

“Double Bind / Double Consciousness” in the Poetry of Carmen Colón Pellot and Julia de Burgos

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Carmen Colón Pellot and Julia de Burgos constructed a female literary poetics and created a space for the *mulata* as a writing subject instead of a written object in early twentieth-century Puerto Rican *negrista* literature. Because of their gender and the societal norms and limitations placed upon blacks, they each found it difficult to reconcile their heritage as *mulatas* in a white male Hispanic society. They each testify to the “double bind” of black female authors who strive to identify themselves as both women and as blacks. In her seminal article “Feminism and Afro-Hispanism: The Double Bind,” Rosemary Feal notes that the double bind of scholars when reading texts written by Afro-Latin American writers “is to uphold the dignity of all Afro-Latin American characters...while engaging in legitimate feminist practice” (30). Feal also notes that in order to study the intersection of race and gender in works by black Latin American female writers’s texts, we must adhere to the racial, historical, and social specificities in each country. She further explains that, “[a]lterity’ in feminist Afro-Hispanic scholarship has as its imperative the formulation of alternate interpretive practices, and it is through analyzing the link of race and gender that we can gain more complete access to that world of difference” (30). The double bind inherent in Afro-Hispanic literature is not only that of scholars but also of the authors themselves who comprise the focus of this study. The double bind of Colón Pellot and de Burgos compels us to return to W.E.B. Du Bois’s seminal essay on double-consciousness, *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), where he presented the problem of duality that plagued blacks at the turn of the twentieth century:

It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his twoness, an American, a negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. (5)

Although Du Bois's theory of double-consciousness does not include gender, it incorporates the problematic of race that African Diaspora figures continue to face in the twenty-first century. The double bind/double-consciousness of Colón Pellot and de Burgos is multiple and deals with their multiracial heritage as women of color. The present study examines the intersection of race and gender in both of their writings building upon the theoretical framework of double bind/double-consciousness as espoused by Feal and Du Bois. This analysis also builds on the work of Consuelo López Springfield and Claudette Williams who analyze the themes of gender and race separately in their studies on the single authors. In "I am the Life, the Strength, the Woman: Feminism in Julia de Burgos' Autobiographical Poetry," López Springfield suggests that "at the heart of [Julia de Burgos's] autobiographical poetry lies a rhetorical quest to justify a female poetics" and that the author "negotiated her own space between female aesthetics and male-constructed literary conventions" (56). In "'Oh Lord, I Want to be White': The Ambivalence of *Mulatez* in Carmen Colón Pellot's *Ambar mulato*," Williams argues that there are ways in which Colón Pellot's poems both "coincide with and deviate from *negrista* practice" (32). Both articles are seminal studies on the individual writers and are among the first to analyze feminism (Julia de Burgos) and *mulatez* (Colón Pellot) in their separate studies. Their studies, however, do not analyze the intersection of race and gender and the problematic that this duality poses for these authors. Not only were they forced to define their bicultural heritage in a society that abhorred blackness, as precursors to the feminist movement, they also negotiated a feminine poet space to challenge the social mores of the period. It is through this critical lens that I (re)read the texts by Colón Pellot and de Burgos by interpreting race and gender, the theme of *mulatez*, and the poets's desire to attain whiteness. There are some challenges to the discussion of the interplay of race and gender in this study because of the perception of race in Latin America and the Caribbean on the one hand and the downplay of gender at the expense of race on the other. As Feal reminds us, blackness in Latin America relates "to the conscious- and unconscious- identification with a given racial group" (31). Furthermore, the intersection of race and gender becomes more complicated in the Hispanic Caribbean because as Williams notes, "Racial divisions complicate gender divisions in Caribbean societies..." (*Charcoal and Cinnamon* 7). As *mulatas*, Colón Pellot and de Burgos reconciled a dual heritage of blackness and whiteness that was complicated by their gender and the inferior status held of black women who were not afforded the same social status or sexual liberties as their white female counterparts. It remains important to study Colón Pellot and de Burgos within the context of race and gender in Puerto Rico because as Jiménez Muñoz suggests "dentro del contexto de la historia de la mujer

¹ *Mulatez* is the harmonious coexistence of African and Hispanic heritage.

puertorriqueña, ‘mujer’ y ‘raza’ típicamente se analizan de forma separada” (74). These texts illustrate that it is impossible to study race without discussing gender.. Not only did the authors challenge societal norms as women but their works clearly elucidate that their color further hindered their literary reception as female authors; both poets gained recognition after their deaths. Furthermore, a nation-building rhetoric of anti-blackness complicated their identification as *mulatas* because Puerto Rico desired to obscure the black masses and disputed the legitimacy of the *mulato* in the social, political, and cultural matrix.

