

Urban Borderlands: African Writers in Precarious Spain, 1985-2008

by

Anna Catherine Tybinko

Department of Romance Studies  
Duke University

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Approved:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Lamonte Aidoo, Co-Advisor

\_\_\_\_\_  
Stephanie Sieburth, Co-Advisor

\_\_\_\_\_  
Walter Mignolo

\_\_\_\_\_  
France Winddance Twine

\_\_\_\_\_  
Elvira Vilches

Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for the degree of Doctor  
of Philosophy in the Department of  
Romance Studies in the Graduate School  
of Duke University

2021

ABSTRACT

Urban Borderlands: African Writers in Precarious Spain, 1985-2008

by

Anna Catherine Tybinko

Department of Romance Studies  
Duke University

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Approved:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Lamonte Aidoo, Co-Advisor

\_\_\_\_\_  
Stephanie Sieburth, Co-Advisor

\_\_\_\_\_  
Walter Mignolo

\_\_\_\_\_  
France Winddance Twine

\_\_\_\_\_  
Elvira Vilches

Abstract of dissertation submitted in partial  
fulfillment of the requirements for the degree  
of Doctor of Philosophy in the Department of  
Romance Studies in the Graduate School of  
Duke University

2021

Copyright by  
Anna Catherine Tybinko  
2021

## Abstract

This dissertation, “Urban Borderlands: African Writers in Precarious Spain, 1985-2008,” analyzes the literature of four African-born authors who publish for a Spanish audience: the Beninese writer Agnès Agboton; Najat El Hachmi and Rachid Nini who migrated from Morocco; as well as exiled Equatorial Guinean novelist Donato Ndongo-Bidyogo. Because they come from such diverse backgrounds, literary critics have typically only read their work in unison under the label “migrant narrative.” However, rather than treat these authors and their depictions of migrancy as somehow foreign, I ask what they can tell us about Spain’s dependency on undocumented African workers in its quest to become a developed, European nation. Starting with the promulgation of the first immigration law in 1985 this project charts Spain’s subsequent transformation from a country of émigrés into a cosmopolitan destination for workers the world over.

Sociological and anthropological approaches to Spanish/African relations center on Spain’s frontier zone with Morocco or in the true interior, between agricultural workers, whereas these creative works offer rare testimonies to the simultaneous bordering of Spanish cities. Through their collective storytelling effort, I reframe the concept of bordering—not just as geographical lines or physical boundaries—but as practices of racialization and gender discrimination that undergird labor market segmentation, thereby exerting serious controls over the day-to-day of migrant life in a

new host country. Each chapter addresses one of these forms of border making and how it contributed to Spain's ability to claim its place among the ranks of the European Union. On the whole, the project considers these bordering efforts as iterations of precarious life and labor conditions that predate the financial crisis of 2008.

## **Dedication**

Para Ale, por ser mi compañero en todo, y Marina, por acompañarme durante el último empujón.

# Contents

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| Abstract .....   | iv  |
| Dedication.....  | vi  |
| Acknowledgments.....   | ix  |
| Introduction.....  | 1   |
| 1. Writing Spain, Writing the City: Donato Ndongo-Bidyogo's <i>El Metro</i> and Urban Entrapments .....                      | 27  |
| 1.1 Introduction .....   | 27  |
| 1.2 Donato Ndongo-Bidyogo and the Equatorial Guinean Context.....  | 31  |
| 1.3 Overview .....   | 39  |
| 1.4 Paradise Lost.....   | 44  |
| 1.5 Re-writing Immigration .....   | 56  |
| 1.6 Conclusion.....  | 64  |
| 2. Rachid Nini's <i>Diario de un ilegal</i> as a Record of the Harsh Realities of Migrant Life in the Spanish El Dorado..... | 68  |
| 2.1 Introduction .....   | 68  |
| 2.2 The Author & The Text.....   | 76  |
| 2.3 A Story of Spain.....  | 83  |
| 2.4 The Pervasive Nature of Migrant Precarity .....  | 91  |
| 2.5 Conclusion: El Dorado or Fortress Europe... or Something Else?.....  | 110 |
| 3. Najat El Hachmi: At Home in the World .....   | 115 |
| 3.1 Introduction .....   | 115 |

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| 3.2 Overview .....   | 122 |
| 3.3 Mimoun/Manel.....  | 131 |
| 3.4 The Narrator/Protagonist.....  | 142 |
| 3.5 Conclusion.....  | 157 |
| 4. Mothering, <i>Mestizaje</i> and the Migrant Future of Spain in Agnés Agboton's <i>Más allá del mar de arena</i> ..... | 160 |
| 4.1 Introduction .....   | 160 |
| 4.2 Criticism.....   | 169 |
| 4.3 Storytelling as Mothering.....   | 173 |
| 4.4 Mestizaje and Beyond.....  | 195 |
| Conclusion .....   | 203 |
| Appendix A .....   | 211 |
| Works Cited .....  | 215 |
| Biography.....   | 227 |

## Acknowledgments

Writing itself may be a solitary endeavor, but this dissertation has come to fruition thanks to the support of a wide-reaching community of scholars, colleagues, friends and family to whom I am eternally grateful.

First and foremost, I would like to thank the members of my committee for lending a critical eye and a discerning ear as I worked through these ideas on paper and out loud. Many thanks to my advisors, Lamonte Aidoo and Stephanie Sieburth whose thorough feedback, dedication and enthusiasm have spurred this project along. Lamonte, you are an amazing role model, mentor, and friend. Thank you to Walter Mignolo for the engaged and enlightening conversations over the years. I am consistently humbled by the insight of Elvira Vilches, whose incredible attention to detail has often signaled new avenues of inquiry that I overlooked myself. France Winddance Twine is a fount of wisdom and I am honored to have her read. Finally, the beauty of a Romance Studies department is the ability to make transversal connections across language and literatures. I am thankful to Helen Solterer and Saskia Ziolkowski for their willingness to forge such connections.

I will always have my undergraduate advisor, Chris Swafford, to thank for introducing me to the joys of studying Spanish literature and instilling in me a love of all things Spain way back when, as well as my Preparing Future Faculty mentor, Nina

Namaste, for helping translate that love to the undergraduate classroom now that I find myself in the instructor role. I want to express my appreciation for the phenomenal students I have had the opportunity to teach at Duke University, especially the members of my “Spanish Narratives of Migration” courses. Your fresh perspectives on many of the works dealt with in this dissertation gave me much food for thought. Thank you to Nadia Ford for seeing in me a mentor and friend. I have learned so much from witnessing the *joie de vivre* with which you embark on every new adventure.

During the doctoral program, I was fortunate enough to find a cohort of peers that crisscrosses years, areas of study –and more. C.J. and Elia, it has been a delight to grow our little team of *peninsularistas* together. Thank you to Marcelo Noah, Marina Bedran, Nicolás Sánchez Rodríguez, and Matthew Whitehouse Gordillo for forming such an enriching “fauxhort.” To my sister-scholars: Alyssa Granacki, Farren Yero, Nina Ebner and Camila Moreiras, there are no words to adequately express my gratitude for your friendship. Alyssa, in particular, deserves much credit for tirelessly helping me edit grant proposals, conference papers, and errant sentences. You are a true powerhouse. Nina, who knew that being born a rowhouse apart from one another would spark decades of intellectual exchange? I consider it the happiest of coincidences. A big thanks to Rachael Eisenberg who has always expressed sincere interest in the development of this project and whose groundbreaking decarceration work represents an important challenge to the urban borderlands that plague our beloved hometown of Philadelphia.

I must extend a huge *gracias* to my loved ones in Spain who have opened their hearts and homes to me during successive research trips: Isabel de Madariaga, the Barrera-Demicheli family (Eduardo, Nora, Bruno and Brunella), David García Martínez, María Besant, Joy Figueroa, Tracy Scott and Pablo Fernández Fraga. Thank you to Marta Iturmendi for helping me navigate the ins and outs of Spanish academia. There are new friends to thank as well. The incredible activists who I met through the Madrid branch of SOS Racismo continue to inspire my work. I am especially touched by the warm welcome I received from Fátima Abdallah González and by the generosity of Georgina Marcelino who literally offered me the (very stylish!) clothes off her back when my luggage got lost in transit.

I am also touched by the trailblazing scholars on this side of the pond who have taken the time to offer me their sage advice. Thank you to Martin Repinecz and Jeffrey Coleman for including me in the Taller de Raza, Etnicidad, y Ciudadanía en España (TRECE) as part of ALCESXXI last summer. Chapter 4 benefited greatly from the input of Jeffrey, Michelle Murray, Mary Kate Donovan and Nagore Sedano. Michelle, thank you for continuing to lend your incredible expertise. *Obrigada* to Daniel F. Silva for his willingness to take part in endless discussions of decoloniality, racial capital, and more. *Miles de gracias* to Benita Sampedro Vizcaya and Adolfo Campoy-Cubillo for their encouragement to think through the Global Hispanophone. Benita graciously facilitated Donato Ndongo-Bidyogo's visit to Duke University in 2017. That visit, in turn,

determined much of my orientation to this project and working with living authors, so I am deeply indebted to Benita, to Donato, and to that experience overall.

Last but not least, thank you to my dear parents, Helen Mangelsdorf and Roman Tybinko for always cheering me on. My father, Roman, taught me early on to question the boundaries of national identity and to value stories of migration. Thank you, Alejandro Barrera de Madariaga, I could not have done this without you.

This dissertation was researched and written with the help of fellowships from the Duke University Graduate School, the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation and the American Council of Learned Societies. The project profited greatly from affiliations with the Instituto de Lengua, Literatura y Antropología of the Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas and the Departamento de Estudios Románicos, Franceses, Italianos y de Traducción at the Universidad Complutense de Madrid, where it evolved under the guidance of Professors Margarita del Olmo Pintado and Pura Fernández, and Barbara Fraticelli and Eugenia Popeanga Chelaru, respectively.

## Introduction

“Perhaps the butterflies are mute because  
no one would believe their terrible stories.”

- “Immigration Interview with Don Francisco,” *Dulce*, Marcelo Hernandez Castillo, p. 21

In dealing with a group of authors who, within their lifetime, migrated to Spain in some capacity, this dissertation wrestles with the same tensions present in Hernandez Castillo’s poem. For one, there are the issues of communication and belief. Is there a way to put into words the hardships that the migratory process often presents? Will these narratives be believed? A crucial element that unites these diverse authorial voices is a dedication to storytelling, of committing their terrible stories to the page despite all odds. Donato Ndongo-Bidyogo (Chapter 1) and Najat El Hachmi (Chapter 3), both espouse what I will call a “turn to fiction.” That is, when recounting experiences so horrific that they risk being deemed “exaggerated” or “unreal,” these two authors express a preference for a fictional approach. Without claiming their stories as fact, they present us with situations and characters that very well *might* exist.<sup>1</sup> Even in the case of Rachid Nini (Chapter 2) and Agnès Agboton (Chapter 4), whose narratives of migration are technically autobiographical, there is a resistance to the linearity that traditionally

---

<sup>1</sup> Here, I am paraphrasing Jacques Rancière’s reflections on mimesis: “One who engages in mimesis is not one who reproduces real situations or events by transposing them, but rather one who invents characters and situations that do not exist but that might exist” (Rancière 92).

defines the genre. In this way, these works of nonfiction explore the “uncertain boundaries between events that one reports and those that one invents” much like their fictional counterparts (Ranci re 9). The question of stereotypes looms large in this project as well. Part of the genius of Castillo’s “Immigration Interview” is the dark irony with which he interrogates the figure of the migrant.<sup>2</sup> It asks us: are butterflies not migrants too? Millions of monarchs cross the border between Mexico and the U.S. every year (“Monarch Butterflies Migrate 3,000 Miles—Here’s How”), whereas the obstacles put in place to prohibit the same movement of human beings means that thousands of people have died in the past decade trying to follow the same route North (Missing Migrants Project, International Organization for Migration).

Meanwhile, a very similar scene plays out across the Atlantic. Slicing through the hillsides of North Africa there are two enormous, steel mesh barriers that divide the autonomous Spanish cities of Ceuta and Melilla (often referred to as enclaves) from Moroccan territory. These double-facing fences, or *vallas*, are nearly twenty feet high and crowned on the top with razor-wire. Along with the Guardia Civil patrolling the Spanish side, thermal cameras and motion sensors lend a distinctly prison-like feel to the entire operation. These heightened surveillance measures now make for one of the world’s most militarized borders, despite the fact that Spain and Morocco are on

---

<sup>2</sup> Whenever speaking in general terms, I opt for the noun “migrant” and the verb “migrate” to avoid assumptions regarding the directionality or legality of migration.

amicable terms. For this reason, political scientists such as Wendy Brown cite the Spanish-Moroccan example as illustrative of the performativity of national boundaries in an era of late capitalist globalization that, rather than indicate a resurgence of nation-state sovereignty, signals its erosion (Brown 32). In this light, the “ad hoc landscape of flows and barriers both inside nation-states and in the surrounding postnational constellations...signifies the ungovernability by law and politics of many powers unleashed by globalization and late modern colonization, and a resort to policing in blockading in the face of this ungovernability” (Brown 24). Drawing on this performative element, numerous scholars speak of a “border spectacle” taking place on Spain’s southern frontier in which “migrant illegality is made spectacularly visible” through a show of European force (Andersson 138; De Genova, “The Borders of ‘Europe’ and the European Question” 3; De Genova, “Border, Scene and Obscene” 492; Soto Bermant 123).

Crucially, as anthropologist Ruben Andersson reminds us, the Spanish border spectacle is fundamentally “double-edged;” it is a theatrical performance in “two distinct acts” (Andersson 139). With this assertion Andersson is pointing to Spain’s “peculiar geography” as a peninsular land formation that extends into the Atlantic Ocean and Mediterranean Sea—and owns island territories in both bodies of water. This has resulted in a “dispersed border at sea versus the sharply demarcated land borders of

Ceuta and Melilla” (139). And, as he warns us, while the militarization of Ceuta and Melilla may have the most striking visual impact, Spain’s maritime frontier is no less dangerous. In fact, the majority of migrant deaths in the region have resulted from attempted Atlantic and Mediterranean crossings. To give a sense of the numbers, the United Nations Higher Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) reports that Spain received nearly 42,000 arrivals in 2020, with 40,326 migrants arriving by sea and the remaining 1,535 people arriving by land. Their calculation for the dead and missing along both routes reached a grim 788 (UNHCR). However, according to some non-governmental organizations, this estimate is shockingly low. *Caminando Fronteras*, which monitors migratory flows from popular countries of departure, insists that closer to 2,170 migrants were lost in the attempt to get to Spain by boat alone. They calculate that eighty-five percent of the past year’s death toll, or 1,851 people, took place during 45 shipwrecks en route to the Spanish-owned Canary Islands. This is a stark reminder of the way in which the Atlantic Ocean, much like the Mediterranean Sea, has been weaponized by Spain through a politics of non-assistance.<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup> The term “politics of non-assistance” was coined by Charles Heller and Lorenzo Pezzani as part of their *Forensic Oceanography* project which attempted to document the precarious conditions, and unprecedented number of deaths in the Mediterranean in the aftermath of the Arab Spring. See “Ebbing and Flowing: The EU’s Shifting Practices of (Non-) Assistance and Bordering in a Time of Crisis” and “Liquid Traces: Investigating the Deaths of Migrants at the EU’s Maritime Frontier.”

The works gathered here all touch on the precariousness of migrant life in the face of Spain's bordering efforts. Ndongo-Bidyogo's *El Metro* (*The Metro*, 2007), for example, details the travails of Lambert Obama Ondo, the novel's Cameroonian protagonist, as he is smuggled from Dakar, Senegal, across the Western Sahara and taken by fishing boat or *cayuco* to Lanzarote, in the Canary Islands. Agboton's *Más allá del mar de arena: Una mujer africana en España* (*Beyond the Sea of Sand: An African Woman in Spain*, 2005) frequently reflects on the growing popularity of this same route and the extreme danger it presents. Unlike the mere 13 kilometers of Mediterranean that separate Spain and Morocco at the Strait of Gibraltar's narrowest point, migrants attempting to reach the Canary Islands from West African countries such as Morocco, Western Sahara, Mauritania, and Senegal must traverse hundreds—if not thousands—of kilometers of open Atlantic in vessels designed for coastal fishing rather than deep sea ventures. As described in Chapter 4, this route started to gain popularity in the mid-2000s as a result of the EU's attempts to "externalize" its border controls by pressuring a number of its North and West African neighbors to shoulder the burden of controlling "irregular migration." Although this trajectory has seen renewed fervor in the past several years with 2020 being the deadliest on record (*Missing Migrants Project*), it is worth noting that this is not a recent phenomenon. Reports of the first rickety rafts (*pateras*) trying to make their way across the Mediterranean in the early 1990s soon

flooded the Spanish news media. In response, the shipwreck figures as an important trope in Nini's *Diario de un ilegal* (*Diary of a Clandestine Migrant*, 2002, originally *Yawmiyyāt muhāyir sirri*, 1999). In his case, the haunting images of capsized pateras that wash up on Spain's southern beaches after the failed attempt to cross over from Morocco operate as a sort of leitmotif, tying together disparate threads of his own scattered narrative of migration. Compared to the perils of Spain's aqueous non-border, the bureaucracy of applying for a visa through the Spanish Consulate as described in Nini's *Diary*, or the hassle of customs and the discomfort of the ferry ride across the Strait as dealt with in El Hachmi's *El último patriarca* (*The Last Patriarch*, 2008, originally *L'últim patriarca*) seem relatively prosaic. Still, what the EU terms "regular" migratory processes are harrowing too. Just like Nini, *The Last Patriarch's* Mimoun is exposed to the vicissitudes of political corruption and is the target of racist aggressions during every phase of his journey. Across the board, there is no one instance in which the border appears as a concrete physical entity in any of these texts. Instead, these heterogenous literary works allow us to conceptualize the diffuse nature of contemporary border regimes. Rather than dwell on the impediments to migration that material barriers represent, these texts point to practices of gender discrimination, racialization, and labor market segmentation that determine the day-to-day of migrant life in a new host country. And, unlike the butterflies of Hernandez Castillo's poem, these authors are far

from mute; they are responsible for some of the most vibrant portrayals of migrant Spain. I contend that through the act of storytelling they have purposely sought to highlight how Spain's construction as European, in opposition to Africa, has created a dangerous epistemological space that migrants must navigate. The objective of this study is, therefore, to examine whether the words of those who write from that embattled space can be considered particularly insightful or revelatory when exploring ongoing issues of inequality—especially where the influence of neoliberal policies is concerned.

Spain makes for a fascinating case study when it comes to the question of internal bordering because it only passed its first unified immigration law in 1985. The *Ley Orgánica 7/1985, de 1 de julio, sobre derechos y libertades de los extranjero en España*, or LOE, marked a watershed moment in the transformation from a long-standing country of émigrés into a popular destination, a process that unfolded almost in parallel with the Spanish transition to democracy, known simply as “the Transition” (1975-1982).<sup>4</sup> In fact, the LOE was considered a prerequisite for Spain's admission to the European Economic Community and thus indicated its true re-emergence on the global stage after nearly forty years of isolation and economic stagnation under the dictatorship of Francisco

---

<sup>4</sup> Between 1880 and 1974 an average of 83,000 Spaniards left every year (Muñoz Comet 21), whereas after the death of dictator Francisco Franco in 1975 and until 1988, a total of 466,394 returns were registered in Spanish consulates (Cornelius 387).

Franco (1939-1975). Designed to defend Spain's hard-won Europeanism, this law is notorious for focusing solely on the regulation of human mobility.<sup>5</sup> Germany, France and Switzerland had already enacted policies to restrict the influx of non-native workers over a decade prior in the wake of the 1973 petroleum crisis. The EEC therefore wanted assurance that admitting Spain would not create a chink in their armor (Aja 21). So, although the LOE ushered in an era of unprecedented immigration, it established very little administrative recourse for migrants to 'regularize' their situation, thereby forcing them into perpetual undocumented status.<sup>6</sup>

Furthermore, with the formation of European Union (EU) in 1993, and the Schengen Area two years later, Ceuta and Melilla became the new European conglomerate's only terrestrial border with Africa practically overnight. This formerly

---

<sup>5</sup> As Daniela Flesler notes, finally being deemed "European" was a long battle. Spain first applied in 1962 but was rejected because the political conditions under Franco's authoritarian rule did not meet regulations. Therefore, entry was solicited again in 1977 after his death and finally granted in June of 1985.

<sup>6</sup> According to noted legal scholar Eliseo Aja, "En realidad, la LOE no era, pese al título, una ley sobre derechos y libertades de los extranjeros puesto que solo mencionaba los citados, recortándoles además, sino que era una ley dirigida a facilitar el control de la entrada de los extranjeros y su expulsión cuando se encontraran en una situación irregular" ("In reality, the LOE was not, despite its title, a law about the rights and liberties of foreigners, given that it only mentioned them in passing and undercut them on top of that. Rather, it was a law directed at facilitating the control of foreigners entering the country and their expulsion when they found themselves undocumented"; Aja and Arango 21). The law's main components addressed short-term visits but made no provision for permanent residence, family reunification, or a route to naturalization (Carrera). Furthermore, although the LOE has been revised many times, Spain did not implement a citizenship until 2015, meaning that until quite recently any petitioner would need to prove good civic character and display a "sufficient degree of integration into Spanish society" as stipulated by Article 22.4 of the Civil Code. The inherent subjectivity of this ruling turned supposed inclusion measures into potential tools of exclusion as the individual autonomous regions had primary responsibility for defining these parameters.

dusty frontier zone came to epitomize the notion of “Fortress Europe” as Spain hurriedly engaged in wall-building efforts. While this popular turn of phrase references the increased militarization of checks and controls at united Europe’s exterior borders, it also recycles terminology coined by Joseph Goebbels during World War II as he sought to convey a sense of security to the beleaguered inhabitants of the Third Reich (Seaton 41). This echo of Nazi-era ideology demonstrates how the EU’s present-day “area of Freedom, Security and Justice” (Laitinen 127) is predicated on the control and exclusion of racialized bodies. Whether it be from Africa, Latin America, Asia or the Middle East, most of those “outsiders” who seek their futures in the EU hail from places that experienced the impact of either outright or de facto colonization in the past. In many cases, “their forebears contributed to collectively producing the greater part of the material basis for the prosperity of Europe” (De Genova, “The Borders of ‘Europe’ and the European Question” 18). But while much of Europe perceives these arrivals as the return of the colonized, Spain’s position is slightly different. African immigration in particular dredges up Spain’s medieval history, when much of the Iberian Peninsula was ruled by successive Islamic dynasties of Arab and Berber descent (711-1492), and raises anxieties about its European status (Flesler, Martin-Márquez). As we will see in Chapters 2 and 3, Moroccan migrants, specifically, are often associated with the figure of the marauding “Moor.” Despite Spain’s long-standing colonial influence in Morocco,

their presence is cast as the return of the threatening colonizer. Framed in the language of *Reconquista*, an influx of workers from across the Strait of Gibraltar is thus posited as an “economic invasion.”

On the other hand, maurophobic discourses have consistently accompanied the fetishization of Spain’s Moorish heritage—or its habitus, to borrow from Barbara Fuchs (Fuchs 5). Even during the fateful century between the fall of Granada, the last Muslim kingdom, to the Catholic Kings in 1492, and the expulsion of the Moriscos (Muslim subjects already forcibly converted to Christianity) starting in 1609, “Spanish culture retained and even celebrated the culture of al-Andalus” (Fuchs 1). As Fuchs argues, “Spanish attitudes towards Moors and the Moorish heritage underlie key cruxes in Spain’s development” (Fuchs 2). In *Disorientations: Spanish Colonialism in Africa and the Performance Identity*, Susan Martin-Márquez bolsters this same argument by illustrating how “the post-Enlightenment ‘rediscovery’ of its Andalusian past led Spaniards and foreigners alike to Orientalize the Iberian nation” (Martin-Márquez 8). This came to a head with the age of European imperialism, when Spain’s northern neighbors would cite the country’s historical ties with, and geographic proximity to, Africa in order to claim that Spaniards were not entirely European (Mignolo, “Afterword: What Does the Black Legend Have to Do with Race?” 313). In particular, anti-Spanish vitriol on the part of Britain—or the “Black Legend,” as it was later dubbed by Spanish journalist Julián

Juderías (1914)—revived many tropes from the Inquisition. In a bizarre twist, concerns about purity of blood (*limpieza de sangre*) that had been used to legitimize the expulsion of the Jewish and *Morisco* populations in the fourteenth through fifteenth and seventeenth centuries, respectively, were later used by the British to characterize Spain itself and cast Spanish colonial endeavors as particularly “brutal” or “barbaric.”<sup>7</sup> While the earliest articulations of this line of racist thought—that is notably *internal* to Europe—dates back to sixteenth century and the reign of Elizabeth I, the Black Legend reached its zenith in the nineteenth century when “Spain’s backwardness was made all the more evident by the progressive light of England’s modern, ‘legitimate’ (i.e., more

---

<sup>7</sup> Many Iberian Jews converted to Christianity as a result of the pogroms of the fourteenth century. The Spanish Inquisition was established in 1478 by Catholic Monarchs Ferdinand II of Aragon and Isabella I of Castile to regulate the behavior of these *conversos*—often referred to as “new Christians.” However, the Jewish populations living under Muslim rule in other parts of Iberia were still allowed to practice their faith openly as *dhimmi*, or “People of the Book” (referring to the three Abrahamic religions) who were granted legal protections under Islamic law. The collapse of the Caliphate of Córdoba in 1031 and the surrender of the Nasrid rulers of Granada to the Catholic monarchs in 1492 were decisive political dates in this respect. The Alhambra Decree of 1492 called for the immediate expulsion of any openly practicing Jews, whereas the defeated Muslim community was offered relative religious and cultural freedom upon surrender. Initially they were known as *mudéjares* (from the Arabic *mudajjan* meaning “permitted to remain”), a term used throughout the medieval period for Muslim subjects who were allowed the continued practice of Islam as the Christian kingdoms in the North gradually extended their control of the Peninsula. Under the assimilationist approach of the first archbishop of Granada, Fray Hernando de Talavera there was little excuse for Ferdinand and Isabel to renege on the Alhambra Decree that protected the practice of Islam. However, Fray Francisco Jiménez de Cisneros’s harsher tactics (including the burning of all Muslim books and manuscripts in 1500) incited upheaval in Granada’s Albaicín, or Muslim quarters, and therefore the impetus for mass conversion throughout Spain. The converted Mudéjares were called *moriscos* “or little Moors,” thus underscoring their remaining “Muslimness” (Flesler 6). Like the converted Jews they were continuously suspected of maintaining their original religious practices in secret—even after several generations. But unlike the *conversos*, Spanish fears about these “crypto-Muslims” ultimately resulted in their expulsion from Granada in 1569 and their expulsion from Spain altogether in 1609, starting with their famous deportation from the Kingdom of Valencia to North Africa. All this despite the fact that Moriscos were technically baptized, Catholic subjects.

free market) approach to power” (Silverblatt 100). Therefore, the conceptualization of Spain as “half European, half African” —often summed up in the old adage that “Africa begins in the Pyrenees” —is shorthand for how the country has been relegated to the margins of Europe’s industrial modernity (Vilarós and Ugarte 201). Thanks to the internalization of these ideas, “Spain is a nation that is at once Orientalized and Orientalizing” (Martin-Márquez 9); it continues to wrestle with this legacy and its position of alterity vis-à-vis Western Europe—on the “fringes of the West” as Leopoldo Zea puts it.

This has had multifarious effects on Spain’s conduct as an international power in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. We can look at the case of a newly democratic Spain, which throughout the 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s marketed the “exotic” nature of the sunny South to tourists from northern Europe and the United States, as racist attacks against Moroccan migrant groups proliferated in this same region—not to mention, in massive urban centers like Madrid. It also directly affected Spain’s colonial projects in northern Morocco, the Western Sahara (1884-1976), and Equatorial Guinea (1778-1968). As Martin-Márquez explores, the Franco regime took advantage of the idea that Spain and Morocco shared a common bond, advocating for reinvestment in the Spanish Protectorate (1912-1956) under the guise of respecting and supporting this “fraternal” connection (Martin-Márquez 239). Franco famously rose to power as General of the

Spanish “Army of Africa,” made up of the Spanish Legion and the Fuerzas Regulares Indígenas (volunteer infantry units recruited largely from Ceuta and Melilla). Not only were these troops used to quell workers’ strikes in Andalusia in 1931, and in Catalonia and Asturias during the “Revolution of 1934,” but they also proved crucial for the Nationalist victory during the Spanish Civil War (See Flesler 77–78; Martin-Márquez 202–06). Through an inversion of colonial discourses, the Republicans were characterized as “savages” and “infidels,” and the long-held social construct of the *moro enemigo* (enemy Moor) was recast as a *moro amigo* (friendly Moor); all of this was part of what General Franco claimed was a second reconquest of Spain (Martin-Márquez 203). This further exacerbated the dynamic wherein contemporary Moroccan migrants are deemed problematic “not because of their cultural differences, as many argue, but because, like the *Moriscos*, *they are not different enough*” (Flesler 9). In contrast, the Saharawi population in the Western Sahara, and the various indigenous populations inhabiting Equatorial Guinea, Spain’s only sub-Saharan colony, were treated as the inveterate other. Spain’s colonization of Guinea in the 1880s was modeled after the conquest of the Americas centuries beforehand. That is, it was undertaken with the express mission of proselytizing to the “uncivilized natives.” Both the slave trade in nineteenth century and the instatement of an exploitative plantation economy in twentieth were legitimized “by efforts to bestow upon them the greater good of God’s

salvation” (Martin-Márquez 280). As we will see in Chapter 1 and Chapter 4, sub-Saharan migrants in Spain today, along with new generations of Afrodiasporic Spaniards, must confront Spain’s ongoing disregard for Black life, not to mention its need to dissociate itself from Blackness in the effort to finally join the ranks of (supposedly) White Europe.<sup>8</sup>

As the migrant population began to grow along with Spain’s economy, so too did the cultural output that reflects upon this important paradigm shift for the Iberian nation. Whether written by autochthonous Spaniards or migrants themselves, these “migrant narratives” go far beyond simple push and pull factors, or the nature of the journey itself. Flesler’s and Martin-Márquez’s books are two prominent examples of the ways in which literary scholars have accounted for this transformation by investigating how an influx of migrants from the Global South re-energizes debates about Spain’s inherent Africanity. While both studies cover a range of themes and time periods, they primarily locate Spain’s reaction to immigration in the works of Spanish-born authors. Although migrant authors are not excluded outright, they often provide a final

---

<sup>8</sup> Throughout the dissertation, I capitalize designations racial such as Black and White in my own writing. This is in line with recent trends in both journalism and Cultural Studies. The capitalization of Black recognizes that it is a cultural rather than a color (See: Nancy Coleman’s *New York Times* article: <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/07/05/insider/capitalized-black.html>). While the capitalized version of White is still up for debate, I am responding to Sarah Ahmed’s call to “show how whiteness is an effect of racialization, which in turn shapes what it is that bodies ‘can do’” (Ahmed, “A Phenomenology of Whiteness” 150) and following the model of antiracist scholars such as Ibram X. Kendi.

counterpoint to a longer analysis.<sup>9</sup> In the final chapter of *The Return of the Moor: Spanish Responses to Contemporary Moroccan Immigration*, for example, Flesler looks at a number of testimonial-style pieces—either written by Spanish-born authors alone, or in collaboration with Moroccans—that attempt to recreate the travails of migration to Spain. She accuses these pseudo-ethnographies of partaking in cultural ventriloquism; however, she also insists that similar work by migrant authors would not be any more effective in communicating the immigrant experience (Flesler 194).<sup>10</sup> Flesler’s rationale rests on concerns regarding interpretation that Gayatri Spivak raises in her “Can the Subaltern Speak?”—in other words, the danger of inadvertently imposing a mode of expression on the dispossessed in colonial societies rather than allowing these so-called subalterns to speak for themselves. As Flesler insists in the case of El Hachmi’s *Jo també sóc catalana* and Nini’s *Diario de un ilegal* (along with fellow Moroccan Ahmed Daoudi’s *El Diablo de Yudis* and Cameroonian-born Víctor Omgbá’s *Calella sen saïda*, written in

---

<sup>9</sup> Martin-Márquez’s last chapter looks at music by the Equatorial Guinean singers Las Hijas del Sol and the film *En construcción* by Spanish filmmaker José Luis Guerín in conjunction with El Hachmi’s autobiography *Jo també sóc catalana* and Ndongo-Bidyogo’s *El Metro*

<sup>10</sup> Flesler looks specifically at ethnographic style collaborations between Spaniards and immigrants such as Torregraso and El Gheryb’s *Dormir al raso*. Or cases when Spanish authors position themselves as immigrant like *Las voces del estrecho* by Andrés Sorel, *Todo negro no igual* by Beatriz Díaz, *La aventura de Saïd* by Josep Lorman, *Por vía de Tarifa* by Nieves García Benito and the short story “Fátima de los naufragios” by Lourdes Ortiz. Lastly, she considers films which do the same *Todos os llamáis Mohamed* and *Ilegal*. Vega-Durán, albeit from the opposite stance, adds the films *Bwana*, *Princesas* and *Flores de otro mundo*, *La vida aquí* and *Aguaviva*. In terms of documentaries, she also considers *El cayuco del infierno* and *Agua con sal*. In terms of novel-testimony includes “*Dem ak xabaar*” *Partir et raconter* by Mahmoud Traoré and Bruno Le Dantec (although in French). I would add *La niña del calle* by Virtu Moron and Kaoutar Haik.

