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# Representations of Slavery and Afro-Peruvians in Flora Tristán's Travel Narrative, *Peregrinations of a Pariah*

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From 1833–1834, Frenchwoman Flora Tristán made a year-long journey to Peru and later published the narrative of her experiences with the title, *Peregrinations of a Pariah 1833–1834* [*Les Pérégrinations d'une paria 1833–1834*; 1838]. This text is of interest to scholars for a variety of reasons: it was authored by a woman who took a long journey by herself at a time when proper European women did not travel alone; it offers an interpretation of Peruvian society just a few years after independence was achieved from Spain; and the publication of the book marked Tristán's entry into public life and her transformation into a social activist. As a work of literature, the book is most often explored in an effort to better understand the nature and functions of travel writing. In her influential study of such narratives, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*, Mary Louise Pratt analyzes Tristán's text as part of her inquiry into the ways in which travel writing "produces" the rest of the world for European readers and how these texts participate in European expansionism. Others have sought to define the genre in which to place the text: is it an autobiography? A *bildungsroman*? A novel? These critical studies all tend to examine *Peregrinations of a Pariah* as a carefully constructed discourse revealing the biases inherent in the nineteenth-century, European gaze rather than as an accurate representation of the people and places that Tristán encountered. However, historians of Peru often rely on Tristán's text to document their analyses of life in that South American nation in the 1830s. This suggests that, across disciplines, we have yet to come to an agreement as to the value and reliability of Tristán's travel narrative as a way not only of understanding European cultural ideology in the nineteenth century, but also as a source of valuable information about Peruvian conceptions of identity during the period of transition from colonial status to independence. In this essay, I would like to examine an aspect of Tristán's text that has not received sufficient critical attention, which is her treatment of slavery and her descriptions of Afro-Peruvians in Arequipa. I will devote particular attention to her representation of the participation of people of African descent in a religious procession, for it helps to illustrate the ways in which Tristán's narration provides us with important information despite the prejudices and even the failures

of comprehension evident in the text. While Tristán's depictions of institutions and daily practices in Arequipa and Lima clearly expose her racial and cultural biases, she nonetheless reveals the central role of Afro-Peruvians in public and private life and helps demonstrate the tensions of a multiethnic society making the transition from colony to independent country. Thus, a new reading of Tristán's representations of slavery and of Afro-Peruvians helps us to understand the extent to which we can rely on travel narratives to provide us with historical information.<sup>1</sup>

The facts of Tristán's life are becoming much more widely known as she is a subject of interest to scholars from a variety of backgrounds.<sup>2</sup> Nonetheless, a few details of her biography and motivations for traveling and writing are worth mentioning here. Born in France in 1804, Tristán was the daughter of an aristocratic Peruvian, Mariano Tristán y Moscoso, and Frenchwoman Anne-Pierre Laisnay. Her parents' marriage was not considered legitimate under French law because only a religious ceremony rather than a civil one was performed. When Mariano Tristán died intestate, leaving behind his wife and two young children, his property in France was confiscated by the government because of his position in the Spanish army. This was merely the beginning of Flora Tristán's difficulties. After a poverty-stricken childhood, Tristán was forced to marry an abusive man who eventually shot and nearly killed her.<sup>3</sup> In the 1830s, separated and in hiding from her husband, Tristán decided to travel to Peru to claim an inheritance from her wealthy father's family. Afterwards, Tristán herself considered her trip a failure because she was only able to secure a small pension from her uncle and not the portion of the family wealth she felt she deserved as Mariano's daughter. Still struggling financially upon returning to France in 1834, she turned the diary that she kept of her trip into a book that sold quite well and established her literary reputation in France. At the time of publication, Tristán was becoming engaged with the workers' struggle and authored several other influential texts, including a novel, *Mephis the Proletarian* [*Méphis*, 1838], and social commentaries, *Promenade in London* [*Promenades dans Londres*, 1840] and *Workers Union* [*Union ouvrière*, 1843], which is her most famous text. Shortly after the publication of *Peregrinations*, Tristán fully embraced her role as an activist working on behalf of France's working class, and she died in 1844 while touring her country to rally workers to unite and liberate themselves.

As happened with so many female writers and intellectuals of the nineteenth century, Tristán and her work fell into oblivion shortly after her death. However, new trends in literary criticism, influenced by twentieth-century feminism and changing definitions of the "literary," brought renewed interest in study of *Peregrinations*. Mary Louise Pratt's *Imperial Eyes* sparked considerable critical interest in travel narratives and provided a model for approaching such texts that seems to still hold sway for

literary theorists. As Pratt frames it, her method of study attempts to respond to a number of critical questions:

How has travel and exploration writing *produced* “the rest of the world” for European readerships at particular points in Europe’s expansionist trajectory? How has it produced Europe’s differentiated conceptions of itself in relation to something it became possible to call “the rest of the world”? How do such signifying practices encode and legitimate the aspirations of economic expansion and empire? How do they betray them? (5).

Pratt poses complex questions about the role of travel writing by Europeans in defining European identity and the ways in which non-European people and localities participated in such processes.

