

Viewing the Afro-Mexican Female Revolutionary: Francisco Rojas González's *La negra Angustias*

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Abstract: Francisco Rojas González's 1944 novel *La negra Angustias* is recognized as the only novel of the Mexican Revolution that features a black woman military officer. Critics have observed that, although this semi-biographical novel portrays Angustias as a gender nonconformist who seeks justice for women and the poor, the conclusion ushers her firmly back to her expected place in society as she falls in love and becomes a self-sacrificing wife and mother. I argue that this apparent reversal is present throughout the novel in a narrative gaze that objectifies Angustias, ogling her brown, curvy body. Furthermore, Angustias herself appropriates the power of the gaze and orchestrates striking visual performances at key points in her trajectory. Thus, the novel foregrounds multiple relationships of viewer and viewed, as Rojas oscillates between rewriting and reiterating nationalist discourses, celebrating and negating the agency of his protagonist.

Keywords: Afro-Mexicans, Francisco Rojas González, gender, *La negra Angustias*, narrative gaze, novel of the Mexican Revolution, race

Francisco Rojas González's 1944 semi-biographical novel *La negra Angustias* is widely recognized as making visible, for the first time in Mexican literature, the participation of a woman as a leader in the Revolution. To my knowledge, this novel remains the only one to focus on an Afro-Mexican woman Revolutionary leader.¹ The first readers of the novel, perhaps recognizing the social significance of turning a literary eye to an obscured aspect of Mexican national identity, honored Rojas González with the National Prize for Literature. Since then, critics have noticed that although the protagonist, Angustias Farrera, transgresses many norms in her activities as a *coronela*, the conclusion of the novel ushers her suddenly and firmly into her prescribed social role. Upon falling in love, she becomes a submissive, self-sacrificing wife, confined to the home where she mothers her green-eyed baby. This apparently abrupt reversal is actually part of a consistent ambiguity that problematizes the relationships between subject and object, viewer and viewed, throughout the novel. While Angustias is indeed a dynamic leader who readily violates social norms up until her ultimate transformation, the extradiegetic narrating agent also constantly puts Angustias in her place through an objectifying, ogling gaze; further complicating matters are a few key scenes calling attention to Angustias's ability to manipulate and appropriate this same ocular power. As this novel oscillates between celebrating and negating the agency of its protagonist, it traces out an ambivalent position regarding nationalist discourses of the time, which privileged masculine virility and feminine submissiveness while blotting out the fundamental contributions of Afro-Mexicans to national identity.

The significance of Rojas González's choice to emphasize the blackness of his Revolutionary protagonist can only be fully appreciated within this discursive context. As Marco Polo Hernández Cuevas explains, post-Revolutionary Mexican nationalist thought, exemplified by José Vasconcelos's *La raza cósmica* (1925), advocated the "homogenization of all ethnicities" through *mestizaje*; to this end, not only were Afro-Mexicans "portrayed as inferior and caricatured," they were made "completely invisible officially at least until the mid 40s" and their

“collective existence and cultural contributions” remain blurred to this day (“Afro-Mexican” 59–60). Indeed, Paulette A. Ramsay notes that the pivotal anthropological study *La población negra de México*—by Gonzalo Aguirre Beltrán, a contemporary of Rojas González—“was initially well received” at the time of its publication in 1946, but “it failed to spark much interest in the study of the historical role of Blacks in Mexico.” Furthermore, “the Afro-Mexican heritage did not become the focus of governmental research until the 80s and 90s” (“Cross-Cultural Poetics” 199).² Nationalist narratives of ethnic unity/homogenization were so widely accepted throughout most of the twentieth century that Matilde Landeta, the screenwriter and director of the markedly feminist 1949 film adaptation of *La negra Angustias*, insisted even in 1995 that “México no ha tenido población negra, y seguimos sin tenerla” in defense of her decision to cast María Elena Marqués (in blackface) as Angustias (Arredondo 199). Thus, in Bridget Arce’s reading, the ending of the novel, in which Angustias and her *mulato* baby are hidden from public view in a tenement house, is a “metonymy that parallels the state of Black consciousness in Mexico” (261).

