In this essay I present a reading of Ana Manuela Mozo de la Torre’s extensive, seventy-two-page letter written from Cuba and addressed to Fernando VII of Spain. This text proves interesting for a number of reasons, which I shall analyze here: first, the scant attention it has received from colonial studies; second, the difficulty of classifying it due to the series of textual displacements through which it shifts (from that of chronicle to that of autobiography); third, the constructive strategies employed by the author and the form in which she presents her supplication. That is, what she pleads for and how she frames her supplication are the central points of investigation for drawing the conclusions of this essay. Finally, for the purposes of this study, it is interesting to analyze the critical vision of the author regarding the situation in the Caribbean colonies and her recommendations to the Spanish monarch for “maintaining” order vis-à-vis the increasing French presence.

I shall show that this letter functions as a fulcrum between the motivations of presenting a petition and rendering a favor. Thus, a textual subject appears petitioning for favors in return for the actions of her husband. To present her requests, the construction employed by the supplicant focuses on the central condition of patriotism, although not that of her husband but, rather, her own: she serves her king by delivering a true account of events in a display of exemplary virtues that blur all hierarchical structures and authorize her to make recommendations directly to the Spanish monarch.

1 Memorial de Ana Manuela Mozo de la Torre, Ultramar, 131, Archivo general de Indias, Seville (AGI).

Ana Manuela Mozo de la Torre was born on December 28, 1780, into a distinguished family of the city of Santiago de Cuba. Several members of her family were involved in the establishment of the first Sociedad económica de amigos del país (1783, ratified on September 13, 1787). María Elena Orozco’s examination of numerous documents from the Provincial Historical Archives of Santiago de Cuba reveals the importance of this family as an essential part of this progressive group, which hoped to transform the regional economy and to distinguish Santiago from La Habana by converting the city into a political center that would increase their collective prestige.2 Ana Manuela’s marriage to don Sebastián Kindelán, who was governor of the eastern part of the island for eleven years, from 1799 to 1810, was in keeping with all the norms prescribed by the first Sociedad económica de amigos del país, established in Santiago when she was a little girl. She was educated by a tutor in her home and learned to read and write at an advanced level. The marriage contracts found in the Provincial Historical Archives of Santiago de Cuba indicate that Ana Manuela’s dowry was vastly superior to Kindelán’s contribution to the marriage. Upon Ana Manuela’s death, seventeen years after her husband’s, their fortune had doubled. During the first years of their prolific marital life (1800–1810) six children were born (three boys and three girls, between 1803 and 1810).

Very little is known about Sebastián Kindelán prior to his arrival in Santiago de Cuba in 1799, where he had come to replace the then governor, Juan Quintana. The city the Spaniard encountered was still reeling from the devastating earthquakes of 1766 and 1784. It continued to be an urban center with a rural character, conserving the customs and appearance of the preceding centuries. The latter half of the eighteenth century and beginning of the nineteenth were marked by extreme conflict. The Haitian Revolution had provoked the exodus of French colonials, who had emigrated to Spanish Santo Domingo, the United States, Jamaica, and, subsequently, to the neighboring Spanish colony of Cuba. In particular, following the Treaty of San Ildefonso in 1796, a wave of refugees began to arrive, most of them using Baracoa as a gateway. They first settled in the eastern territory, and the vast majority settled thereafter in the capital of the Eastern Department, Santiago de Cuba. The city’s population was considerably increased by this wave of immigrants. Governor Kindelán had to confront the problems resulting from the immigration originating in French Saint-Domingue, as recorded in Overseas Memorandum 387 (Memorial 387 de Ultramar) of the Archivo general de Indias, Seville.

Governor Kindelán also faced problems with the ecclesiastical authority. Santiago was the eastern bishopric seat after 1789 and the archbishopric seat after 1804, the latter occupied by Joaquín de Osés Alzúa y Cooparacio, a Navarrese with an overbearing personality who saw the future development of Santiago as tied to agriculture. He shared the opinion of many others who were fearful that Cuba might repeat the Haitian experience: that “the danger of the Negro is a serious problem for the tranquillity of the country, so that it is necessary to populate the countryside with white and free workers.”3 This was the main point of friction between the governor and the bishop but not the only one. The second concerned the reconstruction of the fourth cathedral: specifically, the lack of materials, especially wood for the posts, and the lack of a labor force. These problems were the primary reasons for Ana Manuela Mozo de la Torre’s letter.