Acknowledging that not all travel writers are alike, Pratt explores the question of whether the author’s gender is a factor in the production of travel literature and concludes that it is. Female travelers in the nineteenth century often had different reasons for traveling and writing than did their male counterparts, and their gender circumscribed the activities in which they could participate while traveling and the topics that they could address in their written works. Distinguishing them from the male members of the “capitalist vanguard” pouring into South America from Europe in the wake of independence, Pratt borrows the term “social exploratress” to describe Flora Tristán’s role as a “reinventor of América” (160). Unlike the male experts of the capitalist vanguard, these female writers find their identity abroad in “their sense of personal independence, property, and social authority” (159). A narrative such as Tristán’s is structured around the home, which is posited as the center of political and social life, and excursions made to and from the residence. Tristán closely resembles a nineteenth-century bourgeois, female social reformer as she visits and critiques the various institutions in Arequipa and Lima.

Pratt’s primary interest in Tristán is the construction of her text and of her identity through discourse. The Peru of Tristán’s text, as Pratt describes it, is one created for a potential French readership. For example, Pratt describes Tristán’s relation of her encounter with Pancha Gamarra near the conclusion of the text this way: Tristán “constructs her moment of departure as a political allegory and personal prophecy” (170). Use of the terms “allegory” and “prophecy” suggests that Tristán’s text is much more wishful thinking than it is fact. Finally, Pratt concludes, Tristán’s work is an early example of a growing body of female-authored travel literature “emerging to create specifically female relationships to North European expansionism, a female domestic subject of empire, and forms of female imperial authority in the contact zone” (170). In sum, Pratt’s study focuses on the creation of a place and of a self based on differentiation between the subject and object of the text. While it is particularly effective in revealing the ways in which Tristán’s

discourse is constructed and the ideologies upon which it is based, this methodology leaves one wondering whether the text can only be studied as if it were a fictional text revealing nothing more than information about the author and her worldview.

A number of additional critics of *Peregrinations* as a travel narrative tend to reach conclusions similar to Pratt's and to apply literary categories associated with the study of narrative fiction to the text in their analyses.<sup>4</sup> For example, Mary Rice-DeFosse examines the structure of Tristán's text as a narrative and finds it to be not a fixed message system but a polyvalent, unstable, and ultimately subversive one that combines a multitude of narrative genres, including "travel narrative, autobiography, *Bildungsroman*, and manifesto" (51). Also questioning the message system in *Peregrinations*, Anne E. McCall argues that, despite her claims to authority as a witness, Tristán's biases, particularly her rejection of any similarity between herself and Madame Watrin of La Praya, make her suspect as a reporter: "The La Praya episode demonstrates the unreliable nature of experience as a strategy for knowing, and Tristán shows herself to be a suspicious informant thousands of miles before she ever reaches Peru" (96). Ana Peluffo stresses Tristán's claim to a special position for herself as a European in Spanish America. Tristán's representation of Peru is based on "othering," a form of fictionalizing those who are different from oneself: "[S]e intenta construir un paisaje anti-moderno fundado en el exotismo de la otredad" (371). Peluffo concludes that the world Tristán creates is ultimately a false one: it is "[L]a invención de una contra-cultura americana que no es ni mimética ni referencial" (385). Like Pratt, these scholars conclude that Tristán's narrative creates a "New World" against which a European readership may define itself.

Contemporary critics of Tristán's text ascribe the author's worldview, and therefore her difficulties in representing Peruvian realities, to her French origins. Tristán herself acknowledges this in her book. When describing her arrival at the port at La Praya, Tristán comments, "I must admit that in 1833 I was still very narrow-minded: I thought only of my country. [ . . . ] I judged the opinions and customs of other countries by the standards of my own" (12).<sup>5</sup> However, some critics have noted fluctuations in Tristán's categorization of her nationality, reflecting the fact that the author manipulates her dual heritage as the daughter of a French woman and a Peruvian man according to her needs. While the writer's claims to authority and cultural superiority rest upon her identity as a French woman, the trip to Peru is rationalized by her claims to being a member of a prominent Peruvian family.<sup>6</sup> Although contemporary criticism generally treats Tristán as being French, she has been embraced in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries by Peruvian activists, feminists, and intellectuals.<sup>7</sup> Magda Portal, a prominent socialist in Peru, wrote a biography of Tristán and claimed a position for her as an early socialist.

El Centro de la Mujer Peruana Flora Tristán is currently an influential feminist institution in Lima, Peru (Pratt 157).<sup>8</sup> Pondering the geography of writing about identity, Julio Ramos claims Tristán's book as belonging to Peruvian national literature after having undergone a "lento proceso de incorporación al corpus nacional que no llega a aceptarla hasta mediados de este siglo," when Emilia Romero's Spanish translation was published (19).<sup>9</sup> However marginal the book's position may be in Latin American literature, for Ramos it belongs among other such works because it is about heritage and the construction and defense of certain legacies (20). Her trip to Peru is a "regreso al país natal" (19). Tristán's book was burned in Peru in the nineteenth century because of its sharp criticisms, but more recent Peruvian intellectuals are validating some of Tristán's claims of belonging to the country and are accepting her work as part of the ongoing dialogue regarding Peruvian and Spanish American identities.

While literary critics analyze Tristán's work much in the way that they would a fictional text, historians rely on *Peregrinations of a Pariah* in their studies of nineteenth-century Peru as a source. I cannot pretend to be an expert in historical methodology, but I am struck by the contrast between conclusions drawn in literary critical studies of Tristán's text and the treatment the same work receives in historical studies.<sup>10</sup> For example, Juan Manuel Ugarte Elespuru, author of *Lima y lo limeño*,<sup>11</sup> speaks quite favorably of Tristán in his discussion of her commentary on Lima: for this historian, Tristán "[t]uvo una sensibilidad fina y cultivada" (12). He describes her book as "un retrato bastante acertado del ambiente, y [. . .] muy úti[l] como cuadro general del trasfondo social de aquel tiempo" (13). He agrees with some of Tristán's findings but corrects her commentary where he feels necessary. He does propose that her observations must ultimately be taken "con alguna reserva" because of her biases and disappointments (18). However, Ugarte Elespuru nonetheless dedicates six pages of his history of Lima to Tristán's *Peregrinations*.

