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review

Raza or Race? Remembering Slavery in Equatorial Guinean Literature

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Abstract

In recent decades, in an effort to combat the limited visibility of their works, many Equatorial Guinean writers have sought to integrate their works within a larger, Spanish-speaking cultural sphere. Their efforts invite reflection on how these writers reinforce or deviate from historical ideas of transnational Hispanic identity, such as *hispanismo* or *Hispanidad.* The present study argues that several Equatorial Guinean literary texts, including works by Donato Ndongo-Bidyogo, Francisco Zamora Loboch and Juan Tomás Ávila Laurel, aim to revise historical theories of transnational Hispanic identity by presenting the memory of slavery as an integral part of the shared heritage of Spanish-speaking countries. By enshrining a memory of the transatlantic slave trade, these writers envision a global Hispanophone identity that can be disentangled from its colonial roots, while also creating pathways for solidarity between diverse Afro-Hispanic identities in Africa, Europe and the Americas.

Much literary and critical discourse on Equatorial Guinea has emphasized the distinctive markers of this country's national identity, such as its status as Sub-Saharan Africa's only Spanish-speaking country. However, in recent decades, numerous Equatorial Guinean writers have sought to integrate their works within a larger, Spanish-language cultural sphere—the so-called Hispanic world. The efforts of Equatorial Guinean writers to claim belonging in a transnational, Spanish-speaking community are largely due to the limited global visibility of Equatorial Guinean literature today. At the same time, such efforts also invite reflection on how these writers' vision of a global Hispanophone identity resembles or deviates from historical theories of Hispanic belonging.[1]

In particular, the idea of asserting membership in a community of geographically diverse Spanish-speaking societies recycles historical discourses of a Hispanic family of nations—despite the fact that Equatorial Guinea was usually marginalized in most articulations of such a family. Although the concept of a transnational Hispanic family first emerged in the mid-nineteenth century, it especially came to fruition after the so-called disaster of the Spanish-American war of 1898 through a cluster of theories known as *hispanismo.*[2] These theories, which were promoted by a variety of late nineteenth and early twentieth-century intellectuals, including

1 In recent years, the term "global Hispanophone" has gained currency in academic circles to refer to areas of the former Spanish empire once considered marginal or peripheral in Hispanic studies, such as Equatorial Guinea. However, in this essay, I use the term "global Hispanophone" to refer to the entire Spanish-speaking world in hopes of dislodging the long-entrenched dichotomy between center and periphery. In contrast, I use the term "Hispanic" when referring to historical theories of transnational Spanish-language identities (i.e., "Hispanic family of nations"). Similarly, I use the term "Afro-Hispanic" to refer to Spanish-speaking communities that claim significant African or Afro-diasporic heritage.

2 These theories are also sometimes referred to as *hispanoamericanismo.*

Marcelino Menéndez Pelayo, Juan Valera, Rafael Altamira and Miguel de Unamuno, among others, sought to imagine Spain as culturally or spiritually bound to its lost empire. Despite the political and ideological diversity of these theories, they remained rooted in colonial ideologies, given that they emerged from a desire to assuage the humiliation of Spain's geopolitical decline on the world stage (Loureiro 65). Furthermore, because theories of *hispanismo* promoted the idea that the Spanish-speaking world was held together by a colorless *raza* based on a linguistic and cultural legacy bequeathed by Spain, they obscured the various forms of traumatic, racialized violence through which this community was originally engendered, such as indigenous dispossession and the African slave trade. Yet, as I argue in this study, several Equatorial Guinean writers, including Donato Ndongo-Bidyogo, Francisco Zamora Loboch and Juan Tomás Ávila Laurel, aim to revise historical articulations of Hispanic identity by underscoring the pivotal role that the transatlantic slave trade played in its formation. For these writers, the memory of slavery must be recognized as an integral part of the shared heritage of the Spanish-speaking world. By exposing the racial trauma that earlier theories of *hispanismo* obscured, these writers envision a global Hispanophone identity that can be disentangled from its colonial roots. In doing so, they also create pathways for solidarity between diverse Afro-Hispanic identities in Africa, Europe and the Americas.

The underlying racism of *raza*

In order to trace how contemporary Equatorial Guinean writers revise historically rooted ideas of Hispanic belonging, we must first explore how foundational theories of a transnational Spanish-language community were predicated on the idea of *raza.* The politically diverse theories that comprised historical *hispanismo* included conservative variants that imagined Spain as a "guiding, imperial *madre patria*," as well as progressive strains that aimed to depict a more horizontal relationship between Spain and its former colonies (Faber 136). In addition, conservative *hispanismo* eventually metamorphosized into Ramiro de Maeztu's ultraconservative theory of *Hispanidad,* "whose emphasis on hierarchy, tradition and empire would form the ideological backbone of the Spanish Falange" (136). Despite their ideological diversity, however, theories of *hispanismo* generally suggested that the Spanish-speaking family of nations was held together by a common *raza*, a concept which was usually defined as the combination of "common culture, historical experiences, traditions and language" rather than ethnicity, blood or other criteria associated with the idea of race today (Pike 1).