In the early twentieth-century (1930s and 1940s), a national discourse of *hispanidad* erased blackness from the Puerto Rican national imaginary. Intellectuals such as Antonio Pedreira (*Insularismo* 1934) and Tomás Blanco (*El prejuicio racial en Puerto Rico* 1942) minimized the black presence on the Island and emphasized the country’s Spanish heritage to thwart North American imperialism. Desiring to eliminate blackness from the racial paradigm, Pedreira disputed the *mulato*’s place in Puerto Rican society and argued for assimilation through racial mixing:

Entre una, que es la superior, y la otra, que es la inferior, el *mulato* será siempre elemento fronterizo, participante de ambas tendencias raciales que acrecentará más o menos de acuerdo con el tipo que escoja para un segundo enlace: el mestizo, el blanco o el negro. El mulato, que combina en sí las dos últimas y generalmente no suele ser una cosa ni la otra, es un tipo de fondo indefinido y titubeante, que mantiene en agitación ambas tendencias antropológicas sin acabar de perfilarse socialmente. Vive del presente inmediato, definiéndose de todos y de sí mismo, sin volcar pautas en el ambiente, prudente e indeciso, como el hombre que se encuentra cogido entre dos fuegos. Necesita mayor cantidad de reservas de una u otra raza para resolver su situación. Es hombre de grupo que colabora y no crea, que sigue y no inicia, que marcha en fila y no es puntero. Por lo general, carece de fervores para ser capitán. (35)

Thus, this text found that the *mulato*, the hybrid intermediary between the European and African, to be a threat to the creation of a homogeneous white Puerto Rican society; Pedreira perceived the *mulato* to be just as much of an impediment to the advancement of the nation as the black African. Furthermore, these texts and others propagated national myths of homogeneity that argued that racial prejudice does not exist or described it as “innocent child’s play”. In *El prejuicio racial en Puerto Rico*, Blanco noted, “No hay negros puros en Puerto Rico” and further argued that Puerto Rican culture was “blanca, occidental con muy pocas y ligerísimas influencias no españolas” (Roy-Féquiére “Negrista” 211). Needless to say, “[r]ace, racial identification, and racialist thinking were key elements of the Puerto Rican negrista controversy” (Roy-

Féquiére “Negrismo” 198). Thus, Colón Pellot and de Burgos published during a period in Puerto Rico when nationalists obscured the black masses and promoted a national image that did not coincide with reality. The *negrista* poetry of Puerto Rican Luis Palés Matos, for example, faced harsh criticism and scrutiny because as journalist Luis Miranda noted, “El llamado arte negro no tiene vinculación con Puerto Rico” which summarizes the rejection of the genre’s focus on Puerto Rican blackness in the island (Roy-Féquiére “Negrismo” 211). Thus, although both Colón Pellot and de Burgos published during the height of the *negrista* movement, a movement which supposedly celebrated blackness, the pressure remained to downplay race, racial differences, and racial identification.

The *negrista* movement flourished during the 1920s and 1930s in the Hispanic Caribbean and was a pseudo-black poetry that focused on physical elements of blacks as well as their sexual prowess and propensity toward music (Cartey 67). *Negrista* poets such as Luis Palés Matos (1898-1957), Emilio Ballagas (1910-1954), and Manuel del Cabral (1907-1999) appropriated poetic devices such as *onomatopeia*, repetition, rhythm, and rhyme to portray African culture. Although this poetry concentrated on the black image, it was primarily a movement of white intellectuals who objectified the black literary subject. As a result, the movement has often been viewed as the “exploitation of black culture by white writers” (Cartey 41). These poets portrayed blacks and African culture as sensual, exotic, and sexual without any psychological profundity. The black literary image that materialized during this period was often superficial, and rarely focused on the socio-historical and socio-economic factors that plagued black America such as poverty, discrimination, and racism. One must bear in mind that the *negrista* literature stereotyped the black female corpus and presented the black subject as an object of the white man’s imagination. This is the literary environment in which both poets wrote. Thus, it is essential to read the literary works of Colón Pellot and de Burgos within the context of the national propaganda of the period which diminished the black presence on the Island and the *negrista* movement which portrayed *negras*, *mulatas*, and *zambas* negatively. Colón Pellot and de Burgos not only defied national myths of racial origin but also age old myths of blackness, gender, and sexuality.