More recent historical texts also cite Tristán. Christine Hunefeldt's *A Brief History of Peru* contains a lengthy quote from Tristán's description of the *rabonas*, the unruly mob of indigenous women that accompanied the army (100). Sarah C. Chambers makes multiple references to Tristán in her history of the transition period in Arequipa as Peru became an independent country. In fact, Chambers begins her study with a quote in which Tristán describes her arrival at the "White City" of Arequipa (1).<sup>12</sup> Chambers comments variously on the French writer's "cruel wit" (41), "acid" observations (117), "lively descriptions" (128), and "cynicism" (205), reminding us that Tristán's text is very much shaped by her world view as a French woman. Nonetheless, Tristán appears in this study as an important source regarding not only daily life and social practices in nineteenth-century Arequipa but also institutions and political events.<sup>13</sup> The only time that Chambers points out a notable

discrepancy between Tristán's information and facts recorded elsewhere is when she points out that, while the 1792 census of Arequipa describes only 9% of the city's population as being of African descent, Tristán described that figure as being 25% (79).<sup>14</sup> Finally, Tristán also appears as a source in Peter Blanchard's *Slavery and Abolition in Early Republican Peru*. Blanchard relies on Tristán's text to document the number of slaves held on the Lavalle estate (25), the occurrence of infanticide among slaves (82), and the rebellious attitude displayed by slaves during a civil war (98). Neither Hunefeldt's nor Blanchard's book appears to comment upon Tristán's prejudices or authority as an informant.

Bearing in mind the debate over the capacity of travel narratives to describe people and places with any veracity, it is helpful to turn now to what it is that Tristán actually writes. Although one normally considers the populations of Peru and Arequipa in particular to be largely indigenous and *mestizo*, Tristán's text is marked by frequent references to people of African descent in positions of servitude.<sup>15</sup> Both her entrance into and exit from the "contact zone" are characterized by close encounters with the slave trade and with large-scale plantation slavery.<sup>16</sup> The first port of call for the *Mexicain*, the ship that carries Tristán to Peru, is La Praya in Cabo Verde, a Portuguese slave-trading colony off the coast of Senegal. Near the conclusion of *Peregrinations*, one of Tristán's final excursions before leaving Peru is to the Lavalle sugar plantation. Tristán's entire text is peppered throughout with references to people of African descent. Throughout her stay at her uncle's home, Tristán is served by a *zamba* slave, to whom she frequently refers as "my negress." While literary studies of her text often make references to Tristán's sense of racial hierarchy and the appearance of slaves and free people of color in her narrative, it is not usually the main focus of the analysis. However, because the text not only begins and ends with disturbing encounters with slavery but also describes the constant presence of Afro-Peruvians, whether enslaved or free, in daily life in Arequipa, more needs to be said on this topic. While critics normally propose that Tristán is establishing her own identity as a European woman in her text, I argue that she is also providing us with important information about nineteenth-century ethnic identities within Peru, both *criollo* and Afro-Peruvian. One difficulty presented by Tristán's text is the fact that she does not always make explicit whether she is speaking of free or enslaved persons when discussing Afro-Peruvians;<sup>17</sup> I have tried to make clarifications wherever possible. In spite of the racist remarks and ambiguities that are prominent in Tristán's reporting, her narrative confirms the central role that Afro-Peruvians played in daily life in nineteenth-century Arequipa, in public and in private.

The more frequently examined encounters with slavery in *Peregrinations of a Pariah* are those that begin and end her journey into the "contact zone." Her short

stay at the slave-trading port of La Praya exemplifies the contradictory attitudes that Tristán displays when observing those of another ethnicity and proclaiming empathy for the victims of slavery. Tristán's racism becomes clear immediately, as she describes the first people to approach the *Mexicain* after it has anchored at La Praya: "[A] small boat came towards us, rowed by four half-naked negroes. Sitting proudly in the stern clutching the tiller was a little man with enormous side-whiskers whose copper-coloured skin and fuzzy hair showed that he was not of Caucasian origin. His costume was quite grotesque" (11).<sup>18</sup> Because of her desire to observe and record all in her journal, Tristán decides to explore a bit in La Praya in the company of the officers from the ship. She is taken to visit one of the wealthiest people on the island, Madame Watrin, a woman of mixed racial heritage and most likely the widow of a slave trader (McCall 91).<sup>19</sup> From the beginning of her description of this visit, Tristán is critical of Mme Watrin and what she perceives to be the woman's pretensions to be French: "[W]e went to visit a lady who claimed to be almost French, as she had been married to a Frenchman" (16). Tristán also describes Mme Watrin's appearance: "She was in her fifties, tall and very fat, with a skin the colour of strong coffee, slightly frizzy hair, and fairly regular features" (16). Despite the presence of French artifacts, Tristán dislikes the "odd" and "gloomy" drawing-room (16) and mocks her hostess's brightly colored clothing when she writes, "Perhaps our Parisian ladies would like to know how the ladies of Praia dress for special occasions. Madame Watrin's costume was in glaring contrast with the rest of her person" (17). At the conclusion of the visit, Tristán declines Mme Watrin's invitation to stay at her house while in La Praya: "I was grateful for this courtesy, but I must confess that I was not tempted to accept it, for however much you long for the sight of land when you are at sea, it soon loses its charm when you find yourself among people so far removed from the sort of society to which you are accustomed" (17). After relating the uncomfortable visit to Mme Watrin, Tristán makes the most shocking of her racist statements. Describing her walk through La Praya, she writes, "[I]t was then that we first became aware of the characteristic negro smell: there is nothing quite like it, it follows you everywhere you go. [. . . W]e had to quicken our pace to escape from the *effluvium Africanum*" (17–18). Tristán finds La Praya so unpleasant that she chooses to stay on board the *Mexicain* until it is time to bid farewell to those she has met.