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2 Ana Manuela Mozo de la Torre, Los acentos de una mujer, comp. María Elena Orozco (Santiago de Cuba: Editorial oriente, 2007).
3 Memorial 387 de Ultramar, AGI.
MOZO DE LA TORRE’S WRITING

When Kindelán became governor of San Agustín de la Florida in 1810, complaints were voiced by the bishop. Kindelán had to confront a series of challenges and rivalries: he was accused of being a French sympathizer, and not only was his loyalty to the Crown questioned, but he was also accused of wanting to divide the island into two parts, in collaboration with Napoleon I, and of being, according to comments recorded in a document from 1808, “a subject skilled in Machiavellianism and in other ruined maxims of good order and loyalty. . . . Friendship, Party, and Connections [Amistad, Partido y Enlaces] with the powerful were his first priority, which, of course, he achieved except with the Most Illustrious Reverend Archbishop.”

After her husband was appointed governor of San Agustín de la Florida, Ana Manuela found herself alone with her children in Santiago while her husband’s and family’s honor were being attacked. Thus, as a woman, wife, and mother, she wrote a letter to the judge in Residencia, Colonel don Francisco Alburquerque, in which Ana Manuela, acting as proxy for her husband, defended him in a hearing concerning the governor’s residency at the end of his mandate in the Eastern State. She signed it jointly with Antonio Vaillant and Joseph Sánchez (Sánchez was also a member of an old Santiago family).

A second and longer letter signed by Ana Manuela is the first manuscript sent to the monarch by a Creole American woman; it is a text of more than one hundred paragraphs, in seventy-two folios, which was also submitted to various local and Spanish authorities, thus becoming a voice for the local progressive group. This document is kept in the Archivo general de Indias in Seville and has been published under the direction of María Elena Orozco (2007), but no critical articles have appeared.

With elegant and rational language, Ana Manuela Mozo de la Torre became the first and best advocate for her husband: despite the formulas of etiquette due to the official recipient of the letter (the monarch), she demonstrates a determination to convince, to command the attention of the reader, and to assert what she has to say. She is not content with merely claiming authorship of the letter:

If the inimitable justification of Your Majesty inspires me to appear in your presence, and if you hear the voice of a woman filled with tribulation, at my own great risk I will tell you how much my soul speaks to me in defense of the offended honor of a husband who is today denied his liberty, who cannot defend himself against the slanders of his enemies. May the God of Hosts grant my lips the skill to describe for Your Majesty the extent of the persecutions of my husband and the chains created by the impious to besmirch his good name. (fol. 1)

Then she reveals in detail the difficulties faced by Kindelán upon becoming part of the government of Cuba: how he entered “an open garrison” with very little in the way of defenses, with the ports blocked by the English, “a city without salt,” and she meticulously describes the measures her husband took to deal with the situation. She relates how later he had to attend to the consequences of the events in Saint-Domingue, which included the arrival of the French immigrants in 1799, and then:

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4 Estado, 59A, no. 26, p. 27, Archivo histórico nacional de Madrid (AHNM).
5 Consejo de Indias, legajo 21.130, AHNM.
In the past year of 1803, because the force of the Ethiopian troops could not be contained by
the garrison of French Port-au-Prince, the door of emigration was opened for its inhabitants,
who occupied as many ships as they could find in the bay, and they streamed out, fleeing from
the knife that threatened them, wherever they could go: some bringing with them some for-
tuitous goods, others bare, and in this condition they appeared in this Port as of June 25, 1803,
and the population increased from an estimated 22,000 souls to nearly 32,000 for the popula-
tions of Port-au-Prince, Mul, and Guarico, locales that have all experienced the same fates all
at the same time. (fol. 33)