The idea of a Hispanic *raza* emerged as a reaction to the French-driven discourse of *Latinidad,* which sought to emphasize France's cultural influence on Latin America, as well as the increasing political and cultural hegemony of the United States (Sepúlveda 188-91). In response to these pressures, both conservative and progressive theorists of *hispanismo* imagined Spain's former empire as being united by a Hispanic essence, or *raza*—in other words, the common history, language and shared values that Spain bequeathed to its colonies (190-96). Although the term *raza* was occasionally contested because of its biological implications, it was repeatedly defined as being based on cultural rather than blood-based ties. One of *hispanismo*'s best-known theorists, Miguel de Unamuno, defined *raza* in terms of language: in his own words, "esta nuestra raza no puede pretender consanguinidad; no la hay en España misma. Nuestra unidad es, o más bien será, la lengua, el viejo romance castellano convertido en la gran lengua española" (571).

In addition to insisting that a Hispanic *raza* was not blood-based, proponents of *hispanismo* or *Hispanidad* often argued that their theories were in fact antiracist. For example, the neutral-

ity of Spain and Latin American countries during World War I reinforced their perception of themselves as a family that had positioned itself against "las luchas étnicas del interior de Europa," and therefore, against racial conflict (Sepúlveda 205). Significantly, Ramiro de Maeztu also claimed that his ultraconservative theory of *Hispanidad* was an antiracist alternative to other European imperialisms by reiterating the idea that a Hispanic *raza* was open to all racial backgrounds (Álvarez Chillida 46). Even the Spanish dictator Francisco Franco himself recycled this antiracist rhetoric by claiming, in a speech directed toward Equatorial Guineans shortly before their independence was declared in 1968, that Spanish colonialism had never been based on a belief in Spanish racial superiority (quoted in Álvarez Chillida 41).

Yet, despite the repeated assertions that the idea of a Hispanic *raza* was free of racial ideology, several critics have demonstrated that theories of *hispanismo* masked an underlying racism. For example, Unamuno's vision of the Hispanic *raza* as based only on language rather than on racial heritage was contradicted by his negative treatment of African and Afro-Latin cultures in numerous writings, a pattern which he only reversed a few years before his death.[3] Similarly, in Latin American countries, the celebratory view of Spanish cultural heritage promoted by *hispanismo* reinforced long-entrenched ethnic and racial hierarchies, such as antipathy toward indigenous cultures.[4] Finally, as Álvarez Chillida indicates, both Maeztu's and Franco's claims of antiracism are easily debunked. In *Defensa de la Hispanidad,* the 1934 essay in which Maeztu outlines his theory, the author repeatedly refers with disdain toward peoples of Asian, black, indigenous and Jewish origin (47). Furthermore, during the early years of Francoism, when Maeztu's theory of *Hispanidad* formed one of the regime's official ideological pillars, the harsh imposition of racial segregation between Spaniards and natives in the Guinean colony reached its zenith (42).

Hence, despite the idea that the culture-based Hispanic *raza* wasn't racially exclusive, this idea served to reinforce racial hierarchies in a variety of ways. At the root of these various manifestations of underlying racism was the failure of *hispanismo* to recognize, much less redress, the racial violence through which the so-called Hispanic family had been constructed, such as indigenous dispossession or the slave trade. On the contrary, it is revealing that theories of *hispanismo* circulated during many of the same decades in which Spain was expanding its colonial efforts in Africa. For despite their claims of racial inclusiveness, theories of *hispanismo* were inextricable from the idea that a humiliated Spain, bereft of its American empire, needed to reassert itself by colonizing a racially inferior Africa.

Given the racist roots of historical articulations of a transnational Hispanic identity, for several post-independence Equatorial Guinean writers, the project of claiming visibility, recognition or belonging in a global Hispanophone community requires a renewed awareness of the violent history of slavery and its legacies. For writers such as Ndongo-Bidyogo, Zamora Loboch and Ávila Laurel, the need to recover a memory of slavery is compounded not only by the erasure of slavery from discourses of *hispanismo,* but also by the common perception that "Equatorial Guinea's role in the Atlantic slave trade was negligible" (Branche 23). Despite this perception, as much research has shown, Equatorial Guinea's history is indelibly marked by numerous

3 José Domínguez-Búrdalo demonstrates that Unamuno's negative treatment of black cultures, a recurring pattern in his writings over several decades, only shifted when Unamuno wrote a laudatory letter to Afro-Cuban poet Nicolás Guillén in 1932 (2006, 327-335).

4 The positive view of Spanish heritage allowed Latin American elites to consolidate their power by reinforcing ethnic and racial barriers to power (Halperín Donghi 1987, 80). Similarly, Latin American *hispanismo* often positioned itself as explicitly against *indigenismo,* that is, a movement that sought to revalorize indigenous cultural contributions to Latin American identity (Sepúlveda 2005, 198).

connections to the slave trade. For example, several ethnic groups in contemporary Equatorial Guinea, such as the Fernandinos and the Annobonese, are largely descended from slaves due to various histories of colonial resettlement and migration.[5] In addition, for several centuries, the island of Bioko (formerly Fernando Poo) served as a provisioning station for passing slave ships (Sundiata 18). Furthermore, in the nineteenth century, the Spanish crown made the Fernando Poo region a deportation colony for freed Cuban slaves and political prisoners, where they were subjected to forced labor (Sampedro Vizcaya, "Aquella mansion"). Finally, the widespread use of forced labor in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries created conditions that mirrored slavery (Sundiata 7-8; Di Martino 91-94).