In her discussion of people of African descent in La Praya and the practice of slavery, Tristán is in line with many of the white abolitionists and antislavery advocates of her time. Writing on Brazilian antislavery literature, David Habery remarks that these works tend to be as much "anti-slave" as they are "anti-slavery" (30). Much the same can be said of other critiques of slavery from the nineteenth century. To name only two examples, Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda's *Sab* (Cuba,

1841) and Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (United States, 1852) are both open to the same charge. During and after the encounter with people of African descent at La Praya, even though she is guilty of the same racism that justified the practice of slavery, Tristán deploras the institution itself. While still in La Praya, Tristán is introduced to Monsieur Tappe, a former Jesuit who became a slave trader. She finds the man so abominable that she calls him "a cannibal in sheep's clothing" (26); someone so unpleasant surely "is no Frenchman" (26).<sup>20</sup> M. Tappe's comments on the cruelty necessary in the practice of slavery are followed by a live demonstration of such violence at the home of the US consul, who is also a slave-owner. Tristán takes note of the irony of such behavior in the representative of a country that espouses freedom and equality as founding principles:

At the consul's I was able to witness one of those scenes of cruelty so common wherever slavery, that monstrous outrage against humanity, persists. This young consul, the representative of a republic; this elegant American, so courtly towards me, [. . .] was from that moment no more than a barbarous master in my eyes. We found him below stairs, savagely beating a big negro lying at his feet. (29)<sup>21</sup>

For Tristán, the pitiful and offensive appearance of the blacks of La Praya is the result of their oppression:

I closely examined every negro I saw: the men looked surly and the women stupid. As for the children, they were horribly ugly, quite naked, thin and sickly. [. . .] As we passed the town hall we saw soldiers beating negroes by order of the slave-owners, and this cruel practice only increased the depression which the scene at the consulate had caused me. (30)

At the time of Tristán's voyage to Peru, the abolitionist movement in the United States was in something of an upswing, although it was not as large and influential as it came to be in the years leading up to the Civil War. The British antislavery movement, however, was quite strong at the time. Having outlawed the slave trade for its citizens in 1807, Great Britain also attempted to suppress the international slave trade in efforts to put an end to slavery itself. Although slavery was practiced in France's Caribbean colonies, abolitionism in France was a relatively small and disorganized movement compared to those of the United States and Great Britain.<sup>22</sup> The French first experimented with abolition shortly after the Revolution of 1789; colonial slavery was officially ended in 1794 after slave rebellions in Saint Domingue. In 1802, however, Napoleon Bonaparte reestablished colonial slavery and the Atlantic slave trade in addition to suppressing the antislavery movement within France. The French soon lost control of Haiti (1804), but slavery continued in its other Caribbean colonies. French abolitionists were slowly able to regroup

during the July Monarchy of King Louis Philippe, who took power in France beginning in 1830. Unlike the movement in the United States and Great Britain, French abolitionist leaders were not interested in building up a large, public opposition to slavery, nor were they particularly united in their efforts to sway the government. Indeed, as Lawrence C. Jennings explains, these elite members of the government feared mass political movements because they did not want to repeat the mass “Terror” that followed the French Revolution. Jennings characterizes the French abolitionists as believing that blacks were not inferior but that they were not prepared for freedom;<sup>23</sup> they advocated gradual emancipation rather than immediate abolition. Finally, they tended to be sympathetic to colonial planters’ fears of economic disaster if slavery were abolished. Similar to the French abolitionists in the 1830s, Tristán argues for gradual emancipation. Her discussion of slaves themselves indicates a belief in the superiority of white Europeans but also argues that the institution of slavery is inhumane and degrades its victims. As Martin Scurrah describes, Tristán is sympathetic to the victims of oppression, but she speaks of them not as an equal but as from a privileged position (32–33).