As Luz María Martínez Montiel observes, however, the presence of *negros* and *mulatos* in what is now Mexico actually began with the arrival of Hernán Cortés in 1519, and people of African ancestry outnumbered Europeans there as late as 1742 (157–59). While Martínez Montiel considers African influences to be so highly integrated into Mexican popular culture that “no se pueden separar de la amalgama cultural que los contiene” (168), Hernández Cuevas uncovers the African origins of some of the most powerful icons of Mexicanness: *son jarocho*, *mariachi*, *menudo*, and the verb *chingar* (*African Mexicans* 31–54). Moreover, Ramsay’s readings of Afro-Mexican poems and *corridos* find a surviving collective identity that resists dominant discourses of nationality and links Mexico to a Caribbean aesthetic. Although *La negra Angustias* could hardly be said to participate in this collectivity, and indeed often projects markedly racist attitudes, its ambivalent portrayal of its black protagonist contrasts with the blatant condemnation exhibited in other contemporary works.³

The contradictory dynamic set in motion at the level of Rojas González’s narration is not apparent in a simple plot summary. Young Angustias breaks all the conventions of her rural community, as the only *mulata* and the only woman who refuses to marry. The townspeople are already suspicious of Angustias because her elderly father, Antón Farrera, was once an infamous bandit, but when she rejects a perfectly good suitor, the only explanations the villagers can imagine are equally appalling to them: either she is having an incestuous relationship with her father or she is a lesbian. Either way, Angustias is considered to be possessed, and she is made to submit to a purification ritual performed by her adoptive mother, the *curandera* Doña Crescencia. After this “cleansing,” Angustias seems to fall back into line. However, when Angustias uses her father’s knife to kill a man who is about to rape her, she has no choice but to flee the town. The muletrain drivers who find Angustias in the wilderness take her to their boss, Efrén, who also intends to rape her, but an enamored protector, Güitlacoche, helps her to escape.

Drawing on her father’s legacy as a Robin Hood figure, as well as her own charisma as a speaker, Angustias spontaneously assembles an army of devoted followers who declare her their *coronela* as they join the ongoing Revolution. Although the novel portrays *coronela* Angustias as ignorant—she burns papers in the courthouse just because she has heard that this is something that revolutionaries do, and the concept of a court martial is completely beyond her comprehension—it also shows her meting out justice according to her own values, most memorably when she orders the castration of Efrén on behalf of all the women he has raped, and when she has a pregnant woman stripped and beaten to teach her not to conform to a submissive feminine gender role. When Angustias falls in love with the white, urban, middle-class, effeminate Manuel, whom she has hired to teach her to read, she not only violates class and race divisions, but also deviates from her lifelong rejection of sexual relationships with men.

After one final “masculine” action—kidnapping the helpless Manuel—Angustias quickly conforms to her prescribed role as a Mexican woman. Learning to read and falling in love displace her identity as a military leader and, after forcing Manuel to have sex with her, Angustias obeys his every command; he, in turn, is almost magically transformed into a domineering *macho* immediately following their first sexual encounter. Soon becoming pregnant, Angustias agrees to surrender to the government in exchange for a stipend, which her husband squanders while she contentedly lives in poverty. The novel closes with a meek Angustias singing like a “mirlo prisionero” (228) as she devotes herself to domestic chores in her Mexico City tenement house, while Manuel brags drunkenly to a friend that she is only his exotic *mulata* mistress.

This rapid obliteration of Angustias’s assertive personality has been interpreted as Rojas González’s way of neutralizing the threat she poses to the Mexican social order. Robert McKee Irwin, for example, considers the novel as one of several Mexican works in the 1940s and 50s that express “anxiety about feminism” (188), observing that Rojas González gives his readers “a plot that challenges notions of male superiority, the violence of male heterosexuality, and essentialized gender difference, but that totally reverses itself in the end as if to say he was only kidding” (201). Likewise, Janet Hampton’s semiotic analysis finds Rojas González successful in portraying “an assertive, complex, black female character” (27), but suggests that he distances himself from any feminist viewpoint by framing this character as “an exotic, anomalous—read black—transgressor who is punished severely” (31). Although the plot does indeed work as Irwin and Hampton describe, the present essay will focus on how the narration in the novel continuously undercuts its own depiction of transgression of gender roles by pointedly objectifying Angustias as a black woman throughout the novel. Estelle Tarica has discussed a similarly problematic narrative gaze directed toward indigenous women in Rojas González’s short stories. Tarica argues that, in the posthumous 1952 collection *El diosero*, female characters are “not active players,” but “[i]ndigenous women are nevertheless foregrounded” through considerable attention to their bodies; the text thus registers, she argues, “a self-consciousness about its own visual strategies of knowing the indigenous subjects it describes, and channels a sense of loss and longing for a ‘primitive’ world on the verge of disappearing” (100). Whether self-conscious or unintentional, the objectifying gaze of the narration in *La negra Angustias* is further complicated by Angustias’s manipulation of the power of the gaze to her own advantage at several key points in her story.

