



“Race” and Class among *Nacionalista* Women in Interwar Puerto Rico: The Activism of Dominga de la Cruz Becerril and Trina Padilla de Sanz¹

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“We need to recognize not only differences but also the relational nature of those differences... White women and women of color not only live different lives but white women live the lives they do in large part because women of color live the ones they do.”

Elsa Barkley Brown, “What Has Happened Here” (1992)

Abstract: This article examines the lives of two prominent Nationalist women from Puerto Rico: Dominga de la Cruz Becerril (1909-1981) and Trina Padilla de Sanz (1864-1957). These two women, one black and working-class and the other white and patrician, were emblematic figures of the existing tensions within the Puerto Rican Nationalist Party and the broader independence movement. Tracing the social changes and political conflicts in Puerto Rico between the two world wars, I illustrate how both women have been positioned in the history of such conflicts and in the contentious 1930s debates over the Puerto Rican national question. Both women embodied racialized differences that, in turn, were emblematic of the multiplicity that accompanied being a Nationalist woman and the complexities inherent to how “the fatherland” was envisioned and fashioned during the interwar period.

Keywords: race, gender, class, nationalism, Puerto Rico

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Scholarship on the history of Puerto Rican women has made great strides in recent decades (Colón-Warren 2003; APIHM 2013). Located within that tradition, this article examines: what "race" has meant to women in Puerto Rico (white and, primarily, non-white) within the context of the struggle for national independence; how "race" structured these women's lives and social conditions; and the images that have been socially constructed of them, both as Puerto Rican women and as racially located Puerto Ricans. Furthermore, this article aims to contribute to the interdisciplinary scholarship on gender in the Caribbean by exploring how gender ideologies developed historically in a colonial context, with all its complexities and contradictions, including the fissures within and between its social protagonists (Shepherd 1995; Beckles 1999; Moitt 2001; Moore, Higman, Campbell, and Bryan 2003; Gaspar and Hine 2004).

My analysis of the lives of Dominga de la Cruz Becerril (1909-1981) and Trina Padilla de Sanz (1864-1957), one black and working-class and the other Creole-white and patrician, offers us a window to examine the contradictions within the leading anti-imperialist organization in Puerto Rico during the interwar period—the *Partido Nacionalista*—as well as related tensions across the broader movement against U.S. colonialism on the island. The contradictions embedded within the Puerto Rican national body/"family" highlight the gendered racial differences and structural inequalities persisting underneath anticolonial sentiments in early-twentieth-century Puerto Rico. Furthermore, by acknowledging race as an important category for social analysis we can unsettle mainstream historical narratives on the national question in order to suggest that, in Puerto Rican history, black lives and voices matter too. In this way we can transform and enrich our understanding of the intellectual history of anticolonial movements (Santiago-Valles 2007; Rodríguez-Silva 2012; del Moral 2013; Llorens 2014). The intersection of race, gender and nation, as an abstract-conceptual process and as a lived experience, has proven to be more fundamental than generally acknowledged in socio-historical inquiry, especially within Puerto Rican Women's History (some exceptions include: Matos Rodríguez 1995; Findlay 1999; Jiménez-Muñoz 2003; Roy-Féquièrre 2004; Alegría Ortega and Ríos González 2005).

Examining the changes and social conflicts in Puerto Rico between the world wars, I illustrate how both Dominga de la Cruz and Trina Padilla have been positioned in the history of those conflicts and in the contentious 1930s debates over the Puerto Rican national question. I discuss how both women embodied racialized differences symbolic of the multiple identities associated with being a *Nacionalista* woman, complexities inherent to how *la patria* (the fatherland/motherland) was envisioned and fashioned at that time. The article is divided into six parts, beginning with a brief description of the dire situation of early twentieth-century Puerto Rico and of the political organization to which de la Cruz and Padilla belonged, followed by some preliminary biographical data on both these women. The third section addresses the racial and class-based inequalities constituting the lived experience of both women, while the fourth section considers the role of Catholicism and the gendered transcendence of socio-racial differences within the national imaginary. The fifth section scrutinizes the correlation between both women, the island's outlawed national flag, and related patriotic iconography. Lastly, I focus on the poetics of peoplehood and national community—embraced and ascribed—between Dominga de la Cruz and Trina Padilla.

Socioeconomic Conditions and the *Nacionalistas*

After Spain was replaced as the island's colonial ruler in 1898, North American corporations (e.g., tobacco manufacturing and the garment industry) led by the U.S. sugar conglomerate rapidly took over Puerto Rico's local economy (Clark 1930, 606-607, 646; Perloff 1950, 71, 136-137, 406). By the 1920s, the provincial hacienda system declined considerably in view of falling world-market prices and the credit controls inflicted by U.S. colonialism. As coffee planters laid off growing numbers of rural labourers, the latter flocked to towns and cities joining Puerto Rico's already expanding impoverished population (Clark 1930, 521-522; Perloff 1950, 88; Picó 1983). By the late 1920s overall wages had plunged and mass hunger became widespread, a situation soon aggravated by the Great Depression and because basic goods were more expensive locally on account of

the colonial government's fiscal policies (Clark 1930, 565; Diffie and Diffie 1931, 174-175, 182). By the mid-1930s two-thirds of the island's labouring population was officially unemployed (Quintero Rivera 1975, 24-42).

By the time Dominga de la Cruz Becerril and Trina Padilla de Sanz emerged as prominent members of the *Partido Nacionalista* de Puerto Rico in the 1930s that organization had changed considerably. Established in 1922, the *Partido Nacionalista* began as a moderate pro-independence faction that broke with the old *Partido Unión de Puerto Rico* (Unionistas). Like the Unionistas, the *Nacionalistas* from 1922-1930 were led by besieged coffee-growing, Creole-white hacendados and their affluent urban-intellectual kinfolk, albeit supported by bankrupt tobacco farmers and indigent peasants connected to the haciendas (Ferrao 1990, 40-41, 48-53; Rosado 2003, 117-144). However, deteriorating socioeconomic conditions among Puerto Rico's labouring-poor majorities contributed to a shift in the social composition—and, in part, in the political practice—of the *Nacionalista* party in general and particularly among its leadership after 1927 (Santiago-Valles 2007, 112-113).

