torre a solution to the future. Although the King forgives him, his *cacicazgo* is never restored. His social situation worsens as he ends up working for the King in his royal stables. The *cacique* is remunerated as a master of horses but not the master of his own people. His "sangre regia americana" ("El cacique" 235) (royal American blood) does not endow him with better social recognition or status. He is idealized as "la singular belleza producida por el cruzamiento de razas" (235) (the most singular beauty produced by the crossing of the races), but not seen as the key to the future (235). His social prestige diminishes at the end of the story, while the character of Juan Bautista Monzón is remunerated and restored by naming him to the position of *visitador* in Lima. Monzón is perceived as a symbol of the colonial administration's political and social order.

When it comes to social order there is another character that allows us to discuss how other non-Spanish sectors of the population are perceived by Avel-

laneda. The prototypical figure of the black female slave and servant remains intact in the story. Estrella's slave is portrayed as a facilitator of the illegal relationships of her owner. The *negra* facilitates the encounter between Estrella and Diego de Torre. But if Estrella is perceived by the author as a victim of the patriarchal system (228), the black female slave is portrayed as a contributor to moral disorder. In this sense Avellaneda does not seem to question Freyle's portrayal of sectors of the population of African descent. At least in this story, the black servant has no redeeming qualities. When Estrella's husband realizes that the *negra* knows everything about his wife's illicit relationships, he forces her to confess through the use of force. Avellaneda, the chronicler, comments, "El deber que nos hemos impuesto, sin embargo de no alterar la exactitud de los hechos, nos obligue a confesar que no tuvo la esclava negra el heroico sufrimiento que ostentó Roldán en la tortura, pues declaró plenamente, bajo los golpes del látigo, cuantos secretos le eran conocidos por la confianza que en ella tenía la imprevisora capitana" ("El cacique" 275–276) (The obligation that we have imposed upon ourselves, nevertheless does not alter the truth of the matter, it obliges us to confess that the black slave-woman didn't possess the heroic suffering that Roldán displayed in torture, but declared frankly, under the blows of the whip, how many secrets were made known to her through the confidences she had with the improvident female captain). Avellaneda confesses that the black woman was unable to endure the pain that Juan Roldán suffered in the hands of Orozco and his allies for defending and allying himself with Monzón and Diego de Torre. This *negra* was not willing to sacrifice her life to defend Estrella. Instead, she just confessed everything so she could save her own life. For Avellaneda, heroism cannot be found in the female persona of the black slave as she betrays the lady who invested so much confidence in her. In the reconstruction of this story of the colonial past, the black female slave connotes mistrust. For her and the *cacique*, there is no freedom but only social stagnation. It is the Spaniard, and subsequent *visitador* of Lima, Juan Bautista Monzón, who is able to enjoy better social status as a result of his laudable actions. He is the facilitator of social order in the so-called "New World." In sum, in "El cacique de Turmequé," the colonial past as it is lived in the Viceroyalty of Nueva Granada is viewed as a time of chaos and social order that was only able to be restored by the presence of Spanish representatives of the *madre patria* who were recognized for their honesty, high moral standards, and a rigorous sense of the law.

Final Remarks: Colonizing the Past

There is no doubt that Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda is known by critics for her criticism of social prejudices and injustices as portrayed, for example, in

her famous novel *Sab* or in her work *Dos mujeres*, among others. However, it is evident that when it comes to reappraise a distant colonial past, her position is more ambivalent. Spanish figures such as Columbus, Cortés, and Monzón are praised for their contribution to the Americas in bringing visibility and order to colonial society.²⁵ They also contribute with wisdom and justice to the new continent. Female characters are used to make this message clear as is the case of Isabel la Católica, Malinche, Estrella, and the black female slave. Such is the case for the indigenous character Diego de Torre, cacique of Turmequé. Either through words (Isabel la Católica and Malinche) or through punishments (Guatimozín, the black servant, and Diego de Torre) they all function in Avellaneda's revision of the distant past as characters who reiterate Avellaneda's point of view in which Europe is privileged. But we might ask ourselves: why look at a distant colonial past in colonial regions away from Cuba?

It is important to understand that at the time that Avellaneda wrote her poem in honor of Christopher Columbus and her works "El cacique de Turmequé" and "Una anécdota en la vida de Cortés," Cuba was still under Spanish control. It is also important to note that between 1820 and 1860 Cuba enjoyed more economic progress than any other Latin American country (Bushnell and Macaulay 293), but that soon after political tensions between Cuban *criollos* in charge of coffee and tobacco production and the Spanish administration erupted in the political unrest of the Ten Year's War. The turbulent rebellion known as *Conspiración de la Escalera* (1843–1844) was still fresh in Cuban society.²⁶ Also, as Luis E. Aguilar explains, by the 1860s "opposition to Spain had not only increased, but had spread to all sectors of the population [. . .] The island was becoming divided into two hostile camps: Cubans versus Spaniards" (22). There is no doubt that Cuba's current political situation was present in Avellaneda's mind when she wrote and published these particular works. Looking at the distant past functioned as a way to symbolically prevent an uncertain future.