Julia de Burgos (1914-1953) was born in Carolina, a rural area located in northern Puerto Rico, and became a teacher after studying at the University of Puerto Rico. She published two books in her lifetime, *Poema en veinte surcos* (1938) and *Canción de la verdad sencilla* (1939), and one posthumously, *El mar y tú* (1954). Julia de Burgos’s work and political activism called upon women to participate in politics to forward the political agenda of the era. Her poem “Despierta” for example, calls for social consciousness among Puerto Rican women and incites them to participate politically. A political advocate for her country, the poet joined the women’s section of the Nationalist Party in 1936 which was formed in 1922 to combat United States imperialism. In 1936 she delivered the speech “La mujer ante el dolor de la patria” in support of women’s participation in the Independence of Puerto Rico in 1936 (de

Burgos xxi). Moreover, as López Springfield and Esteves² have suggested, Julia de Burgos’s literary repertoire manifested a female poetics that deconstructed male conventions of the era and created a space for the female subject. The literary sphere afforded few opportunities to female writers during the early twentieth century in Puerto Rico. During the 1930s and 1940s many female writers subscribed to “male constructions of gender in order to be voiced” (López Springfield 56). Julia de Burgos’s poetry rejects and contests these standard notions of gender by subverting and dismantling them.

“A Julia de Burgos” is most likely the “first feminist manifesto written in Spanish by a woman of African descent” and openly defies societal norms (De Costa-Willis xxiii). The entire collection of *Poema en veinte surcos* “is that of a female voice who refuses to accept imposed societal roles” (Esteves 233). In “A Julia de Burgos,” the poet-speaker constructs an alter ego to deconstruct both male and female conventions of the era:

Tú eres fría muñeca de mentira social,
y yo, viril destello de la humana verdad.
Tú, miel de cortesanas hipocresías; yo no;
que en todos mis poemas desnudo el corazón.
Tú eres como tu mundo, egoísta; yo no;
que en todo me lo juego a ser lo que soy yo.
Tú eres sólo la grave señora señorona;
yo no; yo soy la vida, la fuerza, la mujer.
Tú eres de tu marido, de tu amo; yo no;
yo de nadie, o de todos, porque a todos, a todos,
en mi limpio sentir y en mi pensar me doy. (2)

There are two poetic voices in the poem including “you” or Julia and the poetic “I.” Julia dialogues with her moral conscious and unravels the pretensions that women are forced to adhere because of social conventions. The poetic voice “you” represents social lies, hypocrisy, selfishness, appearances, and the conventions of society and stands in opposition to the poetic “I” which symbolizes everything that the former is not. The poetic “I” exudes essence, human truth, individuality, strength, and honesty. The poet-speaker “I” indicates, “Tú eres fría muñeca de mentira social/y yo, viril destello de la humana verdad” (2). The poet-speaker notes that neither option is viable for the woman of early twentieth-century Puerto Rico. While “you” possesses everything, she must sacrifice her integrity and authority to obtain it. Additionally, she

² In “Julia de Burgos: Woman, Poet, Legend” Carmen Esteves analyzes the feminist aspect of de Burgos’s poetry and her refusal to “accept imposed societal roles” (233).

owes everything to the people and nothing remains for her. However, the poetic “I,” which is the feminist alter ego of the subject, has nothing despite the fact she is free like the wind; she belongs to no one and is free like a “Rocinante corriendo desbocado;” she is equally not concerned with outside appearances (2). In other words, she is an outsider because she defies societal norms; she too must pay a price for being free. Thus, both women who form part of the collective subject sacrifice their inner selves to either conform to societal norms or rebuff them. The repetition of the expression “yo no” in “A Julia de Burgos” represents the use of negation by Latin American female writers as a form of resistance to the oppressor and “as a refusal of subsumption in the dominant” (Castillo 55). Negation defines the poet-speaker who stands in opposition to the dominant discourse and social mores of the period. The poetic subject/speaker is the anti-wife, the anti-daughter, and above all, the anti-woman. She defies all parameters established for and by women.