From 1930-1938 more than half of party leadership (local and national) now consisted of racially heterogeneous small-property owners, white-collar workers, petty vendors, and students (Quintero Rivera 1975, 24-50; Ferrao 1990, 90, 92-93). By 1928-1930 the party was moving towards a more aggressively Latin Americanist and anti-imperialist position: the 1930 election of the mulatto lawyer and fiery orator, Pedro Albizu Campos, as the organization's president reflected that change in composition and party goals. Total party membership figures during this period are imprecise (in part because of the mounting government persecution). However, the one time the *Nacionalistas* participated in colonial elections they received approximately 5,000 votes (TFP 1982; Ferrao 1990).

Dominga de la Cruz Beceril

Published before de la Cruz's death in 1981, the principal biographical source we have on de la Cruz comes from North American writer and photographer Margaret Randall (1979) who interviewed de la Cruz then living in exile in Cuba. In this testimonio de la Cruz describes herself, first and foremost, in social class terms. The daughter of manual labourers Domingo Clarillo de la Cruz and Catalina Beceril, she was orphaned at the age of four and parceled out along with her three siblings to the homes of different families. For a few years she came to live with her godmother, Isabel Mota de Ramery, who was married to a Spaniard, a proprietor of a coffee plantation, following the custom of large-landowning families to ritually adopt (usually as house servants) the dependent children of their sharecroppers and ex-slaves.

According to de la Cruz, the death of her godmother and economic difficulties interrupted her schooling in the fourth grade. The demands of the colonial educational system also created problems for how people raised their children, negatively affecting school attendance in the case of girls (ibid, 15, 19; Jiménez de Wagenheim 2016, 34). When the European war worsened the limited market for local coffee production, many coffee haciendas collapsed, including the one owned by her godmother's husband. Consequently, de la Cruz was sent away to live with the rest of her siblings, then subsisting under extreme penury in the city of Mayagüez. Along with her sister, de la Cruz toiled in the needleworks cottage industry (Randall 1979, 19-21, 23-25). Black and mulatto female needleworkers like her were rarely supervisors but rather operated the sewing machines and/or sewed by hand. However, she later got a job at a tobacco-products factory eventually becoming a reader for the employees on the shop floor, following the established working-class tradition throughout the Atlantic world (Tinjero 2010).

The general racialization of the island labour market at this time needs to be taken into account. At one end of the spectrum, Creole-white men comprised around 90% of most professions, especially the better remunerated "higher careers" (e.g., lawyers, physicians, engineers, pharmacists, authors, graduated reporters, and

college instructors). The few Afro-descended Puerto Rican men and “native” women of all races in the professions were disproportionately clustered in low-paying “lower careers” such as teachers and registered nurses. At the other end of the spectrum—i.e., manual work—non-white women were heavily concentrated in domestic service and to a lesser extent manufacturing, while Afro-descended men were significantly overrepresented in the harshest jobs like sugarcane work and dockyard labour (USBC 1941, 61-65; Crespo-Kebler 2005, 137-139).

It was not until the late 1920s that de la Cruz first heard the speeches of the emerging leader of the *Nacionalistas*, Pedro Albizu Campos. At that time, she also benefitted from the workers’ spirited discussions inside the cigar factory as she read out loud local newspaper coverage of the April 6, 1932 incursion into the colonial capitol building by *Nacionalista* demonstrators. The protesters were denouncing the legislative bill to transform the Puerto Rican flag into the official emblem of the island’s colonial government, rather than the banner of the future Puerto Rican republic the *Nacionalistas* were struggling to establish. The proposed 1932 law would have sullied and historically deracinated the flag created in 1895 by the Puerto Rican Section of the Cuban Revolutionary Party. The latter organization was then fighting to liberate both islands from Spanish colonialism, a struggle interrupted by the U.S. entry into the War of 1898 (Hidalgo Paz 2008). Albizu Campos had condemned the 1932 bill because “he considered the Puerto Rican flag very sacred, too lofty and exalted, to allow those selling out their homeland in order to use it for their politicking.” During that confrontation, a *Nacionalista* protester fell from the second-floor interior balcony and died from the injuries. “But, the flag was safe. They took Albizu to jail, but he was freed immediately” (Randall 1979, 30).

Within Puerto Rican history Dominga de la Cruz is mostly remembered for her 1930s *Nacionalista* militancy, in particular for her participation in the events leading up to the Ponce Massacre in 1937. On Palm Sunday of that year, a peaceful march of *Nacionalistas* assembled in the city of Ponce to commemorate the 1873 abolition of slavery in Puerto Rico and to protest the

federal government's incarceration of Albizu Campos and most of the party's top leadership recently convicted of sedition. Risking her life, Dominga de la Cruz ran to raise the Puerto Rican flag when its designated bearer was wounded in the hail of police bullets mowing down the unarmed protesters (Ponce Massacre Commission of Inquiry 1937; Moraza Ortiz 2001).

In Randall's interview, de la Cruz describes her work with the *Nacionalistas* throughout the 1930s as primarily writing articles for the newspaper *El Sol* published in Mayagüez, as well as preparing flyers related to working-class conditions and *Nacionalista* activities. On one occasion, she wrote a short article about Albizu Campos, later printed on leaflets, which she subsequently distributed herself (Randall 1979, 37). Until now, I have been unable to confirm her actual authorship because the pertinent articles in *El Sol* were signed "anonymous." Such precautions are understandable given the widespread harassment, surveillance and repression *Nacionalista* militants experienced, above all during 1932-1938 (Meneses de Albizu Campos 2007).