Galician): “These texts are themselves mediated by other factors, and they do not represent the ‘immigrant experience’ any more — *or any less* — than Spanish ethnographic texts” (Flesler 194). Ultimately, she cautions us that “their analysis, like that of *testimonios*, should always be aware of the entrapments of taking a text to be a transparent medium of representation that gives us direct access to the experience of a homogenous and commensurable community” (Flesler 194). For her part, Martin-Márquez concludes on a more optimistic note. Looking at the case of authors dealt with here, such as El Hachmi and Ndongo-Bidyogo, in addition to fellow Equatoguinean poet and essayist Francisco Zamora Lobo, and Piruchi Apo and her niece Paloma Loribó — otherwise known as the musical group Las Hijas del Sol (The Daughters of the Sun) — she resolves that their narratives “are now engaging in [the] promise to destabilize the very Enlightenment epistemology that sought to draw sharp lines of division between European and non-European peoples and civilizations” (Martin-Márquez 354). Effectively, she insists that we must appreciate these “incursions into the Spanish cultural sphere” for their ability to highlight and interrogate the borders that have been drawn around Spanish identity in the first place.

The underlying question of authenticity has clearly haunted scholars and both directly and indirectly shaped further research. One tactic is to underscore Spanishness as a concept already in flux. For example, Raquel Vega-Durán’s *Emigrant Dreams*,

*Immigrant Borders: Migrants, Transnational Encounters, and Identity in Spain* argues that Spain's long history of emigration is the guiding force in a body of literature, artwork, and film that instead deals with contemporary immigration. She thus proposes that "we look at the Spaniard in the same terms as migrants, that is, as a mobile identity in dialogue with (or opposition to) the changes that develop from the encountered migrant's journey" (Vega-Durán xxi). Likewise, Jessica Folkart's *Liminal Fiction on the Edge of the Millennium* contends that liminality has been a unifying experience and insists that "those who arrive in Spain to put down roots, or view home as an evolving hybrid, or underscore home as a transitional and marginal state in the era of globalization" are an "essential facet" of what should be deemed "the structuring principle of identification in Spain" (174, 18). In *Home Away from Home: Immigrant Narratives, Domesticity and Coloniality in Contemporary Spanish Culture*, Michelle Murray takes the home's centrality as a site of social reproduction as her starting point for exploring representations of migrant women as domestic workers and care providers in a range of recent literary and cinematic works. With the exception Alejandro González Iñárritu, all of the authors and directors in question are Spanish nationals. However, this is precisely the point of *Home Away from Home*: to center the stories of those who have been relegated to the margins in order to "demystify Spain's cosmopolitan and 'post-national' restructuring by revealing the enduring force of colonial violence" as particularly

present in discourses of domesticity (Murray, *Home Away from Home* 72). Along with novel takes on contemporary literature and film, some scholars have branched out into other genres. Isolina Ballesteros's *Immigration Cinema in the New Europe* takes a wider scope than most studies, addressing how the "new era of immigration" in the EU resulted in a corpus of films from the 1990s that depict first-generation immigrants and wider diasporic communities in Europe. Looking exclusively at Spanish film, Isabel Santaolalla's *Los "Otros": Etnicidad y "raza" en el cine español contemporáneo* analyzes how this trend has led to a particular filmic obsession with racial difference. Silvia Bermúdez's *Rocking the Boat: Migration and Race in Contemporary Spanish Music* identifies popular urban music as the first field of cultural production to engage with migration and shifting attitudes about race in twentieth and twenty-first century Spain. Jeffrey Coleman's *The Necropolitical Theatre: Race and Immigration on the Contemporary Spanish Stage* examines how the non-whiteness of Latin American, North African, and sub-Saharan African characters in recent Spanish theatrical works is consistently presented as a threat to the Spain's Europeaness. Volumes like *African Immigrants in Contemporary Spanish Texts: Crossing the Strait*, edited by Debra Faszler-McMahon and Victoria L. Ketz, or Simon Doubleday and Benita Sampedro Vizcaya's *Border Interrogations: Questioning Spanish Frontiers* have been essential for signaling new avenues of inquiry. All together,

these studies have broken important ground in accounting for how Spain's changing demographics will ultimately determine the direction Peninsular Studies takes as a field.

I am indebted to these efforts to debunk the myth of a hegemonic Spanish self; still, although migrant perspectives are key to bringing these arguments full circle, they are often limited to single chapter, introduced as a final thought or as a gesture toward futurity. Thus, while these prior analyses have consistently taken a comparative approach and read migrant voices alongside "native" Spaniards to account for the challenge immigration poses to the fixity of Spanish national identity, "Urban Borderlands" insists they be appreciated on their own terms. This has certainly been done by scholars of postcolonial literature from Spain's former colonies such as Equatorial Guinea (Lewis, Sampedro Vizcaya, Ugarte) in addition to parts of Morocco and the Western Sahara (Campoy-Cubillo, Ricci, Fernández Parrilla). However, by bringing authors of varying national origins into conversation with one another, I identify how their collective life stories offer a largely untold alternative history of Spain and the precarious labor upon which its veritable "Golden Era" depended.

In recent years, the Global Hispanophone has emerged within the U.S. academy as a theoretical antidote to colonial notions of *Hispanidad*. Adolfo Campoy-Cubillo and Benita Sampedro Vizcaya chart its institutionalization, which has further been consolidated by the Modern Language Association's approval of the ongoing Global

Hispanophone Forum. As Campoy-Cubillo and Sampedro Vizcaya suggest, the Global Hispanophone proposes a serious reconfiguration of the approach to Spanish-language studies and the prioritizing of territories or collectives previously treated as marginal (Campoy-Cubillo and Sampedro Vizcaya 4). Yet, accounting for migration and its impact on cultural production within the Global Hispanophone is no easy feat. If inquiry in this burgeoning field is driven by a centrifugal force that steers away from the Iberian Peninsula and challenges its role as the linchpin of Hispanism, how do we theorize texts and translations that target this same space? The starting point, I argue, is to re-conceptualize what constitutes a “migrant narrative” in the first place. More often than not, this label is pinned on authors who have undergone the migratory process themselves and who, having left the postcolonial context, take up residence in the former metropole. At its most generous it describes texts with migrants as their protagonists and migration as their focus, regardless of the author’s biography (Vega-Durán xxxii). If we want to avoid the trap of presuming cultural equivalency between the diverse plurality of sending societies, then the only way to read these narratives of migration in unison is to accept that together they offer a unique portrait of the host country rather than of migrancy itself. To this end, I employ Rebecca Walkowitz’s theory of “born-translated literature,” in several chapters (Chapter 2 and Chapter 4) in order to re-visit these quintessential migrant narratives with an eye to what they tell us about

Spain as a destination. I assert that by claiming the former metropolitan center of what was once a vast empire as their locus of enunciation, migrant writers like Donato Ndong-Bidyogo, Rachid Nini, Najat El Hachmi and Agnès Agboton are challenging the colonial modes of thought that have heretofore defined the country's linguistic, literary, and social landscape through their writing.

In this regard, my project also engages with philosophical arguments about Spain's "precarity" following the 2008 housing bubble collapse (Álvarez-Blanco and Gómez L-Quiñones; Claesson; Labrador Méndez; Moreno Caballud). This language has become more and more popular to describe the feeling of displacement and dispossession following the crisis. A drastic change in material realities left many wondering if the affluence Spain enjoyed after joining the EU had been nothing but a mirage. As budget cuts, austerity measures, massive unemployment, foreclosures and a rash of evictions all wreaked their havoc on the country's social fabric, economists and humanists alike questioned the neoliberal policies that guided Spain onto the global stage. Yet ongoing concerns about the vulnerability of Spanish lives tend to obscure how this entire system capitalized on the precariousness of undocumented, or "irregular," African workers, and how they were caught up in a cycle of under-paid, itinerant jobs well before the collapse. My dissertation therefore intervenes in both academic and

public debates to insist we should interpret migrant narratives in terms of economic stratification, racial discrimination, and as instances of precarity that predate the crisis.

Sociological perspectives maintain that immigration first became a “social issue” in the 1990s, as Spaniards grappled with integration in the face of increasingly heterogeneous arrivals (Aja, Cachón Rodríguez, Carrera). Ethnographic work on the part of anthropologists (Suárez Návaz, Soto Bermant) has allowed us to re-conceptualize these – often racially-motivated – reactions in terms of the erection of new social boundaries. This internal process of “re-fronterización” is said to have mirrored the extension of European borders to include Portugal, Italy, Greece and Spain (the PIGS) in the mid-1980s, and the abolishment of Europe’s internal frontiers in the mid-1990s – all of which put the burden on Europe’s Southern peripheries to act as buffer against Mediterranean migrations. These ethnographies have generally focused on Spanish/African relations in Spain’s frontier zone with Morocco or in the true interior, between agricultural workers of differing origins, whereas the work of the African authors brought together in “Urban Borderlands” stands as the only form of testimony to the simultaneous bordering of Spanish cities. Media coverage homes in on dramatic scenes of primarily sub-Saharan Africans dangling from barbed wire or adrift at sea in unstable boats. The circulation of this imagery both confirms the European vision of who a migrant is in the first place, while also reifying a particular conception of the

border itself. The authors dealt with here tackle this fallacy head on. Their various renderings of the migrant experience make manifest that the border is not only a territorial delineation but the establishment of epistemological categories such as race, sex, and class that have been used to establish divisions within the Spanish labor force — and Spanish society at large.

Ultimately, this dissertation reassesses works that have been analyzed at the intersection of literary, postcolonial, and migration studies by, instead, evaluating their contributions to border studies. Although not always explicitly, I consistently work with and through Walter Mignolo's idea of border gnoseology as a "critical reflection on knowledge production from both the interior borders of the modern/colonial world system (imperial conflicts, hegemonic languages, directionality of translations, etc.) and its exterior borders (imperial conflicts with cultures being colonized, as well as the subsequent stages of independence or decolonization)" (Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs* 11). Interestingly, in coining this term Mignolo is drawing from Congolese philosopher Valentin Y. Mudimbe's use of gnosis to capture the "undisciplined forms" of thought that are otherwise excluded from the Western categories of "philosophy" and "epistemology" (Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs* 10). Hailing from African countries that were either in the throes of decolonization at the time of their migration, or dealing with the political aftermath, these authors certainly confront explicit forms of

othering in the Spanish context.<sup>11</sup> However, they also encounter a Spain that is struggling with its historic otherness within Europe. Often, through their literary expressions, they bring indigenous African knowledges and these supposedly “outsider” perspectives to bear on these experiences, revealing misconceptions within the Western worldview of what constitutes “a good life.” This is most conspicuous in Chapters 1 and 2 where I highlight how Ndong-Bidyogo and Nini critique the vision of Spain as an “Eden” or “El Dorado.” It is also a salient feature of Chapter 4 as Agboton considers the possibilities for true integration in the Spanish cultural context—both for herself as a West African woman and for her sons as part of a diasporic second generation.<sup>12</sup>

---

<sup>11</sup> Equatorial Guinea gained independence from Spain in 1968 while Ndong-Bidyogo was studying in Spain. It has since been governed by two successive dictators: first, by Francisco Macías Nguema (1968-1979), and then by his nephew, Teodoro Obiang Nguema (1979-present). Benin achieved independence from France in 1960, however regional factions led to a fragmented internal politics and six consecutive military coups between 1963-1972. When Agboton first came to Spain in 1977 (and to reside permanently in 1978) Major Mathieu Kérékou had just taken power (1972), instated a nationwide Marxist-Leninist economic policy (1974), and renamed the country as the People’s Republic of Benin (1975). Spain relinquished control of its Protectorate in Morocco (as did France) in 1956, retroceding the territory back to the newly established Kingdom. It held onto *plazas de soberanía* such as the Spanish Sahara until 1976 and retains Ceuta and Melilla as “autonomous cities” today. While Nini is from the former French Protectorate, El Hachmi was born in the Berber region of Rif where Moroccan rule is considered a colonial imposition in its own right.

<sup>12</sup> We can think of Carol Boyce Davies’s assertion that African and diaspora theory holds the most potential for interrupting colonizing processes (See: *Decolonizing the Academy: African Diaspora Studies*). Or Ayo A. Coly and Ivy G. Wilson’s call to rethink the Africanist presence in studies of the Black Diaspora in “Black Is the Color of the Cosmos; or, *Callaloo* and the Cultures of the Diaspora Now.”

The title “Urban Borderlands” references Gloria Anzaldúa’s now-famous notion of a *borderland* which she describes as “a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary” (Anzaldúa 25). With this in mind, Chapter 3 focuses on how El Hachmi’s *The Last Patriarch* illustrates the extent to which patriarchal domination is not just some antiquated aspect of traditional Amazigh (Berber) culture, but a point of continuity between Morocco and Spain, the Rif and Catalonia. The borders both within the aforementioned nations and between them are, therefore, far from natural. Of course, Anzaldúa also describes the U.S.-Mexico border as “*una herida abierta* where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds” (Anzaldúa 25). Thus, the economic ramifications of these ongoing forms of coloniality are of the utmost interest here. Recent theoretical arguments suggest that the Keynesian Welfare State has, in fact, been a fleeting reality within capitalist systems.<sup>13</sup> Along these lines, I argue that precarity has a much longer history Spain. This dissertation seeks to locate an earlier iteration of “precarious” Spain in the situation caused by the lack of papers, itinerant labor, and marginalization of the migrant population since '85 and the enactment of the LOE. Sandro Mezzadra and Brett Neilson’s *Border as Method, or, the Multiplication of Labor* demonstrates how the use of categories such as “citizen” or

---

<sup>13</sup> See Nancy Ettliger’s “Precarity Unbound,” Brett Neilson and Ned Rossiter’s “Precarity as a Political Concept, or, Fordism as Exception,” and Sandro Mezzadra and Brett Neilson’s *Border as Method, or, the Multiplication of Labor*.

“illegal alien” have become essential to the continued commodification of labor power in an era of intensive globalization. In the chapters that follow, we will see how these border making efforts contributed to the rise of a newly cosmopolitan Spain and were most conspicuous in Spanish urban centers. This painful divide between First and Third Worlds was the precondition for the affluence of autochthonous Spaniards prior to the crisis which depended on the precaritization of migrant workers. Writing from these *borderlands*, Ndong-Bidyogo, Nini, El Hachmi and Agboton, share their knowledge of a system that only hit home for the general Spanish population in 2008.

# 1. Writing Spain, Writing the City: Donato Ndongo-Bidyogo's *El Metro* and Urban Entrapments

## 1.1 Introduction

In the wee hours of the morning, a seemingly empty train pulled into its last stop. Unlike almost any other time of day, Madrid's metro system was quiet as the cars waited at the end of the line for service to start up again at dawn. An employee made his rounds, checking each car—a matter of routine. Little did he expect the macabre discovery that awaited him: the lifeless body of a young Black man, bathed in a pool of his blood.<sup>1</sup> Three stab wounds—two to the chest and one in his side—seemed to be the cause. Found at the Moncloa station at around two o'clock in the morning on Saturday, August 8, 1992, the anonymous victim received just two short paragraphs in the Sunday editions of *Diario 16* and *El País*. The newspapers shared that he was wearing a pink T-shirt and jeans when he died, but those particulars appear to have provided no help in identifying him. No further updates on the case were published, and his story, like so many others, went untold. *Diario 16* labeled him as “un africano” (an African man) but

---

<sup>1</sup> Un empleado del Metro descubre el cadáver apuñalado de un hombre,” (“A Metro Employee Discovers the Cadaver of Man with Stab Wounds,” *El País*, 9 August 1992, p. 2) describes the murder victim as “un hombre de raza negra bañado de sangre” (“a black man bathed in blood”) and describes the employee’s “sorpresa” (surprise) as “tan inesperada como macabre” (“as unexpected as it was macabre”). “Un africano muere apuñalado en un vagón del Metro” (“An African Dies of Stabbing in a Metro Car,” *Diario 16*, 9 August 1992, p. 17) says that the cadaver was found “en medio de un charco de sangre” (“surrounded by a puddle of blood”).

did not explain the reasoning behind their claim. If so, what brought him to Spain? Did he have family, friends? Who was responsible for his murder?

Donato Ndong-Bidyogo provides some fictional answers to those questions in his 2007 novel, *El Metro (The Metro)*,<sup>2</sup> wherein the protagonist, Cameroonian migrant Lambert Obama Ondo, makes his way to Spain in search of a better life.<sup>3</sup> He takes one of the now stereotypical migration routes—through the Western Sahara and by boat to the Canary Islands. After a stint in the south of Spain working as a field hand, Obama Ondo settles in Madrid. Still without documentation of any kind, he supports himself as a street salesman, a *mantero*. In Spanish, the name derives from the *manta* [blanket] on which these unregistered vendors sell their wares so that they can quickly gather everything up and run if the police arrive. When larger public spaces like the Gran Vía become too dangerous for *manteros*, the eponymous metro offers a refuge, enabling Obama Ondo to go about his business away from patrol cars and out of the elements. Yet it is also the site of his tragic death at the hands of a group of skinheads.

In rescuing this type of story from obscurity, Ndong-Bidyogo's *El Metro* lays bare the assumptions about both Blackness and migrancy that were pervasive in the public discourse surrounding immigration to Spain throughout the 1990s—assumptions

---

<sup>2</sup> In other studies, the title of the book has been written with “metro” in lowercase following Spanish conventions. However, I am choosing to use the title as it is written on the title page and back cover of the published book. Furthermore, throughout the text—and even in the aforementioned newspaper articles—the Metro is capitalized as a proper noun/place name.

<sup>3</sup> Throughout the text, I will use migrant when I do not wish to ascribe either an “emigrant” or “immigrant” identity to the subject in question. See page 8 for further explanation.

that can be identified even in the briefest of news reports from that era. In this case, the headline of the *Diario 16* piece says it all: “Un africano muere apuñalado en un vagón del Metro” (“An African Man Dies from a Stabbing in a Metro Car”). Although the article later states that the man was found without any means of identification, it presumed from the outset that he is African—and therefore a foreigner—merely because of his skin color. In other words, his Blackness precludes even the consideration that he might be Spanish and acts as a *de facto* border that functions even within Spain’s cities.

Even in 2015, at the height of the so-called migrant crisis or refugee crisis, half of the non-Spaniards residing in Spain had come from the EU or other parts of Europe: that is, 2,186,871 Europeans of various origins as opposed to the 925,983 Africans who made up less than two percent of Spain’s total population (Arango et al. 341). But whether jumping the massive border fences at the Spanish-Moroccan border, or attempting treacherous Mediterranean crossings in unseaworthy vessels, the circulation of images displaying dark-skinned individuals resorting to increasingly desperate measures to enter Europe reflects “in an acute manner the shock with which Spain experiences the influx of people of the Third World as people of color” (Bermúdez 178). By highlighting the perils of the journey, an emphasis on those ensnared in barbed wire or left adrift at sea also turns migration into a spectacle.<sup>4</sup> This spectacular element reifies

---

<sup>4</sup> Legal scholar Sergio Carrera insists that, in the late 1990s, immigration went from “being an issue of technical and administrative nature (of pure academic, administrative and associative interest) to one with a wider structural dimension subject to the interests of the different political parties and society at large. By

preconceptions of what constitutes a border and distracts attention from the challenges that migrants face in Spain. With *El Metro*, Ndongo-Bidyogo plays into the Spanish stereotype of a migrant: a young African man, adrift on the Peninsula, in order to subvert it. Through Obama Ondo's story he demonstrates how, for sub-Saharan migrants in particular, an exaggerated visibility comes hand in hand with a legal and political invisibility, making life on European soil more akin to a jail than a paradise. By toying with the idea of Spain as a "Eden" Ndongo-Bidyogo calls into the question the country's perception of itself as a safe-haven or dream destination for these individuals. To this end, the present chapter dwells less on the migrant status of either author or protagonist and instead highlights the potential of fictional works like *El Metro* to expose the colonial, racist underpinnings of Spain's most recent configuration as a modern, European nation.

Especially as a political exile from a former Spanish colony, Ndongo-Bidyogo's work has typically been read for his indictments of European colonization and his Pan-Africanist leanings. However, I argue that *El Metro* is unique to his oeuvre for its reflections of Spain's turn-of-the-millennium conversion into a *polo receptor* [receiving

---

and large, it became another facet of the national political *spectacle*" (233; emphasis added). "Border spectacles" are also what Laia Soto Bermant calls the *expulsiones en caliente* (hot deportations) or *rechazos en frontera* (rejections at the border)—expedited removals in which migrants who cross into Ceuta and Melilla are simply ushered back to the Moroccan side before they can attempt to claim asylum (123). See page 3 of the Introduction for more.

country] for transnational, postcolonial migratory flows. As an expert writing from within, he sheds light on the subsequent resurgence of anti-Black racism and the plight of Black African migrants in Spain.

## **1.2 Donato Ndongo-Bidyogo and the Equatorial Guinean Context**

Ndongo-Bidyogo is one of the most iconic voices of the Equatorial Guinean diaspora. His intimate knowledge of the Spanish news media and his connection to the Hispano-Guinean Cultural Center in Malabo have made him one of the most visible—not to mention vocal—of the many Equatoguinean authors exiled in Spain.<sup>5</sup> Thus, his prominence in the literary community cannot be ignored when considering the reception of *El Metro*. Alongside the significant portion of the narrative dedicated to Obama Ondo's ancestral home, Ndongo-Bidyogo's presence as an interlocutor in public debates about Africa post-decolonization have bolstered readings of *El Metro* as an exploration of the internal causes for mass emigration. These approaches have yielded fruitful interpretations of the novel, often providing vital context for understanding its place in African letters. Left unresolved, however, is the question of what this "story of emigration" can tell us about Spain as a host country.

---

<sup>5</sup> M'Bare N'Gom explains that the emergence of Equatorial Guinean literary production in Spanish can be traced back to "Stories and Tales," a section of the Catholic missionary publication, *La Guinea Española*, that was inaugurated in 1947 and opened to "natives" (N'gom, "African Literature in Spanish" 585–87) This publication can be seen as the common origin of the "colonial generation." Likewise, N'Gom deems the foundation of the Centro Cultural Hispano-Guineano in 1982 as an linchpin of a post-independence generation of Equatoguineans in exile who spearheaded cultural renewal (N'gom, "African Literature in Spanish" 597).

Michael Ugarte's monograph, *Africans in Europe*, devotes two full chapters to Ndongo-Bidyogo. From a larger group of authors that consider themselves Equatorial Guinean citizens in exile,<sup>6</sup> Ugarte points to Ndongo-Bidyogo's case as particularly illustrative of the need for his neologism *emexile*. Through this conflation of words, Ugarte seeks to illustrate that, while far from synonymous, emigration and exile are often symbiotic: "expatriates rarely leave their country for a single reason or event, as the departure becomes a liminal life-stage defined by what went before and after" (Ugarte 59). Reading *El Metro* through this exilic lens, Ugarte argues that "Ndongo's novel offers a variety of ways in which African immigrants to Spain might be seen as subjects forced from their land" (Ugarte 80). The Spanish gaze is important here since, as Ugarte suggests early on "it might be said that the incessant Spanish discussions about new arrivals serves as one of the novel's central, albeit unstated, contexts" (Ugarte 77).

---

<sup>6</sup> These include a "first wave" of colonial-era authors like Daniel Jones Mathama, Juan Chema Mijero, Rafael Mariá Nzé Abuy, Constantino Ocha'a, and Trinidad Morgades Besari (33), a "poetic transition" represented by the likes of Juan Balboa Boneke, Ciriaco Bokesa and Raquel Ilonbé, as well as later "Macías Generation" exiles such as poet/essayist (and now novelist) Francisco Zamora Lobo, journalist Joaquín Mbomio Bacheng, philologist/historian Justo Bolekia Boleká and Jerónimo Rope (Ugarte also mentions but does not analyze the work of J.M. Davies, Julián Bibang Antino Esono, Marcelo Ensema, and Eugenio Nkogo as part of this group) (90-111). Although overlooked by Ugarte, the writer and activist Remei Sipi Mayo is of the same generation and has been an important advocate for Equatorial Guinean women in Spain. Ugarte's last chapters turn to those who chose to offer dissident voices from home or who have returned to Equatorial Guinea like authors Juan Tomás Ávila Laurel, José Siale Djangany, Maximiliano Nkogo Esono, and María Nsue Angüe. I would like to add that new fiction by César Mba Abogo and Trifonia Melibea Obono, both with a master's degree from Spain, offer fresh perspectives on the return to Equatorial Guinea. Meanwhile, Silvia Albert Sopale, Desirée Bela-Lobedde, Lucía Asué Mbomio Rubio, and Edjanga Jones Ndjoli represent a new literary trend, untreated in Ugarte's monograph: what could be described as a "second generation." Born in Madrid to a Spanish mother and Equatoguinean father, Mbomio Rubio is both a journalist and writer. She has broached the topic of mixed-race couples under Francoism in her *Las que se atrevieron* and about being an afro-descendent woman in Spain in her more recent *Hija del camino*, published in October 2019. Jones Ndjoli was born to Equatoguinean exiles in Madrid. He published *Heredarás la tierra* in 2016 after his first visit to Equatorial Guinea and came out with his second novel, *El diario de Marc* in 2018.

Ugarte highlights that *El Metro* is therefore implicitly directed at a Spanish audience, a stance confirmed by the author himself. When asked what motivates his literary production, Ndongo-Bidyogo explained:

Me interesa, ante todo, comunicar, penetrar en las mentes para “subvertirlas”:  
que no nos conformemos con un único discurso, esforzarnos en conocer y valorar  
las percepciones del “otro”, intentar que también vean los temas desde nuestro  
ángulo; por lo cual es importante “conquistar” al mayor número de personas  
para que se acerquen a nuestros planteamientos y propuestas.

I’m interested, above all, in communicating, penetrating people’s minds in order  
to “subvert them”: so that we don’t conform ourselves to a single discourse, that  
we [instead] push ourselves to understand and appreciate the perceptions of the  
“other,” try and help them see things from our angle; for that reason, it  
[literature] is important for “winning over” the largest number of people so that  
they come around to our approaches and proposals. (Ndongo-Bidyogo *Personal  
interview*).

Trained as a historian, Ndongo-Bidyogo began his career with the publication of *Historia y tragedia de Guinea Ecuatorial* (1977) before spending more than twenty years as a freelance journalist for news sources including *Índice*, *Mundo Negro*, and *ABC*. His forays into literature therefore represent a shift in communicative strategy, meant to capture the attention of white Spaniards—the “Other” in this case. The polysemy of the

Spanish verb “conquistar” is the most revealing because, while I translated it to “win over” for the sake of readability, a more direct translation would be to “seduce,” or “conquer.” In appealing to a Spanish readership, Ndongo-Bidyogo is not simply pandering to European tastes. He is initiating a sort of *Reconquista*—attacking Spanish coloniality from within.

Given that he was born under Spanish colonial rule, Ndongo-Bidyogo is no stranger to the “conquistador” mentality. What is now officially the Republic of Equatorial Guinea is made up of a small mainland region known as Río Muni, in addition to the islands of Bioko and Annobon, located on either side of the Lusophone nation of São Tome and Principe in the Bight of Biafra. The Portuguese were the first to colonize area in 1472. However, British and Spanish competition was fierce, and the Spanish took control of the territory with the 1778 Treaty of El Pardo. As Spain’s only sub-Saharan colony, Equatorial Guinea notoriously suffered from administrative neglect throughout the nineteenth century. But following the loss of its last colonies in the Americas (in addition to the Philippines and Guam) as a result of the so-called disaster of 1898, Spain reinvested in its African colonies with renewed fervor, establishing extensive plantation systems. The dictatorship of Francisco Franco (1939-1975) was particularly interested in Spain’s African holdings. As Susan Martin-Márquez observes, while the Francoist government recognized that proselytizing among the Muslim majority (or Jewish minority) of the Moroccan Protectorate and the Spanish Sahara

would be imprudent, religious conversion of indigenous Equatoguineans to Catholicism was one of the explicit goals of the 1904 statute established by the governing body known as the “Patronato de Indígenas,” and the regime embraced this mission wholeheartedly (Martin-Márquez 280–81). Scholars such as Martin-Márquez and Ugarte stress the paternalistic nature of the Patronato which literally characterized natives as legal minors (Martin-Márquez 281; Ugarte 22). This tactic is fundamental for understanding the enforcement of Castilian as the colony’s official language—and the particular challenges that individual Equatoguineans confronted in the struggles for independence.

Although the Francoist government faced mounting pressure from the United Nations to relinquish its colonial possessions throughout the 1950s, it refused to let go of Equatorial Guinea—instead deciding to convert its West African holdings into overseas “provinces.” In 1959, it was announced in Parliament that the need for Spain’s “tutelage” had ended,<sup>7</sup> that Fernando Poo<sup>8</sup> and Río Muni<sup>9</sup> were now as Spanish as

---

<sup>7</sup> Ndongo-Bidyogo cites the testimony in Parliament (Las Cortes) of Hermenegildo Altozano Moraleda: “la misión tutelar de España sobre Guinea ha acabado. El pueblo ha alcanzado el mínimo de plenitud necesario y no precisa de protección alguna” (The tutelary mission of Spain in Equatorial Guinea has ended. The indigenous community has reached the minimum of plenitude necessary and no longer needs any sort of protection) (Ndongo-Bidyogo, *Historia y tragedia de Guinea Ecuatorial* 82). The announcement also appears in *ABC*, December 31, 1959, 45, in what appears to be a summary of the year’s policy decisions regarding Spain’s colonial holdings in Africa. It claims: “No cabe en esta referencia de lo más saliente del año respecto a nuestras provincias en África el detalle del alto significado de estas decisiones, pero sí es un deber subrayar la magnífica intervención del señor Altozano en el debate de la ley del 30 de julio en las Cortes y su gran lección del momento colonial de los territorios de Guinea, cuando al cerrar España su gestión puramente colonizadora, dio fin a la tutela y adoptó como solución poscolonial la fórmula de integración corporativa” (There is not enough space in this overview of the most important events of the year with

Albacete (Noguera). This approach meant that when the young Ndongongo Bidyogo left home in 1964 to attend high school in Valencia, he was traveling as a Spanish subject within Spanish territory.<sup>10</sup> It also meant that when Equatorial Guinea gained independence in 1968, Ndongongo-Bidyogo and any of his compatriots who lived in metropolitan Spain found themselves stranded: no longer Spanish subjects, they became citizens of nowhere.