In contrast to the outrage she expresses at the practice of slavery in La Praya and later at the Lavalle sugar plantation, the tone of Tristán’s discussion of slavery is quite different when she describes her life with her relatives in Arequipa, Peru, after she has fully entered the “contact zone.” Her description of daily life suggests that little changed for either the upper or the serving classes with the arrival of independence; slaves continued to be essential to the maintenance of the upper-class lifestyle. Tristán appears to settle into life among privileged *criollos* rather easily and casually mentions Afro-Peruvian slaves and servants in nearly every episode that takes place in Arequipa. Wherever Tristán goes in the “White City,” she is accompanied by the “negress” assigned to her.<sup>24</sup> To mention but one example, whenever Tristán and her cousin, Carmen, wish to visit a mill, they ride on the backs of their slaves to cross the river (175). Even the wealthier nuns of Arequipa keep slaves. Despite the vow of poverty taken at the convent of Santa Rosa, Tristán reports, “According to the rule, none of them is allowed more than one maid to serve her; however, several have three or four slaves living in the convent, and each nun has in addition a slave outside to run errands, buy her anything she wants, and keep her in touch with her family and the outside world” (190–91). She again describes seeing slaves at the convent of Santa Catalina: “I saw some [nuns’s cells] with courtyards big enough for keeping poultry: this was where the kitchen and the slaves’ quarters were situated” (197). When recounting the story of her cousin Dominga’s escape from the Santa Rosa convent, she explains that the daring plan was only possible with help from the slave that Dominga kept outside of the convent.<sup>25</sup>

During the description of her long stay in Arequipa, Tristán seldom comments on the evils of slavery as she does in her discussion of La Praya. However, in moments of civil strife, her narrative reveals not only the tensions inherent in a society based on the same social and racial hierarchies that dominated the Spanish colonial era, but also her own complicity in these systems while living with the Peruvian Tristáns. As Blanchard explains, little changed for Peru's slaves with the arrival of independence.<sup>26</sup> Although José de San Martín had made some efforts to abolish slavery, his efforts did not go far enough, and most wealthy, slave-owning *criollos* were unwilling to risk financial losses by going along with San Martín's move towards emancipation. As a result, slavery was not fully abolished in Peru until political one-upmanship led Ramón Castilla to declare the end of the institution in 1854 (Blanchard 195). Despite the failures of the liberators to free Peruvian slaves, the slaves themselves continued to engage in forms of resistance that dated back to the earliest days of Peruvian slavery.<sup>27</sup> Forms of resistance included manumission through self-purchase, running away, and even taking owners to court for cases of abuse (5). In the section of Tristán's narrative that relates the events of a civil war, resistance on the part of slaves and indigenous residents of Arequipa is at its most visible. Describing the panic gripping Arequipa after a battle, Tristán writes: "It was probably the first time these black and white countenances had openly expressed all the vileness of their souls. The Indian threatened, the white cringed, the slave refused to obey, his master dared not strike him" (209). Near the end of the unrest, Tristán sounds more like she did in La Praya when describing "her *samba's*"<sup>28</sup> reassurances that Tristán would not be hurt by the opposing forces:

This girl said to me: "Don't be afraid, mademoiselle, if the soldiers or the *rabonas* come looking for loot, I am Indian like them, their language is the same as mine, I shall tell them 'My mistress is not Spanish, she is French, so don't hurt her.' I am quite sure they won't as they only hurt their enemies." Thus spoke my aunt's slave, a girl of fifteen; but whatever age he is, the slave has never loved his masters, no matter how kind they are. (226)

At the same time, however, Tristán also confesses that she nearly whipped a slave who did not want to help her protect another relative's belongings: "I hurried straightway to his house, and with the help of his negro slave, whom I was almost obliged to beat in order to make him obey me, I had a mule loaded with a bed" (222).

In more peaceful times, resistance and self-expression on the part of Afro-Peruvians, whether enslaved or free, is not as clear to Tristán. Her description of the parade celebrating the feast of Our Lady of Ransom provides a useful example of the way in which Tristán reveals some of the complexities of this multiracial society yet only partial understanding of what she witnesses:

This is the only sort of entertainment the people have, and it gives an idea of what the pagan bacchanals and saturnalia must have been like. [. . .] The procession was headed by bands of musicians and dancers, all in the most ludicrous costumes: the church hires negroes and *sambos* (persons of mixed negro and Indian blood) for a small sum to take part in this religious farce and dresses them up as pierrots, harlequins and clowns, with crude coloured masks to cover their faces. There must have been forty or fifty of them, writhing and gesticulating in the most shameless and indecent fashion, arousing the excitement of the coloured women and negresses who lined the route and calling out obscenities to them. [. . .] This ugly rabble with its shouts and unrestrained laughter made me turn away in disgust. Then the Virgin appeared, magnificently dressed in velvet and pearls, with diamonds on her head, neck and hands. She was carried by twenty or thirty negroes and behind her walked the Bishop and clergy. [. . .] It is from these festivals, remarkable for their splendour, that the Peruvians derive their chief happiness, and I fear it will be a long time before their religion has any spiritual meaning for them. (107–08)

For Tristán, religion in Peru is more about pageantry and spectacle than morality and true spirituality. What she appears to miss altogether is the importance of events such as the procession described above as expressions of Afro-Peruvian identity in the multiethnic environment of Arequipa. Her terminology is negative, but the religious procession that Tristán describes is reminiscent of historians' descriptions of the participation of *cofradías de negros* in religious events in Lima. While I was unable to find reliable sources documenting the existence of *cofradías de negros* in Arequipa, more information is available about religious brotherhoods in Lima.<sup>29</sup> Blanchard briefly mentions *cofradías* in his study of Peruvian abolition. The brotherhoods were originally founded by religious orders to educate slaves in Christianity and to involve them in celebrations for individual saints (Blanchard 3). Despite their intended function as a method of indoctrination and control, however, the *cofradías* also became a means by which some cultural and religious practices of African origin were maintained (2–3). As Blanchard describes,

Some brotherhoods accepted members only from a particular tribal group, providing an obvious means for cultural transfer, while their celebrations, regardless of the membership or ties, reached out to an even wider audience. The festivities had a definite African flavor, created in large part by the accompanying music in which the wooden cajón or drum, of African origin and played almost exclusively by blacks, beat out the rhythms for their dances. These, too, were of African origin. (3)<sup>30</sup>