After the Ponce Massacre, de la Cruz lived in San Juan for two years reciting other authors' poems, giving presentations in schools, theatres, and public forums, such as *El Ateneo de Puerto Rico*. Taking advantage of the relative political liberalism under the new colonial administration of Governor Rexford Guy Tugwell, she shifted her politico-cultural activism from the street to the performance hall (Randall 1979, 65). In 1941, she received a homage and tribute at the *Escuela Superior Central* in Santurce, Puerto Rico. Albizu Campos' wife, Laura Meneses, attended this activity and suggested that de la Cruz should further develop her artistic abilities by studying in Cuba. Following that advice, de la Cruz relocated to Cuba from 1942 to 1944 (*ibid.*, 61-68).

When she returned to Puerto Rico, the local Communist Party helped her gain access to several important venues, where she gave recitals in theatres such as *La Perla* in Ponce and *El Tapia* in San Juan. But with the rising tide of Cold War intolerance, Dr. José Lanauze Rolón, president of the island's Communist Party, advised her to leave Puerto Rico again. Lanauze recommended that, given the

renewed and expanded government persecution, she use her art and talents to denounce the political situation in Puerto Rico. Obviously, McCarthyite hysteria was hardly a favourable climate for artists, intellectuals, and performers—principally those from colonized populations and who moved in anti-imperialist circles. Such a fate also befell other radical Afro-diasporic artists and activists like Paul Robeson and the Trinidadian Claudia Jones. De la Cruz left Puerto Rico in 1945, briefly travelled the Americas, and lived in Mexico for 16 years. She returned to Puerto Rico in 1976 for four months, after having lived in exile in Cuba since 1962 (Randall 1979, 68-71). The continuing lack of published works about—and by—Dominga de la Cruz confirms the neglect that black and mulatto women have been subjected to within Puerto Rican history and letters (Notable exceptions include: Randall 1979; Jiménez Muñoz 2003; Jiménez de Wagenheim 2016).

Trina Padilla de Sanz

Trina Padilla was the daughter of prominent writer, poet, and physician, José Gualberto Padilla, better known as “El Caribe.” Her father also owned the La Monserrate sugar plantation in Vega Baja. The family had two other houses: one in front of the Plaza de Recreo in Vega Baja and another in Old San Juan on O'Donnell Street, in front of the Plaza Colón. For much of her childhood, Padilla lived in the city of Arecibo in a mansion refurbished by Padilla's parents but formerly owned by the heirs of Don Francisco Ulanga, a prominent and wealthy Spaniard who had been Mayor of Arecibo in 1860. Padilla studied in Ruiz Arnao High School in Arecibo and then in the Royal Conservatory of Madrid (Fernández Sanz 1996, 57-59).

According to her granddaughter and biographer Yolanda Fernández Sanz (1996), at 18 Padilla married Angel Sanz Ambros: a distinguished property owner, “Spaniard of royal spirit,” and “the Queen's Procurador [local barrister and legal representative]” who was responsible for the Customs Office in Arecibo. The 1898 shift from Spanish colonialism to U.S. colonial rule forced Padilla to abandon the Ulanga mansion and move to the Fernandina manor. A widow at the age of 45,

Padilla was left with five children and required to live off her remaining inheritance supplemented by teaching piano lessons. She also became a freelance writer for newspapers and magazines, all of which allowed her to renovate “Casa Fernandina” and take care of her family (Fernández Sanz 1996, 57-61).

Unlike Dominga de la Cruz, Trina Padilla is well represented within Puerto Rico’s historical record and politico-literary memory as a celebrated intellectual, poet and writer (Miller 2016). Known in the world of letters as “La Hija del Caribe,” she published eight books and championed female suffrage as a founding member of two pioneering women’s rights organizations (Fernández Sanz 1996, 51; Azize 1985, 117, 123-124). Padilla’s numerous newspaper articles also reflected her concern for the arts, Catholicism, childhood education, and patriotic values—albeit, from a patrician perspective.

Similar to de la Cruz, Padilla belonged to the *Partido Nacionalista* and was an enthusiastic supporter of Pedro Albizu Campos. However, differences with the *Nacionalista* leadership eventually led her to leave the party. On September 23, 1936, during the celebration of the Grito de Lares, Albizu Campos made a speech announcing that “for every Puerto Rican [killed by the colonial regime], ten Americans would fall” referring to the assassination of two more *Nacionalistas* by the colonial police in February of that same year. Padilla, also a speaker at the rally that day, then declared: “I am and will always be pro-independence but [today] I am going home. I do not believe in violence” (Fernández Sanz 1996, 162). As discussed below, that stance strongly differed from Dominga de la Cruz’s role in forming the *Nacionalista* nurse corps assisting the party’s paramilitary units.

Racial and Social-class Disparities

Dominga de la Cruz’s lived experience was that of domestic needle manufacture and later the tobacco workshops. By 1930 needlework employed most of the labour force in manufacturing owned by U.S.-based commercial clothing outlets and textile businesses. Labourers earned far less than most agricultural workers,

who themselves lived near starvation (Picó 1983, 22-23). Needlework in particular generated even worse deprivation: this was where her two daughters had died of rickets. De la Cruz tells Randall that needlework in Mayagüez was “slave labor” where she and her sister worked “badly nourished.” This municipality then had one of the highest tuberculosis levels in the entire island when TB and anaemia were the most prevalent diseases of those years (Randall 1979, 23). Other serious maladies included high rates of infant mortality (Fernós 1928, 461-467).

But for Trina Padilla, working people were figures that enlivened and adorned the picturesque scenery surrounding her white-Creole, titled home. “Inés, the fisherman,” with his “white pants folded to his knees” would make “his daily morning rounds... dropping off the best of the catch,” that fisherman being “part of the landscape of Arecibo.” The servants of the house and their uniforms were depicted lovingly as “part of the family.” Seated at “the large round table with its white linen tablecloth, Meissen china, and silverware,” Padilla instructed her family in observing “all the rules of courtesy and good etiquette. From those rules, no one escaped, not Juan nor José, who served the table and for which occasion he wore pants, a tie, black shoes, and a very starched white long-sleeved shirt” (Fernández Sanz 1996, 114).