Early in the novel, the narrating agent’s description of how young Angustias is gaining increasing attention from the men of the village first relates the sexual objectification of Angustias by male characters and then participates in her objectification by emphasizing her lack of rational thinking:

La sucesión de los días se prolongó. Mientras, Angustias Farrera se iba transformando en otro ser. Los arrieros de tierra caliente, cuando pasaban cerca de ella, *la miraban de muy particular manera* y algunos tenían ciertas palabras dulces y hasta algunos ademanes provocativos. Entonces, *sin saber por qué*, la mulata recordaba la horrible inquietud que se adueñaba de los machos cabríos cuando las lluvias tempranas. Su corazón palpitaba y sentía vergüenza de sí misma. (20; emphasis mine)

While Angustias is incapable of rationally understanding why these stares and *piropos* trigger an unsettling childhood memory, in the preceding pages the narrator and reader have just accessed the relevant information from her past necessary to interpret the association. Without missing a beat, the narration then picks up where the muledrivers left off, looking Angustias up and down and inviting readers to do the same: “El cuerpo menudo y rectilíneo había tomado suaves curvas; sus piernas, negras como dos troncos de ébano, eran torneadas de tal manera, que ella se abochornaba de mostrarlas al pasar el arroyo en pos del ganado. En el pecho palpitábanle dos

torcaces” (20). Far from criticizing the objectification of Angustias by the locals, the narrator participates in it, both by mimicking their lingering gaze and by contrasting her lack of rational understanding with the narrator’s own superior powers of interpretation.

Angustias’s dark skin features prominently in such descriptions, and throughout the novel she is frequently referred to as *la negra* Angustias or *la mulata* Angustias. On occasion the narrator explicitly equates her attractiveness with her ethnicity. For example, directly after lingering over the “feline movements” of Angustias’s “admirable torso,” the narrator references the coastal regions where there were many people “igual a ella en color, en gustos, en índole; gente sencilla, dueña de ademanes lentos y *sensuales* y de acciones broncas como la marejada. Gente alegre y noble, de corazón abierto, tal como ella se imaginaba el cielo marino” (43; emphasis mine). Later, her attractiveness is likened to “las características físicas de su raza,” in that both, according to the narrator, are unchanged by the passing of time (124). While expressing admiration for Afro-Mexicans, the narration also clearly characterizes them as especially sexual, reiterating a common stereotype that dates back to colonial times.⁴

Yet, it is by manipulating how others look at her that Angustias gains the upper hand over those who would make her an object at key points in the novel. A careful reading of the attack scene that leads to her separation from her community reveals that it is precisely by appropriating the gaze that Angustias is able to startle the rapist, creating the opportunity to fight back physically. When Laureano tells Angustias she won’t get away from him this time, she looks down and smiles ambiguously. As he tries to drag her into the brush, she reacts: “Ella tuvo entonces un movimiento trémulo de horror y de asco; alzó los ojos del suelo y los fijó relampagueantes en los de Laureano. Este, atemorizado por el brusco cambio, soltó el brazo de la mulata” (47). She capitalizes on her opportunity and stabs Laureano with her father’s knife. By suddenly changing from a visual object, eyes downcast, to a subject who meets and returns Laureano’s violent gaze, Angustias gains control over her attacker.

The legacy of her father permeates the landscape in Real de Animas, empowering Angustias to put her rescuer, Güitlacoche, in his place by appropriating—and denying him—a dominant gaze. Notably, the narrating agent manifests an awareness of this power dynamic. As Angustias takes in the scene of her father’s old stomping grounds, Güitlacoche has to look up at her because she has left him the shorter horse, which, the narrator remarks, makes him feel “inferior, pequeño y despreciable.” Undaunted, Güitlacoche awkwardly offers to marry his new acquaintance; in response, “Angustias volvió precipitadamente la cabeza hacia el enamorado; sus ojos trocaron la altivez por la agresividad e hicieron pedazos la verde e infantil mirada del Güitlacoche, quien sin poderlo remediar bajó los párpados avergonzado” (72). Her only verbal reply is to order him to fix her saddle, which he obediently does, and Angustias smiles at “la postura avasallada y ruin que ofreció a sus plantas el Güitlacoche.” To clinch her victory, she pulls up her skirt to reveal her “pierna recia, torneada y prieta” (73), forcing Güitlacoche to look at her body from his lowly vantage point. The defeated Güitlacoche can only nod in response. The narrator, and by extension the author and his readers, recognize that Angustias is now consciously manipulating the same ogling stares that in previous episodes were associated with objectification and sexual violence.