In her study of Afro-Peruvian participation in the development of urban life in Lima, Hunefeldt sees the developments within the *cofradías* as “un vivo reflejo de lo que acontecía en la sociedad negra en su conjunto” (“Los negros” 21). The earliest members of *cofradías de negros* were slaves organized by tribe or by origins within Africa (21). Bowser adds that this division was intentional, yet it is not clear whether it was meant to aid in communication with different African groups or whether it was a strategy of “divide-and-rule” (249). During the colonial era, gatherings sponsored by the *cofradías* were the only time that slaves could safely

gather in groups (156). Colonial authorities found these gatherings so threatening that they were suppressed for a time, although this position was later reversed and the brotherhoods were required to participate in the celebrations for certain feast days (247–48). Soon after their founding, however, the *cofradías* began to divide themselves into groups that reflected the hierarchies of the dominant classes under Spanish colonial rule. Lighter skinned *mulatos* separated themselves from those with darker complexions, and the *negros ladinos*, Afro-Peruvians who knew Spanish and the local customs, did not want to be in the same brotherhoods as the so-called *negros bozales*, the recent arrivals from Africa (Hunefeldt, “Los negros” 22). By the nineteenth century, although they still maintained some connection to the original tribal divisions (24), certain *cofradías* were designated for free people of color, while others were for slaves (22). Eventually, the sodalities seem to have become elite groups among the black population because of the expenses involved in their activities (24); members would typically be urban slaves with access to some form of income, including “artisans, small merchants and peddlers, household servants, and the like” (Bowser 250). Despite some of the more negative features of the *cofradías*, especially the reinforcement of divisions between groups of slaves and between Afro-Peruvians and the fact that these institutions were in part instruments of control, the sodalities provided some benefits for members. Participation in the *cofradía* allowed a break from the oppression of slavery and servitude (Hunefeldt, “Los negros” 23). Speaking of the colonial era, Bowser remarks, the brotherhoods “no doubt gave those blacks and mulattoes who were fortunate enough to belong some sense of spiritual well-being and standing in the larger community” (247).

Representative of the contradictions inherent in multiethnic societies, the pageants of the *cofradías* appealed to a wide audience of Peruvians, as foreign observers, who had been largely kept out of colonial Peru by the Spanish authorities, began to note in the nineteenth century (Hunefeldt, “Los negros” 26). Hunefeldt describes horrified English observers who “relataban que mujeres blancas ‘de buena familia’, iban disfrazadas a ver los espectáculos y las fiestas de los negros” (26). Like these English visitors, Tristán also registers her disapproval of her cousin Carmen’s enjoyment of religious spectacles in Arequipa: “Doña Carmen[’s] passion for any kind of spectacle is such that she would be quite capable of going first to church to see Christ crucified (which is always enacted during Holy week in South America) then to the theatre to applaud the tight-rope performers, then to a cock-fight, all in the same evening” (Tristán 110–11).

Whether Tristán witnessed the activities of a *cofradía de negros* is unknown. Moreover, she does not indicate whether the Afro-Peruvian performers and observers she describes were enslaved or free. However, it is clear that Afro-Peruvians were noticeably involved in the procession as both participants and

spectators much in the way that they had been for centuries in Peru. Her harsh judgment of the proceedings confirms that the event did not conform to her Eurocentric standards and that she is either unaware of or unimpressed by the cultural significance of what she has seen. What she describes as “writhing and gesticulating” by the dancers and the “crude coloured masks” could well be Tristán’s version of the “African flavor” that Blanchard attributes to festivals involving *cofradías de negros*. She appears to have witnessed the syncretism blending African, Spanish, indigenous, and colonial customs that makes many Latin American religious practices unique. While the French writer found the spectacle distasteful, neither her cousin nor the large group of onlookers agreed with her. Because they were hired by the church and eagerly received by the crowd assembled to watch, one can only conclude that the public welcomed and expected participation by Afro-Peruvians in such events.

Historians attribute both positive and negative features to the *cofradías de negros* as institutions meant to control slaves but that also provided a space for cultural transfer and relief from the tensions of a life of oppression. Likewise, from her discussion of the feast day procession, Tristán’s reader can also identify some undesirable and some favorable characteristics. The ostentatious display of wealth in the presentation of the Virgin Mary, who was “dressed in velvet and pearls, with diamonds on her head, neck and hands” (107), may have also included the “twenty or thirty negroes” who carried her. Following the colonial tradition, wealthy nineteenth-century *criollos* still viewed the ownership of slaves as a sign of wealth and status (Blanchard xiii).<sup>31</sup> Moreover, Tristán views church pageantry as an instrument of power: “It is by such means that the people of South America are kept in a state of ignorance. The clergy may have supported the revolution, but they had no intention of giving up their power” (110). Despite the colonial aspects of Afro-Peruvian participation in church processions, this event also suggests the possibility of a momentary respite for its participants and spectators from a life of servitude and also the promise of occupying a prominent role in this popular public event. The attendance of the likes of Doña Carmen alongside the noisy, surging mass also suggests a momentary break from the racial and class-based antagonisms dominating Peruvian society in the nineteenth century. Her description of the feast of our Lady of Ransom is marked by her prejudices, but Tristán’s version of events nonetheless allows the reader to gain some sense of the interactions and interdependencies of the different ethnic groups present in Arequipa in the 1830s.