Avellaneda loved her country, Cuba, but she viewed herself as part of her *madre patria*. Her view of the distant colonial past pertaining to other regions of Spanish America (Mexico and Nueva Granada) served as a way to reflect and let Cubans know about Spain's contribution to their existence and sense of identity. The fact that the aforementioned works emphasized a glorious past and the sense of order and justice, underlines what Avellaneda conceives as important with regard to the future of her own island. Cuba should be cautious of not succumbing to political unrest and disorder and should view her motherland as a sign of stability and order. People must remember that what happened to Guatimozín, to Diego de Torre, *cacique* of Turmequé, and to the female black slave can happen to those who do not cooperate or are perceived as not cooperating with the colonial system. If Cuba is the source of inspiration for many of Avellaneda's work, Spain as the *madre patria* is the source of

constancy, dependability, and pride.

Alvaro Félix Bolaños and Gustavo Verdesio argue that another type of colonialism that emerged in Latin America consisted in “the uses of indigenous pasts in order to create discourses of Latin American identity” in which the Amerindian images are “appropriated in order to differentiate between a national or supranational (that is, regional) identity and an external hegemonic power” (12).²⁷ This type of colonialism is very applicable to the case of the Cuban writer Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda. For Avellaneda, the indigenous past, as read through the figures of Guatimozín and Diego de Torre, and through heroic figures such as Christopher Columbus and Hernán Cortés, serves to underline that Cuban identity lies in the heart of Europe, that is, Spain. Ties with the motherland will never be broken as long as Cubans are reminded that the *madre patria* brought civilization, order, and symbolic recognition to the Americas. As she reminds us in her hymn to Christopher Columbus, “Y dos mundos que llena tu nombre / Y te deben su próspera unión, / Ecos mil volverán, ¡grande hombre! / De esta villa á la fausta ovación” (15) (And two worlds unite your name / and owe you their prosperous union, / Thousands of echoes will return, great man! / From this villa to the fortunate ovation).

Notes

1. Unzueta refers to the notion of “imagined community” developed by Benedict Anderson for whom the nation is “imagined as a *community*, because, regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship” (16).
2. “El cacique de Turmequé” and “Una anécdota en la vida de Cortés” were published for the first time in 1869 as part of Avellaneda’s *Obras completas*. Both writings are considered part of the genre of *tradiciones* which is usually described as short stories composed of historical facts and fiction with the goal to educate and entertain the reader. For Aníbal González, orality seems to be an important component of the *tradiciones* as well as the author’s attempt to function as a “supreme dictator or guide” to join the diverse elements of the text as harmonious (65). Perhaps the most known author of this type of genre is Peruvian Ricardo Palma, author of *Tradiciones peruanas* (1872–1910) who according to González, also aimed to criticize and deconstruct “the genealogical framework that underlines nineteenth-century historicism” (63).
3. Guatimozín was another name for Cuauhtémoc who is also known as Cuauhtemotzin, the last Aztec emperor. For in-depth studies on Avellaneda’s novel *Guatimozín*, see the works listed in the bibliography of Evelyn Picon Garfield (“Conciencia”), Michèle

- Guicharnaud-Tollis, Raúl Ianes (1997), and María Teresa González de Garay.
4. The essay that originated the debate was Lastarria's, "Investigaciones sobre la influencia de la Conquista y el sistema colonial de los españoles en Chile." The same year in the newspaper *El Araucano* Bello responds to Lastarria's arguments in an essay with the same title. For an in-depth discussion of this debate, see Meléndez.
 5. For an analysis of the Columbus voyage in Avellaneda's poetry, see María C. Albin ("Género").
 6. For a study of *Album cubano* see María C. Albin ("La revista").
 7. The section "Galería de mujeres célebres" appeared for the first time in the journal directed by Avellaneda "*La Ilustración: Album de las damas*," see María C. Albin ("Fronteras").
 8. Bartosik-Vélez does not study any female writers in her chapter devoted to the case of Spanish America. For a further discussion on the legacy of Columbus in Spanish America, see chapter four, "Colombia: Discourses of Empire in Spanish America."
 9. One must remember that Cuba at the time (1862) was still considered a colony of Spain along with Puerto Rico and the Philippines. However, the political environment was tense and conflicts between Cuban creoles and peninsulars increased due to their different stances with regard to the slave trade and the sugar and tobacco industries. As Tulio Halperín Donghi reminds us, shortly after that in 1868 "a ten-year for independence" is launched resulting in Spain granting Cuba political autonomy in 1875 (156).
 10. This anecdote derives from the epilogue of her novel *Guatimozín*. Avellaneda did not include her novel *Guatimozín* in her *Obras literarias de la Señora Doña Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda. Novelas y leyendas* as she had not had a chance to revise it. Instead, she decided to include this anecdote in the last volume of her works.
 11. Bernal's original passage is quite similar. He mentions, "and so it appeared to all us, among who there was but one opinion upon the subject; that it was a most unjust and cruel sentence" (284). Bernal recalls Guatemuz's confession in which the *cacique* tells Cortés that he never planned a rebellion against him. In the recreation of the episode Bernal quotes the indigenous leader himself telling Cortés, "Malintzin! Now I find in what your false words and promises have ended-in my death. Better that I have fallen by my own hands than trust myself in your power in my city of Mexico." (283) Bernal shows his compassion toward the *cacique* and through Guatemuz's own words judges Cortés for his actions.
 12. The rest of the description states, "Guatemuz era de muy gentil disposición, así de cuerpo como de faiciones, y la cara algo larga y alegre, y los ojos mas parecían que cuando miraba que era con gravedad que halagueños y no había falta en ellos" (388) (Guatemuz was of very gentle disposition, as much of body as of countenance, a face that was long and happy, and his eyes shown even more when he looked with gravity upon the favored ones and saw no fault in them).
 13. Avellaneda adds the following note, "El último emperador de Méjico juntaba en sus venas la sangre de los Aztecas con la de sus antiguos enemigos los valientes fundadores del reino de Atzcapuzalco, que fué durante mucho tiempo el más poderoso e