These feelings of isolation and entrapment were only compounded by the fact that any information regarding the former Spanish colony was quickly designated “*materia reservada*” (classified material) by Franco’s Minister of Information and Tourism, Manuel Fraga Iribarne (Ugarte 59). Undocumented and prohibited from speaking out, Ndongongo-Bidyogo watched from a distance as his beloved homeland

---

respect to the provinces in Africa to report the details of the high significance of these decisions, but it is must to highlight the magnificent contribution by Mr. Altozano to the debates about the law of July 30 in the Parliament and his grand speech about the colonial moment in the territories in Guinea, when, in closing its purely colonial administrative efforts, Spain ended its tutelage and adopted the formula of corporative integration as a postcolonial solution] (T.G.F.). Altozano’s language and that of the report indicate the regime’s vision of Spanish exceptionalism or benign colonialism. Furthermore, the report not so subtly tries to gloss over incorporation as somehow postcolonial even though the division of the territory into two provinces is an exertion of more rather than less control over Equatorial Guinea. For an exploration of this rhetoric through cultural production, see Susan Martin-Márquez, “Unmasking Family Values in Franco’s African Colonies,” in *Disorientations* (Martin-Márquez 220–99).

<sup>8</sup> Annobon and Bioko.

<sup>9</sup> The islands of Corisco, Elobey Grande and Elobey Chico have long been included as part of the municipality of Río Muni for administrative purposes.

<sup>10</sup> I use the word “subject” because, as historian Manuel Pérez Ledesma has explained, Franco barely employed the term “citizen,” opting instead for “*españoles*” (Spaniards) or “*lo español*” (Spanishness, the Spanish entity) to discuss the Spanish citizenry under dictatorship (Pérez Ledesma 375). Discussions of Equatorial Guinea as part of Spain consequently focused on the question of territory rather than on the status of Guineans.

plummeted into successive dictatorships, headed first by Francisco Macías Ngeuma (1968-79) and then by his nephew, Teodoro Obiang Nguema (1979-Present). His fictional pursuits can be seen as a direct product of that political moment. Frustrated by the restrictions placed on journalism, Ndongo-Bidyogo published his first short story, “El sueño” (“The Dream,” 1973) in Camilo José Cela’s journal *Papeles de Son Armadans* (Ndongo-Bidyogo, *Personal Interview*; Ugarte 63). As Ndongo-Bidyogo himself indicates, it is a piece that is very much related to *El Metro* thematically. His subsequent novels *Las tinieblas de tu memoria negra* (*The Shadows of Your Black Memory*, 1987) and *Los poderes de la tempestad* (*The Powers of the Tempest*, 1997), deal directly with the ravages of Spanish colonialism in Equatorial Guinea. While in contrast, “El sueño” revolves around a Senegalese man and an epic journey that lands him in Paris.<sup>11</sup> Taken together, “El sueño” and *El Metro* demonstrate Ndongo-Bidyogo’s lasting engagement with the political limbo and feelings of isolation African migrants face in Europe.

Given that Obama Ondo’s experience in Madrid bookends the entire story, the significance of this particular urban space cannot be overlooked. The first we ever learn of the protagonist is his trepidation in entering the Metro. And likewise, the last few pages of the novel recount how, after bidding farewell to his Spanish love interest, Lucía, he is attacked by three neo-Nazis (“cabezas rapadas”) and left to die aboard a

---

<sup>11</sup> Ugarte and José María Ridau have debated the epic nature of Obama Ondo’s travels. Ridau has called the novel a counter-epic, whereas Ugarte sees the protagonist “as an African Ulysses yearning for a return to an evasive origin (Ugarte 89).

train (Ndongo-Bidyogo, *El Metro* 339–42). This tragic denouement may come as a surprise, but the location does not: from the first chapter on, and regardless of where Obama Ondo's journey takes him, the reader knows he must somehow end up in the Spanish capital. Although Ndongo-Bidyogo's own trajectory confounds the stereotype of an undocumented African migrant, he certainly witnessed the rising racial tensions that quickly polarized the country as Spain's immigrant population grew and diversified. Thus, as I will argue below, *El Metro* represents his attempt to recreate that experience and, if possible, re-write this chapter of Spanish history.

There is broad agreement amongst social scientists that, in the wake of the 1985 *Ley de Extranjería*, immigrants were consistently channeled into sectors abandoned by native-born workers—even as Spain combated one of Europe's highest unemployment rates (Aja and Arango; Cornelius; Muñoz Comet). Typically, this has been studied in terms of labor market segmentation, but sociologist Liliana Suárez-Navaz has gone deeper. Studying the case of agricultural workers in rural Andalucía (both foreign and autochthonous) she turns instead to the creation of social boundaries that mimicked Spain's real wall-building processes in the 1990s— and that informed divisions in the workforce where none had existed previously. After extended ethnographic field work in the province of Granada, Suárez Navaz concluded that “the need to protect the new imagined community—a European ethos based on common citizenship—promotes racist and xenophobic discourses” about African workers in particular (Suárez-Navaz 2).

She describes this as a process of re-bordering — or *re-fronterización*. Suárez-Navaz’s term refers, on one hand, to the militarized fencing system built to physically separate the Spanish enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla from Morocco, or Guardia Civil patrol boats of the Southern coast meant to “poach” migrants. But, on the other, it captures the divisive nature of sociospatial relations; the creation of “new symbolic spaces of belonging and exclusion in the innerland” (Suárez-Navaz 2). With this in mind, I will read *El Metro* for the bordered reality migrants face in Spain, wherein the Metro itself plays a key symbolic role, representing the hellish opposite of the Edenic sanctuary that Obama Ondo is searching for.

### **1.3 Overview**

A pesar de haber perdido la intrepidez y la arrogancia de sus antepasados, Lambert Obama Ondo, miembro del clan de los *yendjok*, se esforzaba por mantener incólume y reafirmar su africanidad militante en todo lugar y circunstancia. Pero no podía dejar de sorprenderse cada vez que bajaba hacia el Metro: le parecía que se había transformado en un ser extraño, medio animal y medio humano, como un gigantesco *grombif* que cada anochecida buscara su madriguera bajo los túneles de la gran ciudad.

Despite having lost the intrepidity and arrogance of his ancestors, Lambert Obama Ondo, member of the *yendjok* clan, pushed himself to remain calm, reaffirming his militant Africanity in every place and circumstance. But he

couldn't help but be surprised each time he descended into the Metro: it seemed as though he had been transformed into a strange being, half animal and half human, like a gigantic *grombif* that upon nightfall looks for his den beneath the tunnels of the great city. (Ndongo-Bidyogo, *El Metro* 13)<sup>12</sup>

These opening lines of *El Metro* establish many of the tensions present throughout the text. It is apparent that, for Obama Ondo, the adjustment to life in the Spanish city represents a challenge to his sense of self. The sterile, mechanized environment has a dehumanizing effect on the protagonist and is thus described as an affront to his African values. To underscore this point, the narrator presents what, for many *madrileños* (residents of Madrid), is a standard part of the city's landscape as somehow foreign. Ugarte suggests that Ndongo-Bidyogo thus "reverses the condition of the emigrant-exile's feelings of strangeness or lack of immediate comprehension to the reader comfortably residing in the host country" (Ugarte 82). Ugarte describes this move as "a subtly subversive gesture" (82), yet the subversion is more than subtle. The entire first chapter goes on to describe the fear that the metro system evokes in Obama Ondo, serving as an extensive premonition of his death. From the beginning, this public

---

<sup>12</sup> Whenever possible I have sought out published translations into English. However, if I have altered those translations for linguistic clarity, I have included a footnote indicating a change. Unless otherwise noted, the translations in this chapter are completely my own. In the case of this opening paragraph of *El Metro*, I have drawn from Michael Ugarte's translation from "He couldn't help but be surprised..." on (Ugarte 82). I changed his "who at each night" to "upon" to reduce wordiness and retained the original Fang term "*grombif*" rather than changing it to groundhog, as I believe the presence of African language words in Spanish to be an important marker of a "born-translated" text as according to Rebecca Walkowitz's definition (Walkowitz 3).

resource that should facilitate his mobility instead represents an obstacle and a hazard. The conflict between modernization and a traditional way of life undergirds the novel is crystallized in this urban setting and will eventually prove deadly to Obama Ondo—as it does for many more anonymous Africans.<sup>13</sup>

This first chapter thus serves as a brief introduction to the fictional present, in which Obama Ondo has finally established himself in Spain, before the strategic use of analepsis transports us back to his natal village in the outskirts of Mbalmayo. There, the venerable Ebang Motuú, chief of the aforementioned *yendjok* and grandfather to our protagonist, struggles to keep the clan's Fang cultural practices alive despite the pernicious influence of the "occupiers" (Ndongo-Bidyogo, *El Metro* 21). Obama Ondo's father, Guy Ondo Ebang, has other ideas, however. For him, coming of age in the colonial period meant that: "la brillantez o la opacidad del porvenir de cada uno se medían por el grado de connivencia con los ocupantes, y todo aquel que se negaba a

---

<sup>13</sup> It is worth noting here that both Silvia Bermúdez and Benita Sampedro Vizcaya have dealt with this sensation of entrapment on the part of sub-Saharan migrants in other forms of cultural production. In *Rocking the Boat*, Bermúdez indicates that the question of confinement in the Spanish metropolis has been addressed in Spanish popular music from the 1990s. Songs written by migrant musical groups as well as by Spaniards about migrant subjects such as Amistades Peligrosa's "Africanos in Madrid," Barricada's "Oveja negra," Las Hijas del Sol's "A ba'ele" and "Tirso de Molina," and Ella Baila Sola's "Que se te escapa el negro" have been fundamental for "exposing how migrant newcomers are (mis)represented as racialized non-white counterparts—mostly 'black' and 'moorish'—to a seemingly homogenous (and white) Spanish identity" (Bermúdez 121). All of these musical pieces deal with the dangers Spain's cityscapes present, particularly for African immigrants. The songs cite classic landmarks like Tirso de Molina, Plaza de España or the magnificent Gran Vía, calling to mind a vision of Madrid as a monumental city while also warning against the dangers of police harassment and racial violence. In her article "African Poetry in Spanish Exile: Seeking Refuge in the Metropolis" Sampedro Vizcaya analyzes 'El prisionero de la Gran Vía,' a poem by Francisco Zamora Lobo, another Equatorial Guinean author in exile. The poem speaks precisely to this sensation of displacement in the midst of the Spanish metropolis.

abrazar las creencias impuestas por los nuevos tiempos hipotecaba irremisiblemente su propio futuro y el de todo su estirpe" ("the brilliance or obscurity of everyone's future was measured by the level complicity with the occupiers, and anyone who refused to embrace the beliefs imposed by this new era irremissibly gambled their own fortunes and those of their whole race"; Ndongo-Bidyogo, *El Metro* 21). In this context, Ondo Ebang chooses to affiliate himself with the local French missionaries in Yaoundé. A choice that his father sees as a betrayal. It is Ondo Ebang's love affair with Dorothée Oyana that, surprisingly, remedies the ideological rift between father and son. When Oyana gets pregnant with Lambert, Ondo Ebang has no choice but to confess his "sins of the flesh" and give up any hope of being ordained. When the opportunity to fill in for the local catechist arises, Ondo Ebang returns home, exemplary Christian family in tow, to fill the vacant post and his pre-destined role as a tribal authority figure as well.

Obama Ondo, "primer fruto de aquellos amores desaforados" ("first fruit of the boundless love") between Ondo Ebang and Oyana (33), finds himself at a very different crossroads when he reaches adulthood. Born under the "mandato de los blancos" ("the white people's mandate;" 68), and growing up in the wake of Cameroon's independence from France, he watches as the country quickly slides into chaos under the autarchic regime referred to only as "El Dedo Portentoso de Su Excelencia" ("The Marvelous Finger of His Excellency"; 69). He tries in vain to enact his own rebellion by returning to the ancestral way of life. He thinks back to his infancy in Yaoundé with disdain,

regarding the material comforts afforded to his family by the Mission as illusory. But, despite his best efforts to respect local customs and uphold a sense of tradition, the death of Dorotheé Oyana results in the first of a series of ruptures that will send Obama Ondo farther and farther away from home. The widowed Ondo Ebang develops an interest in Jeanne Bikié, the mother of Obama Ondo's long-time girlfriend Anne Mengue. When the village elders pronounce that his father's plans to remarry will render his own relationship incestuous, Obama Ondo's hopes of establishing a family are dashed and he leaves for the capital that same day.

While the chaotic city life does not immediately appeal to Obama Ondo, he seeks out his cousin, Philibert Nkony, and finds employment through this connection. He also gets involved in two new love affairs. The first is a secret tryst with the exceedingly wealthy Danielle—or “Madame”—Eboué. The second is with the more suitable Sylvie Anguesomo, who turns out to come from the same region as Obama Ondo. But, yet again, the personal and political align to the protagonist's misfortune. The massive devaluation of the local currency costs Obama Ondo his job just as Sylvie finds out she is pregnant. With the aim of supporting Sylvie, Obama Ondo relocates to the port city of Douala and joins his cousin Ntogo in working as a stevedore. The job is lucrative enough, but it lands him in the middle of political upheaval; Ntogo is at the heart of local unionizing efforts and becomes the target of a bloody crackdown by the dictatorial powers that be. Fearing for his life, Obama Ondo hides on the first cargo ship leaving

port. His first attempt to reach Europe is foiled when the ship docks in Dakar, Senegal. But this initial failure leaves Obama Ondo newly obsessed with reaching what he describes as a “Promised Land”<sup>1</sup> across the ocean. It is this idealized vision of life in Europe that he will eventually have to come to terms with as an itinerant laborer.

### **1.4 Paradise Lost**

Only the last three chapters of the long and winding novel are dedicated to Obama Ondo’s adventures in Spain. In this way, *El Metro*’s distribution squares well with Ndongo-Bidyogo’s own conception of the novel as his attempt to “humanizar al emigrante africano” (“humanize the African emigrant”) (Ndongo-Bidyogo, *Personal interview*).<sup>14</sup> By embedding his protagonist in West Africa’s long history of colonial and post-colonial struggle, Ndongo-Bidyogo complicates any attempt to treat today’s recent migratory flows as an object of study somehow distinct from the legacy of European colonialism. A neoclassical approach to migration studies, for example, maintains that migrants are motivated by a combination of “push” factors that drive them out of their home countries and “pull” factors that orient them toward their given destination. In Obama Ondo’s case, the push factors would include economic crisis and political repression in Cameroon, while Spain’s relative financial stability as part of the European

---

<sup>14</sup> Mahan L. Ellison reads this “humanizing” effort through Emmanuel Levinas’ notion of the “Other” rendering a particularly insightful interpretation of the scant (and therefore shocking) instances in the novel where the third person narrative is broken by the use of *tú* or the second person verb form. And concludes that: “Ndongo makes the face-to-face encounter unavoidable, effectively cancelling the space between “Same” and “Other,” humanizing the immigrant in this encounter” (Ellison 172).

Union draws him in. But Ndongo-Bidyogo seems determined to demonstrate that for Obama Ondo—as for real-life migrants—this framework constitutes an oversimplification. Cast as a personal reaction to several generations of trauma, his intimate reasons for migrating escape categorization.

Ndongo-Bidyogo's choice of the word 'emigrant' is revealing as well. As Raquel Vega-Durán has theorized at length in *Emigrant Dreams, Immigrant Borders*, the directionally neutral "migrant" (or *migrante*), is not technically a noun in Spanish. The Real Academia Española only recognizes the adjectival form as describing someone or something "que migra" ("that migrates") (RAE). This linguistic division forces those wishing to discuss human mobility to emphasize the perspective of the sending or receiving society. "Emigrant" (*emigrante*) implies a strong connection with the person's place of origin, whereas immigrant (*inmigrante*) inherently frames that migration from the perspective of the receiving society (Vega-Durán 4). Ndongo-Bidyogo's writing and presentation of the novel. Ndongo-Bidyogo clearly desires to emphasize Obama Ondo's emigrant identity, his connection with his homeland; a view of the protagonist that has clearly shaped the text as well as its reception.

As Ellison proclaims: "*The Metro* is, at its most basic, a migration narrative, though it could be called several novels in one—a trilogy bound within a single cover" (164). The attention to Obama Ondo's tribal roots, his travails while displaced within Africa—not to mention his arduous journey across the Western Sahara and by boat to

the Canary Islands, have been subject to myriad interpretations. The novel has thus been read as expressing a DuBoisian double consciousness (Ugarte), in line with nineteenth-century slave narratives (Fra-Molinero), through Frantz Fanon in terms of competition between White and Black men (Celaya), and, more recently, as a quintessentially Transatlantic tale (Bermúdez, “Africa Begins in ...”). Nonetheless, little attention has been paid to the way in which it contributes to a burgeoning movement to recognize the value and beauty of Black lives *in Spain*. The back-cover blurb, for example, reads as follows:

Vemos a diario a Lambert Obama Ondo vendiendo baratijas como “top manta”. Apenas nos fijamos en él en el bus, en El Metro. Su historia y la de sus compañeros abre con frecuencia los informativos, y se comenta en tertulias y debates. Ante tragedias recurrentes —en Melilla o Lampedusa— sacude a nuestras conciencias ¿Le conocemos? ¿Le preguntamos por qué atravesó selvas, desiertos y mares para llegar hasta aquí? Donato Ndonga nos conduce a visibilizar a este subsahariano invisible.

We see Lambert Obama Ondo on the daily, selling knick-knacks like “Top Manta”. We barely notice him on the bus, in the Metro. His story and that of his companions often opens news reports and is commented on in debates and forums. In the face of recurring tragedies —in Melilla or Lampedusa—it shakes our consciences. Do we know him? Do we ask he why he crossed jungles,

deserts, and oceans to arrive here? Donato Ndongo induces us to visibilize this invisible sub-Saharan [man].

Colonialism drew borders where none had previously existed, creating brand new nation states. With the upheaval brought on by independence, the 1970s and 1980s saw renewed trans-Saharan mobility –but in the form of transnational migration (de Hass). By the early 1990s the number of international migrants a year was consistently estimated to be around 80 million, nearly half of whom (approximately 35 million) were from sub-Saharan Africa (Russell 297).<sup>15</sup> Thus, this paratext, like the text itself, embeds Obama Ondo within the wider African experience of the era. But despite the reference to the Italian island of Lampedusa that, like Ceuta and Melilla or the Canary Islands, has received an unprecedented number of arrivals from across the Mediterranean in the past few decades, the European focus is clearly Spain. The blurb references Topmanta the ethical streetwear brand founded by the *Sindicato Popular de Vendedores Ambulantes de Barcelona* (Popular Union of Street Vendors of Barcelona) that, united under the slogan “ninguna persona es ilegal” (“no person is illegal”) calls attention to the situation of undocumented African migrants in Spain via their merchandise. Likewise, through both form and content Ndongo-Bidyogo’s novel combats the invisibility of illegality. Beatriz

---

<sup>15</sup> In Russell’s study a “migrant” is defined as someone who has crossed international borders, so these numbers are not referring to internal displacement. However, these 35 million are the numbers *within* sub-Saharan Africa, only a fraction of which, like Lambert Obama Ondo, would eventually make the journey beyond the continent.

Celaya describes *El Metro* as “una de las primeras novelas que se acerca a la experiencia de un inmigrante negro africano en la España actual desde una perspectiva también Africana” (“one of the first [Spanish] novels that deals with the experience of a Black African immigrant in Spain from a perspective that is also African”; Celaya 142). To this, I would add that it is one of the first novels published in Spain to address its rapid transformation from sending to receiving country through African eyes. Therefore, it is crucial to recognize that while the expressed intent of *El Metro* is to raise awareness amongst Spaniards about the foreigners in their midst, the narration also guides the Spanish reader toward some serious circumspection about Spain’s attachment to Whiteness and White, European privilege.

In terms of form, one of the *El Metro*’s most distinctive features is the exclusive use of the indirect and free indirect styles. This formal characteristic has been interpreted in various ways. For Elisa Rizo, the third-person omniscient narration lends an epic dimension to the storyline and connects the novel—a written product—to oral tradition (Rizo 87). Unlike the performative style of the *griot*, or bard of West African fame, our narrator in *El Metro* rarely engages directly with the novel’s audience. Nonetheless, Rizo views the genealogical framing of Obama Ondo’s tale, the many references to ancestry and even the narrator’s deterministic tone as reminiscent of the *griot*’s mission to historicize. I agree with Rizo that there is more behind these stylistic choices than mere

pedantry.<sup>16</sup> However, unlike Rizo, I read *El Metro* as an effort to inscribe the story of Obama Ondo—and so many others like him—in the European historical record.

The fusion of the protagonist's voice with that of the narrator means that novel is devoid of dialogue in the conventional sense. Still, Ugarte insists that "the dialogical imagination of Ndongo's narrative abounds" (Ugarte 84). As Mikhail Bakhtin long-ago established, the interference between the author's word and the word of the protagonist creates an internal dialogism particular to free indirect discourse (Bakhtin 197).

Applying this logic to *El Metro*, we see a totalizing narrative wherein voices other than the narrator's are never explicitly recognized but each word becomes fraught territory of its own. Nowhere is this more apparent than with the description of Europe—and eventually Spain itself—as an "Eden." In guiding a Spanish readership from a re-assessment of "African emigration" to a self-examination, the free indirect style plays a key role in the interrogation of both Spanishness and Europeanness, exposing the hypocrisies of a system in which migrants from Europe's former colonies are treated as foreigners on continental soil.

---

<sup>16</sup> Indeed, to find hints of orality in Ndongo-Bidyogo's work is unsurprising since, as noted by M'Bare N'Gom, the earliest instances of Spanish-language literature produced in Equatorial Guinea emerged from "a process of collecting, transcribing, and translating into Spanish the traditional literary production of the peoples inhabiting this Spanish colony" (N'gom 587). N'Gom maintains that the friction between the Peninsular and Bantu cultural traditions ultimately resulted in "an autonomous text, which, though it was enriched by certain structural norms of the European tale, nevertheless continued to employ a narrative technique that was proper to the oral text" (588). Ndongo-Bidyogo is clearly drawing upon this legacy—even in the creation of a novel that deviates from his typical focus on Equatorial Guinea's colonial past and post-independence present to tackle the question of African migration more broadly.

Celaya observes how this narrative style impacts the development of the novel's female characters. Each stage in Obama Ondo's odyssey is marked by a new relationship, one that reflects his evolving definition of what constitutes a good life. When a young Obama Ondo's aspirations are confined to his small village, the homely Anne Mengue is deemed to be his best match. As the naïve newcomer to the city life in Yaoundé, he is physically taken advantage of by the older and more worldly Madame Eboué. After Obama Ondo adjusts to this urban environment Sylvie Anguesomo is cast as a better match. Like Obama Ondo, she comes from more humble origins but has adapted to a cosmopolitan lifestyle. But exactly when Obama Ondo has saved up enough money in Spain to pay Sylvie's dowry and officially ask for her hand in marriage, Lucía appears on the scene. Abandoned by Obama Ondo and disregarded by our narrator, these women too are cast as the victims of the perpetual conflict between African tradition and European modernity that propels our protagonist forward towards his death. In a paradoxical way, however, both of the cosmologies in conflict are staunchly paternalistic. Whether it is the modern, European worldview—ironically incarnated in Catholicism (Ugarte 83), or the tribal customs that Obama Ondo so reveres at the beginning, his models for success are overwhelming patriarchal. Still, as Celaya points out, it is unclear if the narrator is aware of this paradox. While Obama Ondo is frequently praised for being a man of superior qualities, the women he is involved with are cast as distinctly inferior—reduced to their role as potential child bearers (Celaya-

Carrillo 143), the narrator, at times, concedes that women have been the backbone of the continent and the driving force behind a series of “revoluciones silenciosas” (“silent revolutions”) (Celaya 149; Ndong-Bidyogo, *El Metro* 257). According to Celaya this is typical of a narration replete with inconsistencies in which Lambert, “que solo se guía por ‘el sentido común y la lógica pedestre de un ser inculto y sensible’ *se lanza* unos discursos que apenas pueden ocultar la inteligencia, capacidad de observación y versatilidad lingüística de Ndong” (“who is guided exclusively by ‘common sense and the pedestrian logic of an uneducated yet sensitive person’ goes on rants that barely conceal the intelligence, capacity for observation and linguistic versatility of Ndong”; Celaya-Carrillo 149). The same can be said of Obama Ondo’s optimistic views of Europe as an “Eden,” which, with every enunciation, is tinged by the narrator’s (and indeed, Ndong-Bidyogo’s) own struggles with European racism.

To this end, despite Obama Ondo’s original plans to build an “earthly paradise” for himself amongst the *yendjok*, Eden is only used as a specific referent when he has relinquished any hope of staying in Cameroon, and after his first attempt at emigrating to Europe is frustrated. Temporarily stranded in Dakar, Obama Ondo sets about consulting with “*camelleros*” —smugglers familiar with the various routes he could take across the Sahara to either the Atlantic or the Mediterranean. As he considers “las posibilidades de cruzar hasta la opulenta orilla opuesta” (“the possibilities of crossing over to the opulent opposing shoreline”; Ndong-Bidyogo, *El Metro* 228), Obama Ondo

takes on odd jobs in the marketplace. It is at this point the narrator informs us: “vivía con estrechez y sólo gastaba lo imprescindible para ir maltirando, pero pronto se dio cuenta de que tardaría demasiado tiempo, años y años, en reunir el dinero necesario para alcanzar las puertas del Edén” (“he lived modestly and only spent what was necessary to scrape by, but he soon realized that it would take too much time, years and years, to save up enough money to reach the gates of Eden”; 232). There is a certain irony to the fact that, Obama Ondo, a character who eschewed Christianity and judged his father for aligning himself with the “portadores de la Única Verdad” (“messengers of The Only Truth”), suddenly frames his desire for a good life in biblical terms. The choice of Eden as an expression of Obama Ondo’s hopes and dreams has the double effect of underscoring his innocence about the West. After all, it’s hell that is gated, not the earthly paradise described in Genesis. The very idea that Obama Ondo will have to lay siege to an enclosed space resonates more with the image of a militarized “Fortress Europe” than a European promise-land or refuge. The ironic treatment of Eden denotes our narrator’s understanding of the realities that await Obama Ondo in the mainland.

After three months in Lanzarote, the Spanish authorities can no longer detain Obama Ondo and the NGO flies him to Madrid where is shocked by the austere appearance of what he dubs “paisajes espectrales” (“ghostly landscapes”; 281). One complicated Metro ride later, he and his friend Abdoul have managed to board a bus headed for Murcia where they have arranged to work as field hands. Obama Ondo is

initially charmed by the comforts this mode of transport has to offer as the narrator informs us: “experimentó por primera vez la agradable sensación de hallarse por fin en Europa” (“he felt for the first time the agreeable sensation of finally finding himself in Europe”; 290). However, gazing out the window he watches “el monótono discurrir de un anchuroso panorama árido, con una raquítica y mezquina vegetación, sin atisbos aparentes de vida” (“the endless arid panorama pass by monotonously, with an emaciated and miserable vegetation without apparent signs of life”; 292). Thinking back to “los exuberantes bosques de su tierra (“the exuberant forests of his homeland”; 292), Obama Ondo is taken aback; the landscape that unfolds before him in no way meets his prior expectations. Concerned, he wonders: “De dónde sacaban su comida? ¿Sólo se alimentaban de embutidos, latas y conservas? (“Where did they get their food? Did they survive off of cured meats, canned goods and preserves alone?”), and ultimately concludes that “por las trazas, se hubiera dicho que Europa era el continente pobre frente a la fecundidad exultante del África tropical” (“based on these signs, one would have said that Europe was the poor continent in the face of tropical Africa’s exultant fecundity”; 292). In contrast to what he has left behind, Obama Ondo finds it hard to imagine this barren wasteland will give way to the garden of earthly pleasures he came in search of. A European readership, and particularly a Spanish one, however, will know that the Levante is indeed capable of providing agricultural abundance. However, it depends on the migrant workers like Obama Ondo who work night and day in the

greenhouses — or *plástico* — along the Southern Mediterranean coast.<sup>17</sup> He is a part of a global trade network, of imports and exports, that keeps Spanish supermarket shelves stocked. Thus, our more-experienced narrator's mimicry underscores Obama Ondo's naiveté. Given the double-voiced quality of each word, his questions cast a shadow of doubt in our minds nonetheless: is Spain's perceived wealth *real*?

All of this comes to a head when a government bust sends Obama Ondo and the other field hands scattering. He returns to Madrid where he must come to terms with the harsh realities of life in the Spanish capital. On one hand, a family connection in the Cameroonian embassy leaves him confident that he will finally be able to process his paperwork and attain legal residence. While on the other, his only means of keeping afloat in the meantime is to establish himself as a *mantero*. Madrid's subway system quickly becomes "su principal escuela de comportamiento social, de cómo son los países blanco, y dónde comprobaría con renovada admiración la portentosa sabiduría de los ancianos de su pueblo" ("his main school of social behavior, what white people's countries are like, and where he would find renewed admiration for the superb wisdom of the elders of his village"; 288). Whereas in the rural South he spent most of his time

---

<sup>17</sup> With Francisco Franco's development plan, new irrigation systems and these plastic covering that protect crops from the strong Mediterranean winds turned this non-arable land into "la huerta de Europa" ["the vegetable garden of Europe"]. The concentration of *plásticos* in the Poniente Almerense is so high that this "sea of plastic" can be seen from the International Space Station. See for example: <https://www.lavanguardia.com/economia/20181208/453319751509/campo-de-dalias-el-ejido-poniente-almeriense-pasado-y-presente-mar-de-plastico-antes-verde.html>.

surrounded by other migrants, the big city exposes him to the Spanish cultural norms — and virulent racism. As Obama Ondo circulates in the Metro, he reminds himself how to behave in the face of these aggressions: “reír la gracia a los tiernos infantes que sacuden la falda de su madre mientras te apuntan con el dedo; ignorar a los egregios ciudadanos que cambian de sitio para no viajar a tu lado” (“laugh at the sweet infants that pull at their mother’s skirt while they point their finger at you; ignore the egregious citizens that change seats so that don’t have to ride next to you”; 288) and the list goes on. This is one of only a few instances in the text where the narrative voice slips into the second person. No longer dialogic but polylogic, each word can be perceived as Obama Ondo’s instructions to himself, the narrator’s advice for how to navigate this racist environment, and a “tú” that is directed outwards, asking us as readers to imagine ourselves in Obama Ondo’s shoes.