For Dominga de la Cruz, making a living during the 1930s Depression (including waged domestic labour) was neither picturesque, nor sentimental. In labouring-poor homes there was no “Meissen china or silverware,” just as no fisherman paid “his daily morning visit” since fresh fish was not eaten regularly by the likes of her. She describes a very different dietary regimen: “we used to make tea ...from naranjo [orange-tree] leaves, and mixed it with milk to give to the girls. That would fill them up... This was the situation for many women.” It all came down to “Working and finding how to earn more pennies”: “what was done to us was a crime” (Randall 1979, 27-28). De la Cruz disclosed: “I didn’t understand class struggle, but I did understand my misery” (ibid., 25). Her daily life consisted of hitting the streets in search of her day-to-day subsistence.

Fernández Sanz offers another telling reminiscence about how Padilla understood that island's socio-racial demarcations. The granddaughter had a playmate named Ruth who could not attend social events at the Casino de Puerto Rico, the exclusive club for white-Creole elites. When the granddaughter asked why, Padilla responded: "the day will come when you will not only understand, but you will also come to accept it. Ruth cannot attend because she is not white." Padilla then added, "That's simply the way things are, an injustice invented by men" (Fernández Sanz 1996, 131). Needless to say, neither de la Cruz and her siblings, nor for that matter the leader of Padilla's own political party (Albizu Campos) would have been allowed to attend social functions at this social club either.

I have yet to find documentation as to whether de la Cruz crossed paths with Padilla. Nonetheless, their experiences exemplify Elsa Barkley Brown's (1992) observation in the epigraph opening this article. De la Cruz's life was very much the life of "the rest of the help," of "Inés, the fisherman," and of the "man who used to bring us the warm bread for breakfast," and even like the life of "Ruth." The life of de la Cruz was the life of all those labourers who made the lives of people like Padilla (and her granddaughter) possible.

Gender, Racial-national Unity, and Catholic Militancy

The 1930-1938 shift in the composition of the Nacionalista steering committee still retained Pedro Albizu Campos as President. The scarce female representation in the local and intermediate leadership could have been solved by numerous capable women like Padilla herself and the poet Julia de Burgos. Dominga de la Cruz Becerril and Isolina Rondón (secretary and treasurer) were some of the few women occupying party leadership positions during 1937-1938 (Ferrao 1990, 87). The lack of high-ranking women among the *Nacionalistas* merits greater examination because "women" figured so prominently in nationalist narratives.

For Albizu Campos (1974), women were indispensable to national sovereignty and it was necessary that all women unite above social differences. In order “for the Puerto Rican woman to reach this unity, she has to feel viscerally...the sisterhood with other women, regardless of racial differences and without any distinctions in material goals” (ibid., 201). This socio-racial unity was key to Albizu Campos’s nationalist project since for him “the national structure is not an epidermal structure”; rather, “race...follows the transformation of a population pursuing a spiritual ideal” (ibid., 194-95; see also Santiago-Valles 2007). For the *Nacionalista* leader, such a national civilizational renovation required unanimity among all Puerto Rican women: “Where women are divided, the nation will be dismembered...Women bring together the union of a race, the union of a civilization, the union of a people.” According to Albizu Campos, “the engine of Puerto Rican unity has to be the Puerto Rican woman” (Albizu Campos 1974, 200). But, of course, such a cultural transformation would not necessarily imply a shift in other hierarchical relationships and gender imbalances. Elsewhere, I explain how favouring women’s political participation in Puerto Rico hardly meant overhauling conservative social values (Jiménez-Muñoz 1994-95), a fact confirmed by gender relations remaining unaltered once universal female suffrage was achieved on the island in 1935.

Yet *Nacionalista* women did participate in early 1930s party polemics. The party’s leadership asked de la Cruz to oversee the “militant ladies of the party” for the 1933 annual Asamblea Nacional (National Assembly) in the city of Caguas. Party women asked her to write about “the changes women had to undergo” within the *Partido Nacionalista* (Randall 1979, 38). After conferring with them—and with the party’s President—de la Cruz recommended that they not remain something secondary, passive like the Asociación de las Hijas de la Libertad (Daughters of Liberty) established in 1932 originally as the party’s female auxiliary within Puerto Rico’s high schools (Dávila Marichal 2014; Jiménez de Wagenheim 2016, 311). Instead, they could be something more significant like the Enfermeras del Ejército Libertador (Nurses of the Liberation Army), affiliated with the existing paramilitary corps, the Cadetes de la República. These women “were going through drills and everything, but they wanted more, ...to advance as women as such...not to

imitate men but to stand out as women within the Party." The proposal caught on among party women and de la Cruz was charged with giving it concrete form (Randall 1979, 38-40; Dávila Marichal 2014). That was how the political leadership of this black working-class woman first crystallized and was officially recognized by the Nacionalistas.

Randall's book contains a photograph of the *Nacionalista* December 8, 1935 General Assembly, in which de la Cruz is at the Executive Committee table sitting between the Party's two main leaders Pedro Albizu Campos and Juan Antonio Corretjer (ibid., 39). Evidently, the presidium table at the Assembly of Caguas, where de la Cruz sat, was a very different table from "the large round table with its white linen tablecloth" in Padilla's Arecibo mansion. At the *Nacionalista* Assembly in Caguas, which de la Cruz attended with Albizu Campos and Corretjer, she was not "servicing the table," nor wearing the "white-starched" uniform required of the domestic servants at Padilla's house.

However, the Caguas Assembly's presidium table was not excused from contradictions and hierarchy. At that table, de la Cruz was not the one "sitting in front of the entrance," she was not the one "observ[ing] every little movement." True, that privileged position was occupied by another descendant of slaves from a poor Ponce family similar to hers (namely, Albizu Campos). Yet that honoured seat belonged to someone who, unlike de la Cruz, had surpassed a fourth-grade education: Albizu Campos had attended the University of Vermont on a scholarship and would later continue to Harvard (Rosado 2003, 7, 10-11, 13-14, 20-21, 27-31, 36).