Angustias’s subsequent rapid rise to power as a military leader is a direct result of her ability to use both her father’s popular legacy and her own charisma, but it begins with an explicit manipulation of the way others see her. She orders an elderly innkeeper to look at her, holding a lamp up like a spotlight to illuminate her face. After he first sees only a “buena moza”—just as the narrator and the characters have seen her all along—she orders him again, guiding his gaze: “Veme más, viejo, más, hasta que...” At her direction, he recognizes her father’s eyes: “¡El negro Farrera, Antón Farrera! Sí, son sus mismos ojos, su mismo gesto... [. . .] Parece que lo veo...” (79–80). Now that everyone recognizes her as Angustias Farrera—able to direct the same powerful gaze as her father—she puts herself on display for all her new admirers: “Angustias

dejábase admirar por todos, echada en el taburete del mesonero, muda y altiva” (81; emphasis mine). As before, manipulating the gaze allows Angustias to exert other forms of power; as she proceeds to command everyone around her, they obey her as they would her father.

That is not to say that Angustias is never again objectified as a *mulata* in the subsequent narration. The narrating agent makes a point of observing, for example, that when Angustias squeezes her curvaceous body into men’s clothing, it only accentuates her femininity to a nearly ridiculous extent:

El varonil traje de charro le daba un aspecto curioso: por más que quería ser hombruno, la línea relajada de las carnes ubérrimas, aprisionadas en la estrechez propia del atavío, realzaban la feminidad, desbordándose en curvas desproporcionadas. La mujer se movía dentro del traje masculino con una torpeza risible... en otras circunstancias. (110–11)

And quite gratuitously, the narrating agent watches Angustias bathe to make herself pretty for Manuel: “sumergió por largo rato su cuerpo carnudo y macizo. El jabón hirvió en el pelo negro y abundante y resbaló en burbujas sobre su epidermis renegrida, tersa y juvenil. . .” (172). The ensuing ellipsis creates a pause in which to further linger over the sight of her dark body.

At the same time, the narrator continues to characterize Angustias as empty-headed on occasion. Sexual discourse is used to describe the process of teaching her to read: “el profesor echó mano de todos los recursos para quebrar la corteza que cubría aquel cerebro casi virgen de ideas y de altos pensamientos” (159). And although she quickly becomes literate, when Manuel takes Angustias to sign up for her military pension, she is unable to comprehend the written documents, which she nevertheless signs: “Angustias quedó como en la luna, sin comprender aquellas palabras que hablaban de planes y de conveniencias” (215). To publicize his dominance over *la negra* Angustias, Manuel orchestrates a performance of sorts; after ordering her to put her masculine clothing back on, he tells her to walk behind him to the spring, where the townspeople are gathered; there, he loudly orders her to tie his shoe, which she happily does; the onlookers take note of his manliness, but Angustias is oblivious: “ni siquiera advirtió el radical cambio de posturas” (208–09). At the end of the novel, when a boastful Manuel invites a drinking buddy over to what he explains is only his “casa chica,” he refers to Angustias as “una exótica mulata, guapetona y buena gente” (226–27)—that is, just the way the narrator has been looking at her, and inviting the reader to look at her, all along. Any implied condemnation of Manuel thus seems ironic, at best, and hypocritical, at worst.

A reading of the visual dynamics as they are presented over the course of the narration thus suggests a fairly straightforward picture: Angustias is repeatedly visually objectified as a *mulata* by both the characters and the narrator, and she is able to manipulate and appropriate this power at a few turning points in the narration, aided by her father’s legacy. However, in a few outstanding moments in the novel, Rojas González places words in Angustias’s mouth that seem to encourage readers to compare parallel scenes in which she herself manipulates the gaze by creating transgressive performances.