The narrative voice lures the reader in and then sets us up to scrutinize the very substance of “developed Spain” from the migrant position. During this time in Madrid, Obama Ondo is continually impressed with the splendor of Spain’s cities and the material comforts of what he simply refers to as “civilization” (288). His new-found admiration comes with a degree of resignation as well and he ultimately concludes that “Ya nunca más creería que los blancos son seres privilegiados: su sacrificio les costaba comer cada día, adquirir aquellos pisitos como colmenas, pagar los plazos del coche y los muebles, vestir, educar a sus hijos” (“He would never again believe that white

people were privileged beings: it cost them great sacrifice to eat every day, acquire those little beehive-like apartments, pay for their parking spots and furniture, dress and educate their children"; 337). Oddly enough, these are Obama Ondo's last ruminations about Spanish culture before his death. In observing those around him, he confirms the earlier suspicion that the promise of a European "Eden" is just another mirage for the road-weary clandestine migrant. Much like the semblance of "the good life" that his father, Ondo Ebang, attained by affiliating himself with the French colonizers in Cameroon, Obama Ondo's modicum of "success" in this consumer-driven environment turns out to be hollow.

### ***1.5 Re-writing Immigration***

In terms of content, it is worth noting that Ndongo-Bidyogo seems to have organized certain plot elements around a variety of newspaper headlines from the era. Considering Ndongo-Bidyogo's experience working for various media outlets, his attention to the optics of migration following Spain's 1985 law is not surprising. However, this fictional rendering of real-life material serves a vastly different purpose than his other endeavors. Ndongo-Bidyogo uses this content to enhance the plausibility of Obama Ondo's story, all-the-while suppressing names and dates to emphasize that his protagonist is no anomaly. In weaving these events into the fictional story of an individual migrant, he is attempting to re-write immigration.

One such instance of this re-writing is the massive devaluation of the local currency—which costs Obama Ondo his job at a warehouse in Yaoundé because there are no longer any imported goods to unpack or sell. In 1994, France did in fact cut the value of the African franc in half, sending shockwaves through numerous countries that comprise the *Communauté Financière Africaine* (African Financial Community).<sup>18</sup> The anthropologist Ruben Andersson has noted that the sudden devaluation “reduced spending power and so pushed more West Africans to look for better fortunes abroad: that is, in the European countries that had largely been responsible for their economic predicament and whose borders now came with a ‘no entry sign’ attached” (Andersson 19). In *El Metro* these same conditions leave Obama Ondo completely reliant on his girlfriend, Sylvie, to survive. She and the other women stave off the devastation of inflation by organizing themselves into underground collectives called *totines* or *djangu*. By selling dry goods on the black market, they raise a monthly quota that goes to maintaining each member’s household in a communal fashion (Ndongo-Bidyogo, *El Metro* 195–96). Obama Ondo considers this dependency as an affront to his manhood and motivates his relocation to Douala.

There, the circumstances surrounding the assassination attempt against his cousin Ntogo are clearly an allusion to the atrocities committed by Cameroon’s

---

<sup>18</sup> In 1994 the CFA included: Senegal, the Comoros, Burkina Faso, Ivory Coast, Chad, Benin, the Central African Republic, Congo, Gabon, Niger, Togo, Cameroon and Mali, as well as Equatorial Guinea, which had joined the group in 1985 (Noble).

infamous Paul Biya. Biya has been in power since his predecessor stepped down suddenly in 1982 and within the novel references to “Su Excelencia” and “El Dedo Portentoso” (“His Excellency” and “the Portentous Finger”). begin while Obama Ondo is still back in his village. With chaos reigning in other neighboring “países tercermundistas” (“third world countries”), “El Dedo Portentoso” retains a firm grip on Cameroon by staging rigged elections. However, when the growing financial crisis creeps across national borders the regime’s tight control only creates greater strife. In this context, Obama’s inability to buffer himself by simply returning to the land makes him a stand in for an entire generation of young men whose hopes for the future were dashed by the rash of authoritarian regimes that spread throughout African in the wake of decolonization—regimes that were all too often propped up by the former metropolitan powers. And while Spaniards may have originally overlooked this political and economic turmoil the former French colonies, Ndongo-Bidyogo’s fiction brings these issues home when a terrified Obama Ondo escapes reprisal by hiding among the cargo on a massive freighter bound for Spain.

The timing of Obama Ondo’s flight from Cameroon associates him with another generational hallmark: the first wave of *pateras* to reach the Canary Islands.<sup>19</sup> With the formation of the European Union (EU) in 1993 and the Schengen Area two years later,

---

<sup>19</sup> *Patera* was first popularized as a name for the small rafts used to cross the Strait of Gibraltar throughout the 1990s however it has quickly become the general term for any unseaworthy vessel used for migration purposes. *Cayuco* is synonymous but more commonly refers to the West African-style fishing boats that were co-opted for transporting migrants to the Canary Islands in the 2000s.

the Spanish protectorates of Ceuta and Melilla became the EU's only terrestrial border with Africa. As addressed in the Introduction, the intense militarization of this region left people searching for other routes to Europe. Thus, when in 1994, two Sahrawi youths managed to cross the sixty-plus miles of open ocean between the west of Morocco and the Spanish archipelago on a small raft, it sparked a chain reaction. By the time Frontex launched operations Hera I and Hera II in 2006 to staunch the flow, thousands of other ill-suited boats—crammed with migrants—had made the journey.

In this way, Ndongo-Bidyogo attaches Obama Ondo to *the* trend in African migration to Europe of recent decades; one that brought on what Andersson has called the “birth of a border” (Andersson 68). That is, the military-style efforts to secure both land and sea from the arrival of what, realistically, are just rickety fishing boats—all because they carry on board the feared economic migrant. After a year of working itinerant jobs in Dakar’s central market, Obama Ondo saves up enough money to try again and places his fate in the hands of “La Red.” This mysterious mafia-like organization provides him with a passport, flies him to Casablanca, and smuggles him in van across the Western Sahara. From there, he and his fellow migrants are packed aboard a fishing canoe bound for the island of Lanzarote. Here, the novel gestures towards the extensive human trafficking networks that quickly spread throughout Morocco as the Spanish borders became increasingly militarized. Traffickers who coordinated either Atlantic or Mediterranean crossings were given the name “tiburones”

(sharks) and sub-Saharanans were referred to as “corderos” (lambs). In a report from the era, José A. Carrizosa explains that a *cordero* would usually be charged twice as much as someone from the Maghreb due to his skin color (Carrizosa). This is just one example of the many economic practices that emerged on either “side” of this newly redrawn border, reinforcing its existence from the top-down and the bottom up. And as Ndong-Bidyogo’s narrative makes clear, the explicit racialization of sub-Saharan migrants moves extends far beyond the physical border and deep within Spanish territory.

Beyond the specific legal measures described in the Introduction, immigrants to Spain were also greeted by a surge of virulent nationalism. On November 13, 1992, the country was rocked by the murder of Lucrecia Pérez, often—erroneously—cited as the country’s first hate crime. As a Black Dominican woman who had recently arrived in Madrid, she was singled out and shot by an off-duty police officer and his neo-Nazi friends determined to “teach black people a lesson” (Ruano Blanco). Given the almost celebratory period of renewed cultural production initiated by the Transition, scholars have likened the somber news of Pérez’s death to waking up with a brutal hangover as the fledgling democracy was forced to reckon with the vestiges of its fascist past (Bermúdez, *Rocking the Boat* 8). Such an explicit display racism only served as reminder of Spain’s complicated double bind wherein upticks in immigration confirm its status as

a desirable First World destination while also calling attention to its precarious position on the fringes of the West.<sup>20</sup>

The case of Lucrecia Pérez forever marks a historical moment in which Spaniards found themselves struggling with the question of integration in the face of increasingly heterogenous arrivals and immigration was first deemed a “social issue” (Cachón Rodríguez 177–84; Aja, *Inmigración y democracia* 51). The brutal nature of this attack on Blackness and Black bodies sparked outrage amongst the Afro-descendant communities in Spain. It inspired Francisco Zamora Lobo’s book-length essay: *Cómo ser negro y no morir en Aravaca* (*How to be Black and Not Die in Aravaca*),<sup>21</sup> one of the earliest anti-racist treatises to be written from Spain, and was vital to the foundation of SOS Racismo, the first Spanish NGO dedicated to the fight against racism and xenophobia.<sup>22</sup> The incident also became a referent for investigative journalists trying shed light on the emergence of neo-Nazi cells across Europe.

---

<sup>20</sup> Leopoldo Zea observes of the continental attitude toward Spain, “There was something about the people from the other side of the Pyrenees that made them more like the nations against whom they had fought than those they had defended by their resistance. There was something ‘barbarian’ that set them apart from the rest of Europe” (Zea 122). Kant, for example, described the Spanish national character as “of the terrifying kind, which inclines a bit to the adventurous” (Kant 50). And Hegel wrote that “rivers and seas are not to be regarded as disjoining, but as uniting.... only mountains separate” (Hegel 92–94). From this perspective, Spain is connected to Africa by the narrow Strait of Gibraltar and cut off from the rest of Europe by the Pyrenees.

<sup>21</sup> The incident took place in Aravaca an up-and-coming neighborhood in the Western suburbs of Madrid, thus Zamora Lobo’s title makes direct reference to the Pérez case.

<sup>22</sup> In fact, Pérez’s likeness was used on the SOS Racismo flyer advertising the first annual “March Against Racism” (Manifestación contra el racismo) in 2017. In honor of the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of her death, the march took place on November 12<sup>th</sup> that year.

One such piece entitled, “Primero fueron a por los negros...” (“First They Went After the Black People,” (Shwartz and Lladó 22), decries the rise of populist leaders like Jörg Haider of Austria, disparages French politician Jean-Maria Le Pen’s far right movement, and sounds the alarm about skinhead groups prowling Spanish cities. Although well-intentioned, these exposés seem more concerned about these outbursts as “public safety hazards” than about their impact on racialized groups. In 1993, the Police Department in Barcelona created a special task force to combat the “skinhead problem” (Corachán 3), and similar measures followed in Madrid. Nonetheless, two years later, over a hundred new incidents were reported, including an assault on American dancer, Carl Paris.<sup>23</sup> In this climate, further news coverage cautioned: “Usted puede ser la próxima víctima” (“You Might Be the Next Victim,” Aranda 2). Lucrecia Pérez’s story was followed for weeks, even months after the fact and white supremacist groups finally registered as a problem requiring government intervention. Yet, the plight of the African migrants who initially—and continually—suffered this violence never made it to the headlines.<sup>24</sup>

---

<sup>23</sup> A smaller article in *El Periódico*, simply titled “Tres nuevas agresiones de ‘skins’ en Madrid durante el pasado fin de semana” (“Three New “Skinhead” Aggressions in Madrid Over the Weekend”), cites the Metro as a preferred setting of such attacks and describes how Carl Paris was thrown on the ground and kicked by a group that left him with a fractured hand (“Three New “Skinhead” Aggressions in Madrid Over the (Yagüe 29).

<sup>24</sup> Sabrina Brancato argues that while the contributions of immigrants from Spain’s former colonies in the Americas are often embraced under Ramiro de Maeztu’s notion of *Hispanidad*, “Equatorial Guinea does not feature on the map in spite of the fact that the majority of Guinean writers presently reside in Spain” (Brancato, “Afro-European Literature(s): A New Discursive Category?” 9). David Howard and Ginetta Candelario have examined how the Dominican Republic links itself to Spain as a “madre patria” in a bid for

In order to shed light on this dynamic, Ndong-Bidyogo purposely crafts a tale that first takes the Spanish imagination far afield but slowly and surely circles back “home.” Obama Ondo’s last moments, gasping for breath in Metro a car, are intended to read as a tragically familiar to the average Spaniard. The structure of the novel thus cannot be overlooked since, in drawing attention away from the *paterization* of immigration and to the reality on (or under) the ground in Spanish cities, *El Metro* forces Spain to take a good, long look in the mirror. With this in mind we are finally able to reassess the opening scene and the reasons for Obama Ondo’s apprehension as he enters the Madrid’s subterranean tunnels:

Le asaltaba como un comienzo de desazón cada vez que bajaba las escaleras mecánicas hacia las entrañas de la tierra, porque a lo mejor un día podría encontrarse en esos húmedos abismos con alguna de las ánimas de sus idos, aunque pronto se reconfortaba diciéndose que era más bien improbable que los espíritus de los negros se le aparecieran en un país de blancos.

He felt uneasy every time he rode the escalator toward the bowels of the earth, because one day he might bump into the animus of his deceased ancestors in that humid abyss, although he quickly comforted himself with thought that it was

---

whiteness. It would be fascinating to explore how this tendency garnered attention for Lucrecia Pérez while the stories of African migrants were further silenced.

unlikely that the spirits of black folks would manifest in white country.

(Ndongo-Bidyogo, *El Metro* 13)

The association of the Metro with purgatory gestures toward the ongoing state of illegality that Obama Ondo endures for the sake of accessing the infrastructural benefits that Spain offers. It is a phenomenon that Malick Gueye, spokesperson for the Sindicato de Manteros y Lateros of the Asociación Sin Papeles de Madrid (ASPM, the Association of Undocumented Workers in Madrid) describes as “la jaula de la clandestinidad” (the cage of clandestineness) (Sánchez).<sup>25</sup> As in Obama Ondo’s case, if officials are unable to process and deport migrants within three months of detention, they are permitted to remain in Spain but do not receive visas. They remain in limbo, are unable to be treated within the public healthcare system or even rent apartments. And without a vote, they have no civic voice, no legal recourse to change these circumstances.

## **1.6 Conclusion**

Ugarte concludes his analysis with the assertion that, in unison with his protagonist, Ndongo-Bidyogo “obliterates borders” (Ugarte 87). However, it seems to me that he instead harnesses the powers of fiction to counter the ongoing political fictions of a cohesive nation-state in need of strong border regimes. No national entity has been safe from the vicissitudes of globalization, neither former colonies like

---

<sup>25</sup> Gueye has also explained the heightened visibility of sub-Saharan African in Spain in terms of racial difference, while they find themselves politically invisible (*Traficantes de sueños* and *Instituto para la Democracia y el Municipalismo*).

Cameroon or Equatorial Guinea nor former metropolises like Spain. The focus on the landscape; urban and rural, African and European, makes it clear to what extent the border as dividing line is a social construct. Unfortunately, it is a construct supported by all sorts of bordering regimes that partake in the control of Black lives whether in the middle of the Mediterranean or subterranean Madrid.

Critical race theorists have long maintained that “attacking embedded preconceptions that marginalize others or conceal their humanity is a legitimate function of all fiction” (Delgado and Stefancic 42). Ndongo-Bidyogo’s narrative style thus constitutes what Delgado and Stefancic have called “counterstorytelling” (42). Operating on the premise that “race is not real or objective, but constructed,” this perspective maintains that well-crafted stories are a powerful tool for the destruction of racial prejudice (43). Interpreting *El Metro* as a counterstorytelling effort demonstrates how much of Spain’s 1990s success on the global economic stage was predicated on an intensive process of internal bordering. Synchronous to the structure of the novel, the narrative form itself is an important facet of Ndongo-Bidyogo’s humanization project.

Rather than framing this autobiographical material as an exposé of the rampant structural inequalities that migrants face or as a historical account of how Equatorial Guinea’s independence was obscured by Spain’s dictatorial forces and then overshadowed by democratization, Ndongo-Bidyogo crafted a novel that intervenes in the archives of Spanish historiography to make space for broader forms of Black world

making. It is a denunciation of the hegemonic, teleological “progress narrative” that frames economic development as the only possible future.

Curiously, however, despite giving individuals like the anonymous African man mentioned at the start of the chapter a name and a story, *El Metro* does not endow Obama Ondo a distinct voice. Ndongo-Bidyogo is so intent on connecting with a Spanish audience, on disbanding erroneous perceptions about Africa and its people, that he exerts an exquisite level of narrative control, rarely letting his protagonist get a word in edgewise. It also leaves the majority of the novel’s secondary characters relatively underdeveloped. The omniscient narration never enters their thought processes, and without dialogue we get no real sense of their personalities. In particular, the many women who bolster and inspire Obama Ondo throughout his journey are literally and figuratively left behind. This trend will continue in the next chapter with Nini’s *Diario de un ilegal* which similarly centers exclusively on the male perspective. Unlike *El Metro* which challenges a commodity-based notion of well-being by contrasting it with Obama Ondo’s African cosmovision, Nini dismantles the idea of a Spanish El Dorado by underscoring the many similarities between Spain and Morocco. Both texts effectively reveal the isolating nature of itinerant labor and highlight the irony with which these men’s efforts to participate in the Spanish economy only result in further marginalization. Yet, they do not accurately represent migrant Spain in its entirety

because, as we will see in Chapters 3 and 4, narratives of migration are inherently family stories.

## 2. Rachid Nini's *Diario de un ilegal* as a Record of the Harsh Realities of Migrant Life in the Spanish El Dorado

### 2.1 Introduction

Ever since the 1985 *Ley de Extranjería* (LOE) ushered in an unprecedented era of immigration for Spain, Moroccans have represented the single largest group of foreign-born nationals in residence (Aja, *Inmigración y democracia* 56). Real numbers are always hard to come by, especially since this law essentially forced migrants into illegality until revisions were introduced in the early 2000s.<sup>1</sup> But civil registries (el Padrón Municipal) and the Encuesta de la Población Activa (Labor Force Survey) administered by the Instituto Nacional de Estadística (National Statistics Institute or INE) give us a rough idea of this robust and evolving population. The magnitude of migratory flows between Morocco and Spain are not necessarily surprising given the two countries' geographic proximity, close historical ties, and Spain's colonial presence in North Africa. However, these same factors make for complex web of cultural relations that spans the Strait of Gibraltar. While Spain's experience as a popular host country may be new, Moroccan

---

<sup>1</sup> This first version of the *Ley de Extranjería*, La Ley Orgánica 5/1985, sobre derechos y libertades de los extranjeros en España, has been strongly criticized for focusing exclusively on migratory controls rather than the "rights and liberties of foreigners in Spain" as claimed. It made no provisions for asylum or family reunification and those wishing to travel on a work visa had to obtain a work contract from Spain ahead of time and back in their country of origin. This particular requirement was a near impossibility in a pre-internet age, meaning that the law essentially only allowed for illegal entry or a brief stay on a tourist visa (Aja, "La evolución de la normativa sobre inmigración" 21). By the early 1990s the situation was so acute that the government implemented emergency "regularization" campaigns every year between 1993 and 1999 in an attempt to legalize the precarious working conditions of tens of thousands of people (24). See the Introduction for a detailed description of how this legislation has evolved over time.

immigration reminds Spaniards that despite the division of national territories, the Southern Mediterranean region has been a veritable borderlands for centuries (Pack). Spain was one of the original 20 member countries signed the Convention founding the Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD) in 1960 but was only admitted to the European Economic Community in 1986 following the LOE's promulgation. With accession to this supra-national economic structure the mere fourteen kilometers of sea that separates the Peninsula from African soil came to represent one the most extreme income gaps in the world. But what does it mean to span that divide?

Through his own story, as documented in the autobiographical *Diario de un ilegal* (*Diary of a Clandestine Migrant*, 2002), Rachid Nini (also spelled Niny) sets out to expose how the country's rapid development capitalized on migrant labor and lives. Just as Donato Ndong-Bidyogo toyed with the notion of a European "Eden" in *The Metro*, Nini ironizes the vision of a Europeanized Spain as an "El Dorado." However, it is also important to recognize that, while seemingly similar, these two symbols have very different connotations. Recent trends in eco-criticism have led scholars to revisit the myth of El Dorado and its counterpart: the notion of a "Second Eden." As representative of the natural abundance not only drove European colonialization of the South American tropics both have continued to inform "the practices of natural resource extraction and exhaustion, known as 'extractivism,' that have transformed the region's

cultures, landscapes and economies in ensuing centuries" (Rogers 2). However, according to Charlotte Rogers, while the earthly paradise could be sought for the sake of moral redemption, "El Dorado, in contrast, was often described as a place of fundamental strangeness and dubious morality, both because it had its origins in native accounts and those who sought it were motivated by material concerns" (Rogers 6). Thus, the reconfiguration of Spain as a European "El Dorado" because of its unusually rapid economic expansion during the late 1990s leaves us with many bizarre and relatively unexplored contradictions to deal with. In particular, and as exemplified by *Diary of a Clandestine Migrant*, the relocation of this legend to Southern European soil underscores the position of Spaniards as the new "unreliable natives." Nini's clever subversion of the myth, including his use of the diary form to record his exploits (much like Columbus), also touches on important questions of hedonism. If El Dorado offers the "easy acquisition of wealth and pleasure...with no inkling of hard work or spiritual redemption" (Rogers 4), then Spain is no El Dorado. As Nini bitterly remarks in the conclusion of *Diary of a Clandestine Migrant*: "Para vivir aquí tienes que trabajar como una mula" ("To live here [Spain] you have to work like a mule"; Nini 207). I therefore argue that by turning the speculative fictions (in every sense of the word) that drove Spain's exploration and conquest of Africa and the "New World" back on the former

colonial power, Nini's narrative put the very logic of Spanish *desarrollismo*, or developmentalism,<sup>2</sup> into question.<sup>3</sup>

It is important to address from the outset that Nini is unlike the other writers covered in this dissertation. Although he writes from Spain both as his physical and epistemological locus of enunciation, he is not writing directly in a Peninsular language as is the case with Donato Ndong Bidyogo (Castilian), Najat El Hachmi (Catalan) and Agnès Agboton (Castilian). Gonzalo Fernández Parrilla, the translator of *Diary of a Clandestine Migrant* into Spanish, touts the piece as the first testimonial to be written in Arabic (Morocco's official language) about the experience of Moroccan migrants in Spain (Fernández Parrilla, "Emigración y literatura árabe: tránsitos identitarios" 214).<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup> For more on Francoist developmentalism and its selective, elitist "creation of a Middle Class" (in other words; the perpetuation of inequality) in the years leading up to the Transition to Democracy see Chapters 1 and 2 of Luis Moreno Caballud's *Cultures of Anyone*.

<sup>3</sup> There is perfect polysemy to the word "speculative" here. As Elvira Vilches details in Chapter 2 of *New World Gold*, the major source of gold in Medieval Castile (Christian) was armed conquest and the resulting tribute exacted from the former Muslim rulers from North Africa. This started a European search (predominantly by Genoese, Portuguese, and Castilians) for the famed kingdom of Mansa Musa, "the richest monarch in the world," which was supposedly located in present-day Mali (Vilches 53). "Castile's need for gold resonated with Columbus's project to sail west in search of the fabulous riches of the East and the famous kingdom of the Great Khan, who, like Mansa Musa, lived in the most unthinkable magnificence" (Vilches 54). But the writings Columbus sent home from this venture were speculative fictions in the two senses of the word: meant to inspire further investment from Ferdinand and Isabella through metonymic links that connected the Caribbean landscape with the "East" and with "savagery" — the possibility of gold, despite its physical absence (Vilches 59–64).

<sup>4</sup> According to Fernández Parrilla, Nini's testimonial builds on a much longer tradition emigration literature in Arabic where *rihla* or travel literature has been one of the most important prose genres. Cristián Ricci explains that much like *Diary of a Clandestine Migrant*, the first literary works addressing the modern migration of North African citizens to Europe during the seventies were written in Arabic and points to Abdallah Laroui's 1971 *al-Gurba* (translated in English as *The Exile* or *The Loneliness*) and Mohamed Zafzaf's 1970 *al-Mar'a wa-l-warda* (*The Woman and the Rose*) (Ricci, "A Transmodern Approach to Afro-Iberian Literature" 584). This was followed by a large number Francophone literature on the topic published in both Morocco and France. As Fernández Parrilla indicates, Spain did not become a popular destination until the

However, neither the Arabic version *Yawmiyyāt muhāyir sirri* (literally, “Diary of a Clandestine Migrant”), published by the Moroccan Ministry of Culture in 1999, or its subsequent translation into Spanish published by Ediciones del oriente y del mediterráneo in 2000 are the “original” per se. Rather, these reflections on Nini’s errant lifestyle abroad were first published as weekly installments by the Moroccan newspaper *Al Alam* and compiled after the fact.

Nonetheless, when the Spanish version finally hit bookshelves, Nini averred that he was writing for a Spanish readership all along: “Allí se sabe todo lo que digo. Aquí no. Aquí, de nosotros, sólo se sabe lo que sale por televisión. Los clichés: la patera, los ahogados, la pesca, el hachís. A las personas no las conocen. Y creo que no quieren saberlo. Hay un bloqueo psicológico histórico. Y los medios y los políticos ayudan a que ese bloqueo no se acabe” (“There, they know about everything I say. Here, about us,

---

1990. Since then, *harraga* literature has become a true subgenre on both sides of the Strait of Gibraltar (Fernández Parrilla, “Emigración y literatura árabe: tránsitos identitarios” 212). Spanish-language publications include Mohamed Azirar’s 1988 *Kaddour “el fantástico”* (*Kaddour “The Fantasy,”* published as a feuilleton in the daily francophone Moroccan daily, *L’Opinion*), Abdelkader Uariachi’s 1990 *El despertar de los leones* (*The Awakening of the Lions*, Mohamed Sibari’s 1993 *El caballo* (*The Horse*, first published as feuilleton in *L’Opinion* in 1990), and finally, *El diablo de Yudis* (*The Devil of Yudis*, 1994) which received significant critical attention as the first novel by a Moroccan author to have been written in Spanish and published in Spain (Campoy-Cubillo 129; Fernández Parrilla, “Emigración y literatura árabe: tránsitos identitarios” 213; Ricci, “A Transmodern Approach to Afro-Iberian Literature” 584). We could also point to collaborations between Spanish and Moroccan authors such as Pasqual Moreno Torregrosa and Mohamed El Gheryb’s *Dormir al raso* (*Sleeping Unsheltered*, 1994). However, I am intrigued by the uniqueness of *Diary of a Clandestine Migrant* as an original Arabic publication seemingly aimed at a Moroccan audience that is then translated fairly quickly into Spanish—due, we can assume, to Nini’s dedication to depicting migrant life in Spain rather than the trials and tribulations of the migratory process, or even frustrated migration attempts as seen in these earlier publications.

they only know what they see on television. The clichés: pateras, the drowned, fishing, hashish. They don't know actual people. And I believe that they don't want to know. There's psychological, historical blockage. And the media and the politicians make sure this blockage doesn't end"; Mora). In this 2002 interview with Miguel Mora, Nini not only makes a clear distinction between "here" (Spain) and "there" (Morocco) but also between "us" (Moroccans) and "them" (Spaniards). By inverting the order in which he refers first to a place and then people, Nini confirms his position as a Moroccan who writes about the realities of migration that many Spaniards have either tried to ignore or to which they have been generally oblivious.

It is therefore interesting to consider *Diary of a Clandestine Migrant* as a piece of "born-translated literature" — to employ Rebecca Walkowitz's novel conception. The premise of Walkowitz's eponymous monograph is that "an acknowledgment of translation's central role — as spur, problem and opportunity — has to change what the anglophone novel is" (Walkowitz 23). In the case of migrant narratives directed at a Spanish audience, we can also see translation as a challenge to what "Spanish" literature is. For, as she asserts, "Literature in dominant languages tends to 'forget' that it has benefitted from literary works in other languages," and born-translated works are therefore engaged in "a project of unforgetting" (Walkowitz 23), of reminding readers of the many ways "Spanishness" (and its linguistic valences) was and is constructed vis-à-vis Africa. By writing first in Arabic but with the intent of targeting Spaniards, Nini

indicates that the movement of people between North Africa and the Iberian Peninsula has a great deal to tell us not only about the sending society but perhaps even more so about the host country as well.

In this sense, the messaging behind *Diary of a Clandestine Migrant* is not unlike that of *The Metro* in that it asks a Spanish readership to confront their prejudices regarding African migration and instead turn a critical eye to the challenges migrant's face in Spain. Yet the symbolism of Spain as an El Dorado has different implication. Whereas Lambert Obama Ondo's search for Eden calls into question the erroneous conflation of moral value with that of material goods in Spain's neoliberal economy, El Dorado asks us to interrogate the very discourse that guides our perceptions of wealth. Nini's choice of imagery is likely motivated by the unique set of prejudices that Maghrebi migrants confront in Spain as opposed to their sub-Saharan counterparts. Specifically, as addressed in the Introduction, Moroccans are associated with the figure of the Moor and cast as invaders. This stereotype is unmistakably linked to what Flesler dubs the "Loss of Spain Legend" that seeks explain how Muslim troops under the direction of Tariq ibn Ziyad were able to conquer Visigothic Hispania in 711 and is therefore rife with sexual connotations. According to the legend, Count Julián, governor of Ceuta sent his daughter, Florinda La Cava, to the court of the newly appointed King Roderic back on the mainland. When Roderic rapes Florinda, Julián acts in revenge by "opening the gates of Spain" and facilitating the transport of Tariq's army across the

Strait (59). Building off of the lasciviousness and violence that Western cultures ascribe to the East, this narrative draws a direct parallel between the violation of Florinda's body and the violation of the Iberian Peninsula. It casts Christian Visigoths as the "real owners" of the territory that would become Spain and Muslims (Arabs and Berbers from what would be Morocco) as the usurpers. The figure of the violent and lustful Moor is therefore part and parcel to one of Spain's most important foundational myths—and has very real effects on everything from hiring practices in the Spanish labor market to the application of aid on Spain's maritime frontier. Many Spanish employers consider *subsaharianos* (Black, sub-Saharan Africans) to be particularly hard-working, docile and trust-worthy workers, whereas *magrebies* (North Africans from Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia) are viewed as "unproductive" and "conflictive" (Cornelius 398). Even rescue workers for the Spanish Red Cross work along a racial typology when assisting those who are shipwrecked in the crossing. Sub-Saharans are deemed to be rule-obeying and thus more worthy of immediate attention than the potentially rebellious Moroccans, Algerians or Tunisian who might disobey orders, self-harm or try to run away (Andersson 149). In battling these vicious forms of racism, Nini cleverly takes Spain to task for its own lust for material wealth. His references to a different legend; that of the mythic El Dorado recalls the avarice that drove Spanish colonialism—and in a way resonates with its re-emergence on the global stage in the late twentieth century.

## 2.2 The Author & The Text

Nini is a published poet and, apart from the time he spent working odds jobs in the Levant (although it did serve as material for a report of sorts), he has made his living as a journalist. As he reveals in the final chapter of *Diary of a Clandestine Migrant*, his nascent journalistic career first gave him the opportunity to travel to Spain. In 1992, while studying for his university degree in Arabic Literature and frustrated with the treatment he received working freelance for the *Al Alam* (“The Flag”)—run by the nationalist Istiqlal party—Nini founded his own newspaper, *Awal* (“The Word” in Amazigh).<sup>5</sup> While *Awal* only lasted for three issues, its mere existence earned him an unexpected invitation to the International Amazigh Congress that took place in the Canary Islands in 1997.<sup>6</sup> Unemployed at the time, and thoroughly disenchanted with his prospects at home, Nini took advantage of the misplaced conference invitation to obtain a visa to visit Europe. Those three years as an itinerant laborer, traveling throughout much of the Levant (and beyond) form the basis of Nini’s chronicle and offer a fascinating window into a period in which Spain officially took on its role as “gatekeeper” for the European Union following the formation of the Schengen Zone in 1995. Nini strategically deploys biographical data as a means of confronting forces that

---

<sup>5</sup> *Al Alam* is the same daily that will, ironically of course, end up publishing *Diary of a Clandestine Migrant* in installments while Nini is still abroad.

<sup>6</sup> Nini does not say so explicitly, but it’s quite possible that his newspaper, *Awal*, got confused with a journal started by the Berber community in Paris. A journal that, coincidentally, is one of the foundational publications of the academic movement to recognize Imazigheniy (from the Berber Amazigh, plural Imazighen, adopted as the proper term for the indigenous peoples, or pre-Arab inhabitants, of North Africa).

would otherwise be out of his hands. In this case: the illegalization of trans-Mediterranean migratory flows for the sake of wage suppression and increased surplus value rather than European “security.” In this sense, the *Diary* is reminiscent of an exposé in that Nini aims his testimonial at revealing the hypocrisy — and centuries of racism — shaping these new bureaucratic structures.