By all accounts, de la Cruz had enormous respect for the figure of Albizu Campos: "We loved Don Pedro, no, not like a myth we mentally had concocted, no. But like a father who wanted his children to have dignity, who educated us to achieve that dignity" (Randall 1979, 42-43). The auto-infantilization in this narrative substantiates how the table at the Caguas Assembly—like the *Partido Nacionalista* itself—was not a place where de la Cruz, as a Puerto Rican woman, could feel, in the very words of Albizu Campos, completely "free," "sovereign,"

and “independent.” However, and opposite Padilla’s table, de la Cruz was not there to display good manners. There she could claim a certain degree of political validation and agency, exhibiting the same rights and aspirations no less legitimately than a member of the island’s patrician class.

As was customary among Nacionalistas at the time, de la Cruz refers to Don Pedro as “a father,” “our apostle,” and “the Teacher,” adding: “those of us who followed him [did so] as his disciples” (Randall 1979, 40, 41, 48). Comparable mythic-religious elements and Christic symbology were also significant within the world of Padilla, a devout Catholic. Fernández Sanz’s book contains a photograph of her grandmother leading the 1936 procession of the Virgen Dolorosa (Holy Virgin of Sorrows). Padilla also wrote frequently for the islandwide Catholic weekly, *El Piloto*, dedicated to protecting Vatican doctrine against freemasonry, communism, spiritualism, and especially Protestantism (Ferrao 1990, 281). *El Piloto* likewise condemned the burning of convents during the Spanish Civil War, and blamed communists for spreading free-thinker influences among the island’s population (ibid., 282). For instance, Padilla’s article for the September 5, 1931 issue criticized the “licentiousness” and “bacchanalia” of Puerto Rican youth (ibid., 285). Other Nacionalistas contributed articles to this weekly paper, including Juan Antonio Corretjer, J. M. Toro Nazario, and José Paniagua Serracante (ibid.). However, emerging scholarship has begun re-interpreting these socio-cultural complexities within the Partido Nacionalista and in the writings and political practice of its most prominent leaders during that period (Carrión 1993; Rodríguez Vázquez, 2004; Santiago-Valles 2007).

Some of the same fears over the social changes accompanying modernity, anxieties expressed by well-bred educated women like Padilla, informed the era’s Creole-white elite narratives. Nonetheless, these imagined and real transformations cannot be understood without considering the socio-economic and political shifts actually taking place within Puerto Rico during the interwar decades. The worsening economic situation towards the end of the 1920s and early 1930s not only precipitated an increase in social strife and disorder among the island’s impoverished majorities. A frenzied scramble for bureaucratic posts

and administrative favours ensued on the part of islandwide political leadership and party cadres, leading to a series of new alliances, splits, and coalitions among local political organizations. Above all, it fostered a rash of intense disputes: between and within the various party leaderships; between the latter and their own party bases; between the colonial governor and the colony's legislature; and among the colonial legislature and the U.S. Congress, the Bureau of Island Affairs, and the U.S. President (Clark 1975, 76-105). For these and other reasons, propertied and educated "natives" longed for the restoration of order within a landscape perceived as increasingly slipping from their social and semiotic grasp.

The elite's sense of foreboding over looming socio-economic chaos and political disorder very much explains Padilla's need to cling to old ways of life, particularly if she herself was experiencing the economic consequences of those changes. Fernández Sanz mentions her grandmother oftentimes vehemently expressing the need to preserve her class heritage and condition: "It is necessary, she said, to maintain at all cost the decorum within which one is born" (Fernández Sanz 1996, 61). To generate some revenue, she also rented out two rooms in her home (separated by a hall) to North American school teachers arriving in the island in large numbers. In Arecibo people were aware of Padilla's shrinking inheritance: physicians would not charge honorariums for their services to the family and two bottled-milk factories delivered free milk to her house. At the municipal theatre hall she had a designated balcony and sounding board enabling her to enjoy the performances of Spanish artistic troupes. She was also an honorary member of select clubs like the Casino Puertorriqueño in Arecibo, the Casino Español and many other elite socio-cultural organizations. The property taxes on her residence were waived by an administrative law inaugurated by her good friend and Secretary of the Treasury (1935-1940), Rafael Sancho Bonet (*ibid.*, 66). By comparison, no physician (paid or otherwise) was available to save de la Cruz's children from death at an early age due to rickets. Likewise, and in sharp distinction to Padilla, de la Cruz's access to socio-cultural enrichment had been primarily limited to the literature and political tracts she was paid to read in the tobacco manufacturing shops.

As women, de la Cruz and Padilla were social and racial opposites, who nevertheless shared the same general political ideal and unevenly shared a conservative vision of what it meant to be a woman and to be a Puerto Rican, accepting many of the same gender hierarchies. But, in Puerto Rico during the 1920s and 1930s, their disparate lived experiences meant that the possibilities available to both women were not the same. As recent scholarship demonstrates (Matos-Rodríguez and Delgado 1998; Findlay 1999; Rodríguez-Silva 2012, 213-216), the meaning of women's roles and gender hierarchies in early twentieth-century Puerto Rico varied widely across class lines. The privilege—or imposition—of staying at home for propertied and educated women (like Padilla) was socio-economically impossible for labouring poor women (like de la Cruz) who inevitably had to earn a living outside the household. Similarly, notions of respectability and sexual morality among “native” working-class women at that time ran the gamut from an institutional defense of marriage to a support of free love (Azize 1985; Valle Ferrer 1990).

Of the Anticolonial Flag and Other Patriotic Symbols

The Puerto Rican flag figured prominently in the historical memory shared by de la Cruz but, here again, the racialized nature of the national question merges with the question of social class. She discussed another incident related to the Puerto Rican flag, this time implicating the *Nacionalista* committee of Mayagüez towards the end of 1933 vis-à-vis President Franklin Delano Roosevelt's announced visit to Puerto Rico. On that occasion, the flag became the epicentre of the class struggle within the *Partido Nacionalista* mediated by Albizu Campos. Some of the patrician members of the party wanted to receive President Roosevelt with a flower bouquet, which led Albizu Campos to travel to Mayagüez and dissolve that *Nacionalista* committee. “The ‘bourgeois’ elements that abandoned the committee decided to establish a separate Club... [and] tried to use the Lares flag” of the 1868 uprising against Spanish colonialism. However, “Don Pedro reminded them that the Lares flag harked back to the first revolutionary

movement where Puerto Rico [struggled to] establish itself as a nation, and advised them that if they insisted on using it, the real Nationalists would greet them with gunfire" (Randall 1979, 36).