Having failed to secure the portion of her family’s wealth that she wanted, Tristán prefers to return to Europe rather than to continue to live at her uncle’s home. Before leaving Peru, she visits Lima and the nearby Lavalle sugar plantation, where she has a final encounter with the practice of slavery. Having given up her

pretensions to life as a member of *criolla* society, Tristán begins to sound once again like a European critic of slavery as she nears her departure from the “contact zone.” Politely arguing with the plantation owner, Tristán states her support for gradual emancipation: “I am convinced that only a process of gradual emancipation offers a means of transforming the negroes into useful members of society” (284). Going a step further than the French abolitionists, however, Tristán even supports the production of sugar beet in Europe as a means of combating the use of slave labor: “I can only pray for the ruin of your refineries, and I believe my prayers will soon be answered. A few years more, and the sugar beet will replace your sugar cane” (283).<sup>32</sup> Sounding more like the critic that she was in La Praya, Tristán describes the slaves at the plantation as “look[ing] sullen and miserable, even the children” (286) because of the ill-treatment that they receive. She attempts to engage them in conversation, but they will not speak to her except to say “yes” or “no.” Before departing the plantation, Tristán is shown two slave women imprisoned for infanticide. One of the two looks Tristán in the eye, and the French writer offers her own interpretation of the woman’s gaze: “the other, who was young and very beautiful, turned her large eyes upon me in a look which seemed to say: I let my child die because I knew he would never be free like you, and I would sooner have him dead than a slave” (286). This scene leads Tristán to express her admiration for those slaves who rebel by whatever means are available: “[A]mong them there must be some indomitable spirits who suffer torments and die without ever submitting to the yoke” (286). Shortly after this excursion, Tristán departs for Europe.

Literary critics who argue that Tristán’s reports of life beyond Europe are informed by her Eurocentric world-view make a strong case. Her narrative indicates that she understood her status as a French woman to grant her the authority to evaluate non-European people and institutions, and she generally judges them to be inferior. However, Tristán’s identity as a French woman is not entirely a fixed or stable one; as she moves further into the “contact zone” to claim her identity as the member of a *criollo* family, she refrains from embracing certain moral positions. Living like her cousin Carmen, Tristán accepts the role of race-based slavery in daily life in Arequipa almost without comment. When she complains of the abuses of slavery to Mme Watrin in La Praya, that lady replies that Tristán would quickly become used to it were she to live in La Praya (Hawkes 30). Her words seem to come true when Tristán lives the life of a wealthy *criolla* in Arequipa. Critics describe Tristán’s self-definition as a European as being based on othering of the inhabitants of the “New World,” yet her general lack of criticism of the practice of slavery and of racial hierarchy while in Arequipa suggests that upper class Peruvians, such as the Tristáns, also based their sense of identity on differentiation from the people of color who served them.

Despite her prejudices, however, Tristán's narrative also allows some glimpses at the problems and contradictions inherent in a society based on inequalities. During the civil war, she shows her awareness of the fissures threatening to grow during a time of political instability. In addition to portraying the constant presence of slaves and servants of color in upper class life in Arequipa, her description of the feast day demonstrates the central role of Afro-Peruvians in long-standing cultural and religious traditions. For the reader, this raises questions about the possibilities of cultural transfer and moments of unity among the oppressed group, as well as the ways in which an institution such as the *cofradía de negros* helped maintain unequal power systems.

In conclusion, approaching a travel narrative such as Tristán's benefits from consideration from both literary and historical perspectives. Tristán's worldview, and therefore information, is colored by her cultural background. Indeed, her text is a construction designed to paint its author as the sympathetic victim of patriarchal societies in both France and Peru. However, reading "con alguna reserva," as Ugarte Elespuru advises, means that we can try to go beyond the prejudices that affect her reporting to try to better understand life in nineteenth-century Arequipa. Without forgetting the biases inherent in the text and the careful construction of her discourse, the reader can look to Tristán's text for some indicators of the dynamics at work in the communities that she describes. Rather than the *mestizo* city the reader may have expected, *Peregrinations of a Pariah* portrays a multiethnic society in Arequipa during the transition from colonial to independent status and highlights the central role of Afro-Peruvians in both private and public life.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>I would like to thank the anonymous reviewers for the *Afro-Hispanic Review* as well as my colleagues in the Faculty Seminar on Race, Class and Gender at Marquette University for their helpful comments during the revision of this paper.

<sup>2</sup>Among the biographical studies of Tristán's life and works are Susan Grogan's *Flora Tristán: Life Stories* and Máire Cross and Tim Gray's *The Feminism of Flora Tristán*.

<sup>3</sup>This event occurred after the publication of *Peregrinations*. Unfortunately, the literary success achieved with this publication also made it possible for her husband to find and shoot her.

<sup>4</sup>It is somewhat surprising that a number of the articles dating from after the publication of Pratt's book do not cite her as a reference while reflecting a number of the same interests.

<sup>5</sup>Unless otherwise noted, all quotes are from the Jean Hawkes translation. Hawkes's translation is excellent, but it is an abridged version of Tristán's text.

<sup>6</sup>Tristán's uncle, Don Pío Tristán, was a powerful and wealthy man. For a brief time, he even held the important colonial administrative position of viceroy.

<sup>7</sup>This marks an important change in the reception of Tristán's work in Peru. When the first translations of her work arrived in Peru in 1838, the author was burned in effigy because of her critical comments (Pratt 155).

