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“Black, Puerto Rican, Lesbian Literature”?: Representations of Yolanda Arroyo Pizarro

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Contents

Abstract

This thesis analyses representations of author Yolanda Arroyo Pizarro (Guaynabo, Puerto Rico, 1970) and her literary work as Black, Puerto Rican, and lesbian. It questions why and how the identity categories of race, sexuality, gender, and nationality are foregrounded in representations of this author and her body of work, while considering the implications of this categorisation process for literature more broadly.

Where previous scholarship on Arroyo Pizarro has centred textual analysis, this thesis offers a new approach by focusing on extratextual representations. The thesis takes much inspiration from the relatively small body of reader reception studies of live reader participants, as well as research on paratexts.

Stuart Hall's work on representational systems provides a framework for this study of literary categories. Analysis incorporates paratextual and metatextual sources such as reviews, criticism, and social media posts, which give an initial picture of the ways in which Arroyo Pizarro and her texts are represented. Following this, the focus moves to analysis of interviews conducted with fourteen participants including the author, book industry professionals, academics, and other readers. This interview methodology produced new representations of Arroyo Pizarro and her work from a variety of perspectives. While the sample is small and cannot be considered representative, it offers rich, qualitative data on participants' personal relationships with this author, her writing, and the phenomenon of identity-based literary categories.

Analysis of interview data centres on participants' representations of the author, her texts, and her readers. Participants foregrounded race, sexuality, gender, and nationality in their representations of Arroyo Pizarro and her work, representing both as Black, Puerto Rican, and lesbian. Terms like "Black literature" and "literatura lésbica" are ultimately found to resist strict definitions. Prompted to take positions on the political implications of categorising literature by identities, participants acknowledged the potential for such categories to be reductive but generally argued that their use is necessary for the visibility and empowerment of marginalised groups. On the question of readers, interview participants constructed age, politics, and religion as more important factors than race, gender, or sexuality in determining whether an individual would read and enjoy Arroyo Pizarro's work.

The thesis contributes an innovative approach and methodology within the field of literary studies. The focus on extratextual representations demonstrates that literary texts are not autonomous, discrete objects, but are produced by discourses of power and identity.

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Introduction

Can a work of literature be Black, lesbian, or Puerto Rican? Race, sexuality, gender, and nationality cannot be applied to a novel or a poem in the same way they are commonly understood in relation to human subjects. Nevertheless, such terms are extremely prevalent in the ways we construct literature, from government-funded national publishing initiatives focused on promoting Puerto Rican literature, to independent LGBT bookshops, to recommendations between friends of the best Black writing. Search engine results for "literature" prefaced by "Black", "lesbian", or "Puerto Rican" comprise seemingly endless lists of works categorised accordingly. To explore this phenomenon, this thesis takes as its focus the persona and work of Yolanda Arroyo Pizarro, which have been constructed at the intersection of these three categorisations.

The concept for this thesis began to emerge when I encountered Arroyo Pizarro's work and observed the prevalence of identity categories in paratextual materials related to her writing. The first book of Arroyo Pizarro's that I read was the short story collection *Lesbianas en clave caribeña: Cuentos de marimachas, buchas y camioneras. Femmes, patas y cachaperas* (2012c). The title and subtitle, as well as the cover, which features an illustration of two nude women, are hardly subtle in their emphasis of lesbian identity; this was a large part of the book's appeal to me at the time. It was only when someone close to me asked me why I was reading the book, seeming somewhat taken aback by these same elements, that I began to consider how this overt signalling might be received differently by different people. The person posing the questions was a heterosexual woman, and I wondered whether her identity had informed this reaction, so different from my own as a queer woman.

Although I began with the question of "literatura lésbica" specifically, originally intending to analyse a group of authors whose work had been categorised in this way, I found that Arroyo Pizarro's case presented further complexity and nuance because of the racialised categories, such as "literatura afro", that had also been assigned to her work. Rather than giving this dimension less attention than it deserved, I decided to focus specifically on Arroyo Pizarro and explore these multiple categories. Over the course of my fieldwork in Puerto Rico, the question of nation and the division of literatures by national boundaries,

a dimension which had previously seemed so self-evident that I had not thought to interrogate it, also came to the fore, ultimately becoming another central focus of the thesis alongside sexuality and race. While other categories are explored, "literatura lésbica", "literatura afro", and "literatura puertorriqueña" (and their various combinations and iterations) are the ones that take centre stage in representations of Arroyo Pizarro's work and, by extension, in this thesis.

Given that the central objective of this study is to question and problematise the ways in which this author and her work have been represented, the seemingly simple task of introducing Arroyo Pizarro becomes more complicated. In so doing, I myself must make choices about how to represent her; indeed, if I describe her as a Black Puerto Rican lesbian author, I am taking for granted and reproducing the very paradigm that I will go on to interrogate. Critics have not generally introduced, for example, the late Mario Vargas Llosa as a "white heterosexual male author"[1]. However, that is not to say that omitting these descriptors would be a neutral choice, either: as the thesis will demonstrate, these aspects of Arroyo Pizarro's identity are central to the ways in which she has been constructed as an author and public figure and are therefore critical context for the research at hand. Furthermore, leaving out these marginalised identities would obscure the context and experiences of oppression associated with them. It is therefore necessary to acknowledge these details, while problematising that very necessity.

Arroyo Pizarro's extensive bibliography makes it impossible to list all of her published works here. Her first book, *Origami de letras*, a collection of short stories, was published in 2004 by Publicaciones Puertorriqueñas. Since then, she has published novels, short stories, poetry, children's books, and essays, and written in genres such as historical fiction and, more recently, afrofuturism. Her novels include *Caparazones* (2010) and *Violeta* (2013), both of which feature Black queer female protagonists and focus on turbulent romantic relationships, abuse in various forms, and alternatives to the traditional heteropatriarchal family, themes which recur across much of Arroyo Pizarro's work (Simpson, 2025). The short story collection *las Negras*, published first in Puerto Rico in 2013, then in a bilingual edition titled *Negras* by Columbia University Press in 2023, and

[1] Nationality, on the other hand, is a near-ubiquitous detail in descriptions of authors, on which more later.

finally in Spain by Yegua de Troya in 2025, is a work of historical fiction centring the stories of enslaved African women in the Caribbean. These three works are some of the author's most frequently cited, both in scholarship and in the interview data generated during my research.

Alongside her writing, Arroyo Pizarro is renowned for her activism: the author frequently makes public statements in favour of racial justice, LGBT rights, feminism, Puerto Rican independence, housing rights, and many more causes. Her activism also intersects with her personal life, about which many details have been made public, such as the fact that she was one of the first people in Puerto Rico to enter a same-sex marriage after campaigning for it to be made legal. As well as being an author and activist, Arroyo Pizarro has worked as a lecturer at EDP University, where she has held the position of writer in residence. She also founded La Cátedra de Mujeres Negras Ancestrales, a group that researches the histories of Black women in Puerto Rico and publishes creative works based upon these, with the goal of making visible these stories that have long been hidden. Finally, it bears mentioning that my own perspective on Arroyo Pizarro, and therefore the representation of her expressed in the present research, has been shaped by my personal interactions with the author during the period of fieldwork I undertook in Puerto Rico in 2023. As I will discuss in more detail later, Arroyo Pizarro was incredibly generous with her time, not only agreeing to be interviewed but also putting me in touch with other participants, inviting me to events, and generally welcoming me and facilitating my work. This project certainly would not be what it is without her enthusiasm and active participation.

This thesis examines the ways in which Arroyo Pizarro and her texts have been produced through extratextual representations. I apply Stuart Hall's conceptualisation of language as a representational system, contending that readers' experiences with the content of texts are always predated and shaped by representations of those texts. These representations may be constructed in the form of reviews; of interviews with the author; of a bookshop display; or simply of a book cover, whose graphic design creates some impression of the book. Such representations colour the (potential) reader's opinion and expectations of the text in question. Through centring these representations rather than textual content *per se*, the thesis gives an alternative perspective on literary studies. I

analyse representations of Arroyo Pizarro and her work in written sources, including academic criticism, professional and lay reviews, and social media posts; as well as verbal representations in the form of interviews I conducted with fourteen participants familiar with Arroyo Pizarro's writing, including the author herself, academics, students, book industry professionals, and other readers.

Given that, as I have stated, a work of literature cannot be Black, a lesbian, or even Puerto Rican in the same way that we understand these identities when applied to human subjects, I pose the question of how these categories may be understood in relation to literature. I explore the potential meanings of these categories as being related to author identity, textual content, reader identity, and other possibilities. I also examine arguments in favour of and against the use of these categories, posing the question of whether they are liberatory for the marginalised groups they reference, or whether they might have undesirable side effects such as pigeonholing these same marginalised groups or normalising hegemonic identities. I go on to explore questions related to readership, such as whether an identity-based literary category necessarily appeals only to readers who share the identity in question. While the thesis focuses on a specific author, Yolanda Arroyo Pizarro, it is clear that the findings have further-reaching implications, not only for scholarship on literature but for the literary world in general, including bookshops, libraries, school and university literature curricula, book marketing, and more. My ultimate aim is to prompt my reader to question the wider practice of categorising literature on the basis of identity.

While contemplating how to describe the motivations behind this project, I came across a reflection from the owners of Category is Books, Glasgow's queer bookshop, on why they decided to start their business: "like any good queer story, different truths have been told, things misremembered. There's a variety of answers, different combinations and collages of replies" (Bug and Fin, 2025). The same is true of this thesis: it is impossible to pinpoint a single moment of inspiration, and my narrative of its conception has doubtless been developed over the years since. Nevertheless, I believe that the story as I tell it now can help to contextualise the project, even if it is a collage of misremembered truths. While the idea for the thesis itself crystallised around Arroyo Pizarro, I had already been contemplating identity-based literary categories before I ever heard of this author. During

my undergraduate degree, a module I took on modern Latin American literature had included an optional section on "women's writing", which, at the time, I was excited to have the opportunity to study. I chose this option alongside sections dedicated to individual named (male) writers Jorge Luis Borges and Pablo Neruda, and others on genres like magical realism and dictatorship novels or topics like the Mexican Revolution. Although writing by women theoretically could have been included in these genre sections, in my experience, it was not. That term, I wrote six essays on literature by men and one on literature by women. Looking back years later, after I had graduated, I was infuriated that male writers had been given so much more space. Where men's writing was categorised by genre, topic, or even by individual author, women writers were grouped together monolithically by gender, as though women do not also write across many genres and on many topics. Where I had once been excited by the concept of "women's writing", I became frustrated that female writers had been restrained to this category. As I told one interviewee (see Chapter 5), this experience was a key stepping stone on my way to this project.

The influence of my subjectivity on this thesis began with these personal experiences that inspired its conception; I operate on the understanding that my own positionality as the researcher has played a central role in shaping the research from beginning to end. I strive to put into practice the principle of reflexivity, making my own presence visible and considering its effect on the research wherever possible. This manifests throughout the thesis in such practices as my use of the first person, reflection on my own identity and experiences, and inclusion and analysis of my interventions in interviews.

Previous research on Arroyo Pizarro has focused largely on textual analysis. John Maddox's book *Fractal Families in New Millennium Narrative by Afro-Puerto Rican Women* (2022) features a chapter on *las Negras* and the poetry collection *Saeta*. A chapter of Alexandra Gonzenbach Perkins' PhD thesis *Queer Transnationality: Narrative, Theatre, and Performance Across Temporal, Spatial, and Social Geographies* (2014) explores Arroyo Pizarro's novel *Caparazones* alongside Mayra Santos-Febres' *Sirena Selena vestida de pena*. There have also been numerous articles published on Arroyo Pizarro, several of which are discussed in Chapter 3 of this thesis and which also centre textual analysis. This study therefore takes a novel approach, foregrounding the

extratextual discourses that construct both author and texts. This approach is not only innovative within research on Arroyo Pizarro, but is also relatively uncommon in literary studies more broadly, where textual analysis is still by far the most prevalent mode. This focus on the extratextual is deeply influenced by reader reception criticism, as well as by principles of book history and theories of the author.

Thesis Structure

The thesis is presented in six chapters. The first chapter sets out the approach taken to the project, covering the influence of Stuart Hall's work on representation, as well as elements taken from studies of literary culture, book history, theories of the author, and reader response criticism. I detail the understanding of race and sexuality as social constructs that underpins the work. The chapter also includes a literature review of previous scholarship on the intersection of personal identity and literary categories.

In Chapter 2, I establish the methodological approach, introducing the sources to be analysed in Chapter 3 before focusing on the original interviews that constitute the focus of Chapters 4–6. I conducted these interviews with fourteen participants in Puerto Rico and the United States, including the author herself, one of her publishers, a number of academics with varying relationships to Arroyo Pizarro, fellow author and bookseller Luis Negrón, and other readers of Arroyo Pizarro's work. The chapter discusses participant recruitment, the format of the interviews, and processes for transcription and analysis of interview data. I address and account for the challenges that this methodology presented. I also introduce each of the interview participants in turn in order to contextualise their perspectives on Arroyo Pizarro and her work.

The third chapter analyses representations of Arroyo Pizarro and her work in sources such as academic criticism, lay reviews, marketing copy, author biographies, professional reviews, blogs, and published interviews with the author. In this chapter, I also engage with Gérard Genette's theory of paratexts and metatexts, acknowledging the influence of the framework while critiquing its limitations.

Chapter 4 focuses on interview participants' representations of Arroyo Pizarro as an author, public figure, and individual, analysing the ways in which they foregrounded various aspects of her identity such as nationality, race, and sexuality as some of the

most salient details about her. In Chapter 5, the focus turns to participant representations of Arroyo Pizarro's writing. I analyse how terms related to identity like "literatura afro" and "lesbian literature" were applied to the author's literary work. The chapter interrogates the meaning of these terms, posing the question of whether the identities referenced relate to author identity, subject matter, or some other criteria. Also included in this chapter is analysis of participants' positions on the practice of categorising literature by identity. Chapter 6 centres readers and the act of reading. Analysis focuses on how participants spoke about their own and others' reader identities and reading experiences with Arroyo Pizarro's work. It considers the question of who Arroyo Pizarro's readers might be: are those who embody particular racial or sexual identities more likely to read and enjoy her work, or are there other, more salient factors? It also contemplates the importance participants placed on reader identification with reading materials, *versus* interest in reading and learning about identities and experiences different from one's own.

As well as representing a significant contribution to the scholarship on Yolanda Arroyo Pizarro specifically, this thesis also provides insight into a much wider phenomenon: the categorisation of literature and authors based on race, gender, sexuality, and nationality. The latter is a near-universal detail included in representations of authors and literature, a feature which usually goes unquestioned but which I will go on to interrogate. By contrast, race, gender, and sexuality are almost exclusively referenced in relation to marginalised identities: rarely, if ever, has a category such as "heterosexual literature" or "literatura blanca" been proposed. A discussion of how identity and cultural production are co-constructed is especially timely given the current right-wing backlash to identity politics. This can be seen in the United States, for example, in the contemporary demonisation and scapegoating by the Trump administration of "Diversity, Equity and Inclusion" (DEI), which is being used as a dog whistle for marginalised individuals and communities gaining any form of power, however limited (Lawrence, 2024; Mahdawi, 2025). Donald Trump's executive order banning DEI in schools applies to Puerto Rico, which was the first jurisdiction to certify it (Chomphosy, 2025). In the literary sphere, rising rates of book bans in the United States disproportionately target "books about race and racism, LGBTQ+ people and characters, people and characters of color, and books

with sex-related content" (PEN America, 2024). In response to such reactionism, the progressive tendency is often to cling to discourses of identity. These have certainly been useful for mobilising movements, but they can also be inadvertently essentialising and reproduce hegemonic binaries. While it would be naïve to think that we have moved "beyond" the need for identity politics, especially in the current global political climate, I consider it necessary to reflect critically on the practice of delineating cultural production like literature on the basis of identity, rather than taking for granted that this practice inherently serves the oppressed and marginalised. It is only through such reflection that we can identify shortcomings of current approaches and ultimately innovate new liberatory strategies.

Chapter 1. Approaches

Introduction

Authors and literary texts, far from being self-contained, are produced by extratextual representations thereof. In the case of Yolanda Arroyo Pizarro and her body of work, these representations have strongly emphasised identity categories, including race and sexuality. In order to explore this paradigm, it is first necessary to establish what is meant by "representations" of this author and her texts, and thus to lay the groundwork for the thesis' innovative focus on extratextual discourses rather than on textual analysis. This chapter will therefore situate the research from a theoretical perspective. I explore the assumptions underpinning my approach, beginning with Stuart Hall's theory of language as a representational system and concepts of encoding and decoding, which form the foundation for much of the theoretical discussion that follows. From there, I move to a discussion of my approach to literary culture, in which I review existing critical works rooted in the disciplines of book history and reader response criticism. I lay out my conceptualisation of the figures of reader and author, relating these back to encoding and decoding. I then outline my perspective on identity, focusing particularly on race and sexuality and demonstrating how both are social constructions through a brief overview of their histories. This destabilisation of race and sexuality is critical for the subsequent discussion of identity-based literary categories, which must be approached from the perspective that race and sexuality, far from being natural features of the world, are socially constructed. Finally, I bring together the areas of literary culture and identity, reviewing several previous studies that have centred the question of identity-based literary categories. I examine each study's perspective on the phenomenon and detail their contributions to my own thinking in the present research.

Representation, Encoding, and Decoding

Before delving into more specific aspects of my approach, it is first pertinent to establish some broader, more holistic principles underlying much of my thinking in this thesis. Stuart Hall's work on communication and representation has allowed me to draw together some of the at first apparently disparate threads within my research. Hall explains that language is a representational system, which uses signs to represent

objects, people, concepts, ideas, feelings – anything to which one might wish to refer when communicating with another person. Hall uses the example of a glass: one cannot speak using an actual glass; rather, we must use the word "glass" as a representation of the object (Hall, 1997, p. 17). In a more complex example, he argues:

> A 'raw' historical event cannot, in that form, be transmitted by, say, a television newscast. Events can only be signified within the aural-visual forms of the televisual discourse. In the moment when a historical event passes under the sign of discourse, it is subject to all the complex formal 'rules' by which language signifies. To put it paradoxically, the event must become a 'story' before it can become a communicative event. (Hall, 1980, p. 118)

Hall uses the terms "encoding" and "decoding" to describe different moments in the communication process. In order to communicate about a glass, a historical event, or anything else, we must "encode" our ideas into the code of language. For communication to take place, this code must then be decoded at the other end by the receiver, be that a hearer, viewer, or reader: as Hall puts it, "The reader is as important as the writer in the production of meaning. Every signifier given or encoded with meaning has to be meaningfully interpreted or decoded by the receiver" (Hall, 1997, p. 33). Thus, the decoder is not merely passive, but an active participant in the construction of meaning: the action they perform is decoding the message. The decoder brings their own interpretation, expectations, and frame of reference, all of which are socially constructed, to the process of decoding. This means that the encoding and decoding processes are never perfectly symmetrical; this is where "distortions" and "misunderstandings" can arise (Hall, 1980, pp. 119–120). Even where no misunderstanding is consciously identified, the fact that we cannot directly access any individual's internal understanding of the code means that we can never definitively know that their understanding is the same as our own, or that of another individual. Furthermore, language is always evolving, over time, space, and circumstances; there is no objective or final meaning of any particular sign within the system.

This conceptualisation of language and representation has profound implications for my research. The necessity to encode into language in order to communicate brings with it a multitude of possibilities regarding what exactly to encode. This is particularly true of

more complex concepts, ideas, and phenomena, which offer seemingly endless possibilities regarding their representation. When describing an author like Arroyo Pizarro, one might choose to represent facts about her life, such as when and where she was born; one could represent aspects of her identity, such as her race, sexuality, or nationality; one could choose from among her bibliography which texts to list; one could describe her political positioning; one could comment subjectively on her personality. The choice to focus on any of these or other aspects would contribute to a particular representation of the author, which might then be decoded in a variety of ways. Similarly, when referring to a literary text or texts by Arroyo Pizarro, the encoder will not recite the text in its entirety: they must make choices about the most salient aspects of the text, summarise, and represent it in a particular way. Thus, representations of a text or body of work in terms of identity categories, such as "novela lésbica", "literatura afro", or "Puerto Rican literature", are only a few of the potentially endless ways those texts might be represented and have different effects *versus* other possible representations of the same texts.

Rather than one instance of encoding and a subsequent decoding, the process under scrutiny in this thesis is a chain of multiple instances of encoding and decoding. A text itself, such as a novel, poem, or short story, is made up of language; thus, its creation is an exercise in encoding, a communication process in which the reader then participates by decoding, making meaning out of the text. In the context of my research, those readers then go on encode a representation of the texts; this may be in the form of a review, a scholarly article, marketing copy, or comments in an interview, including those carried out during the fieldwork for this thesis. I have decoded these representations by reading or listening to them; I then represent them in the thesis, thus encoding them again. At some point in the future, relative to the time of writing, the readers of my thesis will decode my analysis. Thus, there are multiple instances of encoding and decoding, in a chain of representations, shaped by the available discourses and the subjectivities of all of these participants. Far from mirroring some objective "truth", referring to a text with a term like "lesbian literature" is a particular way of representing it. Such an act produces the category and actively sorts the text into it. Furthermore, it is historically contingent, dependent on discourses that produce identity categories like "lesbian", as well as the

construction of "literature" and the possibility of connecting the two. Over the remainder of the chapter, I go on to lay out my approaches to both literary culture and identity categories.

Literary Culture

Instead of focusing solely on the content of any particular text, I treat literature and literary texts as cultural phenomena. I approach the book "as an activity or event enabled by each act of reading, in the journey from author to reader" (Kumaraswami and Kapcia, 2012, p. 44). This view of the printed text not as fixed and static, but as constantly evolving through interaction with human subjects, is crucial to my research. In this section, I will first give an overview of my holistic approach to literature; I then focus on the figures of the author and the reader as two particularly salient participants within the communication process of literature. I describe how my research has been influenced by principles of book history, reader reception criticism, and theories of the author.

Book History

Although not fitting into either discipline *per se*, the present research borrows certain principles from book history and bibliography, broadly understood. Book history is a wide-ranging and varied field, as well as a relatively new one. It emerged from the convergence of prior disciplines like bibliography and social history (Finkelstein and McCleery, 2006, p. 1), with which it shares a great deal of overlap. In fact, there is significant variation among scholars in definitions of book history and where to draw the dividing lines between this and bibliography in particular. In their introduction to *The Book History Reader*, David Finkelstein and Alistair McCleery cite "emphasis upon print culture and the role of the book as material object" as the feature that sets book history apart from bibliography, which they say focuses more on "the technical analysis of individual books or editions" (2006, p. 1); according to these definitions, both disciplines centre the book as physical, material object. Other definitions are wider: Robert Darnton defines history of the book as "the social and cultural history of communication by print" (2006, p. 9), while DF McKenzie terms bibliography "the sociology of texts" (McKenzie, 2006a, p. 37). These definitions go beyond the book as physical object, considering the conditions of literary production, distribution, and reception, and the human parties involved. My work is informed by many of the principles of this wider understanding of book history

and bibliography. While the physical book is not a central focus of my study, what Finkelstein and McCleery call "the very recognition that a book is a result of a collaborative [...] process" (2006, p. 2) is of paramount significance. McKenzie argued that attempts to divorce the book from its social, economic, and political context would, in fact, prove "feebly degressive" (McKenzie, 2006a, p. 37); as he put it, "The book as physical object put together by craftsmen – as we all know – is in fact alive with the human judgements of its makers. It is not even in any sense 'finished' until it is read" (McKenzie, 2006b, p. 206); I put this principle into practice by analysing reader perspectives.

I also take from book history and bibliography a holistic view of literary production. Robert Darnton states that

> printed books generally pass through roughly the same life cycle. It could be described as a communications circuit that runs from the author to the publisher (if the bookseller does not assume that role), the printer, the shipper, the bookseller, and the reader. (2006, pp. 10–11)

The recognition of multiple participants in the literary life cycle has informed my work; indeed, over the course of my fieldwork I interviewed individuals representing a number of the roles Darnton mentions above. Thomas Adams and Nicolas Barker express the contention that Darnton's model focuses on people rather than on the book itself: it is more a social history than a history of the object. However, for my purposes, Darnton's model is apt: rather than the physical object itself, I wish to foreground the social processes that take place around it and produce it. Having laid out these holistic perspectives and principles I inherit from book history and bibliography, I will now detail my approach to two particularly salient figures within the literary life cycle: the author and the reader.

The Author

Where book historians often focus on a specific book or text, the focus of my study is the construction of a particular author and the category of texts delineated by their association with her. Nevertheless, far from returning to the myth of individual authorial genius, I approach the construction of "authorship" critically, not taking for granted its primacy or even its objectivity. In the seminal essay "The Death of the Author", Roland

Barthes wrote that the idea of the "author" is a product of our society following the increase in prestige of the individual under capitalist ideology (2006, p. 277); in "What is an Author?", Michel Foucault made a similar argument, stating that "The coming into being of the notion of 'author' constitutes the privileged moment of individualization in the history of ideas, knowledge, literature, philosophy, and the sciences" (2006, p. 281). The "author" is therefore a historically contingent construct and not an inherently important or stable figure. Foucault explained that what he termed the "author function" is linked to juridical and institutional systems that established a system of ownership for texts at the dawn of the nineteenth century (2006, p. 285). The author function also does not refer straightforwardly to a real individual: it is, rather, a functional principle that is used to group together, define, and differentiate texts. Within this paradigm, texts attributed to the same author are typically expected to conform to a unity of writing. According to John Brewer, this assumption arose in the eighteenth century, when authors needed a way to distinguish themselves and came to rely on the idea of originality (2006, p. 322), which emphasised the individualistic conception of the author. Thus, the author has come to be viewed as the all-important figure in the creation of literary work.

This primacy of the author figure results in a particular emphasis on the identity of the author. There is an assumption that the identity of the author is relevant, important, and dictates the character of the works associated with that author. In conjunction with contemporary identity politics, this can mean that aspects like the author's race, gender, and sexuality come to the fore. As Andrew Elfenbein comments, in foregrounding a particular identity category, "insofar as an author becomes of interest because of their membership in that category, literature by that author is supposed to represent what it is like to be a member of that category, and therefore is autobiographical" (2020, p. 281). This has posed problems, for example, for feminist critics who would destabilise the position of the author, but who also assign value to the identity of women authors. Cheryl Walker argues that "to erase a woman poet as the author of her poems in favor of an abstract indeterminacy is an act of oppression" (1990, pp. 570–571). However, this does not mean treating the author as an "originating genius", but rather as a "contradictory, fluctuating presence" (Walker, 1990, p. 568) with multiple personas that are historically and culturally contingent.

In my approach to authorship, I find it crucial to acknowledge that the figure of the "author" is intrinsic to how we understand and construct literature in the contemporary world. We do not accept that a literary text could be authorless: while the same is not true of, e.g., reference books, in the literary domain we demand that there must be a name on the cover of any given book, even if it is a pseudonym. That name, and the public discourses surrounding it, produce the "author" and the text(s) in particular ways: through association with other texts under the same name; with a human subject, sometimes, but not always, with the same name; and with the public persona(s) constructed around this subject. While acknowledging the primacy of the author in contemporary discourses of literature, I strive to problematise certain assumptions around authorship. In particular, I refute the assumptions that (1) the author is all-important; (2) the author is consistent; and (3) the author is identical to or interchangeable with the human subject of the same name, where one exists.

Regarding (1), I take the position that works published under the name "Yolanda Arroyo Pizarro" vary in the extent to which they can be considered the product of a sole author by this name. No text is the product of one isolated individual: there are other participants involved, such as publishers, editors, proofreaders, and cover artists; even in the case of self-published texts, other influences contribute to the production of a text. I aim to take this into account by considering other participants in the process. Problematising the primacy of the author also extends to my approach to Arroyo Pizarro as a source: while I consider Arroyo Pizarro's perspective on her body of work, including by interviewing her, I strive not to treat her account as uniquely authoritative or definitive on all aspects, relative to accounts from other sources.

In relation to (2), I aim to problematise the idea that the author is a consistent, fixed presence. The Arroyo Pizarro who penned *Origami de letras* in 2003 need not be assumed to be the same as the Arroyo Pizarro who published *Afroqueeridades* two decades later; nor must the Arroyo Pizarro I interviewed in 2023 be identical to either of these. All subjects fluctuate in response to their circumstances and environment; this author is no exception.

Relatedly, regarding (3), I intend to destabilise the equivalence that is often assumed between the author function and the individual who, at least in this case, shares its name.

I do not assume that either the published works or the public persona(s) of Arroyo Pizarro necessarily reflect the "expression" of any essential "truth" about Arroyo Pizarro's subjectivity. This is not in preference for a simplistic public/private dichotomy; I do not posit two distinct entities, "Arroyo Pizarro the author" and "Arroyo Pizarro the private individual". Indeed, many aspects of what we might call Arroyo Pizarro's "personal life" have been incorporated into her public persona, intrinsically structuring understandings of the author and the works associated with her. When I include aspects of Arroyo Pizarro's identity and biography, this is not in service of uncovering some "truth" about her psyche or the meaning of her texts, but in order to consider how these aspects have been incorporated into the construction of her public authorial image.

In summary, I aim to treat the figure of the author in general, and Arroyo Pizarro specifically, as I do other subjects: not as stable or fully accessible, but as complex and shifting presences. In particular, the inclusion of varied interviewee comments presents a number of supposed contradictions, which often cannot be categorically reconciled. I do not claim to represent Arroyo Pizarro "as she is". Rather, the image presented is refracted and fragmented, as though seen through a broken pane of glass; from this, I do not attempt to extrapolate a definitive, "coherent" image, since I reject the premise that this is possible or desirable.

The Reader

The principle that decoding is as important to the communication process as encoding inevitably leads to a consideration of the role of the reader. This has been extensively theorised and studied within reader-response criticism, from which I have drawn a great deal of inspiration in the conception and execution of this research. Reader-response criticism is a heterogeneous field, a loose collection of critical approaches united primarily by increased focus on the reader; here, I will give an overview of the development of the discipline, and discuss some contributions that have informed my thinking.

Before the dawn of reader-response criticism, literary studies had been dominated by New Criticism from the mid-1930s to the late 1950s (Freund, 1987, p. 40). New Criticism positioned itself as being concerned solely with "the text itself", which, its proponents

claimed, could be analysed without recourse to the reader. New Critics claimed not only that the text was the sole proper object of study, but also that it was possible to extract from the text its "objective" meaning; this approach does not acknowledge subjectivity on the part of the critic. Within New Critical spheres, focusing on the reader was actively frowned upon: W.K. Wimsatt, a seminal New Critic, termed such an approach "the affective fallacy" and argued that it would lead to the disappearance of the text itself (1970, p. 21); according to Wimsatt, "Better the disappearance of the subject than the literary object" (1970, p. 61). This firm stance on the objectivity and stability of texts having been so central to the dominant literary theory of the previous decades, the rise of reader-response criticism in the 1960s and 1970s represented a "revolution" in the field of literary theory (Suleiman and Crosman, 1980, p. 3).

In his 1970 essay "Literature in the Reader", reader-response critic Stanley Fish responded to Wimsatt's assertion of textual objectivity: "My reply to this is simple. The objectivity of the text is an illusion" (1980, p. 43). Fish focused on interpretation, positing that meaning is located not in a text or utterance, but in the reader/listener's experience of that text/utterance. A text is not a static entity that holds intrinsic significance *per se*; meaning can only be created by a reading subject. In order to approach this reading subject, Fish initially posited the idea of an "informed reader", whom he defined as having "competence" both in the language of the text and of literary discourses (1980, p. 48). This idea of the "informed" reader presupposes that some readers are superior to others, a premise that raises a number of problems regarding who might be considered "informed", on what criteria, and according to whose arbitration; Fish himself went on to recognise this and to reject the formulation (1980, p. 15). In later work, he instead favoured the idea of "interpretive communities", groups of people bound together by socially constructed norms of communication, internalised systems within which they understand and interpret utterances or texts; thus, he no longer conceived of interpretation as an individualised process (1980, p. 318).

Interpretation is not the only aspect of reading discussed within reader-response criticism. Another prominent theorist of the 1970s, Hans Robert Jauss, focused on the aesthetic as well as the interpretive dimension of reception. Jauss referred to readers' preexisting "horizon of expectations" for texts, which new literary texts can either meet or

challenge; according to Jauss, this horizon influences both interpretation and taste, and is constructed not individually, but socially. Jauss emphasised the historically contingent nature of reception, stating that "A literary work is not an object which stands by itself and which offers the same face to each reader in each period" (1970, p. 10). Thus, Jauss shared with Fish the idea that a reader's response to a text is always contextual rather than objective.

Reader-Response Criticism and Feminism

The ideas of reader-response criticism were taken in new directions by feminist critics, who posed questions about the impact of gender on reading experiences. Patrocinio Schweickart commented that

> Feminist criticism can have considerable impact on reader-response criticism, since [...] it is but a small step from the thesis that the reader is an active producer of meaning to the recognition that there are many different kinds of readers (1986, p. 38)

Schweickart's argument is that, if reading is dependent on the prior experience of the reader, then a woman's differing experience from a man is likely to affect her in her role as a reader. The critic focused on the androcentrism of the literary canon, which she stated had a "profoundly damaging effect" on women readers because of the equation of "male" with "universal" (1986, p. 40), sidelining female perspectives and experiences. Schweickart echoed arguments by Elaine Showalter and Judith Fetterley. In her 1971 article "Women and the Literary Curriculum", Showalter discussed the problem of androcentricity in the literature taught to undergraduate students of English. She argued that "Women are estranged from their own experience and unable to perceive its shape and authenticity [...] Instead they are expected to identify as readers with a masculine experience and perspective, which is presented as the human one" (1971, p. 856); maleness is assumed to be the default state of humanity and therefore the default reader positionality and experience. Fetterley took up this argument in the introduction to her 1978 work *The Resisting Reader: A Feminist Approach to American Fiction*, stating that through the pretence that androcentric literature is universal literature, women are "taught to think as men, to identify with a male point of view, and to accept as normal and

legitimate a male system of values, one of whose central principles is misogyny" (1978, p. xx). Thus, Showalter, Fetterley, and Schweickart argued that women readers are forced to suspend their womanhood and adopt a male perspective in order to engage with an overwhelmingly male literary canon.

While these are valuable contributions to both reader-response criticism and feminism, and were radical in their time, I would argue that they run the risk of reinforcing a simplistic and essentialist male/female binary and thus suggesting a single, monolithic "female" perspective and reader positioning. Jean Kennard complicated this paradigm by asking:

> What does the term woman reader signify if it is presumed to include Third World women, Caucasian women, upper-middle-class women, women living below the poverty level, and my chief concern here, both heterosexual and lesbian women? Can we assume that there are no innate differences between the lesbian and the heterosexual woman? If there are, then surely they must be considered in studies of gender and reading. (1986, p. 63)

We are reminded of the incredible diversity of experiences within the category of "women" and asked to contemplate the implications of intersectionality for reading experiences. Lynne Pearce also recognised this problem of attempting to universalise the experience of all female readers, noting that a text may "speak" differently to Black women, heterosexual women, and working-class women from the way in which it speaks to her (1997, p. 47).

Pearce's feminist perspective on reader-response criticism led her to move away from a view of reading as an "act of interpretation" towards a focus on textual positioning and the interaction between text and reader. She specifically confronted Fish for his "narrowly academic conception of the reader [...] as one who is in search of something to interpret or explain" (Pearce, 1997, p. 6). Pearce went on to explain that an affective, as opposed to interpretive, understanding of reading has been neglected due to the tendency in Western thought to consider rationality and emotionality as diametric opposites, and to privilege the former. By extension, interpretation has been considered the more respectable way of understanding reading, through its formulation as an act of rationality

as opposed to one of emotion. Theorists like Fish have characterised the "ideal reader" as being intellectual and informed. Given the gendering of the rationality/emotionality binary, this also characterises the ideal reader as implicitly male; the "inferior" reader is implicitly female in her emotionality (Pearce, 1997, p. 7). Pearce proposes a reformulation of the reader as "a lover, whose object is not to understand the text but to engage (with) it" (1997, p. 6). This idea that reader engagement is emotional rather than strictly interpretive is one that will gain importance as we move away from the largely theoretical works I have discussed up to this point and towards applied studies that work with real readers.

Studies on Live Readers

Janice Radway's *Reading the Romance*, first published in 1984, is a seminal work of reader-response criticism based on research with live participants, and has had a deep influence on my own work. Using ethnographic methods, Radway conducted a study with a group of women readers of romance novels, aiming to "investigate reading empirically [...] to move beyond the various concepts of the inscribed, ideal, or model reader and to work with actual subjects in history" (Radway, 1991, pp. 4–5). She attempted to understand how and why the women engaged with romance literature, the ways in which their socialisation and experiences might have led them to this genre in particular, and what role it played in their lives; thus, she put the question of gender and reading experiences to the test. In her introduction to the 1991 edition of *Reading the Romance*, Radway reflected that:

> Since I was assuming from the start with reader theorist Stanley Fish that textual interpretations are constructed by interpretive communities using specific interpretive strategies, [...] I still conceived of reading in a limited fashion as interpretation and saw the project largely as one focusing on the differential interpretation of texts. [...] the Smithton women repeatedly answered my questions about the meaning of romances by talking about the meaning of romance reading as an activity and a social event in a familial context (1991, p. 7)

Working with live subjects changed Radway's perspective on the significance of reading: it became apparent that, at least in the lives of the Smithton women, reading was more

than a straightforward interpretive act, also having emotional, social, political and interpersonal implications.

The idea of reading as a community activity among women was taken up by Alma Kuhlemann in her article "Detecting a Feminist Reading Model: Clues in Marcela Serrano's *Nuestra Señora de La Soledad* and in Responses from Her Women Readers". Through an email survey of Serrano's readers, Kuhlemann found that verbal recommendations, lending, and giving of books to other women were all common experiences; reasons given included a desire to strengthen female relationships and the raising of feminist awareness (2016, p. 63). Like Radway, Kuhlemann found that there is a community-building aspect to the act of reading among female readers.

In her 2010 thesis *Daughter of Fortune: Isabel Allende's Popularity from a Readership Perspective*, María Covadonga Fanjul Fanjul used pre-existing reading groups to analyse the factors in Isabel Allende's international popularity in the UK and Spain, observing around 300 readers in total. Fanjul Fanjul described her approach as "readerly", while also taking account of aspects beyond the reader-text interaction, such as public discourse around the author (2010, p. iv); this incorporation of the reader into a holistic perspective on an author was influential in my own research. Fanjul Fanjul examined public representations of Allende in the press and came to the conclusion that these have had a strong influence in shaping reader response (2010, p. 84). According to Fanjul Fanjul, "Selling Allende's public image has become as important as selling what she writes. Allende's public images, and discourses around her as a personality, contribute to her 'literary' success" (2010, p. 307). In my own research, I take up the question of authorial public image, examining how the public discourses constructed around Arroyo Pizarro play into the construction of her literary output.

Fanjul Fanjul found relationships between reading and self-identity. The researcher aimed to ascertain whether certain features of Allende's novels were particularly salient to women readers. She found that the women in her study tended to relate the texts to their own lives, in particular comparing female characters to themselves and to the women around them. Additionally, the act of reading itself was leveraged in the construction of self-identity. Many of the readers seemed concerned with what they read and how this impacted their identity construction, particularly with regards to class.

Fanjul Fanjul noted a repeated inclination on the part of certain readers to locate Allende on the spectrum of "lowbrow" to "highbrow" literature, a phenomenon that she related to these participants' desire to be perceived as intellectual readers of middle- to highbrow literature (2010, p. 267). Thus, reading played a role in readers' self-identity not only in the sense that readers could relate their own lives to the content of a text; readers also used what they chose to read as a signifier and reaffirmation of their belonging to a particular social group. Parvathi Kumaraswami, who conducted interviews with a group of nine Cuban readers for her thesis *Reading Women's Self-Writing from Revolutionary Cuba*, also noted that reading "allowed for identities to be [...] publicly performed and even transformed" (2003, p. 199). These findings introduce another dimension to reading: as an element in the construction of identity itself. Not only does the pre-existing identity of the reader inform their reading experience; the reading experience can also have an influence on the reader's identity formation. This mutually constitutive relationship between reading and identity is one that has informed my approach to readership and to the participants in my study.

Identity

In order to consider the relationship between reading and identity, I must first establish some of the assumptions about identity and identity categories that underpin my work. I take a social constructivist approach to identity in general, understanding the subject not as a stable entity, but as being produced by culture, context, and experience. Race and sexuality are central aspects of my research; as such, these warrant particular scrutiny. In order to understand the interplay of race, sexuality, and other aspects of identity, the principle of intersectionality must be applied (Crenshaw, 1989); this is particularly salient when examining the construction of an author like Arroyo Pizarro, who is a Black lesbian from an island locked in a neocolonial relationship with the United States, within the broader geopolitically marginalised regions of the Caribbean and Latin America; the complexities of these layers of national and regional identities will be explored in more detail in Chapter 4. Although I present race and sexuality here as separate subsections, I also highlight the ways in which they are mutually constituted and reinforcing, both the results of a "colonial logic [that] is masculine, hetero, and white" (Pereira, 2019, p. 421). In this section, I will demonstrate that both race and sexuality are socially constructed

categories. I do so by giving a broad overview of the histories of both concepts; the specific constructions of race and sexuality at play in the context of my research will be examined as part of the interview analysis of later chapters.

Race

I take the position that race is socially constructed and is therefore mutable and historically and culturally contingent, rather than being in any way transhistorical or fixed. The very concept of "race" as we know it today is a relatively recent invention in human history, only truly beginning to crystallise in the seventeenth century in Europe. Medieval Europeans had a pre-existing fear of "other" groups (Lieberman and Reynolds, 1996, p. 143); however, they tended to categorise these into "as many 'peoples' as there were cities or kingdoms" (Hudson, 1996, p. 248). The concept of constructing groups as wide-ranging as those that we now consider "races", spanning millions of individuals spread out across entire continents, would have been completely unthinkable. Between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries, European "exploration" brought the peoples of Europe into increasing contact with non-Europeans, leading them to contemplate differences between themselves and these other groups. In the New World, European efforts to expand and colonise brought them into contact with indigenous peoples, whom they categorised as "savage" in order to justify brutalising them and dispossessing them of their land (Hudson, 1996, p. 251). European capture and enslavement of West Africans, originating from multiple distinct peoples, led to the homogenisation of those groups. Thus, where Europeans had once conceived of "other" peoples as belonging to seemingly infinite small groupings, they began to "rely on generalized impressions of whole continental populations" (Hudson, 1996, p. 258). This led to the conceptualisation of "races" as describing "ever larger populations" (Hudson, 1996, p. 248). At first, Europeans understood these differences in terms of environment and level of civilisation rather than inborn biological difference (Douglas, 2008, p. 35); variety among humans was therefore understood to be "theoretically reversible" (Douglas, 2008, p. 26). This understanding began to shift in the eighteenth century with the scientific taxonomies of authors across Europe, including Carl Linnaeus in Sweden; Georges-Louis Leclerc the Comte de Buffon and Georges Cuvier in France; and Johann Friedrich Blumenbach in Germany. In Medieval Europe, Christian doctrine had maintained that humankind was

distinct from the animal kingdom, meaning that the human species was not included in the study of natural history (Hudson, 1996, p. 254). By contrast, Enlightenment authors increasingly viewed humans as one segment of the natural world, therefore being subject to the same process of analysis and classification that had already been employed with regards to other species (Hudson, 1996, p. 258). In the 1730s, Linnaeus classified *homo sapiens* within the animal kingdom (Douglas, 2008, pp. 35–36); in 1758, he introduced four varieties of humanity "identified by color, clothing, and customs" (Lieberman and Reynolds, 1996, p. 143). Buffon had already classified humans into six groups nine years earlier; in 1775, Blumenbach proposed four human categories of his own; in 1790, Cuvier identified three. These taxonomies often explicitly "ranked" the races, always with Europeans at the top; thus, the very concept of racial classification came hand in hand with white supremacy (Lieberman and Reynolds, 1996, p. 143). Thus, the "biological doctrine of race invested traditional 'folk' prejudice with a new intellectual authority" (Hudson, 1996, p. 252). In the Americas, the dehumanisation of slavery at the hands of Europeans led to the homogenisation of formerly distinct groups of Africans. As Birt puts it, "the masters invented an inferior race called Negroes. Indeed, it was the racists who invented the Negro, who transformed varied African peoples into the Negro" (2004, p. 61). Enslaved Africans and their descendants were forced to abandon their original varied languages in order to communicate with one another and with their enslavers; Africans originally from different cultures mixed and had children together, blurring the distinctions between groups; and enslaved peoples formed a common culture in their new environment. European and European-descendant enslavers no longer differentiated between enslaved peoples, constructing them all as one race of "Negroes" and themselves as "white" by contrast (Hudson, 1996, pp. 251–253). In the face of growing opposition to slavery, the new doctrine of race could be used to justify the continuation of the practice and of the suppression of indigenous people, since "white" people cast both groups as being inferior to themselves.

Thus, the modern concept of "race" arose out of European prejudice against, and desire to oppress, other peoples and was formalised and legitimised through the sciences. The use of race as a justification for subjugation was contested early on, especially by abolitionists; however, even they often accepted the scientific legitimacy of the concept

of race itself (Hudson, 1996, p. 251). It was not until the 1940s and 1950s that this scientific legitimacy came to be challenged within the academy, by anthropologists like Ashley Montagu; these challenges were not taken seriously until the late 1960s, when they began to gain popularity within the scientific community (Lieberman and Reynolds, 1996, p. 153). Now, scientists generally agree that race has no biological basis and that "genes are distributed in gradations or frequences which overlap each other in such a fashion that population boundaries simply cannot be established" (Lieberman and Reynolds, 1996, p. 152). Through this brief history of the invention of race, we can see that the "racialising" of peoples "is by no means a permanent or unavoidable way of understanding humankind" (Hudson, 1996, p. 259); rather, it was actively constructed by Europeans and their descendants in order to justify their supremacy, over a relatively recent period of human history.

How, then, can we understand race, if not as a biological category? In his lecture "Race, the Floating Signifier", Stuart Hall provides a compelling framework, reconceptualising race as a discursive category. He argues that race works like a language, with the features of the body acting as signifiers to which we assign meaning. Like any other language, meaning is "relational and not essential" (*Stuart Hall: Race - The Floating Signifier*, 1997) and is therefore historically and culturally contingent, shifting and changing over time and space. Hall states that "the body is a text, and we are all readers of it". This is not to say that biological differences do not exist; of course, they do, but the meaning we assign to them is arbitrary, just like the relationship between signifier and signified in spoken and written languages. To extend the comparison, one might think of text on a page, or spoken language: ink, marks, and sounds are all real and exist in the physical world, but it is only the socially constructed convention of language, and the active process of decoding, that gives them meaning. The word "taller" might be written on a page, but depending on the context and the decoder, it might be interpreted as the English word referring to comparative height, or as the Spanish word for "workshop". The marks themselves have no inherent meaning. Similarly, bodily characteristics can be read in multiform ways: they gain meaning "not because of what they contain in their essence, but in the shifting relations of difference which they establish with other concepts and ideas in a signifying field". Thus, race is not an essential property of an individual, but is rather the product of

discourses that assign meaning to bodies. These discourses change across both time and space: the same human subject might be assigned different racial categories in different cultural, national, and linguistic contexts, as well as at different points in history or even within their own lifetime.

Sexuality

Another core assumption underpinning my work is that sexuality in general, and homosexuality in particular, are culturally constructed, historically contingent concepts. As Michel Foucault outlines in *The History of Sexuality*, prior to the 19th century, sexual acts considered "contrary to nature" included adultery, incest, bestiality, and sodomy alike (1978, p. 18). David Halperin describes the historical understanding of sodomy as "a sinful act which any person, given sufficient temptation, may be induced to commit" (1990, p. 8). According to Halperin, the identification of the self with the sexual self began in late antiquity and was strengthened by the Christian confessional. In the high Middle Ages, sexual behaviour began to be attributed to a type of person: "sodomite" came to refer to a person inclined to commit particular acts. The nineteenth century saw the crystallisation of the concept of "sexual inversion", which described sexual deviance as a form of gender non-conformity; it was not until the late nineteenth century that the concept and terminology of "homosexuality" as a sexual orientation distinct from gender presentation emerged (Halperin, 1990, pp. 8–9). The term "homosexual" itself is widely believed to have been coined by German-Hungarian writer Karl Maria Kertbeny in the 1860s (Feray, Herzer and Peppel, 1990). In the latter half of the 19th century, a number of medico-scientific studies attempted to delineate sexual pathologies; the most influential was Austro-German psychiatrist Richard von Krafft-Ebing's *Psychopathia sexualis*, first published in 1886, which classified a range of sexual "perversions", among them homosexuality (Schaffner, 2011, p. 477). Like the scientific taxonomies of race before them, these studies of sexuality claimed to discover and describe inherent, natural categories of humanity, when they were in fact creating and constructing these categories. As Foucault puts it, "The nineteenth-century homosexual became a personage [...] The sodomite had been a temporary aberration; the homosexual was now a species" (1978, p. 20). Thus, the construction of same-sex sexual desire and activity evolved: where these were once understood in terms of specific, discrete acts of

unlawful conduct, the idea that particular individuals might be essentially predisposed to same-sex attraction took over in Western discourses of sexuality.

Just as the claim that race is socially constructed does not mean that physical differences between humans do not exist, the claim of the social constructionist view of sexuality is not that the phenomenon of human beings differing in their sexual tastes is a recent one. Rather, what is relatively new in relation to human history is the idea that these differences in sexual tastes constitute distinct types of people (Halperin, 1990, p. 26). Halperin is careful to point out that to advocate for the constructed nature of sexual identities "is not to say that they are false or unreal, merely that they are not positive, natural, or essential features of the world" (1990, p. 28). They are very real in the minds of contemporary human subjects, and thus have material effects on the world in which we live. However, the fact that the world has not always been understood this way demonstrates that the contemporary understanding of sexual orientation and identity as being organised into categories like "heterosexual", "bisexual", "homosexual", etc., is a contingent historical construct that casts a person's sexual taste as a stable, inherent, and essential aspect of their person. This understanding of sexuality has been naturalised, and leveraged politically, to the extent that questioning it has been taken by some as an attack on the gay rights movement or on gay people's understanding of themselves. In the chapter "An Exchange with Richard Schneider", included in Halperin's book, Schneider claims that "The idea that homosexuality was as deeply rooted as one's gender or race has been a cornerstone of the hope for increased social tolerance and eventual 'liberation'" (1990, p. 51), and that Halperin's argument constitutes a challenge to this hope. Halperin refutes this claim, saying that he is not sure "how politically useful it is to claim that sexuality is as essential and unalterable as gender or race" (1990, p. 52). Halperin is right to question the political indispensability of claiming that sexuality is essential; however, he fails to challenge Schneider's underlying assumption that gender and race are essential features of an individual rather than being social constructs themselves.