It is worth remembering that during the first half of the twentieth century and per U.S. colonial decree, it was illegal to publicly display the 1895 Puerto Rican flag. For de la Cruz, the flag evidently was a vital and precious symbol, for which one should be willing to die, if necessary. The most eloquent confirmation of that ideal is de la Cruz's participation in the already mentioned 1937 *Nacionalista* mass demonstration which ended in the Ponce Massacre. This was how de la Cruz described to Randall the events of March 21, 1937: "I saw a person cross [in front of me] fall wounded, and at that moment, I saw the flag on the floor. I took the flag drenched with blood, and continued [forward] with it" (ibid., 52). Carmen Fernández, the wounded person to whom de la Cruz refers, was one of the over 150 protesters and bystanders seriously wounded by a police assault that also killed 19 Nationalistas in the massacre (Ponce Massacre Commission of Inquiry 1937; Pérez Marchand 1972).

Arthur Garfield Hays, general counsel for the American Civil Liberties Union and a lawyer in numerous legendary trials (including those of Sacco and Vanzetti as well as of the Scottsboro Boys), came to Puerto Rico to investigate the 1937 Ponce Massacre at the request of the *Partido Nacionalista*. A formal committee was established composed of the presidents of the local Bar Association, Medical Association, the Ateneo Puertorriqueño, and the directors of the most important daily newspapers on the island, *El Imparcial*, *La Correspondencia*, and *El Mundo*. This commission rendered a final report holding the colonial government responsible for the massacre (Ponce Massacre Commission of Inquiry 1937; Moraza Ortíz 2001).

Dominga de la Cruz testified before the commission, making very clear the nature of her participation in the Ponce events that day (Randall 1979, 56-57). According to de la Cruz, Hays "rose to his feet when I strode by. And he wrote in *El Mundo* newspaper, something like 'one had to see her, young, black, immutable in her

dignity'" (ibid., 57). This racial marking is significant because being black had been detached from anything having to do with dignity given the received discourses of the period, not only in the United States but also in Puerto Rico. For her part, this was how Randall positioned the magnitude of de la Cruz's role in the history of Puerto Rico: "We went in search of the woman behind the historical [1937] moment ...Dominga ...must have had to live years and years accessible to our most intimate pain" (ibid., 12).

But how does this compare with Trina Padilla's status and ranking within the history of Puerto Rico? To what extent and at what level was she too "the woman behind the historical moment" and, in her case, what moments were these? Padilla's relation to those patriotic symbols is very different from that of de la Cruz, albeit by no means any less complex. That different positioning begins with how "respectable" public opinion at the time converted Padilla herself into a patriotic representation: la patria transubstantiated in the flesh and blood of a woman, a living symbol of Puerto Rican nationhood. Journalist Luis Villaronga (1947) confirms this iconography: "La Hija del Caribe! [i.e., both 'The Daughter of the-poet-known-as-'El Caribe' and 'The Daughter of the Caribbean Region'] It's as if we said the soul of Puerto Rico! Our Fatherland's Muse," to which he added: a "loving muse, devotee of our Borinquen [i.e., Puerto Rican] homeland ...mindful of the traditional, moral, and intellectual values of our land" (ibid., 2).

In her case too we have emblematic encounters with the Puerto Rican flag, revealing much about Padilla's own attitude towards that national (anticolonial) banner. According to her granddaughter, Padilla "was the first Puerto Rican woman, who dared to...fly the Puerto Rican flag from the balcony of her house, the [flag] with the lone star." Padilla knew full well that "this was against the law, but Grandma ignored that ban, and no one ever dared take down the flag." According to her, "Those in charge of enforcing the law looked the other way while the flag continued waiving at the house of that brave woman" (Fernández Sanz 1996, 158). Notwithstanding the indisputable bravery of having an elite "native" woman defy colonial law so brazenly, it is highly doubtful the local authorities and police would have been so tolerant if the banned flag had been

flying from a much more modest house, for instance, that of a black needle-manufacture worker and reader at cigar factories.

Fernández Sanz subsequently narrates an incident coinciding with the visit of the celebrated Chilean poet, Gabriela Mistral, to Padilla's house in 1932. That month, two rival political rallies were scheduled to take place, one called by the pro-U.S. and bureaucratized Partido Socialista and the other by the moderate and pro-independence Partido Liberal (successor to the old Unionistas) led by Antonio R. Barceló (Silvestrini 1979; Baldrich 1981; Fernández Sanz 1996, 158). As the Socialista demonstration filed in front of the Padilla manor, the marchers "began insulting the two women, and attempted to rip off the Puerto Rican flag while Grandma and Doña Gabriela struggled, holding on to the flag." "Days afterwards...the Liberales carried out their own rally and both women stood at the same balcony, next to the Puerto Rican flag. But this time, the participants enthusiastically applauded and ceremoniously hailed [Padilla and Mistral, saluting them by] raising their hats" (Fernández Sanz 1996, 158). Note that, with all probability, part of what was playing out in that first confrontation in front of Padilla's mansion was fieldhands settling old scores with the daughter of the owner of the La Monserrate sugarcane plantation in Vega Baja. After all, the Socialistas were part of the island's labour movement and its trade-union federation, the Federación Libre de Trabajadores, had organized many of the sugarcane workers throughout the island, including in Arecibo where Padilla lived (Silvestrini 1979).