Importantly, the enshrinement of a memory of slavery in works by Ndongo-Bidyogo, Zamora Loboch and Ávila Laurel is consonant with scholarly efforts to integrate Equatorial Guinean culture within a broader paradigm of Atlantic studies. These writers' revision of what it means to belong to a global Hispanophone identity is especially congruous with Joseba Gabilondo's call for "a new dialogue ... between Black and Hispanic histories of the Atlantic" (100), as well as Benita Sampedro Vizcaya's argument that Equatorial Guinea must be reimagined as "an Atlantic site of colonial convergence" ("Engaging" 910). Specifically, by constructing an Equatorial Guinean memory of slavery, these writers invite recognition of a shared heritage between their country and other areas of the Hispanophone world that were also affected by the violence of the slave trade, while also counteracting the marginalization of Equatorial Guinea within histories of transatlantic exchange.

Slavery and transatlantic community in Donato Ndongo-Bidyogo's early works

As several scholars have noted, a memory of slavery pervades much of Donato Ndongo-Bidyogo's writing, despite the fact that his most acclaimed works are set in periods and contexts far removed from the slave trade itself. An early example can be found in the cluster of articles Ndongo-Bidyogo wrote as a tribute to Frantz Fanon, which were published in the Spanish magazine *Índice* between 1972-73. Although these articles address Fanon's reflections on the full trajectory of colonialism and its aftermath, the memory of slavery nonetheless forms a crucial subtext, especially when Ndongo-Bidyogo suggests that relations between Europeans and African can be summed up as "la historia del amo frente a la historia del esclavo" ("Pensando en Frantz Fanon: la emancipación" 168). Other scholars have emphasized that a memory of slavery can also be traced in the writer's later works. For example, Baltasar Fra-Molinero has argued that Ndongo-Bidyogo's novel *El metro* (2007), which narrates a Cameroonian emigrant's journey from Africa to Spain, creates a "palimpsest" between emigration and slavery given that the novel follows "pautas similares a las autobiografías y biografías de esclavas y esclavos en los Estados Unidos en el siglo XIX" (82). Similarly, Ténon Koné has maintained that the leitmotif of the boat voyage, which surfaces in many of the author's short stories and novels, serves as a "chronotope" that accentuates parallelisms between slavery and contemporary migration, especially in *El metro*. Ndongo-Bidyogo himself has highlighted his investment in forging a renewed memory of slavery on several occasions. For example, in an interview with Dorothy Odartey-Wellington from 2006, he notes that during his speaking engagements, he frequently reminds Spanish and

5 The Fernandino community, which evolved under British colonial rule in the 19th century, was descended from recaptured slaves that were resettled in the island of Fernando Poo; over time, they also mixed with the local Bubi population (Sundiata 1996, 7). The Annobonese, the community to which both Zamora Loboch and Ávila Laurel belong, are descended primarily from Angolan and São Toméan slaves who were originally resettled on the island of Annobón during Portuguese colonial rule (Santana Pérez 2014, 16).

European audiences of the slavery's enduring legacy in Europe despite their reluctance to hear about it (166).

Although Ndongo-Bidyogo has produced a wealth of writings in which we might explore his engagement with a memory of slavery, two early texts, in particular, reveal his vision of slavery both as an enduring trauma and a shared heritage that can create opportunities for transatlantic solidarity. The first is his short story "La travesía" (1977), in which an unnamed African narrator recounts his experience of the Middle Passage. The second is his essay "El marco de la literatura de Guinea Ecuatorial" (1984), which served as a prologue to the first ever anthology of Equatorial Guinean literature. These two texts offer complementary perspectives about how a memory of slavery might reshape the global Hispanophone community, a community which had historically privileged language and culture ("*raza*") as unifying elements of a Hispanic cultural heritage, but not race or its associated traumas.

In "La travesía," Ndongo-Bidyogo's exploration of the violent memory of slavery invites reflection on how both language *and* racial trauma can contribute to the creation of a transatlantic Hispanophone identity. The story narrates how an African narrator-protagonist is sold to white slave traders by a local African chief and then forced to board an overcrowded ship along with slaves of multiple ethnic backgrounds and languages. On their way to the New World, the narrator experiences numerous forms of physical and emotional abuse, while also witnessing the deaths of several of his comrades; eventually, he is tasked with disposing of the bodies of dead slaves by throwing them overboard. Finally, increasingly uncertain of his own sanity, the narrator himself perishes, never having reached the New World.

In addition to the story's abundant depictions of brutality against slaves, a central theme of "La travesía" is the narrator's intense frustration at his lack of a common language with his enslaved comrades, as well as his disgust for what he refers to as the "repugnante idioma" (34) of "el animal blanco" (35). After several failed attempts to communicate with his fellow prisoners, who hail from a smorgasbord of different linguistic communities, the narrator becomes increasingly exasperated, finally screaming aloud, "¡¡¿Alguien habla mi idioma?!! ¡¡¿Me entendéis?!!" (32). Despite his vexation, the narrator cannot help but muse that the other slaves, in light of their shared condition, must be having thoughts and experiences similar to his own: "[D]ebemos sentir lo mismo, deberíamos pensar algo juntos" (33).