Of course, in terms of format, Nini’s *Diary* is anything but a piece of investigative journalism. Narrated in the first person, Nini’s description of his time abroad also recounts the day-to-day lives of those around him. Indeed, it is only through small asides that we start to understand Nini’s motivations for leaving Morocco: an oppressive political regime that is causing serious stagnation — both economic and intellectual. In the meantime, we follow a non-linear story that generally describes the past few days’ events in installment fashion. Nonetheless, his return to Morocco in 2000, Nini’s career skyrocketed. He took a position with the public television network 2M and started writing a column for an up-and-coming daily paper, *Assabah* (“The Morning”). By 2006 he launched his own independent Arabic language newspaper, *Al-Massae* (“The Evening”), with a number of colleagues. Unlike Nini’s earlier attempt with *Awal*, *Al-Massae* attracted significant readership. In 2012, it was described by Al Jazeera as Morocco’s most popular daily paper, and a 2013 Oxford Business Group report on the country found that *Al-Massae* out-printed and out-sold *Assabah* (its nearest competitor) by some forty thousand copies (“Freed Moroccan Journalist Remains Defiant”; *The*

*Report* 241). In a crowded field, the paper gained traction by positioning itself as a “watchdog” (Madhi 75). Nini likewise achieved a certain notoriety for his “acid chronicles” (Fernández Parrilla, “Emigración y literatura árabe: tránsitos identitarios” 214)—that is, his acerbic writing style.<sup>7</sup>

It is debatable to what extent we should take Nini’s more recent career into account when returning to his previous work. Undeniably, *Diary of a Clandestine Migrant* is written in the same biting—and even combative—tone as the reports that later brought Nini celebrity status. Especially given his insistence that the text was written to open Spanish eyes to the destructiveness of the country’s role in European border regimes, it is tempting to treat Nini’s testimonial as an earlier manifestation of his activist tendencies. However, fellow writer Laila Lalami describes him as an “unlikely free-speech martyr” and reminds us that Nini is far from the progressive journalist one would expect to receive a PEN award. As she explains it: “His sarcasm is aimed at corrupt politicians and greedy officials, but also at liberals, feminists, Jews,

---

<sup>7</sup> Having finally found an outlet to publish without government oversight, Nini railed against corruption regardless of the consequences. In 2008, Nini was charged with “defamation” and forced to pay a fine of 6,120,000 dirhams (about \$500,000) for implicating the Dean of the Rabat Bar Association and an unnamed judge for attending a same-sex marriage—still considered illegal in Morocco (Chama 38). After publishing several opinion articles criticizing the Moroccan Intelligence agencies in 2011, Nini was convicted of being “a threat to national security” and sentenced to a year in jail (Lalami). His widely publicized incarceration turned Nini into a symbol of media rights in Morocco. NGOs like Amnesty International deemed him a prisoner of conscience, a petition for his release circled on platforms like Change.org and Spanish journalists suddenly professed their support for his critical approach to Moroccan affairs (Cembrero). To top it off, Nini was even awarded an Oxfam Novib/PEN Award for Freedom of Expression upon his release in 2012.

homosexuals, and other real or imagined dangers to the nation” (Lalami).<sup>8</sup> We hear this same paranoid voice in *Diary of a Clandestine Migrant* as well—or, at least, the origins of it.

Above all, there is evidence of Nini feeling out of place, both at home and abroad. The long hours that he works in the pizzerias of Benidorm—first for Jesús and then Jacob, both Jewish (Nini 94)—followed by interactions with David, a fellow fieldhand in Oliva whom Nini suspects may be of Moroccan-Jewish origin (Nini 145), inspire flashbacks to his childhood when he first learns of the ethnic tensions that have historically divided much of Morocco. His grandmother, for example, warned him that as a Berber, he should not play with Arabs, while his grandfather harbors significant resentment against Jewish merchants for taking advantage of Berber artisans (151-152). Likewise, Nini is not blatantly anti-feminist, but on the first page of his chronicles he recounts a phone call with an ex-girlfriend, Buchra, that sets the tone in terms of the disdain and detachment with which he relates to other women throughout the text:

“Ayer marqué el número de teléfono de Buchra. No reconoció mi voz. Me preguntó por qué no la había vuelto a llamar. La muy cabrona. Le dije que me había ido de Marruecos, que andaba por Europa. Me preguntó cuando volvería. Le dije que me había establecido

---

<sup>8</sup> Lalami addresses Nini’s incarceration and subsequent release (therefore his position in the public sphere) in terms of the ironic: “The turn of events held plenty of irony. Nini, often the recipient of score-settling government leaks, ended up jailed by the same government whose agenda he sometimes served. And the people who rose to his defense—human-rights activists and journalists—were the same people he often attacked in his writings.”

en España. Me dijo mejor. Mucho mejor” (“Yesterday I dialed Buchra’s phone number. She didn’t recognize my voice. She asked me why I hadn’t called her back. What an asshole. I told her that I had left Morocco, that I was in Europe. She asked me when I would come back. I told her I’d established myself in Spain. She said better. Much better.”; Nini 9). The phone call serves the double function of orienting the reader and of introducing us to our narrator. As Nini recounts their conversation we learn not only where he is narrating from in a geographical sense, but his psychological state as well.

This seems an apt moment to delve briefly into textual analysis, because Nini crafts a narrative in which the devil is very much in the details—and this particular vignette subtly but effectively lays out much of the diary’s core organizing logic. As the conversation continues, Nini’s frustration grows, especially when it becomes clear that his bitter remarks are lost on Buchra:

Le dije que no sabía por que había marcado su número y la había llamado. Que tal vez necesitaba escuchar una voz conocida. Dijo que España era maravillosa. Le dije que sí, que maravillosa, y que por eso mismo los árabes no soportaron su belleza y se marcharon todos. ¡Y mira tú por dónde ahora se han arrepentido y regresan! Uno a uno. Ahogados la mayoría de las veces. Se río y me dijo que le enviase una tableta de chocolate. La muy cabrona.

I told her I didn’t know why I had dialed her number. That maybe I needed to hear a familiar voice. She told me Spain was marvelous. I told her that yes, so

marvelous that the Arabs couldn't handle its beauty and they all left. And would you look at that, now they've regretted it and are returning! One by one.

Drowned most of the time. She laughed and asked me to send her a bar of chocolate. What an asshole." (Nini 9)

No matter how hard Nini tries to convey that Europe, and specifically Spain, is not the "país de maravillas" it is made out to be in the North African imaginary, Buchra remains aloof. Her request for an indulgence like chocolate demonstrates her indifference. In commercial terms Spain is a land of plenty: it is just a question of at what cost. It is not until the second chapter that we learn that he and Buchra formed a bond as university activists, protesting during the student revolts in the early 1990s, and that when she left him suddenly to marry another man, their mutual contempt for the elite group of "wannabe" communist poets organizing the strikes quickly turned into the me-against-the-world attitude the characterizes his autobiographical tale (Nini 25).

It is through this reported dialogue that we are introduced to one of the text's most important recurring themes: the Arab and Berber influence on Iberian society. Critics such as Sabrina Brancato have noted: "The author evokes the solitude and devastation of the last Arab kings defeated by Christians and suggest a parallel with the desperation of present-day immigrants burning their papers in order not to be sent back" (Brancato, "Burning Heaven" 71). Likewise, Michelle Shepherd argues that "this conflation constitutes a symbolic inertia that complements the physical immobility

narrated in *Diary of a Clandestine Migrant*. These Maghrebi immigrants, both theoretically and practically, are confined; situated on the social periphery and symbolically affixed to a chronological anachronism, they are limited to the darkest recesses of both physical space and the collective imagination in contemporary Spain" (Shepherd 57). It is worth noting, however, that this "conflation" of contemporary North African migrants with the medieval "Moors" has typically formed a part of Spanish xenophobic discourse. Yet, here, it is Nini, a Moroccan migrant, who evokes what Daniela Flesler would call the "ghostly return" of Moorish invaders; not the other way around (Flesler 56). While scholars like Flesler focus on how the slippage between past and present "permeates current Spanish views of Moroccan immigrants" (Flesler 57), Nini's *Diary* stands as a reminder that it also shapes how these same Moroccan migrants view Spain.

Well aware of these historical entanglements, Nini returns to the topic time and again, confirming Spanish fears that the two countries are not that different after all. In this light, Nini's attempts to underscore the Moroccan's position in Spanish society as the anachronistic "Moor" and inveterate "Other" serve to remind Spaniards of their own backwardness. Indeed, as Fernández Parrilla confirms, this view of Spain as both part of and apart from the West is shared by westerners and Maghrebis alike (Fernández Parrilla, "Translating Modern Arabic Literature into Spanish" 89). Similarly, in analyzing Nini's text alongside the work of Tunisian and Algerian authors, Brancato argues that "the absence of the common trope of cultural difference is a distinctive and

significant element...of texts by Maghrebi authors in Southern Europe" (Brancato, "Burning Heaven" 68). To this end, Fernández Parrilla insists that the value of *Diary of a Clandestine Migrant* resides in this familiarity with, and therefore ability to ironize, the historically embedded nature of Spanish-Moroccan relations and perceptions of one another.<sup>9</sup> Whether "caustic" (Murray), "borderline satire" (Fernández Parrilla, "Emigración y literatura árabe: tránsitos identitarios" 216), "sarcastic" or "bombastic" (Lalami), a penchant for the ironic seems to be Nini's defining trait as a writer. While Nini may be anything but a reliable narrator and is a problematic figure for many of the reasons listed above, in his irreverent exposition we find a timely critique of Spain's desperate attempts to Europeanize—often at the cost of its neighbors to the South.

### **2.3 A Story of Spain**

Given that the use of irony is one of Nini's key narrative devices, it might be tempting to interpret his avowal that "No hay nada de ficción en el libro...es real al 100%" ("There's nothing fictional in the book... everything is 100% real"; Mora), as a sort of meta-ironic gesture. After all, as a literary scholar and a writer himself, Nini

---

<sup>9</sup> "Mas allá del testimonio, único y de gran interés, el valor de la obra radica en el tono irónico, incluso satírico en ocasiones, que Nini mantiene a lo largo del libro, como cuando, con conocimiento de la historia compartida, aborda cuestiones del discurso popular y xenófobo, como la de que estamos siendo de nuevo invadidos por los marroquíes por los musulmanes en general" ("Beyond the testimonial [aspect], which is unique and of great interest, the value of the work resides in its ironic tone—even satiric on occasions—that Nini maintains throughout the book, when for example, with knowledge of the shared history [between Spain and Morocco], he broaches questions of popular discourse and xenophobia, like that 'we are being invaded again by Moroccans, by Muslims in general'; Fernández Parrilla, "Emigración y literatura árabe: tránsitos identitarios" 216).

should be well aware of the illusory nature of “the real.” In his insistence that *Diary of a Clandestine Migrant* be treated as strictly non-fictional, we should therefore recognize a certain desperation to connect with and get the attention of a Spanish readership. Quoting Fernández Parrilla once again, Nini’s narrative must be appreciated as a landmark publication when charting the evolving practices of “autorrepresentación textual” (textual self-representation) in Spanish on the part of former colonial subjects and immigrant communities in Spain.<sup>10</sup> (Fernández Parrilla, “De indígena a catalana: representaciones textuales entre lo colonial y lo poscolonial” 256). Of course, Nini’s text was not written in Spanish initially, but both his urgings and Fernández Parrilla’s interpretation confirm that this chronicle of life in Spain should be read under the auspices of “born-translated” literature. I mean this in the most conspicuous sense, that is, as a work “written for translation, in the hope of being translated” (Walkowitz 4). For as Walkowitz reminds us: “Refusing to match language to geography, many contemporary works will seem to occupy more than one place, to be produced in more than one language, or to address multiple audiences at the same time. They build

---

<sup>10</sup> Establishing a parallelism between migrant author and their written product, Fernández Parrilla reminds us that “Como a las personas, a los textos procedentes de «otras culturas» les cuesta entrar y, una vez dentro, son mejor acogidos si se atienen a los estereotipos. Si no es así—si no corroboran la tiranía política, el peso de la religión, la opresión de la mujer en la sociedad patriarcal, etc.—, suelen quedar relegados, como mucho, al gueto de los especialistas (“Like the people that write them, the texts that come from other cultures have trouble entering [the Spanish literary context] and once inside, they are better received if they abide by presiding stereotypes. If this is not the case—if they do not corroborate the political tyranny, the weight of religion, the oppression of women in patriarchal society, etc.—they tend to be, at best, relegated to the ghetto of specialist”; Fernández Parrilla, “De indígena a catalana: representaciones textuales entre lo colonial y lo poscolonial” 256).

translation into their form" (Walkowitz 6). Nini does this by soliciting translation via subject matter. In a way, he ensures that neither Moroccan nor Spanish audiences will have the proprietary experience of being "native readers," given that his effort to make the migrant experience in Spain legible to Spaniards is written in Arabic.<sup>11</sup>

The ideological controversies surrounding the memory of Al-Andalus on either side of the Strait of Gibraltar have long impacted the study, translation and reception of Arabic literature in Spain (Fernández Parrilla, "Translating Modern Arabic Literature into Spanish" 89). In assessing more recent successes and failures to translate Arabic letters into Spanish, Ovidi Carbonell i Cortés lauds Gonzalo Fernández Parilla and Malika Embarek's translation of *Diary of a Clandestine Migrant*. According to Carbonell i Cortés, the genius of their work lies in its minimalist approach. The text is presented without footnotes or glossaries and they avoid resorting to Arabisms in Spanish when direct translation seems otherwise impossible. In this way, the Spanish version avoids "the exoticist solipsism of the Spanish encounter with their Arab/Berber Other" (Carbonell i Cortés 148). On the contrary, Arabic terms are occasionally left untranslated, marking their foreign on a sociolinguistic level. To illustrate this point, Carbonell i Cortés points to a passage towards the end of the *Diary* in which Nini visits Toledo:

---

<sup>11</sup> I am directly repurposing the language of Walkowitz's assertion that: "Whether or not they manage to circulate globally, today's born-translated works block readers from being "native readers," those who assume that the book they are holding was written for them or that the language they are encountering is, in some proprietary or intrinsic way, theirs" (Walkowitz 6).

Toledo. Viernes, una y media de la tarde. Me senté en una de las terrazas de Suqadawab. Enfrente está el Arco de la Sangre. No sé de dónde proviene ese nombre brutal, aunque sí sé al menos que en los siglos pasados la plaza de Suqadawab, en uno de cuyos cafés estoy sentado, era el lugar donde se dejaba el ganado antes de entrar a la ciudad. El nombre actual, escrito en el rótulo de mármol blanco, es Zocodover.

Toledo. Friday, one thirty in the afternoon. I sat in one of the terraces of the Suqadawab. In front of the Arch of Blood. I do not know where this brutal name comes from, although I do at least know that in past centuries the Suqadawab square, in one of the cafés where I am sitting, is where one left their flocks before entering the city. The current name, inscribed in a marble plaque, is Zocodover.

(Nini 175)

Carbonell i Cortés indicates that the normalization of the Arabic *sūq ad-dawāb* (cattle market) functions as a sort of reversed exoticism when aimed at Spanish readers (Carbonell i Cortés 148–49), forcing them to see today’s crowded, touristy Zocodover as a bizarre mutation of its former practical self.

While the politics of terminology may seem tangential (at best) for understanding the significance of Nini’s work in the Spanish context, the technical prowess of the translation of *Diary of a Clandestine Migrant* mirrors Nini’s own capacity to translate the migrant perspective into terms that are relevant to the average Spaniard.

As a shrewd and informed observer of the Spanish political economy, Nini delves into a process that anthropologists have dubbed “refronterización” or re-bordering (Soto Bermant, Suárez-Navaz), wherein Spain’s external bordering was replicated internally through the segmentation of labor; by discriminating against migrant workers, Spaniards were able to advance in their own careers and catapult themselves onto the global economic stage. Plenty of valuable scholarship on Nini’s *Diary* already exists, much of which builds off of the text to highlight the precarious situation of the migrants that cross the Strait of Gibraltar in *patera*. However, as I will argue in continuation, Nini’s tales of the dark underworld of illegal employment that supports Spain’s booming tourist industry along the Mediterranean coast communicate the extent to which the precarity of these migrant “Others” is part and parcel of Spain’s financial success.

As Nini moves from Benidorm to Paris, then Brussels and back to the Levant, his trajectory gets harder to follow. At times, we find him working in the orange groves in Oliva or as a construction worker in Pego during the off-season. Other chapters are dedicated to the laborious hours spent as “pizzero” or tending a bar in Benidorm during peak tourist seasons. The installments are typically punctuated by nostalgic reflections about his childhood or university years in Morocco and when nostalgia clearly overpowers him, the later chapters (18-121) fracture into brief log-like entries from various points during his three-year journey. These musings are always marked by a

day of the week and the time, but no specific date. They range from locations like Rabat, where Nini must go every month to pick up his scant paychecks from the newspaper for which he freelances, to Heidelberg, where he finds himself as a tourist. This back and forth, which Murray has described as “helter-skelter,” is dizzying for the reader (Shepherd 59), but effectively conveys Nini’s sense of displacement. It all builds up to the conclusion: “Tenía que volver...” (“I had to return...”; Nini 197).

In chapter 13 (of 22), Nini finally addresses the origins of the text we are reading: “Cuando hacía mal tiempo, dejábamos el campo y nos metíamos en el bar más cercano. Allí los hombres empezaban a beber y a jugar a las cartas esperando a que se escampara. Yo cogía una servilleta y escribía lo que se me pasaba por la cabeza. Cesaron las lluvias y me di cuenta de que estaba escribiendo un diario” (When the weather was bad, we’d leave the fields and hole up in the nearest bar. There, the men would drink and play cards until it cleared up. I’d grab a napkin and would write down whatever came to mind. When it finally stopped raining, I realized that I was writing a diary; Nini 117). Nini explains that upon leaving Morocco he swore off the possibility of being a writer “porque está claro que no es una profesión respectable” (“because it’s clearly not a respectable profession”; Nini 117). Thus, it’s fascinating to think of the material conditions that drive him back to writing—and the production of the *Diary* in particular. As an undocumented hourly wage worker, or *jornalero*, he will not be paid for these idle hours. Yet, through writing, he is able to (literally) capitalize on this downtime to

evaluate his circumstances. He even repurposes trash — scraps of paper and used napkins, ascribing new value to the minutiae of everyday life both physically and poetically. His reflections on the writing process are marked by a sense of helplessness, but they also constitute a reclamation of his agency: “Nadie puede elegir lo que le va a ocurrir en el día, pero sí contarlo. Los diarios de este tipo son la forma más divertida de reescribir este crimen abominable que es la vida. De recuperarla de manera selectiva. De convertir las cosas pequeñas en sucesos sobre los que merece la pena meditar” (“No one can choose what’s going to happen to them on any given day, but they can choose how to recount it. Diaries of this kind are the most entertaining way of rewriting that abominable crime that is life, of recuperating it in a selective sort of way, of converting little things into events that are worth reflecting upon; Nini 117).<sup>12</sup> Nini eschews any claim to presenting an objective perspective and instead, he harnesses the power of subjectivity to shed light on a deeply flawed economic system that stretches across the Strait.

Throughout the narrative, and regardless of his geographic location, Nini gives the reader a sense of the social panorama. In the opening chapters, for example, he describes the cast of characters that accompanies him in Oliva, picking oranges. Each person is labeled in terms of either ethnic or national identity: there’s “Áhmed, el

---

<sup>12</sup> David Álvarez cites this same passage, but offers a different English translation (157). I’ve primarily changed the phrase “Nadie...” back into the third person, whereas Álvarez translates it into a statement in the second person.

argelino flaco" ("Ahmed, the skinny Algerian"); Miguel, the child of Spanish emigrants who returns after a lifetime in Argentina (10-11), and "Christian, el italiano" ("Christian, the Italian"). The other Moroccans our narrator comes into contact with seem to live an even more itinerant lifestyle than he does: an early example is Jáled, who simply disappears, convinced he's being pursued by the police, and Abdelwahab, who lives out of his car, a Renault Tráfico. Abdelwahab preys on older, single English women, reselling the trinkets they buy him to fund his drinking habit. The narrator explains that "Para él no existe un país llamado Marruecos. Ni llama a su madre por teléfono. Su padre lo trajo a España antes de la época del visado. Y lo abandonó a su suerte" ("For him, there is no country called Morocco. He doesn't even call his mother. His father brought him to Spain before the visa was instated. And he abandoned him to try his luck"; 29). Abdelwahab's presence seems to remind us that while the constant movement of people and goods between Spain and Morocco has been constitutive of both country's economies (Soto-Bermant), there is no welcoming expat community awaiting Nini on the other side of the Strait. Newly imposed migration controls have made each person's journey a solitary venture, a dance with their own destiny — or a brush with death, Nini's testimony is so powerful because it manages to convey the impact of these structural forces on individual lives. As we will see below, Nini engages in an activity, or even phenomenon, known as *harraga*. He may be exceptional because of his access to news outlets — and ultimately to translation — but I contend that the *Diary*

therefore offers an authentic first-hand account of the way precarious migrant labor became constitutive of the “new Spain.”

## **2.4 The Pervasive Nature of Migrant Precarity**

There are two distinct, yet intertwined, definitions of precarity active in Nini’s writing. The first, as a number of scholars have identified and as I will expand upon below, is the precariousness of migrant im/mobilities as symbolized by the inherently unstable and life-threatening mode of transport that is the *patera* (Shepherd). As Álvarez has pointed out, this is also addressed in direct or indirect references to the North African phenomenon known as “harraga.” However, the second has less to do with the precarity of migrant lives in Judith Butler’s ontological sense, and instead has to do with the fundamental instability of a system that is dependent on their labor—one that, ultimately, is not sustainable. Thus, in what follows, I will demonstrate *Diary of a Clandestine Migrant*’s potential as a “precarious narrative” that, despite Nini’s claims that it is “100% real,” deploys its own political fiction to convey this message.

Nini’s narrative begins and ends with references to the risky—and often downright deadly—boat ride across the 14 kilometers of Mediterranean that divide Spain from Morocco, Europe from Africa. This is typically undertaken in a *patera*, a general name given to a wide range of unseaworthy vessels repurposed for the journey. While scheduled ferries travel back and forth between these two continental points with regularity, the overcrowded and ill equipped pateras are known to capsize during the

trip. As explored in Chapter 1, this illegalized means of making the trip only emerged with the formation of the European Union in 1993 and the Schengen Zone in 1995. The autonomous Spanish cities of Ceuta and Melilla, in what would be Morocco, became the new European conglomerate's only terrestrial border with Africa practically overnight. Fears that Spain would become "la puerta de Africa" (Africa's front door) motivated an intensive fence-building process. The militarization of the Spanish-Moroccan border as described in the Introduction have pushed those without the means to arrange for a visa towards the sea route, turning the narrow Strait into a veritable graveyard.

In the very first lines of *Diary of a Clandestine Migrant*, Nini reflects on the gut-wrenching experience of bearing witness to this gruesome spectacle:

Ayer en la televisión una patera se estrellaba contra la costa rocosa. Los siete cadáveres yacían como barcos varados. Estaba comiendo cuando las imágenes pasaron ante mí. De repente sentí que me atragantaba...Hoy repitieron las imágenes, y también las reprodujeron algunos periódicos. ¡Qué horror! La locutora de televisión opina que el gobierno está dormido, y yo no sé muy bien qué hago aquí.

Yesterday on television a patera crashed against the rocky coast. The seven cadavers lay there like ships run aground. I was eating when the images flashed in front of me. All of a sudden I felt like I was choking...Today the images were shown again, and a few newspapers reproduced them. What a horror! The

newscaster is of the opinion that the government is asleep at the wheel and I don't really know what I'm doing here. (Nini 9)

Shepherd suggests that "Nini's decision to begin his text with the traumatic television images of immigrants who perished in pateras acknowledges the precariousness of immigration as depicted in contemporary Spanish media and cultural production" (Shepherd 55). It is a reminder of the fact that migrant subjects are perpetually associated with these vessels and with a sort of existential precarity in the Spanish public sphere. As Shepherd astutely observes, Nini's recurring use of the interrelated symbolism of pateras, shipwrecks and the Strait itself "links a discourse of immobility and danger to his own personal experience of illegality" (55). Still, I would add that Nini's visceral reaction is also a response to the normalization of these images via their circulation and the facility with which other migrants, not unlike himself, are reduced to disposable or bare life.

In line with David Álvarez, I argue that Nini's obsession with pateras should not only be read in terms of how they are depicted by the Spanish media but also in relation to the North African practice of *harraga*. Unlike Álvarez, I see Nini as deeply embedded in this social movement—rather than writing from outside. As sociologist Amade M'charek clarifies in her recent study, *harraga* (الحارقة) is an Arabic word used in Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco that has frequently been translated as "those who burn," based on the Arabic word for "to burn" or *ahrag* (أحرق). Yet, M'charek warns that this is

too narrow of an understanding. She dates the earliest use of the term to the 1970s, when it was used to describe illegal crossings from Tunisia into Libya; during this period “Southern Tunisian men burned the Tunisian–Libyan border in the hope of finding jobs in prosperous Libya” (M’charek 419). Since the Schengen Convention and the imposition of more elaborate visa systems in many EU countries, harraga has been popularized throughout much of the Maghreb as a way to actively defy these “securitization” measures. By the late 1990s, harraga came to mean the burning of visas, which as M’charek reminds us, “doesn’t mean that papers were set aflame, but rather that people disregarded their papers and stayed in France or another European country for longer than they were officially allowed” (M’charek 419). In relation to Spain as a destination for this illegalized migration flow, Murray cautiously outlines the way in which Nini’s individual trajectory can be interpreted as representative of a larger phenomenon, whereas Álvarez underscores the exceptionality of Nini’s situation. According to Murray: “Much like the narrator of *Diary of a Clandestine Migrant*, undocumented immigrants who do not arrive in pateras are still associated with these crafts as a pivotal symbol of a restricted, precarious mobility” (Shepherd 55). While in contrast, Álvarez insists on the “rarity and idiosyncrasy” of Nini’s subject position: “inasmuch as he did not have to undertake a life-threatening journey or hand over an enormous sum of money to a smuggler in order to get to Spain.” Álvarez furthermore asserts that “his situation is also atypical insofar as he gets to publicize his experience, first in the form of

newspaper reports and later in a book that is published in Morocco and in Spain” (Álvarez 155). Here, is where I therefore diverge from Álvarez, because according to M’charek’s definition, Nini’s plan to attain a tourist visa expressly to find work abroad is an act of harraga. By recording his undertakings in the *Diary*, Nini inscribes himself in this collective effort to burn Europe’s borders.

Rather than his academic formation or access to publishing outlets somehow distinguishing him from the masses, Nini’s participation in harraga seemingly erases his social capital. It is a testament to the transcendence of the EU border regime. Before leaving home, he tries to solidify his connections with the intellectual class with which he used to associate during university: “Dos días antes de mi partida quedé con algunos amigos para hacerme con direcciones que pudieran ser útiles si algo ocurría o necesitaba una pequeña ayuda económica en algún lugar del viejo continente. Pero la mayoría me dejaron plantado” (“Two days before my departure I made plans with some friends to gather contacts that could be useful if something happened or if I needed a little economic help in the Old Continent. But the majority of them stood me up.”; Nini 54). Recalling the sensation of being abandoned by his supposed friends and unable to depend on a reliable network as he faces emigration, Nini remarks bitterly: “Cuando me fui, sólo los ladrones se quedaron a mi lado. En estos tiempos perversos puedes depositar tu confianza en un ladrón, pero no en un intelectual” (“When I left, only the thieves stayed by my side. In these perverse times you can deposit your confidence in a

thief, but not an intellectual.”; 54). United by their juridical standing — or lack thereof — Nini finds companionship in those who share his extralegal status — which he regularly confirms with affirmations like: “En España, al llegar, la mayoría de mis amigos eran ladrones” (“In Spain, upon arriving, the majority of my friends were thieves.”; 52). But while this example is phrased in the past tense, others bring us closer to the present: “Hasta ahora no me he encontrado más que con ladrones. No he conocido ni a un solo escritor o periodista. Tal vez sea mejor así” (“Until now I haven’t connected with anyone other than thieves. I haven’t met single writer or journalist. Maybe it’s better this way”; 53). Of course, as is the case throughout much of the text, it is nearly impossible to tell how much time has passed between his arrival and the “now” of his present-tense claim. Days, months and years all blend together in style that Álvarez has dubbed “narrative vagrancy.”

The absence of any particular chronological logic in *Diary of a Clandestine Migrant* has led critics like Álvarez to claim, “Despite the first word of its title and the text’s focus on the quotidian indignities the narrator must contend with, the *Diary* does not adhere to some of the key (if unstable) temporal conventions of the diary genre” (Álvarez 157). Indeed, the entries are never dated. However, the reader does slowly get the sense of where Nini has been during his travels and who he has met along the way. Thus, it is often a reference to an interaction with one of these interlocutors that helps us associate Nini’s reflections with a particular phase in his journey. For this reason, while

Murray reads the *Diary* through modes of transport as metaphor for precarious movement and Renata Dotson-Renta focuses on the act of transit—or *translado*—itself (Dotson-Renta 437), I would like to examine how this lack of temporal orientation or geographical fixity serves to underscore the ubiquity of the clandestine experience. Regardless of the where and when, Nini's reports reveal similarly tenuous conditions for those who live "in defiance of the bureaucratic rules and their elaborate visa systems" (M'charek 419).

As he briefly turns the spotlight on each of these individual profiles, a sense of the larger power structures at play slowly emerges. During a brief stint north of the Pyrenees, Nini is hosted by one of the aforementioned thieves, Mustafa. Despite his complaints that in Spain everyone treats him strangely when he tries to communicate in French (73-74), Nini never seems comfortable in Paris. All of his opinions about France are framed in opposition to his friend's: "Mustafa cree que Europa es una tierra de botín para los argelinos. Especialmente Francia. Dice que aunque se pasara toda su vida robando no compensaría lo que Francia robó durante los año que estuvo en Argelia" ("Mustafa thinks that Europe is a land of bounty for Algerians. Especially France. He says that even if one spends their whole life stealing it would never make up for what France stole the years it was in Algeria."; 55). This anecdote points to the historical valences of harraga; for as M'charek explains: "Folded into harraga is a story of colonial and postcolonial relations. For a long time after official independence it was easy to

travel from the Maghreb countries to the former colonizer" (M'charek 419). But given that this more fluid movement between former colony and metropole has been stymied by European unification, Nini seems to be inserting a question mark here: is the possible "bounty" of Europe worth the life-threatening journey or the constant exposure to violence needed to access it?

The incredulity with which Nini greets Mustafa's comments is further underscored when he considers the misadventures of other Algerian friends in Spain, almost all of whom have been stopped by the police and a number of whom have even received deportation orders demanding that they repatriate within 10 days. However, Nini adds: "ninguno abandona esta tierra. Es como si se hubiera convertido en su propia tierra. Donde están sus verdaderas raíces. La policía también sabe que ellos no regresarán. Por eso, la primera vez que los detienen registran su nombre y ya no vuelven a molestarlos ("[N]one of them abandon this country. It's as if they've turned into their own country. Where their true roots are. The police also know that they won't go back. That's why the first time they detain them they take down their names and don't bother them again."); 63). Even once in Europe, the mechanisms of surveillance and harassment forces these migrants into an autonomous state, a land of their own. This is made all the more obvious in the particular case of Abdelkáder. As Nini tells it: Abdelkáder cuenta riendo que cuando lo detienen da nombres y nacionalidades distintas. Una vez, iraquí; otra, palestino, etc... Dice que es una Liga Árabe ambulante.