<sup>8</sup>A section of the Centro de la Mujer Peruana Flora Tristán's website is called, "Flora vigilando tus derechos," which makes her sound like a patron saint.

<sup>9</sup>Ramos's discussion is also about the state of *hispanoamericanismo*, or the inquiry into Spanish American identity, and the participation of US scholars in that conversation. He points out that seminal texts about Spanish American identity, such as Octavio Paz's *El laberinto de la soledad* and José Martí's "Nuestra América," were written in the United States (14–18). All of these issues speak to the question of who has the right and who has the ability to speak of Latin American identity. Ramos argues for categories that move beyond the limitations of language and location.

<sup>10</sup>My comments here are based purely on references to Tristán that I found in books devoted to the history of Peru and not on scholarly discussions by historians regarding critical approaches to travel narratives.

<sup>11</sup>This text dates from 1966, but it is cited by a more recent historical study, which is Blanchard's *Slavery and Abolition in Early Republican Peru*.

<sup>12</sup>The city's nickname is based on both the whitewashing of the local architecture and the mythical belief that the majority of the city's inhabitants were ethnically white (Chambers 14).

<sup>13</sup>Pratt also points out the fact that Tristán devotes considerably more of her text to political events than do the male writers of the capitalist vanguard (157).

<sup>14</sup>The difference between Tristán's figure and the one from the census suggests several possibilities. On one hand, it says something about how Tristán perceived people in Arequipa and assigned them a racial identity according to her system. She says little about the indigenous and *mestizo* populations in her text. However, it may also mean that some Arequipans preferred not to identify themselves as being "negro" for the census. Either way, it suggests that racial identification is a subjective rather than a fixed category.

<sup>15</sup>Chambers makes a similar observation: "Tristán constantly remarked upon the omnipresent slaves" (79).

<sup>16</sup>Pratt defines the "contact zone" as the place of contact between the travelers and those whom the travelers observe: "It treats the relations among colonizers and colonized, or travelers and 'travelees,' not in terms of separateness or apartheid, but in terms of copresence, interaction, interlocking understandings and practices, often within radically asymmetrical relations of power" (6–7).

<sup>17</sup>One can only speculate as to why this confusion occurred. Did Tristán not entirely understand the complicated system of slavery in place at the time in Peru, which included both slaves and "libertos," who were technically free but were forced to live like slaves during a long apprenticeship period? Did she not wish to associate herself too closely with slavery by mentioning the system outright? Was there a difference in status, treatment or quality of life for Afro-Peruvians in different positions of servitude? Tristán's almost interchangeable use of the terms "slave," "servant," and "negro" may reflect Peruvian attitudes of the time. As Romero explains, in the 1791 census, "negro" was used as a synonym for "esclavo" (55). Also, see Blanchard for an extensive discussion of the slavery system and abolition

in Peru in the nineteenth century.

<sup>18</sup> Tristán's text is not clear whether the men in the approaching boat are enslaved or free.

<sup>19</sup> Mme Watrin's own origins and history are not described in Tristán's text.

<sup>20</sup> M. Tappe's comments on slavery reveal notable resistance on the part of slaves. He explains that he has married a slave woman because he's been poisoned three times by his slaves. His wife is obliged to taste his food before he eats it (Tristán *Peregrinations* 28).

<sup>21</sup> The irony of the existence of slavery in the US is brought up again on board the *Mexicain* in a conversation between Chabrie and David. This episode does not appear to be included in the Hawkes's translation. See Romero (117–18).

<sup>22</sup> All of my information regarding the French abolitionist movement comes from Lawrence C. Jennings's *French Anti-Slavery*.

<sup>23</sup> This statement strikes me as problematic. Believing that slaves were not ready for freedom suggests to me a belief in their inferiority.

<sup>24</sup> Tristán tends to use the terms, "negress" or "samba," to refer to the woman of color who served her in her uncle's household. When she addresses the young woman as a slave, she calls her "my aunt's slave."

<sup>25</sup> In an episode that reads more like fiction than fact, Dominga staged her own death to escape the convent. Her slave brought her a woman's dead body, which Dominga then placed in her own bed and set on fire. Another nun left the outer door unlocked so that Dominga could escape, and she was presumed dead for several months. Both of Tristán's cousins, Dominga and Carmen, serve as examples for Tristán of the terrible fates that await women.

<sup>26</sup> Blanchard's *Slavery and Abolition in Early Republican Peru* is a very thorough study of the institution of slavery in Peru during the first half of the nineteenth century. Blanchard also adds that little changed for former slaves after 1854.

<sup>27</sup> The first African slaves were brought to Peru with Pizarro's expedition (Blanchard 2). African and Afro-Peruvian slaves were originally brought to Arequipa to work in the vineyards.

<sup>28</sup> Hawkes uses *samba* rather than *zamba*.

<sup>29</sup> The two historians of Peru that I contacted while undertaking the research for this paper informed me that they were not aware of any research available on *cofradías de negros* in Arequipa or whether there were any such sodalities in that city.

<sup>30</sup> Blanchard does not specify, but I assume he is referring to *cofradías* of Lima.

<sup>31</sup> Fernando Romero states that in the colonial era, white, urban slave owners in Peru would compete to see who could not only own the most slaves but also who could dress them most luxuriously (59).

<sup>32</sup> The interests of French colonial planters managed to put a stop to the sugar beet industry in France (Jennings 118).

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