Significantly, the slaves' lack of a shared language is portrayed as a political as well as a personal frustration, given that it prevents them from organizing against their captors. Although the narrator emphasizes this point several times throughout the story, it becomes especially perceptible in a scene in that depicts the lashing of a fellow slave:

> Oigo el pesado caer de los latigazos en el cuerpo desnudo. Y oigo las palabras ininteligibles para mí, pronunciadas por una garganta pegajosa; el negro no dice nada, ni grita, ni se defiende. Sus movimientos desesperados, queriendo cubrirse la cara, repercuten dolorosa y angustiosamente en todos nosotros... Si nos entendiéramos, sería el momento de dar una voz, levantarse al unísono y rodear al animal blanco. Pero es imposible. (33-34)

This scene underscores the fact that although the narrator believes that his companions share his desire to challenge their white overlords, they are unable to do so because of their inability to communicate. The slaves, in other words, are united by the shared trauma of racial violence, but are isolated by linguistic incomprehension. As a result of this fact, Jerome Branche opts for a pessimistic reading of the story, suggesting that its narrative of community formation is "some-

what limited" (26).

However, it is also important to note that although the narrator's attempts to communicate with his companions are unsuccessful, his feeling of a deep connection to them persists throughout the story. Significantly, the idea that the slaves are bound by trauma but divided by language constitutes a distortion of historical narratives of Hispanic belonging, such as those promoted by *hispanismo.* For if *hispanismo* suggested that a family of far-flung nations was held together by the Spanish language, but not by the memory of racial violence, the story portrays the slaves' sense of community as exactly the inverse. Furthermore, a closer look suggests the possibility of some optimism regarding the slaves' linguistic situation. After all, the fact that the story repeatedly emphasizes the slaves' need for a common language while itself being written in Spanish calls attention to the political utility of transforming colonial languages from instruments of violence into tools of resistance. It also calls attention to the fact that several European languages, including Spanish, eventually did become common languages for black populations on both sides of the Atlantic.

By paradoxically highlighting the political potential that emerges when the victims of colonialism adopt the very languages that were used to traumatize and enslave them, this story aims to accentuate Equatorial Guinea's place within two, overlapping transatlantic spheres in which it had traditionally been marginalized: the global Hispanophone community, on one hand, and the Afro-diasporic world, on the other. By highlighting the duality of colonial languages as potential tools of both oppression and resistance, "La travesía" implicitly challenges the idea of a colorless, culture-based *raza,* which erased the trauma of racial violence from its celebratory portrayals of Spanish cultural heritage. At the same time, the story also seeks to advance the Ndongo-Bidyogo's goal of imbuing Equatorial Guinean literature with a transatlantic, Afro-diasporic consciousness—a project which he had arguably begun in the articles about Fanon he had published only a few years earlier, and which he would continue in later texts that accentuate the similarities between emigration and slavery, such as *El metro*.

Although the narrator of "La travesía" never completes his transatlantic journey, the story's meditation on the formation of a transatlantic black identity nonetheless creates pathways for solidarity between diverse Afro-Hispanic experiences. A particularly notable example of this potential solidarity surfaces in his foundational essay about Equatorial Guinean literature, "El marco de la literatura de Guinea Ecuatorial" (1984), published only seven years after "La travesía." In this essay, Ndongo-Bidyogo delineates the boundaries of the then emergent Equatorial Guinean literary canon, offering nuanced reflections on his view of the differences between European and African cultural perspectives. Although he defends the status of Spanish as Equatorial Guinea's national literary language, he also highlights the fact that the particularities of Guinean culture risk being lost in translation when articulated in Spanish (1984, 36).

For Ndongo-Bidyogo, Equatorial Guinea's rich oral traditions present a special challenge for adaptation into Spanish-language literature. On one hand, he notes, the country needs writers who will "rendir un tributo de admiración y reconocimiento" (21) to the *juglares,* the performers of traditional storytelling; at the same time, the nation's writers must go beyond merely preserving oral tradition, given that they must also create "una literatura nueva, original y personal, producto de su contemporaneidad" (23). In particular, he considers it crucial for Equatorial Guinean writers to be able to capture the rhythmical and musical qualities of the nation's oral traditions in Spanish, given his view that such musicality is a distinctive feature not only of Equatorial Guinean culture, but of African and Afro-diasporic cultures more broadly (40). Given the challenges of using a colonial language to achieve such a task, Ndongo-Bidyogo proposes

Afro-Cuban literature as a source of inspiration:

> Los negros transportados como esclavos a las Antillas supieron aprovechar las características de los vocablos españoles ... para realizar esa vigorosa síntesis que constituye la lírica afrocubana, plena de fuerza simbólica, cuya originalidad está, precisamente, en la incorporación de la danza, de la música, del ritmo, a las palabras. (41)

In this passage, the author highlights several commonalities shared between Afro-Cuban and Equatorial Guinean cultures that enable the former to serve as an example for the latter. First, like Equatorial Guinean literature, Afro-Cuban literature has also faced the task of integrating oral and musical cultures of African origin into European languages and genres. In particular, because Afro-Cuban writers also had to write in Spanish, they learned to exploit this language's particularities to suit the nuances of their culture, which, like Equatorial Guinea's, is also marked by distinctive rhythms and musicality. The resulting product, in which both Afro-Cuban culture and the Spanish language are reciprocally transformed, constitutes a "vigorosa síntesis," characterized by "fuerza simbólica" and "originalidad" – qualities that Ndongo-Bidyogo clearly hopes that Equatorial Guinean literature can emulate. Importantly, despite the geographic and cultural distances that separate Equatorial Guineans from Afro-Cubans, the fact that Ndongo-Bidyogo refers to Afro-Cubans as "los negros transportados como esclavos" and emphasizes the role of the slave trade in creating a significant bond between the two communities.