Alternatively, what is more germane is the obvious similarity between de la Cruz and Padilla regarding their willingness to physically and publicly expose themselves to some degree of bodily harm in defense of the illegal national flag. However, and once again, a significant contrast remains when it comes to the risks involved in each case. On the one hand, there was the threat of the rowdy unarmed participants (the Socialista demonstrators) even as "those in charge of enforcing the laws" "look[ed] the other way." On the other hand, there was the unarmed de la Cruz, dodging bullets fired by those same agents "in charge of enforcing the laws."

Conjuring a People and a National Community

More broadly, de la Cruz and Padilla epitomized two conflicting approaches within 1930s discussions about the national question and Puerto Rican identity. De la Cruz has been represented as the one who knows “our most intimate pain” (Randall 1979, 12) and the one who protected the freedom of her people with her body and life, while the image of Padilla is more of one who protected “the traditional, moral, intellectual values of our land” (Villaronga 1947, 12) with her pen. Indeed, they both were active members of a political party sworn to the emancipation of a people and a land from U.S. colonialism and to achieving recognition for the Puerto Rican nation. But, what kind of “people,” what sort of “nation”/ “[national] family” or what manner of “land” is being evoked in each case? For de la Cruz, the lived meanings of “people” or “nation” ultimately seemed to refer to the island’s working people, to the plight of labouring poor Puerto Ricans. Yet what did that mean for Padilla?

In her case, the “people” or the “nation”/ “[national] family” were more likely to be identified with the rarified abstractions fashioned by Creole-white patricians and the “native” elite intelligentsia, an appraisal easily confirmed given her ample literary corpus. The poems and dedications in Padilla’s *De mi collar* (1926) signal a discernible national camaraderie and distinguished cultural fellowship. This book’s introduction was written by the well-known Spanish poet and novelist, Concha Espina, and the collection contains poems dedicated to propertied and highly cultured Puerto Rican figures such as: the poet, political leader, and patriarch Luis Muñoz Rivera; the poet, corporate lawyer, orator, and politician José de Diego; the physician and abolitionist Ramón Emeterio Betances; and the poet, educator, and politician Virgilio Dávila. She also dedicated poems to some other of her illustrious friends, including: Concha Espina; the soprano and educator Amalia Paoli; and the philanthropist, educator, and suffragist Isabel Andreu de Aguilar. The poems are divided thematically and each topic is given the name of specific precious stones: amethysts, pearls, diamonds, sapphires, rubies, emeralds, and diamonds. Here Padilla is quite clear about who she wants to be associated with—Puerto Ricans and Latin Americans—in the world of letters.

La patria (the fatherland/ motherland) appears in the fourth section of the book, under the topic "Rubies." In her poem, "Labor, Omnia Vincit," ["Hard Work Conquers All"], Padilla (1926, 106) describes the "nation"/ "[national] family" in the following manner: "I want to see you free and strong and powerful/ shining with your star at a radiant height/ under the pale blue sky where your ideal resides." Padilla reclaims only two canonical and kin identities later famously upheld by Antonio S. Pedreira ([1934] 1971), Clara Lair (1937) and other members of the *Generación del Treinta* (The 1930s Generation). Within this uncanny lyrical universe, the ghostly presence of extinct indigenous ancestors textually resurfaces as a component only to be superseded by the defense of the Spanish lineage of the Americas and where the African-descended element is conspicuously absent. Within the received Creole-white elite tradition, only the first two iconic kinfolk were understood to be the foundations of Puerto Rican national identity/"family" (Flores 1979; Rodríguez Castro 1987-1988; Roy-Féquièrre 2004).

In juxtaposition to the wealth of writings by and about Padilla apropos her discursive politics of location, the mismatch with de la Cruz once again could not be more stark. For one thing, the already mentioned scarcity of material written by de la Cruz (and about her) makes it more difficult to demonstrate how she viewed identity affiliations vis-à-vis the national question between the two world wars. One way of illustrating her textual sympathies and politico-cultural kinships is via the large number of "negro-themed" poems and labouring-poor invocations she staged in public—notably, not her own verses since, as far as is known, she herself wrote no poetry. A typical example of this ethno-literary and political proclivity is the programme from her performance "Farewell Recital" in San Juan's Teatro Tapia on April 5, 1945. Here the abundant Afro-diasporic subject matter and working-class topics give us a glimpse of the company she was likely to keep: Luis Lloréns Torres ("Copa de Noche de Reyes", "La Radio"), Teófilo Badillo ("La Canción del Gigue"), Pedro Juan Labarthe ("Me he ido de Gitaneria esta Noche"), Nicolás Guillén ("Sabás", "Balada de Simón Caraballo"), Julia de Burgos ("Ay, ay, ay, de la Grifa Negra"), Oña Casadoras ("María Reglas"), Luis Palés Matos ("Lamento", "Pueblo Negro"), Emilio Ballagas ("Comparsa Habanera",

“Elegia de María Belén Chacón”), Matilde Rodríguez (“El Pregón del frutero”), and José Zacarías Tallet (“La Rumba”) (Randall 1979, 69).

Consider the contradictory and emblematic case of renowned Creole-white poet, Luis Palés Matos (1898-1959), who published in 1926 in the newspaper *La Democracia*, what was said to be one of the first Afro-Antillian poems, “Pueblo Negro,” and who in 1937 published his similarly themed book of poems *Tuntún de pasa y grifería*. How does de la Cruz encounter the poetry of Palés? According to de la Cruz, the 1937 Ponce Massacre greatly affected her, causing her to become extremely nervous and emotionally distressed. A psychologist recommended she retire from her more politically active life, whereupon she started collaborating with the Mayagüez radio station, WPRA, reciting poems on the air (Randall 1979, 61-62). She mentions that after reciting lyrical poems on the radio “they would play... pretty, melodious music; ...then [a year later], ...they sent me to learn the Negroide poetry of Palés Matos—who is the most outstanding poet of all things black in Puerto Rico—for which, they would put on music fitting that type of poetry” (Randall 1979, 64-65). Note that on one hand, there is “pretty, melodious music,” and on the other hand, there is another type of music, one “fitting that type of poetry,” the “Negroide poetry.” Also note that if she was not familiar with Palés’ poems, it might have been partly because they did not necessarily respond to her reality, specifically, the reality of the poor, working population. Palés’ poems mainly depicted blackness as something mythological and exotic (Branche 1999; Williams 2000, 53-56; Roy-Féquièrre 2004). In this sense, how could Palés’ version of “blackness” have been relevant or familiar to some one like her?