In fact, the construction of sexuality is deeply intertwined with those of both race and gender. In her article "Heterosexualism and the Colonial/Modern Gender System", María Lugones points out that modern conceptions of race, gender, and sexuality were

constructed and imposed on much of the world, including what is now called Latin America, by Europeans. European colonialism introduced the Western gender binary to societies in which gender had often been constructed differently: Lugones points to Oyeronke Oyewumi's study that demonstrates how the European gender system was imposed on Yoruba society and to Paula Gunn Allen's work that shows many Native American groups to have recognised more than two genders and had a positive conception of what we would now call homosexuality. The European construction of gender was introduced by colonisers as a tool of domination and hierarchy; compulsory heterosexuality is a characteristic of this construction of gender relations (2007, pp. 196–197). Furthermore, gender and race are mutually constituted systems: only white bourgeois women have consistently been counted as "women" in the West. Women excluded from whiteness were understood to be devoid of "femininity" and thus to be animals: they were not seen as fragile and passive like white women, but rather considered aggressive and strong enough to carry out physical labour under enslavement. White colonisers excluded non-white women on the basis that they lacked normative gender as the colonisers conceived of it (2007, pp. 201–206). Under this arbitration, to be human was to have one of the two binary genders, with heterosexuality being a constituent part of enacting this gender correctly; this is the system that was imposed through colonialism, and which persists through cultural imperialism. Thus, "heterosexuality is not just biologized in a fictional way; it is compulsory and permeates the whole of the coloniality of gender in the renewed, large sense. In this sense, global, Eurocentered capitalism is heterosexualist" (Lugones, 2007, p. 201). My work is structured by the understanding that gender, race, and sexuality are socially constructed rather than natural features of the world, and that the dominance of European constructions thereof is due to colonialist practices of enforcement.

Again, however, the fact that these categories are constructed does not detract from their real and perceptible influence on the world, particularly as the basis of material oppression; similarly, the fact that these matrices of identity have been imposed through colonialism does not mean that they do not shape contemporary subjects, of course with regional and local specificities. As Luciano Martínez points out, "no [es] tan simple trazar la línea entre lo propio y lo ajeno ya que los mismos homosexuales hispanoamericanos

('Hispanic queers') han incorporado muchas veces conceptos extranjeros" (2009, p. 863). Just as the Spanish and Portuguese languages were originally a colonial imposition but are now the mother tongues of the majority of the population of Latin America, concepts like homosexuality are in common use in discourses across the continent. Many social movements are organised around these identity categories: as Martínez puts it, "La rúbrica 'lésbico-gay' [...] convoca las luchas políticas y sociales en curso en nuestros países" (2009, pp. 864–865). Martínez notes various social phenomena that revolve around these sexual identity categories, such as the increasing presence of gay men and lesbians in telenovelas, films and literature at the time he wrote in 2009; the inauguration of pride marches, originally a US phenomenon, in many Latin American countries; and the increased emphasis on gay tourism in cities like Rio de Janeiro and Buenos Aires (2009, pp. 864–865). Since Martínez wrote this in 2009, there have also been significant advances in the extension of legal protection against discrimination on the basis of identity, and of partnership and parenting rights in many Latin American states; these struggles have been based on the premise of "gay" and "lesbian" identity. It is clear, therefore, that these categories hold significance in this cultural context. In interviews conducted for my own research, as I will discuss at length in later chapters, the construction of sexuality in terms of essential personal identity was predominant. In pointing out the socially constructed and colonially imposed nature of gender, race, and sexuality, my intention is not to discount the importance of these constructions, but to destabilise their naturalisation in order to question their downstream effects.

From Personal Identity to Literary Category

Having established that the dominant discourses of race and sexuality as identity categories construct these as inherent and stable characteristics of individuals, I now move towards the focus of the thesis: the transferral of these categories to a literary context. Literary categories like "Black literature" and "lesbian novels" are founded on socially constructed identity categories like "Black" and "lesbian". Thus, these characteristics are applied to literature, even though a novel cannot be "Black" or a "lesbian" in the way we understand these terms when applied to human subjects. This construction of literature in terms of essentialist identity categories can have a number of effects, arguably both positive and negative. In this section, I examine a number of

previous studies that have discussed literary categories based on non-heteronormative sexuality, and which moved me to consider varied perspectives on the phenomenon.

Sergio Gutiérrez Negrón's chapter "Cruel Dispositions: Queer Literature, the Contemporary Puerto Rican Literary Field and Luis Negrón's *Mundo Cruel* (2010)" describes what the critic calls "the rise, solidification and institutionalization of a strong and openly queer literary space in the island's literary field" (2018, p. 158), which he characterises as "the most important development of the Puerto Rican literary field" of the twenty-first century thus far. Gutiérrez Negrón characterises the historic Puerto Rican literary field as being built on masculinist nationalism, homophobia, and heteronormativity, leading queer authors "to choose between the closet and exile" (2018, p. 158). He describes how Manuel Ramos Otero and other gay Puerto Rican authors left the archipelago for the US throughout the 1960s–1980s due to homophobic persecution, ostracisation, and censorship. The critic details how this finally began to change with two publications of 2007: *Centro Journal*'s "Puerto Rican Queer Sexualities" special issue, and *Los otros cuerpos*, the first anthology of queer literature in Puerto Rico. Gutiérrez Negrón states that these publications, explicitly marked as queer, paved the way for the positioning of queer literature within the Puerto Rican field (2018, p. 170). He characterises the establishment of an explicitly queer literature as a necessary challenge to the repressive and homophobic *status quo*; similar arguments were made repeatedly by participants in my own research, as I will discuss in Chapter 5.

In her 2004 doctoral thesis *Finding and Creating Possibility: Reading in the lives of lesbian, bisexual and queer young women*, Paulette Rothbauer studied the reading habits of young lesbian, bisexual, and queer female readers in Canada. She found that reading so-called lesbian literature fulfilled a number of functions in the lives of her participants. One was what Rothbauer called "reading for possibility": as a way of imagining possible future trajectories for their lives as lesbian, bisexual, and queer women. Another function was "reading for community": reading lesbian literature allowed participants to "come together as lesbians and queer and bisexual women to talk about lesbian and queer texts". Rothbauer found that reading practices enabled these young women to "explore, contest, and enact lesbian and queer identities" (2004, p. 109). Thus, she postulated that

a category like “lesbian literature” could hold utility for individuals and communities marginalised on the basis of gender and sexual identity.

While I found Rothbauer’s approach and methods compelling, some limitations stood out to me. The researcher recommended that library workers implement complete and consistent classification of fictional works including cross-referencing along subject terms that identify salient lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, and queer content, in order to make these more easily searchable (Rothbauer, 2004, p. 121). It seems to me that this recommendation rests on the underlying assumption that it is both possible and desirable to identify and classify books neatly into such categories. One might wonder what would qualify a particular text as lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, or queer; where the boundaries between these categories might lie; and who would be responsible for assigning them, all questions which I find troubling as they rely on the essentialist policing of these identities. Nevertheless, the study presents potentially significant personal and social advantages of identity-based literary categories, which should not be discounted; I was interested to see whether these would manifest in my own research.

One scholar who is more critical of the construction of sexuality-based literary categories is Jeffrey Zamostny. In his article “Canon Formation and Diversity: Latin American Gay Literature in the Global Market”, Zamostny discusses the interaction between what he calls “gay Latin American literature” and the international literary field. He argues that the Latin American gay canon came into being in the 1970s and 1980s, largely at the service of the gay liberation movement within the United States, where activists “turned to so-called ‘world’ authors to prove the existence of a ‘universal’ gay identity” (2011, p. 82). The positions of power occupied by agents of legitimation within the US, including writers, publishers, and scholars, among others, alongside the strength of the American market, has meant that the canonisation of Latin American gay literature has occurred largely in the US (2011, p. 81). Works are stripped of their specific local and national contexts, marketed generically as “Latin American” literature, to make them easy to group together and promote to an international audience. They are sanitised and commodified: “commercial pressures transform difference’s radical potential into an innocuous commodity [...] Diversity becomes a product” (2011, p. 81). Zamostny points out the homogenising and exoticising effect of grouping very disparate texts from

throughout the continent together in order to market them to a US gay audience. He gives the example of the US publishing house Gay Sunshine Press, which published the anthologies *Now the Volcano: An Anthology of Latin American Gay Literature* (1979) and *My Deep Dark Pain is Love: A Collection of Latin American Gay Fiction* (1983), intended as evidence for the supposed universality of gay identity. In 1982, the publishing house produced a translation of the Brazilian novel *Bom-Crioulo*, originally published in 1895. Zamostny details how early editions of the novel represented it as a canonical work of Brazilian literature and made little to no mention of homosexual content; by contrast, Gay Sunshine Press explicitly marketed the text as "Latin American gay literature", a marketing strategy designed to appeal to the existing gay audience within the US (Zamostny, 2011, pp. 87–88). Here, we see that works with non-normative representations of gender and sexuality come to be exoticised and commodified for an international gay literary market; furthermore, this is done explicitly in service of reinforcing the image of homosexuality as a naturally occurring, universal phenomenon rather than a social construct. The entire concept of "gay Latin American literature", and the works that make up the corresponding canon, Zamostny argues, are a North American imposition, designed to fit more complex works into a homonormative framework for the purposes of marketing them to self-identified gay audiences in areas of geopolitical power on the basis of hegemonic understandings of sexuality. Within global capitalism, once "gay" has been established as a type of person, it also becomes a market niche waiting to be filled, to which products like "gay literature" can be marketed. Zamostny's work prompted me to consider the ways in which strictly delineated identity categories are open to capitalist appropriation, and to question whether Arroyo Pizarro's texts had been similarly commodified.

In an issue of *Revista iberoamericana* dedicated to "Los estudios lésbico-gays y queer latinoamericanos", two articles demonstrate very distinct approaches to discussing non-heteronormative themes and characters in Caribbean literature. Here, I juxtapose Sonia Valle's "Ramificaciones caribeñas de la subjetividad lesbiana. Una lectura no-heterosexual de *La última noche que pasé contigo* de Mayra Montero" and Yolanda Martínez-San Miguel's "Más allá de la homonormatividad: intimidades alternativas en el

caribe hispano" in order to illustrate some of the issues with essentialist identity-based categories of literature.

Valle's article outlines how lesbian literature has been suppressed in a Puerto Rican context and emphasises the need for lesbian visibility in Puerto Rican literature; her concerns are similar to those expressed by Gutiérrez Negrón, discussed above. However, unlike Gutiérrez Negrón, who proposes the expansive category of "Puerto Rican queer literature", for which he offers no strict definition, Valle emphasises a need to "identificar el lenguaje del discurso lesbiano y diferenciarlo de los otros lenguajes que tratan el tema del erotismo o de la sexualidad" (2008, p. 1104). She presents a very specific definition of what constitutes lesbian literature: according to the critic, a lesbian text is one which deals with sexual attraction between women and details the geography of the female body; it must also deconstruct the psychoanalytic notion of the woman as "lacking" a penis; and finally, the writer of lesbian literature must be positioned critically with regards to heteronormativity. This list of highly specific requirements in order to be included within the category of "lesbian literature" seems likely to exclude many texts that might otherwise be included[2]. While Valle claims that increased visibility for lesbians in literature will lead to "la desconstrucción de las categorías fundacionales de identidad relacionadas con los conceptos de raza, género y sexualidad" (2008, p. 1102), she instead polices the boundary of lesbianism and lesbian literature through her strict and narrow definition.

By contrast, Yolanda Martínez-San Miguel actively questions the practices of rigid categorisation and delineation of identity categories, denouncing these as homonormative. She discusses several Caribbean texts whose characters do not conform to strictly defined, essentialist categories: "se narrativiza una bisexualidad, lesbianismo y homosexualidad que no encaja en las definiciones ya tradicionales" (2008, p. 1053). Martínez-San Miguel discusses a number of texts, focusing on the exploration of sexual identities that are not strictly defined as heterosexual, gay, or bisexual, and in fact rejecting these as definitive categorisations. Similarly, the critic eschews categories like "gay" or "lesbian" when referring to the texts themselves. Juxtaposing these articles

[2] Among other things, this definition would exclude much literature by or about transgender lesbians.

by Valle and Martínez-San Miguel reveals two opposite approaches to a category like lesbian literature: one that prioritises an essentialist and rigid understanding of sexuality and identity, and one that actively rejects this essentialism and rigidity. Martínez-San Miguel emphasises the need to avoid the institutionalisation of identities; to create alternative spaces that do not replicate hegemonic structures of repression; and, importantly, to "trascender etiquetas identitarias sin volver a invisibilizar y marginar la alteridad sexual" (2008, p. 1054). This last point makes clear that in rejecting essentialist identity categories, we must take extreme caution not to simply force the marginalised back underground; the balance of these concerns also lies at the heart of this thesis.

Amy Kaminsky comments on the relationship between "gay" and "lesbian" as personal identities and these same terms as categories of cultural production, where the designations come to be understood not only as an essential characteristic of an individual, but also as applying to works of art, such as literature and film. Kaminsky argues that, because literature by and about lesbians and gay people has historically been suppressed, there is still a need to demonstrate and analyse gay and lesbian themes in cultural production; on this point, she makes the same argument as Gutiérrez Negrón and Valle. However, she also warns that "De la persona gay a la película gay (¿o es al revés?), de la mujer lesbiana a la novela lésbica (¿o viceversa?), caemos en la trampa de las identidades fijas" (2009, p. 882). Thus, fixed identities and fixed categories of cultural production are mutually reinforcing; like Martínez-San Miguel, Kaminsky insists on the need to question these strict categorisations, even while acknowledging their political usefulness. In my approach to the topic, I hold in tension the recognition that such categories have served political and social purposes and continue to hold relevance for many people who use them, while remembering that these categories are not naturally occurring and questioning their origins, use, and effects. Categorisation of texts as "lesbian" or "gay", as well as "Black" or "female", among other designations, results from wider societal discourses that divide humanity into such categories. The identification and uplifting of texts marginalised on this basis is a recognisable rallying point in struggles to liberate marginalised groups. Nevertheless, it is worth questioning the logic and ramifications of using the same essentialised identity categories that are

used for oppression in the effort for liberation; the studies I have discussed present some of the potential dangers of this practice.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have leveraged Stuart Hall's work on representation as a framework for understanding how Arroyo Pizarro and her texts are produced by sources external to the texts themselves, demonstrating the importance of this novel focus. Representations inevitably shape readers' perceptions of author and text(s); therefore, neither can be understood to exist independently of these representations. Building upon the foundation of Hall, I have outlined my approach to literary culture and the importance of viewing literature in terms of the participants and processes that produce it, rather than attempting to treat the text itself as static or objective. This perspective is influenced by cultural studies, book history, and reader-response criticism. I have also laid out the assumptions regarding identity, in particular race and sexuality, that underpin the work: in order to question the practice of assigning identity-based literary categories to Arroyo Pizarro and the texts associated with her, it is first critical to establish that identity categories themselves are not natural or objective facts. By extension, literary categories based on identity are not neutral: rather, they are particular ways of representing the author and her work that are informed by and potentially reinforce essentialist constructions of identity. My review of previous studies on sexuality-based literary categories begins to highlight some of the arguments other scholars have made in favour of and against such categorisations, perspectives which informed my thinking and raised questions regarding the general phenomenon prior to embarking on my own research into Arroyo Pizarro specifically. The following chapter will move towards a consideration of the methodologies used to investigate representations of Yolanda Arroyo Pizarro, her works, and her readers.

Chapter 2. Methodology

Introduction

Since the inspiration for this project arose largely from paratextual materials (primarily titles, subtitles, and book covers) associated with Arroyo Pizarro's work, it was only natural that my research began with these. From there, I became interested in the effect of such paratexts on potential readers. I began searching for evidence of Arroyo Pizarro's readers, looking for sources like online reviews and posts on social media. Hoping for the opportunity to have more in-depth conversations with readers, I decided to adopt an interview methodology as a core component of the project. My interest was not in gaining a representative sample or in conducting a large-scale quantitative study, but to produce rich, qualitative data and explore participants' personal relationships with Arroyo Pizarro and her writing.

Prior to conducting my own interviews, I carried out research into representations of Arroyo Pizarro and her work in a variety of sources, including book covers, reviews, publisher websites, author biographies, interviews conducted by other parties, and social media posts. This research provided me with an initial indication of the ways in which the author and her work were represented, demonstrating the strong focus on identity categories across these varied sources and therefore evidencing the rationale for the project before I conducted fieldwork. Analysis of these sources is covered in Chapter 3.

The focus of this chapter is on the methodology and context of the interviews that I conducted with fourteen participants in 2023, which form the basis of analysis of Chapters 4–6. I first describe the process of recruitment, detailing the various methods I tried, along with the successes and failures. I then provide some general context and information about the interviews. This is followed by introductions to each individual participant and the context and setting of our interview; I also reflect on my own positionality as researcher and interlocutor throughout the interviews. In the final sections, I discuss the process of transcribing and coding the interview data. I take a reflexive approach, treating the methodology not as static but as evolving over the duration of the project, both as the result of changes in my thought process and of

challenges I experienced in the field. I thus reject what Jackie Stacey called "the temptation to represent the research project as a seamless narrative" (1994, p. 50); instead, I strive to "share not only its successful moments but also its moments of renegotiation" (Fanjul Fanjul, 2010, p. 39). As I have outlined, a significant aspect of my approach to this research was an interest in the reader; as such, I set out to conduct research on the readers of Arroyo Pizarro's work. My primary goals were to determine how participants represented the author and her work, particularly in relation to identity categories like race and sexuality, and to gauge participant opinion on the use of identity-based literary categories as a phenomenon. In Fanjul Fanjul's words, the focus on readers "does not signify that ultimately the 'true' answers" lie with these readers; "[t]his is just a part, albeit an important one, which aims at completing the puzzle" (2010, pp. 39–40). Furthermore, the small scale of the study means that the findings cannot be generalised; rather, they offer in-depth analysis of this specific context.

Recruitment

Having established the intention to conduct research into readers, I was immediately confronted with the questions of where to look for readers, who these readers might be, and how I might make contact with them.

Where?

There were several possibilities regarding where to look for readers, since Arroyo Pizarro has been published in a number of countries, including Puerto Rico, Spain, the United States, and Colombia. I was theoretically open to readers from any location, but prioritised being physically present to conduct research in Puerto Rico for a number of reasons. While a comparative study of representations of Arroyo Pizarro across multiple literary contexts would certainly be illuminating, in the interests of time I was not able to conduct fieldwork in more than one physical location during the PhD. I prioritised Puerto Rico as I wished to explore Arroyo Pizarro's domestic context and ensure that Puerto Rican readers were foregrounded in the research. I also thought that the extensive body of work Arroyo Pizarro has published in Puerto Rico in comparison with only a subset being available elsewhere might mean that her texts were more widely available and therefore more read. Furthermore, Arroyo Pizarro had indicated an openness to academic research, which I hoped might lead to opportunities to find participants; as I

will demonstrate, this intuition turned out to be correct, as Arroyo Pizarro's involvement proved invaluable to my recruitment efforts. I thus concentrated my efforts in Puerto Rico, spending a six-week period there from 10th April to 23rd May 2023. I stayed in San Juan, also travelling to the neighbouring cities of Carolina, Loíza, and Caguas during the trip. I remained open to interviewing participants in other locations; three participants were located in the United States and carried out interviews remotely.

Who?

The question of who Arroyo Pizarro's readers are can be answered rather flippantly: people who have read her work. However, as I discovered, the issue is more complex than it immediately appears. On reflection, I imagined the reader in a particular way and hoped to recruit the reader I imagined. This is evidenced by particular comments I made in interviews. At times, usually towards the end of an interview, the "interviewee" would take on the role of asking me questions about my project; sometimes, this conversation turned towards the interview method itself. In my conversation with Mónica Lladó Ortega, I made the following comment:

> es muy difícil encontrar... lectores generales, digamos. Em... yo he hablado con... muchos grupos de personas, eh, eh, editores, em... libreros, lo que sea. Em, y también académicos. Pero es muy difícil encontrar a... una persona cualquiera que sea lectora.[3]

Similarly, in my interview with Alexandra Gonzenbach Perkins, I said that

> It's very hard... like, it's quite easy for me to look up, you know, who's written about her [Arroyo Pizarro]... who's published an article on her, who's taught her... that's relatively (AGP: Mhm) easy. But it's very difficult to know, like, who's just a random person who's read her work. (Laughing) It's really, really difficult.

These extracts demonstrate some assumptions I had about readers. I had created a dichotomy of academics and book industry professionals *versus* "lectores generales", whom I constructed as "random" people who happen to have read Arroyo Pizarro's work; however, this is an inexact distinction. Students, for example, posed a challenge: does an

[3] Details on my approach to transcribing speech can be found later in this chapter.

undergraduate student who has been assigned a text for a university class count as "just a random person who's read her work", or does the fact that they have formally studied the text in a university context turn them into an academic reader? Furthermore, this kind of thinking led me to conceive of academics not as "readers", despite the fact that they had of course read Arroyo Pizarro's work, but as an essentially different category altogether. Of course, involvement with academia (as student, lecturer, or researcher) affects one's perspective on reading, a fact that must be taken into account in analysis, but all readers are affected by their experiences and positionalities. I now believe that when I was searching for what I called "general" and "random" readers, I was looking for something that does not exist: the pure, typical, average reader.

I also found that my conceptualisation of the reader clashed with others' expectations regarding academic research and interviewing. In recruitment, I found that some people I contacted declined to be interviewed, giving the reason that they were not experts in Arroyo Pizarro. I found it extremely difficult to convey that I was not looking for expertise and that my only criterion for interviewees was having read Arroyo Pizarro's work in any capacity. There was a disconnect between our understandings of which kinds of readers were suitable research subjects. While it is impossible to know for sure, I suspect that this may have been a significant obstacle to recruitment, as people who saw my calls for participants may not have considered themselves suitable on the basis of a lack of expertise.

How?

I tried a number of methods of recruitment, to varying success. Some were on-the-ground methods that targeted potential participants physically located in the San Juan area; others cast the net wider. In this section, I will discuss all of the methods I employed and their results.

1. Flyers and Posters

I made flyers advertising my study (see Appendix A), some of which I distributed at book-related events where Arroyo Pizarro was a participant such as the Feria Anual del Libro in Caguas; I hoped that people attending such an event would be interested in books and possibly have read Arroyo Pizarro's work. I put up some of the flyers as posters in

bookshops, again in hopes that bookshop customers might have read Arroyo Pizarro's work; all of the bookshops where I hung posters stocked some of the author's books. I put up more posters around the University of Puerto Rico Río Piedras (UPRRP) campus, hoping to attract students. I did not receive any responses to these flyers and posters; this method was entirely unsuccessful.

2. Social Media

I attempted to use social media, including Facebook, Reddit, and Twitter (as it was still named at the time) to recruit participants. I hoped that using social media platforms might help me to find readers with whom I was unlikely to interact personally. I targeted some Puerto Rican and San Juan-focused online spaces, while also making some posts in more general spaces; I wanted to remain open to multiple sources of participants. I joined LGBT and university Facebook groups based in San Juan and made posts promoting the study; I made a post in the Puerto Rico subreddit; I made several tweets advertising the study, some of which were retweeted by Yolanda and/or cultural and academic institutions. All of these posts linked a Microsoft Forms survey where people could leave their contact details. I received a handful of email addresses this way, but when I reached out, only one person responded. This was Lola Rosario, my first interviewee, who also contacted me on Twitter. However, it later transpired that Arroyo Pizarro had sent her my tweet directly, rather than Rosario happening upon it; as such, I count this more as an instance of snowballing/introductions than a social media recruitment. I also found a number of Instagram users who had posted about or reviewed Arroyo Pizarro's work, which I discuss further in Chapter 3. I tried to reach out to some of these users, but to no success. I therefore consider social media to have been another completely unsuccessful method of recruitment.

3. Email

Unlike flyers/posters and social media, email is targeted at a specific recipient and requires knowing that recipient's email address. This method is therefore more suited to identifiable public figures and groups. I identified a number of potential participants, mostly through online searches, and emailed them directly. These included publishers, academics, LGBT organisations, and bookshops. Contacting publishers and bookshops

in this way proved mostly unsuccessful: one publisher responded saying that they were not able to participate, but suggested another participant; the only publisher I managed to recruit through email was one I had met in person; and no bookshops responded to emails. Some academics did reply, but often said that they were not the right fit for the study, usually because of a lack of expertise as discussed above; some of these individuals suggested colleagues, and this resulted in one interview, with Esther Rodríguez Miranda. One of the publishers I emailed, who was not available for interview, put me in touch with Mónica Lladó Ortega. I received some responses from LGBT organisations, but none that resulted in interviews.

4. Phone Calls

Like email, phone calls are targeted and require knowledge of the recipient's phone number; this was not a major recruitment method, since I did not have numbers for most potential participants. However, following a lack of responses from bookshops via email, I did call two or three. This produced one interview, with the bookshop owner and writer Luis Negrón.

5. Meeting at Events

While in Puerto Rico, I attended five events at which Arroyo Pizarro was speaking. After these events, Arroyo Pizarro would often introduce me to people. I met Edgardo Machuca, the publisher from EDP University Press, in this way, as well as the Anonymous Lecturer. These successes were therefore due partially to attending the events and partially to the introduction by Arroyo Pizarro. I was also invited to two university seminars by interviewees Marie Ramos Rosado and the Anonymous Lecturer, connecting me with undergraduate students of Arroyo Pizarro's work. I met Dayaneira in Ramos Rosado's seminar, exchanged contact details, and subsequently interviewed her. I met Alexandra Gonzenbach Perkins virtually at a conference I attended shortly after my fieldwork trip; I attended in person in Vancouver while Perkins joined by video link. She expressed interest in my work and in being interviewed, and I later contacted her by email and arranged the interview.

6. Introductions/Snowballing

The most successful avenue for recruitment was through personal introductions and snowballing. The majority of my contacts were made this way, primarily through Arroyo Pizarro herself, who took every opportunity to send me contact details of potentially relevant people or to introduce me to people in person at events, as discussed above. She sent a number of emails to people she thought I would benefit from speaking to, copying me in; this was how I made contact with Marie Ramos Rosado and Edda López. Arroyo Pizarro also sent me the phone number of Daniel Torres, whom I contacted over WhatsApp message. It is clear that Arroyo Pizarro acted as a gatekeeper to other participants and that her support was indispensable to the project. Other participants also suggested potential contacts: Lola Rosario put me in touch with Rosario Méndez Panedas over email, and Daniel Torres connected me with his student Caroline.

As for Arroyo Pizarro herself, it is hard to attribute my success in recruiting her to just one method. Arroyo Pizarro is extremely active and responsive on social media and has a positive relationship with academia, being a lecturer herself and actively engaging with academics who research her work. Prior to the fieldwork, she had been aware of me for some time, having followed me on Twitter from quite early in my PhD. I emailed her on the lead-up to arriving in Puerto Rico, and she responded positively. I also met her at an event only three days into my stay; we spoke, and she gave me her number to keep in contact. This recruitment is arguably therefore due to a combination of social media, email, and meeting at events.

As I have detailed, the least successful of these varied recruitment methods were those intended to attract participants without either personal connection to Arroyo Pizarro or formal positions in the literary world. This is not to say that these methods would not be successful in another study on readers: it is unclear why these methods failed, and it may be related to the specific context. Ultimately, my initial hopes of recruiting readers from outside formalised circuits of literature were not fulfilled, a fact which deeply influenced the methodology and analysis.

Interview Locations

In all cases, I allowed participants to choose the location of the interview, for two main reasons: firstly, I did not have access to an obviously suitable location, since I was in

Puerto Rico only temporarily and did not have connections with any workplace or university to which I might invite participants; secondly, I wanted to make sure that attending interviews was as convenient and comfortable as possible for participants, both so that they would be more likely to attend and so that they would be at ease in the interview itself. I therefore made every effort to conduct the interviews at the locations chosen by interviewees, or in their preferred medium when interviews were conducted remotely. This did have certain drawbacks; in particular, several of the locations were public spaces and as such featured a significant amount of noise and interruptions, which affected the sound quality of the recordings. This has unfortunately resulted in difficulties with hearing and transcribing portions of those interviews. However, I feel that the loss of short portions here and there is a small price to pay to ensure that the experience was accessible and comfortable for my participants, which also benefited the research.

Interview Format

I chose one-to-one interviews as a method due to both their suitability and practicality. I considered using focus groups, as I was interested in the potential for multiple participants to generate discussion and debate. However, once I was in the field, it quickly became apparent that trying to arrange focus groups would likely present insurmountable difficulties because of the logistical considerations, such as needing to coordinate more people's schedules and find a suitable location for multiple people to sit, talk, and be audible on a recording; I thus abandoned this idea. One-to-one, semi-structured interviews allowed me to have in-depth conversations with the participants and to adapt my questions to the specific interviewee and the flow of conversation, an advantage over a method like surveying.

In advance of each interview, I wrote prompts for myself with suggested questions; I relied on these in some interviews more than others, often picking up on interviewee comments to ask new, unplanned questions. I opened the interview by asking the participant to describe their relationship with Arroyo Pizarro and her work, including how they had first heard of her and which of her texts they had read; this encouraged participants to produce representations of the author and her texts. Towards the end of

the interview, I usually turned the conversation more explicitly towards identity-based literary categories, such as when I had the following exchange with Edda López:

> SMS: Em… bueno, algo que a mí me interesa es el hecho de que… se ha hablado mucho… de… su obra en términos de… como por ejemplo, "literatura negra", "literatura lésbica", como eso… como que ca- categoriza…
>
> EL: (overlapping) Etiquetas, sí.
>
> SMS: Así. Y… bueno, lo que quiero… preguntarle es… ¿cómo cree que afecta eso la percepción de su obra? ¿Cree que… influye en, en quién… la lee, o, o…? ¿Qué le parece? Por ejemplo, porque… no se habla de "literatura blanca" ni "literatura masculina", "literatura heterosexual". Entonces ¿qué, qué piensa usted de, de esa dinámica?

Introducing this topic encouraged participants to reflect on the phenomenon itself, discuss it, and sometimes to present arguments for and against. My reasoning for introducing this topic of conversation further into the interview was that I felt introducing it earlier on would influence whether or not they used such categories uncritically in their representations of Arroyo Pizarro; I wanted to see whether they would use terms like "literatura lésbica" without my having brought them up explicitly. Most interviews were around an hour in length. The shortest, with Mónica Lladó Ortega, was thirty-two minutes long; the longest, with Lola Rosario, was an hour and nine minutes.

Representing Others

I now turn to addressing the fact that analysing interview data involves the representation and interpretation of others' words. The use of interviews has allowed for the incorporation of viewpoints other than my own; in particular, as I will go on to discuss, most participants are Puerto Rican and many are also Black, providing perspectives on race and nationality that go some way towards filling gaps in my own knowledge. However, I do not claim to be able to represent these participants' "voices" in an objective or unbiased way. The impossibility of doing so is well expressed by Pam Alldred in her chapter "Ethnography and Discourse Analysis: Dilemmas in Representing the Voices of Children": according to Alldred, "Social constructionist theory has warned that giving our 'subject' a 'voice' involves the fantasy that it is possible to have unmediated direct

knowledge of experience" (1998, p. 11). This is true on at least two levels: firstly, a participant's account of experience is already a representation of, rather than direct access to, that experience; secondly, in this thesis, access to that account is mediated by me, the researcher, therefore constituting "my own construction of my informants' construction" of their experiences (Radway, 1991, p. 15). I have made decisions, consciously or unconsciously, about how to represent and interpret participants' interventions. As such, I wish to be clear that any representation of participants' words has been filtered through my own subjectivity and actively reproduced by me as the researcher and writer of the thesis; or as Janice Radway puts it in her 1991 introduction to *Reading the Romance*, "what I took to be simple descriptions of my interviewees' self-understandings were mediated if not produced by my own conceptual constructs and ways of seeing the world" (1991, p. 15). Furthermore, I understand and construct my participants, including myself, as adopting variable subject positions, avoiding "the fantasy of unitary, logical beings whose experiences are stable, fixed by identity and internally coherent" but instead "allow[ing] for an individual to be multiply or shiftingly positioned" (Alldred, 1998, p. 17). Participants, like all people, adapt their behaviour and their discourse to the situations in which they find themselves. What they said and did in the interviews was influenced by factors including their level of comfort with me; their emotional state at the time; past personal experiences; the environment in which the interview took place; and my own behaviour and interventions in the conversation. All of this is also true of myself as an interlocutor. I therefore take the position that all interview data is a product of its very specific environment, time, and place; as such, any comments made by participants cannot necessarily be taken as reflecting "fixed" internal views and positions, now or even at the time of interview.

Participant Introductions

I will now give a brief introduction to each interview participant and respective interview setting. These introductions appear in the same order in which interviews took place. In each introduction, I give personal details that the participant shared in the interview and which I felt provided relevant context for their comments; a description of the individual's relationship with Arroyo Pizarro, which in some cases is an interpersonal relationship and in others is purely the relationship between reader and author; and relevant details about

the interview itself, particularly the location and language. The introductions are based on information that the participant themselves gave over the course of the interviews, rather than on other sources; this is intended to honour participant agency and to reflect their identity and circumstances at the time of the interview specifically. The one exception to this rule is that I have included notes indicating when an interviewee is also the author of a source analysed elsewhere in the thesis, in the interests of clarity and transparency. Use of the past tense does not necessarily indicate that an individual's situation has changed; it simply refers to the fact that my statements are intended to refer to the moment of interview. Furthermore, the issue of representation remains. Firstly, the interviewees chose to represent themselves in particular ways. Subsequently, I have chosen when to quote, paraphrase, include, omit, and summarise; these are necessary exercises in the interests of space, but ones which introduce my own subjectivity into these representations.

The introductions are not uniform: some include details such as a participant's race or sexuality, while others do not; this is reflective of the different information given by each participant. Prior to conducting interviews, I deliberated over whether and how to prompt interviewees to describe their own identities. In order to make statements about how a person's race, gender, sexuality, nationality, or other aspects of their identity might have affected their relationship with Arroyo Pizarro's work, I would need to gather this information explicitly. It is often assumed that qualitative researchers will gather such demographic information, for example by use of self-completion questionnaires given to participants (Bloor *et al.*, 2001, pp. 39–40). I considered various ways of prompting interviewees to define themselves in terms of race, sexuality, etc.; however, I ultimately came to the conclusion that any attempt to do so would naturalise and presuppose the relevance of whichever identity categories I subjectively chose to ask about, which would be inherently at odds with my purpose in this research. Furthermore, the small nature of the study means that these participants' comments could not have been generalised to their particular demographics in any case. I also felt that participants should not be put in the position of either having to give this information or make the active choice to refuse. For these reasons, I chose to leave participants to bring up whichever aspects of their

identity they considered salient; as such, I can only comment on those aspects that they chose to disclose within the interview context.

Each interviewee was given the choice as to whether they would be referred to anonymously or by name. This decision originally stemmed from the necessity to include the names and positions of some participants, such as Arroyo Pizarro herself, and the expectation that some academics and professionals might prefer to be associated with their comments. Ultimately, I offered the choice to all participants. Most chose to be identified by name, with one exception: the Anonymous Lecturer. The two students, Caroline and Dayaneira, chose to be associated with their first names only. Participants were also consulted on the level of detail about their professional and personal information to be included.

Lola Rosario

Lola Rosario introduced herself as a cultural journalist and an Afro-Boricua woman who grew up in New York and moved to Puerto Rico at the age of fifty-three, two years before our interview took place. She described a complex relationship with race that had evolved over her life, stating that "I always knew [...] I'm not white" but that "I didn't always identify as Afro-Boricua"; this ambiguous positioning was due to the fact that, as she described it, "my African ancestry is... is... less obvious". I will return to the idea of racial ambiguity and more or less "obvious" Blackness in Chapter 4. Rosario identified herself as a feminist, noting that she had not always been one, and commented: "I mostly identify as heterosexual". She described herself as "very... possessive" of and "very aggressive" about her Puerto Rican identity, expressing the view that only those of Puerto Rican descent should live in the archipelago.

Rosario told me that she had first heard of Arroyo Pizarro due to an event in which the latter was participating, but that Rosario had missed the event. Later, Rosario was writing a piece on the legacy of historic Puerto Rican educator Celestina Cordero Molina and got in touch with Arroyo Pizarro as part of her research, on the suggestion of Rosario Méndez Panedas, another of my interviewees; Arroyo Pizarro agreed to collaborate with Lola Rosario on her work. Rosario and Arroyo Pizarro then met in person at a panel event in which Arroyo Pizarro was a participant. Rosario stated that she has read some of Arroyo

Pizarro's poetry, as well as hearing a live reading by the author of her children's book *Pelo bueno*.

The interview took place outside in the public space of the Paseo Julia de Burgos in Loíza, a town around 15 miles east of San Juan. The outside setting meant that the recording was interrupted by numerous gusts of wind, which resulted in some brief parts that were difficult or impossible to hear. Rosario told me in advance that she preferred to have the interview in English; we spoke mostly in English, with Spanish words and phrases peppered in.

Esther Rodríguez Miranda

Esther Rodríguez Miranda is Puerto Rican. At the time of our interview, she lived in San Juan and worked as an academic at EDP University.

Rodríguez Miranda told me that she first heard of Arroyo Pizarro when she was working in a publishing house around the age of twenty-four and was tasked with proofreading one of the author's manuscripts. She later read other books by Arroyo Pizarro, describing herself as becoming interested because of the theme of "la afronegritud". Rodríguez Miranda and Arroyo Pizarro met at a university event, became friends on Facebook, and from there developed a closer relationship. Rodríguez Miranda later wrote an article on Arroyo Pizarro's book *las Negras* (Rodríguez Miranda, 2021). At the time of interview, Rodríguez Miranda and Arroyo Pizarro were colleagues, both working at EDP University.

Our interview was carried out in a pizza restaurant. We paused the interview a handful of times to interact with restaurant staff and to eat. We spoke mostly in Spanish, with some English words and phrases being used.

Yolanda Arroyo Pizarro

Arroyo Pizarro particularly emphasised her sexuality in our interview, referring to herself as a lesbian several times and stating that "toda la vida yo fui una adolescente y una adulta cuir". She focused less on her race, referring to herself once in passing as "negra"; these choices were likely informed by her perception of the focus of my research and of my own identity, leading her to emphasise what seemed relevant and what we had in common. She repeatedly described herself as transgressive, calling herself "una molestia" and "un espíritu de contradicción", stating that her goal is to "tratar un poquito

de desestabilizar lo estable, lo heteronormado, lo, lo patriarcal, la normalización patriarcal que existe, eh, y molestar lo suficiente como para que esa gente no se sienta necesariamente cómoda".

The interview took place in the cafeteria-style seating area of a Freshmart, a Puerto Rican health food supermarket. There was some background noise and a few interruptions for purchases and speaking to staff. We spoke in Spanish, occasionally using English words.

Daniel Torres

Daniel Torres stated that he was born in 1961 and lived in Puerto Rico until 1984; since then, he had lived in the United States, Spain, Chile, and Mexico, finally settling in Ohio where he worked as an academic at Ohio University at the time of our interview. He gave few details about his personal identity, but hinted at experiences of racialisation in the United States, commenting that

> el color enseguida... (SMS: Mm) se ve. O sea, el texto enseguida, ya eres un texto, ya no eres un profesor de una universidad, eres un texto, y ese texto... puede ser... llevado a todo lo que implica el raci- el gran racismo que hay en este país, por ejemplo, en Estados Unidos[.]

Torres told me that he had first met Arroyo Pizarro at a presentation of his book *Mariconerías: Escritos desde el margen* (2006) at a bookshop in San Juan. At the time, Arroyo Pizarro was a student and a protégée of Torres' friend, the writer Mayra Santos-Febres. According to Torres, he later got to know Arroyo Pizarro's work through Santos-Febres' recommendation. He has since collaborated with Arroyo Pizarro on various events; taught her work to undergraduates; invited her to classes where he was teaching her work; and reviewed her novel *Caparazones*. I analyse Torres' review of *Caparazones*, "Las Facultades Amatorias en *Caparazones* de Yolanda Arroyo Pizarro", in Chapter 3.

This interview was conducted over online video call while I was in my accommodation in San Juan and Torres was in his office in Ohio. This setup produced overall good sound quality, with one brief glitch in the recording. We spoke in Spanish, with occasional English words.

Rosario Méndez Panedas

Méndez Panedas introduced herself as an academic working at the Universidad Interamericana de Puerto Rico in San Germán, a city in the south-west of the island. She told me that she is Spanish and that, although she had been living in Puerto Rico for thirty years, "todavía después de tantos años… (SMS laughs) eh, aquí en Puerto Rico, me dicen (laughing) que de dónde soy". She stated that she is a feminist and that her research "siempre ha tenido que ver con la mujer", with an interest in race developing in more recent years. She also commented that she is not Black and that, while she conducts research on Black women, she cannot speak about racial issues from a place of personal experience.

According to Méndez Panedas, she first met Arroyo Pizarro in 2016 when the latter established a chapter of her project La Cátedra de Mujeres Negras Ancestrales in San Germán. Méndez Panedas described how she went to the first meeting, became involved, and has since carried out research and published books with the Cátedra. Méndez Panedas described the objective of the Cátedra:

> su objetivo era que nosotros produjéramos textos creativos que hicieran énfasis en la presencia de las mujeres negras, que habían sido invisibilizadas a lo largo de la historia. Así que ella nos decía, verdad, que a través de nuestros escritos, pues, teníamos que resaltar esas… voces de las mujeres esclavizadas

Méndez Panedas detailed how Arroyo Pizarro connected her with a publisher who went on to publish Méndez Panedas' books: another of my interviewees, Edgardo Machuca at EDP University Press. Méndez Panedas told me that she and Arroyo Pizarro maintained a friendly working relationship, and that she had read some of Arroyo Pizarro's writing, including *las Negras* and *Pelo bueno*, since collaborating with her.

This interview took place over the phone, as Méndez Panedas was located in San Germán and I was unable to travel there. I was again located in my accommodation in San Juan at the time of the interview. The audio-only medium may have affected the conversation in comparison with face-to-face or even video call interviews, since we could not use cues like facial expressions or body language. We communicated in Spanish.

Luis Negrón

At the time of our interview, Luis Negrón was the proprietor of the bookshop La Esquina in the Río Piedras area of San Juan. Negrón is also the author of short story collection *Mundo cruel* (2010), which is the focus of a book chapter by Sergio Gutiérrez Negrón discussed in Chapters 1 and 3. Throughout the interview, Luis Negrón emphasised his Puerto Rican nationality and made references to his sexuality, commenting that "yo, siempre [...] yo digo, 'yo no soy gay, yo soy, yo soy homosexual'".

Negrón described a close relationship and feeling of solidarity with Arroyo Pizarro, stating that "yo soy bien defensor de Yolanda [...] no me gusta que nadie se meta con, con, con Yolanda, este, le, le tengo mucho cariño [...] nos queremos mucho". I asked about sales of her books in La Esquina, and Negrón told me that they sell her books, including *las Negras, Ojos de luna,* and *Las caras lindas*. Of her work, he stated that he particularly enjoys the short story collection *Ojos de luna*. In my interview with Arroyo Pizarro, she had told me that it was Negrón who had encouraged her to make contact with the Spanish publisher Editorial Egales; when I asked him about this, he commented that "me gusta, eh, saber pues, poner un autor, o una autora, parearlo con un edit- una editorial que yo creo que le va a ir bien".

The interview took place in the back room of Negrón's bookshop, La Esquina. The batteries of my recording device went flat around forty-five minutes into the hourlong interview, meaning that the last portion was not transcribed. Negrón opened the interview by commenting that "Yo como puertorriqueño, I switch, a veces"; true to his word, he spoke a mixture of Spanish and English, often switching back and forth more than once in the space of a sentence. This made the interview one of the more complex to transcribe, despite the relatively good quality of the recording.

Anonymous Lecturer

The Anonymous Lecturer preferred not to be identified by name. She described herself as a Puerto Rican author and academic working at a Puerto Rican university. She included herself in the categories of "las mujeres afro" and Black people in Puerto Rico.

The Anonymous Lecturer told me that she had first heard about Arroyo Pizarro when the latter won a prize; she seemed to be referring to the Bogotá39, a 2007 initiative to identify

the thirty-nine most promising Latin American writers under the age of thirty-nine. Following this, the Anonymous Lecturer stated that she had read Arroyo Pizarro's short story collection *Ojos de luna* and went on to read more of her work. She told me that she read the writer's blog and later followed her on social media. The lecturer has taught Arroyo Pizarro's literature in university classes on the theme of race, primarily using the short story "Saeta"[4], which appeared in *Ojos de luna* and was later published in *las Negras*; she told me that she has taught this story since she began working at the university in 2009.

This interview took place in a busy student centre on the university campus where the lecturer worked. This environment was extremely loud; we tried to move locations, but it was hard to find anywhere in the area without significant background noise. As a result, there are several parts of the recording that are difficult or impossible to hear, including one particularly long period of thirty seconds that is completely inaudible. The interview was conducted in Spanish.

Edgardo Machuca

Edgardo Machuca was clear that he spoke to me in his capacity as director of Editorial EDP University, the publishing house of EDP University; as such, he did not share personal details about himself.

Machuca told me that Editorial EDP University had been aware of Arroyo Pizarro as early as 2005. She later participated in an event at the university, which is when they made contact. In 2013, Editorial EDP University published Arroyo Pizarro's book *Carimbos de cancer*; apart from this volume, they have mostly published Arroyo Pizarro's children's books. Machuca described Arroyo Pizarro as the "escritora residente" of the university, where she also worked as a lecturer at the time of the interview. He stated that the publishing house, a team of four people, works together with Arroyo Pizarro on the books, and that Machuca's own involvement is on a "macro" level.

The interview took place in Machuca's office on EDP University campus in Hato Rey, San Juan. Machuca preferred not to be recorded; I took notes by hand. As such, there is no full transcription of this interview, and most of the publisher's comments are

[4] Not to be confused with Arroyo Pizarro's collection of poetry, also titled *Saeta*.

paraphrased, with only very short verbatim quotes that I was able to take down. The interview was conducted in Spanish; I took notes in a combination of Spanish and English.

Marie Ramos Rosado

Marie Ramos Rosado introduced herself as a "catedrática" (the most senior academic rank; equivalent to professor in UK institutions) in Spanish and Literature at UPRRP and noted that she teaches a course on "la mujer negra en la literatura puertorriqueña". She stated that she is heterosexual, following this with the remark that "mi círculo de amistades es… diverso. Yo tengo muchas amigas del mundo lésbico. Y homosexual". On Puerto Rican politics, she commented that she takes a pro-independence and anti-colonial position.

Ramos Rosado has a longstanding relationship with Arroyo Pizarro; it was a little unclear exactly how long, since she commented that they have known each other more than a decade but also estimated that they had met "más o menos en el 2000", which would be more than two decades. Ramos Rosado stated that she first encountered Arroyo Pizarro online, where she noted that the writer is highly active and vocal. She later became familiar with Arroyo Pizarro's literary work. The two have collaborated on projects and conferences together. Ramos Rosado has published and presented on Arroyo Pizarro's work and wrote a prologue for the short story collection *las Negras*. An article by Ramos Rosado, "Mayra Santos Febres, Yvonne Denis Rosario y Yolanda Arroyo Pizarro: narradoras afrodescendientes que desafían jerarquías de poder", is included as a source in Chapter 3.

According to Ramos Rosado, Arroyo Pizarro "dice que yo soy su, una de sus mentoras, pero yo soy mentora desde la… desde el espacio público también, porque yo nunca le he dado clase". The academic commented that their friendship grew stronger in 2016 when Arroyo Pizarro dedicated a fictionalised biography, *María Calabó*, to her. Ramos Rosado stated that "yo me he leído de ella bastante", including *Pelo bueno, Violeta, las Negras, Caparazones, Ojos de luna,* and *Saeta*; she noted that "no he leído toda su obra, porque ella tiene demasiada". She told me that she teaches Arroyo Pizarro's work, including *Violeta, Caparazones,* and *Ojos de luna*, at UPRRP every semester.

Our interview took place in a classroom at UPRRP, where Ramos Rosado teaches. Ramos Rosado invited me to conduct the interview during a period of time which she had allotted to her students to come and drop off their final assessments; as such, we were interrupted multiple times by students, stopping the recording for a couple of minutes at a time as the lecturer spoke to them. This resulted in the interview being somewhat disjointed. There were also a handful of students in the classroom throughout who appeared to be working independently; it was unclear to me whether they were listening in, which put me on edge. The interview was ultimately derailed by the student hand-in process, ending somewhat abruptly. Our conversation was conducted in Spanish.

Edda López

Edda López introduced herself as a retired business administrator and feminist activist. She told me that she had begun fighting for political causes when she was fourteen, and that she had primarily focused on Puerto Rican independence until more recently, when she began to pay attention to racial issues as well. She described herself as a Black woman and as an "afrofeminista". In reference to literature, she commented that "Yo no soy escritora, yo soy consumidora de, (SMS: Sí) del producto".

López told me that she first met Arroyo Pizarro not in her capacity as a writer, but through an activist organisation, around 2013. López said that she had heard of Arroyo Pizarro as a writer before this, but had not read her work at the time that they met. She commented that the first book of Arroyo Pizarro's that she read was on profiles of women in Puerto Rico who have changed history; she was not able to find the title, and I have not been able to verify this information. Since this, she stated that she has read "un montón" of Arroyo Pizarro's texts, including *Afrofeministamente*, almost all of her children's books, *las Negras, Transcaribeñx,* and *Las caras lindas*; she told me that her favourites were *las Negras* and *Las caras lindas*. She commented that one of the things that drew her attention to Arroyo Pizarro was the latter's marriage, since her marriage was one of the first same-sex marriages in Puerto Rico, which was covered in news reports. López emphasised her similar experiences to Arroyo Pizarro, describing herself as a "persona que se crio muy cerca de donde se crio Yolanda" and commenting that "tenemos la misma… compartimos la, la crianza, fuimos, eh, personas de una familia empobrecida" and that "somos mujeres negras, que fuimos niñas negras, discriminadas".

My interview with Edda López took place in the same pizza restaurant as the interview with Esther Rodríguez Miranda. There was some background noise, as well as brief pauses for ordering and eating. We spoke in Spanish.

Caroline

At the time of our interview, Caroline was an undergraduate student at Ohio University, double-majoring in Spanish and social work. She specified that she was Asian, from Ohio, and had been "adopted coming into the country". She told me that she often sought out reading materials relating to different sexual experiences, saying that "I feel like that's a crucial part of my identity is kind of understanding what that means for different people". She also mentioned having many friends in the LGBTQ+ community.