Other poems evidence this same repudiation of cultural standards. In “Yo misma fui mi ruta” the poet-speaker defies societal norms by not conforming. She notes,

Yo quise ser como los hombres quisieron que yo fuese:
 un intento de vida;
 un juego al escondite con mi ser.
 Pero yo estaba hecha de presentes,
 y mis pies planos sobre la tierra promisoro
 no resistían caminar hacia atrás,
 y seguían adelante, adelante,
 burlando las cenizas para alcanzar el beso
 de los senderos nuevos. (56)

Clearly, the poet-speaker constructs her own route to defy social conventions. Likewise, in “Pentachrome” de Burgos commences five of the six stanzas with “Hoy, quiero ser hombre” associating men with patriotism, violence, and most importantly action. She notes,

Hoy, quiero ser hombre. Sería un Quijote.
 Sería el Alonso Quijano verdad,
 del pueblo que en héroes de vida hoy convierte
 los héroes en sombras del loco inmortal. (26)

De Burgos’s father read to her frequently the adventurous tales of Cervantes’s *Don Quijote de la Mancha*. Clearly she associates *el Quijote* with adventure, action, and independence which stand in opposition to the accepted passive behavior of women.

The poet-speaker ends the poem with the most violent act of men against women: that of the physical violation of women.

Hoy, quiero ser un hombre. Subir por las tapias,
burlar los conventos, ser todo un Don Juan;
raptar a Sor Carmen y a Sor Josefina,
rendirlas, y a Julia de Burgos violar. (26)

Julia de Burgos satirizes one of the most powerful figures in Spanish literature, that of *El Quijote*. The tone is burlesque and clearly mocks the sexual prowess of men. The poet-speaker ends with the violation of author Julia de Burgos. By inserting herself in the text, she rewrites literary history and subverts and dismantles the power of men. Through the literary tropes of subversion and satire, de Burgos found a subtle way to be voiced. Clearly, it is only through poetry and writing that women can achieve revenge.

“Ay, ay, ay de la grifa negra” displays a *mulata* consciousness and treats the question of race and gender. Julia de Burgos writes both within the *negrista* tradition and against it by conforming to and deconstructing national myths about blacks. The poem commences,

Ay, ay, ay, que soy grifa y pura negra;
grifería en mi pelo, cafrería en mis labios;
y mi chata nariz mozambiquea. (32)

The first stanza is reminiscent of *negrista* literature dominated by white writers who characterized blacks stereotypically as big-lipped. Even some black writers utilized stereotypical caricatures to portray blacks as evidenced in the above cited poem and in Nicolás Guillén’s “Negro bembón” which satirizes a big-lipped black man who lives off the hard work of others. However, in “Ay, ay, ay de la grifa negra” the burlesque tone changes in the third stanza of the poem and chastises the slave masters for their lack of moral and social conscious:

Dícenme que mi abuelo fue el esclavo
por quien el amo dio treinta monedas.
Ay, ay, ay, que el esclavo fue mi abuelo
es mi pena, es mi pena.
Si hubiera sido el amo,
sería mi vergüenza;
que en los hombres, igual que en las naciones,
si el ser el siervo es no tener derechos,
el ser el amo es no tener conciencia. (32)

De Burgos appropriates the tropes of *negrista* literature in her self-portrait by describing her hair as kinky, foreign, and exotic. The subject described in the poem is an amalgam of mixed raced African descent. As a daughter of parents of German and Spanish descent, it remains unclear whether one parent or both possessed some African blood. Furthermore, de Burgos has been described as a woman “de color canela,” with “resonancias de sangre indígena” with traces of Visigothic heritage in her hair (De Burgos xxiv, xxv). Similar to her contemporary Colón Pellot, she was a light *mulata*. Clearly, de Burgos appropriates the *negrista* aesthetic to be voiced; the poem, however, stands out for its denouncement of the ills of slavery. She uses satire to poke fun at the master and to elevate her African heritage. Finally, in the last stanza, the poem evokes the theme of *mulatez*:

Ay, ay, ay, que la raza se me fuga
y hacia la raza blanca zumba y vuela
a hundirse en su agua clara;
o tal vez si la blanca se ensombrará en la negra.
Ay, ay, ay, que mi negra raza huye
y con la blanca corre a ser trigueña;
¡a ser la del futuro,
fraternidad de América! (32)

The poem simultaneously conforms and breaks with the *negrista* aesthetic of the era and reinforces and defies stereotypes. Despite its acknowledgement of the evils of slavery and the white slave master, the poem terminates by dissolving racial problems on the Island through *mestizaje*. Notwithstanding the poem’s focus on the African heritage and the creation of a “bronzed society,” it still promotes *blanqueamiento* or the eventual dilution of the black African population. In this respect, her poem coincides with the writings of Carmen Colón Pellot who consistently promotes *blanqueamiento* as an option for the plight of the *mulata*.

“Ay, ay, ay” is Julia de Burgos’s only poem that clearly refers to her African heritage. Although she was the “first published Puerto Rican female poet to adopt a ‘mulata’ identity,” she wrote primarily as a female poet and not as a racial one (López Springfield 64). However, it was equally difficult to write as a female poet and as a racial one during an era when male writers dominated the literary sphere. The lack of reception of her works attests to this difficulty. De Burgos’s omission can further be explained by the double bind of writing as a black and female writer. As Carole Boyce Davies reminds us, “For it is the additional identity of femaleness which interferes with seamless Black identity and is therefore either ignored, erased or ‘spoken for’ (8). Julia de Burgos allowed her race to be “spoken for” in order to focus primarily on gender issues of the period. Her contemporary Colón Pellot recoups many of these feminist themes but clearly demonstrates that they are complicated by her race.

Carmen Colón Pellot was born (1911-2001) in Arecibo, located in the Northern Coastal Valley of Puerto Rico and struggled with not only her blackness but also her inferior status as a black woman in a white world. Her views on race relations and race are often contradictory and echo her existence as a light *mulata* in a color conscious society. In the prologue to her sole published book of poetry *Ámbar mulato* (1938), she notes that in Puerto Rico “...no existe el tipo de ‘negro perfecto’ supersticioso y ñáñigo. Nuestra población actual es jíbara vetada de sangre mulata” (Colón Pellot, “Prólogo”). While she identifies as a *mulata*, her description of Puerto Rican society echoes that of the national rhetoric which promoted its *jíbaro* or indigenous roots.

In “¡Ay, señor que yo quiero ser blanca!” subtitled a mulatto prayer, the poet-speaker confesses that she wants to be “rubia y blanca/como la espuma/como la charca/como las flores/de los naranjos/ de mis montañas”(45). In this poem the white woman and by extension whiteness is associated with virginity, beauty, and purity. The association of whiteness with purity, goodness, and chastity is a literary trope that permeates Hispanic literature and is omnipresent in the literature of Afro-Hispanic writers; this poem coincides with other Afro-Hispanic texts written during the nineteenth and early twentieth century that elevated whiteness.³ Afro-Panamanian writers such as Federico Escobar (1861-1912) and Gaspar Octavio Hernández (1893-1918) for example, elevated whiteness at the expense of their own Afro-Latin identity to coincide with the national imaginary.⁴ While Colón Pellot professed a *mulata* consciousness as evidenced by the title of her book, as Claudette Williams notes, the poet’s works often evoke ambivalence about her racial heritage and particularly her status as a woman of color in a white world. In “Motivos de envidia mulata,” the poet-speaker professes envy for her white female counterpart. In the first stanza, the poet-speaker muses,

Tengo envidia de ti,
nube blanca;
te enamoras en brazos
del viento;

³ In “Cultural Strangulation: Black Literature and the White Aesthetic”, Addison Gayle notes that “[t]he distinction between whiteness as beautiful (good) and blackness as ugly (evil) appears early in the literature of the middle ages-in the Morality Plays of England” (34). In “Black Phobia and the White Aesthetic in Spanish American Literature,” Richard Jackson notes how Spanish authors such as Lope de Rueda utilized this same dichotomy in their works (*Eufemia* 1576); this influenced the writings of Spanish American authors such as Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda (*Sab* 1841) and Cirilo Villaverde (*Cecilia Valdés* 1882) who portrayed their black protagonists with white features (467).