Nada más llegar a España quemó su pasaporte. Así deshizo de su identidad. Y así ha seguido. Un mero ciudadano de todos los países árabes de golpe” (“Abdelkáder says, laughing, that when they detain him he gives different names and nationalities. One time, Iraqi; another, Palestinian, etc...He says that he’s an ambulatory Arab League. As soon as he arrived in Spain, he burned his passport. In that way he undid his identity. And that’s how he’s continued. A mere citizen of all of the Arab countries at once.”; 63-64). As we see with the case of Abdelkáder, he receives no material gains in reneging his original nationality. His compulsory autonomy is really a form of isolation and it hardly grants him access to European assets. Rather than becoming a citizen somewhere, he simply becomes a non-citizen of everywhere.

Nini, too, suffers from this association with illegality. Referring to himself and his fellow Moroccans he returns disgustedly to the stereotypical image of migration presented by the Spanish media: “La televisión ofrece de nosotros la imagen de un país que no es más que una flota incesante de pateras...” (“The television offers of us the image of a country that is nothing more than an incessant fleet of pateras...”; 73). But the damaging effects of this association go beyond stereotypes: midnight raids, internment in a detention center and deportation are all real risks. Thus, Nini admits to living in constant fear. It is only in the presence of Macarena, his Spanish girlfriend (about whom we learn little more than her name), that he says he feels comfortable even looking at a police car: “A veces lo hago en venganza por todos los momentos en los que estaba solo.

Y probablemente alerta" ("Sometimes I do it out of revenge for all the times I was alone. And probably on edge"; 28). It's as if even meeting the gaze of this inanimate object is an act of defiance: one that he is incapable of when the officers stop him on the street or initiate a body cavity search without warning, under the suspicion that he might be hiding hash somewhere obscene. This dynamic eventually becomes far too taxing and as he leaves Spain, Nini attests:

Me he cansado de estar siempre alerta. Quiero salir de casa sin tener esa sensación. Caminar en compañía de alguien sin que el coche de policía se detenga detrás de mí, sin tener que dar explicaciones ni pedir permiso. Me he cansado de esconderme siempre como un imbécil. Y de correr cuando había que salir huyendo. Quiero mirar a mi alrededor y ver a mis semejantes. Que mi aspecto no le produzca extrañeza a nadie. Que no me intimide una mujer y que no me mire un niño con la boca abierta. Quiero irme a dormir por la noche sin comprobar el cerrojo de la puerta y que la cartera sigue debajo de la almohada. I have gotten tired of always being alert. I want leave home without this sensation. To walk in the company of someone without a police car pulling up behind me, without having to give explanations or ask permission. I have gotten tired of always hiding like an idiot. And running when it's time to flee. I want to look around and see people that look like me. And that my appearance doesn't astonish anyone. That I'm not intimidated by a woman and that an open-

mouthed boy doesn't stare at me. I want to go to sleep at night without checking that the door is locked and that my wallet is still under the pillow. (197)

In the above passage Nini responds to the way his juridical invisibility has also made him a highly visible Other in Spain. His rationale reads as a litany of excuses, perhaps directed at a Spanish audience, for why his clandestine mode of existence is no longer viable—or why Spain is not worth the sacrifice of suffering these harrowing experiences on a daily basis. Nini also seems to predicate his definitions of success or failure on male chauvinism, much the same way as Beatriz Celaya has identified in the case of Ndongo-Bidyogo's fictional protagonist, Lambert Obama Ondo (Celaya-Carrillo 143). Nini cites finding a woman's judgement intimidating or being perceived by children in the street as a monster, rather than a protector and provider, as an affront to his personhood (which is very much linked to his manhood). Also, like Obama Ondo, his relationship with a white woman seems to have—at some point—offered a sense of attainment. With the destructiveness of these gendered caveats in mind, it is still worth recognizing that what he ultimately detests is the precarity of the migrant situation in Spain or, to use Butler's definition, "their exposure to violence, their socially induced transience and dispensability" (Butler xvii). I thus contend that the same conditions that render migrant lives precarious in the dangerous journey across the Strait are to be found throughout *Diary of a Clandestine Migrant*, even on *tierra firme*. In burning Europe's borders, Nini finds himself amongst the *precariato* that Butler has described as inhabiting the "limits of

the frame,” wherein their violent subjugation becomes the “presupposed background of everyday life” (Butler xvi).

Butler clarifies that her definition of precarity is not necessarily synonymous with *bare life* or the extra-juridical status of Europe’s perpetual outsiders, because “to be protected from violence by the nation-state is to be exposed to the violence wielded by the nation-state, so to rely on the nation-state for protection from violence is precisely to exchange one potential violence for another” (26). In this particular case, migrants may be suffering from the violence of the national, but it is Spain that should be wary of the supposed protections supra-national conglomerations like the EU have to offer. This is what Nini is getting at with ironic statements like:

En la actualidad, España es el país de Europa menos racista, lo he leído hoy en el periódico. Han publicado un estudio sobre cómo perciben los españoles a los extranjeros y a los gitanos. En algunos de esos pueblos remotos a cuyos campos fuimos a trabajar, la gente apenas sabía nada de los marroquíes. Todo lo que sabían se remontaba a antiguas leyendas sobre los moros que habían ocupado a su tierra. Y a los que habían expulsado de mala manera.

Currently, Spain is the least racist country in Europe. I read it today in the newspaper. They published a study about Spaniards’ perceptions of foreigners and gypsies. In some of the remote villages whose fields we went to work, people barely knew anything about Moroccans. Everything they knew was based

on ancient legends about the Moors who had occupied their lands. And that they had expelled in an ugly way. (Nini 74)

These newspaper claims ring false in the face of everything else Nini has told us, not to mention that the pairing of the first statement and his description of the treatment he receives in the Spanish countryside reads as almost oxymoronic. As someone who is writing these words to be published in a Moroccan newspaper and who has since built his career around supposed truth telling through journalism, the fact that Nini is the one questioning this data feels, once again, almost meta-ironic. Yet, while Nini seems generally oblivious to this larger irony, he deftly illustrates how Spain's multifarious attempts to join the ranks of "post-racial" Europe constitute acts of violence in and of themselves.<sup>13</sup> First of all, in an oft-cited poll taken only a few years later, Spaniards would cite immigration as one of their greatest concerns, thus challenging the earlier charade of acceptance.<sup>14</sup> Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, for a country with an

---

<sup>13</sup> See, for example, Stefanie Boulila *Race in Post-racial Europe: An Intersectional Analysis*.

<sup>14</sup> Raquel Vega-Durán explains that by the end of the 1990s "this diverse and now visible economic migration was so remarkable that by 2000 Spaniards listed it on official surveys as their third most pressing concern, behind terrorism and unemployment" (Vega-Durán 3). Referring to an INE (Instituto Nacional de Estadística) survey, Vega-Durán is referring to a shift in public opinion that can be seen as directly linked to the violent attacks on North African migrant groups in Terrassa, Barcelona in July of 1999, and in El Ejido, Almería, in February of the year 2000. For more on these brutal race riots see Flesler's *The Return of The Moor* (2-3), Wayne Cornelius's "Spain: The Uneasy Transition," (418-419), and the SOS Racismo publication *El Ejido*. The sociologist Lorenzo Cachón Rodríguez breaks migratory flows to Spain down into three phases. Nini's arrival coincides with the second phase that Cachón Rodríguez dates from 1986, following the promulgation of the first *Ley de Extranjería*, to 1999. He says this period is defined by "new immigration"; new in the sense that migrants are arriving in ever-larger numbers from regions of the world that they had not previously—Morocco being the predominant sending country, new in the sense that these groups brought "new" religious diversity and "new" racial diversity to the peninsula (Cachón Rodríguez 178). Of course, with these "new arrivals" nearing the 1 million mark in 2000, the "newness" of immigration during

ongoing colonial presence in North Africa, and one that fought wars in Morocco in both the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, only being able to recognize present-day Moroccans in terms of medieval taxonomies is delusional at best.

Within the larger social portrait Nini paints, the Spaniards he interacts with are not labeled as such. Unlike the other characters no national or ethnic descriptor is applied to them. Could this be read as an indication of chronicle's ideal eventual target public? Quite possibly. A Spanish readership would likely assume that the Merches, Josés, Juans and Albertos are indeed "one of their own," whereas the Jáleds, Ahmeds, Abdelwahabs and Abdelkáders are not. However, much like the rest of the cast of characters, the behavior of the Spaniards we meet betrays their lower socioeconomic status. Merche appears earliest in the *Diary* because she works alongside Nini and the others in the orange groves. She is the only one with a car and Social Security, so the other crew members prevent her from climbing the trees in case an accident inadvertently brings a visit from a labor inspector down on all of their heads. She is just as terrified, however, of the foreman, Paco, thus cementing her complicity with the rest of the group. We learn little else about Merche, except that her toothless father, José,

---

this second phase seems to have brought on the third (2000-Present) in which immigration is deemed a "social problem" by Spaniards (Cachón Rodríguez 180–81). Lastly, Cornelius also explains that amongst the Latin Americans, Asians and Africans that composed this increasingly diverse second phase, Maghrebi migrants (from Morocco Algeria and Tunisia) faced the most discrimination from employers looking to hire unskilled foreign workers (Cornelius 398-399).

joins the crew on occasion. Merche collects his pay at the end of each week so he doesn't drink it all away. Nonetheless, they start their days together in a local bar, drinking whisky-laced coffee and watching the same pornographic video that the bar tender, Manolo, plays on repeat every morning "to attract customers" (Nini 18). A reported conversation between Nini and Merche has received significant critical attention for epitomizing his perspective on Spain:

En las cimas de algunas colinas se ven antiguas fortalezas derruidas.

Señalándolas le digo a Merche: mira ahí vivíamos antiguamente. Merche no comprende por qué teníamos que subir a la cima de la montaña para vivir.

Construíamos esas fortalezas en lo más alto para poder vigilaros, porque vosotros vivíais en los llanos, le dije. Merche no sabía nada de historia

At the top of some of the hills you can see ruined fortresses. Pointing to them out to Merche I tell her: Look, we that's where we lived in the past. Merche doesn't understand why we had to go up to the peaks of the mountains to live. We built these fortresses way up high to be able to keep an eye on you, because you guys lived down in the valleys, I told her. Merche knew nothing about history. (11)

As Álvarez explores in his own analysis of *Diary of a Clandestine Migrant*, this passage demonstrates how Nini is consistently "positioning himself as an outsider with an ancestral link to a land in which he is not currently welcome, but about aspects of whose history he is more knowledgeable than many of its contemporary inhabitants" (Álvarez

160–61). The way Álvarez sees it, by illustrating the relative ignorance of the average Spaniard and “by bringing into focus some of the seedier aspects of contemporary Spain, the narrator also questions the presumption of cultural superiority that has dominated Spanish perspectives on Moroccans and Arabs ever since the Reconquista” (Álvarez 160). In the above quote, Nini re-appropriates the epithet “moro” that Paco hurls at Nini and his friend Áhmed as a sort of perverse complement about their work ethic (Nini 17-18). For once, Nini is the one signaling a continuity between past and present, between himself and the successive waves Arabs and Berbers that populated the Peninsula since Tariq ibn Ziyad arrived in 711. Thus, in response to Álvarez’s incisive commentary, I would counter that Nini manages to interrogate the Spanish presumption of cultural superiority precisely by foregrounding Spain’s inherent Africanity. The corrupt business practices, the dark underworld that Merche and other characters seem to inhabit; these “seedier aspects” are in fact the economic backbone of Spain’s glittering Mediterranean coastline where a “Moorish” past only adds a tantalizing exotic element for hordes of British tourists.

These questions of superiority and inferiority arise again when Nini moves farther North to Pego, where he works in construction. Looking for housing, he finds an advertisement in the local paper for a room in a shared apartment. His housemates are a retiree that Nini refers to as “La señora Carmen” and a middle-aged Andalusian man named Juan. Juan turns out to be an alcoholic whose own children have taken to court

for his abusive tendencies—as well as a Franco sympathizer (129). Having unwittingly agreed to share space with an ultra-nationalist, Nini succinctly sums up the situation in his curt way: “Juan lleva cincuenta años sin quedarse mucho tiempo en un trabajo. Cree que los trabajos estables y cómodos los hacen los inmigrantes y los extranjeros” (“Juan has spent fifty years without spending much time in any one job. He thinks the stable, comfortable jobs are all taken by immigrants and foreigners”; 124). And later: “Hay un tipo de hombres que echar al mundo la culpa de todo. Creo que Juan es uno de esos.” (“There is a type of guy that blames the whole world for everything. I think Juan is one them.”; 128). Unlike Merche, Juan is stand-in for those who espouse xenophobic attitudes in an attempt to cover up their own personal failings and Nini’s more polished demeanor seems to confound him:

Quería saber por qué había venido a esta ciudad, de qué vivía y cómo me permitía tres platos distintos en una sola comida. Por qué no me parecía a los otros moros que salían regularmente en televisión bajándose de las pateras y subiendo, en el mejor de los casos, a los coches de policía y, en el peor, entregados a las olas que acunan sus cadáveres rumbo al Paraíso. La señora Carmen le dice que soy una persona con estudios y que, precisamente por eso, le caigo bien. Pero Juan quiere saber más.

He wants to know why I have come to this city, what I live off of and how I can afford eating three different dishes in one single meal. Why I didn’t look like the

other Moors that appear regularly on television stepping out of pateras and climbing, in the best of cases, into police cars and, in the worst, delivered to the waves that cradle their cadavers on the way to Paradise. Señora Carmen tells him that I'm an educated person, and precisely for that reason, she likes me. But Juan wants to know more. (127)

This is prime example of how Nini's first-person perspective somehow morphs into the third-person narration of the thoughts and observations of those around him. By eliding direct or reported speech attributes, it's as if Juan is speaking through him as Nini replays his housemate's inquiries over and over in his head. Mediated by the shadow of detention or death represented by the pateras, Juan's xenophobically driven interrogation reads as particularly absurd. Nini may not have come by patera and his educational level might far surpass that of Juan, but they move constantly between the same type of odd jobs to make ends meet. It speaks to the extent to which the border acts as a regulator of human capital leaving Juan nothing to fear.

Yet, through the figure of Juan, Nini also demonstrates that racism is not just "an autonomous force, an additional factor shaping late capitalist forces toward class segmentation" (Suárez-Navaz 6). Instead, as Liliana Suárez-Návaz has suggested, it emerges from constant relational processes of negotiation between individual in the social sphere (Suárez-Navaz 7). Juan, like the many other Spaniards Nini profiles briefly, is complicit in manipulating the limits of representation. Of course, Juan's befuddled

belief that immigrants occupy the comfortable jobs in some ways is the least egregious. There's Alberto, the contractor in Pego, who, after a great deal of back and forth with his personal lawyer, forces Nini and the other undocumented workers to come to the construction site during siesta hours when he's certain no agents from the Ministerio de Trabajo will make a surprise visit (Nini 136). It's also the many individual police officers perpetuating the climate of fear cited earlier. When, at the very end of the *Diary*, Nini claims that precisely because young Spaniards do not want to be employed in agriculture or other physical labor, "Si te piden los papeles, basta con abrir la palma de la mano delante de la policía, para que sepan que te ganas el sustento en el campo y te dejen seguir tu camino. En esta península los dedos agrietados les sirven a los inmigrantes árabes les sirven de carné de identidad mejor que esos otros azules casi imposibles de conseguir" ("If they ask for your papers, it's enough to open the palm of your hand in front of the police so that they know you earn your living in the fields and let you keep going.<sup>15</sup> On this peninsula rough fingers serve as an identification card for Arab immigrants, better than those other blue ones that are almost impossible to obtain"; Nini 207). With respect to these same lines, Murray insists that "the reader is painfully aware that this sort of physical currency carries no weight with the authorities and the undocumented have one option, to flee, when faced with such an interrogation"

---

<sup>15</sup> In the Spanish version Nini uses the word "sustento," or sustenance, which I think is very apropos here in terms of referring to basic survival or subsistence, but it does not translate well.

(Shepherd 61). In other words, this is yet another instance of Nini's use of irony. But that is not so clear to me given that his suggestion for how to best avoid detention coincides with Abdelkáder's strategy as well. I do, however, agree with Murray that "this comment resonates with the notion of embodied labor" (61), in that, whether this type of interaction is real or fabricated it conveys the extent to which migrant illegality is the necessary foil that confirms Spain's legality within the EU system—in the company of those very member states that once took advantage of undocumented Spanish labor within their now non-existent borders.

## **2.5 Conclusion: *El Dorado or Fortress Europe... or Something Else?***

There is mutual agreement among scholars that Nini's narrative, like other "migrant narratives," pokes holes in the prevailing myth of an Edenic and economically sound Europe—one in which migrants (the bulk of them ex-subjects from Europe's former colonies) will *finally* be able to access the stores of colonial wealth merely by stepping foot on European soil (Álvarez 160–64; Brancato, "Burning Heaven" 72–73; Shepherd 61–62). Typically, this dream of a "land of plenty" is belied by underscoring its inaccessibility through the counter-vision of a Fortress Europe; the brutal set of border regimes established precisely to curtail migrant mobility while preserving and protecting White privilege (in both an economic as well as territorial sense). However, as I have addressed here, *Diary of a Clandestine Migrant* takes a slightly different approach. Nini certainly reveals the extent to which this privilege is perennially inaccessible to the

racialized North African “Other,” but he also seems to suggest that Spain’s reliance on migrant labor to “move up in the world” (and again, I am playing with possible double entendre here and thinking of a movement upwards in terms of both social mobility in addition to geopolitical North-South location) is a sign of its fragility, its vulnerability on the “fringes of Europe,” rather than its European prowess.

Nini ultimately expresses his frustration with the lack of compassion he encounters on the part of many Spaniards for, as he explains it:

Los españoles no saben gran cosa de los inmigrantes. Al menos las nuevas generaciones. Las generaciones anteriores vivieron la emigración durante la Guerra civil y durante el régimen del general Francisco. Y por eso conocen el infierno que es emigrar. Se fueron a México, Argentina, Francia y no sé qué otros lugares. Y ahora no se avergüenzan de sí mismos cuando, al ver una persona de rasgos árabes dicen: “Uuuuh, yah han vuelto esos moros!”

Spaniards do not know much about immigrants. At least the younger generations. The earlier generation lived through the years of emigration during the Civil War and under the Franco regime. That’s why they know how hellish it is to emigrate. They went to Mexico, Argentina, France and Germany and I don’t know where else. And now they are not even embarrassed of themselves when,

upon seeing a person with Arab features, they say: “Ugh, those Moors are back already!” (Nini 83)<sup>16</sup>

Given that he is talking about “Spaniards” as whole in the third person, it would seem that Nini’s target audience for this particular rant is in fact the *Diary’s* initial readership back in Morocco. He is railing against what Raquel Vega-Durán has called Spain’s “historical amnesia about its own past as a land of emigrants—emigrants who themselves knew what it was like to be an immigrant in another country” (Vega-Durán xiv). However, in doing so he reveals the desire to somehow break down this barrier, to force these oblivious “new generations” to reckon with what the encounter between citizen and non-citizen feels like from the migrant, or outsider, perspective. It is also a warning in some ways. Because, despite the paranoia of people like Juan, migrant labor has been consistently channeled into labor market niches abandoned by native workers (Cornelius 400). Spain went from the country with Europe’s highest official unemployment rate (around 23%) in the early 1990s, to one of the fastest growing economies by 1996 with unemployment down to about 13% at the turn of the millennium (Cornelius 400, 422). All of this while the country saw its largest influx of

---

<sup>16</sup> I have translated “generaciones nuevas” as “younger generations” rather than “new generations” for the coherence of the entire quote. However, I cite the turn-of-phrase, “new generations,” in my analysis because it gets at the idea of the freshness—and subsequent obliviousness—of those who have only known democracy rather than those who grew up during Franco dictatorship in Spain (1939-1975) or the Moroccan monarchy of Hassan II (1961-1999) followed by that of his son, Mohammed VI (1999-Present).

Moroccan migrants yet.<sup>17</sup> The promulgation of the 1985 LOE and Spain's subsequent accession to the EEC in 1986 ended "fifty years of international ostracism" which in turn "produced a strong rhetoric about a 'European ethos' based on common citizenship" (Suárez-Navaz 3). Within this new schema the illegalized African worker—and the "Moor" in particular—was necessarily positioned as antagonistic to the Spanish population, devoid of the new rights and liberties these Spaniards could claim as EU members. However, as Nini seems to insinuate, the differentiation between the native and foreign populations in Spain is largely driven by the promise of European privilege and not necessarily by concrete material differences.

In the last pages of the *Diary*, Nini reconsiders Mustafa's conception of a "país botín" (country of bounty or booty). Thinking back to the history class in which he first learned about Tariq ibn Ziyad's conquest of the Iberian Peninsula Nini muses: "Ahora también entiendo por qué, en cuanto se distinguen las luces de Andalucía, los inmigrantes queman sus papeles y los arrojan al mar. Lo hacen para que nadie vuelva con vida a la otra orilla. La muerte o el botín. Quemar los pasaportes es bastante similar a quemar el barco de vuelta" ("Now I also understand why, once they make out the lights of Andalucía [on the horizon], immigrants burn their papers and throw them to the sea. They do it so no one comes back alive. Death or bounty. Burning one's passport is much

---

<sup>17</sup> In 2001, the INE reported that 247, 872 Moroccans were living ("empadronado") in Spain, representing 15.8% percent of the total number of registered foreign residents – and the single largest group by country of origin. These numbers, of course, only represent those who registered themselves in their municipality which many undocumented migrants are afraid to do.

like burning the boat to return on" ; Nini 207). He likens the act of harraga to the famous military leader's decision to force his troops to burn all the boats they arrived in. But in doing so, he also underscores the futility of this "get rich or die trying" attitude because "lo realmente ridículo de toda esta historia es que aquí no hay botín alguno" ("the most ridiculous thing about this whole story is that here there's no bounty at all."); Nini 207). Undergirding Spanish fears of a re-invasion is that Spain in possession of *something* worth plundering, but Nini makes it clear that this is self-deception. As Nini concludes: "Tampoco existen tesoros escondidos en ningún lugar de la Península. Al menos eso es lo que he podido ver en mis vagabundeos. Sin embargo, hay huertas de naranjos y tomates, y plantaciones de cerezos, almendros y olivos donde es imposible trabajar sin envejecer años de golpe" ("There also isn't any treasure hidden anywhere on the Peninsula. At least that's what I've been able to see in my wanderings. Nonetheless, there are orchards of oranges and tomatoes, and plantations of cherry, almond and olive trees where it's impossible to work without aging years of your life all at once."); Nini 207). For the many Spaniards reckoning with effects of crisis, *Diary of a Clandestine Migrant* would be best be read as an account of the economic and labor conditions during the supposed bonanza years rather than "migrant narrative" alone. Spain's economy did expand exponentially during the 1990s and early 2000s, however Nini's testimonial begs the question: how much of that financial success relied on not-so-glamorous practices of workplace discrimination and labor market segmentation?

### 3. Najat El Hachmi: At Home in the World

#### 3.1 Introduction

After more than a decade, there is still little consensus among critics about how to interpret Najat El Hachmi's 2008 *L'últim patriarca* (*The Last Patriarch*). Following in the wake of her autobiographical *Jo també soc catalana* (*I am also Catalan*, 2004), this debut novel in many ways launched her literary career. To begin with, it was awarded the Ramon Llull prize, the highest honor for Catalan letters. Distributed by Editorial Planeta, a (formerly) Barcelona-based publishing house with branches throughout Latin America, this award guarantees immediate translation into Spanish and significant international dissemination of the prize-winning text. Thus, while *I am also Catalan* remains untranslated, the rest of El Hachmi's oeuvre has seen wide diffusion in Catalan, Spanish, English, French, and more.

More recently, she has published three other novels: *La cassadora dos corpos* (*The Body Hunter*, 2011) – also with Editorial Planeta, in addition to *La filla estrangera* (*The Foreign Daughter*, 2015) and *Mare de llet i mel* (*Mother of Milk and Honey*, 2018) with Edicions 62. She has since described the latter two as completing a sort of “migration triptic” with *The Last Patriarch*, one that foregrounds women's voices. This is clearly a concern that motivates much of her writing. Just last year, she came out with her first non-fiction piece since *I am also Catalan*; a book-length essay entitled, *Sempre han parlat*

*per nosaltres* (*They Have Always Spoken for Us*, 2019). This feminist manifesto addresses the doubly enforced silence of “third culture kids” like herself: that is, the daughters of Muslim Moroccans in Spain who not only risk rejection from their communities if they speak out against the patriarchal norms with which they were raised, but also have to counter a Western desire to accept—or even protect—those customs in the name of multicultural pluralism.

In short, whether through her fictional works or public-facing non-fiction, El Hachmi has been a consistent champion of the particular challenges facing women of Maghrebi origin in Spain, and Catalonia in particular. Born in Nador, Morocco in 1979, El Hachmi immigrated to the Catalan city of Vic with her family when she was eight years old. She attended the University of Barcelona where she earned her degree in Arabic Literature. Despite this biographical data and El Hachmi’s staunch claims to a Catalan identity, Planeta emphasized El Hachmi’s Moroccan roots and her penchant for storytelling as deriving almost exclusively from an Amazigh (Berber) oral tradition. This created a polemic about orality in her work that not only conditioned the reception of *The Last Patriarch* (Ricci, “*L’últim patriarca* de Najat El Hachmi y el forjamiento de una identidad amazigh-catalana” 73), but her subsequent novels as well. As a seeming testament to Michel Foucault’s “author-function” which speaks to how literary criticism essentially invents the figure of a particular author, El Hachmi’s name evokes a whole

body of discourse surrounding the growing Amazigh community in Catalonia and larger debates about assimilation versus integration.

However, it must be noted that El Hachmi is not the only Catalan author who, having migrated to Spain herself, focuses on the particular situation of foreign-born women. In fact, she is not even the only Riffian — let alone Moroccan — woman writer of her generation. For this very reason, Cristián Ricci reads her work in unison with that of Laila Karrouch, who also moved from Nador to Vic with her family around the same time as El Hachmi, as exemplary of new type of “borderland literature” emerging from Spain (Ricci, “African Voices in Contemporary Spain”). Building off of Walter Mignolo’s idea of “border gnosis,” Ricci explores how both authors home in on a particular Amazigh-Catalan identity to reveal the fictive nature of national boundaries — thereby disrupting the binary opposition of Morocco to Spain, Africa to Europe.

As addressed in the previous chapter, Spanish-Moroccan relations (largely speaking) cannot be reduced to monolithic nationalities. While Rachid Nini makes frequent references to the fact that he hails from the former French protectorate, the largely Tamazight-speaking Rif region where El Hachmi’s hometown is located was occupied by Spain from the 1912 Treaty of Fez until independence in 1956. As Adolfo Campoy-Cubillo indicates, the resulting community of Riffian expatriates in Catalonia is just one example of how the Spanish state is “compelled to reconsider its national and peripheral identities in view of the demographic changes brought about by immigration

while positioning itself in the European project of the creation of a transnational community" (Campoy-Cubillo 9). Given this multi-layered colonial history, the nature of contemporary post-colonial migratory flows between the two countries, and their geographic proximity, the nature of the border between Spain and Morocco draws frequent comparison to the division of the United States and Mexico. In the case of the production of women writers like El Hachmi who grapple with this fraught border space in their work, many scholars see parallels with Gloria Anzaldúa's Chicana feminism (Joan Rodríguez; Murray, "Migration and Genealogies of Rupture in the Work of Najat El Hachmi"; Ricci, "A Transmodern Approach to Afro-Iberian Literature"; Ricci, "The Reshaping of Postcolonial Iberia: Moroccan and Amazigh Literatures in the Peninsula"). Ricci, for example, reads *The Last Patriarch* through Anzaldúa's notion of nepantilism, "an Aztec word meaning torn between ways" (Anzaldúa 100), which he sees as capturing the narrator/protagonist's "condition of *mestiza*, crossbreed, of foreigner both in her north African/Amazigh culture as well as in Europe" (Ricci, "The Reshaping of Postcolonial Iberia: Moroccan and Amazigh Literatures in the Peninsula" 33). For Anzaldúa, nepantilism—or *nepantilismo* in Spanish—best captures the *mestiza* subject's ambivalent relationship to language. And while I think this has important implications for how we might interpret El Hachmi's relationship to both Catalan and Tamazight vis-à-vis later works, a focus on language in *The Last Patriarch* draws our

attention away from more fruitful comparisons with Anzaldúa's particular brand of border thinking.

Crucially, Anzaldúa envisions the US-Mexico border as "*una herida abierta* where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds" (Anzaldúa 25). Time and again, she draws attention to physical experience of the borderlands enunciating subject who is trapped in "*los intersticios*, the spaces between the different worlds she inhabits" (Anzaldúa 42). For Anzaldúa, this constant state of being "neither, nor" necessitated the development of *la facultad*: both an immediate "sensing" and the ability to see underlying structures deep below the surface of everyday phenomena. In explaining what is constitutive of *la facultad* Anzaldúa highlights that "those who do not feel physically and psychological safe in the world are more apt to develop this sense. Those who are pounced on the most have it the strongest – the females, the homosexuals of all races, the darkskinned, the outcast, the persecuted, the marginalized, the foreign" (Anzaldúa 60). In short, the physicality of what Anzaldúa dubs "intimate terrorism" cannot be denied and should inform our understanding of the Spanish-Moroccan borderlands that El Hachmi depicts in *The Last Patriarch*.

With her unique perspective on the relationship between the small nationalities that make up Spanish and Moroccan territories, it is no wonder that El Hachmi's work has provoked serious interest on the part of literary critics. In the twelve years since its publication, scholars have analyzed everything from the *The Last Patriarch's* use of the

Catalan dictionary as narrative device (Crameri; Yebra López) to El Hachmi's intertextual relationship to her Catalan feminist predecessors, Caterina Albert and Mercé Rodoreda (Campoy-Cubillo; Everly, "Immigrant Identity and Intertextuality in '*L'últim patriarca*' by Najat El Hachmi"; Ingenschay; Ricci, "*L'últim patriarca*"). The major themes explored have included questions of hybridity, how gender and sexuality relate to the construction of national identity, and the rejection of the home as a domestic sphere in relation to Homi Bhabha "unhomeliness" (Ingenschay; Folkart, "Scoring the National Hym(e)n"; Folkart, *Liminal Fiction at the Edge of the Millennium*; Everly, "Rethinking the Home and Rejecting the Past: A Feminist Reading of Najat El Hachmi's *L'últim patriarca*"). However, so far, none of these studies has attended to the dynamics of space in the novel.