Caroline told me that she encountered Arroyo Pizarro's work in a one-to-one university tutorial she had with lecturer and fellow interviewee Daniel Torres, where she told him that she was interested in learning more about the Caribbean; Torres suggested Arroyo Pizarro among a number of authors. Caroline read the short story "Changó"; she told me that her first impression was that "it was highly controversial and I loved it". She described her interest in the story as being related to its portrayal of "these more unexplored or not talked about areas of sex", which suited her interest in reading about different perspectives on sex.

This interview took place over a video call while I was in San Juan. We spoke in English, with occasional Spanish words and phrases.

Dayaneira

At the time of our interview, Dayaneira was a student at UPRRP, taking a class with Marie Ramos Rosado. She described herself as "una mujer puertorriqueña negra, afrodescendiente" and "una persona demisexual, es decir, necesito una conexión con otra persona para tener sexo". She also stated that she considered herself "feminista en construcción porque estoy en constante aprendizaje sobre el feminismo". She had formerly worked in a bookshop in San Juan.

Dayaneira told me that she had heard Arroyo Pizarro's name when she worked in the bookshop, but hadn't paid attention to her at that time. She then took Ramos Rosado's class "La mujer negra en la literatura puertorriqueña", in which she was assigned Arroyo

Pizarro's novel *Violeta* for a presentation. She described *Violeta* as "mi nuevo libro favorito", saying that she identified with the romantic relationship described in the novel. At the time of interview, she had not yet read other works by Arroyo Pizarro, although she expressed interest in doing so, particularly *Transcaribeñx*.

This was the only interview I conducted in a written format rather than verbally: Dayaneira suggested that we have the interview over WhatsApp message. There are obvious differences between this medium and verbal communication: in particular, the absence of visual or auditory cues such as facial expressions or tone of voice, and the increased opportunity for both parties to think over and edit messages before sending, *versus* speaking aloud. The transcription process was also very different: rather than transcribing from an audio file, I simply copied our written messages into a document, and this served as the transcript. There was therefore relatively little interpretation involved in this transcript compared to others: Dayaneira herself chose how to write the messages. I have preserved quotations from this transcript as they were written in WhatsApp, including grammatical or punctuation "errors" such as omission of inverted question and exclamation marks and use of quotation marks instead of italics for book titles. Furthermore, the written medium allowed for the use of emoji and unpronounceable neologisms such as "negrxs", which I have also preserved. Our conversation was in Spanish.

Mónica Lladó Ortega

Mónica Lladó Ortega introduced herself as a lecturer at the University of Puerto Rico in Carolina. She did not give many details about her personal identity in our interview, focusing instead on her academic work, in which she said that "yo siempre trabajo, este, los temas LGBT".

Lladó Ortega told me that she had been teaching Arroyo Pizarro's work for ten years, including the novel *Violeta*; she said that student reception to this text had been positive and that Arroyo Pizarro had spoken to Lladó Ortega's students. The lecturer also described her experience organising a queer literature conference, in which Arroyo Pizarro participated, and said that this had brought the two closer together. Lladó Ortega then began studying Arroyo Pizarro's work more closely and wrote a research paper on

her for *CENTRO Journal*. This article, "El cuerpo y la praxis del flujo en la narrativa de Yolanda Arroyo Pizarro", is included in the analysis in Chapter 3.

We conducted our interview in a busy café; there was a lot of background noise and some interruptions when speaking to wait staff. We spoke in Spanish.

Alexandra Gonzenbach Perkins

At the time of our interview, Perkins was an academic working at Texas State University in Austin, a city that she described as a pocket of progressiveness in the conservative state of Texas. She told me that her academic interest in the Hispanic Caribbean had arisen during her PhD, and that she has always been interested in contemporary texts and LGBTQ representation. She stated that she is a "cis, heterosexual, white, middle-class woman from the United States" but that she had grown up with many LGBT friends and that "personally I, I don't... I don't share those social identities, but it's something that has been an important part of my experience".

Perkins said that she had found out about Arroyo Pizarro in either 2010 or 2011, in the second or third year of her PhD at the University of Miami. One of her advisors had come back from Spain having found *Caparazones* in a bookshop there; she suggested it to Perkins because she knew of the latter's interest in Caribbean texts with LGBTQ representation. According to Perkins, she immediately bought the text, loved it, and incorporated it into her research project. The lecturer later met Arroyo Pizarro in person at a conference in Puerto Rico in 2014. She also stated that she had taught *Caparazones* in two institutions. Perkins also commented that "I think probably... the majority of the texts that Yolanda has published, I own, and I have kind of read through them or skimmed through them at, like, kind of different levels of, of intensity, but, um, I haven't dedicated as much time to any text that I have... to *Caparazones*".

This interview took place online in September, a few months after the other interviews; due to the personal circumstances and commitments of both Perkins and myself, we were not able to have it sooner. By this point, I had returned to the UK. We intended to have a video call, but the video portion failed for most of the interview, meaning that this was conducted by audio only. We spoke in English, with occasional use of Spanish words.

My Positionality

Having given details of the interviewees, it is also pertinent to introduce myself as a participant in all fourteen interviews and as the researcher more broadly. As Jørgensen and Phillips state, reflexivity, or the "attempt to take into account the researcher's own role in knowledge production" (2002, p. 23) is of paramount importance, since the researcher's subjectivity inevitably shapes the research. The following section focuses on a consideration of how I am constructed in terms of social identity (e.g. in terms of race, gender, and nationality); however, my commitment to reflexivity is not constrained to this section alone. Throughout the thesis I will continue to reflect on how my involvement has shaped the research process. To this end, I include quotes and analyses of my own speech during interviews, such as the questions I posed. As Jørgensen and Phillips note, these form part of the "dialogical context to which the responses belong" (2002, p. 24) and should not therefore be omitted as though interviewees' speech occurs in a vacuum.

Following discursive psychology I take the view that my "self" is neither fixed nor essential, but rather is "formed, negotiated and reshaped in social interaction" (Jørgensen and Phillips, 2002, p. 14); as such, the subject positions I have taken throughout the years of research involved in this doctoral project have varied significantly, and can only be represented in broad strokes. Nevertheless, I will lay out in general terms some of what I perceive to be the most significant ways in which my subjectivity has shaped this research project, including the interviews. My approach to this section draws on Maithree Wickramasinghe's book *Feminist Research Methodology: Making Meanings of Meaning-Making*; under the heading "Positioning/constructing myself in researching", Wickramasinghe reflects critically on her positionality throughout the research process, considering different aspects of her identity in turn (2009, pp. 58–66). I have adapted her approach to suit my own subjectivity and research.

Race and Nationality

The relevance of my race and nationality to this project can hardly be overstated. I am, in all discursive contexts through which I have ever moved, unambiguously decoded as white. Since "whiteness" is not a globally or historically uniform concept, I will further clarify this statement, following Puerto Rican researcher Isar Godreau's reflection on her

specific phenotypical characteristics and how these influenced her research (2015, p. 2). I embody virtually all of the phenotypical characteristics generally associated with whiteness, such as light-coloured eyes and relatively straight hair; I also have quite pale skin, even for a person of my race. My whiteness is generally interpreted as being of Northern, rather than Southern, European origin. This is an important distinction when I move through the discursive contexts of many Latin American countries, where "whiteness" in the local population is more often constructed based on characteristics (perceived as) originating in Southern European countries like Spain and Italy. In Puerto Rico, the prevailing racial discourse constructs Puerto Rican whiteness as being of Spanish origin, as can be seen reflected in the "tres razas" discourse that constructs the Spaniard, the Taíno, and the African as the ancestors of Puerto Rico (more on this in Chapter 5). As such, while carrying out the fieldwork for this thesis in Puerto Rico, my specifically Northern European whiteness meant that Puerto Ricans decoded me as a foreigner just from looking at me, where a more Southern European whiteness might have been interpreted as local. Furthermore, it was my impression that my characteristics led many Puerto Ricans to assume that I was from the US until told otherwise, a fraught situation given the colonial relationship between the US and Puerto Rico. The presence of people from the US in the archipelago as both tourists and immigrants is controversial, to say the least: one of my own interviewees, Esther Rodríguez Miranda, described the situation as "tantos estadounidenses mudándose, haciendo settler colonialism". The Puerto Rico/United States dichotomy was omnipresent throughout my stay in Puerto Rico; knowing that I would not be perceived as Puerto Rican, and that the most obvious and available alternative frame into which I might be placed was American, I at times found myself pre-emptively asserting my Scottish/British nationality as a way of situating myself outside the dichotomy altogether. I use "Scottish/British" because the way in which I and others construct my nationality is somewhat variable, especially in a non-UK context where the status of Scotland as a constituent country of the United Kingdom and the difference between "English" and "British" are often not understood. During my fieldwork, this was further complicated by my association with an English university. My participants may therefore have understood me as being Scottish, British, or English, but my suspicion is that the distinctions between these were not very significant in this context. Most relevantly, I was constructed as foreign, English-speaking but non-US, and

white, all of which contributed very significantly to the production of the data. As I will discuss in more detail later, it is clear to me that participants made active efforts to explain various aspects of Puerto Rican life to me as a foreigner and as a white person, in particular the national racial discourses. These were repeatedly emphasised as being distinct from other racial discourses, especially that of the US, with which I was implicitly assumed to be more familiar despite not being American, a further example of the Puerto Rico/US dichotomy: by not being Puerto Rican, I was implicitly associated with the US.

My nationality has also had significant impact on the research process outside of the interviews themselves. As a foreigner who has never lived in Puerto Rico, and had never visited prior to my fieldwork, all of my knowledge about the country had been gained second-hand, primarily from reading and from interacting with Puerto Ricans in online spaces. Thus, the six-week period I spent in Puerto Rico involved a great deal of learning, not only through the interviews but also through everyday interactions. Given the limited amount of time I spent in Puerto Rico, I am still very much an outsider; in some ways, this can make it easier to notice things that may be "taken for granted" when observing one's own culture, but on the other hand, my knowledge likely has gaps that may be reflected in the analysis. As for the two interviewees from the US, I had not spent time in any of the specific US locations they described to me (chiefly Ohio, Utah, and Texas), and thus relied on their accounts for contextual information.

Similarly, my race has shaped my subjectivity throughout my life. Theories of standpoint epistemologies construct knowledge in terms of the subjectivity of the knowledge-producers, accounting for different categorisations of knowledge according to factors like an individual's race; following this logic, those oppressed on the basis of race have "subjugated knowledges" that I, as a white person, cannot access directly (Wickramasinghe, 2009, p. 41). In particular, whiteness has shielded me from the experiences of racism that others have to endure; furthermore, having been raised as a white person in a racist world will undoubtedly have left me with a level of unconscious bias. I strive to approach these shortcomings by critically examining my own knowledge and supplementing it with the words of others; however, within this work, these words are, as I have outlined above, always filtered through my representations of them.

Class

Within my own national context of the United Kingdom, I am decoded as middle-class. This categorisation is based on factors such as my family background, education, mannerisms, and accent. This positionality has doubtless had an influence throughout my research, not least because undertaking higher, and especially postgraduate, education is generally more available to the middle and upper-middle classes. Academia generally privileges middle- and upper-middle-class ways of knowing and writing; my position within this environment accordingly reinforces this class positioning and shapes my subjectivity and the discourses I employ. This is not necessarily a fixed position: I certainly do not speak, even in research interviews, in the same language that I use in academic writing. However, the fact that this research is being produced as a PhD thesis, for submission to an academic body, means that it must, to some extent, conform to these classed ways of producing knowledge.

Coming from the United Kingdom, a country with a very specific and deeply entrenched discourse of social class within which my own understanding of class has been forged, I have found it particularly difficult to intuit how my class may have been interpreted by my interviewees from Puerto Rico and the US; however, I have gleaned some information from participant comments. Interviewees emphasised the relationship between class and race, such as when Luis Negrón commented that "when I say white, here, it has a different connotation: it's about class. (SMS: Mhm.) No es, no es de col- no es de, de, de color. No tiene que ver con eso". The relationship between race and class in Puerto Rico has also been the subject of critical analysis such as that by Hilda Lloréns (2018). My unambiguous whiteness would therefore place me in a position of class privilege in this context. Participants also related class to education, such as when Torres commented that "casi todos los escritores venimos de una clase media, media media, (SMS: Mm) que la educación ha sido el trampolín". My status as a postgraduate researcher, then, can be assumed to further influence the construction of my class. Based on these factors, it seems probable that participants would have constructed me as middle- to upper-middle-class, which in turn likely influenced the ways in which they interacted with me.

Language

I am a native English speaker who began studying Spanish at the age of thirteen; my Spanish is strong, but not quite of a native level. Furthermore, prior to this fieldwork, I had lived in Argentina, travelled in other South American countries, and spent some time in Spain, but had not previously visited the Caribbean; my Spanish was informed by these experiences. I speak Spanish with a recognisably Buenos Aires accent; this, combined with my known status as a foreigner, inevitably affected my interactions on a linguistic level. At times, participants clarified their use of particular words or terms, assuming (often correctly) that I would not be familiar with them. I consider it likely that they may also have avoided the use of certain words and phrases entirely and attempted to use a more "neutral" form of Spanish at times, in efforts to facilitate our communication and because of the perceived "informality" of local varieties; in this way, my involvement likely affected the data significantly. When English was spoken, there were also differences in varieties: I speak British English, while my interviewees spoke American English, which may have produced minor differences in understanding. I generally made it clear that I spoke both Spanish and English and left it up to the interviewee as to which language they preferred to speak. I include details of the language in which each interview was conducted in the individual introductions, above.

Gender and Sexuality

I am a cisgender woman and am, as far as I am aware, almost always perceived as such. I have long hair and generally dress in a feminine way. I am sure that my gender will have influenced participants' expectations of me. For example, of my fourteen interviewees, eleven were women; it is possible that some may have been more comfortable discussing issues of gender and sexuality with a female researcher. However, my gender was not often referenced explicitly in the way that my nationality and race were.

My sexuality is a more complex topic. I variously construct myself as queer, bisexual, gay, and lesbian; without wishing to spend too much time introspecting, the variance in labels is context-specific, as is the decision as to whether to indicate my sexuality at all. The ways in which participants may have decoded my sexuality is ambiguous to me, in part because I suspect that my relatively normative gender presentation means that others do not necessarily assume that I am anything other than heterosexual until I specify.

However, the fact that I was researching identity categories in relation to an openly lesbian author may have been taken by some as an indication of my own sexuality. I explicitly "came out" to some participants but not others; this occurred in different contexts and for different reasons. I believe that coming out, or not, affected participants' constructions of me and therefore influenced the data produced. For example, in my interview with Dr Ramos Rosado, she asked me whether either of my PhD supervisors "tiene preferencia gay"; after I answered this question, the conversation continued as follows:

> SMS: Y... y, bueno, yo también, o sea... (laughs) Em...
>
> MRR: ¿Tú también?
>
> SMS: Sí.
>
> MRR: Ajá.

The fact that she considered a gay perspective important to the work, her repetition of my statement for clarification, and the almost triumphant way in which she said "ajá" imply to me that this revelation changed her view of my project and of me in some way, which presumably influenced the way she interacted with me for the remainder of our interview. Similarly, other participants' knowledge (or lack thereof) of my sexuality likely also influenced the data.

My sexuality and gender have also doubtless influenced my approach to the project as a whole. As I told Edda López, "lo que... al principio me llamó la atención de Yolanda fue su obra... que trataba más, eh, la temática lésbica, porque a mí me interesa eso"; my reflection on this interest resulted in the project at hand. I began my PhD focusing specifically on sexuality and gender, intending to research three authors who had been constructed in these terms; it was only as I adjusted to focus solely on Arroyo Pizarro that I came to place race as an equally important topic within the project. This initial focus on sexuality and gender over race is in itself a reflection of my standpoint as a queer white woman. The project has evolved largely due to exposure to others' perspectives through literature review and interviewing, but it is likely that some issues being "closer to home" than others will have influenced me throughout the research.

Career Status and Age

I was, to state the obvious, a doctoral student during this research; this status doubtless influenced participant perspectives on me and therefore affected the data. As previously noted, my educational background is likely to have contributed to a construction of my class status. Beyond this, my specific level within academia is also likely to have had an effect, particularly on those interviewees who were themselves engaged in the academic world. Academic discourse places its participants into a defined hierarchy, with the most senior academics at the top and undergraduate students at the bottom. As a doctoral researcher, I am positioned above undergraduate students but below senior academics in this hierarchy, although my association with British/European academia likely also confers a certain level of prestige due to the Eurocentrism and neocolonialism often present in hierarchies of knowledge, potentially placing me in a "higher" position than postgraduate students from another context interpreted as less prestigious. My academic position relative to those interviewees involved in academia certainly influenced those conversations, since it affected the power dynamic. Of my fourteen interviewees, ten were affiliated with universities at the time of our interviews: eight as lecturers and two as undergraduate students. The researcher is generally understood to hold more power than the interviewee in an interview situation, and this is true in many ways; however, in my interviews with academics this was often in tension with my inferior academic position, which was further compounded by being significantly younger than most of them. This was most palpable in my interview with Ramos Rosado, the most senior academic I interviewed. At some points of the interview, Ramos Rosado took control and quizzed me on the specifics of my thesis, ignoring my attempts to steer the interview back to my own questions, and even giving me advice on my approach, in an interaction that more closely resembled an academic review of myself than an interview of her; this made me uneasy at times. In other interviews with academics, I did not feel the balance of power tipping quite as far away from me, but was nevertheless aware of and influenced by our relative positions. Meanwhile, the dynamic was quite different in interviews with undergraduate students Caroline and Dayaneira. Cognizant that being interviewed by a PhD researcher several years older than them might be intimidating, I made a conscious effort to come across as friendly and non-threatening.

This overview is intended to contextualise how my positionality has shaped the research and should be taken into account throughout the thesis; I will refer back to certain aspects in the analysis chapters.

Transcription

Having conducted and recorded the interviews, I deliberated over how to work with these recordings, analyse them, and represent them in written form for the thesis. I considered whether to transcribe the interviews in full or work initially from recordings and only transcribe those quotations I wished to analyse. Ultimately, I decided that full transcription, although an extremely time-consuming process, would make it easier for me to engage with the interviews, as the written format would make it possible to code particular sections thematically, as well as to scan and skim the text and compare sections of multiple interviews side by side. Full transcription also meant that I did not have to pre-emptively decide which sections were relevant; this proved productive, as I have returned to the transcripts multiple times throughout the analysis process, and different parts have jumped out at me on different occasions.

I was initially somewhat perturbed by what I saw as the losses occasioned by the adaption process from audio recording to written transcript. As has been noted by other researchers (Hobson, 2000, p. 114; Fanjul Fanjul, 2010, pp. 77–78), it is difficult or impossible to fully represent things like inflection, tone, and hesitation in a transcript. I was briefly intrigued by the promise of conversational analysis at overcoming this issue through use of symbols to represent things like intonations; however, as Kitzinger notes, this method is better adapted for research on "everyday" conversations than interviews, and analysis typically focuses on very granular details of conversation (2004, p. 25), while I remained invested in analysing overarching discourses. Furthermore, I felt that use of a complex system of symbols would be more, not less, alienating from the experience of participating in or listening to a conversation. As such, I opted for simply transcribing the words as I heard them on the recordings, uneasily accepting that transferral from one medium to another is yet one more form of necessarily imperfect representation.

As I have noted previously, the recordings were of varying quality, and some portions were difficult or impossible to hear; I indicated parts where I was unsure of which word was

used, or where I could not hear at all, in the transcripts. I have tried to include details such as laughter, overlapping speech, and signals of active listening (such as saying "yes"/"sí" or making sounds like "mm" while the other person is speaking), as I feel that these are significant cues in conversation and are relatively straightforward to represent in a written form. I have indicated pauses through use of ellipsis. When two people speak at the same time, I have included the secondary speaker's words in brackets, where audible.

Coding Themes

Once the interviews were fully transcribed, I began the process of coding them thematically in order to conduct analysis. Evans *et al*. describe the process of thematic analysis as taking place over six phases: "(a) becoming familiar with data, (b) generating initial codes, (c) searching for themes among codes, (d) reviewing themes, (e) defining and naming themes, and (f) producing the final report" (2017, p. 431). I broadly followed this process, with some tweaks. Having already listened to the interview recordings in order to transcribe them, I read through the transcripts to further familiarise myself with the material (phase a). I then began the process of generating codes (phase b) based on the topics of conversation that surfaced repeatedly. I first tried working with printed copies of the transcripts and colour-coding, but I found that this became confusing and did not facilitate simultaneously viewing all the excerpts that had been assigned the same code. I switched to using an individual Word document for each code and copying excerpts into the relevant document(s). The codes I created were numerous and quite specific, because I found so many points of interest that I arguably had issues "seeing the wood for the trees" in this initial phase. However, I feel that having such specialised codes has ultimately been beneficial, helping me to organise the points for analysis and compare similar comments across different interviews with a high level of detail. The initial codes I identified were as follows:

- Academia
- Activism
- Arroyo Pizarro's Personality
- Canon
- Categorisation
- Children

- Class
- Colonialism
- Gender
- History/Historical Narratives
- Inter-group Interaction
- Internet
- Intersectionality
- (In)visibility
- LGBT
- Literary Landscape
- Publics
- Puerto Rico
- Race
- Reading
- Relatability/Representation
- Transgression
- The USA
- Writing

I then moved on to phases (c) and (d), searching for and reviewing the themes among these codes. At first, I struggled to sort these codes into discrete themes, finding that they could be combined and linked with one another in multiple ways. It was then suggested to me by a friend and fellow PhD student that I try organising the codes into a mind map (see Appendix B). I found this incredibly productive, as I was able to draw multiple links between codes in a complex interrelationship rather than sorting them into entirely separate themes. I found that certain codes clustered more closely together, while maintaining links with codes in other clusters. In phase (e), I named the three clusters "Power", "Identity", and "Literature", all of which interlinked with one another. Once I recognised these as the themes around which the codes were clustered, I felt that this should have been obvious from the beginning, since the thesis is ultimately about how the power dynamics inherent in identity categories inform how we construct literature. This process enabled me to organise the interview data into macro and micro levels, to

see both “wood” and “trees” as necessary, and to move on to phase (f), writing the analysis.

Conclusion

This project’s analysis of a wide range of paratextual and metatextual materials alongside original interview data represents an innovative methodology that has much to offer to the wider study of literature. The use of interviews in particular is still unusual in this field, and has provided a much-needed alternative approach to literary studies, as well as enabling me to incorporate multiple perspectives beyond my own. Characterised and shaped by successes and failures along the way, this methodology has had to adapt and respond to challenges throughout. In conducting the interviews, I was required to make difficult decisions, often balancing the demands of research with participants’ comfort. Certain choices, such as not prompting participants to provide data on their personal identities, or conducting interviews in locations where participants felt comfortable at the expense of sound quality, might be seen as detrimental to the research; nevertheless, I stand by these decisions, which were made out of respect for participants’ autonomy. In contrast with my initial aspirations of finding hypothetical “lectores generales”, I was forced to contend with the reality that there is no Platonic conception of a reader: as human subjects, all readers come with experiences, backgrounds, and perspectives. The perspectives explored within this thesis are intrinsically shaped by the participants’ connections with the literary world, with academia, and with Arroyo Pizarro herself, a fact which must be taken into account throughout. This realisation has ultimately benefited the study, as it has prompted me to prioritise contextualising the interventions of all participants, including myself. Recognition of my own presence throughout the project, from conception through planning and conducting the interviews, transcription, analysis, and writing up, has also been crucial and has deeply informed my methodology. Processes that I had once thought straightforward, like transcription, involved making choices that fundamentally affected the representations of participants and their interventions in the research, forcing me to repeatedly confront and reflect on my own active role in the production of the data. The remaining chapters are divided on the basis of my own involvement in data production: the next chapter focuses on sources that I did not have a hand in producing, while Chapters 4–6 focus on interviews that I conducted.

Nevertheless, in the context of this thesis, even those sources that I did not directly produce are inevitably refracted through my own representations of them.

Chapter 3. Paratexts and Metatexts: Pre-existing representations of Arroyo Pizarro

Introduction

Prior to conducting interviews, I carried out an analysis of representations of Arroyo Pizarro and her work in a number of pre-existing sources, which form the focus of the present chapter. In contrast with the interviews, these are sources which I did not have a direct hand in producing. The sources took a number of forms, including book covers, scholarly criticism, professional reviews, lay reviews, publisher websites, author biographies, interviews conducted by other parties, a reflective piece written by Arroyo Pizarro, and social media posts made on Twitter/X and Instagram. In commenting on Arroyo Pizarro and her work, these sources necessarily make representations of the author and her texts. My interest in this chapter is in the nature of these representations: how do these sources represent Arroyo Pizarro and her work in terms of identity categories, and to what effects? Many of the sources discussed fall under the category of "paratexts", first defined by literary theorist Gérard Genette; others might be defined as "metatexts" according to Genette's definition, as I will discuss. I engage critically with Genette's taxonomy, exploring its implications and limitations in relation to the present research. I then move to consider the ways in which the sources under discussion represent Arroyo Pizarro and her work at large, simultaneously drawing on existing discourses and contributing to their construction. Finally, I examine sources that focus on Arroyo Pizarro's novel *Caparazones* (2010) as a case study.

Genette's Theory of Paratexts and Metatexts

The sources at the centre of this chapter can be described as "second-order texts, which 'are about' other texts" (Dalgaard, 2001, p. 179). The study of such texts has been deeply influenced by literary scholar Gérard Genette, in particular his work on paratexts. Genette coined the terms "paratext" and "metatext" as part of a wider taxonomy of the relationships between texts. The development of this taxonomy can be traced through a number of Genette's publications over a period of several years. Three particularly significant texts in this evolution are *The Architext: An Introduction*, first published in

French as *Introduction à l'architexte* in 1979; *Palimpsests,* published as *Palimpsestes* in 1982; and *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*, first published as *Seuils* in 1987.

Genette used the term "transtextuality" to encompass all relationships between texts, stating that his interest in texts was in fact an interest in transtextuality (1992, p. 81). In *The Architext*, he included four subcategories of transtextuality: intertextuality, metatextuality, paratextuality, and architextuality. In that publication, he defined "paratextuality" as referring to relationships of imitation and transformation, giving the examples of pastiche and parody (1992, p. 82). In *Palimpsests*, he rebaptised this category of imitation and transformation with the term "hypertextuality" (1997, p. 5). From this point on, he used "paratextuality" instead to denote that which provides the text with a "setting". Within "paratextuality" he included titles, subtitles, prefaces, forewords, epigraphs, illustrations, blurbs, and book covers (1997, p. 3); at this point, Genette's definition of paratextuality focused on components of the printed book. Metatextuality, in *The Architext*, was defined as "the transtextual relationship that links a commentary to the text it comments on". Genette argued that "All literary critics, for centuries, have been producing metatext without knowing it" (1992, p. 82); this definition remained stable in *Palimpsests* (1997, p. 4). Intertextuality was defined as the actual presence of one text within another, incorporating quotation, plagiarism, and allusion (1997, p. 2); finally, "architextuality" was used to describe the relationship linking a text to very broad genres or forms such as the novel, poem, or essay (1997, p. 4). The most relevant terms for my purposes are paratextuality and metatextuality, since all of the sources I go on to analyse fall under one or other; as such, I will focus primarily on these two terms.

Later, in *Paratexts*, Genette focused specifically on paratextuality, giving this category a more detailed definition and analysing examples. Here, Genette stated that paratexts are those materials that present a text, acting as a "threshold [...] that offers the world at large the possibility of either stepping inside or turning back" (2009, p. 2). He distinguished paratexts from other types of transtextuality largely based on the criterion that paratexts are a commentary that is "authorial or more or less legitimated by the author" (2009, p. 2), an idea to which I will return in more detail shortly. The category of paratexts described by Genette is very broad and includes both those materials physically attached to the

book (which he termed “peritexts”) and those detached from it (“epitexts” (2009, p. 5)). Genette stated that the latter could include, for example, interviews with the author, or even “factual” materials like the sex or age of the author, which, when known to the public, influence how the text is received (2009, pp. 7–8).

Following Genette’s definitions in *Palimpsests* and *Paratexts*, the terms “metatext” and “paratext” between them cover the materials I analyse in this chapter (and, indeed, in the entire thesis: the major distinction is that this chapter encompasses those paratexts and metatexts which I did not have a hand in producing, while later chapters focus on interviews that I conducted, which are arguably paratexts and metatexts themselves). However, I wish to highlight some issues with Genette’s terminology, especially in application to the present research. In particular, the main distinction Genette makes between “metatext” and “paratext” is his designation of “authorial responsibility” or legitimation as a criterion for paratexts: he states that “By definition, something is not a paratext unless the author or one of his associates accepts responsibility for it” (2009, pp. 9–10). As Kathryn Batchelor has argued, this definition presents “certain contradictions within the concept of the paratext itself” (2018, p. 14). While Genette insists on approval by author or publisher, he also comments that “in principle, every context serves as a paratext” (2009, p. 8); as Batchelor points out, contextual information is rarely under the control or responsibility of the author or their associates (2018, p. 14). Genette gives the example that knowledge of Marcel Proust’s homosexuality changes the reading of his work, meaning that this could be classified as a paratext (2009, pp. 7–8); however, the degree to which public knowledge of Proust’s homosexuality can be said to be legitimated by the author is dubious, since Proust did not publicly acknowledge it (Carter, 2006, p. 28). Authorial or publisher legitimation can also change over time: a review, clearly falling under Genette’s definition of a metatext, can become paratext when it is legitimated by a publisher or author, perhaps by being affixed to a physical copy of a book or shared on the author’s social media. The fact that “the degree of responsibility may vary” (Genette, 2009, p. 9) is something that Genette himself acknowledged; however, it makes it a difficult criterion on which to base the boundary between paratext and metatext.

Beyond the difficulties in determining authorial responsibility, I also take issue with the exercise itself. Genette's focus on authorial legitimation has been challenged by other critics: Roswitha Skare commented that Genette ignores "the fact that many other people might be involved in the production of a book", leading him to "ignore important elements" (2020, pp. 512–515). In my work, as I have detailed, I am interested in destabilising the primacy of the author figure; to divide sources into a dichotomy based on approval or lack thereof by the author seems antithetical to that principle. While authorial involvement is certainly a relevant aspect to consider when analysing a particular source, I treat other sources as just as significant and worthy of analysis. Here, my approach clashes with Genette's, who in *Palimpsests* criticised investing "the hermeneutic activity of the reader" with "authority and significance" (1997, p. 9), something which I actively seek to do. Therefore, while the terms "metatext" and "paratext" as defined by Genette would cover everything in the chapter, I am not interested in treating these as dichotomous or in sorting each source into one or the other. Rather, I would emphasise what the two categories have in common: both metatexts and paratexts, as defined by Genette, are texts which are about other texts. All of the sources I analyse in this chapter fall under this description.

Paratextual and Metatextual Representations of Arroyo Pizarro

I now turn to the paratexts and metatexts under consideration in order to analyse the representations they make of Arroyo Pizarro and her work. These sources, listed in the table below, encompass sixteen academic sources on Arroyo Pizarro, a significant portion of the existing scholarly criticism on the author, as well as a seventeenth article which primarily focuses on another author, Luis Negrón, but makes reference to Arroyo Pizarro in ways relevant to the present analysis. I have also analysed five professional reviews; four lay reviews; the website of Arroyo Pizarro's Spanish publisher, Editorial Egales; author biographies posted on the university websites of Baruch College and Pitzer College; two published interviews with the author; a reflective piece written by the author and published in an academic journal; my own transcript of an event in conversation with Arroyo Pizarro, hosted by the London Spanish Book and Zine Fair; the covers of novel *Caparazones*; anthology *Los otros cuerpos*, in which a text by Arroyo Pizarro was

included; seven posts made on Twitter/X[5]; and four Instagram posts. My chief interest is in considering the ways in which these paratexts and metatexts incorporate identity categories into their representations of the author and her texts.

Source Type	**Title**	**Author/Organisation**
Academic Criticism	"Yolanda Arroyo Pizarro o la construcción de un cimarronaje electrónico: Hacia una poética electrónica de los marginales"	Eduard Arriaga Arango
Academic Criticism	"Puerto Rico erizando mi piel. Intertextos/intercuerpos lordeanos en la narrativa de Yolanda Arroyo Pizarro"	Diego Falconí Trávez
Academic Criticism	"De cuerpos-territorio y disidentificaciones lesboeróticas. Las encrucijadas subjetivas en la narrativa de Yolanda Arroyo Pizarro"	Diego Falconí Trávez
Academic Criticism	"Cruel Dispositions: Queer Literature, the Contemporary Puerto Rican Literary Field and Luis Negrón's *Mundo Cruel* (2010)"	Sergio Gutiérrez Negrón
Academic Criticism	"From the Dark Shores of Puerto Rico: Yolanda Arroyo Pizarro's Portrayal of the Society's Margins in *Los documentados*"	Emmanel Harris
Academic Criticism	"Mujer y esclavitud en el cuento 'Saeta' de Yolanda Pizarro"	Amarilis Hidalgo de Jesús
Academic Criticism	"Las especificidades del feminismo lésbico decolonial caribeño bajo el prisma de la literatura: los casos de Yolanda Arroyo Pizarro y Rita Indiana Hernández"	Sophie Large
Academic Criticism	"El activismo queer, feminista y decolonial en la literatura de Yolanda Arroyo Pizarro: por un pensamiento de la Relación"	Sophie Large
Academic Criticism	"El cuerpo y la praxis del flujo en la narrativa de Yolanda Arroyo Pizarro"	Mónica Lladó Ortega
Academic Criticism	*Fractal Families in New Millennium Narrative by Afro-Puerto Rican Women*	John T. Maddox IV
Academic Criticism	"Autodefinición y subversión en *Fe en disfraz* de Mayra Santos-Febres y *las Negras* de Yolanda Arroyo Pizarro"	Edgar J. Nieves López
Academic Criticism	"Queer Affect and Transnational Movement in Yolanda Arroyo Pizarro's *Caparazones*"	Alexandra Gonzenbach Perkins
Academic Criticism	"Hacia la nueva profecía. Cuatro poetas puertorriqueñas	Lilliana Ramos Collado

[5] I include both the website's former and current names for clarity and because some posts were made prior to the change.

	contemporáneas: Aixa Ardín, Yolanda Arroyo Pizarro, Áurea Sotomayor Miletti y Nemir Matos Cintrón"	
Academic Criticism	"Mayra Santos Febres, Yvonne Denis Rosario y Yolanda Arroyo Pizarro: Narradoras afrodescendientes que desafían jerarquías de poder"	Marie Ramos Rosado
Academic Criticism	"La poética de la esclavitud (silenciada) en la literatura puertorriqueña: Carmen Colón Pellot, Beatriz Berrocal, Yolanda Arroyo Pizarro y Mayra Santos Febres"	Zaira Rivera Casellas
Academic Criticism	"Yolanda Arroyo Pizarro: Epistemologias negras caribenhas"	Cristian Souza Sales
Academic Criticism	"Visibilizando la sexodiversidad: El contrapunteo de la mononormatividad y los poliamores en Violeta, de Yolanda Arroyo Pizarro"	Elena Valdez
Publisher Website	Editorialegales.com	Editorial Egales
Author Bio on University Website	"Afrolatinidad and Writing: A Conversation with Yolanda Arroyo Pizarro"	Pitzer College
Author Bio on University Website	"Wanwe- Yolanda Arroyo Pizarro – Latin America and the Caribbean: Cultures and Societies"	Rojo Robles, Baruch College
Interview	"Entrevista con la escritora Yolanda Arroyo Pizarro"	Yolanda Arroyo Pizarro and Afroféminas
Interview	"La piel negra que transgrede: Entrevista por David Caleb Acevedo a la escritora Yolanda Arroyo Pizarro, Mayo 2012"	Yolanda Arroyo Pizarro and David Caleb Acevedo
Interview	"Writing is Resisting: Literature by Black Women"	Yolanda Arroyo Pizarro, Lucía Mbomía Rubio, and Dayana Cata for London Spanish Book and Zine Fair
Reflective Essay	"Cómo se tejen macacoas, se amogollan avalanchas o se pintan caparazones: El proceso de creación en tres textos híbridos"	Yolanda Arroyo Pizarro
Amazon Review	"*apreciação como leitor e literato*"	Tejo Damascena Ferreira
Goodreads Review	Untitled review of *Caparazones*	David Caleb Acevedo
Goodreads Review	Untitled review of *Caparazones*	Joharis
Goodreads Review	Untitled review of *Caparazones*	Danika at the Lesbrary
Professional Review	"Las facultades amatorias en 'Caparazones' de Yolanda Arroyo Pizarro"	Daniel Torres
Professional Review	"Caparazones de Yolanda Arroyo Pizarro: sexualidad, ecología y política"	Carmen Centeno Añeses
Professional Review	"Reseña a Caparazones por *Hola Cultura*, DC Latino Culture"	*Hola Cultura*

Professional Review	“Ficciología: Crítica de Libros: Caparazones de Yolanda Arroyo Pizarro”	Nelson E. Vera Santiago
Professional Review	“Las lesbianas no son mujeres - Reseña a Caparazones”	Carmen González Marín
Anthology	*Los otros cuerpos*	Luis Negrón, Moisés Agosto Rosario, and David Caleb Acevedo (Editors)
Novel Cover	*Caparazones*	Yolanda Arroyo Pizarro and Editorial Egales
Twitter/X Post	“Yolanda Arroyo Pizarro discussed her award-winning writing, which promotes historical recovery and discusses Afro-identity and sexual diversity. Read the full […]”	The Daily Tar Heel [@dailytarheel]
Twitter/X Post	“Celebrate #Juneteenth with an empowering virtual talk by Puerto Rican author and ‘artivist’ Yolanda Arroyo Pizarro, a leading Afro-Caribbean voice […]”	Brooklyn Public Library [@BKLYNlibrary]
Twitter/X Post	“En el evento se reconocerá la trayectoria de Carmen Jovet y la dedicatoria será a la literatura lésbica y a […]”	El Nuevo Día [@ElNuevoDia]
Twitter/X Post	“Dedicamos esta edición de aniversario a la literatura lésbica y la escritora afroqueer Yolanda Arroyo Pizarro. Te esperamos del 8-11 […]”	Orgullo Borquerón [@BoqueronOrgullo]
Twitter/X Post	“Yolanda Arroyo Pizarro Novelista, cuentista y ensayista puertorriqueña. El contenido de sus libros aborda los temas de visibilidad de las […]”	Iris [@eltucatucanazo]
Twitter/X Post	“Brenda Navarro, Yolanda Arroyo Pizarro, Iveth Luna Flores, Elena Garro, Banana Yoshimoto, Lulu Wang y Amy Tan.”	Xiatil [@Xiatil]
Twitter/X Post	“Like the Dominican Republic, Duke says that Puerto Rico is also an island culture that is Afro-descended but behaves as […]”	JWJI Emory [@JWJIEmory]
Instagram Post	“Mujeres en la literatura: Yolanda Arroyo Pizarro”	Melina Kurin [@espanolconmelina]
Instagram Post	“5 Black authors”	AfroResistance [@afroresistance]
Instagram Post	“Top Queer books I read this year”	@kio_reads
Instagram Post	“Books by Puerto Rican Authors”	Victoria [@cuir_bookseeker]

Applying Identity Categories: Three Trends

These paratexts and metatexts frequently feature identity categories in representations of Arroyo Pizarro and her work. The link with these categories is made in a number of ways, which I have divided into three trends: (1) identity categories constructed as a theme or themes of the author's writing; (2) identity categories applied to the author; and (3) identity categories applied to the literary work itself.

An example of the first trend is found in the author bio from the Pitzer College website, which states that "her writings often focus on topics many consider provocative such as homosexuality and race" (2021). Similarly, the Baruch College website introduction to Arroyo Pizarro notes that "She published [sic] books that promote the discussion of Afro-identity and sexual diversity" (Robles, 2021). *The Daily Tar Heel*, a student newspaper at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, made a post on Twitter/X promoting an article about an event with Arroyo Pizarro that had taken place at the university. They stated that the author's work "discusses Afro-identity and sexual diversity" (The Daily Tar Heel [@dailytarheel], 2023). Another user of Twitter/X, @eltucatucanazo, referred to "el lesbianismo y la negritud" as "temas fundamentales en sus publicaciones" (iris [@eltucatucanazo], 2023). Such summaries use abstract nouns like "homosexuality" and "negritud", constructing these as concepts which the texts explore, rather than as inherent qualities of the work or the author necessarily.

The second trend represents the author herself in terms of identity labels, often connecting these with her role as a writer. Elena Valdez notes that Arroyo Pizarro is "Considerada una de las principales autoras lesbianas de Puerto Rico" (2018, p. 297); Marie Ramos Rosado refers to the writer as one of multiple "escritoras afrodescendientes" (2012, p. 187). In both cases, the term in question is used in the plural, referring not only to Arroyo Pizarro but to a wider group: the critics construct the categories of "escritoras afrodescendientes" and "autoras lesbianas", locating Arroyo Pizarro within these. The choice to represent these details of Arroyo Pizarro's personal identity casts them as being relevant to her role as an author: not only is Arroyo Pizarro *personally* Black and a lesbian, but this is the type of *writer* she is. John T. Maddox refers

to Arroyo Pizarro as "a Black, out-of-the-closet lesbian" (2022, p. 77); beyond highlighting her race and sexuality, he also emphasises the fact that her personal identity is public knowledge, thus informing public perception of the author and her work. These can be understood as "factual" paratexts of the type that Genette described: in a hypothetical world where Arroyo Pizarro remained a recluse and the public were unaware of her race and sexuality, she would likely be represented and received quite differently. For one thing, these aspects of her identity are politicised: during the event "Writing is Resisting: Literature by Black Women", hosted by the London Spanish Book and Zine Fair in October 2021, Arroyo Pizarro stated that: "Yo creo que [las mujeres negras], cuando escribimos, nuestra propia identidad ya se posiciona en el lugar de lo político y se posiciona en el lugar del activismo, sin querer necesariamente" (Arroyo Pizarro and Mbomío Rubio, 2021). The emphasis on Arroyo Pizarro's identity in paratexts and metatexts represents her and her work in an implicitly politicised way.

One of the most common aspects of Arroyo Pizarro's identity represented in the second trend is her nationality. This is often one of the pieces of introductory information alongside the first mention of her name. The practice of including an author's nationality in an introduction is so ubiquitous that it might appear self-evident, but this very ubiquity prioritises nationality as indispensable information in the representation of writers and thus deserves comment. Arriada Arango introduces Arroyo Pizarro as "la autora puertorriqueña Yolanda Arroyo Pizarro" (2012, p. 24); Falconí Trávez opts for "la escritora puertorriqueña" (2016, p. 55); Harris calls her "Arroyo Pizarro, a Puerto Rican writer of African ancestry" (2012, p. 108); Marie Ramos Rosado introduces "tres escritoras puertorriqueñas negras: Mayra Santos Febres, Yvonne Dennis Rosario y Yolanda Arroyo Pizarro" (2012, p. 185). The latter two comment on race alongside nationality, constructing both as important introductory information. Other academic texts open with an acknowledgement of Arroyo Pizarro's place of birth (Large, 2017, 2018; Falconí Trávez, 2018). Of the sixteen academic sources, only one makes no mention of Puerto Rico, focusing instead on the Caribbean more broadly (Hidalgo de Jesús, 2010). The focus on nationality is also common on social media. Arroyo Pizarro's bio on her Twitter/X profile begins with "Puerto Rican writer" (YolandaArroyoPizarro [@YArroyoPizarro], no date). The Brooklyn Public Library Twitter/X account also introduced her as a "Puerto

Rican author" (Brooklyn Public Library [@BKLYNlibrary], 2023); user @eltucatucanazo noted that she is a "Novelista, cuentista y ensayista puertorriqueña" (iris [@eltucatucanazo], 2023); the account for the James Weldon Johnson Institute for the Study of Race and Difference at Emory University calls her "the prolific Black Puerto Rican writer" (JWJI Emory [@JWJIEmory], 2024), additionally making note of her race; Instagram user @kio_reads opens a review of the novel *Violeta* by stating that "Esta novela es de una autora puertorriqueña la cual admiro mucho" (@kio_reads, 2023b). These instances follow the very widespread convention of introducing authors with their nationalities or places of birth, which constructs this as a crucial piece of information in the representation of any given author. Arroyo Pizarro is no exception; indeed, in later chapters I will discuss the particular salience of her nationality in interviewee representations.

In the third trend, identity labels are used in representations not only of Arroyo Pizarro herself, but of her work. Identity-related adjectives are used to modify nouns like "literature" and "escritura". Mónica Lladó Ortega claims that "Yolanda Arroyo Pizarro es sin duda una de las mayores exponentes de literatura *queer* puertorriqueña contemporánea" (2018, p. 273); this is echoed by Sergio Gutiérrez Negrón, who calls Arroyo Pizarro "another figure who is key to understanding the institutionalization of queer literature in the Puerto Rican literary field" (2018, p. 182). Cristian Souza Sales states that the writer "é considerada uma das mais importantes vozes da literatura negra porto-riquenha/caribenha contemporânea" and that she "escreve contos e poesias afro-lésbicas/lesboeróticas" (2021, p. 114). Marie Ramos Rosado refers to Arroyo Pizarro as one of a group of authors who "dan forma a un nuevo canon de escritura femenina" (2012, p. 189). In these examples, the epithets "literatura *queer*", "literatura negra" "contos e poesias afro-lésbicas/lesboeróticas", "queer literature" and "escritura femenina" are used to represent Arroyo Pizarro's literary output. Social media provides further examples: the Twitter/X accounts of Orgullo Boquerón, one of the biggest LGBT pride events in Puerto Rico, and *El Nuevo Día*, Puerto Rico's largest newspaper, both made posts in April of 2023 in advance of Orgullo Boquerón 2023, which took place in June of that year. Both noted that the event would be dedicated to Arroyo Pizarro and to "la literatura lésbica" (El Nuevo Día [@ElNuevoDia], 2023; Orgullo Boquerón

[@BoqueronOrgullo], 2023), demonstrating that the construction of these categories can also take place outside of explicitly literary or academic contexts. Thus, her writing is represented as essentially “queer”, “lésbica”, “negra”, “afro-lésbica”, and “femenina”; these become characteristics not only of the writer but of the texts themselves.

While the first two trends refer explicitly to subject matter and author identity respectively, a term like “lesbian literature” is more open to interpretation. Since a novel evidently cannot “be” a lesbian in the usual sense of the word as applied to human subjects, the categorisation may be assumed to refer to some combination of author identity, subject matter, characters, readership, and possibly other factors. Most sources do not provide definitions or criteria. Thus, such categories are often nebulous. Of my sample, the only academic critic to hint at a definition is Souza Sales, who states that Arroyo Pizarro “escreve contos e poesias afro-lésbicas, lésbicas/lesboeróticas. Com a temática LGBTQIA+, publicou livros como *Violeta* (2013) *Perseídas* (2011); *Lesbianas en Clave Caribeñas* (2013) [sic]; *Transcaribeñx* (2017)” (2021, p. 114). The classification therefore appears to be based on the works’ thematic content in this instance. In the introduction to the anthology *Los otros cuerpos*, which bills itself as a collection of gay/lesbian/queer Puerto Rican literature, Agosto Rosario states that the authors do not necessarily identify as gay, lesbian, or queer, and that “esta antología es de carácter temático y no es su propósito etiquetar a sus autores a base de sus trabajos literarios” (2007, p. 14). We are given to understand, then, that this definition of gay/lesbian/queer literature is based on theme and content of the texts, rather than self-identification of the author. However, this is muddied somewhat by an earlier statement that the anthology features “personas que se orientan sexualmente hacia su mismo sexo y escriben sobre sus experiencias, o que en su literatura, trabajan personajes y situaciones que se identifican con estas orientaciones sexuales y sus formas de vida” (2007, p. 13). The definition therefore wavers over whether self-identification of the author is a criterion. This is emblematic of the ambiguity of this trend in general: the meaning of identity categories is rarely made clear when applied to literary work, but these categories are nevertheless widely used and accepted.

Each trend represents Arroyo Pizarro or her writing in a different way. The first treats identity categories as topics or themes of the work, potentially among other themes; a

certain distance is maintained between the work and the theme, which are not equated. The second focuses on the author's own identity, emphasising particular elements such as race, sexuality, and nationality as salient details about Arroyo Pizarro. The third trend refers to the works themselves, representing these as *essentially* queer, Black, and/or female. The third trend is particularly ambiguous compared to the former two: while there is still a certain level of ambiguity in what constitutes identity-related topics of a work, or who qualifies as a Black, female, or lesbian author, terms like "lesbian literature" and "Black literature" are even more open to interpretation. Despite these differences, all three trends emphasise identity categories in the representation of Arroyo Pizarro and her works.

Sorting Works into Identity Categories

One of the ways identity-based literary categories are constructed is through explicitly "sorting" works and authors into these categories. I refer here to methods that group a number of works or authors together into identity-based groupings. Such sorting of works can be achieved in a number of ways and by a number of different parties. I will consider the construction of these categories through such sorting methods as article metadata, anthologies, and various forms of lists and catalogues of works; many of these are made possible and necessary by the Internet, databases, and search engines. These generally employ the second or third trends; this is perhaps due to the relative succinctness of a heading such as "lesbian writers" or "Black literature" compared to, say, "books that explore queer identity" or "literature about Black experience"; the phenomenon thus lends itself to reductionism and essentialism. Creating a list of "lesbian writers" or "Black literature" simultaneously presupposes the validity of such a category and contributes to its construction. Such lists represent particular aspects of authors or works as something that they all have in common and which is relevant to the reader. The lists presuppose and construct audiences for themselves: a hypothetical reader who is seeking out such a catalogue of books is both assumed to exist and made possible.

Publishers' Catalogues

One of the longer-running examples of a catalogue of literary works is the publisher's catalogue. These can sometimes be grouped thematically: some publishing houses either specialise in works belonging to particular genres or publish collections with a

specific focus. Publication by such institutions or in such collections frames the included editions in light of these specifications and thus contributes to the construction of the works. Arroyo Pizarro has been published by a number of different publishing houses; one in particular to which I wish to draw attention is the Spanish company Editorial Egales. The company has published editions of Arroyo Pizarro's novels *Caparazones* (2010) and *Violeta* (2014), as well as short story collections *Lesbianas en clave caribeña* (2012), *Transcaribeñx* (2017), and *Afroqueeridades* (2023). The latter three titles all emphasise particular identity categories: lesbian, Caribbean, trans, Afro, and queer. In the case of *Transcaribeñx*, it is notable that this collection of short stories was previously published in Puerto Rico under the title *Transmutadxs*; the Caribbean element of the title was introduced for the Spanish edition, arguably exoticising this identity category and aspect of the book for a European context. Nevertheless, both editions now circulate within Puerto Rico.