Angustias’s repetition of key phrases invites parallel readings of three purification rituals: the *limpia* performed on her by her adoptive mother to “cure” her of her refusal to marry, the castration of the rapist Don Efrén, and the beating of the self-sacrificing pregnant woman. After being made to submit to the first ritual, intended to make her conform to her proper feminine social role, Angustias creates her own variations which are meant to cure a man and a woman of their excessive identification with their respective gender roles. Likewise, after being made the spectacle in the first ritual (and, I might add, in the entire novel), Angustias becomes the creator and director of the other two scenes.

In characteristic fashion, the narrator provides an unflinching and eroticized view of the *limpia* that Doña Crescencia performs with chicken blood to purify Angustias of the evil airs causing her to reject male suitors/attackers:

Doña Crescencia ordenó a la Angustias que se desnudara; la muchacha, sin protestar, dejó descubierta ante el asombro de las mujeres su carne prieta y juvenil, contorneada magníficamente. Luego, a invitación de doña Crescencia, tendióse sobre el camastro.

La bruja mojó sus dedos en la sangre caliente y humedeció las sienes y los párpados de la mulata; después siguió por las axilas y las coyunturas y las trabazones de todos los huesos; finalmente volteó el contenido de la cazuelita en la cuenca del ombligo; el líquido rojo escurrió hasta la entrepierna del cuerpo calosfriado y tembloroso. (38)

The ritual takes the place of the sexual initiation Angustias has refused, as the women, the narrator, and the reader watch her lying on display in the bed, blood running over her trembling naked body and between her legs. In stark contrast, the narrating agent averts its gaze when Angustias orders the castration of Efrén “a nombre de las mujeres” because Angustias herself commands Güitlacoche to execute her orders out of her sight (91–92). Even after the sentence has been carried out and Angustias demands to see Efrén, he is covered in a poncho.

The narrative eye is, however, glued to the sadomasochistic scene in which a furious Angustias orders Güitlacoche to beat the white, pregnant girlfriend of the engineer. The pregnant woman has begged Angustias not to execute her boyfriend as planned, pleading “No puede ser, coronela... Escúpame, patéeme, mande que me ahorquen” (114). Angustias eventually grants her request, but only after forcing her to atone for playing the traditional feminine role of self-sacrificing mother, saying “usté me sigue provocando vómitos y eso debo castigarlo a nombre de las mujeres” (115). After ordering Güitlacoche to tie the woman to the table, Angustias strips her, and the dramatic effect is heightened by the use of candlelight: “Angustias fué arrancando una por una las vestiduras de aquel cuerpo trémulo. Las carnes quedaron íntegramente al descubierto; la luz rojiza de las velas se embarraba a la piel y le daba coloraciones nacaradas; la palidez del rostro fué extendiéndose hasta abarcar todo el cuerpo palpitante y tibio” (116). Like the narrator, Güitlacoche is excited at the sight of the pale, trembling body: “apenas pudo contener un bestial sacudimiento. La sangre se le había agolpado en las mejillas y en las orejas; un sobrehumano esfuerzo le mantuvo inmóvil; pero no pudo evitar que aquella emoción pasara inadvertida para la mulata” (116). The beating enacts a reversal of the colonial legacy of oppression of *mestizos* and Afro-Mexicans by white elites, and constitutes a shocking attack on the Mexican ideal of motherhood. It ritually exaggerates the pregnant woman’s complicity with her own victimization, while figuratively “castrating” Güitlacoche by forcing him to act only at Angustias’s command and forbidding him sexual gratification (112–18). Angustias explicitly compares this ritual to the castration of Efrén, which she did on behalf of all his previous victims: “Se trata, Güitlacoche, de que otra vez hagas justicia a las mujeres” (116).

As Angustias shuts her eyes during the actual whipping, “presa de una cobardía que la avergonzó en lo íntimo,” the narrator cannot resist looking. At first, the narration of the whipping is focalized through Angustias, so it is only heard, not seen, but the narrator soon adds in visual details: “A medida que la víctima acentuaba sus horribles retorcimientos y sus espasmos quejumbrosos, la mano del verdugo se asentaba con mayor energía, y cuando aquel cuerpo destrozado doblóse presa del dolor infinito, entonces los azotes sucedieron con la frecuencia agobiadora de una tormenta” (117). When the frenzied Güitlacoche ignores Angustias’s command to stop, she whips him in punishment. Angustias covers the broken body and orders the woman and the engineer set free. Finally, Angustias equates this ritual—and by extension, the earlier castration—to the original *limpia* by echoing Crescencia: “Quedó sin mancha, como recién nacida. ¡Limpia como la Toca de la Verónica y el Manto de María!” (118). These three juxtaposed scenes are not simply inversions of one another, but rather, create shifting relationships of varying degrees of domination and submission, viewing and directing, amongst men and women, *mestizo*, *mulata*, and white.