Ndongo-Bidyogo goes on to cite Nicolás Guillén, Cuba's foremost poet of African descent, as a singular case that merits the attention of Equatorial Guinean writers:

> [E]l ejemplo de Nicolás Guillén bastará para ilustrar lo que se pretende decir. Si a la altura de 1930, sus poemas provocaron un escándalo literario, hoy se reconoce universalmente su frescura rítmica, que lo sitúa entre los grandes poetas contemporáneos de nuestro idioma común. Precisamente el ejemplo revitalizador de los negros antillanos nos lleva a creer que los africanos podemos aportar todavía algo sustantivo a la cultura de las lenguas extranjeras en que nos expresamos. No todo está inventado, ni mucho menos, a pesar de lo maravillado que se pueda quedar ante tantos libros encerrados en las bibliotecas de Europa. (1984, 41-42)

In this excerpt, Ndongo-Bidyogo praises Guillén not only for his successful translation of Afro-diasporic oral culture into Spanish, but also, just as importantly, for his acquisition of transnational visibility. For as he correctly notes, Guillén's two most famous collections of poetry, *Motivos de son* (1930) and *Sóngoro cosongo* (1931), earned him tremendous recognition not only within Cuba, but throughout the entire Spanish-speaking world, despite initially provoking backlash due to their unconventional celebration of a long-denigrated culture. For this reason, Ndongo-Bidyogo asserts, by following the example of Guillén and other Afro-Caribbean writers, Equatorial Guinean literature can overcome the obstacle of invisibility which—despite the decades that have passed since his essay was published—continues to affect it today.

Read together, Ndongo-Bidyogo's story "La travesía" and his essay "El marco" offer a multifaceted theory about how to dislodge a contemporary global Hispanophone identity from the colonial ideologies that gave birth to it. Although in "La travesía," the characters' lack of a common language precludes them from forming a fully-fledged community, the story's retrospective gaze accentuates the political potential that can emerge when the descendants of those affected

by the slave trade transform colonial languages into tools of resistance. In this way, the story suggests that *both* language *and* the traumatic memory of slavery can jointly serve as a source of community-building, an idea which stands in stark contrast to historical theories of a colorless, culture-based *raza*. This view of transatlantic community is further theorized in "El marco," where Ndongo-Bidyogo presents Afro-Cuban literature as a kind of older sibling in whose footsteps Equatorial Guinean literature must follow. The opportunities for transatlantic solidarity that he proposes in this essay, which center around the challenges of adapting African and Afro-diasporic oral cultures into Spanish, emphasize the historical role of slavery in creating a common heritage between diverse Afro-Hispanic identities – a notion that also surfaces, as we will see, in works by Francisco Zamora Loboch and Juan Tomás Ávila Laurel.

Francisco Zamora Loboch's recipes against racism

Undoubtedly, one of the most prominent and forceful explorations of the memory of slavery in Equatorial Guinean literature can be found among the works of Francisco Zamora Loboch, another one of the nation's best-known writers. I am referring to the book-length essay *Cómo ser negro y no morir en Aravaca: manual de recetas contra el racismo* (1994), which was written as a response to the 1992 murder of Lucrecia Pérez Matos, a Dominican migrant, by white supremacists in the Madrid suburb of Aravaca. Pérez Matos's murder, which was later recognized as the first registered hate crime to take place on Spanish soil, shocked many Spaniards at the time, who were surprised by the existence of virulent racism in their country (St. John). By referring to this traumatic episode, the title underscores how Zamora Loboch and Pérez Matos's shared status as blacks in 1990s Spain makes them bearers of the legacy of slavery, despite their origins on different sides of the Atlantic. In this way, the text emerges from a recognition of shared heritage between Zamora Loboch, an Equatorial Guinean long exiled in Madrid, and Pérez Matos, the murdered Dominican migrant.

Zamora Loboch's grief over Pérez Matos's murder leads him to trace the genealogies of Spanish and global racism that culminated in her untimely death. To this end, the essay exposes a range of intersections between Spanish and global racism throughout history and in the present. Discussing far-ranging topics such as European interference in African governments or the politics of race in sports, it insistently portrays these issues as symptoms of the legacies of the transatlantic slave trade. Yet while the book discusses slavery from a global perspective, it especially emphasizes the history of slavery in peninsular Spain, a gesture that challenges the erasure of slavery in Spain's national narratives and in historical theories of a transnational Hispanic community. By spotlighting peninsular slavery, the text suggests that the principal commonality Spain shares with its former empire is not a colorless *raza* based on language or culture, but rather, the fact that Spanish soil, like that of the Americas, is stained by the brutality of racial violence. However, the text also endeavors to resignify Spain's legacies of racism by recovering a transatlantic black subjectivity embedded in the interstices of its culture.

Zamora Loboch's first mention of peninsular slavery occurs in the essay's prologue. After meditating on the relationship between early modern religious persecutions, the transatlantic slave trade and contemporary racism, Zamora Loboch observes that "Vascos, catalanes, cántabros, gallegos y asturianos se dieron con verdadera vocación y dedicación completa a la trata de esclavos" (20). In this passage, he reminds readers that Spain *and* its constituent regions, including regions whose identities are often articulated in opposition to Spanish nationalism, such as Catalonia and the Basque Country, must be reinserted into a transnational history of racism.