Egales describes itself as "la primera editorial especializada en literatura LGTBQI+ en España y Latinoamérica" (Editorial Egales). They state that the literature they publish is "dirigida a gays, lesbianas y transexuales" (Editorial Egales), defining the material in terms of its intended readership, which is constructed as being made up of LGBT people. Publication by Egales represents Arroyo Pizarro's texts as works of LGBT literature. Prior to the publication of a new edition of *Las negras* by Yegua de Troya in 2025, Egales had for years been the only European outfit to publish Arroyo Pizarro's work. In the Spanish/European market, therefore, her writing was primarily represented as LGBT literature. By contrast, in her domestic context of Puerto Rico, Arroyo Pizarro has a much greater number of works, published either autonomously or with a variety of publishers that are not specifically LGBT.

The Egales website divides its catalogue into more specific clickable categories, such as "Narrativa lésbica", "Narrativa gay", and "Narrativa trans", which appear when searching for books. The practice of tagging books in this way encourages the website's customers to choose between specifically defined identity-based categories, reinforcing this approach to literary categorisation. All five of Arroyo Pizarro's texts are tagged as "Narrativa lésbica". *Afroqueeridades* is additionally tagged as "Transexualidad", but the same is not true of the other four texts by Arroyo Pizarro in Egales' catalogue. This is

especially noteworthy in the case of *Transcaribeñx*; given the book's title and numerous transgender or gender-non-conforming characters, one might have expected it to be tagged with "Narrativa trans" or "Transexualidad". The "Narrativa lésbica" tag therefore appears to have more to do with the author's identity than the content of the book.

Anthologies

Inclusion in themed anthologies can also contribute to the construction of literary categories. Anthologies of works by multiple authors are typically organised around a shared characteristic, representing this as an important feature of each text individually as well as a commonality between them. The anthology *Los otros cuerpos* (2007) is explicit in billing itself as a queer anthology: the collection is subtitled "Antología de temática gay, lésbica y queer desde Puerto Rico y su diáspora". As noted in Chapter 1, *Los otros cuerpos* is cited by Sergio Gutiérrez Negrón as one of two contemporary publications that were instrumental in the solidification of a queer Puerto Rican literary canon (2018, p. 158). The volume features a short story by Arroyo Pizarro, thus constructing her within the literary category of Puerto Rican gay, lesbian, and queer literature.

Metadata

In academic articles, the link between Arroyo Pizarro's work and identity categories is produced not only in the text, but also in the metadata, particularly titles and keyword tags. Among my sample, titles include the word "queer" (Perkins, 2016; Large, 2018); "lesbian" or derivatives (Large, 2017; Falconí Trávez, 2018); "negras" (Souza Sales, 2021); "afrodescendientes" (Ramos Rosado, 2012); "Afro-Puerto Rican" (Maddox, 2022); "mujer" (Hidalgo de Jesús, 2010); and "women" (Maddox, 2022). Of the sixteen academic sources on Arroyo Pizarro, I was able to retrieve keyword tags for ten, either from the documents themselves or from online databases. Among these ten articles, five were tagged with "queer" or a derivative term (Perkins, 2016; Large, 2017, 2018; Lladó Ortega, 2018), including "queer literatures" (Falconí Trávez, 2018); four with "lesbian" or a derivative term (Falconí Trávez, 2016, 2018; Large, 2017; Valdez, 2018); two with the race-related terms "negra" (Souza Sales, 2021) and "Black literature" (Nieves López, 2018); and one with "womens [sic] literature" (Nieves López, 2018). Including these terms in titles and keywords groups these articles together with scholarship on other works that

are deemed “queer literature”, “Black literature”, or “women’s literature”, making these categories legible to databases: the articles will appear in searches for these terms, reinforcing the construction of these literary categories within the academic sphere.

Social Media

The previous examples relate to publication through formal means; however, this is not the only way in which works can be sorted. In the digital age, it is easier than ever for anyone with an internet connection to produce and disseminate information, including sharing opinions about media such as books. Social media users also sort works into identity-based categories: it is common to see social media posts that list multiple authors or texts under a specific identity-based heading. Two of the ways this is achieved are through posts listing examples of a particular category and through tagging posts. Although not always stated explicitly, this practice is often implied to be in service of correcting inequality through increasing the visibility of marginalised authors or texts. An Instagram post by @afroresistance, a community-based organisation that educates and organises for racial justice throughout the Americas (AfroResistance, no date), made a post in September 2022 listing five Black authors, one of whom is Arroyo Pizarro. The caption of the post, in English, Spanish, and Portuguese, states that International Literacy Day serves “to remind the public of the importance of literacy as a matter of dignity and human rights” (AfroResistance [@afroresistance], 2022). It is therefore implied that publishing this list of Black authors is in service of promoting literacy and racial justice, the organisation’s *raison d’être*. Arroyo Pizarro also appears in several posts listing women authors. For example, Twitter/X user @eltucatucanazo started a thread with the post: “Voy a poner aquí a grandiosas escritoras y poetas” (iris [@eltucatucanazo], 2022). Each of the eighty posts in the following thread is dedicated to a different author, mostly Spanish-speaking Latin Americans, among them Arroyo Pizarro. In a similar instance, in reply to a post from @paz_bojorquez asking “¿A cuántas de estas escritoras leíste? ¿Las conoces? ¿A quien [sic] agregarías a la lista?” (MaríaPaz [@paz_bojorquez], 2024), followed by a list of thirty female authors, user @Xiatil replied with the names of seven more, including Arroyo Pizarro (Xiatil [@Xiatil], 2024). On Instagram, Spanish teacher @espanolconmelina frequently posts about Spanish-speaking authors. In March 2023, she made a series of posts titled “Mujeres en la literatura”, which she introduced with the

caption: “Como marzo es el mes de las mujeres [...] preparé una colectánea de las principales autoras hispanoamericanas” (Kurin [@espanolconmelina], 2023). Each of the twenty-five posts profiles an individual author, including one on Arroyo Pizarro. The user’s dedication of these posts to Women’s Month, a feminist observance, implies that posting this series of women writers is intended as a feminist act.

In order to contextualise the next two posts under analysis, I must first give a brief overview of “Bookstagram”, to which Bronwyn Reddan refers as “the bookish community on Instagram” (2022, p. 6). Bookstagram can be considered an online “affinity space” (Boffone and Jerasa, 2021, p. 10), organised around books, where Instagram users share and discuss their reading practices. Instagram users who post Bookstagram content, termed Bookstagrammers, “are microcelebrities who develop a public identity or brand as a reader” (Reddan, 2022, p. 1). The following two posts were made by Puerto Rican Bookstagrammers @cuir_bookseeker and @kio_reads, both with relatively small followings (1,797 and 794 respectively, at time of writing). The first post was made by @kio_reads on 30th December 2023 with the heading “Top Queer books I read this year” and lists twelve books, including Arroyo Pizarro’s *Violeta*. In the caption, the user wrote: “Here’s to more diverse books in 2024” (@kio_reads, 2023a). Another bookstagrammer, @cuir_bookseeker, made a reel (a short Instagram video) titled “Books by Puerto Rican Authors”, one of which was *Afrohistoria* by Arroyo Pizarro. In the caption of this post, the user commented: “Remember to diversify your bookshelf because we all have stories to tell, and they are all valuable!” (Victoria [@cuir_bookseeker], 2023).

Both Bookstagrammers made appeals to the concept of diversity in their posts. To analyse this, we must consider the culture and dynamics of the Bookstagram space. Proximity to and choice of books are leveraged to represent the self in a particular way: as Sunggyung Jo points out, “#Bookstagram images tell us so much more about the owners/readers than about the actual books themselves” (2023, p. 945). Selecting particular books to read, review, and post can be used for the purpose of creating a particular representation of oneself; Reddan calls this “bookish self-fashioning” (2022, p. 1). This phenomenon intersects with the principle of “diversity” in the literary world in complex ways. In a literary context, “diversity” is often used to refer to books written by or about people who belong to marginalised groups (De Melo, 2024, p. 2). It has been

argued that diversity of books, characters, and authors is important for the political struggles to liberate these marginalised groups (Boffone and Jerasa, 2021, p. 11; De Melo, 2024, p. 3). In this environment, reading and posting about "diverse" books can become part of the "bookish self-fashioning" process. This is not to say that Bookstagrammers necessarily consciously or "inauthentically" post these books in order to represent themselves as more engaged in social justice movements than they truly are; whether or not this commitment is "authentic" is beside the point. However, the potential desirability of representing oneself as supporting "diversity" must be taken into account as a potential influence when considering these Bookstagram posts. Although this paradigm is arguably more visible in a Bookstagram context, it is hardly limited to this environment, being "made possible by our shared cultural belief that what one reads tells us who the reader/owner is" (Jo, 2023, pp. 945–946), paired with the difficult-to-prove but widespread assumption that reading can be used "for positive communal, ethical, and political changes" (Jo, 2023, p. 942).

The practice of adding hashtags to posts on Instagram also contributes to the categorisation of literary works. Hashtags are clickable hyperlinks that Instagram users can add to their own posts in order to sort these posts thematically within the app. Users can click on or even follow hashtags to find particular types of content. Instagram also makes use of algorithms that recommend similar content to that with which a given user has interacted previously (Mosseri, 2021). Instagram is somewhat opaque about how the algorithm takes hashtags into account; however, their guide for creators states that "How often people see your content is based on what they like, comment on and even how you tag or format posts" and recommends that creators "Play to your audience and their niche" by using "trending hashtags on topics relevant to your audience" (Instagram for Creators, no date). It is therefore safe to assume that hashtags play a role in which posts are assigned to which niches, and that users who interact with a post with a given hashtag are more likely to be shown other posts with the same hashtag. In Bookstagram spaces, in addition to general Bookstagram hashtags, users may tag posts with hashtags relating to particular genres or categories of literature. The previously discussed post by @kio_reads, "Top Queer books I read this year", featured the following hashtags: #queer; #queerbooks; #queerbookstagram; #queerbookstagrammer; #queerbook (@kio_reads,

2023a). The same user also posted a review of Arroyo Pizarro's novel *Violeta*; although the review did not feature a particularly strong focus on queer or Puerto Rican identity as themes of the book, the post was tagged with #queer; #queerliterature; #puertoricanbooks; #puertoricanstories; #queerlatinx (@kio_reads, 2023b). The reel of "Books by Puerto Rican Authors" posted by @cuir_bookseeker featured the tag #latinebooks (Victoria [@cuir_bookseeker], 2023). While both posts identified Arroyo Pizarro as Puerto Rican specifically, broad Latin American regional terms were also used in hashtags, perhaps in order to cast the net wider for potential audiences. Although not a Bookstagram account, @afroresistance employed book-related hashtags in their post of Black authors: #blackauthors; #blackauthorsmatter; #blackauthorsofinstagram (AfroResistance [@afroresistance], 2022). Use of these types of tags likely means that Instagram users who have previously shown an interest in posts about Queer, Puerto Rican, Latin American, or Black books and authors will be more likely to be shown these new posts as well, entrenching the categorisation. The choice of particular tags over others thus represents books and authors in particular ways to the Instagram algorithm; these examples emphasise sexuality, nationality, region, and race. Someone who has not already shown an active interest in these categories may not receive the recommendation for these books, potentially creating niches to which the books and authors in question may be confined.

Goodreads

Goodreads, "the world's largest site for readers and book recommendations" (Chandler, no date) with over 150 million members in 2023 (Stamper-Halpin, 2023), allows its users to review, catalogue, share, and search for information about books. The site gives users the option to assign books to "shelves", which are personalised digital catalogues of books. The shelves to which Arroyo Pizarro's works have been assigned include many based on identity categories. The novel *Caparazones* appears on shelves titled "lgbt"; "women-gender"; "Puerto-rican-literature"; "queerreads"; "queer-lit"; "Puerto-rico"; and "sapphic". Short story collection *las Negras* has been included in shelves such as "black-authors"; "race"; "women-gender"; "Puerto-rico"; "race-diversity-equality"; "afrodescendientes"; "gender"; "black-women"; "black-lives"; and "blackness". In this way, users of Goodreads actively sort Arroyo Pizarro's work into identity-based literary

categories, for themselves and potentially for others who view these lists. Through shelving books on Goodreads, posting lists on social media platforms, and use of hashtags, Internet users contribute actively to the representation of Arroyo Pizarro's work in terms of identity categories.

Works Separated into Distinct Categories

It is important to note that, while some sources have attributed certain identity labels to Arroyo Pizarro or her work as a whole, sources sometimes make a distinction between the categories to which they assign different texts within the author's body of work. We see an indication of this in the above-described Goodreads shelving practices for *las Negras* versus *Caparazones*: while the shelves within which *las Negras* was categorised feature references to race, nation, and gender, none refer to sexuality; meanwhile, *Caparazones* was included in shelves relating to nation, gender, and sexuality, but not race. The phenomenon can also be seen in academic criticism; for example, Souza Sales describes *Violeta*, *Perseídas*, *Lesbianas en clave caribeña*, and *Transcaribeñx* as "contos e poesias afro-lésbicas, lésbicas/lesboeróticas", while terming *las Negras* an "antologia de contos negro-diaspóricos" (2021, p. 114); he refers to race in all cases, but *las Negras* is not represented in terms of sexuality the way other texts are. John T. Maddox goes further, claiming that Arroyo Pizarro "seems to have works that are either only lesbian or only Black in their thematics" (2022, p. 99). I must disagree with Maddox on this point, given that the author's works most frequently cited as "lesbian" (*Caparazones*, *Violeta*, *Lesbianas en clave caribeña*, to name a few) all also contain reflections on race within the text; Maddox's statement is a rather stark example of the divide between constructions of Arroyo Pizarro's works in terms of race and sexuality.

This distinction is also reflected in the broader thematic focus of scholarly articles on Arroyo Pizarro. Of the fifteen articles, all at least mention the issue of race; most devote considerable time to this topic, with several (Rivera Casellas, 2011; Arriaga Arango, 2012; Harris, 2012; Falconí Trávez, 2016; Nieves López, 2018; Souza Sales, 2021) treating race as a major focus of the piece. Sexuality is also a primary focus of numerous articles (Falconí Trávez, 2016; Perkins, 2016; Large, 2017; Valdez, 2018), as well as appearing as a secondary theme in several others (Ramos Collado, 2012; Falconí Trávez, 2018; Large, 2018; Lladó Ortega, 2018; Souza Sales, 2021). We see a clear thematic split depending

on the works discussed, as demonstrated in the table below: the articles that focus most on sexuality all discuss either or both of the novels *Caparazones* and *Violeta*. Other articles also explore this theme in *Lesbofilias*, *Lesbianas en clave caribeña*, and *Perseidas*. The six articles that make no mention of sexuality (indicated in bold in the table) cover other works, primarily *las Negras* and *Los documentados*. There is also a shift in focus over time: with the exception of Nieves López (2018), the other five articles that do not mention sexuality were all published in the years 2010–2012; meanwhile, except for Ramos Collado (2012), articles that mention or focus on sexuality were published in the years 2016–2021. Academic critics' representations of Arroyo Pizarro have come to focus more on sexuality over time, constructing this as an increasingly salient aspect of her work.

Author	**Date**	**Work(s) Discussed**	**Race?**	**Sexuality?**	**Gender?**
Arriaga Arango, Eduard	**2012**	***Los documentados* (2005), *Ojos de luna* (2007), *Origami de letras* (2004)**	**Focus**	**No**	**Yes**
Falconí Trávez, Diego	2016	*Violeta* (2013); *Caparazones* (2010); *las Negras* (2012); *Lesbianas en clave caribeña* (2012); personal diary/memoir *La Macacoa* (2011)	Focus	Focus	Yes
Falconí Trávez, Diego	2018	*Caparazones*; *las Negras*; *Lesbianas en clave caribeña*; *La Macacoa*.	Yes	Yes	Yes
Harris, Emmanuel	**2012**	***Los documentados***	**Focus**	**No**	**Focus**
Hidalgo de Jesús, Amarilis	**2010**	***las Negras***	**Yes**	**No**	**Focus**
Large, Sophie	2017	*Caparazones*, *Los documentados*, *Violeta*	Yes	Focus	Focus
Large, Sophie	2018	*Caparazones*, *Violeta*, *Lesbianas en clave caribeña*,	Yes	Yes	Yes

		Ojos de luna, *Transmutadxs* (2016)			
Lladó Ortega, Mónica	2018	*Lesbofilias* (2014); *Menorragia: histerias de octubre* (2015); *Transmutadxs*	Brief	Yes	Focus
Maddox, John T. IV	2022	*las Negras*	Focus	Brief	Yes
Nieves López, Edgar J	**2018**	***las Negras***	**Focus**	**No**	**Focus**
Perkins, Alexandra Gonzenbach	2016	*Caparazones*	Yes	Focus	Yes
Ramos Collado, Lilliana	2012	*Perseidas* (2010)	Yes	Yes	Brief
Ramos Rosado, Marie	**2012**	***las Negras***	**Focus**	**No**	**Focus**
Rivera Casellas, Zaira	**2011**	***Ojos de luna***	**Focus**	**No**	**Focus**
Souza Sales, Cristian	2021	*Tongas, palenques y quilombos. Ensayos de afroresistencia*	Focus	Brief	Focus
Valdez, Elena	2018	*Violeta*	Yes	Focus	Yes

Arroyo Pizarro's Shifting Self-Categorisations

Most of the time, these identity-based categorisations go unquestioned; however, Arroyo Pizarro has at times been called to address them explicitly in interviews. The author has taken varying positions on the issue, at times rejecting these categories while at other times accepting them, demonstrating the mutability of authorial approval of these representations. When asked by David Caleb Acevedo how, as a writer, she was defined by being a woman, Puerto Rican, Black, and a lesbian, Arroyo Pizarro said:

> constantemente se me etiqueta por algo. Al principio fue incómodo, pero soy resiliente y una vez descubrí que el ser humano promedio necesitaba de esas etiquetas para incluirme en sus referentes cognitivos pragmáticos, dejé de sentirlo como un ataque (Arroyo Pizarro, 2012b, p. 3)

This response from 2012 illuminates the evolution of Arroyo Pizarro's attitude to this "labelling". Initially expressing discomfort, she went on to adopt a pragmatic position, seemingly accepting that the "average human" will employ these labels whether she likes it or not. In a reflective piece written by Arroyo Pizarro and published in *Tinkuy* journal the same year, she commented on her selection for the Bogotá39: "Me di absoluta cuenta que representar a mi país, era también representar a la mujer trabajadora, la maternidad, la Afrodescendencia y el sector LGBTT, puesto que soy profesora, madre, negra y lesbiana" (Arroyo Pizarro, 2012a, p. 13). According to Arroyo Pizarro, one of the consequences of constantly being categorised with these identity labels is that she is seen as a representative of those groups at large. She again took a pragmatic approach, recognising that her classification as Black, lesbian, *et cetera* will happen with or without her consent. Nine years later, in 2021, Arroyo Pizarro openly referred to herself as "una escritora afrolesbiana puertorriqueña" (Arroyo Pizarro and Mbomío Rubio, 2021). Thus, Arroyo Pizarro has, at times, participated actively in representing herself in terms of identity labels; this will resurface in later analysis of my own interview with the author.

Case Study: Representations of *Caparazones*

When considering the phenomenon of identity categories being applied to Arroyo Pizarro's works, the novel *Caparazones* (2010) emerges as a particularly relevant case study, since it has frequently been referred to as a lesbian novel: for example, Arroyo Pizarro referred to the book as "la primera novela lésbica que se publica en mi país" (Arroyo Pizarro and Mbomío Rubio, 2021). This categorisation may be partly due to controversy surrounding the book and Arroyo Pizarro's reported difficulties publishing it, which she described thus: "esa primera novela de dos mujeres enamoradas racializadas no se pudo publicar en Puerto Rico, pues la autopubliqué, la llevé a Barcelona, Egales la vio, la publicamos allá" (Arroyo Pizarro and Mbomío Rubio, 2021). According to Arroyo Pizarro, the novel's subject matter was so controversial with regards to sexuality and race that publishers would not take it, leading her to self-publish in Puerto Rico and to seek overseas publication in Spain; as previously discussed, *Caparazones* was published in Spain by Editorial Egales, a specifically LGBT publishing house. Arroyo Pizarro's account that racism and homophobia were the reasons behind the publishing rejections, while highly plausible, is not necessarily the only possibility; it is hard to prove this one way or

the other, but we should keep in mind that there may also have been other factors at play. However, emphasising the adversity *Caparazones* faced and declaring it to be the first of its kind as a "lesbian novel" serves to represent it as a successful underdog and a breakthrough in the literary and political context of the archipelago. The epithet "novela lésbica" may have been produced partly through this hostile environment that apparently rejected the novel on the basis of its content, essentialising it as "lésbica" in a way intended to be derogatory; using the label can thus be interpreted as an act of reclamation.

Book Covers

The covers of any book are critical paratexts, serving as representations of the text before a potential reader even opens its pages. The front cover of the Egales edition of *Caparazones* (Figure 1, below) features a grainy sepia photograph of what appear to be the nude bodies of two women, one sitting up with her arm resting on the other, who is lying down. Neither woman's head is visible, focusing the viewer's attention on their bodies. The nudity and the pose suggest a sexual intimacy between the two, signalling that the novel features an erotic relationship between women. The sepia tone makes it difficult to tell, but one woman appears to have darker skin than the other, which would correlate with the protagonists in the novel. The back cover shows a smaller reproduction of the same photograph, as well as a blurb and a quotation from Nelson E. Vera Santiago's review (an example of a metatext becoming paratext). The blurb does not explicitly represent *Caparazones* as a work of lesbian or queer literature; in fact, it only makes it clear that the novel centres on a relationship between two women in the penultimate sentence (Arroyo Pizarro, 2010). Perhaps other features, like the cover photograph, were considered overt enough signals of lesbian content that the publishers considered it redundant to further emphasise this in the blurb.

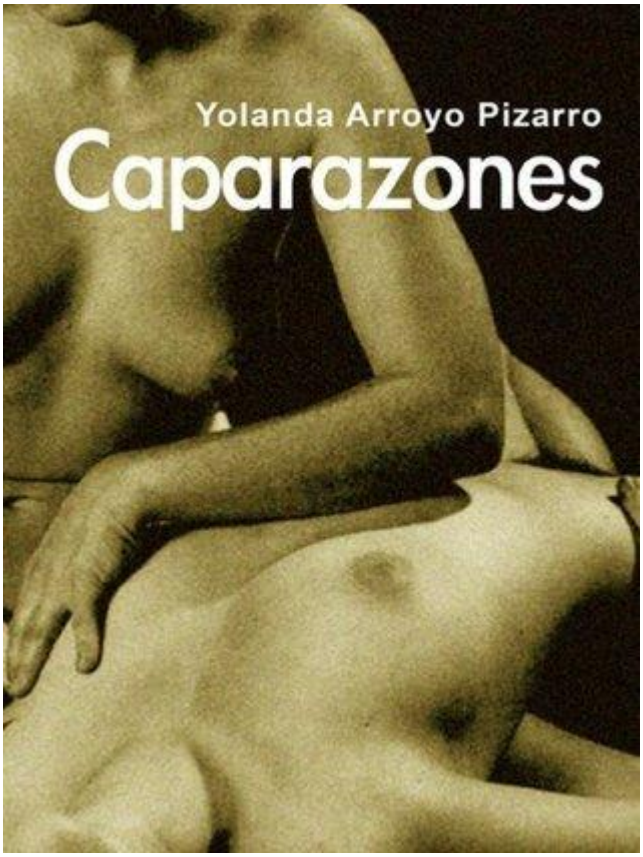

Figure 1: Front Cover of *Caparazones* (Arroyo Pizarro, 2010)

Scholarship

Academic discussion of *Caparazones* features a strong focus on sexuality. Among the sixteen sampled academic sources, *Caparazones* appears in five, making it one of the most frequently discussed of Arroyo Pizarro's texts. The focus on sexuality is already apparent from the titles of the articles: of the five, four feature either the word "queer" or a derivative of the word "lesbian"; the fifth article, which compares Arroyo Pizarro's work with that of Audre Lorde, is no less interested in "la condición afrodescendiente, lesbiana y poscolonial de la escritora" (Falconí Trávez, 2016, p. 56). All five articles discuss race, gender, and sexuality; however, there is a particular emphasis on sexuality in comparison with criticism on other works by Arroyo Pizarro, thus representing it as an especially salient aspect of this specific work.

Reviews

I accessed both lay and professional reviews of the novel. From among the four reviews posted on Amazon and Goodreads, three represented sexuality as a significant aspect of the novel (Acevedo, 2012; Danika at the Lesbrary, 2013; Damasceno Ferreira, 2014); the

fourth did not, but sorted the novel into a shelf titled “sapphic” (Joharis, 2020). Identity-based epithets of the third trend identified earlier sometimes appeared in professional reviews: Daniel Torres calls *Caparazones* “una novela ecológica queer” (2012), while Centeno Añeses implies that the book belongs to a wider category of “la literatura lésbica en Puerto Rico” (2017). However, in comparison with the academic articles, which had a strong focus on sexuality as a theme of the work, the professional reviews tended to give a more general overview of the novel, recapping the plot and representing other aspects beside the sexuality of the characters. While the professional reviews still discuss the treatment of sexuality within *Caparazones*, this is as one element of a more rounded representation of the novel. In particular, the novel’s theme of environmentalism is given far more attention in professional reviews than in academic articles.

(Imagined) Readership

Across sources, there was a certain tension regarding the novel’s imagined reader, who was constructed in a number of ways. In contrast with Editorial Egales’ claims of an LGBT readership for their publications, references in other sources to a specifically LGBT audience for *Caparazones* are few and generally more vague. Nelson E. Vera Santiago’s review of the novel makes some hints at a specific readership without outright stating as much. The reviewer speculates: “quizás sea la contestación a un reclamo de la comunidad de lectoras ansiosas por una novela que abarcara este tema y alimentara la sed de narrativa homo-erótica y sicológica dentro del contexto del lesbianismo” (2010). Vera Santiago suggests that the novel will appeal to specific readers: an existing community of women (he uses the feminine “lectoras”) who are already anxiously waiting for a novel dealing with lesbian themes. Whilst not outright stated, it seems likely that this is intended to refer to a lesbian or queer female audience.

Amazon reviewer Tejo Damasceno Ferreira focuses on gender and sexuality throughout his review and projects an imagined readership based on these demographics. His statement that “Apesar de ser homem, e heterossexual, aprendi há muito tempo a aceitar sem restrições as escolhas de gênero dos seres humanos” (2014), in the context of the review, implies that a novel about lesbian characters would not be expected to appeal to heterosexual men, although he portrays himself as having overcome this barrier due to his open-mindedness. His comment that “tenho profunda admiração pelo

chamado lesbianismo, pelo que ele tem de suavidade e beleza" (2014) exoticises and essentialises lesbianism. Finally, he makes the brief aside that the novel's plot is developed "sem pornografia" (2014), a comment that would appear to contain two implications: firstly, that this is contrary to expectation, perhaps because of the nudity on the cover or implying an expectation that a novel with lesbian protagonists would feature pornography; and secondly, that the lack of such material is preferable, since the rest of the sentence lists positives of the novel. The review represents the novel in a number of ways: gender and sexuality are emphasised as the most salient aspects; the supposed lack of pornographic content is cast as both surprising and commendable; and heterosexual men are portrayed as not being the usual or intended readers.

In contrast, several sources make active efforts to represent the novel as having universal appeal; this is in line with Arroyo Pizarro's own claims about her work more broadly. Professional reviews by Torres, *Hola Cultura*, and González Marín all represent *Caparazones* as a universal or conventional love story. *Hola Cultura* writes: "Caparazones es una historia de amor convencional podría decirse, si no fuera por ser dos mujeres las protagonistas principales" (2014). According to González Marín,

> hay que decir que es un relato cuya fábula [...] es una realmente universal. Sin embargo, se trata de una fábula universal con un detalle que la trasforma sustancialmente: un triángulo amoroso, dos mujeres y un varón; pero las amantes son las dos mujeres (2012).

Torres states: "se enlaza el amor de Nessa y Alexia como los grandes amores de la historia, como Cleopatra y Marco Antonio o María Félix y Agustín Lara, pero se trata de dos mujeres comprometidas y enamoradas formando una familia completa" (2012). These three excerpts follow a strikingly similar pattern: the novel tells a conventional love story, *except for* the fact that it is between two women. Curiously, the reviewers emphasise the conventionality, while simultaneously contradicting it: in all three cases, the comment that the lovers are both women forms a separate clause, juxtaposed by the conjunctions "pero" and "si no fuera por", thus implying that the gender of the protagonists takes away from the novel's supposed conventionality. One of the reviews posted on Goodreads comes from David Caleb Acevedo; unlike the other Goodreads reviews, this is not exactly a lay review since, as well as being one of the editors of *Los*

otros cuerpos, Acevedo has a long-standing relationship with Arroyo Pizarro and translated the English edition of the novel. Acevedo calls *Caparazones* "The epic of love gained and lost, over and over again, story [sic] that belongs to us no matter what our sexuality is" (2012). This sentence echoes the same sentiment: it is an explicit reassurance that sexuality is not a barrier to reading and enjoying the novel and an assertion of its universality as a love story. The reviewers project an imagined public that would be alienated by the depiction of lesbians; pre-empting this, they represent *Caparazones* as having universal appeal, perhaps in order to promote the novel to as wide a readership as possible. The *Hola Cultura* review calls the novel "Literatura para todos" (2014), explicitly promoting it to all readers. There are many possible reasons to represent the novel as being universal, some more cynical than others: sources with a relationship with Arroyo Pizarro (such as Daniel Caleb Acevedo and Daniel Torres) may wish to support her to sell more copies; those who enjoyed the text may have an interest in recommending it as widely as possible; one might wish to challenge the idea that novels written about or by lesbians only appeal to a certain subsection of the population. Comments on readership across sources express a certain tension: while the idea of a "universal" audience appears to be desirable to many, the content of *Caparazones* is nevertheless constructed by some as a barrier to certain readers. Even those reviews that represent the novel as being "universal" tend to claim that it is so *despite* being about a lesbian relationship, a statement based on the premise that this fact detracts from the story's universality.

Conclusion

From Bookstagram to scholarship, a wide range of paratextual and metatextual sources foreground identity categories like race, sexuality, and nationality in their representations of Arroyo Pizarro and her literary work. Thus, these sources contribute not only to the construction of this author and her texts, but also of these identity-based literary categories more widely.

I have defined three trends in the relationships that sources construct between author/text and identity categories: identity categories as a topic of the text(s); identity categories applied to the author; and identity categories constructed as an essential characteristic of the text(s). All three contribute to the representation of this author and

her work as being defined by identity categories. In the third trend, many sources represented Arroyo Pizarro's works with terms such as "Black literature" and "lesbian novel". These terms, while used frequently across a range of paratexts and metatexts, were usually left ambiguous in their meaning, rather than having any strict definition. Works were also sorted into these categories through means such as metadata, catalogues, and book lists, which group together works on the basis of these identity constructions. Such sorting practices often serve to catalogue these works in a way that is legible for databases and search engines, which may have the effect of making them more accessible to certain audiences while simultaneously running the risk of representing them in an essentialised and reductive way. The case study of representations of *Caparazones* has provided an example of how metatexts and paratexts can represent a text as a "novela lésbica", emphasising sexuality perhaps even as the most salient aspect of the text. Several sources approached the topic of readership: while some constructed readers as being likely to embody particular characteristics, others insisted on the universal appeal of *Caparazones*, even while implying that the novel's lesbian content might be considered a barrier.

This examination of paratexts and metatexts has introduced many of the themes that will recur throughout the thesis: emphasis on identity categories in representations of both author and texts; the ambiguity of identity-based literary categories; differing constructions of works within Arroyo Pizarro's oeuvre; and the question of reader demographics and whether certain readers are put off by the connections between Arroyo Pizarro's work and marginalised identities. This research into paratexts and metatexts took place largely in an earlier phase of my research, demonstrating the emphasis placed on identity categories in these sources' representations of Arroyo Pizarro and her texts. Having thus confirmed the relevance of this author and body of work as a case study of the wider phenomenon of identity-based literary categories, and having demonstrated the emphasis placed on identity categories in these sources' representations of Arroyo Pizarro and her texts, I went on to carry out interviews with fourteen participants in Puerto Rico and the United States in 2023. Analysis of these interviews forms the focus of the remaining three chapters of the thesis. My aim in conducting interviews was to investigate whether the emphasis on identity that I had

observed in pre-existing paratextual and metatextual sources would also be present in this new data.

Chapter 4. The Author: Interviewee Representations of Arroyo Pizarro's Authorial Persona

Introduction

The present chapter focuses on representations of Arroyo Pizarro herself in terms of identity categories. The figure of the author is intrinsic to the contemporary construction of literature; as such, the identity of the author is assumed to be relevant and even indispensable to the text itself, therefore becoming a topic of public interest. Wenche Ommundsen states that "There is a preference for personality over writing", accompanied by a tendency "to see writers as seamless extensions of their texts" (2007, p. 249), which can result in an intense public investment in the writer's personal life. As Ommundsen puts it, the "job description" of a writer comes with "an obligation to be put in the public eye". While this is against the preferences of many authors, some turn it to their advantage, becoming "competent performers" or even "producing authorial selves as intriguing as any fiction" (Ommundsen, 2007, p. 246). Arroyo Pizarro is one such case: far from avoiding the limelight, she makes regular public appearances, shares political statements on social media, and has made much information about her personal identity and life events public knowledge. The boundaries between author, public figure, and private individual, arguably fuzzy for many writers, are especially blurred when it comes to Arroyo Pizarro. It is hardly surprising, then, that my interviewees' representations of this author incorporated descriptions of her personality, identity, and life events. Discussions of Arroyo Pizarro's identities *per se* were tightly interwoven with representations of her activism, transgression of the *status quo*, and what participants characterised as her deep-seated empathy and solidarity. I begin by examining interviewees' representations of Arroyo Pizarro's identity, working from the principles established in Chapter 1: namely, that categories like race and sexuality are not inherent and objective but are constructed through discourse. Threaded throughout is the theme of transgression, which receives focused attention later in the chapter and leads into analysis of interviewee comments on the author's activism and politicisation, which they linked with her identity.

Racialising Arroyo Pizarro

Race was central to participants' representations of Arroyo Pizarro and was mentioned in every interview. As detailed in Chapter 1, I approach race not as an objective or essential characteristic, but as a discursive category; as such, I will examine how participants constructed Arroyo Pizarro's race, rather than taking it for granted as an obvious fact. Throughout this section, it is particularly crucial to recognise my positionality as a white foreigner, as this context had a significant impact on the interviews.

Participants repeatedly and unambiguously represented Arroyo Pizarro as Black: the Anonymous Lecturer referred to her as "una autora negra"; Rodríguez Miranda used the term "una mujer visiblemente negra"; Arroyo Pizarro called herself "una muchacha que es negra"; Negrón and Ramos Rosado both stated that she "es negra", to name but a few examples. Some participants emphasised that Blackness was a crucial part of Arroyo Pizarro's public image. Ramos Rosado and I had the following exchange:

> MRR: Al lle- al llegar a Puerto Rico, me imagino que te empezaste a encontrar con esa línea.
>
> SMS: Claro.
>
> MRR: Porque es una cosa leerlo allá, pero cuando llegas aquí, te das cuenta de... del impacto que ella tiene aquí.
>
> SMS: Sí, exacto.
>
> MRR: Con la cuestión negra.

The academic emphasised the importance of race to Arroyo Pizarro's reputation within the national space of Puerto Rico specifically. My own identity came into play in this excerpt: as at other points in the interviews, participants assumed my starting point of ignorance on the topic. This affected the way in which they discussed race and racial issues, which likely would have been quite different had they been presented with another interviewer.

"Evidentemente negra"

In the context of wider Puerto Rican racial discourses, the unambiguous assignation of the category "negra" to Arroyo Pizarro takes on a particular significance. As Hilda Lloréns

explains, race in Puerto Rico is generally constructed as "a continuum" (Lloréns, 2018, p. 33) rather than as discrete, clearly defined and mutually exclusive groupings: multiple categorisations such as "*trigueño, indio, mestizo, jabao, moreno*, and others [...] exist in between 'pure' black at one end and 'pure' white at the other" (Lloréns, 2018, p. 33). This conceptualisation of race manifested in my interviews, such as when the Anonymous Lecturer referred to a group of students as "no negros... tampoco blancos, porque no, no hay una raza así fija". Within this paradigm, an individual is assigned a category based on phenotypical characteristics such as skin colour, nose shape, lip shape, body type, and hair texture (Lloréns, 2018, p. 35). Isar Godreau comments that in Puerto Rico, "people assign different meanings to the same racial term or change classifications depending on their interpretation of hair texture and other features that can sometimes override skin-tone as criteria" (2015, pp. 36–37). Within the context of this understanding of race as a continuum based on multiple phenotypical features, the assignment of the category "Black" becomes limited. "Pure Black" is constructed as an "extreme" and "numerically marginal" category, based on the assumption that the vast majority of Puerto Ricans are racially mixed and therefore not "Black" but somewhere in the middle. Since race is assigned based on a variety of phenotypical traits, all of which are assumed to exist on a spectrum from "white" to "Black", anyone whose phenotypical traits average out to somewhere in the middle will not typically be assigned "Black":

> blackness as a descriptor is applied only to people who possess all of these physical traits: dark skin, hair worn 'naturally' in kinky curls or waves, dreaded or braided (but not straightened), their facial features might also include a broad or large nose and/or thick lips. (Lloréns, 2018, p. 40)

Such an appearance "leaves no doubt that they are in fact black"; such individuals "are often referred to in Puerto Rico as 'obviously black'" (Lloréns, 2018, p. 39), a term that differentiates them from the general population, which is constructed as "mixed". I saw this paradigm reproduced in my interviews. Both the Anonymous Lecturer and Marie Ramos Rosado referred to particular individuals as "evidentemente negros", as Lloréns describes. In this context, my participants' repeated use of "negra", without further qualifier, to refer to Arroyo Pizarro constructed her as unambiguously Black. In writing about her own experience, Arroyo Pizarro has described how the above-listed

phenotypical characteristics contributed to her racialisation: in *Afrohistoria*, she described her experience as a child of receiving "gritos y burlas de otros compañeros de escuela por ser de un color feo, por tener el pelo malo y porque su boca y nariz son anchas" (Arroyo Pizarro, 2018a, p. 6).

Claiming Blackness

At times, participants represented Arroyo Pizarro not only as Black, but as actively claiming her Blackness. Edda López stated that the author is "valiente para expresar su negritud" and that "ella no se escondía para... para, ella hablaba con mucha... firmeza sobre su negritud... sobre su orgullo de su negritud"; Daniel Torres referred to Arroyo Pizarro as "afirmando su raza negra". Claiming Blackness was constructed as an individual action, one that goes against the Puerto Rican norm, as interviewees described it, of denying Blackness. The Anonymous Lecturer stated that as Puerto Ricans, "todos somos afrodescendientes, aunque mucha gente no lo quiere aceptar". Within the racial paradigm of Puerto Rico, with its limited interpretation of who counts as "Black", Lloréns states that there is "a practice of distancing oneself and to distance others from declaring a black identity" (2018, p. 37). In this context, actively claiming Blackness can be construed as a radical act; participants praised Arroyo Pizarro's pride and outspokenness regarding her racial identity. This takes on new significance in relation to Arroyo Pizarro's role as an author. While an individual possessing the phenotypical characteristics associated with Blackness may not have the option of denying Blackness in their day-to-day life (such as when Arroyo Pizarro was bullied as a child), the author role can present different possibilities, since the extent to which an author's personal identity is known to the public is variable. An author can conceivably remain anonymous, their race completely unknown; they may make few public appearances, their identity known but in a limited fashion; or, even if they are known, they might not speak publicly about their race, not choosing to claim Blackness as actively as Arroyo Pizarro does. As such, references to Arroyo Pizarro not only as Black, but also as actively claiming Blackness in a way that is politicised, contribute to the representation of her as a transgressive and political author.

Constructions of Arroyo Pizarro's Sexuality

"Lesbianas" and "homosexuales": Contrastively Gendered Terms

Arroyo Pizarro's sexuality was also a frequently-mentioned aspect of her public persona; however, where all participants mentioned race, there were a handful who did not mention sexuality. The term most commonly used to reference Arroyo Pizarro's sexuality was "lesbian" or "lesbiana": the Anonymous Lecturer commented that "es una autora negra, (SMS: Sí), lesbiana"; Caroline stated, "she's a lesbian"; Torres mentioned that "es una mujer lésbica, le- lesbiana"; Perkins used the phrase "Black lesbian author" in reference to Arroyo Pizarro; and Edda López, Marie Ramos Rosado, and Arroyo Pizarro herself all also used the word "lesbiana" to describe her. "Lesbiana" and "lesbian" are gendered terms that inherently refer to both sexuality and gender and which are not used for gay men. "Gay" and "homosexual", which are sometimes employed in a gender-neutral fashion in both English and Spanish, were in these interviews used primarily to describe men rather than women. Participants made a distinction between "lesbian(a)" and "homosexual"/"gay", such as when Rodríguez Miranda commented of Arroyo Pizarro that "Ella tiene muy buenas relaciones con muchos artistas homosexuales y [...] lesbianas". By adding "y lesbianas" to the statement, she conveyed that "homosexuales" does not automatically include women. Similarly, Ramos Rosado made repeated references to lesbians and homosexuals or gays: "personas lesbianas y gays"; "el tema de la cuestión lésbica... igual que homosexual..."; "Yo tengo muchas amigas del mundo lésbico. Y homosexual". By stating both each time, she implied that "gay" or "homosexual" would not be sufficient to cover both men and women. Throughout my interviews, no participant ever referred to an individual woman as "homosexual" or "gay", instead preferring the term "lesbiana"; "gay" and "homosexual" were sometimes applied to a mixed-gender group, such as when Arroyo Pizarro stated that "los homosexuales hemos existido siempre", but never solely to women.

Other potentially gender-neutral terms were not frequently used either. "LGBT", while sometimes used for groups of people, was not applied to Arroyo Pizarro as an individual, likely because the term explicitly encompasses multiple identities that are, in general,

mostly constructed as discrete[6]. The word "queer"/"cuir", while used in other contexts, was not often employed to represent Arroyo Pizarro; the only examples were from the author herself, who commented that "toda la vida yo fui una adolescente y una adulta cuir" and that at a certain point in time she had felt that "muy probablemente soy la única persona cuir que está publicando temas cuir" in Puerto Rico. In these instances, the use of "cuir" seemed specific to the context in which they occurred: Arroyo Pizarro was telling me that she had sought broadly for queer/cuir authors and stories in Puerto Rico, found a gap, and then identified herself as a queer/cuir author who could fill this gap. In this instance, she represented herself as belonging to a mixed-gender categorisation of queer/cuir authors, thus constructing non-hegemonic sexuality as a commonality among a wider group, where "lesbian" is gender-specific. At other moments, she made a gendered distinction between herself and other queer/cuir authors: when discussing the book fair she attended in Barcelona, she noted that "yo era la única lesbiana en el grupo", going on to mention that the group included her friend and fellow writer Luis Negrón, whom she referred to as an "hombre gay". Thus, her comment about being the only lesbian highlighted the specific intersection of sexuality and gender: she was not the only queer or LGBT member of the group, but was specifically the only lesbian. Thus, participants displayed a strong tendency to represent Arroyo Pizarro specifically as a lesbian rather than as gay, homosexual, queer/cuir, or LGBT; gender specificity was overwhelmingly preferred. The use of any of these terms would have implications: preference for one of the gender-neutral terms would contribute to the construction of a broader category of LGBT or queer/cuir writers, implying that this group has something in common despite differing experiences of gender and sexuality. The fact that "lesbian" and "lesbiana" were used more often constructs a much more specific grouping of authors and represents Arroyo Pizarro as belonging to this specific group, differentiating her from gay male writers in particular. This gendered distinction in sexuality-related categories will have implications for the categorisation of texts, to be discussed in the following chapter.

[6] While lesbian, gay, and bisexual are typically constructed as discrete identities, it is usually understood that a subject can be any one of these and transgender simultaneously.

(In)Stability of Sexuality

As noted in Chapter 1, categories like "homosexual" and "lesbian" tend to be constructed as stable, inherent, and essential aspects of individuals. Within this conceptualisation, it is generally understood that a person's sexuality is stable throughout their lives, even before they are aware of it. In line with this logic, Arroyo Pizarro encapsulated her experience thus: "toda la vida yo fui una adolescente y una adulta cuir". Daniel Torres commented that "Luego [Arroyo Pizarro] descubre y sabe que es una mujer lésbica, [...] lesbiana"; the use of "descubrir" constructs one's sexuality as an "inner truth" to be discovered. Marie Ramos Rosado described Arroyo Pizarro's trajectory in a different way:

> ella hablaba [...] de cuando estaba en la, en la... tortura de su, de su búsqueda de identidad, porque ella fue una mujer heterosexual, casada, y luego empieza... a plantearse todo esto, y entonces empieza a sumir ese discurso en las redes.

The idea of the "búsqueda de identidad" chimes with the dominant essentialist discourse, which constructs lesbians as "discovering" the stable inner truth of their sexuality, which is assumed to pre-exist the discovery. However, essentialism tends to reject the idea that any lesbian ever "was" heterosexual; as such, Ramos Rosado's statement simultaneously confirms and contradicts central tenets of essentialism. Ramos Rosado's identification of Arroyo Pizarro's public statements as the moment of change in her identity apparently conflicts with the author's own statement that she was always queer/cuir; Ramos Rosado's representation of Arroyo Pizarro focused on the outward, public performance of her sexuality, equating this with the author's identity.

Public Sexuality

As with race, an authorial persona may not necessarily include the public enunciation of individual personal sexuality; indeed, this is arguably even more true of sexuality than race, since sexuality is not as readily decoded from an individual's appearance. When discussing her attendance at the Liber book festival in Barcelona, Arroyo Pizarro commented that "éramos como veinte escritores puertorriqueños, pero yo era la única lesbiana en el grupo, digo, abiertamente lesbiana"; she first stated that she was the only lesbian, then correcting herself to "abiertamente lesbiana". This clarification hints at the ambiguity and blurriness of the category of lesbian authors: whether or not someone is a

lesbian is not always public knowledge, and for this and other reasons, the boundaries of the category are not always clear-cut. It is not Arroyo Pizarro's sexuality *per se*, but the public knowledge thereof, that makes this an important aspect of her authorial persona. As with race, participant representations of Arroyo Pizarro incorporated her publicly-identified sexuality as an important aspect of her authorial persona. Perkins commented that Arroyo Pizarro is "really well respected and well known in Puerto Rico" as someone who "has shared her voice in terms of, you know, Black lesbian experience particularly"; this statement frames Arroyo Pizarro's public comments on her sexuality and race as some of the things for which she is best known. Ramos Rosado stated that "el identificarse ella [Arroyo Pizarro] como lesbiana es una ruptura (SMS: Mm) al canon, (SMS: Sí) bien fuerte"; she thus represented Arroyo Pizarro as actively identifying as a lesbian, which she cast as a transgressive act.

As well as her identity as a lesbian *per se*, participants mentioned other related aspects of her personal life that are known to the public in their representations of Arroyo Pizarro. Daniel Torres noted that, for Arroyo Pizarro, "el criterio de... de... de privacidad que tiene mi generación y otras generaciones, (SMS: Mm) un poco como que se rompe, (SMS: Mhm) eso se rompe, porque tienes la vida, la obra". He represented her writing and her private life as mutually constituted, the distinction between them blurry. Both Edda López and Marie Ramos Rosado represented Arroyo Pizarro's marriage as a salient detail. As López commented:

> EL: También, una cosa que me llamó mucho la atención de Yolanda fue cuando ella se casó.
>
> SMS: Mm.
>
> EL: Ella fue parte de unas, unas... unas personas pioneras... que... cuando se [mumbles] cuando se... legalizó el matrimonio entre personas del mismo sexo aquí en Puerto Rico, ella fue una de las pioneras.
>
> SMS: Sí.
>
> EL: Y su historia estuvo en... en los periódicos, [¿?] en la televisión, fue reseñada... este, y eso me llamó la atención también, (SMS: Mm) que además de ser valiente

> para expresar su negritud… era muy valiente… para ser pionera en ese matrimonio (SMS: Claro) [¿?] que ella tuvo.

Similarly, Ramos Rosado stated that:

> cuando se empezó a hablar del matrimonio… gay, (SMS: Mm) eh, de personas lesbianas y gays… ella fue de las primeras que asume una posición vocal defendiendo esa línea. Y si no es la primera, es de las primeras que se casó… legalmente en Puerto Rico. Y ella salió mucho en televisión.

Both of these participants represented Arroyo Pizarro's marriage as being intertwined with her politics and relevant to her position as author; both also emphasised the media coverage that brought public attention to the event. For many authors, their relationships and marriages are not public knowledge or, at least, do not contribute significantly to their authorial personae; in the case of Arroyo Pizarro, the politicisation and publicisation of her marriage was such that these two interviewees included it in their representations of her.

Arroyo Pizarro's status as a mother was also discussed in relation to her sexuality, by Arroyo Pizarro herself and by Daniel Torres. Torres stated that:

> es una madre, es una mujer que tuvo una hija, que cumplió hasta cierto punto con la sociedad con ciertos parámetros, ¿no? Luego descubre y sabe que es una mujer lésbica, le- lesbiana, y entonces hace una afirmación de eso.

In this account, motherhood was referred to as a way of complying with societal expectations for women; this was juxtaposed with lesbianism, represented as a form of transgression. Arroyo Pizarro also commented on lesbian motherhood:

> YAP: en mi… la época en que yo me criaba había una disonancia…
>
> SMS: Mm.
>
> YAP: …entonces te decían que si tú querías ser madre, no podías ser lesbiana, y si ibas a ser lesbiana, no podías ser madre.

Thus, she described a public discourse that constructed lesbianism and motherhood as mutually exclusive. As Daniel Torres pointed out, to be a mother is to comply with societal

expectations; to be a lesbian is to break with them. As such, the two are not expected to coexist, and lesbian motherhood is often constructed as impossible or deficient. Arroyo Pizarro went on to comment that this was a lie told "para que te mantuvieras en el carril" because "el patriarcado quiere asegurarse de que haya hembras para su consumo, y nosotras no somos"; telling women that they can only be mothers if they submit to men is a way of keeping those women in line. Thus, Arroyo Pizarro's public identities as both mother and lesbian expose the fallacy that women must choose between the two, another way in which she is represented as transgressive.