- ilustre de todos los del Anahuac” (“Una anécdota” 165) (The last emperor of Mexico brought together in his veins the blood of the Aztecs with that of their old enemies, the valient founders of the kingdom of Atzacapuzalco, that was for a long time the most powerful and illustrious of all of the Anahuac).
14. For Fernando Unzueta, Avellaneda’s version of Guatimozín’s story (especially in her novel) is one of a tragic national romance. For Unzueta, Guatimozín’s death and the death of his wife reinforce Avellaneda’s criticism of the violence of conquest, while the love relationship between Cortés and Malinche underlines the possibility of the conquest as an illegitimate foundational act (213).
 15. Although Avellaneda seems to suggest that Cortés’s unrest was due to the guilt he felt toward his decision to order the execution of Guatemuz and his cousin, Bernal Díaz states that Cortés was also unhappy about all the vicissitudes they had suffered and the uncertainty waiting ahead. Bernal recounts, “bien quiero decir que como Cortés andaba mal dispuesto y aun muy pensativo e descontento del trabajoso camino que llevábamos, e como había mandado a ahorcar a Guatemuz e a su primo el señor de Tacuba” (491) (well I want to say that since Cortés was in a bad mood and very pensive and discontent over the difficult path we were taking, and how he had ordered the hanging of Guatemuz and his cousin the man from Tacuba).
 16. For Bernal, the reason for the accident had more to do with Cortés’s inattentiveness when he did not pay close attention to the idol figures that surrounded the room in the indigenous palace where he was staying.
 17. The story was narrated in chapters thirteen and fourteen of *El carnero*.
 18. The biographical information comes from Ulises Rojas, *El cacique de Turmequé y su época* and Luis Fernando Restrepo, “El Cacique de Turmequé o los agravios de la memoria.” See also Gamboa.
 19. According to Luis Fernando Restrepo, “En 1584 presentó a Felipe II el muy conocido “Memorial de agravios,” en el que documenta los múltiples abusos que sufrían los indígenas de parte de los encomenderos y las autoridades coloniales neogranadinas” (“El Cacique” 17) (In 1584, he presented to Felipe II the well-known “Memorial de agravios,” in which he documents the multiple abuses the indians suffered by the hands of the encomienda holders and Neo-Granadian colonial authorities). Restrepo adds that in this “Memorial,” Torres presented himself to the Spanish authorities as a “cacique Cristiano” (Christian indigenous leader) who “buscaba legitimar su dominio tanto por la tradición muisca como por la tradición jurídica hispánica” (“El Cacique” 18) (hoped to legitimize his dominion as much through the Muisca tradition as through the Hispanic juridic tradition).
 20. These studies have centered on documents found in the Archivo General de Indias and Archivo General de la Nación in Bogotá.
 21. Restrepo following Carolina Alzate refers to Avellaneda’s “El cacique de Turmequé” as a novel but it must be clarified that Avellaneda never refers to this story as a novel but instead calls it in her *Obras Completas* a “leyenda americana” (American legend). Critics such as Mary Cruz consider it a type of “tradición” (tradition).

22. Evelyn Picon Garfield and Carolina Alzate are among the most important critics who privilege this feminist approach when studying “El cacique de Turmequé.” See Picon Garfield (“Sexo/texto”) and Alzate.
23. For an in-depth study of Freyle’s misogynist view of colonial society see, Ivette Hernández Torres.
24. It is important to note that Unzueta is not discussing “El cacique de Turmequé.” He is referring instead to Avellaneda’s novel, *Guatimozín*.
25. For Avellaneda, Christopher Columbus belongs to Spain as Queen Isabel la Católica was the only one to recognize his plan to discover and conquer new lands.
26. For a discussion of the years which preceded and followed the insurrection, see Hugh Thomas.
27. For a discussion of other types of colonialism in Latin America, see Alvaro Félix Bolaños and Gustavo Verdesio.

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