This argument is further developed in the essay's first and seventh chapters, "Trabajar como un negro" and "La maldición de Cam," both of which enumerate incidents of racial violence or discrimination enacted against slaves in different regions of Spain between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries. In one anecdote, which is drawn from Catalan language sources, two slaves fled after being severely mistreated and beaten by their Catalan masters (28-29); in another, from the town of Castalla in the year 1520, a slave named Mateo was shot, pierced with a sword, then dismembered by an angry crowd (29-30). Zamora Loboch also discusses unsavory aspects of slavery in other regions, including Galicia, where a slave was purchased to fill the undesirable job of executioner (32); Andalusia, where, according to Zamora Loboch, slaves were commonly owned as late as the nineteenth century (30); and the Basque Country, where "judíos, moros, mulatos o negros" were outright forbidden from living in the first place (32). The seventh chapter, "La maldición de Cam," follows suit by citing other such episodes, including a Catalan-language proclamation of a sixteenth century law that forbade blacks in Valencia from gathering in public (138-139).

Importantly, Zamora Loboch directly frames his discussion of these incidents of racial violence as an attempt to underscore Spain's resemblance to parts of the world that are more commonly associated with the memory of slavery. For example, he prefaces his inventory of racist violence in "Trabajar como un negro" by noting that "no hacía falta viajar hasta la lejana América para ... probar el rigor del látigo del hombre blanco" (28). Similarly, he introduces his recounting of the Mateo story by observing that black slaves in Spain "podía[n] ser linchado[s] al más puro estilo de Alabama o Aravaca" (29). By comparing his indexing of racial violence in Spain to racism in Latin America and the U.S. South, Zamora Loboch establishes a mirror effect between Spain and the Americas, thus abolishing imaginary dichotomies between Europe and the New World, and between colonizer and colonized. However, by also emphasizing the complicity of Spain's regions with racial violence, he reveals "the implication of all those communities in Spain's past and present exploitation of Africans," despite the thorny relationship between Spanish and regional nationalisms (Martin Márquez 343). The overlapping mirror effects between Spain and the New World, on one hand, and between Spain and its regions, on the other, constitute a revision of narratives of *hispanismo*. By recalling these numerous episodes of racial violence in Spain and its constituent regions, Zamora Loboch's text highlights a shared collusion in racial violence between Spain, its regions, the rest of Europe and both Americas – a collusion which supersedes *raza* as Spain's most enduring transatlantic legacy.

Yet, Zamora Loboch's essay also argues that the scars of racial violence in Spain have made the country a home to transatlantic black subjectivities. In the essay's fifth chapter, "Negritud e Hispanidad," Zamora Loboch argues that such a subjectivity inhabits Spain's literary canon, which he divides in racist and antiracist halves. On one hand, writers such as Lope de Rueda and Quevedo are categorized as voices of racism and intolerance, while on the other, Cervantes, García Lorca and the anonymous author of the picaresque novel *Lazarillo de Tormes* are designated as forces of antiracist change. Despite its obvious essentialism, this taxonomy, which Michael Ugarte finds "worthy of an academic treatise," is productive because it invites a reinterpretation of the canon from the perspective of a transatlantic black identity (2013, 104). As I have discussed elsewhere, Zamora Loboch's designation of Cervantes' *Don Quijote* as the principal work of Spain's antiracist canon is left unexplained, but is more fully developed in some of his later writings.[6] Yet, Zamora Loboch provides an equally striking antiracist reading of the

6 In "Don Quijote in Africa" (2017), I trace how Zamora develops this claim more fully in his poem "Estefanía," in which he imagines what would happen if Don Quijote travelled to the Equatorial Guinean island of

Lazarillo, which he discusses at greater length than the *Quijote* in this chapter.

As Zamora Loboch indicates, the *Lazarillo*, which tells the story a roguish young boy from Salamanca who must serve a series of masters in order to survive, features two characters of African descent: Zaide, the absent stepfather of the main character, Lazarillo; and Lazarillo's young, interracial stepbrother, who is Zaide's son. Fascinated by the scenario of an interracial family in sixteenth-century Spain, Zamora Loboch wonders what might happen if the unknown author of this classic were discovered to be a mulatto:

> Pudo ser así: esclava raptada en Annobón por negrero portugués, joven, bella, en casa de señor importante con deseos de restregar la cebolleta en sangre caliente. El pajar. Una noche fría de invierno. Resultado, un mulato. Maravedises, a cambio de silencio, estudios lejos de casa del hijo bastardo, sin apellidos, afición por la literatura ... y, como venganza, el libro genial desgarrado de un mestizo, y a la hora de firmar, un silencio elocuente. ¿A que resulta una teoría plausible, un excelente pajote mental? (99-100, original elision)

Although Zamora Loboch derides his own fantastic musings about the *Lazarillo*'s origin as a "pajote mental," his tongue-in-cheek theory of the novel's authorship is noteworthy because it mirrors reality in several ways. First, the anecdote resembles aspects of Zamora Loboch's own biography, such as his Annobonese origin, the fact that he studied far from home, and his affinity for reading and writing literature.[7] Furthermore, the idea that a son's written work might break the silence imposed on his enslaved mother, a victim of racial and sexual violence, is conspicuously analogous to Zamora Loboch's own objectives in *Cómo ser negro,* which include breaking the murderous silence imposed on Pérez Matos and unearthing Spain's repressed memory of slavery.