Community

Beyond her personal, individual identity, some participants also represented Arroyo Pizarro as being connected with a wider LGBT community. In the context of talking about LGBT activism, the Anonymous Lecturer stated that Arroyo Pizarro "está muy conectada a... a la comunidad". In Esther Rodríguez Miranda's words, "la comunidad LGBTTQIA [...] sí la conoce [a Arroyo Pizarro] y la apoya" and "Ella tiene muy buenas relaciones con muchos artistas homosexuales y [...] lesbianas". Perkins remarked that Arroyo Pizarro was known for "doing... important work for the lesbian community [...] in Puerto Rico". These excerpts illustrate how the LGBT community or lesbian community was constructed as being based on solidarity, mutual support, and interpersonal relationships rather than solely on sharing a characteristic, and Arroyo Pizarro was represented as being actively involved with this community. If the insistence on representing Arroyo Pizarro specifically as a lesbian might have implied a separation from other queer or LGBT people, these references to her connections with the LGBT community counteract that possible interpretation. Instead, she was represented as having solidarity with other people marginalised for their sexuality and gender.

Gender: Incidental Representations

In comparison with other categories like race or sexuality, attempting to identify instances in which Arroyo Pizarro's gender was emphasised in participant representations of the author presents specific difficulties. In Spanish, of course, the vast majority of nouns and adjectives are inherently gendered. In English, the phrase "female author" specifically highlights the writer's gender; in Spanish, the word "autora" or "escritora" is already feminine, in a way that is not necessarily intended as a commentary

on the person's gender. Reference to a specific "escritor(a)" or "autor(a)" will always include an indication of the author's gender, whereas it does not inherently include an indication of race, nationality, or sexuality. Therefore, there is no real equivalent in terms of gender to phrases like "autora negra", "autora puertorriqueña", or "escritora lesbiana", wherein the speaker is actively drawing attention to the author's race or sexuality. For example, when Edda López commented that "Yolanda es la, la escritora más extraordinaria de Puerto Rico, de verdad", there was a certain ambiguity as to whether she was claiming Arroyo Pizarro to be the best writer in Puerto Rico, or specifically the best female writer. My instinct is that I cannot consider every use of "escritor", "autor", "escritora" or "autora" to be a notable commentary on the gender of the author in question, any more than I could consider the use of "she" and "he" to be such among those interviewees who chose to speak to me in English. In both languages, gender is communicated incidentally in a way that race and sexuality are not, making it harder to identify specific instances when gender affects representation; arguably, since it is always present, it always does.

In the case of Arroyo Pizarro, most comments that explicitly mentioned gender did so alongside referencing other aspects of her identity, highlighting the intersectionality of her position; indeed, as mentioned above, most references to her sexuality used the term "lesbiana", inherently referring to both sexuality and gender. Esther Rodríguez Miranda stated that "los jóvenes mismos ya están usándola a ella [Arroyo Pizarro] como referente, de lo que es ser mujer, de lo que es ser lesbiana, de lo que es ser afropuertorriqueña"; here, Arroyo Pizarro was represented as a role model not only for those who embody all of the exact same identities as her, but also for women, lesbians, and Afro-Puerto Ricans at large. Participants also made many references to Arroyo Pizarro's identity as a Black woman, such as when Luis Negrón stated that Arroyo Pizarro "es una mujer, es negra"; when Edda López commented, "Ojalá hubiera más escritoras negras que, que apalabraran las cosas así"; or when Edgardo Machuca of Editorial EDP University commented that the publishing house works with "diversas autoras Afrodescendientes", including Arroyo Pizarro in the category. In these excerpts, participants emphasised both race and gender simultaneously. When I asked López "¿Cómo diría que es la percepción pública de, de ella [Arroyo Pizarro] en este país?", she responded: "Pues mira. Para eso

tendría [que] también hablar… de cómo nos perciben a las mujeres negras en este país". She centred race and gender in her representation of Arroyo Pizarro, equating the author's position with that of Black women in Puerto Rico generally, which she went on to describe: "a las mujeres negras, que, particularmente a las que, que somos vocales, nos perciben como… como agresivas, violentas… nos… nos tratan de… de invalidar, nos cancelan, nos invisibilizan, eh, incluso mujeres negras". Without specifying the source of this oppression, López commented on the silencing of Black women in Puerto Rico. According to her account, those who are too vocal to be silenced are discredited as aggressive and violent. She included Arroyo Pizarro in this group, saying that "Aquí en Puerto Rico, no, las mujeres negras, es bien raro que se apalabren" and that "una de las que lo apalabró fue Yolanda". Thus, she represented Arroyo Pizarro as having overcome the intersecting oppressive forces of misogyny and racism that attempted to silence her. Similarly, Daniel Torres stated that Arroyo Pizarro and Mayra Santos Febres "son lo que se llama en Puerto Rico las negras parejeras", defining "parejeras" as those who "siempre le [van] a contestar al sistema. No [van] a aceptar lo que el sistema [les] quiere imponer". Through this definition, Torres took a term that can be used pejoratively and reframed it positively in terms of standing up to an oppressive system in a show of strength; he connected Arroyo Pizarro's identity as a Black woman with his characterisation of her as transgressive.

Representing Arroyo Pizarro as a National Author

The nation emerged as a particularly strong theme in representations of Arroyo Pizarro. As noted in Chapter 3, the nationality of an author is often one of the first pieces of information sources give, and we tend to take its importance and relevance to literature for granted; I will discuss this in more detail in Chapter 5. Furthermore, the general focus on the national context is doubtless partly due to the fact that most of my interviews took place in Puerto Rico with Puerto Rican interviewees. However, it was not only the interviewees that focused on the nation during our conversations: reading over the transcripts, I noticed how often I myself asked questions that implicitly located Arroyo Pizarro within a specifically Puerto Rican context, especially variations on "¿Cómo diría que es la percepción pública de Yolanda en Puerto Rico?" By asking such questions, not only did I set the limits of discussion at the boundaries of Puerto Rico; I also invited my

interlocutor to speak for the nation as a whole. Here, Benedict Anderson's description of the nation as an imagined political community becomes an important frame of reference. Anderson argued that although "the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them", the nation is imagined as a community because it "is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship" (2006, pp. 18–20), despite actual inequalities. Imagining the nation as a community of equals obscures the absurdity of asking an individual interviewee to answer a question on behalf of some three million people, most of whom they have never met.

"Heredera de toda esa tradición": Relating Arroyo Pizarro to other Puerto Rican authors

One of the ways interviewees emphasised nationality was by constructing the national literature in terms of a tradition or heritage passed down through generations of writers, within which they located Arroyo Pizarro. Some interviewees traced a particular line through history, constructing a narrative of "Puerto Rican literature" through time; in some instances, this intersected with identity categories other than nationality, such as gender and race. Luis Negrón gave the following account of Puerto Rican literature:

> LN: Entonces, pues, aquí pasamos de los ochenta, verdad, una, una, y los setenta, una generación bien politizada... me parece [mumbling] me parece, por ejemplo, a mí me parece quiénes hacen la, la, la literatura más interesante en ese momento son, la narrativa especialmente, son, pues, mujeres, ¿no?, como Rosario Ferré, (SMS: Mm) eh, Ana Lydia Vega, (SMS: Sí) Magali, Carmen Filippi... y ellas eran las más leídas, punto. O sea... y era por el público en general... que no, sabes, que no necesariamente... ¿por qué?, porque eran las, eran bien irreverentes, (SMS: Mm) usaban el humor... eh, eh, eh... eh... eh... eh... y pues el, el humor es algo muy importante para el caribeño, porque el humor es una forma bien importante de, de pasar información. Eh, eh, eh, eh, eh, la seriedad nos cuesta mucho.
>
> SMS: Mm.
>
> LN: Y la seriedad y la nostalgia y... y... y el luto y todo, y todas esas cosas eternas, nosotros no tenemos tiempo para eso, ¿verdad?, entonces pues, este, pues, eh, eh, eh... eh, pues me gusta eso de nuestra literatura, que está desde el inicio, sabes,

> desde que tú lees… qué sé yo, desde que tú lees a, a, a… a Tapia, eh, eh, eh… sabes, tú lees a Tapia, […] tú lees a Yolanda, y tú lees a Ana Lydia Vega, este, eh, eh, eh… eh, aquí nuestra literatura casi siempre, y la preferida por el público, es la que no se toma muy en serio.

First, Negrón referred to several writers who have commonly been included in the so-called "Generación del '70" of Puerto Rican literature. He mentioned several women writers, specifically noting their gender, and characterised their literature as irreverent and humorous, qualities he stated are important for Caribbeans; although most of this portion of our conversation focused specifically on Puerto Rican writers, Negrón's comment about humour was generalised to the region more broadly, implying a commonality between Puerto Ricans and other Caribbeans. Not only did Negrón construct a throughline of national literature; he also projected an imagined national or regional readership with specific shared tastes, which I will discuss in more detail in Chapter 6. Towards the end, he traced Puerto Rican literature back to its "inicio", citing Alejandro Tapia y Rivera, who has often been called the father of Puerto Rican literature. He constructed a narrative of the national literature, naming particular authors and characterising them as having certain commonalities because of their shared nationality; he included Arroyo Pizarro in this narrative, thus representing her nationality as an essential and salient characteristic. Daniel Torres also drew connections between Puerto Rican writers who have discussed the theme of Blackness. He stated that

> creo que Yolanda es muy buena discípula de Mayra Santos Febres. Son discursos que cuando estudias a Yolanda tienes que estudiar a Mayra, tienes que estudiar a Palés Matos, tienes que estudiar a Fortunato Vizcarrondo, tienes que estudiar todo, toda una tradición, la misma Angelamaría Dávila, toda una tradición de escritores y escritoras, que han trabajado lo negro (SMS: Mm) en la literatura puertorriqueña.

Like Negrón, Torres named a number of Puerto Rican authors, including Arroyo Pizarro, in order to construct a particular literary tradition. By claiming that in order to understand Arroyo Pizarro, one must study the work of these other authors, he framed this as the essential context within which to place Arroyo Pizarro: one that is necessarily informed by both race and nation. Earlier in the interview, he had commented that Arroyo Pizarro

> juega también con la cuestión de la identidad sexual, y siempre lo hace desde el punto de vista de la mujer negra, que, que (SMS: Claro) es una voz casi inédita en la literatura puertorriqueña, está Marie Rosado, que lo ha estudiado, no, y además ha escrito sobre el tema, hay otras escritoras, no, como Angelamaría Dávila, y es heredera de toda esa tradición.

Although he was initially discussing sexuality as a theme of Arroyo Pizarro's work, the category of writers he went on to describe, Black women in Puerto Rican literature, was defined by gender, race, and nationality, but not specifically by sexuality. Once again, he referred to "la literatura puertorriqueña" as the relevant frame of reference and drew connections between Arroyo Pizarro and other Puerto Rican writers, describing her as the inheritor of a particular tradition, having been influenced by these previous writers. Some of the same writers cited by Torres, such as Angelamaría Dávila, Fortunato Vizcarrondo, Mayra Santos-Febres, and Luis Palés Matos, were also mentioned in interviews with the Anonymous Lecturer, Lola Rosario, and Marie Ramos Rosado; through linking Arroyo Pizarro to other Puerto Rican authors, participants emphasised the salience of nationality in their representations of her.

In one case, other Puerto Rican authors became notable for their absence. Arroyo Pizarro described how, before embarking on her career as a writer, she had set out to look for Puerto Rican literature with queer characters and had found "una novela, eh, sobre un… una mujer trans, una chica trans" by Mayra Santos-Febres, seemingly referring to *Sirena Selena vestida de pena*. She went on to explain:

> Entonces me doy cuenta de que, de que Mayra es una mujer cis-hetero que está escribiendo sobre un tema, em, no cis y no hetero. Y me pongo a preguntarme, y dónde está esa gente que, o sea, ¿dónde está esa gente que se parece más a mí, y menos a Mayra? Eh, y en Puerto Rico no había nadie. Y entonces ahí es que empiezo a leer a Mario Bellatin, *Salón de belleza*, mexicano, a Odette Alonso, cubana-mexicana, a Mabel Cuesta, este, cubana, eh, este… en la diáspora, viviendo en Estados Unidos, y por supuesto escritores españoles, eh, algunos italianos[.]

Here, Arroyo Pizarro placed importance on the identity of the author, specifying that she had wished to find queer authors writing about queer themes. She also prioritised

nationality, beginning by looking among Puerto Rican authors; thus, she implied that those within her own nation would be the most likely to have something in common with her. Failing this, she described expanding her search to authors from other countries, including the nationality of each author she mentioned as a relevant detail. Thus, she constructed shared identity in terms of both nationality and queer identity as important aspects of the writers she was seeking. She went on to state that: "Después empieza Moisés Agosto-Rosario a publicar sus libros, y cada vez empiezan más voces, y más voces, entonces ahí, ahí me percato que hace unas décadas atrás, había existido este autor Manuel Ramos Otero". Like other participants, she related her own trajectory to that of other Puerto Rican authors, thus emphasising Puerto Rican nationality in her representation of other authors and of herself.

"La escritora más extraordinaria de Puerto Rico": Nation and Reputation

Representations of Arroyo Pizarro's renown were particularly entangled with the nation. Daniel Torres made multiple statements regarding the author's position within Puerto Rico: "creo que ya Yolanda se ha convertido en una referencia, en la nueva literatura (SMS: Mm) puertorriqueña"; "ha creado, creo, que un espacio en la literatura puertorriqueña"; "creo que, que ella tiene una presencia muy importante en la, en la, en la literatura puertorriqueña". He thus repeatedly emphasised her position specifically within Puerto Rico, rather than commenting on her reach outside the country. Some participants made references to a particular space or place that Arroyo Pizarro occupies: Ramos Rosado stated that the author "ha logrado su espacio", while Negrón commented that "Yolanda ha encontrado ese espacio"; both implied that she has achieved an appropriate space within the national literature, according to their own assessments. López, on the other hand, claimed that "ella tiene un lugar que se merece, pero se merecería tener un lugar más prominente", conveying that the position occupied by Arroyo Pizarro, while notable, is still inadequate. She also stated that "Yolanda es la, la escritora más extraordinaria de Puerto Rico, de verdad", assigning Arroyo Pizarro great praise within a Puerto Rican context but not commenting beyond this national boundary. According to Negrón, "Yolanda tiene, tiene reconocimiento en el país, Yolanda tiene el oído del país, [...] es una de las escritoras más afortunadas ahora mismo en, en el país", while Rosario Méndez Panedas told me that "en Puerto Rico, ya era muy conocida".

Again, these participants favourably represented her position and renown specifically within Puerto Rico.

Participants sometimes mentioned national literary prizes when discussing Arroyo Pizarro's reputation. Rodríguez Miranda and I had the following exchange:

> SMS: Y es… ¿es muy bien conocida en Puerto Rico?
>
> ERM: Pues, mira. Eh… sí. Ha ganado… ha ganado premios nacionales, eh…

Rodríguez Miranda drew on Arroyo Pizarro's national prizes in response to the question of whether she is well-known, indicating an underlying assumption that prizes bring greater recognition. However, as Sarah Bowskill notes, the renown bestowed by literary prizes is inherently transient: prizes respond to "a specific political (and literary) moment" and often fade from memory (2023, p. 4). Arroyo Pizarro also made mention of Puerto Rican literary prizes. Focusing on national prizes specifically once again frames the discussion in terms of the nation; furthermore, the very existence of national literary prizes in and of itself reinforces the construction of the national literary space. On the other hand, the Anonymous Lecturer stated that she had first heard about Arroyo Pizarro "cuando a ella le dieron un premio de los, los, los mejores escritores (SMS: mm) de 39 años…", referring to the Hay Festival's Bogotá39, a selection of Latin American writers under the age of 40. In this case, even though she was located in the same country as Arroyo Pizarro, it was a broader regional prize, which categorised Arroyo Pizarro as a Latin American author, that made the Anonymous Lecturer aware of her.

Despite these statements affirming Arroyo Pizarro's prestige within Puerto Rico, some comments also highlighted how the author's recognition is limited within this domestic context. Daniel Torres emphasised the importance of institutional approval in Puerto Rico and the difficulty for writers like Arroyo Pizarro to gain it because of structural racism and elitism:

> DT: Es tanto el racismo en Puerto Rico, desde el punto de vista de la misma institución literaria… […] esos campos (SMS: Mhm) del poder (SMS: Sí) que hay en Puerto Rico, hay, la institución puertorriqueña de la literatura es muy blanca.
>
> SMS: Mhm.

DT: Y todos los que nos hemos acercado con algún tipo de diversidad, es como una válvula, es como una, una, una burbuja, que no, que se resiste a incluir en ese continuum todos estos escritores y escritoras a contracorrientes. Mayra Santos Febres sí, porque ella está en el centro de lo que es la Universidad de Puerto Rico, y ella tiene su agente, o sea ella, ella ha sabido ubicarse. Yolanda como buena alumna de Mayra, ha intentado, pero como no está en la institución, o no estuvo en la Universidad de Puerto Rico, el Recinto de Río Piedras, la Universidad de Puerto Rico, tiene un peso muy particular. Es casi (SMS: Sí) como un pedigree. Es casi como un título de nobleza, (SMS: Claro) te lo digo así. Y entonces si no tienes eso, quedas un poco como a corrientes, como que [clicks tongue] huele a que no es serio lo que estás haciendo, (SMS: Mm) entonces ése creo que ha sido el problema de Yolanda y otros escritores, y muy inteligentemente ellos han creado su nicho.

While Torres elsewhere extolled Arroyo Pizarro's place in Puerto Rican literature, here he stated that her prestige has been limited by these national institutions. He also discussed her publication history:

DT: [...] ella ha publicado a contracorriente, (SMS: mm) es verdad que ha publicado en, en Madrid, es verdad que ha publicado en España, pero en Puerto Rico mismo, son ediciones de autor lo que ella ha hecho.

SMS: Sí. Sí.

DT: Entonces, eso, eso también complica un poco las cosas, aunque ha empezado a publicar con la institución de, donde ella, donde ella trabaja, ¿no?

SMS: Mhm. [¿?]

DT: (overlapping) [¿?] Claro, eso le ha dado cierta, cierta, ¿no?, cierto reconocimiento [...]

Torres implicitly placed self-publication in a less prestigious position in comparison with publication by a publishing house in Spain or with an institutionally approved publication in the domestic context. In conjunction with his remarks on the racism and elitism of academia in Puerto Rico, above, we might infer that exclusion from these institutions pushes writers like Arroyo Pizarro towards self-publication. This becomes a vicious circle,

since, according to Torres, self-publication itself is less prestigious, further excluding the author and limiting her recognition. Dayaneira also commented that structural oppression within Puerto Rico has limited Arroyo Pizarro's reach:

> SMS: Entonces te parece que es muy bien conocida en el país?
>
> D: Diría que no porque vivo en un país patriarcal.

The student constructed Puerto Rico as inherently patriarchal, meaning it therefore denies recognition to a figure like Arroyo Pizarro, whom Dayaneira represented as transgressive and antithetical to patriarchy, once again representing the author in a politicised way. Thus, some participants represented Arroyo Pizarro's relationship with the nation as one complicated by other aspects of her identity like race, class, and gender, since they argued that Puerto Rico is racist, elitist, and patriarchal.

Navigating International Literary Spaces as a Puerto Rican Writer

When discussing the focus on the nation, it is important to bear in mind that the majority of Arroyo Pizarro's texts circulate primarily or solely within Puerto Rico; some of her works have been published in other countries including Spain, Colombia, and the United States, but these are few in number compared with her extensive bibliography in her domestic context. Arroyo Pizarro and I discussed some interactions with international literary spaces and how these were shaped by her position as a Puerto Rican author. She told me that she once tried to send a manuscript to a large Spanish publishing house:

> YAP: una vez traté con una… traté con una de las grandes, ni fue Seix Barral ni fue Planeta, fue otra, que ahora no me acuerdo, ahora no me acuerdo el nombre. Eh, y no [¿?] el manuscrito si yo no tenía agente.
>
> SMS: Mm.
>
> YAP: Y en Puerto Rico ninguno tenemos agente.
>
> SMS: ¿No?
>
> YAP: Porque no tenemos… el dinero para pagar a un agente.
>
> SMS: Claro.
>
> YAP: Entonces.

SMS: Bueno.

YAP: Como, “Caramba, no me van a publicar si yo…” Entonces, eso lo intenté una sola vez y ya decidí que no, a las grandes no les iba a enviar nunca nada más.

According to Arroyo Pizarro, the fact that she did not have an agent meant immediate dismissal by the publishing house. She attributed her lack of an agent to financial barriers, which she claimed was the case not only for herself but for Puerto Rican writers in general; there may also be other reasons beyond funds, such as a limited culture of agents in Puerto Rico. According to Arroyo Pizarro, access to international publication with a large publishing house was therefore prohibitive for a writer of her national background, implying that the system privileges European writers. This chimes with the characterisation of international Hispanophone publishing put forward by Locane, in which power is concentrated in large Spanish publishing houses, creating a centre-periphery relationship where the centre is located in Europe while Latin American countries form the periphery. Locane notes that “la literatura latinoamericana mundial no se selecciona y jerarquiza en América Latina, como sería de suponer, sino en Europa” (2019, p. 71), a phenomenon that Eduardo Becerra terms “una situacion de neocolonialismo cultural de base mercantil en las relaciones entre España y América Latina” (2021, p. 64). International circulation of Latin American texts thus requires their validation within the “centre”, leading to the “balcanización de los campos literarios en Latinoamérica” (Becerra, 2021, p. 63). Thus, the international distribution of Arroyo Pizarro’s work is limited by processes that concentrate power in the “centre” and restrict or even exclude “peripheral” authors and texts. Arroyo Pizarro stated that this paradigm “nos deja a veces huérfano a los puertorriqueños de publicación”. The importance of the national publishing environment is therefore increased, since Puerto Rican authors are to some extent constrained to it.

During our interview, Arroyo Pizarro also described her experience at an international book fair: “Yo estaba en una… en una feria del libro de Barcelona. Entonces, yo fui con, éramos como veinte escritores puertorriqueños”; she was referring to her attendance at Liber, the Spanish international book fair for industry professionals which alternates between Barcelona and Madrid, in 2010. She noted that “ese año Barcelona le dedicaba a Puerto Rico la feria del libro, por eso es que yo fui”. Puerto Rico was the “guest of

honour" at that year's fair; this guest of honour format merits some consideration and has been the subject of much discussion in analysis of book fairs. The practice of inviting a country, region, or city as a guest of honour is widespread across these events: the Frankfurter Buchmesse, the largest book fair in the world, has featured such a guest every year since 1988, a tradition which Vogel calls "a symbol of cosmopolitanism, neighborliness, peace and community" (2019, p. 93). Other fairs, including Liber, follow Frankfurt's lead. Antonio María Ávila, the executive director of the Federación de Gremios de Editores de España, the group that organises Liber, states that the guest country has the opportunity to "[presentar] a sus autores a la sociedad española y [mejorar] la imagen de ese país" (2019, p. 273). Conversely, Marco Thomas Bosshard argues that the guest of honour format essentialises diversity and reproduces national stereotypes (2021, p. 317). The practice has also been criticised for its eurocentrism (Vogel, 2019, p. 95). Arroyo Pizarro's participation in Liber through the guest of honour format may be considered within the context of these conflicting perspectives on the phenomenon. Puerto Rico's position as guest of honour enabled Arroyo Pizarro to take part, and as she described, her participation in this event facilitated her contact with Editorial Egales, leading to her publication in Spain. However, the Spanish book fair acted as a gatekeeper in deciding which "peripheral" country to spotlight and which authors from that country to feature. Furthermore, this significant moment of presentation on the international stage explicitly categorised Arroyo Pizarro and her colleagues as examples and representatives of Puerto Rican literature, contributing to the construction of this category and of Arroyo Pizarro's positioning within it for an international (read: Spanish/European) audience, a context in which it may be essentialised and exoticised.

Assigning Regional Identities

While nationality was by far the most prevalent geopolitical identity category used to represent Arroyo Pizarro, there were a handful of instances in which participants used broader regional terms, referencing either the Caribbean or Latin America, to describe the author. Luis Negrón stated that "es una mujer, es negra, verdad, eh, eh, en un país caribeño". This came in the context of discussing the ways in which Arroyo Pizarro has been marginalised; he went on to state that "se le ha tratado de, de poner en su lugar". The statement therefore served to imply that Caribbean countries in general, not only

Puerto Rico, are racist and sexist. Alexandra Gonzenbach Perkins also mentioned Arroyo Pizarro being "from the Caribbean". The comment was made during a conversation about how Perkins had originally encountered Arroyo Pizarro's work, in which she told me that her PhD advisor had suggested it because she knew it had relevance to Perkins' research interests, which Perkins described as being focused on the Hispanic Caribbean. Thus, representing Arroyo Pizarro as Caribbean in this instance made the link with Perkins' research clear, demonstrating how academic representations of authors often respond to academic requirements to categorise disciplines and research areas, with a particular emphasis on the geopolitical. The role of academia in the construction of regional literary categories will be explored further in the following chapter. Daniel Torres also referred to Arroyo Pizarro as Caribbean on one occasion. When describing how he had introduced Arroyo Pizarro to some of his students, he stated that

> tengo también muchas estudiantes afro-americanas y afro-americanos, (SMS: Mm) y ver una autora afro-americana, o afro-caribeña, es una cosa, recuerdo una estudiante llorando, que me decía, "bueno, profesor, pero es que es la primera vez que yo veo y he leído una persona que se parece a mí."

Torres first said "afro-americana" then corrected himself to "afro-caribeña"; in the context that he was talking about his "estudiantes afro-americanas y afro-americanos" at Ohio University in the US, it seems that he meant to draw a similarity primarily on the basis of race and initially misspoke regarding Arroyo Pizarro's national/regional identity. He went on to comment that "para mis estudiantes afro-americanos, que conozcan también eso en el contexto caribeño, en el contexto latinoamericano, 'oye, no somos tan diferentes, nada', ¿no?" Here, he explicitly acknowledged the national/regional difference between his students and Arroyo Pizarro, while drawing attention to the common racial identity; his categorisation was ultimately more related to race than region.

Caroline used the term "Afro Latina" to refer to Arroyo Pizarro; she was the only participant to represent the author as Latina specifically. The fact that this came from an American participant is noteworthy; as I will go on to discuss in the following chapter, a "Latin American" framing was uncommon and virtually non-existent among Puerto Rican participants, who tended to prioritise the nation and, to a lesser extent, the Caribbean, in

their construction of both Arroyo Pizarro and her work. Puerto Rico is one of several territories and countries that are varyingly constructed as Caribbean, Latin American, or both; the choice to use one or the other term to represent the archipelago can change the context in which it is understood, grouping it together either with other Caribbean islands or with mainland Latin American nations. This was exemplified by Lola Rosario when she described a friend saying: "'yo no soy latina… soy caribeña.' Like, we're not from Latin America…" This comment, and the fact that the Caribbean was a more common frame of reference than Latin America (albeit still infrequent compared to nationality), may speak to a stronger shared Caribbean identity, perhaps on the basis that Puerto Rico has more cultural similarities with fellow Caribbean island nations and territories than with mainland Latin American countries. Overall, Arroyo Pizarro was represented as Puerto Rican far more often than any regional identity category; among these, the more frequent was Caribbean, with only one instance in which she was described as Latina. These categorisations will be revisited in the following chapter, in which I discuss their application to texts.

"Una autora transgresora"

As indicated throughout this chapter, representations of Arroyo Pizarro's identity were intertwined with the theme of transgression. The author was not only represented as Black, lesbian, and Puerto Rican *per se*: these designations were tied up with her outspokenness, her rejection of the *status quo*, and her politicisation. The author characterised transgression as an essential part of her personality: while telling a story about her childhood, she commented that "mi abuela decía que yo era un espíritu de contradicción, que yo siempre [¿?] a la contraria de lo que sea que me dijeran. Y un poco es cierto". She thus represented her contrariness as having been present from a very early age. Speaking about her writing career, she said that "yo soy una molestia, yo soy una… como decía mi abuela, la pajita que cayó en la leche de ellos, entonces, yo les molesto"; thus, she extended this contrarianism to her career as an author. Other participants made similar comments: the Anonymous Lecturer described Arroyo Pizarro as "una autora transgresora", while Edda López stated that "ella transgrede". Rodríguez Miranda represented Arroyo Pizarro as "una mujer muy provocadora en todo lo, en todo. Desde cómo se para hasta lo que escribe es una mujer muy provocadora", describing her as

provocative both in her physical presence and as a writer. Rodríguez Miranda also stated that, as a writer, "A ella [Arroyo Pizarro] le gusta empujar, eh, (SMS: Sí) el límite, así que, a ella le gusta ser irreverente"; López characterised her as "una voz que rompe con el standard… de la cuestión literaria aquí en Puerto Rico"; Lola Rosario commended her for "questioning the, the… the stories that we're told". Ramos Rosado gave an example of an early controversy from the 2000s, when Arroyo Pizarro "hablaba de su menstruación… de… (SMS: Sí) eh, todas sus cosas del cuerpo" and that "eso trajo una polémica"; she highlighted the author's willingness to discuss taboo topics, representing her as a controversial figure. These comments across many interviews represented Arroyo Pizarro as a transgressive author who questions authority and pushes the boundary of acceptability.

Participants also represented Arroyo Pizarro's public statements as transgressive. Rodríguez Miranda stated that "ella no tiene miedo a la polémica, y en su vida pública, pues, no tiene miedo a denunciar y eso la lleva a tener muchos encontronazos con gente que no piensa igual que ella". Ramos Rosado described a controversial altercation in which Arroyo Pizarro "empezó a cuestionar a esta persona… que era de la clase alta económica"; she leveraged this anecdote as evidence for Arroyo Pizarro's willingness to rock the boat. Ramos Rosado also emphasised that Arroyo Pizarro is "una voz disidente", "una mujer guerrera", and "polémica"; she claimed that as a dissident voice, Arroyo Pizarro is not a "bombón de menta que le caiga bien a todo el mundo". The academic noted that one of Arroyo Pizarro's positions is that she "es anticolonial, (SMS: mm) o sea, que es una mujer independentista, anticolonial"; she stated that "Eso es polémico". Through these characterisations, participants represented Arroyo Pizarro as publicly outspoken, unafraid to challenge the politically powerful, and willing to risk being disliked in order to express her positions. In this way, Arroyo Pizarro was portrayed as controversial and transgressive in her roles as both author and public figure, the two being intertwined and mutually reinforcing.

Arroyo Pizarro's transgressive and controversial status were also linked with her identity. As Ramos Rosado said:

> MRR: Yo entiendo que de lo más controversial que ella tiene es cuando ella empezó a sumir la voz… pública… de, porque no es solamente escribirlo, es decirlo.

SMS: Mm.

MRR: “Soy una mujer lesbiana…” este… [mumbles] eh, fue bien polémico

She thus characterised Arroyo Pizarro’s lesbian identity, and her public articulation thereof, as controversial in and of itself. Luis Negrón commented further:

> yo creo que ella no le huye a la controversia… ella pues, la, la… sabes, eso es parte, parte de su activismo, sabes, no hay activismo (SMS: Claro) que no se meta en lugares, verdad, este, eh, eh, eh, así, este, y pues ella tiene pues muchos, muchos temas, pues, la raza, el, este, eh… el género, eh, eh, eh, eh… es una mujer, es negra, verdad, eh, eh, en un país caribeño[.]

Here, Negrón echoed other participants’ claims that Arroyo Pizarro is unafraid to court controversy; he linked this with her identity as a Black woman. Thus, Arroyo Pizarro was represented as transgressive both for her marginalised identities and for her provocative attitude and personality; both are controversial in and of themselves, while also feeding into and reinforcing one another.

Arroyo Pizarro as Activist

Several participants discussed Arroyo Pizarro’s activism and political involvement, often affording these almost equal importance with her status as a writer. According to Rodríguez Miranda, “ella es activista política, casi, (SMS: Sí) además de escritora”; Negrón called her “una escritora y activista”. Perkins and the Anonymous Lecturer talked about the author’s LGBT activism in particular. The former commented:

> I know that she’s also… really well respected and well known in Puerto Rico, not, not only as an author, but as a, an (SMS: Mm) activist and someone who really… um, has… shared her voice in terms of, you know, Black lesbian experience particularly, but also, um, you know doing… important work for the lesbian community, um, in, in Puerto Rico…

Similarly, the Anonymous Lecturer stated:

> AL: Es bien conocida, y las redes han servido para eso. Sí, hay estudiantes que, que, que… han hablado de ella, eh… primero desde ese a- activismo LGBT… que…

SMS: (overlapping) ¿Eso primero? ¿Eso es lo más…?

AL: (overlapping) Yo pienso que sí

Thus, both interviewees not only mentioned Arroyo Pizarro's LGBT activism, but also characterised it as a key part of her public image; the Anonymous Lecturer went so far as to say that some students know her primarily for this activism, rather than in her capacity as an author. Thus, participants represented Arroyo Pizarro not only as a writer, but also emphasised her role as a political activist.

These politicised representations of Arroyo Pizarro intersect in complex ways with representations of her identities. While Arroyo Pizarro herself is politically active and outspoken, participants sometimes implied that authors with marginalised identities are inherently political, not because of what they say or do, necessarily, but because of their identities in and of themselves. Frequently, a direct equivalence was drawn between racial or sexual marginalisation and politicisation, at times implying that all marginalised authors automatically share particular political views and goals. This was particularly evident in the conversation with the Anonymous Lecturer, who repeatedly emphasised a politicised image of marginalised authors. She reconstructed a conversation between herself and her students on the subject of Arroyo Pizarro:

> para yo explicarles "¿por qué ella escribe así? ¿por qué ella tiene que estar exigiendo? ¿Por qué está exigiendo [¿?] ella?" Pues, porque es una autora negra, (SMS: Sí) lesbiana, vocal, y entonces su poética está haciendo una exigencia a la sociedad.

The lecturer stated that Arroyo Pizarro's work makes demands of society *because* she is a Black lesbian author. She attributed the politicisation of Arroyo Pizarro's work to her racial and sexual identity, implying that to be a Black lesbian author is inherently political: when an author's identity is controversial in and of itself, as is the case with Arroyo Pizarro, they arguably have less agency in whether or not they and their work are politicised in this way. While Arroyo Pizarro characterised herself as naturally transgressive and contrarian, it is nigh on impossible to disentangle this from representations of Black women as "agresivas" and "violentas", as López put it.

"Una persona sumamente solidaria": Arroyo Pizarro's Empathy and Solidarity

Some participants who know Arroyo Pizarro personally made connections between the author's politics and what they characterised as her profound personal solidarity and empathy. Marie Ramos Rosado commented that she "Es una mujer muy solidaria, ha estado conmigo en movimientos"; she thus characterised Arroyo Pizarro as a supportive person and highlighted her acts of solidarity in favour of political causes. Similarly, in the context of discussing the author's relationships with other LGBT people and her vocal support for women and trans people, Rodríguez Miranda described Arroyo Pizarro as "una persona muy solidaria. Una persona sumamente solidaria". She went on to add that "Yolanda es una persona que siente mucho", representing Arroyo Pizarro's outward acts of solidarity as resulting from deep internal emotions. Rodríguez Miranda also stated that Arroyo Pizarro "es una persona bien empática, muy, muy empática", a sentiment that was echoed by López when describing Arroyo Pizarro's response to the Pulse nightclub shooting in Orlando in 2016:

> EL: Cuando hubo una matanza... en Estados Unidos, en una discoteca gay, Pulse, (SMS: Sí) en Orlando, [¿?] (SMS, overlapping: Recuerdo, sí) un montón de gente, Yolanda... yo me acuerdo de su emoción... Yolanda lo soltó todo... y se fue... a la discoteca Pulse... y acompañó a la gente que había perdido... gente allá. No la conocía.
>
> SMS: Mhm.
>
> EL: Ella no la conocía, pero ella tuvo que ir hacia allá. Y [¿?] y ella pasó por ese luto como si hubiese estado allá. Eso no lo hace todo el mundo.
>
> SMS: No.
>
> EL: Y para uno poder hacer eso... porque te digo, ella... lo primero fue [mumbles], como ella verbalizó su dolor, ¿verdad? Que, muy genuino. Pero ella no se conformó con quedarse aquí en Puerto Rico y esperar. Ella se montó en ese avión, fue allá, fue parte de los memorials, fue parte de todo lo que se hizo allá... genuinamente con dolor, entonces para [¿?] poder hacer eso, tú tienes un, un sentido de empatía... ¡brutal! Porque tú te tienes que poner en el lugar, cómo te dolería a ti...

> si, si pasa eso, pero además… como tú, una mujer negra… lesbiana… pudiste haber estado allí. Claro, hay mil millas de distancia, pero… para ella poder escribir *Transcaribeñx*… ella lo vivió.

Thus, López framed Arroyo Pizarro's actions in response to the attack as evidence of what she characterised as her profound and genuine emotion and empathy; López also credited Arroyo Pizarro's ability to write a text like *Transcaribeñx* to this empathy, stating that her writing is facilitated by her empathy. Both Rodríguez Miranda and López emphasised Arroyo Pizarro's solidarity and empathy with other marginalised people in particular. Thus, these participants represented Arroyo Pizarro as deeply and authentically empathetic and connected this with her political activity and solidarity.

Conclusion

Certain identity terms emerged as the most frequent in representations of Arroyo Pizarro: Black, Puerto Rican, and lesbian. Far from value-neutral reflections of "fact", the choice of these over other possible ways of representing the author have wider implications. In the Puerto Rican context, where the population at large is constructed as "mixed", and Blackness, by contrast, is assumed to be uncommon and undesirable, to be "evidentemente negra" and to claim that identity actively is to challenge that national narrative. Arroyo Pizarro's representation as a national Puerto Rican author is complicated by what participants characterised as the racism and homophobia inherent to the nation. The emphasis on nationality itself, while common in representations of authors worldwide, takes on particular significance in a Puerto Rican context: to be represented as a Puerto Rican author is to be leveraged in the construction of the nation, implicitly or at times explicitly in response to US neocolonialism. It can also bring with it the impossible responsibility of speaking for the nation on an international stage, which in some cases can produce an exoticised or essentialised representation of Puerto Rico. Finally, the emphasis on lesbian identity underlined the intersection of gender and sexuality: rather than possible gender-neutral alternatives, participants repeatedly represented Arroyo Pizarro specifically as a lesbian, highlighting the lesbian experience as distinct from others within LGBT or queer/cuir categories. However, participants made clear that this preference in terminology did not imply a rejection or distancing from these

broader groups; on the contrary, they emphasised Arroyo Pizarro's solidarity, empathy, connections with, and advocacy for the wider LGBT community.

Interviewees represented Arroyo Pizarro not only in terms of her identity, but also repeatedly emphasised her public enactment thereof as transgressive. It is one thing to be a lesbian, Black, or Puerto Rican; it is another to embrace and perform these identities publicly and boldly. While it is possible to imagine a marginalised author who downplays their identity, attempts to assimilate, or avoids rocking the boat, participants represented Arroyo Pizarro as actively courting controversy and challenging the *status quo*. They highlighted the author's active claims of her Blackness and lesbianism, stigmatised identities from which it was noted that others frequently distance themselves. The identities that participants chose to emphasise in their representations of Arroyo Pizarro as an individual and in her role as an author will resurface in the following chapter, as I explore the extent to which the author's identity influenced participant representations of the texts themselves.

Chapter 5. Texts: Interviewee Representations of Arroyo Pizarro's Literary Works

Introduction

While the previous chapter focused on representations of Arroyo Pizarro as an author, the purpose of this chapter is to detail how participants related identity categories to her body of work as a whole, as well as to individual texts associated with her. The distinction between representations of author and texts is not always clear-cut. As will be discussed, author identity is a significant factor in the representation of texts; however, it should not be taken for granted that the two are equivalent. As I will demonstrate, the fact that an author is represented in a particular way does not necessarily mean that (all of) their texts are assigned the same characteristics. Furthermore, the transferral of human identity categories to inanimate texts can never be one-to-one: a literary text cannot be "Black" or a "lesbian" *in the same way* that these words are used in reference to human subjects, because texts do not have human bodies or human sexual desires. Representing a text, or body of work, as "Black literature" or "literatura lésbica" must, then, have some other meaning. Even regional and national identities, arguably more applicable since texts do come into being in particular geographical locations, are of course socially constructed, and thus their application to literature is not value-neutral: the same text might be represented as "Puerto Rican", "Caribbean", or "Latin American", all with different implications.

The chapter is divided into two overarching sections: "Categorising Texts" and "Reflecting on Categorisation". In the former, I analyse how interview participants represented Arroyo Pizarro's texts in terms of identity categories, outlining which categories were used more or less frequently and how they were employed and constructed by participants. I discuss participants' use of terms relating to region, nation, race, sexuality, and gender to represent Arroyo Pizarro's texts. In "Reflecting on Categorisation", I analyse the parts of the interviews in which I prompted interviewees to reflect on this categorisation, recentring the conversation on the practice itself in order to problematise it. I asked interviewees how such categories might be defined; what effects they might have on perceptions of Arroyo Pizarro's work; why categories like "white literature" and

"heterosexual literature" are, by contrast, almost never used; and what their opinions were on the broad practice of categorising literature in terms of identity. This line of questioning and the analysis thereof provoke a consideration of what it means to represent Arroyo Pizarro's literary work with identity-based categories and potential arguments for or against doing so, with implications beyond this specific body of work.

Categorising Texts

"Literatura caribeña" *versus* "Latin American Literature": Categorising by Region

Participants used various geopolitical identity categories to represent Arroyo Pizarro's work; these included broad regional classifications such as "Latin American", "hispanoamericana", and "Caribbean", as well as the national category "Puerto Rican", all of which overlap. As discussed in Chapter 4, Puerto Rico is at times constructed as Caribbean, Latin American, or both, and the choice of framework represents the archipelago and its people in different ways, drawing similarities with different groups of countries and territories. As previously mentioned, Puerto Rican interviewees' comments hinted at a stronger shared Caribbean identity than a Latin American one, perhaps because of cultural similarities with other Caribbean islands. Furthermore, whether or not Puerto Rico is part of Latin America has sometimes been disputed on the basis of its colonial relationship with the United States; as a result, inclusion of Arroyo Pizarro's texts within the category "Latin American literature" constitutes a choice in how to construct both Puerto Rico and Latin America, and could even be interpreted as a political statement.

The very broad region of Latin America was used only infrequently in my interviewees' descriptions of Arroyo Pizarro's work. These references always involved an academic context outside of Puerto Rico itself: either in relation to universities in the US, in the case of Alexandra Gonzenbach Perkins, Daniel Torres, and Caroline; or in a UK context, when I mentioned it myself. As I will go on to discuss, Puerto Rican interviewees were far more likely to place Arroyo Pizarro in the framework of a national literature, as "Latin American literature" would likely be considered far too broad of a category in this context. In Anglophone countries and institutions, on the other hand, the tendency to generalise the entire region is more prevalent. Alexandra Gonzenbach Perkins reflected on her

experience teaching Arroyo Pizarro's novel *Caparazones* in two US universities. She described the first time she had taught the text:

> it was, it was a Latin American focused course, but I chose a lot of texts from the Hispanic Caribbean because (SMS: Okay) that's my area of expertise, um, so it was the last text that we read, kind of in a larger frame of… Latin American literature from… like the… (SMS: Mm) early 20th century to… today… (SMS: Mhm) or to contemporary times

The focus of the course was defined as "Latin American literature"; therefore, *Caparazones*' inclusion therein creates a two-way relationship between the novel and this regionally-defined literature. The novel is presented as representative of the broad region of Latin America, and Latin Americanness is highlighted as an essential and important feature of the text. Perkins mentioned that the module in question was broadly described as "Latin American focused", but that many of the texts she chose were from the Hispanic Caribbean. While she referred to this far more specific region of the Spanish-speaking Caribbean, the broad brief of the course speaks to the impetus within Anglophone institutions to generalise Latin America and to push individual academics to present their much more specified research interests in these broad continent-spanning terms, an approach that is not usually taken for European literature. Perkins went on to recount her second time teaching *Caparazones*:

> it was a course that we developed… based on our own research interest. It's called the Latin American novel, I think is the (SMS: Okay) official name of the course, but we, you know, we're able to choose, you know, kind of whatever we want to choose, and so that course was more focused on… gender and sexuality in the Hispanic Caribbean, in (SMS: Mm) contemporary novels. So that was a cour- that was a text, that course, and *Caparazones* in that course, was put into conversation with other novels, um, that deal with, um… representations of gender and sexuality in contemporary novels[.]

This second course was also described as being on "the Latin American novel", an extremely broad concept which Perkins narrowed to contemporary novels from the Hispanic Caribbean that focused on gender and sexuality. While the university dictated

the "Latin American" framing of the module, Perkins had agency to choose which texts to include, representing "Latin America" in a particular way for her students; her focus on the Caribbean is markedly different from, for example, the version of "Latin American literature" that I was taught as an undergraduate student, which focused more on Mexico and Argentina. In Perkins' case, contemporary novels from the Hispanic Caribbean focused on gender and sexuality were constructed as representative of the broader region of Latin America, casting these novels (including *Caparazones*) and Latin America itself in a particular light to Perkins' students. This demonstrates how broad the categorisation of "Latin American literature" is; by favouring this framework, Anglophone institutions contribute to the flattening of an extremely diverse region.

The academic focus on geopolitical categorisations of literature was not limited to undergraduate teaching, but also appeared in discussions of research. Perkins described a number of academic fields into which the study of Arroyo Pizarro's literature might be placed:

> [Arroyo Pizarro] she's, she's, especially, I mean, within, you know, within the realm of, of folks who study… kind of a, a variety of, of things, whether it's, you know, (SMS: Mm) Caribbean literature, or… LGBTQ literature or, you know, Black in the Americas literature, uh, (SMS: Yeah) and culture… um… she's, she's a pretty well-known figure across those fields.

In this excerpt, the lecturer constructed specific fields of research based on identity categories: regional identity; sexuality; and race and region in tandem. By referring to multiple categories, Perkins highlighted the many ways in which Arroyo Pizarro's work can be represented. The excerpt demonstrates how academia contributes to the construction of such categories: academic conventions dictate that researchers fit the works they study into the moulds of particular disciplines and categories like these, even though two researchers within "Caribbean literature" may have little in common, working on texts in different languages, from different centuries, of completely different genres, *et cetera*; these are nevertheless grouped together by this regional category. In another example of regional categorisations in an academic research context, Daniel Torres projected the construction of regional literatures onto my own work when he asked about my thesis:

DT: Cómo, ¿cómo la estás tú contextualizando [a Arroyo Pizarro]? ¿La estás contextualizando en la literatura hispanoamericana, en el caribe, la literatura puertorriqueña…? en… ¿cómo la estás…? (S laughs) ¿Cómo la estás enfocando?

SMS: Eso… bueno. Es complicado. Yo comencé desde un punto de vista de… la literatura lésbica… hispana, o latinoamericana…

His insistence on a frame of reference and the assumption that this would be based on a construction of national or regional literature speaks to the grip these concepts have over academic discourse. Furthermore, his suggestions of "hispanoamericana", Caribbean, and Puerto Rican as possible contexts shows the many possible approaches that can be taken to Arroyo Pizarro; the implication is that each of these frameworks would represent the author and her works in a different light. In this excerpt, Torres used the phrase "literatura hispanoamericana", another term that was only used in an academic context. The only other instance of its use was by Rosario Méndez Panedas, who stated this as her area of study: "mi línea de investigación siempre ha sido alrededor de la mujer, verdad, eh, (SMS: Mm) mi, mi área de, de estudio de literatura hispanoamericana". The fact that terms like "Latin American" and "hispanoamericana" were only used to describe literature in academic contexts speaks to the role of academia in the construction of these categories. Participants did not otherwise reference Latin America in their representations of Arroyo Pizarro's work; in contrast, Puerto Rico was a near omnipresent frame of reference, as I will discuss later.

Grouping Puerto Rico together with other Spanish-speaking Latin American countries rather than with the entire Caribbean often serves academic interests because academics who speak Spanish can be better-placed to read, research, and teach texts in Spanish, while the linguistic diversity of the Caribbean as a whole can present challenges. Nevertheless, as seen in the above examples from the interview with Perkins, the Caribbean was also referenced in academic constructions of literary categories. Perkins referred specifically to the Hispanic Caribbean; at other times, participants spoke about the Caribbean in general, although on some occasions it seemed likely that this was employed in a narrower sense. Daniel Torres told me that he had taught Arroyo Pizarro's short story "Changó" in the context of Caribbean literature and that "he trabajado varios cursos de literatura caribeña". Speaking about his student, fellow

interviewee Caroline, he stated that "ella hizo un independent study, tipo, este (SMS: Mm) honors tutorial conmigo, sobre el caribe, sobre la literatura del caribe, y leímos a Yolanda y leímos a Mayra Santos Febres, y a otros autores y a otras autoras". Given that Caroline was studying Spanish, it seems likely that she in fact only studied Caribbean texts written in Spanish, and neither she nor Torres mentioned any in other languages. Therefore, by referring to "literatura caribeña", Torres seemingly constructed a corpus made up entirely of texts written in Spanish, including one by Arroyo Pizarro, as representative of the region at large; he also represented a broad Caribbean regional identity as a salient characteristic of the text and as the preferred frame of reference within which to read it. This emphasis on the Caribbean may have been specific to "Changó", rather than applying to Arroyo Pizarro's work in general. Indeed, the collection in which the story appears, first published in Puerto Rico as *Transmutadxs*, was published under the title *Transcaribeñx* in Spain, emphasising the Caribbean aspect of the texts contained within. I discussed this fact with Torres; he commented that "eso es una cuestión de mercado", implying that the addition of the "Caribbean" aspect would play well in the Spanish market, perhaps because of the exoticisation of the Caribbean in that context or because of an impetus for publishers to be seen diversifying their lists. The story in question centres on the clandestine immigration to Puerto Rico of a Dominican man, Changó; its themes thus extend beyond Puerto Rico to another Caribbean country and to the broader regional issue of migration between Caribbean islands. As Torres pointed out, Changó "es un nombre muy, muy muy importante (SMS: Sí) en la literatura y en la imaginería, este, del caribe" because it is the name of an orisha in Santería and other Caribbean religions with Yoruba influence. Torres emphasised that the story "trabaja muy bien de la sexualidad, pero también de la identidad del dominicano, del puertorriqueño... o sea, la, la idea del caribe" and explores "la identidad sexual en el caribe". This emphasis on Caribbean identity as a theme of this particular story may have informed Torres' choice to represent this text as "literatura caribeña". It is not only because the author is from a Caribbean country, but because of this particular text's focus on the region and regional issues whose impact extends beyond the borders of Puerto Rico. Thus, within Arroyo Pizarro's oeuvre, a specific work like "Changó" might be represented as Caribbean in order to highlight subject matter relating to the region beyond the borders of Puerto Rico itself.

Regional designations changed depending on the participant's geopolitical positioning and discursive context, with interviewees located in Puerto Rico being very unlikely to represent Arroyo Pizarro as "Latin American"; this was more common, but still infrequent, in Anglophone contexts. Overall, regional categories were most often used in an academic context.