In 1940s Mexico, the cultural phase of the Revolution was promoting an ideal of national unity—or homogenization—through *mestizaje* that would whiten and ostensibly improve the

African component of Mexican identity. Government censorship and the federalization of the educational system were working to protect ideals of decency and restore the traditional family structure and gender roles that had been eroded by the war.⁵ Make no mistake: the blatant sexism and racism of *La negra Angustias* would likely make most present-day readers cringe. And yet, although through its narration the novel encourages readers to objectify Angustias, this very spectacle also compels us to look at what official nationalist discourses were covering up—the contributions of Afro-Mexicans to the creation of Mexican identity and the possibility for transgression of traditional gender roles.⁶ Moreover, *La negra Angustias* invites readers to look at *how* we look, and to witness how an individual might appropriate the very visual and discursive mechanisms that paradoxically both objectify and obscure her.

NOTES

¹Gertrudis, while not the main character in Laura Esquivel's *Como agua para chocolate* (1989), is a mulatta Revolutionary *generala* who bears an interesting resemblance to Angustias.

²Hernández Cuevas critiques the late twentieth-century promotion of African ancestry as the “third root” of Mexican identity as reiterating the racial hierarchy promoted by Vasconcelos and other eugenicists (*African Mexicans* xiv). Furthermore, Laura A. Lewis suggests that the “third root” concept has had “the effect of replicating the separation of blackness and Mexicanness” (69–70).

³See Richard L. Jackson's pioneering study of negative representations of black characters in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Spanish American literature. Just one example of the many overtly racist literary representations cited by Jackson is the 1954 Mexican novel *Roquedal* by Ramiro Torres Septién, in which a black man kills his mulatto child and himself in order to spare his white lover the shame of having them as her family (473–74).

⁴Like Irwin (201), Arce links Angustias to the colonial Veracruz legend of the Mulata de Córdoba, a folk healer of unknown origins who is said to have driven men mad with her exotic sexuality and rejected them all because she was a witch and owed her loyalty to Satan. Arce contextualizes this legend pointing out that the Inquisition did try cases of *mulatas* accused of witchcraft, and that in colonial times *mulatas* and black women were legally forbidden to wear fancy clothing, implicitly because it would render them completely irresistible. Arce examines several versions of the legend, including two by Xavier Villaurrutia in 1948: Mexico's first opera and one of the country's first films featuring an Afro-Mexican (229–39).

⁵Elizabeth Salas considers the novel's ending to be the author's prescription for what 1940s psychologists viewed as a social ill: the absence of men from the home as they fought in the Revolution upset the distribution of power within the family structure, and Angustias's power as a military leader is likewise viewed as unnatural and unhealthy; “the best cure for her sick personality is to love, marry, and serve a man. In submitting to the teacher, she discovers her true identity as wife and mother” (87). Tarica, in her study of Rojas González's portrayal of indigenous women, observes that, during the 1940s rise of conservative nationalist “middle class decency” and the corresponding censorship, “eroticism was displaced onto fetishized women who were exotic yet not foreign enough to be politically threatening” (110–11). Likewise, Hernández Cuevas finds that by making visible the existence of black Mexicans while simultaneously placing them in subservient positions, late 1940s films such as *Angelitos negros* and *La negra Angustias* “told the public that everything was okay, that ‘black’ blacks were few and that soon they would be willingly and happily assimilated” (*African Mexicans* 83).

⁶Suzanne Bost writes: “As she straddles both sides of the race, sex, and legal-status binaries, her ambiguous physical identity (her light skin and her compromised femaleness) embodies both ends of the spectrum or, rather, shows where they overlap. The ease with which she assumes the dual identities brings the two ends together and deconstructs their polarity” (150). Although Bost is referring here to two US narratives of gender-bending, escaped mulatta slaves, her words eloquently describe Angustias as well.

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