⁴ For information on literary whiteness in Panama see, Sonja Stephenson Watson’s “Nationalist Rhetoric and Suppression of Black Consciousness: Literary Whiteness in Poems by Federico Escobar and Gaspar Octavio Hernández” (2010).

te promiscuas sola
 con los árboles machos
 de las sierras altas
 y te rimen por casta y hermosa.
 A mí nadie me canta,
 a mí me esclavizan las normas;
 las leyes cristianas. (Colón Pellot 3)

The white cloud symbolizes the white liberated woman who experiences a freedom unknown to her black or *mulata* counterpart. The white woman represents purity, chastity, and beauty and is regaled for her whiteness. Meanwhile the black woman is “enslaved by Christian laws” which inhibit her sexual freedom. In the penultimate stanza, the poet-speaker confesses,

En las noches quietas,
 los luceros guapos
 te guiñan miradas
 Tú floras coqueta
 y te ves de ronda
 con el más apuesto
 que tu amor reclama. (Colón Pellot 4)

“Motivos” clarifies the root of the poet-speaker’s envy; she is not envious of the white woman merely because of her purity, chastity or beauty as in “Ay señor,” but because of her ability to escape societal norms. The white woman flouts societal norms by flirting and expressing her sexuality without the social stigma. In contrast, the *mulata* is enslaved, a literal enslavement that points to that experienced by her African ancestors as well as a metaphorical one defined by strict societal codes that are inescapable. The situation of women of color during the early twentieth century was dire and Colón Pellot’s poem reflects their lack of social mobility. As Jiménez Muñoz observes, “Todavía en 1940, las mujeres negras y las mulatas en la Isla eran casi dos veces más propensas a tener que estar trabajando como sirvientes que las blancas. Para esta fecha había más mujeres de descendencia africana que blancas desempeñando trabajo manual como cocineras y enfermeras prácticas” (86). In this context, Colón Pellot’s frustration is understood. Unlike Julia de Burgos’s “Pentachrome” which singles out the sexual repression of women at large, Colón Pellot incorporates race by acknowledging that *mulatas* are repressed sexually because of both their race *and* gender. Colón Pellot informally dialogues with her *negrista* male counterparts who exoticized and sexually stereotyped the black female corpus. However, the sexual improprieties of the black woman are not forgiven. The double standard of *mulatas* exemplified in the poem reflect their lack of social mobility in early twentieth-century Puerto Rico when women

of color worked more manual labor jobs as servants, cooks, and bedside nurses than white women (Jiménez Muñoz 86).

Not all of Colón Pellot’s poetry praises white women at the expense of the *mulata*. Similar to de Burgos’s “Ay, ay, ay,” other poems by Colón Pellot evoke the theme of *mestizaje* or more specifically *mulatez*. In Ian Smart’s seminal text *Nicolás Guillén: Popular Poet of the Caribbean*, he defined *mulatez* as the “harmonious aesthetic union of the opposing elements”, that is, the African and European heritage elucidated in Guillén’s well known poem “Balada de los dos abuelos” (164). Despite the historical conflict of conquest and slavery that characterized his essence, Guillén found a way to reconcile his African and Spanish heritage poetically and aesthetically through *mulatez*. Stylistically and thematically Colón Pellot’s poem “Canto a la raza mulata” echoes Guillén’s “Balada de los dos abuelos”. In his attempt to reconcile his two disparate heritages, Guillén humanizes both grandfathers by detailing their encounter in Africa and their subsequent poetic embrace. Despite the fact that one is the *conquistador* and slave master and the other is his slave, Guillén recreates a symbolic encounter and embrace that most likely never occurred historically. The last verses of his poem point to the union of Taita Facundo (the black grandfather) and Don Federico (the white grandfather), and the subsequent reconciliation of his *mulato* heritage:

¡Federico!
 ¡Facundo! Los dos se abrazan.
 Los dos suspiran. Los dos
 las fuertes cabezas alzan;
 los dos del mismo tamaño,
 bajo las estrellas altas;
 los dos del mismo tamaño,
 ansia negra y ansia blanca,
 los dos del mismo tamaño,
 gritan, sueñan, lloran, cantan.
 Sueñan, lloran, cantan.
 Lloran, cantan.
 ¡Cantan! (56)