As Ana Manuela relates this episode, she describes her husband in the following manner, in
the style of the best of lawyers: “these events were the crucible that proved Brig. don Sebastián
Kindelán’s mettle and left him forever imprinted with the stamp and recommendation of an
imperturbable Spaniard, and I have no doubt that owing to these same characteristics of incor-
ruptibility . . . Your Majesty promoted him to the government of Eastern Florida at this most
critical time.” Finally, Kindelán solved the problem of the French troops that pulled out of the
island and dedicated himself to “utilizing the foreign laborers to encourage agriculture and the
arts.” The period of the foreigners’ stay was regulated through “reports and justifications, and
the oath of loyalty and servitude with a pledge of good behavior and the promise of a letter of nat-
uralization” (fol. 32). Kindelán’s instructions to Captain General Someruelos during the years
1799–1802 regarding territorial necessities were totally different from those of previous years: the
French presence had begun to be felt through the increased economic activity in the territory
and had begun to fulfill the aspirations of the progressive group. The scales began to tip toward
expansionist development, which included the cultivation of coffee. Thus, Kindelán requested
of the captain general of the island, the marquis de Someruelos, that he permit the introduction
of slave labor and certain tools, as Ana Manuela recalled and quoted in her letter to the king:

There is a need for workers, and the easiest way to obtain them [is the slave labor] for the ben-
efit of the Patria and its inhabitants, for the particular benefit and commerce in general. There
are a considerable number of sugar refineries and some new coffee plantations that provoke
astonishment, despite admiration for their production; the labor is so fragmented and is so
methodical [i.e., strictly managed] that the harvest is compromised for the consumption of
the district and it must be protested: help is needed, and this is true because I have seen that
there are no plantations that have even a third of the workers they need, and the owners are
practically unrewarded for their labors because they scarcely have enough field hands to plant
and care for the cane that is needed, and it is frightful to see that they must begin the sugarcane
harvest at so much risk. (fol. 34)

In this delicate situation, Ana Manuela highly valued her husband’s efforts given the circum-
stances: she explains that her husband assumed a very peaceful attitude toward the settled
French, despite the ploys and insults of General Louis Ferrand, governor of Santo Domingo.
In the first person she reviews and describes “the operations of my husband in the eleven
years that he governed this garrison city.” She accuses Archbishop Osés Alzúa y Cooparacio of
having tried to undermine her husband through slander and deceit. She vigorously denounces
“the impeccable hatred of this prelate for my husband for no other reason than his refusal to coop-
erate with his unjust intentions against his families, which he wished to tear apart like a furious
lion after having his cubs torn away” (fol. 20). Since the issue of the French was the most pressing of the moment, “after the archbishop saw Cuban land awash in that rain of foreigners, enriching it with their labors because of my husband’s clever regulations,” he set to sowing “the seeds of discord,” spreading the idea that the French, having established plantations, wanted to become lords of the territory. Describing, in her expressive style, Osés’s accusations, Ana Manuela specifies that he and “the less cautious and imbecilic group of clerics” were determined to foment hatred against the French, whom they accused of preparing “a large offensive against the country” and “planned uprisings.”

The recurrence of a subjective “I” as producer of the truth (the constant use of such phrases as “I warn” and “I say”) places the narrator in a position of loyalty and active participation. The writing emphasizes the cowardice of the bad vassals—that is, the archbishop and his friends and followers, who have provided a false account of events. By revealing these intentions, the false testimonies and lies of the archbishop, she assumes an opposing stance to the self-representation that she announced at the beginning of the narration, that of a “good Christian.” In this way, Ana Manuela maintains coherence in her request without reiterating a discourse of misfortunes—or without resorting to a topos of humility but asking for recognition of her good service to His Majesty.