Nation as Literary Category

As noted in Chapter 4, the nation was a strong theme of discussion in my interviews. The position of Arroyo Pizarro and her texts within "Puerto Rican literature" was repeatedly emphasised. Daniel Torres provided multiple examples: "creo que ya Yolanda se ha convertido en una referencia, en la nueva literatura (SMS: Mm) puertorriqueña"; "ha creado, creo, que un espacio en la literatura puertorriqueña"; "creo que, que ella tiene una presencia muy importante en la, en la, en la literatura puertorriqueña". Here, the distinction between the author and her texts becomes blurry: although he referred to Arroyo Pizarro occupying a particular position, it was the literature itself that he characterised as Puerto Rican. Similarly, the Anonymous Lecturer commented that Arroyo Pizarro "es una, es una portadora muy importante entre la literatura puertorriqueña". Luis Negrón stated, "creo que Yolanda va a pasar al canon (SMS: ¿Sí?) de literatura puertorriqueña", then amended his position: "ya está en el canon de, de, de nuestra, de nuestra literatura". Thus, he constructed a specifically Puerto Rican literary canon, cementing the categorisation of literature on national grounds and representing Arroyo Pizarro's work as belonging to this category. Specific texts received similar treatment: Torres commented that *Transmutadxs* "cambió la conversación en la literatura puertorriqueña", placing the book in a Puerto Rican literary context; Negrón termed *Ojos de luna* "un libro de cuentos puertorriqueño", representing the collection as essentially Puerto Rican. Such references to "Puerto Rican literature" might seem unambiguous: the idea of national literatures has become so naturalised that it usually goes unquestioned. However, as Jorge Locane puts it,

> el uso de genticilios en el mundo de la literatura es artificial. No en el sentido de 'falso', pero sí en el de que no habría nada intrínseco a ella que autorice la operación. La acción de designar un texto o un escritor como guatemalteco o latinoamericano se fundaría, entonces, en factores extraliterarios. El acto

> respondería no a necesidades de la literatura sino a las de determinados grupos humanos en eventual relación de tensión con otros. [...] tanto las diferentes declinaciones nacionales de la literatura así como la literatura latinoamericana y también la literatura mundial son ficciones elaboradas en función de proyectos políticos, culturales o económicos, no literarios. (2019, p. vii)

What, then, are these political, cultural, and economic projects? Gregory Jusdanis locates the advent of national literatures in the process of modernisation and nation-building itself: literature becomes one building block in the culture of the imagined community that is the nation. Thus, "[t]he literary canon, as a collection of texts recounting the story of the nation, facilitates the experience of solidarity by allowing people to see themselves as citizens of a unified nation" (Jusdanis, 1991, p. 49). In the context of Puerto Rico, an entity whose "nationhood" is disputed, this dependence on cultural nationalism in the absence of political and economic independence becomes hypercharged. The employment of literature as a tool for asserting Puerto Rican identity and difference goes back almost a century:

> Puerto Rico's post-1898 colonial context under the United States set the stage for the birth of an anti-colonial literary canon in the twentieth century. Puerto Rican intellectuals of the 1930s generation used literature as an anti-colonial shield against US imperialism. (Gonzalez-Conty, 2019, p. 26)

Up to the present, literature remains an important symbol in the construction of a Puerto Rican national culture and identity. During a panel I attended at the Feria Anual del Libro 2023 in Caguas, where Arroyo Pizarro was a participant, the moderator posed the question: "¿Crees que hay un proyecto literario de país en Puerto Rico?" Arroyo Pizarro responded in the affirmative, but the answer was already clear: the national literary project was being constructed through the question itself, the panel composed of Puerto Rican authors, and even the existence of a national book fair *per se*. I discussed this event in my interview with Esther Rodríguez Miranda:

> SMS: Ella [Arroyo Pizarro] estaba hablando en un pánel. Y le... les preguntaron a los panelistas sobre si... qué, cómo era... si... la literatura puertorriqueña es un proyecto nacional.

ERM: Mhm.

SMS: Y creo que eso tiene que ver con…

ERM: Ahí te vas a depender de con quién estás hablando y qué autor. (SMS: Sí.) Hay autores modernos que no, que no les importa, que… pues que quieren hacer algo… que no les in… (sighs) hay autores modernos que no les interesa la responsabilidad.

SMS: Claro.

ERM: De decir que están escribiendo una literatura puertorriqueña. Eh… hay otros que, que están ya muy americanizados, muy globalizados, y entienden que esas cosas no les afectan. En el caso de ella [Arroyo Pizarro], ella no tiene ningún problema en, en, verdad, en afirmar que sí, que es parte del proyecto del país, y que bueno, que bueno, que es parte del proyecto del país, parte del proyecto de la literatura puertorriqueña moderna

In this discussion, Rodríguez Miranda referred to an alternative group of authors who are uninterested in claiming that their writing is "literatura puertorriqueña", acknowledging the possibility that the national is not an equally salient frame of reference for all texts by Puerto Rican authors. She portrayed the label of "literatura puertorriqueña" as a responsibility: the responsibility to represent and affirm the nation and the national literary project, likely of increased significance in the Puerto Rican context due to the aforementioned emphasis on cultural nationalism. According to Rodríguez Miranda, Arroyo Pizarro is unafraid to assume this responsibility. The lecturer represented Arroyo Pizarro's writing as Puerto Rican not solely because the author is from Puerto Rico, but also because of her particular commitment to the national literary project.

Where categories based on regional identity were almost exclusively used and constructed within academia, use of "Puerto Rican literature" was not restricted in this way. There were still some examples of the term being used in an academic context, such as references to the module "La mujer negra en la literatura puertorriqueña", taught at UPRRP; this was mentioned by Marie Ramos Rosado, who teaches the module, as well as by the Anonymous Lecturer and by Dayaneira, an undergraduate student of Ramos Rosado's who had participated in it. Such a module constructs a category of literary

works with some form of focus on Black women from within a presupposed national "Puerto Rican literature". When I asked Dayaneira how she had first heard of Arroyo Pizarro, she replied that "me enteré de la autora Yolanda Arroyo por la clase que estuve tomando este semestre universitario, 'La mujer negra en la literatura puertorriqueña'". Although she later amended this to clarify that she had previously heard of Arroyo Pizarro due to working in a bookshop, Dayaneira told me that the module was what prompted her to read the author's work for the first time; thus, Arroyo Pizarro was presented to her through this particular framework offered by her university, explicitly contextualising the author in terms of nationality, race, and gender. This focus on the national differs from the broad Latin American courses that Perkins described teaching in US universities. Within this Puerto Rican institution, Arroyo Pizarro's texts are represented as specifically Puerto Rican, as part of a course that focuses exclusively on the national literature.

At times, participants represented Arroyo Pizarro's work as having particular characteristics due to being Puerto Rican. Luis Negrón emphasised the role of humour in Puerto Rican literature; he listed several Puerto Rican writers, including Arroyo Pizarro, then stated that the national literature "no se toma muy en serio". He also named *Ojos de luna* as Arroyo Pizarro's "libro más canónico", commenting that

> LN: Y también es un libro de cuentos, que es más fácil...
>
> SMS: Mm.
>
> LN: ...que un libro de cuentos puertorriqueño esté en el canon que una novela porque somos... somos... somos tradicionalmente pues... nos va mejor con el cuento y con los géneros breves, verdad, que con los géneros más largos (SMS: Claro) como las novelas. Este, tenemos, tenemos mejores libros de poesía y tenemos mejores libros de cuentos, eh, que novelas, ¿verdad?

He thus represented *Ojos de luna* as characteristically Puerto Rican not only in terms of author identity or content, but also in form, which he argued is typical of the national literature more broadly. Esther Rodríguez Miranda offered a different characterisation of Puerto Rican literature:

> ERM: hay, hay algo que tiene la literatura puertorriqueña excelente, la literatura puertorriqueña comprometida.
>
> SMS: Mm.
>
> ERM: Y es que rescatan a los personajes olvidados por el gobierno, por la sociedad, no, eh, los invisibles, los… drogadictos, los indocumentados, y ella [Arroyo Pizarro] hace una excelente labor de rescatar y darle voz, o de representarlos por lo menos…

In this excerpt, she described "la literatura puertorriqueña excelente" as that which represents the downtrodden in society. Rather than stating that this is true of "excellent" literature in general, the comment was specifically in reference to the national literature. In this way, she cast Arroyo Pizarro's commitment to these marginalised groups not only as commendable, but also as inherently Puerto Rican, emphasising the national in her representation and categorisation of the author's work.

Two Puerto Rican interviewees used the phrase "nuestra literatura" in reference to Puerto Rican literature. As noted above, Luis Negrón commented that Arroyo Pizarro "ya está en el canon de, de, de nuestra, de nuestra literatura". He expanded on this idea to make it clear that he meant Puerto Rican literature:

> cuando se vaya a mirar a una, a una… a la literatura puertorriqueña. (SMS: Mhm) ¿verdad? Cuando tú empiezas, qué sé yo, a, a, si quieres, si quieres crear una biblioteca, verdad, este, (SMS: Sí) de literatura puertorriqueña, ahí va a estar Yolanda.

The Anonymous Lecturer also used the phrase while speaking about the Puerto Rican literary context: "poetas que son… eh… muy importantes en, en el, en nuestra literatura". In referring to "nuestra literatura", these two participants not only constructed a national literature, but also staked an ownership claim over it. Claiming Puerto Rican literature as "our" literature conveys the speaker's belonging to the imagined community of the nation. My position as an outsider was also a factor in this construction: these Puerto Rican interviewees presented me, as a foreign interlocutor, with an image of literature written by individual authors like Arroyo Pizarro as belonging not only to those authors,

but also to the nation at large. This demonstrates a particularly strong and active construction of this national literary category in comparison to other categories: literary categorisations based on other identity characteristics, like race or sexuality, were not referred to as "nuestra" on the basis of shared identity in this way.

In some cases, the concept of "Puerto Rican literature" was also given particular emphasis in comparison with other categorisations. Negrón commented that:

> pues ahora mismo, pues, pues, en todas las editoriales hay autores, eh, que publican de todo, o sea, no hay... ya no hay un libro gay, ya, no hay un libro lésbico, eso no hay, eso no hay, ya no hay, son libros puertorriqueños, básicamente, y la gente pues lee a Yolanda o me lee a mí

This statement contrasted the concept of a gay or lesbian book with that of Puerto Rican books. As much as both might be based on imagined communities, Negrón explicitly rejected the former categories, including his and Arroyo Pizarro's writing in the latter; thus, he cast nationality as a more legitimate way of categorising books than sexuality. In her final comments on Arroyo Pizarro, Esther Rodríguez Miranda also emphasised the framework of nationality, although in this case not to the exclusion of other identity categories:

> eso es importante, no, ese trabajo que ella hace, de... de proyectarse al mundo, y a la misma vez, eh, promocionar la literatura puertorriqueña. Es literatura afro, es literatura lésbica, y al final es literatura puertorriqueña que está escribiendo desde una colonia herida, eh, desde una ansiedad de vivir en un país ocupado, eh... y a lo mejor esos son otros aspectos que puedas también preguntarle a las personas, ¿no? Eh... cómo su... cómo su obra... refleja una, una realidad social de mucha ansiedad.

Here, Rodríguez Miranda affirmed the categorisation of Arroyo Pizarro's work as "literatura afro" and "literatura lésbica" (both of which I will discuss further in this chapter) while placing particular emphasis on its status as "literatura puertorriqueña" and focusing on the national context. During the interview, I had explicitly posed questions about categories based on sexuality and race, so Rodríguez Miranda's suggestion that I ask interviewees about nationality as well implies that this was a

framework she felt deserved more attention than I had given it, although not to the exclusion of the other categories. Her comments about the reality of living in an occupied country underlined the political dimension of emphasising Puerto Rican identity in a literary context. While the idea of national literatures is prevalent worldwide, Puerto Rico's colonial status, absence of national sovereignty, and anxiety about US political, economic, and cultural encroachment result in an increased urge to assert a unique cultural identity. To represent Arroyo Pizarro's work as Puerto Rican literature is to claim it as part of this effort.

"Literatura afro": Racial Categorisations

Race was a frequent topic in discussions of Arroyo Pizarro's texts. There was a notable difference in the terminology used for the author herself *versus* her writing: as discussed in Chapter 4, participants often described Arroyo Pizarro as "negra"; "literatura negra", on the other hand, was not commonly used. There are several instances of this term in the interview transcripts, but these are almost exclusively my own usage in the context of posing a question about identity-based categories, for example when I asked Arroyo Pizarro: "¿tú crees que... eso de... categorizarte como "literatura negra", "literatura lésbica", lo que sea, crees que eso afecta quién te lee?" There is only one example of an interviewee using the term: in an exchange with Dr Ramos Rosado, I used the phrase in a question and she repeated it in her answer. In all other instances, participants, including Ramos Rosado, used the phrase "literatura afro". Given that "negro/a" was readily used in relation to people, this does not indicate a rejection of the word. Rather, it seems more likely that "literatura negra" was not used because of possible confusion with "novela negra", a phrase used in Spanish to refer to a subgenre of crime novels which in English might be described as "noir". Indeed, my own use of "literatura negra" was likely due to the influence of my native English, in which "Black literature" refers to race and not to the noir genre.

The term "literatura afro" was used by multiple participants. Esther Rodríguez Miranda stated that Arroyo Pizarro's work "Es literatura afro", affirming this characterisation. Edda López described a subset of Arroyo Pizarro's work as "obras... eh, afrolésbicas", representing them as being defined simultaneously by race, sexuality, and gender. Participants also discussed the category of "literatura afro" beyond Arroyo Pizarro's work.

López described a debate she had witnessed regarding the nature of the genre; Dr Ramos Rosado commented that "hay una literatura afro", going on to use the phrase several more times; and the Anonymous Lecturer referred to "la literatura negrista, antillana, afro". The phrase was always introduced to the conversation by interviewees rather than by myself; thus, it was not a term that I influenced interviewees to use.

The adjective "afro" was also used to describe a topic or theme of Arroyo Pizarro's works. The Anonymous Lecturer spoke about her experience teaching the author's work in a university setting: "siempre incorporé el tema de la racialidad, (SMS: Mm) o el tema de lo afro en mis cursos". She cited Arroyo Pizarro's short story "Saeta" and book of poetry *Afrofeministamente* as examples of texts that discuss "el tema de afrodescendencia". Lladó Ortega also highlighted "el aspecto de lo afro. La afroidentidad" in Arroyo Pizarro's work. Esther Rodríguez Miranda stated that "es cuando, es a través de la afronegritud (SMS: Mm), ¿verdad?, de lo afro, que entonces, empiezo a leerla, más que por la cuestión sexual o lésbica, empiezo, eh, mi conexión con lo afro"; thus, she not only referred repeatedly to "lo afro" as a topic of Arroyo Pizarro's work, but also cited this as the primary topic that had attracted her to the work, explicitly juxtaposing this with "la cuestión sexual o lésbica". She also commented that "en el caso de Colombia sé que tiene que ver más con lo afro" during a discussion about which of Arroyo Pizarro's texts have been published in other countries; she described Arroyo Pizarro's publications in Colombia as being mostly those texts with "afro" themes. Nevertheless, she clarified that Arroyo Pizarro's work is known for discussion of both sexuality and race:

> ERM: ...pero se conoce por los dos porque...
>
> SMS: ¿Los dos qué? (laughing)
>
> ERM: Claro. Los dos, por los dos temas, tanto por el tema afro como por el tema lésbico

In this context, her statements that she personally began reading Arroyo Pizarro's work because of "lo afro" and that it is better known for this theme in Colombia were limited to those specific contexts; however, she asserted that the work is broadly known for topics of both sexuality and race.

Sexuality and Literary Categories

Among sexuality-related terms, "lesbian" was by far the most frequent frame of reference employed by participants in relation to Arroyo Pizarro's work; this mirrored its frequent usage in reference to the author herself, as discussed in Chapter X. The terms "lesbian" and "lésbico/a" were used a number of times by participants in reference to literature. It is worth noting the difference between the English and Spanish phrases. In English, the word "lesbian" is both a noun and an adjective: in the nominal sense, "lesbian" usually refers to a person, while the same word can also be used as an adjective to denote something "characterized by sexual activity between women, or sexual or romantic attraction between women; involving or relating to lesbians or lesbianism" ('lesbian, n. & adj.', 2018); the same word is used for both. Meanwhile, in Spanish, there are two distinct words: the noun "lesbiana" and the adjective "lésbico/a". Thus, although broadly equivalent, the English phrase "lesbian literature" differs slightly from the Spanish "literatura lésbica", in that the English applies the same word to both literature and people, while the Spanish employs a different form of the word in reference to literature, arguably establishing more of a distinction. In the interviews I conducted in Spanish, interviewees almost always used the word "lésbico/a" rather than "lesbiana" when referring to literature, novels, etc. The only exception was one instance in which Dr Ramos Rosado used "literatura lesbiana"; however, she used "literatura lésbica" on multiple other occasions, leading me to interpret her use of the former as a slip of the tongue rather than a deliberate choice. The adjective "lésbico/a" was therefore the norm when referring to literature.

I myself frequently used the phrases "literatura lésbica" and "lesbian literature" in posing questions to my interviewees about the categorisation of Arroyo Pizarro's work; this was the sexuality-based category I used most frequently, over potentially broader possibilities like "queer literature"/"literatura cuir", "LGBT literature"/"literatura LGBT", *et cetera*; thus, I contributed to the framing of Arroyo Pizarro's work within this particular category, with the specific gender and sexuality connotations it embodies. Arroyo Pizarro used "literatura lésbica" to refer to her own writing twice. As discussed above, Esther Rodríguez Miranda stated that Arroyo Pizarro's work "Es literatura afro, es literatura lésbica, y al final es literatura puertorriqueña"; thus, she actively asserted the lesbian

nature of the author's work alongside these other characteristics. In this case, Rodríguez Miranda did not distinguish between works within Arroyo Pizarro's oeuvre, declaring her body of work as a whole to be lesbian, afro, and Puerto Rican. At other moments, interviewees characterised a specific work or a subset of Arroyo Pizarro's work as lesbian. Both Dayaneira and Arroyo Pizarro herself referred to *Caparazones* as a "novela lésbica", reconfirming a construction of this novel that I have previously noted is common among other paratextual sources. Edda López commented that

> EL: Sabes, em... Yolanda usa... Yolanda, eh, es tan diversa que ella puede... tener obras infantiles... y son accesibles para la niñez...
>
> SMS: Claro.
>
> EL: Pero son fascinantes para la gente adulta.
>
> SMS: Mhm.
>
> EL: Y entonces tener, eh, obras... eh, afrolésbicas.

Thus, she drew particular attention to the diversity of Arroyo Pizarro's oeuvre, describing a subset of her works as "afrolésbicas", combining race, gender, and sexuality in one word. This was contrasted with the author's children's books, which were not characterised in this way, hinting at the taboo around combining non-hegemonic sexuality with children's literature, which I discuss in more detail in Chapter 6. Unlike Rodríguez Miranda, who described Arroyo Pizarro's work generally as Black, lesbian, and Puerto Rican, López constructed subcategories of the author's writing and assigned particular identity-based categorisations to some and not others; I have previously discussed how paratextual sources often did the same.

As discussed in Chapter 4, participants tended to use "gay" to refer specifically to gay men rather than in a gender-neutral sense, favouring "lesbian(a)" when characterising women; this gendered distinction between "gay" and "lesbian(a)" was maintained in relation to literature. This was perhaps most evident in Arroyo Pizarro and Luis Negrón's comments on the publishing house Editorial Egales. When I asked Negrón about the publisher he stated that "son unas mujeres, yo estaba allí... y... yo miré su catálogo, y yo, yo sabía que era un catálogo más interesado en literatura lésbica". As previously noted,

Egales bills itself as an LGBTQI+ publishing house, establishing a broad, non-gender-specific brief; Negrón, however, claimed that their catalogue was more specifically focused on the gendered category of lesbian literature. Arroyo Pizarro expressed a similar sentiment: after telling me that it was Negrón who recommended she take her manuscript to Egales, she went on to comment that

> mi otro compañero [Luis Negrón], yo sentí que le dio como que una envidia, bendito, porque el que quería publicar con ellos era él. O sea, yo estaba, (SMS: sí) pero yo soy del, o sea yo era... el tipo de literatura que ellas publicaban. (SMS: mmm) Mujeres, lesbianas. (SMS: okay) Él era hombre gay (SMS: sí), y aunque era literatura gay, pues ellas tenían bastante de eso, ellas querían visibilizar la literatura lésbica.

Again, the gendered contrast between "literatura gay" and "literatura lésbica" was reaffirmed: Arroyo Pizarro constructed these as distinct categories rather than grouping them together under a broader, gender-neutral term. She also implied an equivalence between author identity and literary category: in stating that "yo era... el tipo de literatura [...] Mujeres, lesbianas", she equated herself and her own identity as a lesbian with her literature, which she represented as "literatura lésbica"; similarly, she termed Negrón an "hombre gay" and his writing "literatura gay". While she initially concurred with Negrón that lesbian literature was the "type" that Egales published, she then stated that, rather than being uninterested in gay male literature *per se*, the publisher already had enough of this in their catalogue and that their interest in lesbian literature was more in aid of filling a gap than an exclusive focus on it. The two categories were framed as needing to exist in balance within the catalogue, further distinguishing them from one another rather than as belonging to one category. "Gay" was never used in relation to Arroyo Pizarro's work; "literatura gay" was always gendered as male and not applied to the output of female authors.

As was the case with author identity, possible gender-neutral terms like queer, cuir, or LGBT were also less common than "lesbian" and "lésbico/a" in relation to literature, although there were a few instances of their use. As noted above, Alexandra Gonzenbach Perkins referred to "LGBTQ literature" as one of a number of academic disciplines within which Arroyo Pizarro's work might be studied. As discussed in Chapter 4, Arroyo Pizarro

stated that at one point in time she had struggled to find writing on queer topics in Puerto Rico: “ahí me doy cuenta que es, muy probablemente soy la única persona cuir que está publicando temas cuir”. The phrase “temas cuir” constructed queerness as a theme of the hypothetical works she was searching for, rather than describing the literature itself as essentially queer. Similarly, Ortega Lladó stated that “mi trabajo doctoral también, ah, eh… enfoca lo cuir […] siempre esa línea, este… me llama”; “lo cuir” was constructed as a topic or approach rather than as an essential characteristic of the work necessarily. This was one of a few uses of “cuir”/“queer” in an academic context. Ortega Lladó and Ramos Rosado both mentioned attending academic conferences on queer literature, at which Arroyo Pizarro was in attendance and where her work was discussed. Ortega Lladó recalled the Congreso de Literatura Queer (CLiQ) in 2015, which she co-organised; Ramos Rosado spoke about the Coloquio del Otro Lao 2020, a conference that centres “una conversación en torno a los temas cuir y trans relevantes” (*Coloquio Del Otro Lao*, 2022), to which she referred as “un congreso de LGTB […] cuir”. The briefs of these conferences represent the topics discussed therein as essentially queer, including Arroyo Pizarro’s literary work; the participants’ choice to mention these conferences contributed to their portrayal of Arroyo Pizarro’s work as queer in the context of our interviews. The fact that these are academic events and were discussed by two academics speaks to the role of academia in the construction of the category “literatura cuir”, alongside other identity-based categories. Such conferences bring academics with diverse interests together under this banner, contributing to the construction of the category, incorporating specific authors and texts, including Arroyo Pizarro, and establishing “literatura cuir” as an academic field. It is unsurprising that “cuir” in reference to literature was largely confined to discussions of academia, given that this usage of the term was popularised within the academic sphere; this is particularly true in a Spanish-language context, where the word is a relatively recent import. Beyond these limited uses, “LGBT” and “queer”/“cuir” were rarely used in reference to literature; interviewees generally preferred more specific, gendered terms, a fact which produces a strongly gendered distinction between lesbian authors and literature *versus* gay male authors and literature.

Some terms were notable for their absence, such as "bisexual". This word was never used to describe literature, texts, characters, or themes, despite the fact that some characters in texts discussed by participants are arguably bisexual (Iolante in *Violeta* and Nessa in *Caparazones* come to mind). Other than in broad categorisations like "LGBT", bisexuality was referenced very infrequently, only being mentioned by myself, Arroyo Pizarro, and Alexandra Gonzenbach Perkins. References to bisexuality were usually in passing and grouped together with other identity labels, such as when Perkins stated that "some of my students in that class were… um… bisexual… or… (SMS: Mhm) lesbian… or… kind of in the, you know, the realm of queer… experience" and that "I had friends who were… gay, lesbian, bi… um, trans". The fact that texts with arguably bisexual characters were never described as "literatura bisexual" or with other similar terms might have been because the author in question publicly identifies as a lesbian, suggesting that the categorisation "literatura lésbica" has more to do with the author's identity than with that of the characters. Alternatively, it might be because participants view the characters as lesbians rather than as bisexual, a position which is certainly defensible, or because the texts in question focus mostly on relationships between women. On the other hand, it may be because of the more widespread phenomenon of bisexual erasure: the tendency towards reinforcing a heterosexual/homosexual binary which prioritises a focus on lesbians and gay men to the exclusion of bisexuality (see, for example: Stewart, 2021; Morgenroth *et al.*, 2022; Cahill *et al.*, 2024).

Categorising by Gender?

There was notably no real equivalent to terms like "literatura afro", "literatura puertorriqueña", or "literatura lésbica" when it came to gender specifically. On two occasions, I tentatively suggested the term "literatura femenina" when posing the question of identity-based literary categories; no interviewee used the term. In English, for categorisations of race, geopolitics, and sexuality, there were examples of constructions wherein "literature" was modified by an adjective, characterising the literature itself as Black, Puerto Rican, lesbian, *et cetera*; the grammatically equivalent construction in relation to gender would be "female literature". However, this was never used in my English-language interviews and, indeed, is not in common use more widely.

The more common term is "women's literature"[7], which appeared very infrequently in interviews. When gender was referenced, it was usually in tandem with other aspects of identity such as sexuality: as I have noted, the prevalent term "literatura lésbica" is inherently gendered, referencing both sexuality and gender simultaneously.

Although there was discussion of transgender identity and participants acknowledged that some of the texts they mentioned feature transgender characters, participants did not represent Arroyo Pizarro's literature as "transgender", "trans", "transgénero", or other related terms. Several participants spoke about the short story collection *Transmutadxs*, also known as *Transcaribeñx*; both titles allude to the fact that the stories feature a number of trans and gender-non-conforming characters. As discussed previously, Daniel Torres spoke about this text at some length, noting that he has taught the constituent short story "Changó" a number of times in a university setting. He described this story: "es un cuento que me gusta mucho de *Transmutadxs*, donde ella trabaja la cuestión de... el transgénero, pero desde el punto de vista de mujer a hombre". Here, Torres represented transness as a topic or issue that the text explores, rather than representing the text itself as trans. Speaking about the entire collection, he added: "*Transmutadxs*, los cuentos que tiene, juega con la cuestión del género, juega, juega también con la cuestión de la identidad sexual, y siempre lo hace desde el punto de vista de la mujer negra". He again referred to gender and sexuality as issues that the texts explore. Torres seemingly contradicted himself on the point of view of the stories: this claim that the stories of *Transmutadxs* are "desde el punto de vista de la mujer negra" appears to be at odds with the remark that "Changó" features "el punto de vista de mujer a hombre". This mismatch may be resolved if we understand the former as referring to the author's identity while the latter referred to the character, two different meanings of "punto de vista": both author identity and character identity were referenced as relevant points of view in the context of the story. Torres used phrases like "la cuestión del transgénero" multiple times but never characterised the collection or its constituent stories with terms like "literatura trans" in the way that numerous participants used "literatura lésbica" for other works. A number of other participants also commented on trans characters and

[7] Notably, "women's literature" employs a possessive rather than adjectival form, setting it apart from the other examples and implying that the literature in question *belongs* to women in some way.

themes in Arroyo Pizarro's work. Torres' student, Caroline, also referred to "Changó" and to the fact that the story is written "from the perspective of someone who is… in the trans community". Dayaneira stated that she was interested in reading *Transcaribeñx* because she hoped to "encontrar ahí más formas de educarme sobre la comunidad LGBTQ, personas trans, negrxs y parte del Caribe". She thus hinted at the trans characters in the short stories; I will comment more on the idea of reading to learn in Chapter 6. Ramos Rosado noted that Arroyo Pizarro "está hablando de las mujeres negras y lesbianas, y trans", making another reference to the author's inclusion of trans characters in her writing. In contrast with bisexuality, which was never mentioned in relation to any of Arroyo Pizarro's characters, texts with transgender characters and themes were acknowledged by multiple participants; however, no participant represented any text as "transgender literature" or with any similar term, while "literatura lésbica" and related terms were used a number of times. It seems to me that this was related to participants' awareness that the author is not herself transgender, and that author identity therefore played a significant role in the construction of these categories.

Reflecting on Categorisation

While the chapter thus far has focused on participant representations of Arroyo Pizarro's writing and their relatively uncritical use of categories, the remainder will centre the parts of the interviews in which the categories were problematised and discussed as a phenomenon in and of themselves. In most interviews, I posed direct questions about identity-based categories of literature, inviting the interviewee to reflect more explicitly on these categories, their use, and their effects. I asked these questions towards the end of the interviews in order to minimise the ways in which this line of questioning might influence the participants' representations of Arroyo Pizarro's work in the first instance. In this section, I will consider the definitions and criteria participants specified when asked what constitutes such categories; discussion of why categories like "white literature", "male literature", and "heterosexual literature" are not often used; and the positions participants took regarding the use of identity-based literary categories.

Participant Definitions of Categories

I have already given some consideration in this chapter to the possible criteria for a category like "lesbian literature" or "literatura afro": the relevance of factors like author

identity, subject matter, and character identity have been discussed at various moments. These previous references were to unspoken assumptions underlying participant representations, such as the equivalence that Arroyo Pizarro implied between author identity and literary category when she stated that "yo era… el tipo de literatura que ellas [Editorial Egales] publicaban. (SMS: mmm) Mujeres, lesbianas. (SMS: okay) Él [Luis Negrón] era hombre gay (SMS: sí), y aunque era literatura gay, pues ellos tenían bastante de eso, ellas querían visibilizar la literatura lésbica", suggesting that her writing was "literatura lésbica" and Negrón's was "literatura gay" because of their respective identities. Conversely, the fact that participants sometimes singled out specific works, rather than Arroyo Pizarro's entire bibliography, as "literatura lésbica", while other works were not represented in this way, implies that it is not only her identity but at least partially the content of the text in question that determines such a category. In these previous cases, the criteria were implied rather than being outright stated; I will now discuss examples in which participants provided explicit definitions of such literary categories, at my prompting. In some cases, where interviewees made use of identity-based literary categories, I posed questions about how these categories were constituted. Daniel Torres and I had the following exchange:

> SMS: Claro, sí. Em… entonces… em… para ti… un término como literatura negra, por ejemplo, pero puede ser cualquier- como literatura lésbica, lo que sea… em, ¿se trata del… de la identidad de la, de la autora o de la temática de la obra, o… ambas cosas, o…?
>
> DT: (overlapping) Yo creo que hay, que hay que ir a los personajes, pero invariablemente tú vas a tener autores como Luis Palés Matos… que para todos los efectos era blanco…

Torres highlighted author identity, while allowing for exceptions. He named Luis Palés Matos as a white author whom he nevertheless included in the category of Black literature; the example of Palés Matos recurred among multiple interviewees. The Anonymous Lecturer criticised the fact that, according to her,

> lo hegemónico nos ha hecho, aquí en Puerto Rico, eh… eh… nos ha obligado a [¿?] la escuela, a que la única persona que puede hablar, y que tiene… *standing* para hablar de lite- de poesía negrista, es Luis Palés Matos[.]

She compared the case of Palés Matos with that of Fortunato Vizcarrondo, a Black writer whom she stated has been marginalised for his identity and politics. She criticised what she characterised as the public portrayal of Palés Matos, a white writer depicting Black characters and issues, as a greater authority on "poesía negrista" than Black writers such as Vizcarrondo, and emphasised the need to promote "literatura negrista a partir de los propios afrodescendientes". Thus, while she noted that this category of literature has historically encompassed some white writers, she criticised the tendency to valorise these white writers over their Black counterparts. She placed importance on author identity throughout, stating the need to promote "literatura negrista a partir de los propios afrodescendientes porque [?] que hablar de su propia experiencia, porque son de ellos"; for this reason, she stated that she had taught "poemas… negristas de mujeres afro" in her university class. As noted in Chapter 4, the Anonymous Lecturer represented Black writers as inherently political. She characterised her teaching of other Black women writers, such as Arroyo Pizarro, as "un trabajo de solidaridad". Thus, she invested importance in author identity because of Black writers' authority to discuss first-hand experiences of Blackness. She also took the position that promoting the work of Black authors would contribute to political change, taking for granted the premise that Black writers' texts, including those by Arroyo Pizarro, would inherently be political.

Speaking about the category of Black literature, Ramos Rosado commented that

> MRR: […] lo que pasa es que hay un gran movimiento… de escritoras que han salido, y escritores negros, afrodescendientes.
>
> SMS: Sí.
>
> MRR: Evidentemente negros. Entonces, ha habido un resurgir y están reclamando su espacio.
>
> SMS: Mm.
>
> MRR: Como escritores.

Here, she connected the category with Black authors, implying that the literary category is defined by author identity. However, later in the interview Ramos Rosado explicitly denied that author identity is a criterion. During a conversation about categories like "literatura afro" and "literatura lésbica", I prompted the academic to clarify what she meant by these terms:

> SMS: Y... con un término así como por ejemplo literatura afro o literatura lésbica, para usted, ¿eso re- se refiere al, al hecho de que el autor es... de ese grupo, o... (MRR: No, no necesariamente) los personajes, o...?
>
> MRR: (overlapping) No, no, no, no. Cuando yo digo "literatura afro", hay una literatura afro, pero fíjate que ahora mismo, hay un escritor que se llama Luis Palés Matos que no es negro.

In this exchange, she asserted strongly that author identity is not a defining criterion of "literatura afro", citing Luis Palés Matos; she went on to state that Palés Matos "Es como tú", apparently comparing Palés Matos to me in order to represent him as unambiguously white, a moment in which my racial categorisation was explicitly highlighted. She juxtaposed her description of Palés Matos as white with the statement that he "es el padre en Puerto Rico del movimiento y de la poesía negrista, en el 30"; assigning him this status while representing him as white served as evidence for her argument that the race of an author does not determine the categorisation of their work. Rather, she told me:

> MRR: Es que tenga interés... en ese tema, que lo promueva, aunque la persona no sea negra.
>
> SMS: Okay. Sí.
>
> MRR: Y... y en fa- y a favor de ese tema. En afirmación. Pero... no es solamente que sea un escritor negro.
>
> SMS: No.
>
> MRR: Que trate el tema.
>
> SMS: Es la, la temática.
>
> MRR: La temática.

She thus argued that the categorisation has more to do with the themes and topics of the work than the identity of the author; there remains some ambiguity about what might constitute relevant themes or topics. Furthermore, the phrases "que lo promueva", "a favor", and "en afirmación" imply a political element: beyond simply featuring themes of race, or Black characters, Ramos Rosado hinted that in order to be considered "literatura afro", a work must be in favour of a particular cause, presumably related to Black liberation. Again, there is some ambiguity regarding which cause(s) these texts should promote, or how this affirmation is determined; given the diversity of opinions found within racial justice movements, this is less straightforward than it might appear at first glance. Taken together, Ramos Rosado's comments seem in some ways inconsistent: at times, she drew an equivalence between author identity and categorisation of texts, which she went on to vehemently deny in favour of the topic or theme of works; she also implied that a text must have a particular political positioning or aspirations to be classed as "literatura afro". These shifting criteria exemplify the broader ambiguity of literary categories based on identity, which are rarely given explicit definitions; the paratexts and metatexts I analysed in Chapter 3 used similarly dynamic and unstable criteria for these categories.

Ramos Rosado extended her logic regarding the primacy of subject matter over author identity in the case of "literatura afro" to other literary categories, commenting that "yo creo que la cuestión lésbica puede pasar lo mismo". She used the example of Mayra Santos-Febres, whom she stated "no es lesbiana… y escribió, eh, *Sirena Selena vestida de pena*, que trata sobre un tra- mm, travesti"; this example seems a little out of place given that *travesti* identity is generally considered distinct from lesbianism, only sharing general gender/sexuality non-conformity, further evidence of the ambiguity of categories in both identity and literature. Ramos Rosado continued:

> MRR: Sabes, que, que casi siempre, cuando una persona… eh, eh, este, escribe sobre el tema… de, de algún movimiento, no necesariamente todos, pero yo estoy hablando de los que definen el tema… en esa línea, y que en alguna manera, dentro de su obra, aunque traten tema lo que sea, siempre meten el tema.
>
> SMS: Mhm.

MRR: Es un tema que les preocupa y lo trabajan.

I picked up on the idea that "siempre mete[r] el tema" is a criterion, bringing the conversation back to Arroyo Pizarro by commenting:

SMS: Pero hay varios textos de Yolanda que no trabajan el tema… cuir, digamos.

MRR: No. Por eso te estoy diciendo, Yolanda no lo trabaja, Yolanda no es toda tampoco de ese tema.

SMS: Mm.

MRR: No, Yolanda no es de ese tema. Yolanda… no es de ese tema… el lésbico nada más. Yolanda más que nada, yo diría que trabaja más la cuestión afro.

SMS: Sí.

MRR: En casi to- en casi toda su obra.

SMS: Sí, eso aparece en todo, sí.

MRR: En todo.

Following Ramos Rosado's line of argument, these statements seem to imply that, because Arroyo Pizarro does not deal with lesbian themes in all of her texts, her writing cannot be considered "literatura lésbica". By centring her criteria on the themes across an author's entire oeuvre, Ramos Rosado did not account for the possibility that some works might be lesbian literature while others are not. She represented Arroyo Pizarro's work as "literatura afro" more than "literatura lésbica" because of what she identified as "la cuestión afro" appearing throughout all, or almost all, of the author's writing, thus emphasising race over sexuality in this representation.

White, Male, Heterosexual Literature?

One of the ways in which I prompted interviewees to reflect on identity-based literary categories was by posing questions about "white literature", "male literature", and "heterosexual literature". I invited interviewees to consider why such categories are not commonly used, for example in the following question posed to Rosario Méndez Panedas:

> SMS: Sí. Em... algo que me interesa mucho es, es el hecho de que a veces la literatura... se describe... como... por ejemplo... "literatura femenina" o "literatura negra", se, como se le marca con ese... (RMP: Ajá) aspecto de identidad, ¿no?, eh, (RMP: Ajá) categorías de identidad, y, pero al otro lado, no solemos hablar de literatura... blanca... ni masculina, ni heterosexual, ¿no?

I introduced such a question in most interviews, with the intention of highlighting the asymmetry of identity-based literary categories in common usage and prompting my interlocutor to incorporate discussion of this phenomenon into their commentary. In response, Méndez Panedas stated that "no hablamos de literatura blanca, ni de literatura escrita por hombres, porque (SMS: Claro) pensamos que, que la literatura... blanca nos incluye a todos, ¿verdad?, (SMS: Sí) pero no es así. No es así". She thus argued that these terms are not used because of a societal assumption that literature written by white men is universal in a way that other literature is not, a premise which she challenged. Perkins commented on "the idea of, you know, non-categorised literature which is, is, you know, white, and (SMS: Mhm) heterosexual and generally male", highlighting and calling into question the idea that maleness, whiteness, and heterosexuality are neutral and therefore do not need to be named as such. In a similar vein, Daniel Torres and I had the following exchange:

> SMS: [...] se usan estos términos, pero nunca se usa, eh, un término como por ejemplo literatura heterosexual, o literatura bla- eh, blanca, (DT: Mm) o, o masculina. Em... qué... ¿qué piensas de eso? ¿Qué, qué, qué, qué efectos crees que... tienen estos términos y el hecho de que... se usa el uno y no el otro, no?
>
> DT: Yo creo que el otro está implícito, ¿no? (SMS: Mm) Hablar de literatura blanca, heterosexual, es, es casi como un oxímoron, porque casi (SMS: Claro) toda la literatura ha sido eso.

According to Torres, whiteness, heterosexuality, and maleness are implicit, meaning that representing literature with these labels is almost oxymoronic. This statement again speaks to the widespread assumption that these are default characteristics and therefore do not need to be named.

In contrast with the other interviewees, Arroyo Pizarro advocated for the active use of categories like "literatura blanca" and "literatura heterosexual". She immediately challenged me when I stated that "no existe... em... este... 'literatura blanca'... [...] 'literatura heterosexual'", stating that "Sí existe"; she argued, "No existe la taxonomía o la clasificación". She thus constructed these as categories that exist despite not being named. She stated that "ésa es mi lucha", framing this as a situation she was actively fighting to change. She further remarked that

> YAP: ellos han normalizado... eh... esos espacios donde ellos se llaman lo normal.
>
> SMS: Claro. Sí.
>
> YAP: Eso es lo normal.
>
> SMS: Sí, no se dice porque es normal...
>
> YAP: Porque es normal.
>
> SMS: ...o sea, no tiene, no hay que decir "literatura masculina, (overlapping) blanca (YAP: ni blanca), heterosexual (YAP: heterosexual), porque... es literatura normal, ¿no?
>
> YAP: Pero yo lo digo.

Thus, she characterised this normalisation of white, heterosexual, and male literature as the result of an active effort made by the corresponding groups of people. She illustrated this point through anecdotes, telling me that "en una ocasión me dijo, un escritor, 'bueno, no existe literatura masculina porque lo normal es que escriban los hombres', ¡así me dijo!" She described a male writer stating that it is "normal" for men to write, the implication being that women writers are an aberration. Her tone at the end of this anecdote indicated outrage at this sentiment. However, she went on to say:

> YAP: Se atreve a decir "lo normal es que los-" y, bueno, él lo dijo desde un lugar de enunciación, em... siendo... cuidado por el mismo patriarcado, o sea él está metido en ese sistema, pero igual yo estoy también metida en ese sistema...
>
> SMS: Claro.
>
> YAP: ...lo que pasa es que yo estoy del lado que observa...

SMS: Mmm.

YAP: ...que... que *mi* literatura es invisible, o... y digo literatura porque estamos hablando de arte...

SMS: Mmm.

YAP: ...pero si vamos a la realidad, mi *existencia* es la que es invisible, o la que debería serlo. Entonces yo le entiendo, tenía razón, no estaba diciendo algo que no fuera de verdad.

SMS: Mm.

YAP: Lo que pasa es que ese entitlement es lo que es problemático.

She specified that her distaste with this writer was not because what he said was untrue; in fact, she agreed that the substance of his statement was factual. Rather, she highlighted his privileged positionality within the existing system, contrasting this with her own as a marginalised author. In this context, she characterised his complacency with the *status quo* as entitled. Speaking about another writer, this time a white woman, she recounted:

YAP: en un momento dado yo empecé a usar... el asunto de la literatura negroide. Yo un día dije en un fórum, ella estaba, estábamos todos, y yo dije, "bueno, hablemos de literatura blancoide". Y ella se... eso a ella le molestó porque ella dijo "¡ahí va la mía!"

SMS: Mmm.

YAP: Y cuando se acabó la mesa, tuvimos una discusión, y nosotras partimos, o sea, eh, dejamos de dirigirnos la palabra.

For context, the category of "literatura negroide" uses the antiquated term "negroide", equivalent to English "negroid" and generally considered extremely offensive in modern use; nevertheless, "literatura negroide" is still used in some literary contexts. Arroyo Pizarro has publicly challenged the continued use of the term for years; in 2016, she made a post on her public Facebook page expressing her opposition, asking that the reader "De ahora en adelante haga el compromiso de no aportar al racismo", and

pointing out the hypocrisy in the fact that "no se pueda decir blancoide" (Arroyo Pizarro, 2016). Two years later, she published a book entitled *Blancoides* (2018b) as a further challenge to the category of "negroide". She used this same term "blancoide" in the above excerpt from our interview; according to her account, the white writer found this so objectionable that she did not speak to Arroyo Pizarro for several years. Thus, Arroyo Pizarro used this anecdote to highlight the asymmetry of such terms and the hypocrisy in the normalisation of "negroide" *versus* rejection of "blancoide". Along similar lines but in reference to sexuality, she stated that during public readings, "yo digo 'yo voy a leer literatura lésbica y ellos van a leer literatura heterosexual' [...] tú vas a hablar de tu pareja mujer o de tu pareja hombre", going on to imply that such statements caused discomfort among these participants. Thus, in our discussions of categories like white, male, and heterosexual literature, Arroyo Pizarro framed the relative absence of these categories in discourse as the result of an active effort by writers with privilege on the basis of gender, race, or sexuality to normalise their own literature. She advocated for challenging this normalisation by deliberately naming these categories in order to reframe them as specific rather than neutral or universal. This act was cast as transgressive, unsettling the privileged and confronting the *status quo*.

Participants' Shifting Positions

During our discussions of identity-based literary categories, the interviewees and I took various positions on the use and effects of these categories. While most participants ultimately argued that the continued use of the categories was necessary, they often expressed certain reservations or concerns about them, negotiating their positions during the conversation and displaying a certain level of ambivalence regarding the issue. While some similar sentiments expressed across more than one interview, I have chosen to analyse individual participants' positions one at a time in order to capture the ambivalence and shifting positions within the same conversation.

Rosario Méndez Panedas: "Es necesario nombrarla para darle esa visibilidad"

When I asked Rosario Méndez Panedas what she thought of identity-based literary categories such as "literatura femenina" or "literatura negra", she initially responded: "lo que pasa es que... em, muchas veces, verdad, cuando se trabaja con literatura que está fuera del canon, pues es necesario nombrarla para darle esa visibilidad". Her statement

rested on the premises that (1) Black, "female" literature is inherently outside of or excluded from the canon; and (2) entry into the canon is desirable. She argued that representing literature in this way is necessary in order to make it more visible, apparently assuming that visibility would lead to incorporation in the canon. She then changed tack: "quizás el problema es que tengamos que seguir, eh, utilizando esas categorías, porque no debíamos, ¿verdad?, debía ser, eh, literatura sin más". Here, she bemoaned the need to use these categories, stating that it would be preferable for such texts to be referred to simply as literature; reference to identity categories was cast as a kind of necessary evil. She went on to restate that the necessity of the categories is in aid of entry to the canon: "hay quizá una necesidad de… utilizar esas categorías en lo que se consigue una mayor representatividad dentro del canon, (SMS: Claro) ¿verdad?, que haya, que haya esa, esa presencia en lo que se va haciendo un espacio". She again constructed the representation of marginalised literatures in the canon as the goal of naming the categories, an idea which will be revisited in analysis of other interviews. While I do not wish to discount this argument entirely, I question whether it necessarily follows that categorising authors and texts by identity categories would aid in their recognition within the same sexist, racist, and homophobic system of cultural and literary value that denigrates them for those identities; indeed, whether recognition within such a system is even desirable was questioned at other points in the interviews.

Méndez Panedas went on to raise a concern regarding identity-based categorisations that was not voiced by any other interviewee. She commented that what she called "excesiva categorización y excesiva… etiquetas" can result in

> RMP: […] una cierta ambigüedad, o, o, o confunde también, ¿verdad? Por ejemplo, eh, a mí a veces me, me, me piden hablar sobre… problemas raciales, o sobre, eh… problemas afros. Yo no puedo hablar de eso.
>
> SMS: Claro. Sí.
>
> RMP: No puedo hablar de esos temas, porque no… ahora, sí estoy produciendo una literatura que tiene a esas mujeres, eh, pertenecientes a, a, a la raza, verdad, (SMS: Mhm) eh, afrodescendiente, así que, pues hay que ser un poco cuidadoso con, con esa categorización[.]

Here, she stated that, because she writes about Black women, she has sometimes been erroneously assumed to be Black herself; at another point in the interview, she made clear that "yo no soy una mujer negra". The chain of events is roughly as follows: Méndez Panedas wrote about Black women; the content of her texts led to their categorisation as "Black literature" or "literatura afro"; this was interpreted as referring to author identity rather than subject matter; Méndez Panedas was mistakenly assumed to be Black; she was asked to speak about racial issues, which she highlighted as a problem because she is not Black and therefore is not an authority on Black experiences. This is symptomatic of the general ambiguity around identity-based literary categories, wherein, as I have outlined, it is often unclear whether a term like "Black literature" is intended to refer to the identity of the author, the subject matter, or some other factor(s); thus, these become equated, which can result in such misunderstandings.

Following this, she went on to restate her point about the canon: "eh, pero por otro lado entiendo, verdad, que, que mientras no logremos que sea parte del canon esa literatura, pues quizás debemos todavía, eh, tener que hablar de ella para, para hacer una mayor, eh, (SMS: Claro) representatividad". She continued in this vein: "así que creo que en este momento, lamentablemente, porque no me gusta tanto la categorización y las etiquetas, pues quizás sí sea necesario, (SMS: Mm) verdad, hasta lograr esa representatividad". In this way, she again constructed the practice of assigning identity categories to literature as unfortunate but temporarily necessary; she implied that this might best be abandoned once the goal of greater representation in the canon is reached. Overall, Méndez Panedas expressed criticism and hesitation regarding the categorisation of literature based on identity, but repeatedly returned to the argument that it is necessary in the present in order to gain recognition. It was assumed throughout that categories like "literatura afro" would increase visibility and ease entry to the canon.

Edda López: "Hay que nombrarla"

When I prompted Edda López to consider identity-based categories and how they might influence perception of Arroyo Pizarro's work, she began by sharing an anecdote about another writer who had been asked a similar question and "respondió… que no existe literatura… afro". López described her reaction to this:

EL: Y yo no podía… no podía creerlo, y te voy a decir por qué. Las personas… racializadas como negras… tenemos unas experiencias diferentes. O sea, yo, a mí se me haría difícil escribir como una persona blanca, claro.

SMS: Claro.

EL: Recordemos nuestro contexto… colonial.