In light of the multiple dimensions of Zamora Loboch's solidarity with Pérez Matos, which include their shared heritage as blacks living in Spain, as diasporic and postcolonial subjects, and as citizens of the Spanish-speaking world, I argue that Zamora Loboch's theory of the origins of the *Lazarillo* may be read as a call for an alternative vision of a global Hispanophone identity. According to this family metaphor, the Spanish-speaking world, like the fictional mixed-race son, was engendered through racial and sexual violence. Similarly, the father's efforts to silence the mother and hide the son are analogous to theories of *hispanismo,* which used the idea of a colorless, culture-based *raza* to downplay the violence through which the Spanish-speaking family was formed. Yet, by highlighting the son's ability to bring his mother's story to light despite his father's efforts, this allegory implies that Spain, too, can choose allegiance to its antiracist tradition, symbolized by Cervantes, García Lorca and the *Lazarillo*, rather than to its racist heritage, symbolized by Lope de Rueda and Quevedo. Through this allegory, Zamora Loboch calls for a global Hispanophone identity in which *hispanismo*'s concealment of racial violence can be replaced by an awareness of racism's enduring legacies. This vision, he suggests, will enable past and present racial violence to be redressed, and will allow the silence imposed on victims to be broken.

Annobón.

7 Zamora Loboch was born in Annobón in 1948, but spent most of his youth in Santa Isabel (now Malabo), before moving to Spain in the 1960s to study journalism at university. His prolific writing career illustrates an obvious affinity for literature.

Ávila Laurel and transatlantic solidarities

The third writer examined in this study, Juan Tomás Ávila Laurel, has produced a prolific body of work across multiple genres, including seven novels. A recurring theme is his works, including both literary and nonliterary texts, is the idea that colonialism and its legacies continue to have an enduring effect on the present. The author has articulated this notion through a variety of techniques, such as oscillating between distinct colonial and postcolonial temporalities in his first novel, *La carga* (1999) (Rizo 176-77). Another approach the author has used to represent the enduring legacies of colonialism can be found in novels such as *Áwala cu sangui* (2000) and *Arde el monte de noche* (2009). In these novels, the author depicts the poverty, scarcity and exploitation suffered by his fellow Annobonese during the Macías regime, as well as the devastation caused by the forced deportation of island's able-bodied men, who were subjected to involuntary labor in other regions of the country. Interestingly, the use of involuntary labor, which was practiced during the colonial period as well as under Macías, has been explicitly compared to earlier forms of slavery by several scholars, as well as by Ávila Laurel himself.[8] The abiding effects of colonialism on the present are especially foregrounded in the essay "La ubicuidad de la literatura guineana" (2012). Like Zamora Loboch's *Cómo ser negro y no morir en Aravaca,* this essay connects past and present forms of exploitation in Annobon and in Equatorial Guinea to a broader genealogy of anti-black racism whose origin is the slave trade.

Although many of Ávila Laurel's writings could be said to meditate on Equatorial Guinea's place in a global Hispanophone community, one work that offers a particularly compelling example of how a memory of slavery can produce new transatlantic solidarities is his fifth novel, *Avión de ricos, ladrón de cerdos* (2008). This novel, which narrates the misadventures of two young men from Bata accused of stealing a rich businessman's pigs, contains significant thematic overlap with several of the works studied in this article. For example, its picaresque structure, which has been carefully analyzed by Heba Ismail, evokes Zamora Loboch's idea in *Cómo ser negro...* that the picaresque genre can be reimagined as a mouthpiece for subjectivities engendered by racial violence. Similarly, the novel's marked intertextuality with the poetry of Nicolás Guillén, Cuba's most prominent poet of African descent, strongly recalls Ndongo-Bidyogo's remarks in "El marco..." about the commonalities shared by Equatorial Guinean and Afro-Cuban literature, which were written more than twenty years earlier. By intertwining its picaresque narrative with homage to Guillén, this novel allegorically reimagines a global Hispanophone identity predicated on transatlantic racial solidarity as a path to survival and prosperity for Equatorial Guinean literature, despite the violent origins of this identity.

This novel's main storyline concerns the narrator-protagonist, Mba Sima, an impoverished, adolescent male of Fang ethnicity from the outskirts of the Equatorial Guinean city of Bata. This character's first-person narrative is interwoven with several subplots, including one about his deceased father, Mba Ndong, an admirer of Guillén's poetry. The principal storyline begins when the young Mba Sima and his cousin are caught trying to steal pigs that belong to a corrupt, unnamed businessman. In retaliation, the businessman has them kidnapped and forces them to board a plane to the capital city of Malabo. Although at first, the superstitious businessman

8 Scholars who have made this comparison include not only the aforementioned Sundiata and DiMartino, but also Baltasar Fra-Molinero ("Estado, religión, trabajo y hambre") and Michael Ugarte, who eloquently poses the question: "[W]here does slavery end and voluntary labor begin?" (21). In *Áwala cu sangui,* Ávila Laurel, in a passage describing how Macías' officials coercively rounded up the island's able-bodied men, sarcastically declares: "La ONU no existe. ¡Viva la trata de esclavos!" (56).

plans to kill the two boys in a sacrificial ritual, a mysterious phone call causes him to spare them just in the nick of time. The young men become the businessman's employees and enrich themselves by skimming some of his profits, which they are entrusted with guarding; thus, they are able to support their families and start their own side business.