The constitutive principle and dominant gesture of the letter is the petition, or supplication. For the French linguist Émile Benveniste, it is necessary to examine the etymology of the word “supplication” (in Spanish, súplica) to understand the true meaning of the word. “Supplication” consists in the action of bowing, bending over, throwing oneself at the feet of another, all with a strong connotation of submission by one person to another. Benveniste establishes the connection between the Latin supplicare and supplicium to explain the religious connotation of the word, which was initially used with respect to placating the gods and, thereafter, powerful persons. Supplicium was the offering by which submission was demonstrated to the gods, and thus, the initial meaning of supplicare was to present an offering to the gods in order to appease them. It was this function, initially in a religious context, that gave rise to the legal sense of the word “supplication.” The word “supplicate” stems from the Latin supplicare, whose root comes from suplesicis, “one who bows to pray,” an action that has extraordinary visual and sonorous force. The image created by the word is similar to that created by “to implore,” to humbly pray for something from someone, which necessarily implies a relationship of inequality between the persons. Two elements should be especially noted in this description: first, the act of requesting, of accepting that it is the other who has something to give, whether it is a thing or a position in a hierarchy, and, second, the other represents the way of gaining access to that power. Thus, supplication is an act with twofold connotations: it is an acceptance of submission to the other, and it is a representation of this submission in which the supplicant is aware of her role as actor, that is, her dramatic function, and therefore of the conventionality or artificiality in her complaint. The great force of the trope of supplication derives from its theatricality, the awareness of representation, the mimesis performed by the actor. This theatricality is like imitation that mocks itself, nullifying the feigned rhetorical effect of submission, weakness, and fear before power.

For Ana Manuela, service to the king means the absence of her husband and the dire conditions in which they find themselves. The narrator successfully draws attention to an appreciation of her merits, terrain appropriated for the purpose of presenting her petition. The concerns about the plantations dominate the text and are made to appear overwhelmingly urgent. At the

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6 Émile Benveniste, Problemas de lingüística general (Mexico City: Siglo veintiuno editores, 1993).
conclusion of the letter, the tone of submission, of the poor and aged woman living in an unproductive land filled with savages, disappears and gives way to an emotional appeal of another ilk: that of the good Christian vassal, emphasized by her appeal to the kind sympathies of her addressee. She is a servant of His Majesty.

The dual purpose of this letter is to preserve the honor of the writer and her family and to secure assistance. Regarding honor and estate, we are before a textual subject who petitions for favors (property and money) in return for the actions of her husband. To present her requests the writer assumes the position of the supplicant based on the essential condition of vassalage—not that of her husband but, rather, her own: she serves her king by informing him of the true facts with a display of the exemplary virtues of a true Christian and by suggesting to the monarch how he should act:

the aforementioned city, and Island, being the largest of the Antilles, the richest and most fertile owing to its mines, its fine woods, excellent fruits, and products: the most precious and necessary for Your Majesty, because of its situation it affords the key to the continent of both Americas, for its commerce, and navigation, serving as port of call and anchorage, its famous ports and bays are almost deserted, unpopulated, and without agriculture in the greater part of its fertile territories, which are so propitious for the planting of cacao, sugar, tobacco, indigo, cotton, and other precious fruits, it fails to produce these things in proportion to its extent, and in the service of the state, and of its inhabitants, for lack of workers and the means to do so, and thus to escape the miseries from which they have been reduced, your beloved vassals, who at all times have provided brilliant proof of their constant loyalty and love for Your Majesty. Please, Your Majesty, permit the immigration from the French island to continue so that Eastern Cuba may progress. (fol. 16)

Ana Manuela is an initiator of a discursive practice in which she, as an isolated subject, penetrates the density of events, imbues them with meaning, and assumes the authorial function. Her word has value: she becomes increasingly aware of the importance of her voice and its personal meaning within the system of power relations and of the influence that her voice can accrue as she writes the text. With respect to the years 1810–12, which are critically important in the regional history of eastern Cuba, this assumption of the written word, within such a closed environment as that of a Cuban city, takes on singular importance and merits thorough investigation. The act of writing guarantees, or at least demands, an identity for the subject that is more powerful and gives her an agency that an oral communication does not provide. By producing such a text, the subject defines herself, and in a certain sense she bares herself, she reveals herself, she sets herself along a path of self-affirmation. Ana Manuela is aware of what lies beyond the words she writes in her letter: “at great risk I will say what my soul urges me to say.” The signer of this letter assumes the role of author, along with the power, responsibility, and risk that this implies.