To amend that oversight, I propose a spatial reading of the text that accounts for the limitations and possibilities afforded to its female characters in relation to their environment. I draw from El Hachmi's own definition of her writing as a bodily function. In an essay published shortly after the novel (2010), El Hachmi addresses the challenges facing twenty-first century writers with the wry comment: "Escribir en el siglo XXI sigue siendo lo mismo que escribir en el siglo XX o en otros siglos. La escritura no ha dejado de ser otra secreción corporal más difícil de controlar. Es algo que sale del organismo fruto de lo que se ha ido acumulando durante un largo tiempo después de haberse digerido" ("Writing in the twenty-first century continues to the same as writing

in the twentieth or in other centuries. Writing has never stopped being another corporal secretion, it is only harder to control. It is something that leaves the body as a result of what has been accumulating for a long time after being digested"; El Hachmi, "Escribir en el siglo XXI" 259). It is not out of line with El Hachmi's (at times) self-deprecating and dry sense of humor to compare her writing with excrement. Yet, the message is clear: the written word is the product of a natural, embodied process, not some detached mental phenomenon. Or, as El Hachmi, puts it: "ficcionalizar todo lo que nos rodea, literaturizar incluso los acontecimientos mas triviales de nuestro deambular por estos mundos, no es más que una necesidad universal" ("to fictionalize everything that surrounds us, to literaturize even the most trivial events that occur during our wandering through these worlds, is nothing more than a universal necessity"; 259). Arguably one of those banal details that nonetheless receives literary treatment in El Hachmi's first work of fiction is the relationship of the individual to the physical spaces they inhabit and vice versa.

El Hachmi's commentary on writing is reminiscent of one of Claudia Tate's claims about the work of the authors she interviewed for her seminal collection, *Black Women Writers at Work*. Tate assures her readership that, "extraliterary concerns—social and political issues as well as intimate aspects of their [the authors'] personal lives—do indeed, have direct bearing on the creative process" (Tate xv). Tate claims that, in empathizing with the human condition, the groundbreaking Black (American) women writers interviewed for her collection were capable of an "imaginative embodiment of

the female perspective" from the vantage point of racial difference (xx). Turning this notion of "imaginative embodiment" back on the *The Last Patriarch*, I hope to elucidate what El Hachmi's fiction can tell us about the intersectional experience of racialized North African women as they seek to make a home for themselves in Spain. Sara Ahmed tells us that "as the outsider inside, the alien takes on a spatial function, establishing relations of proximity and distance within the home(land)" (Ahmed, *Strange Encounters* 3). Unlike authors like Nini and Ndong-Bidyogo who ignore the situation of women migrants, El Hachmi draws our attention to how gender discrimination creates even more complex dynamics of difference for those who dwell in this space of inclusive exclusion. Keeping in mind the tremendous influence Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera* had on the subsequent evolution of Chicana Studies in the United States, I think we must consider the potential of this novel to open up new intellectual spaces for border women in Iberian literary culture.

### **3.2 Overview**

*The Last Patriarch* begins with an epigraph stating that "this is the story of Mimoun, son of Driouch, son of Allal, son of Mohammed, son of Mohand, son of Bouziane, whom we shall simply call Mimoun. It is his story and the story of the last of the great patriarchs who make up the long line of Driouch's forbears. Every single one lived, acted and intervened in the lives of those around them as resolutely as the

imposing figures in the Bible” (El Hachmi, *The Last Patriarch* vii).<sup>1</sup> For some critics, this paratext is the only indicator of the text’s overall orality (Abrams qtd. in Campoy-Cubillo 139; Campoy-Cubillo 140). For others, it is just the tip of the iceberg (Folkart, “Scoring the National Hym(e)n” 364; Ricci, “L’últim patriarca” 83). Part I is told in the third person, couched in a strange mix of supposition and “facts” —of the variety one extracts from family lore. Moments where our narrator must fill in informational gaps with educated guesses make it clear that these anecdotes do not come directly from Mimoun, thus illustrating the sense of alienation this daughter must feel from her father. Nevertheless, the storyline faithfully follows the protagonist, from his birth in a Berber village in Rif, through his initial travels to Spain to earn money for his wedding, to his family’s arrival in Barcelona.

Many of the episodes in the first section revolve around the assurance that “Mimoun would have been a normal man if it weren’t for the fact his childhood had been plagued by so many strange incidents.” This exculpatory tone only underscores Mimoun’s discomfort in his home environment and, as Dieter Ingenschay suggests, signals that the patriarch is the victim of his own misogynistic upbringing (Ingenschay

---

<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise noted all the quotations from the *The Last Patriarch* that follow are taken from Peter Bush’s translation from Catalan into English, which was supported by a grant from the Institut Ramon Llull and published by Serpent’s Tail in 2010. Of all the works covered in this dissertation, *The Last Patriarch* is the only one to be translated into English. Michael Ugarte published an English translation of *Las tinieblas de tu memoria negra*, Donato Ndong-Bidyogo’s first novel, but there is no English-language version of *El Metro*. Rachid Nini and Agnès Agboton have not been translated into English at all. In terms of El Hachmi’s works, only *Jo també soc catalana* is available only in the original Catalan. This is a clear testament to her international diffusion as discussed in relation to her contract with Editorial Planeta.

67). In line with Ingenschay, I would argue that none of these “strange incidents” are particularly strange at all. Rather, Mimoun is portrayed as being caught up in a web of intra-familial violence that is consistently normalized by those around him. At only six months old, Mimoun is beaten by his own father (El Hachmi, *The Last Patriarch* 7–10), and at age twelve he is raped by his uncle. The chapter dedicated to Mimoun’s “scare” insists that “many non-official versions abound in the family” as to what might have happened to Mimoun on the night of his cousin’s wedding (24), many of them innocent enough. However, it ends with the narrator’s observation: “If you bear in mind that grandmother’s brother had come up from the river just after Mimoun, it isn’t beyond the realm of possibility that, tired of assailing donkeys and hens, he’d taken advantage of the euphoria of the moment to find a more human cavity in which to slot his erect member” (24). On the one hand, Mimoun clearly suffers from the toxic masculinity that is allowed to pervade Driouch’s household. On the other, he internalizes much of this violent behavior and perpetuates it in manifold ways. This begins with suffocating his baby brother (described as “rival number one”; 15) to death and beating his younger sister to the point of unconsciousness — all for being “too pretty” (42), but soon extends to his wife, our narrator’s mother, identified by Mimoun as a “woman he could tame” (41).

His family does not have either the money for a wedding or a dowry, so Mimoun spends the next sixth months living with his older sister in the nearest city and working

tirelessly in construction to save up for the engagement ceremony. The drive for financial independence sends him even farther afield: he obtains a passport and goes to live with his uncle in Spain.<sup>2</sup> This first foray in Vic ends with Mimoun's expulsion. He has an affair with his boss's wife, which ends abruptly when Mimoun forces her to have anal sex. Rebuked by his lover, an enraged Mimoun enacts his revenge on the couple by burning down their house and is sent home in handcuffs. His return should be a happy one, as it entails his long-awaited marriage and the birth of his first child. But Mimoun finds himself even more discontented than ever in Rif and soon leaves again for Spain, abandoning his new wife and family. The second part of the novel details the family's pursuit of Mimoun and subsequent adjustment to life in Catalonia. Notably, it is at this stage that the narration shifts, recounting this phase in the first person feminine, through the eyes of Mimoun's (still unnamed) daughter. Starting with chapter 4, in which our narrator/protagonist starts reading the Catalan dictionary in an effort to extricate herself from her parents' marital woes, each chapter concludes with the definition of a new vocabulary word.<sup>3</sup> These alphabetized entries are a testament to her attempts to teach herself the language and reflect her gradual acclimation to the local culture.

---

<sup>2</sup> Suspicions that this is the same uncle who sexually abuses him as a child are confirmed for the reader when Mimoun arrives at Barcelona's Estació del Nord feeling lost: "He was just starting to despair when he saw his uncle coming, in the distance, better dressed than he'd ever seen him, his skin lighter in colour, and he gave him a big hug. Welcome to Spain, Mimoun, said the gruff voice that had so often repeated that routine to him of keep still, Mimoun, I won't hurt you, keep still" (El Hachmi, *The Last Patriarch* 67).

<sup>3</sup> I refer to our unnamed narrator/protagonist only as "the narrator" until she transitions into first person narration.

Some critics argue that through her domination of the Catalan language, our narrator/protagonist manages to surpass her father in the integration process — thus subverting the hierarchy imposed by their patriarchal family structure (Folkart, “Scoring the National Hym(e)n” 364; Everly, “Immigrant Identity and Intertextuality in ‘*L’últim patriarca*’ by Najat El Hachmi” 145). This certainly creates tensions between our new protagonist and her father. However, El Hachmi demonstrates that, given the insidious forms of patriarchy that pervade both Spanish/Catalan and Moroccan/Berber society, true liberation has to involve much more than the shedding of one national or cultural skin for another. Both sections of the novel do offer shades of a typical immigrant success story, as Mimoun goes from a simple bricklayer to running a construction company of his own. With these gradual achievements, he moves from one shabby apartment to the next, but farther and farther away from the “stinking river and the tanneries” where he started (El Hachmi 24). As Manel (his peninsularized self), Mimoun is able to partake in the building craze that has overtaken Spain and by the time his family joins him he has already left the slums and is installed in a more comfortable immigrant sector of Vic. They end up in a two-story home in a new development, their own “House on Mango Street” (210). Unfortunately (and much like in Sandra Cisneros’ novel), any sense of progress is eroded by the violence that pervades the narrative as a whole. Within this frame, even the mild comforts afforded the family via a model of “First World” attainment offer little respite.

Meanwhile, his daughter's turbulent coming of age process acts as a foil to Mimoun's definition of success. In seeking an escape from her volatile homelife, she first turns to books, then school, and finally to partnership. Her abrupt decision to marry the young Moroccan man she has been dating (without her family's knowledge) after only three months with him echoes Mimoun's veritable blackmail of his parents to be allowed to get engaged at 16 years old. Unsurprisingly, the narrator/protagonist finds that her marriage replicates many of the same stifling gender dynamics she was running from in the first place. None of these institutions offer respite from patriarchal norms; she is instead forced to meet them head on. Having split from her husband and moved into her own apartment in Barcelona, she is free to host her uncle (rival number two) as he passes through on his way to give a series of lectures in Paris. Their intellectual connection leads to a physical one and the two engage in anal sex. Our narrator/protagonist cites pleasure, pain, and above all, a feeling of triumph. Knowing that her father often stops by to check on her, she leaves the shutters up and the lights on (310). The final lines of the novel describe how, just as she orgasms for the second time, the doorbell rings. She describes how her father's face appears in the video entry system: "Father, who'd never again play the patriarch, not with me, because he could never tell anyone what he had seen, not even *he* could have imagined such a dire betrayal, let alone perpetrated by the daughter he loved so much" (311).

This startling denouement has been the subject of multiple interpretations. In his analysis of this final scene, Cristián Ricci focuses on the non-generative nature of anal sex (Ricci, “*L’ultim patriarca* de Najat El Hachmi y el forjamiento de una identidad Amazigh-Catalana” 85). This incestuous liaison with her uncle upends multiple social norms at once, but according to Ricci, the impossibility of reproduction allows the protagonist/narrator to “transcend the symbolic violence of obligatory maternity” and truly enjoy the sexual encounter (86). Jessica Folkart’s impressive reading of the novel focuses on questions of embodiment and liminality to argue that *The Last Patriarch* “rewrites the story of Peninsular territory and identity, long rendered as a gendered space violated by the African invader” (Folkart, *Liminal Fiction at the Edge of the Millennium* 176). Folkart explores the multiple instances of anal sex in the novel, starting with Mimoun’s rape. By forcing the boy into submission, Mimoun’s uncle asserts his dominance within the patriarchal structure. Rather than develop an aversion to sexual abuse, Mimoun instead becomes the perpetrator, passing on this “phallic legacy of the patriarchy” (196). Mimoun often engages in anal sex with his cousin Fatma and Folkart astutely observes: “Whereas young male recipients grow up to become penetrators themselves, the female recipients can never rise in the patriarchal ranks in this society” (196). For Fatma, sodomy is a means of preserving her hymen—and thus her virginity. However, this strategy backfires and she is ultimately ostracized by her family for her “impure” behavior. Mimoun, in contrast, suffers no consequences for forcing his sexual

preferences on her, or other women. In the case of his boss's wife in Catalonia, "the Catalan woman's anal rape evokes Peninsular stereotypes and fears of the 'Moors' as sexual invaders who anally raped their Christian victims," meaning that "alongside this gender subjugation lurks the ghostly fear of cultural subjugation" (Folkart, *Liminal Fiction* 198–99). The novel's finale offers a counterpoint to this earlier instance of sodomy, especially when we consider the uncle's insistence that "it's the kind of thing that should be kept in the family" (El Hachmi, *The Last Patriarch* 310). Within the familial context this taboo expression of intimacy has very different ramifications and connotations.

For Kathryn Everly, just as for Jessica Folkart, an important subversion of the male gaze takes place as Mimoun is forced to watch his rival younger brother sodomize his daughter on camera. The woman is our subject and she objectifies her father instead (Folkart, "Scoring the National Hym(e)n" 373; Everly, "Rethinking the Home" 55). Both scholars concur that this scene makes playful use of the French expression "la petite mort" to describe the sensation of lifelessness brought on by orgasm, in that the narrator/protagonist's climax spells the death of the patriarch as well. Everly's second article on the *The Last Patriarch* centers around notions of the home. Analyzing the novel as a veritable feminist manifesto, Everly argues that "the destruction of the home literally and figuratively rips the young female protagonist from her family unit yet simultaneously grants her freedom from patriarchal oppression that has up to that point

defined her existence" (Everly, "Rethinking the Home" 46). According to Everly, this is achieved in the culmination of the novel through the erasure of any division between public and private spheres. First, the narrator/protagonist breaks with the gendered tradition of maintaining a home by leaving her husband and renting an apartment of her own in the big city. Second, her purposeful choice of making the transgressive sex act with her uncle visible to the outside world renders the private public and the public private (Everly 55–56). I agree wholeheartedly with Everly's masterful interpretation of the last two chapters. Competing and often entirely contradictory notions of home clearly operate as the unifying theme that holds this multifaceted novel together. In fact, I would argue that the question of home is a central idea in all three of the aforementioned fictional works that make up El Hachmi's migration triptic. Therefore, while Everly is generally reading the home as "located symbolically within the confines of a house or apartment and metaphorically in patriarchal family power structures" (46), there are also grounds for a rich spatial analysis of this first text in the series. Our narrator-cum-protagonist is quite attentive to the subtle dynamics of space and the way it shapes the interactions between characters. Furthermore, how Mimoun and his daughter each conceive of their shared "homes" (in the various forms they take) allows for significant insight into unique challenges women face in the migratory process. In order to extend Everly's argument—and account for these subtleties—I will address the case of Mimoun and his particular quest to possess both people and property. I will then

turn to the daughter, whose living space is generally determined by her father's choices. In this second section, I will examine how she inhabits various houses throughout the course of the novel and, finally, how she strikes out in search of her own true home.

### **3.3 Mimoun/Manel**

Although it is our narrator/protagonist who eventually makes the decision to part ways with her family home and everything it represents, it is worth noting that Mimoun is often depicted as at odds with the various domestic spaces he inhabits as well. This starts practically from the moment of his birth. As the firstborn son in a patriarchal household, Mimoun enjoys (or should enjoy) an optimal position in the family. The newborn is even dubbed "Mimoun the Fortunate" because he has three older sisters to dote on him and there is no competition for their attention. The narrator explains to us that "during the harvest the girls took it in turns to tie him like a bundle on their backs before bending to work with their scythes" (El Hachmi, *The Last Patriarch* 12). The sisters dedicate serious physical and emotional labor to coddling Mimoun. However, they cannot protect him from everything—especially not from violence of the same gendered norms they obediently uphold as his caretakers. Mimoun's mother ("grandmother") is nervous as her fourth pregnancy draws to an end: "in her heart of hearts it didn't matter to her if it was a girl or not. But what would she do after all her girls had gone to live in other peoples' houses, where they'd rear their children ignorant of their lineage? The business of lineage didn't worry her at all...but the loneliness" (4).

According to Muslim tradition, the woman joins her spouse's household (which is, realistically, his father's). Following this convention, Mimoun will remain under his father's roof for life, and even rear his own family there. However, Mimoun realizes from early on that this is not in the cards for him

Everly suggests that "changing one's destiny is a *leit motif* that appears throughout the novel as a thread that connects immigrant and female identity" (Everly, "Rethinking the Home" 54). Indeed, both Mimoun and his daughter are portrayed as entangled in an intergenerational struggle to exercise free will, as confirmed by the final lines of the aforementioned epigraph: "this is the only truth we want to tell you, the truth about a father who has to grapple with the frustration of seeing his destiny unfulfilled and a daughter who, entirely unintentionally, changed the history of the Driouchs forever" (El Hachmi, *The Last Patriarch* vii). Given that the novel itself is typically narrated in either the third person, with frequent use of the free indirect style to capture key moments in Mimoun's development, or in the first person (singular) when we reach the second section, it is unclear who the "we" refers to in this passage. The reader can only assume that since the narrator/protagonist has gathered parts of her story from other sources, in the end it is a collective act of truth telling, one that demonstrates the imbricated nature of each person's fate. Thus, a sense of mutual vulnerability is manifest not only in the novel's content but also its complex narrative form as well.

By the time Mimoun reaches adolescence, he is convinced of one thing: that he is *not* destined to follow the course his own father has set out for him. Beginning with the infamous “*thwap!*” of his father’s first physical assault, home, school and family — three building-block socio-cultural institutions — prove to be hostile spaces from which Mimoun seeks to escape. In the case of the beating, the literal space of the family compound is to blame because, as the narrator explains, when Driouch loses his temper about the baby’s incessant crying: “The yard hadn’t sufficiently resonated with the soft pad of his bare feet. Grandmother would have dodged his slap if he hadn’t slipped his hand behind her and brought the whole weight of his forearm down on the bundle he could hardly see” (El Hachmi 8). The “soft, dry mud in the yard” defeats the mother’s attempts to soothe her infant son and protect him from Driouch’s wrath (8). The narrator concludes: “We don’t know exactly what happened, but we are sure it was there, in the middle of the yard that’s so soft underfoot, surrounded by whitewashed walls, at a time when everyone was surely having their afternoon nap, that Mimoun’s first smack resounded *thwap!* Mimoun who must learn not to be so spoiled” (9). This seemingly unnecessary attention to the structural elements that make up the compound help convey a feeling of serenity and enclosure — even isolation. The grandmother’s maternal instincts are no match for the patriarchal violence that dominates the household and can turn a peaceful home into a nightmarish, prison-like environment with no warning. This is the start of a larger trend in the novel in which the male

characters exert their masculinity through randomized acts of violence thereby creating a home context in which the mere *possibility* of being the next target leave the women feeling as if they are under constant surveillance.

Folkart is interested in the sonorous elements of the novel and notes how the sound of the “*thwap*” (or “*plaf*,” as it is written in the original Catalan) is first introduced in the above scene—but repeated with frequency throughout the text. She observes that “the word has the effect of forced witnessing at an elemental, sensory level—it induces readers to identify with the victim through sound, and the simple and almost inevitable next step is that we imagine *feeling* the blow” (Folkart, “Scoring the National Hym(e)n” 363). In the act of oral storytelling, these sonic elements would serve as a sort of refrain, creating a sense of cyclical continuity. But as Folkart points out, “The story alters a bit each time, with certainty yielding to admissions of not knowing the original truth, and irony destabilizing the assertion by the patriarch that the wailing infant was rightly assaulted because he needed to learn not to be spoiled” (364). In line with Folkart, I suggest that the use of the free indirect style reflects the extent to which the narrator has internalized the male character’s discursive truths. However, her matter-of-fact tone is at odds with the brutality of the acts she describes; the subversion of the men’s unjust, irrational worldview lies in the act of female narration.

This holds true as Mimoun’s tale continues. Unwilling to submit to corporal punishment at school, scarred by the abuse he has suffered within his own family, and

frustrated with Fatma's promiscuity, he determines to change his destiny. His main objective is to find a demurer woman to marry. Yet, at only 16 years-old, his desire for marriage becomes the pursuit of financial independence as well – a pursuit that quickly leads him to Spain. As opposed to the analyses of *The Last Patriarch* that center on El Hachmi's place in Catalan letters and the use of the language to underscore important identity claims, Palmar-Álvarez Blanco suggests we group the novel with a number of other contemporary Spanish narratives in which the characters sacrifice their agency to participate in what turns out to be a fictional "sociedad del bien-estar" fomented by the logic/rhetoric of neoliberalism. Álvarez-Blanco foregrounds Mimoun's trajectory as a particularly brilliant example of how migrants in Spain are subjected to a "doubly colonizing process" (Álvarez-Blanco 59). Desire for assimilation exposes him to "un neo-individualismo voraz," ("a voracious neo-individualism"; 58) that emphasizes consumption as a means of performing his well-being and, in doing so, forces him to abandon his cultural identity.

Álvarez Blanco cites how, on his very first day on the job in Catalonia, Mimoun is induced to change his name to Manel for the sake of professional convenience. When he begins working as a brick-layer alongside his uncle, the latter informs him brusquely that the boss finds Mimoun difficult to pronounce and that "from now on you are Manel" (El Hachmi, *The Last Patriarch* 70). Álvarez-Blanco refers to this moment as "el bautismo económico del personaje," ("the economic baptism of the character"; 59) since,

“sólo a Manel se le permite el acceso al ámbito de la sociedad del *bien-estar*; su entrada, paradójicamente, sólo es posible en la forma de instrumento desculturizado y estereotipado” (“only Manel is allowed access to the social sphere of *well-being*; his entrance, paradoxically, is only possible in the form of a de-culturized and stereotyped tool”; Álvarez-Blanco 59-60). It is this idea of his “transmutación en instrumento del desarrollo” (“transmutation into an instrument of development”; 59) that interests me, since it is at the crux of the doubly colonizing process mentioned above, wherein Mimoun assimilates to both a new cultural and economic model. By trading in his identity, he is able to participate in the incessant development that is at the core of the same fictional “good life” he hopes to lead.

We cannot ignore the historical implications of Mimoun’s “baptism.” Shortly after the conquest of Granada in 1492 by Ferdinand and Isabel (“The Catholic Kings”), the Muslim population was not only compelled to convert to Christianity but take new names as well. The so-called *moriscos* were nominally Christian in every sense of the word. Therefore, Mimoun’s similarly nominal conversion does not occur in a historical vacuum. It speaks to the quasi-religious fervor with which a “new Spain” greeted development following the country’s transition to Democracy and re-emergence on the global stage. A phase that Álvarez-Blanco and Antonio Gómez López-Quiñones have described as being characterized by the oneirism of an impossible golden age (“una *âge d’or* imposible”; Álvarez-Blanco and Gómez L-Quiñones 14). It also reveals the colonial

underpinnings of contemporary Iberian society by elucidating how immigrants like Mimoun are forced to confront centuries of hostility toward Africa and Africans, even in the most quotidian of interactions.

Perhaps it is precisely because of this hostile history that Mimoun feels terribly out of place in Spain—at least at the beginning. The narrator goes to great lengths to describe the sensory overload he experiences upon arrival: the lurching sensation of Mimoun’s first train ride, the noxious smell of the pig farms that surround Vic and the stench of the tanneries that will not leave his nose (68). As much as this urban setting is strange to Mimoun, he is also treated as strange within it:

Those days it was still exotic to see a Moor in the middle of a city in the interior and people often turned round to look at him and stood and stared while they put a hand over their mouths to hide their astonishment. Especially the ladies, who remember stories of murderous north Africans in the war who cut off the heads of anyone who got in their way and hung them up by their hair in the middle of the square. Or at least that’s what people said. (71)

The narrator’s use of the word Moor in this passage is yet another example of the subversive use of the free indirect style. As discussed in Chapter 2, “Moor” (“*moro*” in Castilian and Catalan) is a derogatory term for people of North African descent that has been used indiscriminately to describe those of either Berber or Arab origin—and differentiate them from the Christian population of Spain—well before the forced

conversions mentioned above. Furthermore, the narrator makes reference to the Fuerzas Regulares Indígenas (“Indigenous Regular Forces”) recruited to the Spanish army from the protectorates of Ceuta and Melilla in what would be Morocco. These troops famously played a key part in General Francisco Franco’s rebellion of 1936 and contributed to a number of Nationalist victories during the Civil War.<sup>4</sup> The narrator is once again relaying information that is beyond her years and knowledge base. The double-voiced quality of her repetition underscores both the absurdity of these racist epithets and illustrates their pernicious effect on Mimoun’s everyday life. Fears about the immanent “return of the Moors” curtail his mobility both within the city and within the labor market—inducing Mimoun’s “forced conversion” of the economic sort.

It is worth noting that the first reference to Mimoun’s “Moorishness” occurs prior to his departure for Spain and goes hand in hand with his first ever financial success. The recycling of this language to describe the pre-peninsularized Mimoun/Manel seems to indicate the extent to which the colonial logics that determine Spanish-Moroccan relations extend across the Strait of Gibraltar and deep within the heartland of both countries. Mimoun is determined to use his second cousin’s wedding as an opportunity to find a wife of his own. The first sum of money he earns by working as a building apprentice in the “provincial capital” goes towards a new set of clothes for the occasion and a small tub of Nivea cream. After donning his attire and slicking back

---

<sup>4</sup> See page 12 of the Introduction for more on this aspect of Spanish Civil War history.

his unruly hair with the cream he is dubbed a "Moorish Elvis" (38). This initial transformation determines the trajectory of the entire novel, in which, via the continued consumption of Western products, Mimoun's Moorishness is emphasized in a seemingly perverse fashion. Yet this "perversity" is an expression of assimilation and its impact on both Mimoun and our narrator. The corrosive effects of Western notions of "progress" attach Mimoun to an anachronistic stereotype, the Medieval Moor, rather than allow him the agency to truly choose his own destiny.

At the wedding Mimoun meets his future wife, the narrator's mother. He sets his sights on her because her body language conveys the appropriate level of modesty. When locking eyes from across the room, "she glanced down at her shoes, blushed a bright red under her dark skin, and Mimoun knew. By the way she'd looked down, he knew that was the woman he could tame, and with whom he'd create such close bonds they'd never, ever fall apart" (41). When explaining to his sister why she is the right choice of bride, he insists: "I'm serious, she's the woman for me. That black woman who looks like a slave from one of the stories mother tells us" (47). His entire rationale for the marriage is based on her perceived docility and his infantile associations with an imagined servility that are derived from deeply ingrained colorism. Despite his family's incredulity, the wedding moves forward, setting Mimoun on his mission to Spain. From the very beginning, Mimoun conflates women with property. His drive to work, earn

and acquire makes him nothing more than a cog in the wheel of globalized capitalist system, but Mimoun is blind to that fact, bent as he is on ownership in all its forms.

Once in Spain, Mimoun gradually works his way up the ranks and is assigned to the team of construction workers finishing his boss's house. The affair that brings everything Mimoun has built during his short stay crashing down (both literally and figuratively) is part of a larger trend in which Mimoun plays directly into the role of the "Muslim interloper who lasciviously destroys the foundation of the home and, metaphorically, the identity of the Christian nation, by trespassing the on the wife's body" (Folkart, "Scoring the National Hym(e)n" 367). Certainly, the symbolism of Mimoun's job is not to be ignored, since the act of building is linked to his sexual encounters through the "imbricated concepts" of staking out property and constructing the nation (Folkart 367)—nor can we ignore the connotation of his preferred mode of vengeance. Feeling belittled by the boss toward whom "he must have begun to take a dislike from the moment he looked him over as if he were reckoning up the profit he could get out of him" (El Hachmi, *The Last Patriarch* 70), Mimoun uses his oft-cited charisma to seduce the man's wife. And when rebuffed by his lover, Mimoun sets fire to the new house he's been building for the couple. In Mimoun's mind it is clear: house for woman, tit for tat. He cannot stand to be objectified (by the boss, or anyone else for that matter) because it is an affront to his manhood that can only be remedied by the further objectification of women.

Once Mimoun finally starts making a little extra income, his occasional return to Rif is voluntary and he is treated like a king by the women in his family each time he calls. He determines to follow the straight and narrow, saving up money to send home to support his growing family and make regular trips back. But for all his newly acquired mobility, he demands that his wife swear that she will not so much as set a foot in the front yard. Or, as Mimoun puts it to her: "You won't leave this house unless it's to go to the cemetery" (El Hachmi 108). His violent threats are anything but hollow. On one occasion when she dares to visit her sick father in Mimoun's absence, he beats her publicly upon his return. He draws his sisters into the matter, accusing them of not upholding his stringent rule over his wife, her body and her very movements. Lastly, when our narrator/protagonist is born prematurely after seven months since his last visit rather than nine, Mimoun views it as confirmation of his worst suspicions. Despite being charmed with the baby in person, he renounces his initial hopes for a family life. Instead, he returns to drinking and the "conquest" of Christian women with a renewed fervor. The narrator tries to capture Mimoun's latest strategy for "reaching his destiny" in economic terms: "the great patriarch had learned to refine his search so he'd find women who'd make life easy for him and not bring headaches. When the competition is keen and you're at a disadvantage, you have to find your niche. Mimoun has found a niche to fit the criteria of his own personal taste, as well as the laws of the market" (124). He views Spanish men as rivals and believes that, in order to stake a claim on the "good

life" in Spain, he has to steal "their women." His fetishization of consumption consumes him and he abandons his family for years, virtually starving them out of neglect. They will not be reunited again until the narrator/protagonist arrives in Barcelona at about eight years-old along with her mother and brothers to meet *their* fate.

### **3.4 The Narrator/Protagonist**

If Mimoun's refusal to send remittances home conditioned the family's day-to-day back in Rif, then his other life choices (the affairs, the drinking) determine the very substance of their lives in Catalonia. For our narrator, who now becomes the protagonist, it seems that adaptation to a new place, culture and people presents less of an obstacle than navigating Mimoun's whims. Although the patriarch is his most magnanimous and charming self at first, he quickly begins a downward spiral that will essentially last until the end of the novel. His psychological trajectory stands in direct contrast to the family's gradual upward mobility, meaning that any improvement in their material reality feels increasingly hollow as time goes on. Seen through a child's (and later an adolescent's) eyes, their various dwellings hold an intense symbolic power and are associated with the degree of emotional comfort—or discomfort—experienced within each space.

The narrator/protagonist's memories of the trip to Spain are scant; she recalls very little other than her mother's abject terror of what might happen to her children during this unknown journey and the fact that she (the narrator/protagonist)—only ever

having slept on the floor—falls out of the bunk bed in their berth during the ferry ride across the Strait of Gibraltar. What she claims to remember best is the long hallway leading to their new apartment. It is the image that both concludes Part I: “At the very end there was a passage, a long, *lonnng* passage. And at the bottom of the passage: him. He was waiting for us with open arms and I remember running and that it was such a long way. There he was, and I can still see him sweeping me up in his arms while he pricked me with his moustache” (146). Here, the passage clearly symbolizes the family’s estrangement from the patriarch and the difficulty of overcoming all the years of physical separation. The narrator/protagonist encourages such a reading when she repeats the scene at the start of Part II, this time with the inclusion of her adult perspective: “I went there quite recently and it [the passage] didn’t seem that long, but I was little then and father was waiting for us at the far end, and perhaps that why it seemed so far” (150). The now adult narrator/protagonist cites her mother’s refusal to reminisce about that day, or the events surrounding it. Nonetheless, she insists, “I do remember things,” and continues with a meticulous description of the “home” awaiting them:

The passage walls were swollen, as if they were pregnant, about to burst. The kitchen-diner was right at the back, with two leather armchairs in a disgusting state and next door was a windowless bedroom. Next to the windowless bedroom, another windowless bedroom and next to that, a room with a window

with a grille looking out onto the street, like a prison. The stench everywhere. A stench that had already begun in the city, the district, the province and the whole country. (149-150)

Following directly in Mimoun's footsteps, the family is greeted by an equally squalid abode as the one Mimoun inhabited with his uncle all those years ago. It is better located (in a centrally located "immigrant neighborhood"), but the conditions are just as deplorable. And the visual extent of the squalor is emphasized by the stench of the pig farms to which Mimoun has undoubtedly grown accustomed—but the others have not. The inability to escape that smell, just like the encroaching walls and the windowless rooms, speaks to the physical and psychological entrapment of the narrator/protagonist, her mother, and presumably her brothers (although we never hear much about them at all) as they are forced to reckon with the consequences of Mimoun's choices.