Dominga de la Cruz was not the first recital performer of African descent to narrate Palés’ poetry in Puerto Rico. That performance canon was established by Cuban-born Eusebia Cosme during her recitals of 1934-1938 in Puerto Rico (López-Baralt 1997, 133, 137-145). In fact, the photographs of those performances from the late 1930s reflect the similarity between how Cosme dressed and the wardrobe donned by de la Cruz as a public performer of the Negroide poetry. In an article by poet and writer Carmelina Vizcarrondo, the author comments on

one of those performances in a clever but contradictory manner: “Eusebia also knows how to make herself ours, and that is by reciting the verses of Luis Palés Matos” (1936, 2). Then she adds, “Now is when we can appreciate the exact worth of our poet. Palés, the poet who playfully made-up his own black world, the poet who...has not had the opportunity of capturing from black life itself the most sincere impressions, who has never left our beaches, and that, nonetheless, has accomplished the very dignified conception of ‘Danza Negra’” (ibid.).

I am not going to dwell on the otherwise arguable assumption that Palés whimsically invented “a black world” of “his own,” wishing “to capture...black life” despite his limitations in doing so because he was not black and because he “had never left” Puerto Rico in order to get to know first-hand those “most sincere [black] impressions.” What Vizcarrondo is clearly implying is that “black life,” that “black world” (and those black people), are so removed and extraneous to Puerto Rico that they need to be “made up” or found outside “our beaches.” According to Vizcarrondo the Puerto Rican proximity of a Cuban-born, international performer and actress Eusebia Cosme is possible due to her ability to recite Palés’ poetry. In other words, what “makes her ours” is based on how well she interprets something that could only come from Palés’s fertile imagination precisely because that something was not “ours” (i.e., Puerto Rican). One wonders if in the corresponding recitals of de la Cruz, just like those of Cosme, there was no other way of also “making herself more ours”—namely, more part of the national Puerto Rican and Antillean identity—than “reciting the verses of Luis Palés Matos.”

It is particularly telling the extent to which the fanciful representation and exoticization of black female bodies was widely accepted in these circles. In the introduction of that same article, Vizcarrondo characterizes Cosme’s eyes as “raw molasses” and her body as having “rhythm” and an “amusing walk” (1936, 2). From this description we can infer the position de la Cruz had to negotiate when she also performed these negroide poems: not only the partial deracination and objectification of herself and her poems but also the comparisons to the

performances of Cosme. The literary critic Nilita Vientós Gastón (1936, 2) described Cosme as the originator of this kind of performance.

Such uses of the Palesiano verse are particularly significant in view that de la Cruz did not have the reputation, nor the artistic authority, of Palés. Deploying these poems by Palés could have been an indirect way of legitimizing a tradition and a socio-cultural lineage similar to the same destitute workers that the Creole-white patricians “discarded on the ground.” It was perhaps a vehicle—an occasion—to communicate the Black-Puerto Rican experience: a counter-maneuver to overstep the racism and sexism of Palés’ famous verses. She might have been utilizing Palés as a bridge for other generations and kin traditions with which she identified, but who obviously did not share Palés’ personal or poetic identity/“family,” nor that of his generation.

Hence, using Palés in this manner could have been part of an auto-ethnographic moment, insofar as reciting Palés (similar to Ballagas and doing it while dressed as Cosme had done) “involve[d] partial collaboration with and appropriation of the idioms of the conqueror” (Pratt 1992, 7). In this case, it was about the cultural canons of those Spanish descendants who personified most of the Antillean politico-literary leadership. Yet, as a counterpoint to Palés with Guillén and together with the poem “Ay, ay, de la Grifa Negra” by Julia de Burgos, could we not say that de la Cruz also was making evident the traces of transculturation found in Palés and members of his generation? Paraphrasing Mary Louise Pratt’s reworking of Fernando Ortíz’ signature concept, we should ask ourselves: To what extent was Palés “transporting to [Creole-white elites in Puerto Rico] knowledges [Afro-Puerto Rican/Afro-Antillean] in origin; producing European [and Euro-Caribbean] knowledges infiltrated by non-European ones?” A maneuver whereby Afro-Puerto Rican/Afro-Antillean organic intellectuals and performers later “would re-import that knowledge as [multi-racial, democratic-national] knowledge whose authority would legitimate [the greater participation of Afro-Puerto Ricans/Afro-Antilleans within new, more inclusive forms of political and cultural] rule” (Pratt 1992, 132, 137) .

Conclusion

The lives of Dominga de la Cruz and Trina Padilla highlight the racial and structural inequalities within and across the socio-political body of Puerto Rico and the related political movements against U.S. colonialism. In the end, it remains an open question whether the nationalist struggles of the interwar years were able to transcend the actual practice of taking for granted the alleged moral superiority of Creole-white elite women in relation to the perceived shortcomings of working-class Puerto Rican women of colour.

Although unspoken, and despite all aspirations to the contrary, there is still the strangely familiar allusion that there might actually be more than one [Puerto Rican] nation: the one imagined by de la Cruz, the one desired by Padilla, and certainly, the one envisioned by Albizu Campos. All this suggests the need to rethink the famous phrase from the Partido Unión and the 1920s Alianza of “la gran familia puertorriqueña” (the Great Puerto Rican Family) (Quintero Rivera 1986; Llorens 2016). Instead, it would appear there was a great subaltern, mixed-race, national family versus a great, white/near-white, property-owner national family. Although the New Puerto Rican Historiography already has begun researching and critiquing this slogan (Torres 1998), that does not mean the political discourse on “the [national] family” and the “family”/community does not merit further inquiry and much more indepth scrutiny. The comparative life histories of these two women seem to suggest as much.

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¹ All translations from Spanish texts are mine unless otherwise specified.