The two grandfathers symbolically embrace erasing any cultural or racial differences. The grandfathers unite, amalgamate, and become equalized in stature. Similar to “Balada”, “Canto a la raza mulata” traces Colón Pellot’s African and European heritage and illustrates how “los conquistadores de la raza hispana y los siervos negros dieron vida a mi raza mulata” (22). Similar to “Balada,” the poem ends by extolling *mestizaje racial*:

¡Es la raza mulata ambiciosa

que canta mi verso!
 Raza enorme que estudia
 y medita;
 raza fuerte que impone sus credos;
 y dibuja entre la raza blanca
 su veta dorada de anhelos.
 ¡Es la raza mulata y altiva
 que ensalva mi verso!
 La que vive sonrisas y rimas
 ahogando un recuerdo. (23)

The poet-speaker elevates the *mulata* race that is defined as ambitious and enormous. “Canto a la raza mulata” echoes Julia de Burgos’s “Ay, ay, ay” and Guillén’s “Balada” because they all evoke *mestizaje racial*, exude a *mulato* consciousness, and reinforce the motif of the Hispanic Caribbean as a “crisol de razas,” a region characterized by numerous races, ethnicities, and cultures but not the racial problems that accompany this multiplicity. Like “Ay, ay, ay,” this poem clearly evokes the theme of *mulatez* portraying the historical evils of the Conquest and the subsequent enslavement of blacks throughout the African Diaspora as a harmonious aesthetic union devoid of racial and cultural conflict. “Ay, ay, ay” differs in that it chastises the white slave master for his lack of moral conscious. Contradicting her statement in the prologue to *Ámbar mulato* that Puerto Rico is a *jíbaro* country i.e. one with strong indigenous heritage, the poem denotes that Puerto Rico is indeed a *mulato* nation. Colón Pellot’s portrayal of Puerto Rico as a “crisol de razas” reflects her bicultural heritage on the one hand but also the need to conform to the *negrista* aesthetic on the other. As Jiménez Muñoz notes, “...ésta es la única forma de entrar en la discusión literaria y literata sobre la identidad nacional y cultural en general y la discusión sobre raza, en particular” (78-9).

Colón Pellot’s poetry points to the low esteem of women and their lack of social mobility. The ability of white women to skirt societal norms plagued her, but it is also clear that the limitations of women at large stifled her literary and creative potential. In “Mi verso,” Colón Pellot compares her poetry with her gender. “Este es mi verso/un verso enfermizo y débil como mi sexo” (5). The poetry is identified with the weakness and debility of her sexual identity, one characterized by sickness and inferiority. Her race afforded her little opportunities and coupled with her gender produced conflicts. Having limited access to the prestigious institutions of the creole elite, she found a space by subverting the paradigms of *negrista* literature while appearing to engage them (Roy-Féquiere “Speaking For” 249). While her *mulato* poetry has been lauded, she has frequently been described as a woman “que tenía problemas con la posición de inferioridad racial que ocupaba en la sociedad puertorriqueña” (Jiménez Muñoz 77). Clearly, her hybrid racial identity stifled her literary potential.

At the turn of the twentieth century, *afra*-Hispanic writers struggled to deal simultaneously with issues of gender and race. Carmen Colón Pellot and Julia de Burgos negotiated the dual heritage of being Hispanic and African –a duality which is complicated by both their gender and ethnicity in a male dominated literary world. Their poetry remains important because it transformed a white male centered patriarchal discourse by converting the black female object into a subject who contributed to the social and cultural milieu. The problematic of race and gender is not only evidenced in the writings of Colón Pellot and de Burgos; this is a common issue in *Afra*-Hispanic texts and affects our reading of their works. The reasons are manifold and have as much to do with perceptions of feminism in Latin America as to the guilt that many African Diaspora women experience when discussing their gender; many believe that they do so at the expense of their race. In many ways, their works foreshadow the writings of *Afra*-Cuban poet Nancy Morejón who in 1975 wrote “*Mujer negra*”, a poem as the title suggests that incorporates the African female experience into the narrative of the history of the Americas illustrating the possibility to write both as a woman *and* as a black.

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