As Heba Ismail has argued, the novel bears numerous features of picaresque narratives, such as its first-person narration, its episodic structure, its themes of marginalization and survival, and its emphasis on the "ambigüedad moral" of its main character (74). The novel also bears a pronounced intertextual relationship with the poetry of Nicolás Guillén, which enters the novel by way of the protagonist's estranged father, Mba Ndong, who is also deceased. Despite Mba Ndong's propensity for alcoholism and promiscuity during his lifetime, he is remembered favorably by his son and by others throughout his community for his social role as a "trovador de *nvet*"—that is, a performer of *mvet,* a genre of Fang oral epic (43).[9] In addition, Mba Ndong is also known for having studied in Cuba during his youth, where his discovery of an unnamed Cuban poet affected him so deeply that he was inspired to change his name to Yambambé Yambambó—an unmistakable reference to Nicolás Guillén's poem "Canto negro" from *Sóngoro cosongo.*[10]

Yambambé's identification with Nicolás Guillén is a product of several factors. For example, the narrator speculates that his father must have marveled at the similarity between Guillén's poetic syllables, which aimed to mimic the sound of African languages, such as Fang (52). In this way, the novel accentuates the common cultural heritage and traumatic history that link Equatorial Guinea and Cuba as a result of the slave trade. Furthermore, the novel underscores the fact that Yambambé perceives a parallelism between his commitment to performing *mvet* and Guillén's dedication to integrating Afro-Cuban music into poetry—a parallelism so strong that he renames himself after one of Guillén's poetic creations. Interestingly, Yambambé's renaming of himself indicates a view of Guillén that is marked by heroic awe. By portraying Guillén as a source of inspiration to Yambambé, the novel echoes Ndongo-Bidyogo's argument in "El marco," in which Ndongo lauded Guillén as an example of how Equatorial Guinean writers might enshrine their oral traditions in literature by adapting the Spanish language to their cultures.

However, in this novel, Yambambé's relationship to epic narratives comprises more than performance or narration. Rather, the young narrator's recounting of Yambambé's life constitutes "un canto de tintes épicos" in its own right, making the narrator a kind of "trovador improvisado" of his father's story (Martín de la Nuez 228). In this way, Yambambé's admiration for Guillén is mirrored by Yambambé's own heroic status within his son's *mvet*-like narrative. The narrator's view of his father as a heroic figure reaches its climax in the scene of the miraculous rescue, when a mysterious phone call saves Mba Sima and his cousin from being sacrificed by the corrupt businessman's henchmen. Crucially, when one of the men asks the boys why the caller spoke with "aquella voz peculiar" that seemed to indicate a throat condition, Mba Sima becomes convinced that his father must have intervened from beyond the grave on their behalf (222). For, given Yambambé's role as a performer of *mvet*, his voice is recognizable throughout Bata's Fang community; in particular, this voice was known for being "cascada, como si tuviera algo en la garganta" (54).

Thus, the novel represents two instances of heroic admiration: first, Mba Ndong's discovery

9 *Mvet,* as it is typically spelled in English, refers to both a stringed musical instrument and to "the genre of narration for which the instrument is the accompaniment" (Belcher 51). This heroic oral epic genre is well known in Equatorial Guinea, Gabon and Cameroon. Its narratives "evoke a world of the mythic past, populated by known characters and families ... in which the protagonists are created through the choice of the narrator" (52).

10 Guillén's poem uses these syllables onomatopoeically to imitate the sound of Afro-Cuban music, as the first lines demonstrate: "¡Yambambó, yambambé! / Repica el congo solongo, / repica el negro bien negro."

of Guillén, which causes him to rename himself Yambambé Yambambó; and second, Mba Sima's belief that his estranged, deceased father miraculously rescued him, which is based on the recognition of his father's voice. Consequently, Guillén, Yambambé and Mba Sima represent a multidirectional network of transatlantic solidarity—one that is held together, significantly, by language and race. In the rescue scene, this network of solidarity is directly linked to the narrator's survival and prosperity. By inviting us to imagine how the legacies of Yambambé and Guillén enable the young narrator to narrowly escape death and subsequently achieve prosperity, the novel offers an allegorical commentary on the continued growth of Equatorial Guinean literature. According to this allegory, Equatorial Guinean literature, like Mba Sima, may be imagined as a *pícaro* struggling to make ends meet. In order to survive and prosper, it must follow the example of Yambambé: in other words, it must treasure and preserve the nation's oral traditions, while also rediscovering a feeling of shared heritage and common purpose with other Afro-Hispanic identities and experiences. Thus, by interweaving its picaresque narrative with a reverence for oral cultures and Guillén's poetry, Ávila Laurel's novel complements Donato Ndongo-Bidyogo's and Francisco Zamora Loboch's texts, proposing that an awareness of race, rather than *raza,* can reshape Equatorial Guinea's relationship to the Hispanophone world.

Conclusion

Taken together, the various Equatorial Guinean literary works I have discussed, which span four decades, jointly suggest that the memory of the transatlantic slave trade can serve as a bridge for articulating Equatorial Guinea's place in a global Hispanophone community. The complementary visions of transatlantic solidarity proposed by Donato Ndongo-Bidyogo, Francisco Zamora Loboch and Juan Tomás Ávila Laurel revise the historical discourses of *hispanismo,* which occluded the memory of racial violence that was necessary for constructing a global Hispanic community. Consequently, these Equatorial Guinean writers undermine the notion that a global Hispanophone identity can only be conceived in terms of Spain's linguistic and cultural inheritance. Rather, their alternative visions of transnational community accentuate their own creative power to produce new networks of solidarity amongst formerly colonized peoples, thus decentering Spain's traditional position as the *madre patria* of the Hispanic world.

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