She expressed incredulity, rejecting the author's statement that there is no such thing as "literatura afro". López argued that Black people have different experiences from white people and therefore write different literature; this argument rests on the assumption that an individual's personal experience inherently informs their writing, and that anything they write will necessarily be inscribed with their identity in a way that places it in a different category from writing by those with other identities. The reference to the colonial context of Puerto Rico establishes that López attributed these differences not to some inborn or "natural" difference between races, but to the colonial system that racialises specific groups and individuals, producing these differences in experiences. López then returned to those who deny identity-based literary categories: "hay personas que… no… que prefieren no… atender de que existe la afroliteratura… porque piensan que eso es una… división innecesaria, (SMS: Mhm) pero a mí me parece, y la, y yo lo veo, mucho". According to López, those who oppose the category of "afroliteratura" argue that it creates an unnecessary division; she disagreed with this claim. She then explained that "por ese título, se cuela muchos prejuicios… del sistema, [¿de las?] editoriales, (SMS: Sí) de los [¿?] discursos públicos, de los medios, de las reseñas". Here, she returned to her argument about systematic prejudice, highlighting specific institutions such as publishing houses and reviews that she implied contribute to the suppression or undervaluing of literature by Black writers. She went on to state that Black people "tenemos que transgredir el sistema" because "existen muchas barreras, porque Puerto Rico está formado por el racismo". Rather than a way to gain prestige within existing hierarchies, she thus characterised a term like "afroliteratura" as a way of transgressing the system that oppresses Black people and denies recognition to their literature. She argued that "invisibilizar esa categorización… nos sume nuevamente en el mito de las tres razas"; here, she referred to the common myth that Puerto Rican racial paradigms are the result of the harmonious mixture of "three races" (Spaniards, Africans, and Taíno

indigenous people), which has been used to argue that the archipelago is a post-racial society in which racism is no longer a prevalent issue (Godreau, 2015, p. 184). As noted in Chapter 4, the discourse of racial mixture as norm can lead to the assumption that Black people are rare in Puerto Rico. Thus, López argued that to make a categorisation like "afroliteratura" invisible contributes to this paradigm and ignores issues of race and the experiences of Black people in Puerto Rico. Instead, she proposed:

> EL: Y entonces, ya es hora de que nos apalabremos, y que le llamemos a la cosa como es.
>
> SMS: Mhm.
>
> EL: ¿Sabes? Yo no quiero más división, al contrario. Yo lo que quiero es que me llamen como soy.

In advocating for calling things what they are, she implied that there is a straightforward "truth" behind racial discourse. After some further discussion, she told me: "Recuerda que lo que no se nombra no existe", going on to state that "Hay que nombrarla así". Thus, she clearly stated that to name things is to bring them into existence, and that "literatura afro" or "afroliteratura" must therefore be named. In the context of her previous comments about invisibility and the myth of the three races, these remarks read as a call to address race and racism openly rather than ignoring the issue, and to acknowledge certain differences between Black and white people, caused by racism and colonialism. It was assumed that these differences in identity and experiences would always be discernible in the literary output of Black writers, therefore resulting in literature by Black people always being distinct from literature by white people.

Anonymous Lecturer: "Es categorizarla, pero es necesario"

When I asked the Anonymous Lecturer her opinion of identity-based literary categories, she initially replied: "Bueno, es, sí, es una categorización como el censo", going on to elaborate that

> AL: ¿Verdad? Yo... no estoy de acuerdo con el censo, en el sentido de que nos categoriza. Pero igual sé... que... se utiliza para tratar de... demostrar que hay ciertos grupos minoritarios que [inaudible] los beneficios que otros.

> SMS: Claro.
>
> AL: [Inaudible] Yo creo que hay algo parecido con el asunto de la categorización de la literatura, porque… em… los blancos, o el canon, no va a reconocer la literatura negrista, antillana, afro

She used the analogy of the census to illustrate her criticism of the categories, as well as to acknowledge their usefulness: she argued that the literary categories, like the census, can be used to highlight inequalities in the existing system. Like Méndez Panedas, she noted that the canon excludes literature that has been marginalised on the basis of race. She later reiterated this point:

> Así que casi hemos tenido que [¿?] apropiarnos y (SMS: Mm) decir "tenemos una literatura, eh, negrista, que, que ha trascendido hace mucho tiempo para poder entrar al canon, y que se nos reconozca." O sea, (SMS: Claro) es… categorizarla, pero es necesario

As with Méndez Panedas, these statements assumed the premise that entry to the canon for literature that has historically been excluded is a desirable goal, and that categorisation is necessary in order to achieve this. The Anonymous Lecturer gave a reason for this necessity: "porque si no hablamos nosotros, ¿quién va a hablar de nosotros?" Thus, she portrayed categories like "literatura negrista" and "literatura afro" as being self-determined by Black people, rather than being externally imposed. She later stated that

> Entonces… eso ha… ha… generado esa… división, por decirlo así, y alguna resistencia intelectual, [¿?] de que no, hay poesía, no hay literatura negrista, todo [¿?], no hay poesía negrista, todo es poesía. Pero… pero no, (SMS: Mm) verdad, este… hay diferentes maneras de… de… em, entrar al mundo de la poética, desde la experiencia de diferentes personas y los negros específicamente[.]

Like Edda López, she described opponents of categorisation as arguing that it causes division, which she refuted. She also cited the different experiences of Black people as the reason for differences in literature, again implying an equivalence between personal experience and writing. She stated that these different experiences were because of

"todas estas... eh... formas de invisibilizarlos, (SMS: Mm) verdad, y en, y en la academia, se ha invisibilizado mucho"; like other participants, she referred to Black people being made invisible, in this case particularly emphasising academia as an environment in which this has occurred. She later concluded:

> AL: Y entonces ahí están (SMS: Claro) voces que, es importante... eh... resaltar, (SMS: Mm) para denunciar.
>
> SMS: Sí. Sí. Entonces, tiene... cierta utilidad, ¿no?
>
> AL: Sí. Por lo menos aquí, en la academia... eh, a mí me gusta hacer esa... distinción.

Once again, she argued for the importance of highlighting Black literature in order to draw attention to issues of racism. As a lecturer, she stated that this is particularly important in an academic context, where, as she noted, Black people have historically been marginalised and excluded; the emphasis on use of such categories in this environment hints again at the role played by the academy in their creation.

Marie Ramos Rosado: "Entras en hacer las diferencias, y hay que entrar"

Marie Ramos Rosado commented that a category like "literatura lésbica" could be considered "una navaja de dos filos"; nevertheless, she ultimately came down in favour of identity-based literary categories, focusing particularly on "literatura afro". Like Edda López, she referred to a recent event at which "se planteó que si [mumbles] la literatura se debe llamar, se debe, si, si existe una literatura afro"; the two participants may have been referring to the same event, but I was not able to verify this. Like López, Ramos Rosado asserted that "literatura afro" does exist, while "la persona que estaba en el coloquio, dice que no, que la literatura es literatura". The reason given by Ramos Rosado for the other person's opposing position was that calling all literature simply "literature" rather than specifying categories like "literatura afro" makes it "más fácil acomodarse con el canon"; interestingly, this statement is based on the opposite premise from that assumed in the comments by Méndez Panedas and the Anonymous Lecturer, who argued that use of identity-based categories would facilitate entry to the canon. Ramos Rosado continued:

MRR: Pero [¿?] tú establecer especificidades…

SMS: Sí.

MRR: Entras en hacer las diferencias, y hay que entrar.

SMS: Verdad.

MRR: Gente que es diferente es diferente.

Like other participants, she argued for recognising the differences between groups of people through use of literary categories. She stated that doing so might make it harder for that literature to enter the canon, but she appeared willing to prioritise the recognition of difference over easy entry to the canon. In the context that she had praised Arroyo Pizarro's public identification as a lesbian as "una ruptura al canon", she appeared to advocate for rejecting the canon rather than simply trying to fit into it.

Mónica Lladó Ortega: "Doble filo, doble necesidad"

When asked about identity-based categories, Lladó Ortega commented that they have "ese doble filo, esa doble necesidad", employing similar imagery to that used by Ramos Rosado. Lladó Ortega elaborated on the double-edged nature of the practice, stating that use of these categories can fulfil the need to "empoderarnos [¿?]… [mumbles] al decirlo, y definirlo de un modo…" This reference to the importance of "saying" and "defining" the categories was reminiscent of some of the other participants' comments regarding the urge to name something or speak it into existence; Lladó Ortega cast this as a means of self-empowerment, implying, like the Anonymous Lecturer, that this practice originates within marginalised groups themselves and serves their political goals. Lladó Ortega went on to characterise the other side of the "doble filo": "pero a la vez, este… no querer encajonarlo…" Thus, she also allowed for the possibility that such categories might result in pigeonholing the texts in question, an outcome she characterised as undesirable. She went on to comment on the phenomenon in relation to Arroyo Pizarro more specifically:

MLO: […] siento que cada vez, este… mi percepción de la obra de, de Yolanda es cada vez más apertura, ese romper con, con lo fijo, (SMS: Claro) aunque definitivamente se, se… está trabajando lo lésbico, de eso no hay duda.

SMS: Sí.

MLO: Para nada. O sea, es, y algo, y es algo muy importante en la obra de ella, pero... pero... yo la veo más amplia.

SMS: Mm.

MLO: No se, no se queda ahí. Y... no... no lo dejaría así, esa categoría.

Thus, while she unambiguously asserted that Arroyo Pizarro's work deals with lesbian themes, she also stated that the category of "lesbian literature" alone is not sufficient to describe her literature.

Luis Negrón: "No hace falta"

Luis Negrón stood out among my participants as the most vocally opposed to identity-based literary categories. When I asked him about the use of "literatura lésbica" in book marketing, he stated that this was unnecessary: "no hace falta". As evidence for this position, he went on to claim that a book by Arroyo Pizarro "es uno de los libros que más se venden"; he mentioned that the book was published by the Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña, seemingly referring to *Menorragia: histerias de octubre* (2015). He stated that "es un libro que, que en el mercadeo se siente menos, menos evidente", in support of the argument that overt marketing as "literatura lésbica" is unnecessary in order to make sales. He then made assertions about the preferences of readers, which I will analyse in more detail in Chapter 6. Following this, I asked him about the anthology *Los otros cuerpos*, which he had a hand in compiling:

SMS: Pero... (LN: Este...) con *Los otros cuerpos*, por ejemplo, tú... elegiste, em, darle el subtítulo de... literatura lésbica, gay, (LN: Sí) y cuir, ¿no?

LN: Sí, sí.

SMS: Entonces... ¿por qué decidiste hacer eso?

LN: Porque en aquel momento, verdad, lo que era, en aquel momento, no, no... sí había, había una... una resistencia...

SMS: Mm.

LN: ... ¿verdad?, este, distinta, a, a... a llamar las cosas por su nombre.

SMS: Claro.

I posed this question because it seemed to me that his expressed position against identity-based categories conflicted with the choice to represent *Los otros cuerpos* in this way, and I wondered about the reasoning behind that decision. As discussed previously, *Los otros cuerpos* was published in 2007 and was the first anthology of queer literature published in Puerto Rico (Gutiérrez Negrón, 2018, pp. 169–170). When Luis Negrón used the phrase "aquel momento", he referred to the time of the anthology's publication; our interview took place sixteen years later, in 2023. He argued that, when *Los otros cuerpos* was published, there was a resistance to calling things "por su nombre"; similar to Edda López's remarks about calling things what they are, the statement operates on the premise that such categories are natural and pre-exist their naming. Following this, he commented that "Pero no, pero no es lo mismo no tener que llamar, a no llamarlo porque no te gusta llamarlo". The latter ("no llamarlo porque no te gusta llamarlo") seemingly referred to avoiding the use of these categories because of resistance or prejudice, as he described had been the case at the time of publication of *Los otros cuerpos*; he contrasted this with not "having to" call something by its name, perhaps because that need has now dissipated. Negrón seemed to imply that, while identity-based literary categories were once necessary, we have now reached a point when they no longer are. We might compare this position with Méndez Panedas, who argued that they are currently necessary but that there may come a point in the future when they have served their purpose and can be discarded. While these two participants disagreed on the point that had been reached in the timeline, they both characterised the categories as being temporary in their usefulness.

Caroline: "It's always hard finding that balance"

My conversation with Caroline featured a negotiation of positions on the phenomenon of identity-based literary categories specifically within the context of university teaching. We discussed our experiences of the teaching we had received as undergraduate students; this was shaped by Caroline's ongoing student status in contrast with my own, which had ended five years prior. The parallels between my experience and that described by Caroline led to a lively discussion in which I participated more actively than in the equivalent conversations with other participants; as such, this section will include

more analysis of my own interventions. The exchange began towards the end of the interview when I opened up the conversation for Caroline to ask me questions; she asked what had led me to Arroyo Pizarro's work. I explained that, during my own undergraduate studies, I had been frustrated with the lack of texts by women, LGBT people, and people of colour, especially in the part of the curriculum that was compulsory. I went on to explain that

> the things that there were… were… often quite, like, boxed into specific modules that you could choose to take or not, like there was an option to do women's literature. But… therefore, like, if you didn't take that option, you often just wouldn't study women because they were like this, like, sep- there's like, 'literature', and then there's like 'women's literature', right.

I argued that confining literature by women to specific, optional modules, rather than incorporating these into the mainstream curriculum, meant that students who did not go out of their way to study women might never do so; I characterised this as a problem. My comment about "literature" *versus* "women's literature" highlighted that supposedly "neutral" literature is, more often than not, male-dominated. Drawing on what I had said, Caroline responded:

> I kind of agree with you, we had a class in university that was specifically for female… like… authors in Latin America, (SMS: mm) like the fact that you have to have a class on that, I feel like it's kind of unfortunate that your curriculum is so… (SMS: yeah) like. Because, I mean, there's the classics like Borges or… (SMS: Mhm) García Márquez… but like the fact that I have to have a class for like female authors, I feel like that's kind of terrible.

This comment described a similar class specifically on female authors in Latin America. Caroline reflected on how the existence of this class was made necessary by their absence in the main curriculum. She referred to Jorge Luis Borges and Gabriel García Márquez as "the classics", bringing to mind the fact that no female authors have been assigned the same status within Latin American literature that these male authors have. University curricula themselves play a critical role in constructing particular authors as canonical, a status which is then used to justify their place over others in the curricula, a

self-perpetuating paradigm. Caroline went on to temper her criticism of categorisation on the basis of gender: “But it is nice to be in that environment and then to kind of learn about the diversity of women in these countries”. Although she criticised the necessity for the class, she characterised the class itself as an enjoyable and enriching environment in which to focus specifically on women. To this, I responded:

> Yeah, definitely. And this is like something that I am really trying to grapple with, with my project, with this idea of like, what does categorising, um, literature in terms of identity like, what is the effect on that, like, does it end up getting kind of pigeonholed? Because my experience is that sometimes, yeah, like sometimes… And that’s not to say that, you know, we need to stop doing it. But… I think that sometimes… it does make it… easier for those things to be… like optional, and to be… like not… To never be like, the default because, you know… White men’s literature’s never optional, like white men’s literature is… never referred to as “white literature” or like “male literature”, or, you know, “heterosexual literature”. These things are just like the default, and then… you… maybe have this, like optional add-on of like, “oh, and you can also do this thing on the side if you, like, are… interested in it”, but… it’s never… the centre, you know.

Here, I made overt the argument that had underlain my questions about “heterosexual literature” and “male literature” throughout the interviews: that by naming, for example, “women’s literature”, “LGBT literature”, and “Black literature”, we construct the former three categories as default, neutral, and general, whilst the latter three are named as specific and as deviations from the norm. I reiterated my point that, in a teaching context, this paradigm creates a situation in which what we might call “white heterosexual men’s literature” is centred and made mandatory, while literatures represented as “other” in one or more ways are often sidelined and offered as optional, if they are taught at all. Caroline acknowledged this point: “yes, it’s unfortunate that women’s literature isn’t like mixed in with male literature in the same way that it can just like be itself like a default like there shouldn’t have to be the distinction”. She then returned to her argument about the benefits of focusing on women’s literature:

> But then at the same time… like… and I remember Dr Torres and I having this talk… back in the fall semester, like, at the same time… it’s really hard to say that that

> would be a good solution too, (SMS: yeah) because the female perspective and identity is so different in and of itself, like, women are marginalised compared to men, and that's a perspective you'll never get if you pretend like… it's all the same, (SMS: yeah) so it's always hard finding that balance between, like, yeah, we should all be equal. But at the same time, like… there are different perspectives from a lot of different overlapping identities that it… You, you don't, (SMS: exactly) you almost, you almost, you almost don't want to. Yeah.

Here, she referred to a female perspective and identity, which she represented as differing from men's on the basis of marginalisation; again, we see the equation of personal identity and experience with literary output, and the assumption that a specific group, in this case women, will produce writing that is distinct. Her acknowledgement of different perspectives and identities lent nuance to this argument, complicating an understanding of female identities or perspectives as monolithic. To this, I responded:

> Exactly. And I think that's like, kind of what I'm… that's really what I'm… Sort of looking at in my project is like this… cause to me it's… it's kind of a double-edged sword like… you, you know, this, I don't, I, I'm not proposing that the solution is to just be like, "Ohh it's all literature" because I think that then… you know not talking about it… it… Has the same result where then, "Ohh well, if it's all literature then we can just go back to studying these white men and we don't need to make space for anybody else."

In this excerpt, I constructed a hypothetical scenario in which entirely removing identity-based categories of literature could be used to re-establish old norms and exclude marginalised authors and literatures entirely; I clearly stated that I was against such an outcome. Rather than taking static positions, Caroline and I went to and fro throughout this conversation: we both outlined issues with identity-based categories of literature, describing uses of these in teaching based on our experiences as undergraduates; we also both made arguments for their use and described potential risks of removing them, especially without making other changes. Taken as a whole, this dialogue encapsulates much of my own conflicted thought process regarding the use of identity-based categories, especially in an academic context.

Conclusion

Throughout my interviews, Arroyo Pizarro's writing was frequently represented as Black, Puerto Rican, and lesbian. These identity categories, usually used in reference to human subjects, were constructed as essential aspects of the texts. Each of these categorisations has particular implications. The preference for the gendered terms "lesbian" and "lésbico/a", explicitly defined by both gender and sexuality, over other sexuality-related designations distinguishes Arroyo Pizarro's work from gay (male) literature and other possible LGBT or queer/cuir literary categories. In relation to race, the most popular word used to represent Arroyo Pizarro's work was "afro", which I have argued was in part due to the pre-existence of "negra" as a literary term referring to the noir genre. Participants used "literatura afro" to foreground Blackness in their representations of Arroyo Pizarro's work. Among geopolitically-delineated terms, the most prevalent by far was "Puerto Rican" or "puertorriqueña"; while there were some uses of regional terms like "Latin American literature" or "literatura caribeña", these were far less common. Although national literary categories are prevalent globally, the emphasis placed on nationality was particularly notable among Puerto Rican interviewees in this study. Given the absence of national sovereignty in Puerto Rico's neocolonial context, the assertion of a national literature as part of a distinct cultural identity becomes particularly significant. The emphasis on representing Arroyo Pizarro's work as "literatura puertorriqueña" served to leverage this author's writing within this project of cultural nationalism.

Notably, the identity categories used most frequently to represent Arroyo Pizarro's work broadly corresponded to those used to represent the author herself. This might imply an equivalence between author identity and literary category: that if an author is Black, lesbian, or Puerto Rican, then so is her work. However, this was often not a one-to-one correlation, and participants sometimes actively asserted the importance of other factors such as the subject matter or political positioning of a text as defining or contributing to its categorisation. Even within the same interview, participants shifted their positions on what constitutes "literatura afro" or "literatura lésbica". Furthermore, some participants represented specific works within Arroyo Pizarro's oeuvre in different ways; if author identity were directly correlated with the categorisation of works, we

would expect texts by the same author to be categorised in the same way. Thus, these identity-based categories remained ambiguous, resisting uniform or strict definitions.

In comparison with terms like “lesbian literature” and “Black literature”, the absence of terms like “white literature”, “male literature”, and “heterosexual literature” from popular discourses is palpable. As I discussed with participants, this is the product of a wider paradigm in which whiteness, maleness, and heterosexuality are centred and normalised, while Blackness, femaleness, and queerness are marginalised. As a result, literatures that might be represented as “white”, “male”, and “heterosexual” are instead assumed to be so neutral, normal, universal, and general that they need not be named, while “Black”, “female”, and “queer” literatures are a deviation and an exception. This asymmetrical practice of naming then reproduces and reinforces the paradigm of whiteness, maleness, and heterosexuality as the norm.

While participants acknowledged this issue, most ultimately remained in favour of the use of identity-based literary categories, some more hesitantly than others. As a way of challenging this *status quo*, Arroyo Pizarro advocated for actively naming white, male, and heterosexual literary categories alongside those related to marginalised identities. One major argument in favour of categorisation was a need to recognise the differing experiences of marginalised people; it was sometimes assumed that author identities would be clearly discernible in their writing, thus producing distinct categories of literature. Several participants also argued for the categories’ potential to increase the visibility of marginalised groups. Interviewees generally took the position that, within the homophobic, patriarchal, racist, and colonialist system that created a need for them, the use of literary categories like “literatura afro” and “literatura lésbica” is necessary and serves feminist, anti-racist, and anti-homophobic ends. These progressive political connotations also have implications for Arroyo Pizarro’s readerships, as I will explore in the following chapter.

Chapter 6. Reading and Readers: Interviewee Representations of Arroyo Pizarro's Readers and their Reading Practices

Introduction

Feminist reader-response critic Lynne Pearce argued that "women's writing" refers not only to texts written by and about women, but also *for* them (1997, p. 66). One of my questions going into this project was whether "lesbian literature" or "Black literature" might similarly be defined as literature that is "for" a lesbian or Black readership. It also seemed possible that the categorisations themselves might select such a readership: I wondered whether this way of representing texts would either attract or deter certain reader demographics from engaging with them. Intimately entangled with the issue of reader identities is the question of what readers seek from reading experiences: for example, if identification with a text is an important part of the reading experience, it would follow that readers with particular identities would be more likely to enjoy reading Arroyo Pizarro's work. These questions about reader identities and reading experiences were at the heart of my discussions with interviewees. While the sample is too limited to constitute evidence of Arroyo Pizarro's readership demographics at large, I focus instead on participants' representations of readers and reading.

In this chapter, I analyse participant commentary on the interplay between reader identities and reading experiences, considering whether Arroyo Pizarro's readers share the same identities that have been used to represent the author and her works. Central to this discussion is the question of reader motivations and preferences: chiefly, do readers seek some form of identification with their reading materials, or do they read for difference, or something else altogether? I explore multiple ways in which participants represented reader identification with Arroyo Pizarro's writing, including forms of identification beyond straightforward alignment in terms of racial, sexual, gender, or national identities. I also analyse participant comments on reading about different identities and experiences as a valued part of the reading experience. I then discuss other outcomes participants attributed to reading, such as the potential for readers to learn from reading materials or for their worldview or politics to be influenced. Following this,

the section “Effects of Categorisation on Readerships” considers whether categorisations like “literatura afro” and “literatura lésbica” themselves select particular readerships for Arroyo Pizarro’s work, either because they appeal to or, conversely, repel certain readers. Finally, I consider the reader characteristics that participants represented as major barriers to reading and enjoying the author’s writing. As a whole, the chapter includes participants’ representations of both themselves and others as readers. Neither should be taken as necessarily reflecting “true” reading experiences or behaviours; rather, they constitute instances of the social construction of reading and reader identities.

While all readers and reading experiences are unique, some groups of readers were represented as having specific characteristics that set them apart from others: in particular, children and university students were represented in ways that distinguished them from other types of readers. Although interview discussion focused primarily on adult readers, multiple participants also spoke about children as a significant group of Arroyo Pizarro’s readers. Esther Rodríguez Miranda highlighted that the author has “una población escolar bastante marcada” and commented that her children’s books have “un propósito claro”, hinting at a more didactic purpose of these books in comparison with books for adults. Edgardo Machuca of Editorial EDP University, the press that publishes most of Arroyo Pizarro’s children’s books, stated that they had been interested in focusing on young audiences because Arroyo Pizarro had already established “un público general”. His use of this phrase implicitly referred to adult readers, casting these as the default type of reader where children were a deviation. Since I did not interview any children, all comments on child readers and childhood reading experiences were made by adults, skewing their representation: adults do not have full access to the experiences of children, and often project certain values onto them, as I will discuss.

University student reading experiences, while not monolithic, also have certain characteristics that set students apart from other types of readers. Reading a text because it has been required, or even just suggested, by a lecturer in a university context is a markedly different experience, with different goals and outcomes, in comparison with choosing a book independently for leisure reading. Several of my interviewees spoke about student reading experiences at length in relation to their own status as students or

lecturers. Two interviewees, Dayaneira and Caroline, were students themselves, and had been introduced to Arroyo Pizarro's work by lecturers (Marie Ramos Rosado and Daniel Torres, respectively) in a university setting. Several other participants were lecturers and spoke about their students' experiences with and responses to the texts; these comments must be considered in the context of the lecturer-student relationship. Although I often actively invited lecturers to speak about student responses to Arroyo Pizarro's texts, I do not take these lecturers' comments as necessarily "accurate" reflections of their students' experiences or opinions. These considerations regarding child and student readers must be borne in mind throughout discussion of these groups.

Reading for Identification

By "identification" in this context, I refer to reader responses that highlight commonalities between reader and either reading material or author: when a reader's connection with a text or author is based on (perceived) similar experiences, identities, or feelings. Some participants indicated that identification was an important part of the reading experience to them. Edda López highlighted that she and Arroyo Pizarro shared identities and experiences as Black women in Puerto Rico. She commented that "Yolanda... me representa como mujer negra"; not only did she enjoy reading Arroyo Pizarro's work, but she felt represented by the author herself. López clarified that not all aspects of identity needed to be shared in order for her to feel represented: "quien me represente, no necesariamente tiene que ser una mujer cisgénero como yo". She elaborated on the ways in which she felt represented by Arroyo Pizarro:

> EL: Yolanda... me transmite a mí que ella... tiene... el entendimiento de lo que nos, de, de lo que arrastramos las mujeres negras en este país.
>
> SMS: Sí.
>
> EL: Los estereotipos, los, los... el discrimen, pero además la fuerza que tenemos. La, lo que nos forma. En ese sentido, Yolanda me representa, porque... ella, en muchas ocasiones dice las cosas que yo hubiese querido decir pero que no se me han ocurrido.

It was not solely Arroyo Pizarro's identity as a Black woman, but her expression of a particular experience of Black womanhood in Puerto Rico, marked by strength in the face

of discrimination, with which López identified. At other points of the interview, López referred to other Black women with whom she does not share a viewpoint, such as when she stated that "incluso mujeres negras" try to silence other Black women, or when she criticised an "escritora joven, negra" who, according to López, had denied the existence of white privilege and "se ha blanqueado". It is therefore clear that López did not identify equally with all Black women in Puerto Rico, since they are not monolithic in their attitudes and behaviours. As López put it: "me representa de tantas maneras… porque Yolanda ve las cosas, como que desde el mismo espacio desde donde yo las veo". Thus, López identified Arroyo Pizarro's perspective as an important aspect of the way she identified with the author, alongside their shared race, gender, and nationality.

When talking about identifying with reading materials, Caroline similarly specified a particular perspective or political stance alongside shared identity *per se*. When I asked whether she sought out "things that… like speak to any particular part of, like, your identity" in her reading materials, she answered that she did look for "typically, strong feminist texts", a choice which she stated was in service of "finding myself a little bit and trying to understand how these strong, powerful females are dealing with a world of, you know, machismo". While Caroline's answer related to gender, it also specified the political stance of feminism, implying that not just any text by a woman or featuring women would produce identification and therefore be of interest to her.

Dayaneira's discussion of her experience reading Arroyo Pizarro's work focused on her identification with the characters. She first emphasised shared emotional experiences more than shared identities *per se*, stating:

> Me enamoré de la novela [*Violeta*] porque nunca me había sentido tan identificada sobre el amor que le tiene Iolante a Vita. Yo he amado así. Yo he amado intenso a mi "Vita" desde joven justo como Iolante. Mi "Vita" es un hombre cisgénero y blanco. Mi "Vita" se llama Rodrigo[8]. Siempre hemos intentado estar juntos, pero nunca funciona así que, siempre nos vemos por un tiempo; luego, peleamos, y luego, nos contentamos. Siempre volvemos el uno al otro, y por eso, amé la comparación de Iolante hacia Vita como cometa. Lloré mucho leyéndolo.

[8] Name has been changed.

In this excerpt, Dayaneira drew a parallel between the central relationship of *Violeta* and her own relationship. She specifically cited the identity of her on-again-off-again partner as a cisgender man, implicitly contrasting this with the character Vita, who is a lesbian; by including this detail, she conveyed that the similarities were more to do with the emotional intensity and the turbulent nature of the relationships than with identity. Nevertheless, when I asked if factors like race, gender, and sexuality had contributed to her reading experience, she replied: “Sí creo profundamente que la raza, género y la sexualidad ha sido parte de mi identificación con la novela. Primero, soy una mujer puertorriqueña negra, afrodescendiente”. She went on to state that “Me gusta que la protagonista de esta novela sea una mujer de mi isla, negra, gorda, feminista y lesbiana”. She thus highlighted race, gender, and nationality as aspects of her identity that she shared with the protagonist of the novel and which contributed to her identification with this character. Regarding sexuality, she described more of a distinction:

> Ahora, sobre sexualidad me identifico más relacionada al acto de tener sexo ya que, desde mi perspectiva el sexo entre Iolante y Vita, iba más allá del acto carnal sino que existía una conexión de almas. Soy una persona demisexual, es decir, necesito una conexión con otra persona para tener sexo y pues, siento que el sexo entre Rodrigo y yo va más allá que solo "quitarnos las ganas".

In this case, although her sexual orientation was not the same as that of the protagonist, she nevertheless identified what she characterised as a similarity regarding their respective relationships with sex and sexuality. We then had the following exchange:

> SMS: Por lo general, buscas libros que tengan protagonistas que pertenezcan a esos grupos (mujeres/negrxs/LGBT/puertorriqueñxs/etc)? Y/o que sean escritos por autorxs de los mismos?
>
> D: No. Creo que cuando busco libros, siempre escojo "el que me llame", pero la mayoría de libros que he leído son de relaciones y personajes heterosexuales porque creo que la mayoría se tratan de relaciones así. Los libros de personas negrxs y, gays han sido marginados justo como a las personas negrxs y gays.

While she said she had enjoyed reading about a Black, Puerto Rican, lesbian protagonist, Dayaneira stated that she did not tend to seek out texts of this nature. However, she

attributed this not to a lack of interest on her part, but rather to a scarcity of such books, which she stated was the result of societal racism and homophobia. In response to the second part of my question, she replied: "Libros escritos por autorxs de los mismos, pues la realidad, no le presto tanta atención a lxs autorxs sino primero al libro y luego a lxs autorxs". This statement that she paid more attention to the books themselves than the identity of the authors chimed with her focus throughout on character identity rather than author identity.

Esther Rodríguez Miranda cited shared experiences of race as a significant part of what had first interested her about Arroyo Pizarro. She commented that "es a través de la afronegritud (SMS: Mm), ¿verdad?, de lo afro, que entonces, empiezo a leerla, más que por la cuestión sexual o lésbica, empiezo, eh, mi conexión con lo afro", emphasising her own connection with Blackness. The phrase "lo afro" seemed to cast this as a theme of Arroyo Pizarro's writing, rather than solely referring to the author's identity. Rodríguez Miranda made further references to identifying with Arroyo Pizarro's work; these did not always relate explicitly to race. When I began to ask whether she preferred to read texts on such topics, she responded:

> ERM: Pues yo la leo para encontrarme.
>
> SMS: ¿Mm?
>
> ERM: Eh... esa... verdad, cuando ella me dice "publiqué algo", pues yo quiero encontrarme en eso, porque pues, al conocerla, al conocer su obra, al tener una empatía con ella, eh, sé que lo que ella escriba de alguna manera va a narrarme algo que, que, con lo que yo me puedo identificar, eh, para bien o para mal. A veces son escenas o cuentos sumamente pesados y tristes y termina uno con el corazón desgarrado cuando lo está leyendo, pero hay un proceso de identificación, ¿no?
>
> SMS: Mm.
>
> ERM: Eh, así que cuando me acerco a una obra de ella, usualmente estoy buscando qué es lo que me va a enganchar, qué es lo que me va a gustar y qué es lo que yo voy a decir "sí, esto... yo, yo concuerdo con esto, yo me identifico, yo empatizo con lo que está puesto en este momento."

She thus emphasised identification as a crucial aspect of the reading experience for her, and described actively searching for these aspects of Arroyo Pizarro's work. While in the above excerpt, she focused on finding herself in the texts, Rodríguez Miranda went on to expand this to other people close to her:

> ERM: [...] muchas veces me parece que sus personajes son amigas, hermanas, tías, primas mías.
>
> SMS: ¿Sí?
>
> ERM: Tristemente, (SMS laughs) porque hay muchos cuentos que son muy tristes. Hay un cuento que ella tiene que se llama "Aristotela" que es horrible, de una mujer deambulante en Río Piedras, y, y yo lo leo y, y veo a las mujeres en Río Piedras que son deambulantes, eh... y pues y veo gente que conozco que deambularon, las veo en el cuento, y eso es bastante fuerte.

Thus, according to Rodríguez Miranda, identification with the text did not have to mean seeing her own personal experiences reflected therein; it could also include drawing parallels between the text and the experiences of her friends, family, or acquaintances. She emphasised this identification as being central to her emotional connection with Arroyo Pizarro's texts. Although she did not explicitly state that the gender of characters was part of this identification, it is noteworthy that all of the people she mentioned were women (female friends, sisters, aunts, and female cousins), suggesting that gender may have been an important aspect.

Some interviewees also represented other readers, besides themselves, as experiencing or placing importance on identification with their reading materials. Caroline spoke about Arroyo Pizarro's identity as an "Afro Latina" (see Chapter 4) and a lesbian as a potential source of identification for readers with similar identities. She related this to her observations of others' relationships with authors and public figures more broadly:

> friends I have in the queer community, like when they are able to find an author or an actor, or someone who fits their identity, like matches their identity, they... like, I just feel like they just seem so much more confident. Like, "yes, there is someone else out there like me. And you know what they're doing great things and they're

> sharing… real experiences about their lives." And so, um. I don't know, I like, I like seeing other people like, be empowered by people in their community.

Thus, she constructed author identity as a potential source of identification for queer readers, which she stated would result in increased confidence and empowerment. She constructed a shared "community" between authors and readers on the basis of shared queer identity, representing them as having something in common and existing in relationship to one another, even when not personally acquainted. Caroline's description of this identification between reader and author, and the resultant empowerment, focused not on herself but on her perceptions of her friends' experiences. By contrast, she said of her own reading practices that "oddly enough, though, I don't think I've actually sought out literature that specifically focuses on the Asian identity". As an Asian American, she did not actively search for literature related to her racial or cultural background; she framed this as somewhat surprising, but did not provide a reason for it. She thus gave identification more weight in her representation of others' reading practices than of her own.

Some participants emphasised the importance for children specifically of identifying with their reading materials. It bears repeating that none of my interviewees were children themselves and that all participant comments on children therefore come from an adult perspective. Edgardo Machuca stated that children "tratan de identificarse con lo que leen" and that it is therefore important that they "vean que están en un libro" and "se ven en ilustraciones y el texto". Lola Rosario also referred to illustrations as a way for children to identify with texts. Speaking about Arroyo Pizarro's children's book *Pelo bueno*, she commented:

> LR: I forgot to mention that, too, that is so important, you see those images…
>
> SMS: Which images?
>
> LR: The images in the book.
>
> SMS: Oh, yes.

LR: You (SMS: yes) know, they look like your abuela, they look like your sister, you know, they look like your titi, (SMS: Mm) you know, they look like your primo, they look like you!

SMS: Yeah.

LR: Everybody doesn't look like you, everybody doesn't look like me.

In this excerpt, Rosario referred to the imagined child reader in the second person, constructing them as looking like the images in the book; she thus emphasised the importance of these images for children who have afro hair and dark skin, like the characters of *Pelo bueno*. The Anonymous Lecturer also mentioned *Pelo bueno*, telling me that her grandson, eight years old at the time of our interview, owned several of Arroyo Pizarro's children's books. She commented that "el de *Pelo bueno*, [¿?] me encanta porque mi nieto tiene un pelo rizo". She thus implied that the book held value for her grandson because of his own curly hair, perhaps because this shared feature meant that he could identify with the characters.

Several university lecturers also described their students as having experienced identification with texts by Arroyo Pizarro that they studied in class. As previously noted, these comments from lecturers should not necessarily be taken as representative of the students' own reading experiences. Nevertheless, they communicate the value that the lecturers themselves placed on students identifying with reading materials. Perkins spoke about teaching Arroyo Pizarro's novel *Caparazones* in what she described as two very different university environments. Speaking about her current place of work, she said:

here at Texas State, we're a, we are a Hispanic-Serving Institution, (SMS: Mm) which means that we have a, you know, a certain percentage of our student population, uh, self-identifies as Latino or Hispanic, um, and it's a large percentage of the student body, um, (SMS: Okay) so… they… uh, in general, I find that our students are… a lot more… they're, they're open and willing, and they're excited to read about cultural content, [mumbles] cultural contexts that have a lot of relevance to their own lives and their own (SMS: Mhm) experiences.

Although she did not specifically mention Arroyo Pizarro or *Caparazones* in this excerpt, it immediately followed her description of teaching the text at a previous university; in this context, her comments about Hispanic or Latino students being open and willing to read material relevant to their own lives appears to apply to Arroyo Pizarro's work. Perkins therefore represented students as identifying with the content of *Caparazones* on the basis of shared Latino/Hispanic identity; this is closely linked to the US context, where Latino/Hispanic identities are marginalised and also tend to be represented more homogeneously than they are in Latin American countries themselves. Perkins later commented:

> the majority [of the students] are from, you know, have cultural ties to Mexico or Central America, so we don't, it's not (SMS: Right) as many that come from, you know… Puerto Rico or Cuba or the Dominican Republic, but still, you know, there's a different cultural conversation happening there versus, you know students from… (SMS: Of course) um… you know, non-Latino… white, you know, Euro-descendant populations (SMS: Yeah) in the US.

Although she described the students as mostly having Mexican or Central American backgrounds rather than Caribbean ones, thus recognising the differences between their cultural contexts and that of Arroyo Pizarro, she also constructed a common Latino experience in general, particularly in a US context. She characterised Hispanic or Latino students as being more open to the text because of their identification with the cultural context, saying that by comparison,

> I think other cultural contexts, it can be a little bit more… there, there are some barriers to overcome, sometimes, with some students, you know, I don't want to paint with a broad brush because it's not everyone's experience, but, you know, that, that unfamiliarity can… can create maybe some dissonance that students have to work with.

Perkins seemed to attribute this discomfort among some students to their unfamiliarity, as white or Euro-descendant people, with Latino or Hispanic cultural contexts. However, it is worth noting that Perkins' other main experience of teaching *Caparazones*, in which she described a great deal of student discomfort, was at a university in Utah, where she

herself attributed students' refusal to read the novel to their religious backgrounds rather than to their race; this will be discussed in more detail later in the chapter.

Perkins also made mention of LGBT students' responses to Arroyo Pizarro, mentioning that, at Texas State University, "I had, um, I had some, you know, I had students that were… um… queer… (SMS: Mhm) and… lesbian and bi, and I had students that were trans". In this case, she did not expand on how these identities impacted the students' relationship with the material. On the other hand, she emphasised sexuality a little more in reference to teaching at Southern Utah University:

> some of my students in that class were… um… bisexual… or… (SMS: Mhm) lesbian… or… kind of in the, you know, the realm of queer… experience. Um… and they… loved it, you know they, (SMS: Mm) to, to be able to, to talk openly and discuss this work of literature, you know… they, they told me was like the first time that… you know, in a university context, they were able to do that, and it was something that they had really… wanted to be able to do.

In this excerpt, she stated that the experience of studying *Caparazones* had been particularly impactful for LGBT students at Southern Utah University, as it allowed them to discuss queer themes in a university context; this was likely influenced by a taboo regarding such topics in this specific environment, which I will discuss in more detail later. Perkins' relatively lesser focus on the experiences of LGBT students at Texas State by comparison may have been partly because such topics and similar texts were already more openly discussed in that environment, implying that identification on the basis of shared identity may be highly contextual and impacted by factors like the levels of stigmatisation of particular identities in specific environments.

I asked Mónica Lladó Ortega, a lecturer at the University of Puerto Rico in Carolina, whether she had observed differences between students' reactions to Arroyo Pizarro and whether these related to the students' identities. She responded:

> MLO: Es interesante, este, yo pienso que sí. [pause] Pienso que, por ejemplo, un, un estudiante trans… que… que tuve, recuerdo muy bien que… que me agradeció muchísimo (SMS: Mm) al traer esos textos porque se sentía que, que por fin, este, se veía.

SMS: Mm.

MLO: En, en un texto literario, cuando antes era como una invisibili- (SMS: Claro) invisibilización de su… su proceso, y, y… y sí fue muy vocal con eso, sí, sí siento que sí.

She focused on a trans student, stating that the student saw themselves in the text, another reference to identification. Wondering whether this response had been to a text or texts with trans characters specifically, I asked which text they had been studying; Lladó Ortega did not specify, but stated that this student "estuvo conmigo cuando estábamos con el congreso de literatura cuir" and that "todo ese congreso completo fue… tan importante en su proceso". She thus implied that this student's experience of identification went beyond an individual text, and that they had identified with "literatura cuir" in general. The lecturer commented: "ese lector que se identifica, verdad, con estos [¿] [mumbles] van… a conmoverse, tal vez más profundamente", arguing that those readers who identify with a text in some way may have a deeper emotional connection with it.

Daniel Torres, who teaches at Ohio State University, focused particularly on the responses of Black students to studying Arroyo Pizarro. He noted that in his work,

> tengo también muchas estudiantes afro-americanas y afro-americanos, (SMS: Mm) y ver una autora afro-americana, o afro-caribeña, es una cosa, recuerdo una estudiante llorando, que me decía, "bueno, profesor, pero es que es la primera vez que yo veo y he leído una persona que se parece a mí".

Rather than the characters or themes of the text being studied, Torres stated that the students' identification was with the author herself. He represented this identification as emotionally impactful for his Black students.

While all three lecturers represented identification as a salient and impactful aspect of the student reading experience, they notably focused on different aspects of identity. While I can only draw limited conclusions due to the lack of student demographics, as well as the fact that these perspectives came from lecturers rather than students themselves, I believe there is some room for speculation about the importance of context

to these accounts of identification. Torres' account seems to have been influenced by the apparently high number of Black students in his class; it may be that the other lecturers did not mention Blackness as a salient point of identification because they had fewer Black students. Perkins' focus on Latino/Hispanic students at Texas State University, but not at Southern Utah University, was related to the far higher number of these students at the former institution. Conversely, while she mentioned having LGBT students at both institutions, she particularly emphasised their identification with Arroyo Pizarro's writing at Southern Utah University, which seemed to be related to the fact that it was more unusual to read a text featuring queer characters and themes in this environment; Perkins represented the experience of identification as being more emotionally impactful for students in this context. It is unsurprising that Lladó Ortega, teaching at a Puerto Rican institution with presumably mostly Puerto Rican students, would not focus on Latino/Hispanic identity as an important aspect of reader identification with Arroyo Pizarro's texts in the way that a US-based lecturer like Perkins would. For one thing, Latino/Hispanic identity is almost universal in Puerto Rico, recorded at 98.9% in the 2020 US census (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020). Latino/Hispanic identity, being the norm, would be less likely to be considered a noteworthy aspect of the text in this context; Lladó Ortega would also likely have few non-Latino/Hispanic students with whom to compare the reading experiences of Latino/Hispanic students. Furthermore, Latino/Hispanic students in Puerto Rico would be unlikely to experience stigmatisation for this identity in their everyday contexts in the way that those in the US likely would have done, perhaps making identification on the basis of this identity less emotionally impactful to them. Additionally, as I have discussed previously, "Latino/Hispanic" is likely too broad of a category to have much relevance in a Puerto Rican context: Puerto Ricans tended to frame things in terms of the specific national context rather than with broad regional classifications. As discussed above, when Dayaneira, a Puerto Rican student, commented on her identification with Arroyo Pizarro's texts, she referred to herself as "puertorriqueña" and stated that she had enjoyed reading about a character who was "de mi isla"; the common identity she referenced was more specifically national rather than regional.

Overall, many participants represented identification as an important and emotionally impactful part of their own and others' reading experiences. The emphasis on identification would seem to imply that readers who share identities with the author or character(s) might be more likely to read and enjoy Arroyo Pizarro's work, since they could experience identification. However, this is complicated by the indications that the relevance of identification is significantly influenced by context: participants represented identification on the basis of identity as a more valuable part of the reading experience in contexts where the identity in question was more stigmatised, implying that the importance of identification is variable.

Reading for Difference

Although participants often characterised identification as a positive aspect of the reading experience, this was not to the exclusion of reading for *difference*, that is to say, reading about identities and experiences different from one's own. Caroline represented her experience reading the short story "Changó" as an opportunity to read about an identity different from her own, which she characterised as positive. She commented that "having the, mm... the perspective of, um, el yo, from the perspective of someone who is... in the trans community" was "very new to me" and that "looking at it from that perspective was really unique". She emphasised the novelty and uniqueness of reading a text with a trans character, particularly as the point of view character, representing this as an interesting and positive aspect of her reading experience. Alexandra Gonzenbach Perkins and Marie Ramos Rosado both indicated their own interest in reading literature with queer or LGBT themes or characters, while stating that they were themselves heterosexual. I asked Perkins:

> SMS: OK. Um... do you... do you think, and, and this is where, like you, you don't have to get super into it if you don't want to, but like, do you think that your own... identity... has an impact on your interest in her [Arroyo Pizarro's] work?
>
> AGP: Mm. That's a good question. Um... I think... I think in general, it's not so much my identity, but more my experience (SMS: Mm) that has drawn me into... interest in Yolanda, but also in, you know, LGBTQ authors and artists across the board. Um... so... I mean, I'm... you know, cis, heterosexual, white, middle-class woman

> (laughing) from the United States. Um, (SMS: Mm) so, my social identity… you know, I don't really share a lot of social identity with, um… the authors and performers that I study.

She noted that her sexuality, race, and nationality differed from those of Arroyo Pizarro and other authors she researches. However, she still linked her interest in these authors and their identities with her own life experience. She explained that she had gone to a performing arts high school, which she described as "a space where people could really be who they wanted to be", stating that this "really kind of, connected me to those communities in a, in a unique way". She elaborated on the link between this experience and her interest in literary expressions of identity:

> I had the experience of, you know, going through those, like really formative years in a space where… you know, I had friends who were… gay, lesbian, bi… um, trans, and they were able to… explore and express those… identities, like in a, in a really safe and comfortable way, kind of within the context of the school, and then also… I got to see, from a really early age, how those identities played into the, the artwork that they were creating […] I got to see how… people did or did not tie their social identities into their artistic creation from a really early age, and, you know, seeing my friends and people who were really close to me doing that, I think… has always kind of inspired my interest in, (SMS: Mhm) um… you know, in how, how artwork broadly writ can be… a space for self-actualisation and self-representation.

She therefore attributed her interest in literature with queer themes to her proximity to LGBT people and self-expressive art from an early age. While she did not tie this interest to her own sexuality, she related it to herself and her life experiences in another way. Ramos Rosado also spoke about being interested in literature with LGBT themes as a heterosexual woman. In a conversation about the categorisation "literatura lésbica", Ramos Rosado and I had the following exchange:

> SMS: Eso es algo que, que cuestiono que si… con decir… (MRR: [¿?]) "literatura lésbica"… (MRR: [¿?]) ¿queremos decir que es para lesbianas solamente, o no?
> MRR: (overlapping) ¡Ajá! Ajá.
> SMS: Y…

MRR: (overlapping) Y yo creo que no.

SMS: (overlapping) como que, ¿eso limita…?

MRR: (overlapping) No, no, no, no.

SMS: ¿No? ¿Cree que no?

MRR: Eso es lo que tienes que trabajar. Eso es fuerte.

SMS: Sí. Eso es algo que me interesa. Em…

MRR: Ajá.

SMS: Entonces, usted diría que no, que n- que eso no implica que… sólo las mujeres lesbianas… em, van a leer…

MRR: (overlapping) No, porque yo la leo.

At another point in the interview, Ramos Rosado stated, "yo soy heterosexual"; thus, she argued that lesbian literature is not only for lesbian readers because she, a heterosexual woman, reads it. She was vehement in her refutation of the premise, saying "No" repeatedly. She also stated that her students' interest in such texts did not necessarily correlate with their own identities:

SMS: Mhm. Sí. Em, y ¿cree que… la… este, la identidad del lector influye en su… recepción de la, del texto, digamos?

MRR: Fíjate… pienso… ah, puedo pensar que sí, puedo pensar que no, porque yo he dado el… yo le he da- [¿ahora en este semestre?], eh, los que se interesaron en hablar de ella, porque yo, los textos yo no los impongo, yo pongo una lista, y digo, "ella es fulana, es lesbiana, es negra, ¿quién va a coger ese texto?" y el, los que lo cogieron fueron varones.

In this case, she equivocated a little more at first but pointed out again that people other than lesbians are open to reading Arroyo Pizarro's work, this time citing her male students' choice to study the author's texts. Ramos Rosado focused on openness to reading the text in the first place; she did not comment on whether the students' identities affected enjoyment of the text upon actually reading it.

Learning from Reading

Learning was frequently mentioned as a salient aspect of the reading experience. Participants spoke about learning both as an intentional goal sought out by readers and

as a potentially unintended outcome. It was suggested that people read in order to learn about identities, both those different from their own and those that they share. Esther Rodríguez Miranda commented that "quizás la gente de piel blanca en este país la leen [a Arroyo Pizarro] para... para entender la experiencia afro". She thus suggested that some white people in Puerto Rico were interested in learning about the Black experience; that they used reading as a means to do so; and that Arroyo Pizarro's work might be chosen for this purpose. Several participants spoke about students in particular learning about identities other than their own through reading; of course, learning is generally assumed to be a part of the student reading experience, but this need not necessarily focus on learning about identity in particular. Dayaneira highlighted the potential of reading as a way to learn about particular identities, including identities that she herself shared. When I asked her whether, having enjoyed *Violeta*, she was interested in reading other books by Arroyo Pizarro, Dayaneira responded that she was very interested in reading *Transcaribeñx* and that "Espero poder encontrar ahí más formas de educarme sobre la comunidad LGBTQ, personas trans, negrxs y parte del Caribe". She had already stated that she herself was Black and Puerto Rican, meaning that she shared at least two of the identities she cited: reading to learn is not limited to learning about others, but may also be in search of information about aspects of one's own identity. Caroline, an undergraduate student at the time of our interview, stated that she had come to read Arroyo Pizarro because she told Daniel Torres that she "was really interested in learning a little bit more about the Caribbean"; the lecturer suggested a text by Arroyo Pizarro alongside a number of other authors. Underlying this choice on Torres' part is the assumption that reading books by Caribbean authors is a way to learn about the Caribbean. This is not necessarily always true: an author may write about a completely different context from their own life; furthermore, even when an author does write about the Caribbean, the text may be fictional, calling into question the extent to which one can "learn" about the real world from it. In the context of Caroline's desire to learn about the Caribbean, Torres' suggestion of Arroyo Pizarro's "Changó" frames this specific text as offering an educational opportunity. As discussed in Chapter 5, in my interview with Torres, he frequently represented "Changó" as "literatura caribeña", emphasising the Caribbean aspect of the text. He further commented that "Changó" "es un cuento que les muestra a los estudiantes y a las estudiantes todo lo que es este desarrollo de la raza,

(SMS: Mm) pero también de la identidad sexual en el caribe". He thus proposed that the text not only enabled students to learn about the Caribbean in general, but also about race and sexual identity in the region, bringing in these other overlapping aspects of identity.

A number of participants particularly emphasised the importance of learning for child readers. Lola Rosario argued that, through reading Arroyo Pizarro's children's book *Pelo bueno*, child readers would learn a specific message about hair and racial justice. She explained that the book's title refers to "this concept of… your hair can only be good if it's, if it's straight, (SMS: Mhm) if it's lacio". As previously noted, racial designations in Puerto Rico are determined based on a number of phenotypical features in combination, one of which is hair texture, which can even override skin tone as a criterion (Godreau, 2015, pp. 36–37). Hilda Lloréns explains the significance of hair, particularly for women and girls in Puerto Rico:

> Hair is an important 'site' of Eurocentric beauty, and [sic] in mainstream Puerto Rico where straight hair is valorized as the 'most' beautiful, appropriate, and professional. As a result, thousands of girls and women whose hair is other than straight suffer great psychic and psychological distress (Llórens, 'Fugitive Blackness' 115). For instance, the binary oppositions of good and bad are mapped onto the body with straight hair labeled as 'good' (*pelo bueno*) and 'kinky' hair as 'bad' (*pelo malo*). (2018, pp. 35–36)

The terms "pelo bueno" and "pelo malo" are used "naturally as descriptors" (Godreau, 2015, p. 37) to refer to these hair types. Rosario described Arroyo Pizarro's *Pelo bueno* as teaching children a counter-message to the narrative of afro hair as "pelo malo". She argued that the book is

> Erasing that narrative, that, that we are told, and that, whether it's our family, whether it's… friends, whether it's in school, whether it's… we tell ourselves, right, or society, right? Um, the… just, just right off the bat, right? It's, it is, it is, it is good hair. Not only is it… something other than "it's not bad hair", (SMS: Mm) it's beautiful hair, it's good hair, it's… majestic, right?

Thus, she emphasised the text as having a didactic function and the potential to change societal narratives. She argued that communicating these messages to young children is particularly important in order to pre-empt negative and damaging narratives:

> LR: Um, and that if someone… were to say that, to you, or to say, [mumbles] hear it, hear, hear it said, that you immediately know, "A, I'm not gonna be quiet", right, or, or you say, "A, it's untrue, (SMS: Mm) B, I'm not gonna be quiet", right? Um… I'd say, I'd say that.
>
> SMS: Yeah.
>
> LR: And from a very young age, because, right, we learn, we learn these things… when we're children. [mumbles] [if we're?] a bunch of kids just playing, the- [?] not gonna know.
>
> SMS: Mhm.
>
> LR: Right? We're not gonna know, how [?] [just?] because society or… or… adults have told you, (SMS: Mm) [?] before, and then you start to believe it.

Rosario emphasised the importance of conveying this message at a young age, since children hear these harmful narratives from adults and internalise them. She cast the message of *Pelo bueno* as potentially pre-empting chilren hearing the narrative that afro hair is "pelo malo" and arming them with the knowledge of its falsehood and the ability to challenge it. She highlighted the potential for the message of the book to improve the self-esteem of young Black children, stating that it is important "for them to understand that, desde pequeña, desde, like, right off the bat, (SMS: Mhm) 'you're just the most beautiful thing ever'" and that "they've instilled that in you as a child, right, you know the beauty of you".

Rosario told me that the first time she saw Arroyo Pizarro in person was at an event where the author did a reading of *Pelo bueno*. Thus, Rosario's experience of the book was not one of individualised reading, but of collective listening to and watching the author read the book in front of an audience that included children; this context shaped the meaning and effect of the book for Rosario. She described how, during the event, Arroyo Pizarro had brought four or five little girls on stage and handed them crowns to wear and copies

of the book to read along. Rosario described her own emotional response to this: “And I thought that that was so… ‘empowering’ sounds cliché”. She contextualised her reaction by speaking about her own experience as a young girl, saying that “when I was that age… I wasn’t given any of that”. Throughout the interview, Rosario discussed how her Black heritage had not been celebrated in her family or her community, that “I didn’t always identify as Afro-Boricua” and “I didn’t know about our… you know… our grandes mujeres negras”. Because of this, she felt that she had “a whole lot to catch up on”, indicating a desire to learn about her own identity through reading writers like Arroyo Pizarro, since she said she had missed out on this in earlier years. Rosario recognised that the young girls reading *Pelo bueno* along with Arroyo Pizarro might have had different experiences from her own: “maybe they’ve already heard that”. Nevertheless, she characterised her own experience of witnessing a younger generation receiving the messages that her childhood had lacked as “para mí tan impactante”. She acknowledged that, as an adult, she did not have access to the experiences of contemporary children reading *Pelo bueno*, but related her response to the book with her own childhood experiences and her desire to learn from reading.

Rosario also argued that the book would have a positive impact on the world even beyond those children who directly identified with it:

> I’m convinced that… it builds un, un mundo más, más lindo, (SMS: Mm) un mundo más chévere, because then… I can see the beauty in you, and I can learn from you, right, and you can see in me, and I won’t say, “I need to look like you”, why would I need to look like (SMS: yeah) you? You know? Or I would say, you know, “that’s my friend, and my friend is beautiful… and so am I”, (SMS: Mhm) you know

Thus, she described the book not only as instilling self-worth in Black children or children with afro hair, but also as encouraging all children to recognise and value one another’s differences, which she stated would build a better world more widely. Similarly, the Anonymous Lecturer described how she had suggested to Edgardo Machuca that Arroyo Pizarro should visit her grandson’s school, stating as part of her reasoning that “es interesante la mezcla de niños que hay, y se, es bueno que, que vean…” Although she had emphasised her grandson’s curly hair when discussing the importance of *Pelo bueno*, she also cast the book as relevant to this “mixture” of children; like Lola Rosario, she

implied that *Pelo bueno*'s value was not limited only to those with this characteristic and that other children would also be able to learn something from it.

While several participants discussed the potential for children to learn about race from reading, characterising this as a positive outcome, the possibility of children learning about LGBT identities from their reading materials was represented as more controversial. Edgardo Machuca emphasised that Editorial EDP Univeristy's mission is to "crear consciencia de temas importantes como antirracismo". While they have published multiple children's books by Arroyo Pizarro that deal with topics related to race, they have not published any with LGBT characters or themes. When I asked Machuca about this, he stated that "hay que tener cuidado" with these themes for a young audience, gesturing at controversy regarding reading material for children that features LGBT characters or topics. In a similar vein, while discussing which of Arroyo Pizarro's books she had read, Marie Ramos Rosado stated that she had read "las bien polémicas", listing among these the children's book *Mis dos mamás me miman*, which Arroyo Pizarro self-published; she described this as "un cuento donde aparecen los personajes cuir, para la escuela elemental, que eso es... bastante..." Although she trailed off, the comment came in the context of discussing Arroyo Pizarro's controversial books; the implication, therefore, was that including queer characters in a book for elementary school children is controversial. These comments hint at the societal taboo around representing non-hegemonic sexuality in children's literature. Rather than reflecting anything about the reading preferences of children themselves, this taboo is connected to deep-seated homophobia and transphobia among adults which manifest in the assumptions that LGBT people are inherently more sexual than their cisgender, heterosexual counterparts; that they pose a danger to children; and that reading about LGBT identities is inappropriate for children. This was one area in which the potential to learn from reading was represented as potentially controversial, specifically in relation to child readers.

Regarding university students, the Anonymous Lecturer discussed using Arroyo Pizarro's work as a way of teaching and learning about race and racism, especially for those students who are not themselves Black. She stated that at the university where she teaches, there are more "estudiantes que son más... de tez más blanca, eh, y menos

estudiantes evidentemente negros" because "le es muy difícil entrar a los, a los estudiantes jóvenes negros, afrodescendientes, de lugares marginalizados"; she attributed this state of affairs to issues with schooling, precarity, resources, and support systems for those populations. She noted that, among her classes, "la mayoría son estudiantes... no, no negros... tampoco blancos, porque no, no hay una raza así fija, pero... están receptivos, (SMS: ¿Sí?) a mí me ha sorprendido, han estado muy receptivos, muy receptivos, entienden perfectamente". She did not consider the race of her students to have been a barrier to their understanding of racial justice issues. It should be noted that this was in the context of discussing a class explicitly focused on Black women in Puerto Rican literature, into which students chose to enrol; it seems likely that self-selection would play a part here, as students choosing this class would likely already have some awareness of and interest in racial justice issues. The Anonymous Lecturer stated that she uses Arroyo Pizarro's texts "para poder hablar sobre el tema de afrodescendencia" and that "Uso la, la literatura para que [los estudiantes] entiendan qué es lo que está pasando"; she used literature, including texts by Arroyo Pizarro, as a way of discussing real-world issues of race and racism and fostering "empatía, y, y comprensión, con los afrodescendientes". Discussing the problems with the judicial system's inability to recognise and effectively deal with racism, the lecturer attributed this to a lack of education: "Pues, primero tienes que empezar con trabajar con otros miembros de, de la judicatura... (SMS: Mhm) y la... eh, los miembros del, del, de la administración de tribunales para que entiendan que es racismo. Y esa educación falta." She linked this issue to her own goals in teaching her class, stating that she uses literature as a way to

> generar un pensamiento antirracista, eh... ser aliado, [¿?] de qué tú estés en qué posición, siempre hablo de cuando usted esté en una posición de poder, que pueda incorporar y pensar en, en que... en sus espacios de poder también se incorpore gente evidentemente negra, pues eso, esta clase le puede servir para que usted piense [...]

She characterised her intention as being to influence these students with relative privilege, who might one day be in positions of power, to be antiracist, effect change, and bring Black people into those spaces. Thus, she argued that a lack of education on issues

of race and racism causes further injustice, such as that found in the legal system; that it is necessary to educate those who may one day hold power, so that they will be antiracist allies; and that literature, including texts by Arroyo Pizarro, is an effective way of teaching about these issues. Not only did she characterise reading as a way of learning, but also as a way of influencing those readers' worldviews, and, by extension, effecting political change in the longer term.

The idea that reading could change readers' minds on political issues was echoed, albeit more abstractly, by several other interviewees. Caroline stated that "people need to be exposed to more material like this… because I, I think that's how you're gonna… expand your mind and, you know, not think so like one-sided on issues". Her references to "expand[ing] your mind" and not thinking "one-sided" were somewhat vague, but hinted that reading material like Arroyo Pizarro's texts could positively influence readers' perspectives. Mónica Lladó Ortega made similar comments, stating that teaching texts with "los temas LGBT" is a way to "transformar y, y ayudar a la gente a, a abrir su, su pensar", implying that the act of reading LGBT-themed works makes readers more accepting of LGBT people. Edda López commented that Arroyo Pizarro "hace más… eh… comprensible para personas cisgénero de qué se trata… la diversidad de género", suggesting that cisgender people can and do learn about gender diversity by reading the author's work. She continued: "nos lo cuenta… [¿?] ahí para que lo procesemos y decidamos qué vamos a hacer con nuestras vidas", vaguely implying that this acquired knowledge would inspire some change of behaviour in these readers. It was widely assumed among my interviewees that reading would lead to learning, and that learning about other identities, in turn, would lead to a change in outlook and perhaps behaviour in favour of antiracist, pro-LGBT, and other social justice causes; Arroyo Pizarro's texts were represented as the type of reading materials that would yield these outcomes.

Effects of Categorisation on Readerships

Interviewees suggested that Arroyo Pizarro's readers included both those who share the identities that have been used to represent the author and her texts, such as lesbian, Black, and Puerto Rican, and those with other identities. According to participant accounts, readers varyingly seek both identification and difference in their reading materials, further evidence that Arroyo Pizarro's texts have something to offer to a wide

range of readers of different identities. However, the question remains as to whether categorisation of Arroyo Pizarro's work, particularly as "literatura afro" and "literatura lésbica", may in and of itself affect its readership. This was one of the questions that had motivated me from the very beginning, when I observed that the overt signalling of lesbian content on the cover of *Lesbianas en clave caribeña*, the very thing that had drawn me in, could produce different reactions in others. I thought it likely that the emphasis on identity categories in the representation of this author's writing might both actively appeal to certain readers, while being a deterrent to others. Seeking other perspectives, I posed the question to my interviewees. I asked the author herself:

> SMS: Y ¿tú crees que... eso de... categorizarte como "literatura negra", "literatura lésbica", lo que sea, crees que eso afecta quién te lee?
>
> YAP: Claro, sí.
>
> SMS: ¿Sí?
>
> YAP: Pero yo, ay, yo estoy dispuesta a tomar el riesgo.
>
> SMS: Mm.
>
> YAP: Porque la alternativa... es homogenizarlo.

Arroyo Pizarro acknowledged that the classification of her literature into identity-based categories might limit its readership; however, she argued that this was a price worth paying. She constructed the use of these categories as a way of acknowledging differences and avoiding homogenisation, which she prioritised over a possibly wider pool of readers. Mónica Lladó Ortega also accepted that the categorisation could influence potential readers, stating that "la gente... tiene sus gustos y, y sus énfasis"; she attributed this to a matter of taste and interest, implying that a reader might need to have a pre-existing interest in certain identities in order to read a text that had been categorised in this way. However, like Arroyo Pizarro, Lladó Ortega argued that this did not mean that the categorisations should be avoided. The lecturer stated: "No, no me parece... cómo te digo, transcendental en el sentido de que... que se... [¿ponga?] una categoría X, este... limite el público lector, creo que eso va, va a ocurrir, [¿] inevitable". She characterised

these identity-based categories as being equivalent to any other literary category, arguing that all categories limit readership and that this is unavoidable.

Unlike other participants, and as mentioned previously, Luis Negrón expressed strong and definitive opposition to identity-based literary categories. He argued that they had a negative effect on readership and were unnecessary; he was also somewhat derisive of readers who were interested in them. We had the following exchange:

> SMS: te quiero preguntar que si, si una novela, por ejemplo, se... se habla como literatura lésbica, lit- novela lésbica, lo que sea, ¿tú crees que eso tiene un efecto en quién lo... quién la lee?
>
> LN: Yo creo que, en el mercade- en el mercadeo, sí.
>
> SMS: ¿Sí?
>
> LN: Sí. Y no hace falta.
>
> SMS: Mm.
>
> LN: Yo creo que incluso no hace falta, este, porque por ejemplo, Yolanda ha publicado con el Instituto de Cultura, y, y el libro de (SMS: Claro) Yolanda, de, de Yolanda, [¿?], (SMS: Mhm) es uno de los libros que más se venden. Punto.
>
> SMS: Sí.
>
> LN: Y es uno de los libros, no es que she un, they unmask, o, este, eh, eh, es que, pues, es un libro que, que en el mercadeo se siente menos, menos evidente.

Negrón was emphatic in his statement that such categorisation in book marketing is unnecessary. He used the example of one of Arroyo Pizarro's books, whose marketing he represented as less evidently focused on identity; as noted in Chapter 5, he appeared to be referring to *Menorragia: histerias de octubre* (2015), published by the Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña. He claimed that this is one of the author's best sellers, using this as evidence for his argument that marketing based on identity is unnecessary and that it is not preferred by the consumer. Whether this title is in fact one of Arroyo Pizarro's best-selling beyond Negrón's shop is unclear. Negrón went on to state:

LN: Entonces, pues, sabes, ningún editor ahora va a poner un rainbow, o un pink triangle, I mean they still do…

SMS: Yeah.

LN: …but they have a very specific market.

SMS: Mhm.

LN: Y eso es lo que ellos quieren. (SMS: Claro.) Gente que no leen [sic], necesariamente, pero son gay.

Here, he first made the claim that publishers no longer use such overt marketing relating to sexuality; however, he quickly amended this to state that some still do, but that they market to a specific niche. He characterised this niche as gay people who do not read, a claim for which he did not present evidence and which cannot be verified. As with his statements about activists who buy books but are not "readers", it was unclear whether he meant that these consumers simply buy books but do not read them, or that their reading activity does not "count" in some way, perhaps because of the supposed poor quality of the books. He constructed two distinct categories of texts, and two groups of imagined consumers: firstly, books which are "less obvious" about their LGBT content, which sell well and to a supposedly non-specific market; and secondly, books with overt signals of their LGBT content, which sell only to a specific market of gay people who do not read. He implicitly placed the two into a hierarchy, disparaging the latter category of literature and its attendant consumers as lesser. Taken together with his other comments, Negrón seemed to create a dichotomy between real readers and non-readers (who nevertheless buy and potentially read books). He also appeared to disparage particular reading materials, including those explicitly categorised and marketed as LGBT.

Perkins presented both pros and cons of identity-based categorisations for readership. On the negative side, she stated that, in her experience teaching the work,

sometimes that can put people off of the text, right, because they think that, "OK, well, because it's in this frame of lesbian literature, like, that's all that it's about", right (laughs) (SMS: Mhm), or, that's, you know, that's the primary focu- [mumbles]

> focus of the text when that's really not the case, um, so it can, you know, it can pigeonhole texts in a certain way, which I think is really… uh, dangerous, and, and it's also… it, it can create kind of an incorrect… view of what the text is about.

Thus, she argued that categorisation as "lesbian literature" could represent the text in a flattened and inaccurate way to potential readers, implying that the inclusion of lesbian characters or an examination of lesbian identity are the only things the text has to offer. Her answer implicitly related to *Caparazones* in particular, since she was speaking about her experience of teaching, and *Caparazones* is the only text by Arroyo Pizarro that she had taught. At another point in the interview, Perkins stated that she had chosen to include *Caparazones* in the curriculum because "it is… a contemporary text, it deals (SMS: Mm) with a lot of different really… interesting issues that even go, you know, beyond the scope of, um… you know, personal social identities". She specifically emphasised other aspects of the novel, such as its ecological themes, stating that she thought "there would be something that kind of… everyone could, could grab (SMS: Mhm) onto, I guess, with that text". She thus represented the novel as offering more than just the identity aspect, tying into her point that its categorisation as "lesbian literature" could give an inaccurate impression that "that's all it's about". She stated that this might "push people away from it when… they could benefit (laughs) very much from reading it". She thus represented the text as potentially having positive effects on its readers, even on those who might be put off by the framing as "lesbian literature", although she did not go into detail about what these effects might be.

On the other hand, Perkins also argued that identity-based literary categories might have the advantage of enabling a text to reach a specific readership:

> the potential benefits of that type of categorisation is that it can reach, it can reach a particular readership in… a… more direct and maybe quicker way, (SMS: Mhm) you know, like if you know that you're, you're looking for a text by… a Black lesbian author, like, you know, because of the categorisation and because of the conversations that Yolanda's texts have been put into… um, you know that that's what you're, you're gonna find in that text.

Her statement constructed a group of readers intentionally looking for texts by Black lesbians. She did not specify any particular characteristics that this group might share; nor did she speculate on why they might be seeking out such material. The remark that these readers would know what they are "gonna find in that text" rests on the premise that Black lesbian authors would produce texts with specific types of content, or at least that these readers would expect this to be the case; thus, Perkins implied that author identity is discernible in literary texts, an assumption I have discussed in previous chapters. The lecturer thus argued that representing literature with identity-based categories could have the utility of reaching readers interested in texts corresponding to those descriptions.

Since much of my conversation with Lola Rosario had focused on identity, race, and nationality, I asked her:

> SMS: would you say that you… I don't know, in reading, that you seek out, um… literature that is… uh, kind of referred to as, um, "Black", "Afro… afro-puertorriqueño"… like, do those… kind of categories… are those something, is that something that you look for in, in things that you read?
>
> LR: I'm more drawn to it.
>
> SMS: Mm.
>
> LR: I'm more… [mumbles] I'm… much more… enthusiastic (SMS: Mm) about it, (SMS: yeah) right, if, if I, if I know that.

Thus, Rosario presented herself as an example of a reader specifically interested in identity-based literary categories; in this case, that interest was centred around identities that she shared. Given my own entry point into the topic, I was surprised that more participants did not make arguments along the lines that categorising literature in this way would make it more appealing to readers who shared the identities in question; comments of this nature were relatively uncommon.

Greater Obstacles: Politics, Age, and Religion

As we have seen, participants represented Arroyo Pizarro's readers as having varied identities; it was not often argued that race, gender, or sexuality were determining factors

in whether an individual would read or enjoy Arroyo Pizarro's work. Instead, participants put more emphasis on politics, prejudice, age, and religion as greater obstacles to engaging with the texts; these were often constructed as being interrelated. It was generally assumed that political conservatism and prejudice, such as homophobia, sexism, or racism, would equate to an unwillingness to read the author's work. Conversely, "open-mindedness", progressivism, and a lack of prejudice were assumed to make an individual more likely to read and enjoy Arroyo Pizarro's writing. Participants often linked politics and prejudice with age and religion: young and non-religious people were usually assumed to be more progressive and less prejudiced, while older or religious people were sometimes assumed to be conservative and more prejudiced. By extension, older or religious people were at times represented as being less open to reading and enjoying Arroyo Pizarro's texts, while younger and non-religious people were represented as being more likely to do so.

On a number of occasions, participants made statements based on the premise that conservative or prejudiced individuals would inherently be resistant to reading Arroyo Pizarro's literature. This premise was so taken for granted that it was rarely, if ever, explicitly stated or explained. Dayaneira and I had the following exchange:

> SMS: Entonces te parece que es muy bien conocida en el país?
>
> D: Diría que no porque vivo en un país patriarcal. Tanto hombres, mujeres y hasta personas intersex no son fanáticas de lecturas feministas con personajes negrxs, anticoloniales. Los temas de raza, género, sexualidad y feminismo son temas tabú en mi isla[.]

The student's representation of Arroyo Pizarro's renown in Puerto Rico was intrinsically linked to her construction of the country as patriarchal and racist. She attributed her assessment that the author is not well known in Puerto Rico (which conflicted with other participants' representations of Arroyo Pizarro's renown; see Chapter 4) to the inclusion of Black, anticolonial characters in her texts, as well as the treatment of themes of race, gender, sexuality, and feminism, implying that these would inherently be unpopular in a patriarchal society where race, gender, and sexuality are taboo topics.

The Anonymous Lecturer stated that, when she had tried to teach Arroyo Pizarro's novel *Violeta* some ten years previously,

> AL: Los estudiantes, eh, les resultó chocante ese, esa novela. Em…
>
> SMS: ¿En qué sentido?
>
> AL: Porque el, del, el tema del lesbianismo todavía… aunque… en la universidad, en esta universidad, eh, hay… em, una comunidad gigante, esta de, eh, LGBT+, ya, ya veo que en los últimos años muchas jóvenes… que expresan su afecto a su pareja, y lo vemos, no hay ningún, no hay ningún problema con eso, pero todavía quedan muchos… esa, ese conservadurismo… (SMS: mm) y esa resistencia a tratar esos temas del, del lesbianismo[.]

She attributed this negative reaction to conservatism, suggesting that the resistance to this novel was based on prejudice against lesbians. She argued that this was specific to lesbians rather than homophobia in general, noting that she had not had the same problems with texts featuring gay male protagonists, which she stated was because "A los hombres… a los hombres homosexuales o hombres que, eh, eh, abiertamente gay, se, son más aceptados que las mujeres lesbianas". She thus implied anti-lesbian prejudice was the primary reason why students rejected *Violeta*.

Marie Ramos Rosado made statements that assumed a similar equivalence between prejudice and unwillingness to read Arroyo Pizarro's texts. I mentioned that the only texts by the author which had been published in Spain at the time of our interview were those with lesbian or queer themes, which prompted the following exchange:

> MRR: Que quiere decir que, quiere decir que en España están más abiertos al tema de la cuestión lésbica.
>
> SMS: Sí, pero quizás menos abiertos a…
>
> MRR: (overlapping) ¡A la cuestión negra! ¡Claro!
>
> SMS: Puede ser, sí.
>
> MRR: Así es, que así es, (SMS: este…) porque España es racista.

These comments by Ramos Rosado rest on the premise not only that prejudice and reading choices are equivalent, but also that conclusions about the prejudices of a country can be extrapolated from which of Arroyo Pizarro's texts have been published there. It is my opinion that, while it is certainly plausible that racist attitudes contributed to a lack of interest among Spanish publishers in publishing other texts among Arroyo Pizarro's oeuvre, there are other factors that contribute to which of the author's books come to be published in Spain; for example, as discussed in Chapter 4, the author herself attributed it to her lack of an agent. Furthermore, since the interview with Ramos Rosado, Yegua de Troya has published a new edition of *Las negras* (2025), a fictionalised retelling of the experiences of enslaved Black women, for the Spanish market.

Author and bookseller Luis Negrón expressed an alternative position on the relationship between politics and reading behaviours. While other participants' comments frequently assumed a particular political positioning on the part of Arroyo Pizarro's readers, Negrón argued that readers do not make reading choices on the basis of politics and that they in fact actively reject explicitly political reading material. Negrón claimed:

> people notice when it's about literature and then when it's about expression (SMS: Mm) through literature, or political expression through literature. People notice that, and people prefer literature. Este, eh… eh… (clears throat) here, ¿ah? Estamos hablando de una librería.

At the time, Negrón ran the bookshop La Esquina in Río Piedras, San Juan; he spoke from his position as a bookseller while discussing the preferences and behaviours of readers. Referring to readers, Negrón claimed that "no les gustan mucho los escritores muy activistas". He related this to Arroyo Pizarro, stating that "no la leen porque Yolanda es bien activista"; he described conversations with customers in which he had assured them that "esta es una creadora, ella hace literatura". He thus drew a distinction between explicitly political writing *versus* "good" literature, which is (according to him) less overtly political, if not apolitical; he represented Arroyo Pizarro's work as belonging to this category of "good" literature. According to Negrón, when readers suspect Arroyo Pizarro's literature of having a political message or goal, they think "que su literatura, pues no es tan mágica y tan… poderosa" and that "they know what she's gonna say, [inaudible]. Piensan que la activista habla… lo que va a decir la escritora". He argued to the contrary,

making a distinction between Arroyo Pizarro's literary work and her activism; this contrasts significantly with other participants' representations of Arroyo Pizarro's roles as author and activist as being intertwined, as discussed in Chapter 4. Negrón's insistence that readers do not have political motivations when choosing reading materials can be contrasted with the other participants' emphasis on politics as a determining factor in Arroyo Pizarro's readership. However, even Negrón implied that prejudice might put a potential reader off of Arroyo Pizarro's books, saying that "people come here and, you know, they're not racist and they're not this and they're not that, but they just wanna read, you know, they just want a good book". The aside that "they're not racist" implies that whether or not they are racist does in fact influence their choices; Negrón thus still constructed prejudice as a barrier to reading and enjoying Arroyo Pizarro's books, despite his claim that readers do not choose reading materials based on political motives.

Several participants also referenced age as a factor in their constructions of the relationship between social attitudes and openness to reading and enjoying Arroyo Pizarro's work. When I asked Esther Rodríguez Miranda whether she thought that terms like "literatura lésbica" being applied to Arroyo Pizarro's work would influence the perception thereof, she replied:

> ERM: Claro. Claro, sí, sí. Bueno, también es una cuestión generacional, ¿no? Eh, el estudiante de 22 años que lea la obra le va a importar tres pitos, digo, el estudiante no conservador, y también tiene que ver quizás más con eso, no, con ser conservador o liberal, progresista. El estudiante que no sea sumamente conservador no le va ni a… ni… no le va a importar, no, no, va a ser completamente, eh, innecesario esa, verdad, ese tipo de información. Versus obviamente, eh, sí, hay gente mayor que pues automáticamente quiere distanciarse (SMS: Mm) o… no hay que negar lo que tiene escenas, tiene escenas que, que pues son muy risqué quizás para el… lector de 60 años…
>
> SMS: Sí.

ERM: … y que causen que no quieran leer esa parte y la salten… eh… pero… no creo que… no creo que a los estudiantes, a los jóvenes no creo que les imp… les impacta pero no les fuerza a cerrar el libro…

SMS: Okay.

ERM: …versus a la gente mayor.

Throughout this exchange, she repeatedly emphasised the importance of age, stating that young people and students (whom she often collapsed into the same group) would be far more likely to read and enjoy Arroyo Pizarro's work in comparison with older readers. Where my question had focused on identity-based categorisations of the book, Rodríguez Miranda shifted to mentioning "risqué" scenes, seemingly gesturing at sexually explicit scenes in some of Arroyo Pizarro's texts; perhaps these, rather than the identity aspect *per se*, were what she thought would put older readers off. Not all so-called "lesbian literature" would necessarily include such material, and not all of Arroyo Pizarro's texts that feature LGBT characters and themes do; there seemed to be a certain conflation of non-hegemonic sexuality as a theme with sexually explicit scenes at play. Rodríguez Miranda related age and political positioning with openness to the sexually explicit content of some of Arroyo Pizarro's work, and thus to willingness to read or finish reading the texts.

Marie Ramos Rosado also made a connection between age, prejudice, and openness to reading Arroyo Pizarro's work. As discussed earlier, she recounted that, when she has offered options for which texts to study in class, male students have sometimes been the ones to choose Arroyo Pizarro; immediately following this remark, she commented that "Aquí en Puerto Rico, ya esta nueva generación, este, son menos… prejuiciados con, con el movimiento LGTB". In context, this seems to imply that the students' reading choices were related to this lack of prejudice, which she stated was characteristic of this new generation. Similarly, when I asked Mónica Lladó Ortega how she had found the reception of Arroyo Pizarro's texts among her students, she replied:

MLO: […] lo que he notado… es una… apertura… y… una transformación en el lector joven.

SMS: ¿Mhm?

MLO: En mi experiencia, aquí en Puerto Rico. Los lectores jóvenes… están cada vez más abiertos a la diversidad y a temas, este… como los que trabaja, este, Yolanda, y… y ha sido una recepción muy buena, (SMS: Sí.) muy buena. Sí.

Again, she represented young readers as being open to diversity and, as a result, to reading and enjoying Arroyo Pizarro's texts. She connected this not only with youth but also with a specific generation, going on to tell me that ten years ago, she noticed more homophobia and reluctance to read texts with LGBT themes among students. She implicitly contrasted the current generation of students with those of ten years ago, young at the time but nevertheless more homophobic, implying that the time and context in which they have grown up is equally or perhaps even more relevant than youth in and of itself in the formation of their social attitudes and, by extension, their reading preferences and behaviours.

Participants also sometimes connected religion with prejudice and resistance to Arroyo Pizarro's texts. The author herself told me that she had received "duras críticas de la comunidad religiosa del país" regarding the inclusion of a lesbian character in her first novel, *Los documentados*. Two academics, Alexandra Gonzenbach Perkins and the Anonymous Lecturer, also told me that they had received pushback from religious students when assigning texts with lesbian characters. The Anonymous Lecturer mentioned a student who had objected to studying Arroyo Pizarro's novel *Violeta*. She stated that the student was religious and "muy conservadora", linking religion with political and social conservatism. According to the lecturer's account, religion was the explicit reason the student gave for her refusal to read the novel. Perkins also spoke about students who had refused to read Arroyo Pizarro's work on the basis of their religion when she described teaching *Caparazones* at Southern Utah University. She stated that while the university itself has no official religious affiliation,

> the majority of… students, faculty and staff are members of the Church of Latter Day Saints, (SMS: Right) um, which has a very… a very specific ideology towards… representations of… sex and sexuality, um… (SMS: Mhm) in, in terms of, you know, kind of… what, what is permissible and what is not[.]

A high proportion of the students in her class refused to read *Caparazones* on the basis that they found it "objectionable". Perkins estimated that out of 30 students in her class, only around 8 remained and studied the text. Knowing that *Caparazones* features quite explicit sex scenes, including the very opening lines, I asked:

> SMS: Do you know… if the objection… is, was more… like, the s- the, kind of explicit nature or more that it's… queer? Or both?
>
> AGP: (overlapping) [?] one hundred, 100% the… explicit… (SMS: Okay) depictions, and I mean yeah, [mumbles] I mean, you know, the, the, the queer elements… definitely would also be objectionable, but I (SMS: Mm) think if… if that text had been written without… I mean it would be a totally (SMS: [Okay?]) different text, but (SMS, laughing: Mhm) if those explicit scenes… and (SMS: Yeah) explicit language were not in the text, I don't think I would have had… I, I really don't think… the, you know… 22 out of 30 students would say "I'm not reading this."

Although the sexually explicit material and the queer themes are interconnected, Perkins considered it possible that a different, less explicit, book featuring queer themes might have elicited a different response. Of the few students who remained and studied the text, Perkins stated that some

> were active, you know, in good standing, uh, members of the Latter Day Saints church, and, you know, they, they framed it, they were, they were… of the mind that, you know, "this is an academic context, and my professor's asking me to read this for this reason, and I may not agree with it, but… I can engage with it, you know, on an academic, in an academic way".

Thus, although she reported that the majority of Latter Day Saints adherents in the class outright refused to study the novel, there were others who did complete the reading. She did not claim that these students were necessarily less prejudiced or less opposed to the material, only that they managed to set aside any objections they might have had and complete the reading. Thus, being religious did not correlate one-to-one with refusing to read *Caparazones*: there was a variation in reading behaviours between individuals, even those who seemingly shared similar beliefs and social attitudes. Nevertheless, Perkin cited religion as the reason why so many students rejected the text. Speaking about her

later experience teaching at Texas State University, the lecturer stated that she had only had one student who was "a little bit uncomfortable with some of the… you know, language and descriptions", again hinting at discomfort with the sexually explicit material. The lecturer described this person as "an older student, so she was, um… probably in her… 50s" and stated that she "came from a pretty… you know, religious… background… like, Catholic, and you know, conservative". Thus, Perkins implied that age, religion, and political positioning may all have contributed to this student's discomfort with the novel. The lecturer explained that in this case, she had overcome the student's misgivings with "a really quick conversation of saying, you know, 'you don't have to like it, you don't have to agree with it, this is your job as a reader'". Here, as in her previous statements about some of the students in Utah, Perkins provided another example of a reader whom she represented as uncomfortable or opposed to the material of a book but who completed the reading anyway. This reading experience is inextricably connected to these readers' status as students: outside of this educational context, participants did not provide any examples of readers who were opposed to Arroyo Pizarro's texts on political or religious grounds but who chose to read them anyway.

Participants repeatedly emphasised religion, age, and politics as major factors in a reader's likelihood of reading and enjoying Arroyo Pizarro's work, representing religious, older, and conservative readers as unlikely to do so. The only participant to claim that politics were not a factor in reading choices was Luis Negrón; however, even he implicitly conceded that prejudice might in fact deter a potential reader from reading Arroyo Pizarro's writing.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have posed the question of whether the categorisation of Arroyo Pizarro's works as "lesbian literature" and "Black literature" is understood to imply that her readers share these identities. Overall, participants did not tend to represent Arroyo Pizarro's readership as necessarily having particular identities; some specified that they themselves read and enjoy the author's work without sharing all of the identities with which it has been represented. Nevertheless, participants did represent the reading experience as being affected by reader identities. Many interviewees emphasised identification as an important part of the reading experience for themselves or others;

this identification was often, but not always, on the basis of identities such as race, gender, sexuality, and nationality being shared with the author or characters. However, identification was rarely as simple as just sharing one of these: it was also influenced by other factors like shared experiences, emotions, and political stances. Thus, a reader with a different identity could potentially still find ways to identify with Arroyo Pizarro's texts. The importance of identification with reading materials was also contextual: participant comments sometimes implied that it was an especially valuable part of the reading experience in contexts where an identity was more stigmatised or marginalised.

As well as reading for identification, participants also spoke about reading for difference, representing this as a valuable aspect of reading Arroyo Pizarro's work. Reading about other identities and experiences can offer interesting new perspectives, as well as providing an opportunity to learn. While participants often spoke about reading as a way to learn about others' experiences, it was also sometimes represented as a way to learn about one's own identities. Learning about other identities from reading was often assumed to contribute to reducing prejudice and increasing "open-mindedness".

I posed the question of whether categorisations like "literatura afro" and "literatura lésbica" themselves produce a particular readership for Arroyo Pizarro's work, and whether this readership might share those same identities. While I was not able to determine the actual demographics of Arroyo Pizarro's readership, the research provided interesting insights into participant representations of readers. Participants tended to argue that, while categorisations like "literatura lésbica" and "literatura afro" would affect the author's readership, the deciding factors were more likely to be politics, age, and religion than race, sexuality, gender, and nationality. It was generally assumed that readers prefer texts with which they are politically aligned, and that Arroyo Pizarro's texts are inherently left-wing or progressive. Participants therefore represented Arroyo Pizarro's readership as more likely to be young, non-religious, and politically left-wing or progressive, rather than primarily based on specific racial, gender, sexual, or national identities.

Conclusion

My goal at the outset of this project was to investigate how identity-based literary categories are constructed and influence reader experiences. I sought to question the representation of Yolanda Arroyo Pizarro's writing as "Black, Puerto Rican, lesbian literature": how these categorisations come to be constructed, what they communicate about her work, and the effects they have on readerships.

The emphasis on race, sexuality, gender, and nationality in representations of Arroyo Pizarro and her body of work is not an inevitability, nor an objective reflection of natural "facts". Race, sexuality, and gender are not given equal weight in representations of all authors or literatures: the choice to highlight only marginalised identities is the product of broader societal discourses that mark some individuals and groups as "other" in comparison with a supposedly "neutral" category, which is heterosexual, white, male, and located in the geopolitical centre. Furthermore, the use of categories like "literatura lésbica" and "literatura afro", in the absence of equivalents such as "literatura blanca", "literatura masculina", or "literatura heterosexual", reproduces and reinforces discourses that centre whiteness, maleness, and heterosexuality, since these are constructed as so "neutral" that they need not even be named. Nationality, on the other hand, is a consistent feature across representations of authors and texts, a fact which in and of itself prioritises the construction of the nation as a pre-eminent detail of all literary work over other possible ways of representing literatures. Arroyo Pizarro and her texts could be represented in potentially infinite ways; this thesis has sought to question the implications of foregrounding race, sexuality, gender, and nationality in these representations.

Analysis began with paratextual and metatextual sources including academic criticism, reviews, author bios, and social media posts. From these, I sought to establish an initial picture of the ways in which Arroyo Pizarro and her work are represented. I found that identity categories, primarily race, sexuality, gender, and nationality, were emphasised in representations of both the author and her writing across these varied types of sources. Several sources also sorted texts or authors into identity-based categories; this sorting was achieved through metadata, lists and catalogues of works, and hashtags. I have

argued that these sorting methods contribute significantly to the construction of categories like "literatura lésbica" and "Black literature", since they group works together under identity-based headings and make them discoverable in an identity-centred context.

Following the analysis of paratexts and metatexts, I moved to focus on analysis of interview data. First, I examined how Arroyo Pizarro's authorial persona was represented by interviewees. Participants overwhelmingly represented Arroyo Pizarro as Black, Puerto Rican, and a lesbian, foregrounding her race, sexuality, gender, and nationality as salient details that are central to her authorial persona; this can be contrasted with representations of heterosexual, white, male authors, who are rarely introduced by such identity markers. Arroyo Pizarro was unambiguously represented as "negra" or "Black". Participants' representations of the author thus left no room for doubt regarding her racial classification, despite the general construction of race as a spectrum in Puerto Rico, within which the number of people categorised as "negro/a" is a relatively small group in comparison with a supposedly "mixed" majority. Arroyo Pizarro was also frequently represented as a "lesbiana" or "lesbian"; in comparison with other possible terms like "gay" or "cuir"/"queer", this term highlighted sexuality and gender simultaneously, emphasising both as crucial aspects of the author's identity and persona. Representations of Arroyo Pizarro also emphasised her Puerto Rican nationality, constructing her as a national author; conferring this status upon a Black lesbian writer represents a challenge to participants' construction of the nation as racist, homophobic, and patriarchal. As well as Arroyo Pizarro's identity *per se*, participants portrayed her public self-identification with Blackness and lesbianism as bold and transgressive in the context that these identities have long been stigmatised. Arroyo Pizarro's political advocacy against neocolonialism and in favour of Puerto Rican independence were also emphasised. While Blackness, lesbianism, and Puerto Rican nationality were politicised in and of themselves, the fact that the author vocally "claims" these identities and is engaged in activism for related causes was also incorporated into representations of her as a transgressive and political figure, which comprise key aspects of her public persona.

As well as examining representations of Arroyo Pizarro herself, this research also analysed how her literary work was represented. Participants frequently used terms like

"literatura lésbica", "literatura puertorriqueña", and "literatura afro" to represent the author's writing. Thus, these identities were constructed as salient and essential aspects of the text(s) themselves. In relation to sexuality, "literatura lésbica" and similar terms were the most frequently used. As discussed in relation to the author, the choice of "lesbian" over other possible terms like "LGBT" or "queer"/"cuir" specifies both gender and sexuality simultaneously; this specificity was carried over to representations of the texts. The preference for "lésbica" constructs Arroyo Pizarro's writing as belonging to a category distinct from, for example, gay male literature, and is narrower than "LGBT" or "queer"/ "cuir" literature. Regarding race, while "negra" was used in relation to the author herself, the favoured term to represent her literature was "literatura afro", which I have argued was an effort to avoid confusion with the "novela negra" or *noir* genre. Nationality was also strongly emphasised, with phrases like "literatura puertorriqueña" being used repeatedly to refer to Arroyo Pizarro's work. While national literatures are constructed the world over, the political project of the nation is particularly salient in a Puerto Rican context: due to neocolonialism and the absence of political sovereignty, cultural symbols like literature gain an especially significant role in the construction of a national identity. The representation of Arroyo Pizarro's writing as "literatura puertorriqueña", especially in the context of a research project conducted by a foreign researcher like myself, with mostly Puerto Rican participants, served to leverage her body of literary work in this project of the nation.

The thesis also sought to identify what the human identity categories of "Black", "lesbian", and "Puerto Rican" mean when applied to literature. Given that the preferred terms broadly corresponded to those used to represent the author herself, it seemed plausible that they were purely based on authorial identity. However, participant comments revealed more complex constructions of terms like "literatura afro" and "literatura lésbica": while author identity was referenced, other criteria like subject matter, characters, and political positioning also appeared to contribute to these categorisations. Participants sometimes designated individual works by Arroyo Pizarro as "literatura lésbica" but not "literatura afro", or *vice versa*; since they were all written by a Black lesbian writer, this is evidence that these categorisations do not correlate directly with authorial identity. Individual participants vacillated between different criteria for the

categories, demonstrating their inherent ambiguity and instability. Thus, the categories "literatura lésbica" and "literatura afro" evaded any strict, essentialist definition.

Seeking perspectives on whether the practice of categorising literature by identities ultimately aligns with or hinders the struggles of marginalised groups, I asked participants their positions on the issue. Responses varied, but are well summarised by Ramos Rosado's comment that these categories are a "navaja de dos filos". On the one hand, categorising a text as "literatura lésbica" or "literatura afro" may be in some ways pigeonholing, essentialist, or reductive. On the other, almost all participants in my study argued that, in the context of structurally oppressive systems like racism, sexism, homophobia, and colonialism, these categories are necessary for the visibility and empowerment of marginalised groups and their literary production, and to recognise those groups' differing experiences. As Arroyo Pizarro put it, "la alternativa… es homogenizarlo". Nevertheless, the absence of the corresponding categories "literatura masculina", "literatura blanca" and "literatura heterosexual" both results from and furthers the normalisation of these hegemonic identities and associated literatures. Maleness, whiteness, and heterosexuality are socially constructed as so normal and default that they need not be named; by naming marginalised identities and not hegemonic ones, this normalisation is further entrenched.

I also posed questions about readers. The first of these was whether terms like "literatura lésbica", "literatura afro", and "literatura puertorriqueña" imply that Arroyo Pizarro's readers share those identities. While the sample was too small to draw conclusions about Arroyo Pizarro's actual readership demographics, I gained insight into participant representations of readers. Participants tended not to construct Arroyo Pizarro's readers as belonging to specific gender, race, sexuality, or nationality demographics necessarily. Some participants actively challenged the idea that a term like "literatura lésbica" should be taken to mean that Arroyo Pizarro's readers are necessarily lesbians, providing examples to the contrary. Entangled with reader identities was the question of whether readers prefer to read texts that reflect their own identities in some way. Several participants did indicate a personal interest in or preference for authors or texts with which they could identify. However, while identification with a text or author could be on the basis of shared race, gender, sexuality, or nationality, participants also highlighted

other bases for identification with Arroyo Pizarro's writing, such as a shared viewpoint, political stance, emotions, or life experiences. On the other hand, some participants also expressed an active interest in reading materials by or about people with identities that differed from their own. The drive to read about other identities was sometimes attributed to an interest in learning about those groups and their experiences; however, reading to learn was not limited to this context, as some participants also mentioned learning about their own identities through reading.

Finally, I asked: does the use of terms like "literatura lésbica" and "literatura afro" to represent Arroyo Pizarro's work select a particular readership? It seemed possible that such categorisations might themselves attract or deter certain demographics of readers, as I myself had been drawn in by the signalling of lesbian identity on the cover of *Lesbianas en clave caribeña*. However, rather than race, gender, sexuality, or nationality, participants described age, politics, and religion as more important factors in whether an individual would read and enjoy Arroyo Pizarro's work. These three were generally constructed as being interlinked: participants represented older and more religious readers as more likely to be politically conservative, while younger and non-religious readers were assumed to be more progressive. Underlying participant comments were the premises that (a) the author's work is politically progressive and (b) readers reject reading materials with which they are not politically aligned. As a result, it was assumed that more politically conservative readers either would not choose to read Arroyo Pizarro's work, or, if they did read it, would not enjoy it. Participants therefore constructed reading behaviours and experiences as being deeply politicised and split primarily along ideological lines rather than on the basis of racial, gender, sexual, or national identity. Categorisations of Arroyo Pizarro's work as "literatura lésbica" and "literatura afro", they argued, would not necessarily deter white, heterosexual, or male readers, unless the readers in question were also politically conservative.

The present work makes a major contribution to the study of literature and literary culture through its approach and methodology. As I have noted, the vast majority of literary research takes the form of textual analysis, which, while extremely valuable, is far from being the only way of approaching literature and literary culture. This study's focus on discourses outside of texts themselves has demonstrated that those texts are not

autonomous, discrete objects, but are produced by these discourses; a text rarely, if ever, speaks for itself. While Gerard Genette's argument that paratexts act as a "threshold" has been influential on this line of thinking, I have challenged his distinction between paratexts and metatexts on the basis of "authorial responsibility", which I consider a false dichotomy. Instead, I have analysed multiple sources that construct "representations" of texts, regardless of whether or not they have been endorsed by the author of those texts. In light of this renewed perspective, I have departed from dominant scholarly approaches: in particular, there have been very few studies of verbal representations of texts like those produced in the interviews at the centre of this research. Through the production and analysis of interviews, this project has treated the way in which people speak about this author and her texts as an important aspect of their construction. Speech, even in the context of a semi-structured interview, is inherently more dynamic than writing, allowing for representations that evolved and fluctuated even as the participant spoke. Thus, these verbal representations were more fluid and self-contradictory, being negotiated in real time; rather than being a weakness, this reflected the inherent instability and ambiguity of the subject matter. This methodology has, furthermore, allowed for the incorporation of multiple viewpoints and perspectives, albeit filtered through my representation thereof. The opportunity to interview participants from a variety of backgrounds and experiences, and with varied relationships to the author, has undoubtedly enriched the perspectives on Arroyo Pizarro that I have been able to present in the thesis.

While this thesis has focused on one specific author and her work, its methodological approach could be productively applied to many other contexts. I have sought to question the practice of categorising authors and literary texts by identities such as race, gender, and nationality, and the assumptions that underpin these categories. Similar studies could certainly be carried out on other authors; however, there is also great potential in other ways of delineating literatures for the purpose of similar studies. One of the problems I encountered in defining my project around an author was the difficulties with finding readers of that specific author. Future projects might work in the other direction, by focusing on a group of readers and asking which texts and authors they read. Such a group might be defined by readership of a specific genre (as Radway did for the

romance genre) or literary category; for example, a call for readers of "lesbian literature" might produce insight into the demographics of this readership. The group of readers to be studied could also be delineated by some shared identity, such as race or sexuality: such a study could investigate whether, for example, Black readers choose to read literature by or about Black authors.

Although it occupied only a small part of my research, the glimpse into book- and reading-focused social media spaces revealed another potential area for study. Research on Bookstagram and Booktok has begun to emerge over the past few years; there is certainly scope for far more investigation in this area, particularly in non-Anglophone contexts. It would be interesting to investigate the effects of the increasingly personalised and algorithmically driven nature of social media on reading practices and preferences. Future research could consider whether practices such as the use of hashtags with particular literary genres and categories (such as #queerbooks and #blackauthors) assists authors and texts in finding readerships or, equally, whether it restricts other potential readerships.

Participants in this study constructed reading as a deeply politicised activity, representing political leaning as a more important factor in reading choices than race, sexuality, gender, or nationality, although these are all interconnected with one's politics. It is frequently assumed that an individual's politics and the media they consume are mutually reinforcing; this has often been discussed in relation to increasingly polarised news and online media. The connections between personal ideologies and reading preferences in the context of creative works could be another avenue for further research.

The issues of identity, categorisation, and cultural production discussed in this thesis also have implications beyond scholarship. I would invite anyone involved in any way with the literary world, whether as a book industry professional, author, academic, or simply a reader, to interrogate the ways in which they represent authors and texts, for example through such practices as marketing or promoting books; designing curricula; making recommendations to friends; writing criticism or reviews; or posting on social media. My proposition is not that we completely abandon categories like "lesbian literature" and "literatura afro", but that we interrogate the paradigm in which these are commonly used while their hegemonic counterparts are not; in so doing, we may find creative responses

to this issue. Arroyo Pizarro's suggestion that we explicitly name categories like "literatura heterosexual" and "literatura blancoide" as a way of highlighting this asymmetry and afflicting the comfortable constitutes perhaps not a perfect solution (indeed, there is unlikely to be any such thing), but certainly an interesting and provocative counterstrategy to this normalisation. Above all, it is crucial to recognise that every representation of an author or text in terms of identity is enmeshed with, and contributes, to discourses of power.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Recruitment Flyer

¿Has leído a Yolanda Arroyo Pizarro?

Soy estudiante de doctorado, y estoy realizando investigaciones sobre esta autora. Busco a participantes que hayan leído su obra para realizar una entrevista sobre su experiencia de lectura. Favor de contactarme:

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Appendix B: Mind Map of Interview Data Codes

Yolanda (personal)

Writing

Reading

Individual activities

LITERATURE

Social constructions

Categorisation

Publics

Literary Landscape

The Canon

Academia

From above (hegemonic)

Colonialism

Gender

Intersectionality

Class

Individual

Race

LGBT

Children

Inter-group

Intra-Group/ Relatability/ Representation

Relationships between people

IDENTITY

Puerto Rico

USA

POWER

(In)Visibility

Means

History/ Historical Narratives

Internet

From below (transgressive)

Activism

Transgression