Despite having started his own construction company, Construcciones Manel SL,<sup>5</sup> Mimoun is living in this deplorable state because his last girlfriend, Isabel, kicks

---

<sup>5</sup> Mimoun has a debate with his friend Jaume (aka Hamed) about the name of the company and its business designation. His rationale for listing it under his false name is the following: "You know how hard they find it to trust a Moor. That's why I decided on that name, you know, Construcciones Manel SA. I don't know what the S and the A stand for, but it's what you have to put if you want to look like a real company. Or SL. They let you choose. You know, some people will give me work because they know me and they know I do a good job for a good price, but sometimes I lose money. It's the way to get started so your name gets around. By word of mouth. One problem is sometimes they're expecting Manel from Construcciones Manel to be a shade lighter than I am, and are reluctant to give me work. Until they've seen me chomp on a sausage sandwich they won't believe my name is Manel" (El Hachmi, *The Last Patriarch* 137). There is a lot to unpack in this rant. However, one of the most glaring issues is Mimoun's near obsession with appearances. He feels economically obligated to try and pass as Catalan. This is compounded by his limited understanding of the actual ramifications of certain naming choices. In fact, S.A. or Sociedad Anónima is

him out of her place shortly before the family's arrival. He has not paved the way for them by renting a decent place and he refuses to amend his ways—only buying a space heater for the damp, cold apartment on his friend's urging that it is not too expensive (168). The mother, who spent her forced confinement back in Rif whitewashing the walls and polishing the silver in the fruitless attempt to make herself useful in her inlaws' home, turns her attention immediately to cleaning up Mimoun's mess. The narrator/protagonist assures us that "an ability to transform reality is one of her most shining virtues" (150). Because of her enterprising attitude, the narrator/protagonist likens her mother to Mila, the protagonist of *Solitud*: "A Mila with a headscarf and a string belt, she soon hitched up the hem of her dress so they [sic] wouldn't get in the way" (150). This is the first of numerous intertextual references that pepper the second part of the novel, but it is a particularly telling one. Caterina Albert i Paradís published *Solitud* under the pseudonym of Victor Catalá in 1905 just as Najat El Hachmi presented *The Last Patriarch* for the Ramon Llull prize using the pseudonym Mimouna Bouziane in 2008 (Dalmases). While Albert used her pen name to avoid the scandal of publishing as a woman in the early twentieth century, El Hachmi seems to have done the same as an early effort to detach her personal life from her novelistic endeavors—and vice versa.

---

meant for a public company, usually of considerable size, and would not be applicable to his one-man business. He could choose to register as a Sociedad de Responsabilidad Limitada (S.L.), therefore reducing his personal liability should the business accrue debts. Clearly, he is unaware of these vital differences in business branding and management—and particularly vulnerable because of it.

More important, however, is the plot of *Solitud*, which is considered a key work of incipient feminism in Catalan letters and revolves around Mila's difficult process of self-realization in a state of rural isolation imposed by her husband (Leavitt). Our narrator/protagonist's Mila is no longer living in the countryside, but she is isolated nonetheless. The parallel drawn between the two texts confirms that the tension that undergirds *Solitud*, that is, a woman's conflictive relationship with her home environment, is fundamental to the interpretation of *The Last Patriarch* as well.

The narrator/protagonist will soon weave in references to Mercé Rodoreda's iconic *La plaça del Diamant* (literally "Diamond Square" but translated as *The Time of the Doves* in English) too. Although published in 1962, *The Time of the Doves* is set in Barcelona during the last years of the Second Spanish Republic (1931-1939), the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939), and the brutal postwar years. The narrator/protagonist draws attention to the similarities between the situation of its protagonist Natalia (aka Colometa) and that of her mother, most notably when the family moves upstairs to an apartment on the second floor of their original building but keeps the old flat below because it has a pigeon loft. Watching her mother clean up the droppings, the narrator/protagonist avers "Sometimes mother was more like Colometa than Mila, she'd cleaned up so much dried excrement from the wooden planks that were under the prefabricated Uralite roofs. Except she'd not come from any war, or so it seemed" (179). Intertextuality thus becomes a means of embedding the novel within a much longer

history of women's struggles for independence in Catalonia, and, in the case of this second feminist classic, of creating a "literary bridge between post-war Barcelona and twenty-first century urban sprawl" (Everly, "Immigrant Identity and Intertextuality in 'L'ultim patriarca' by Najat El Hachmi" 142). The plight of the woman in the city is particularly evident because the contrast between public and private life is felt more acutely in this type of crowded setting, and the constraints of domesticity are all the more difficult to navigate. This is certainly the case for *The Last Patriarch's* Mila/Colometa who, fearful of incurring her husband's rage, only dares to leave the house once a week for her Saturday grocery shopping trip.

Although she is quick to recognize her mother's constraints, the narrator/protagonist greets these adventures with a childish glee. Certain consumer items seem to hold symbolic power for her, illustrating the extent to which her family's material reality has changed in the move to Spain. For example, remembering when finding an abandoned pot of ant-ridden yogurt in a gutter back in Rif made her mouth water, she proudly states "now we ate yogurt every Saturday night" (164). The pinnacle is when she and her siblings discover "they also made them with bits of real fruit, the ones that said 'with' not 'flavoured,'" as she assures the reader: "The world was opening up before us" (El Hachmi, *The Last Patriarch* 164). However, this aperture is limited. She might delight in the commodities that life with her father affords the family: the yogurts, the potato chips from the bartenders at each of the establishments Mimoun frequents,

lollipops from the butchers, markers from his work mates who take pity on the children, but she is not oblivious to the dark presence he represents. Certain, seemingly banal, intertextual references capture both her exposure to Western pop culture while also indicating that our narrator/ protagonist is well aware of the oppressive nature of her household from an early age. The most striking of these is her identification with Carol-Anne, the protagonist of the 1982 horror film, *Poltergeist*. One horrible night she awakens to find her father holding a knife to her mother's throat, crazed with the idea that she had an affair with his brother during the long years of abandonment. After this harrowing incident the narrator insists:

All my memories seemed so unreal I had no choice but to turn it all to fiction.

That's why, whenever I remember that night, I always see myself as Carol-Anne before she touches the television with her finger and is taken away forever. That made it so much easier. She was a blonde girl, without hang-ups, living happily with her American parents in an American house and, despite her circumstances, look what happened to her and how she suffered. My poltergeist was different, but I can't recall being in that semi-dark passage with gutted walls without long, blonde hair and a teddy bear in my arms. (156)

She sees a parallel between Carol-Anne's possession by ghosts and Mimoun's possessiveness about the women in his life. Kathryn Cramer argues that the poltergeist "stands as a metaphor for the psychological damage caused by her father's

unpredictable tyranny” (Crameri 509). While I agree with this assessment, there is clearly an important spatial element to Mimoun’s haunting as well. The imagery of the swollen walls returns as she realizes that she too is trapped in sort of parallel realm, condemned to live in the limbo—or perhaps simply the hell—of her father’s making. Her confinement is thus not solely psychological, it is also physical, as she remains bound to and within a domestic space.

At this point, our narrator/protagonist recognizes that the only way to break the spell is to become independent. Unlike her father, her idea of independence has no economic overtones. She simply desires to detach from him emotionally and find herself in the process. Referring again to the movie and to the spiritual medium called in to rescue Carol-Anne, our narrator/protagonist explains: “If you want to escape from the poltergeist and don’t have a loudmouthed little mistress like Tangina Barrons, you should laugh a lot till you feel your ribs are about to explode, or cry a lot till you feel drained, or you should have an orgasm” (El Hachmi, *The Last Patriarch* 161). She understands the value of these deeply embodied sensations for staking out her individuality. However, her household is so oppressive that even these simple pleasures are not a possibility for the narrator/protagonist as a young girl. Instead, she turns to the recitation of the Catalan dictionary, letter by letter, entry by entry as if she’s reciting prayers or verses from the Quran as part of an exorcism: “I still didn’t know how to get an orgasm, father didn’t like anyone crying and mother didn’t like anyone laughing. So I

started to read that dictionary of the Catalan language word by word. Everyone said what an intelligent girl, what a studious girl, but it was only so I could find one of those three things" (161). This dynamic continues regardless of where the family resides. Each new house is haunted by the poltergeist of Mimoun's erratic behavior. This ritual therefore continues to structure a major portion of the remaining narrative as the narrator/protagonist mingles her recitations with descriptions of family life.

Everly likens this piling up of words to an "intellectual arsenal that separates her from her father and from the history he represents" (Everly, "Rethinking the Home" 52); in this sense, "the use of Catalan signifies movement away from her father and from the home because the language offers an expressive connection to the world outside of the home, the world that operates in Catalan" (Everly 53). I agree with Everly that, if not a means of exorcism, the study of Catalan is a means of exodus from her complicated family situation. As Ricci notes, "la narradora descobrirá que el lenguaje no es una mera herramienta neutral que representa el deseo honesto de decir la verdad, sino que también coadyuva a la examinación de las relaciones de poder que promueven los intercambios culturales, lingüísticos y de género" ("the narrator will discover that language is not merely a neutral tool that represents the honest desire to speak the truth, but that it also aids in the examination of the power relations that promote cultural, linguistic and gender exchanges"; (Ricci, "L'últim patriarca" 80). Ricci insists that with this powerplay in mind, "la adolescente narradora se posará en el campo inestable,

conflictivo, de la traducción y la traición" ("the adolescent narrator will position herself on the unstable and conflictive terrain of translation and betrayal"; Ricci 80). Ricci is referring to the many times our narrator/protagonist is forced to translate for her mother: in the super market she is asked to convert prices from pesetas to duros so her mother can truly understand the cost of each item (163); when her mother gets pregnant again, she reads the *Guide to Your Pregnancy* for her (196); and when Mimoun sleeps with one of her teacher's at school our narrator/protagonist mediates all future PTA meetings for her mother—this time translating at her discretion for the sake of diplomacy, rather than word for word. In her mastery of the Catalan language, there is an element of deceit and unquestionably the desire to one up her father and upend his patriarchal dominance. However, as Gloria Anzaldúa explains in relation to her notion of *la facultad*, the pain and discomfort of familial or intercultural conflict can be generative. In the same vein, our narrator/protagonist's attention gradually turns from the soothing act of reading to the painstaking and painful act of writing, of making sense of her environment.

This transition comes slowly, however, with brutal moments of reckoning along the way. The little family's first "move up in the world" is a very literal one. When an upstairs neighbor dies suddenly, the landlord agrees to rent Mimoun/Manel the apartment which, "despite it reeking of death, smelling because it had been shut up or, worse still, stinking of naphthalene that would never go away. It was on the second

floor" (179). Living one floor higher, above the damp and rot seems like an advantage until Mimoun announces that he'll be moving his new Christian girlfriend, Rosa, into their old space. The narrator/protagonist's attempt to intervene in the relationship has already backfired at this point. Using her burgeoning writing skills, she composes a simple note to Rosa: "leave my father in peace, you whore," and signs it. When Mimoun flies into a rage she thinks "I've really landed myself in it, but I was his favourite and he'd never hit me. No, he'd be angry but he'd never hit a girl who was his favourite" (177). Yet, to her disbelief, he does hit her. It's a resounding slap that brings on a vicious nosebleed and represents a tipping point for the two main characters. From this point on, she continually bears the brunt of his anger. Even once Rosa leaves and Mimoun decides to become a devout Muslim, he inexplicably beats his daughter for wearing her hijab out of the house, leaving her face down in a gutter. Gone are the days when Mimoun would insist on dragging his daughter along on his nightly escapades. No matter how high the family climbs, the father-daughter relationship that lies at the heart of the story only deteriorates further.

Unsurprisingly then, these tensions reach their apogee when the family buys their own house in a suburban cul-de-sac. The narrator tells us succinctly, "We were all looking forward to living in an apartment where it was easier to dry clothes in winter because of the central heating, where the walls were freshly painted white and where nobody had died before we moved in" (El Hachmi, *The Last Patriarch* 210). The intense

human vulnerability to which she has been exposed throughout her childhood is treated as an inconvenience on par with chipping paint or musty clothing. Yet, while Mimoun/Manel can pull his family out of financial precarity, the precariousness of their lives is undeniable. It is clear that this massive lifestyle change has very little impact on the violent underpinnings of their everyday. This fact is made painfully evident in the description of her family's trips back to Morocco: "We had to be like kings of the Orient when we arrived, and I thought it was too much, after so long. And we'd had to buy clothes for children and adults, so they didn't think we didn't dress well where we lived" (El Hachmi, *The Last Patriarch* 228). Here we are privy to an "othering" that is two-fold (or perhaps even triplicate): the need to tap into the Orientalized notions of exotic luxury in order to perform assimilation into a "Western" model of success. And as she comes of age, our narrator/protagonist will realize that she wants nothing to do with Mimoun's worldview.

It is in this fateful "House on Mango Street" that the narrator/protagonist reaches puberty, gets her first period, and wrestles with her sexuality — all while trying to find the space for exploration under Mimoun's watchful eye. It is also here that she begins writing for herself. Her secondary school teacher drives all the way from the Barcelona just to bring her birthday gift: "the present was a notebook with blank pages, a really good one, with a real hard cover and not spiral binding, and a fountain pen. A real fountain pen, like a proper writer's she said, and initially she said it should be a space to

share my own experiences with everyone else" (248). Despite the fact that Mimoun, who is spying out the window, wholeheartedly disapproves; our narrator/protagonist has reached the end of her dictionary apprenticeship and the seed has been planted.

Thinking back to her early impressions of their suburban home, she reflects: "The rooms were completely empty when we went to see it for the first time and I thought I'd be happy there, that our problem was space and not the way father was" (210). The freshly painted white walls do not offer a new start, but the blank pages of her notebook do.

As our narrator/protagonist enters womanhood herself she clearly seeks out the writing of other women of color including Sandra Cisneros' *The House on Mango Street* (210, 215), Zadie Smith's *White Teeth* (242-243, 247) and Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*—or at least Steven Spielberg's film adaptation (249). If her voracious reading of the Catalan dictionary marked her divergence from Mimoun's materially-focused means of assimilation into Spanish culture, the consumption of these particular cultural artifacts seems to indicate that she is claiming a space for herself as a woman of color in the world—perhaps even a woman of color writer in the world. At times she merely draws parallels between her own life and certain plot twists in these works. For example, when Mimoun starts sleeping with one of her teachers, she explains: "She was like the teacher in *White Teeth*, although she wasn't a redhead and wasn't very pretty and didn't have the twin children of a Bangladeshi Muslim in her class" (243). Here, she is referencing Samad, one of the main characters in Smith's novel, and his affair with his children's

music teacher. But in other instances, she seems to envision herself as inhabiting the central role. She clearly feels an affinity with Esperanza from *The House on Mango Street* as she acclimates to her new neighborhood and seeks out the company of friends that, like her, are more emotionally and sexually mature. And when Mimoun spies on her interaction with the teacher who gifts her the new notebook, she remarks “I felt like Whoopi Goldberg in *The Color Purple*” (249). In the movie, Goldberg plays the protagonist Celie who is married off at a young age to the abusive to Mister, and older man who, among various forms domestic violence tries to cut Celie off from her sister Nettie. Clearly then, our narrator/protagonist feels herself inhabiting, physically embodying Celie’s experiences as she has seen brought to life by Goldberg. This identification with the physicality of the role speaks to her determination to pursue this friendship—and her writing—in the face of Mimoun’s intimidation. To that end, when she finally divulges all of her father’s abuses to her teacher-friend, she states, “I don’t know if I’d told her about the teacher who was like the one in Zadie Smith, though an ugly version, because at the time Zadie’s fiction didn’t exist, but mine did, but for real” (247). In a possible nod to the novel that she will write about her struggles, the novel that we are reading, the narrator/protagonist finally positions herself author.

There are hiccups on the path to self-discovery, most notably the choice to marry so young. The narrator/protagonist fights tooth and nail for her parents to accept her relationship only to realize she’s made a misstep; she cannot escape her father’s grasp by

while still following a pre-scripted path. In her words: “destiny cannot be written entirely in advance. That’s why the story continues” (El Hachmi, *The Last Patriarch* 298). She cuts ties with her husband, petitions for a divorce in the courts and rents her own apartment. Mimoun shows up at all hours of the day and night, searching a secret lover in ludicrous places like the cupboards above the sink, utterly baffled by her choice to live alone. But, despite this harassment, she perseveres. Her mother, while subservient to her father in many ways has also proved a vital role model. Many years before, she steps in where her daughter fails and stands her ground with Rosa the narrator/protagonist gloats, “for a while I admired mother, because she was more than Mila, or Colometa, and was for real” (203). Yet her admiration is conditional because her mother will never truly rebel against Mimon’s tyrannical ways. Still, this moment marks a turning point in which the narrator/protagonist begins to recognize the value of lived experience. It is a moment of clarity that will guide her towards a larger epiphany: that destiny should and cannot be written in advance (not even partially), that she should live to write and construct a space for herself in the process. When her uncle comes to town and the two spend the night together, she sees the opportunity to do just that. Crucially, her touchstone in this decisive moment is no longer a fictional character or storyline. After multiple references to Rodoreda’s *Diamant*, the narrator/protagonist looks to the author herself: “I was no Mercé Rodoreda, but I had to put an end to the

order of things that had been persecuting me for so long.”<sup>6</sup> She repeats this refrain once more in the moment of seduction: “I’m not Rodoreda, I told myself, but my mission in life goes way beyond this, so why not?” (310). Having informed her uncle that she’s started to write a book and preparing to go to university, the narrator/protagonist’s final rebellion against her father is to become the author of her own life story.

### **3.5 Conclusion**

Given that the novel is written in Catalan, critics have insisted that the narrator of *The Last Patriarch* navigates the cultural influences of four different contexts: an autochthonous Amazigh (or Berber) ethnicity, that of the Moroccan “Third World,” a lived Catalan experience and through it access to a broader European, “First World,” perspective. Vis-à-vis a postcolonial reading of the text, they argue that this nameless protagonist creates a fifth, hybrid identity (Ingenschay 63). Yet this interpretation seems rather contradictory to me. The very emphasis on “hybridity” calls into question the cultural absolutism of the larger hegemonic formations at play while simultaneously precluding the ability to form an identity that would be capable of displacing these

---

<sup>6</sup> Adolfo Campoy-Cubillo cites this same line to argue that, despite the many direct references and more subtle allusions to *Diamant* throughout the text, the Rodoreda that El Hachmi is referring to at the end of her novel is instead the one that wrote *Del que hom no pot fugir*. However, I think it’s worth examining the parallels to Rodoreda’s biography first. As Dieter Ingenschay points out, after her father’s death, Rodoreda married her uncle, Joan Gurguí at just 20 years of age (Ingenschay 65). The marriage received papal approval but was an unhappy one nonetheless. In referencing a personal detail that drove Rodoreda to write her own way out of pain the narrator/protagonist is underscoring the importance of this type of life experience, be it taboo or no, for achieving authorial control.

absolutisms.<sup>7</sup> The multiple, potential means of identification and the fact that the narrator remains purposefully unidentified (even unnamed!) throughout the whole story, would appear to indicate a desire to depict identitarian conflict rather than a preference for multiplicity or hybridity.<sup>8</sup>

By digesting her “otherized” memories and making them legible—even familiar—to a Spanish readership, El Hachmi pushes against Spain’s internal borders. She reminds this potential audience that “the colonial project was not *external* to the constitution of European identity: rather, the identity of these nations became predicated on their relationship to the colonized others” (Ahmed, *Strange Encounters* 10). Spain has long defined itself in relation to its neighbors across the Strait of Gibraltar. Written from notably gendered borderlands, *The Last Patriarch* disrupts this exteriority/interiority, the construction of the “First” world as opposed to the “Third,” more often than not by elucidating the ways in which patriarchal norms unite Spanish and Moroccan culture rather than divide the two. The tensions that arise within the

---

<sup>7</sup> I am thinking of Salman Sayyid’s critique in *Recalling the Caliphate: Decolonization and World Order*. In addressing what he calls the ‘violent hierarchy’ between West and non-West he reminds us how these terms often pre-determine debates on cultural difference: “The invocation of cultural hybridity as a solution to a globalising world presents a paradox. On one hand, it seems to focus attention on the fragmentary nature of the hegemonic cultural formation, on the way its constituent parts were often marginalised and suppressed. On the other hand, at the same time as making possible the weakening of hegemonic cultural formation, cultural hybridity makes it possible to displace the hegemonic formation, since the critique of cultural absolutism implied by cultural hybridity also makes it impossible to sustain any subaltern cultural formation” (Sayyid 59).

<sup>8</sup> See Flesler’s chapter “Difference Within and Without: Negotiating European, National and Regional Identities in Spain” for a more complete explanation of the interplay between immigration and regional identities and especially the politics of language use in Catalonia.

narrator/protagonist's family and the novel's shockingly irresolute resolution erase many of the boundaries that are largely figments of our imaginations: the entities of Africa and Europe, the private and the public, the line between poverty and well-being. Mimoun/Manel's quest for independence and to find his destiny goes unrealized because he contents himself with the slight advantages afforded him within the Western model. He does not fight Spanish racism towards North Africans, but instead plays into it. He does not condemn an economic system designed to exploit him for cheap labor, but instead is mesmerized by the smug sense of superiority that comes with his new-found purchasing power. And above all, he does not question the destructiveness of the patriarchal system in which he was raised until his daughter cleverly subverts these norms to destroy him. It is by putting her story in writing that our narrator/protagonist achieves one final twist: she delves into language to find the power of narration so that she might build a home for herself in the public eye.

## **4. Mothering, *Mestizaje* and the Migrant Future of Spain in Agnès Agboton's *Más allá del mar de arena***

### **4.1 Introduction**

Throughout her 2005 autobiography *Más allá del mar de arena: Una mujer africana en España* (*Beyond the Sea of Sand: An African Woman in Spain*) Agnès Agboton decries what she perceives to be a global situation in which public discourse trends increasingly towards absolute truths. Time and again she reminds her two sons, Axel and Didac: “sois el ejemplo inmediato y palpable, desde que nacisteis, de que el mundo es variado y de que nadie puede reclamar la exclusiva del bien, de la cultura y de la verdad” (“You [plural] are the most immediate and palpable example, since you were born, that the world is diverse and that no one can claim an exclusive right to what is good, to culture and to the truth”; 75). *Beyond the Sea of Sand* traces Agboton's trajectory from Porto Novo, Benin, to Bingerville, Ivory Coast and finally to Barcelona, where she moved with her Catalan husband—the children's father, Manuel Serrat Crespo, at the age of 17. Agboton is quick to acknowledge that she never found herself in the precarious situation of so many migrants in Spain, but she nonetheless identifies with the struggle to seek out new home for oneself in an often-hostile European context.

To this end, Agboton's autobiography can be considered a “migrant narrative” not only because it addresses her own migratory process, but also because it was clearly written in response to the uptick in immigration that Spain witnessed at the start of the new millennium. While the promulgation of the *Ley Orgánica de Extranjería* or LOE did

usher in a new era of unprecedented immigration rather than emigration, it is worth noting that the most significant demographic impact was not seen until the early 2000s. According the Instituto Nacional de Estadística (National Statistics Institute), in the year of *Beyond the Sea of Sand's* publication (2005) the number of registered, foreign-born residents reached almost 4 million, representing about 8.5% of the total population of Spain. With this percentage growing by 1-2 points per year, in absolute terms Spain was second only to the United States amongst the OECD (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development) countries, regarding volume of immigration received during the first decade of the 21st century (Muñoz Comet 24).

As addressed in the Introduction, literary scholarship has been particularly instrumental for addressing how a continued influx of diverse migrant groups confirms Spain's status as a "First World" destination, while also placing stress on the already embattled question of what it means to be Spanish (Bermúdez; Flesler; Folkart; Murray; Vega-Durán). And indeed, with this influx came new strictures and an increase in illegalized immigration. In the 1990s, the erection of massive barrier fences surrounding the Spanish-held territories of Ceuta and Melilla in North Africa transformed this once-porous border region into the veritable face of "Fortress Europe" — and had a significant impact on migratory flows from Africa in particular, sending more and more migrants to sea. Due to increased patrols in the Mediterranean, the media spectacle of sub-Saharan migrants arriving via the more dangerous route to the Spanish Canary Islands

reached its zenith in 2006 (Andersson 21)—and despite the fact that no more than 1% of migrants to Spain actually come by boat, this perilous mode of transport is indelibly etched in the Spanish imaginary.

Well aware of this political environment in which she is writing, Agboton addresses this particular phenomenon in her very first chapter: “en estos últimos tiempos, las noticias que dan por televisión nos bombardean con episodios e imágenes de gente que arriesga su vida embarcándose en las costas africanas, en condiciones muy precarias, para llegar hasta aquí, hasta la mítica Europa, en busca de un futuro mejor” (“Recently, the television news bombards us with episodes and images of people that risk their life departing from the African coasts, in very precarious conditions, in order to arrive here, to mythical Europe, in search of a better future”; Agboton 18). The image of Europe as a land of abundance is indeed a motivating factor for many so-called “economic migrants” at the outset of their journey. But as writers like Donato Ndong-Bidyogo and Rachid Nini make painfully clear, the mirage of a European “Eden” or “El Dorado” disappears into thin air once migrants reach Spanish soil. For this very reason, sociologist Amarela Varela Huerta has invented a new phrase to describe those who seek better fortunes in Europe (and Spain in particular): “exiliados del neoliberalismo” (exiles from neoliberalism) (Varela Huerta). As Varela Huerta explains: “con esta categoría nos referimos a los extranjeros, con o sin permiso de residencia, que viven en España y que se exilian de los efectos que el neoliberalismo provoca en las economías,

las instituciones y las vidas de las personas que viven ‘en el Sur’” (with this category we are referring to the foreigners, with or without legal residence, who live in Spain and are exiled from the effects that neoliberalism has provoked in the economies, institutions and lives of those who live ‘in the South’” Varela Huerta 38). At first, Agboton seems to take an oppositional stance to that of Ndongo-Bidyogo and Nini, positioning herself amongst the “us” – the residents of “mythical Europe” who watch the tragic struggles of these “exiliados del neoliberalismo” from a mediated distance. However, she quickly changes tack.

In a sort of literary *vaivén*, Agboton continues by confirming her common bond with those who are portrayed by the Spanish news media as part of a mass phenomenon or invasion: “estas imágenes me conmueven y nunca puedo mostrarme indiferente ante esos dramas. Porque sé de dónde proceden los hombres de las pateras, sé lo que los mueve; pero también porque sé adónde van y cuál será el terrible final de sus sueños” (“these images move me and I can never express indifference to those dramas. Because I know where the men on the pateras come from, I know what moves them; but also, because I know where they are headed and what the terrible end of their dreams will be”; Agboton 18). This move is typical of Agboton’s writing, in which she both exposes much of the brutality that upholds the construction of contemporary Spain as part the supranational conglomeration that is the European Union, but never directly indicts Spanish racism. Echoing her earlier “terrible final de sus sueños,” she reminds us that

“África no es una tierra fácil, pero Europa también puede ser un lugar terrible” (“Africa is not an easy homeland, but Europe can also be a terrible place”; Agboton 18). Yet despite her insistence, there is no further explanation of this more sinister designation. She crafts a purposeful informational lacuna and in doing so, entices the attentive reader to fill the gap. In what follows, I analyze how Agboton conspicuously omits certain details, as a way to enrich the subtext of her memoir. She may not be as forthcoming as El Hachmi in the previous chapter, but by juxtaposing Dahomanian and Spanish worldviews, *Beyond the Sea of Sand* nonetheless offers an important critique of life on the ground in Barcelona.

As a multi-chapter letter addressed to Axel and Didac, *Beyond the Sea of Sand* can best be described as a memoir—or *libro de memorias* (book of memories) in Spanish. Agboton reminisces at length about her childhood in Benin as well as her adolescence in Côte de’Ivoire, where she met Serrat Crespo. However, the more-or-less linear narrative that later addresses her adaptation to the Spanish cultural context is punctuated by a variety of other material. Agboton and Serrat Crespo dedicated their careers to the preservation of West African oral traditions. Thus, mythology, folklore, and even recipes are interspersed throughout the text. In line with Agboton’s work as a folklorist, her almost conversational style of narration underscores the importance of storytelling as means of historical inscription. With *Beyond the Sea of Sand*, Agboton intervenes in the

growing genre of the “migrant narrative” to create a testament to her experiences and offer a means of thinking beyond the social boundaries she sets out to record.

Agboton is also a prolific writer. In addition to *Beyond the Sea of Sand* she has produced two cookbooks – *La cuina africana* (*African Cooking*, 1988), *Àfrica des dels fogons* (*Africa on the Stovetop*, 2001), and *Las cocinas del mundo* (*Cuisines of the World*, 2002); three collections of African folktales – *Contes d’arreu del món* (*Tales from Around the World*, 1995), *Abenyonhú* (2003),<sup>1</sup> and *Na Mitón. La mujer en los cuentos y leyendas africanas* (*Our Mother: Women in African Stories and Legends*, 2004);<sup>2</sup> and two volumes of her own poems, written in Gun and translated into Spanish – *Canciones del poblado y del exilio* (*Songs from the Village and from Exile* 2006) and *Voz de dos orillas* (*Voice from Two Shores* 2009). Her commitment to self-translation, whether it be re-creating a Beninese dish from memory or explaining the significance of her Gun surname in Spanish, makes Agboton’s production the perfect example of Rebecca Walkowitz’s “born-translated literature” as explored in Chapter 2. As Agboton explains to her (presumably) less-informed readers: “Ahora, en Benín conviven unas cuarenta etnias con lenguas, costumbres y tradiciones distintas. No nos es difícil, pues, aprender lenguas y aceptar hábitos que no sean los nuestros” (“Now, in Benin, some forty ethnicities with different languages, customs and traditions live together. It is not difficult for us, therefore, to learn languages and accept

---

<sup>1</sup> This is a proper noun in Gun and without translation.

<sup>2</sup> *Na mitón* can be translated directly to mean “our mother,” however the back cover of the book explains that it is how one refers in Gun to the goddess of fertility. The subtitle is in Castilian.

habits that are not our own Agboton 23). She describes herself as the product of this melting pot and its linguistic diversity:

Cuando era pequeña, yo hablaba en gun, la lengua de mi padre, pero también miná, porque tengo una abuela togolesa y el yoruba de mi madre. Si añadimos el francés y ahora el castellano y el catalán, además de un poco de inglés, no es extraño que no sepa por qué lengua decidirme. Pero no me cabe duda de que eso representa una riqueza muy valiosa; porque cada lengua no es sólo un instrumento para expresarse, sino también un modo más de ver las cosas.

When I was little, I spoke in Gun, my father's language, but also in Miná, because I have a Togolese grandmother, and in my mother's Yoruba. If we add French, and now Castilian and Catalan, as well as a little English, it is no wonder I that I don't know which language to choose. However, I have no doubt that this represents a valuable asset; because each language is not just an instrument of expression, but one more way of seeing things. (Agboton 23)

We can interpret Agboton's efforts to preserve her wealth of Beninese knowledge by translating it from Gun (also known as Gungbe) into Spanish as the impetus for *Beyond the Sea of Sand*. In this sense, translation is "medium and origin rather than afterthought" (Walkowitz 3-4); it drives and shapes her text.

Perhaps for that reason, previous analyses of *Beyond the Sea of Sand* have taken Agboton's years working as cultural mediator in Barcelona as an entry point for

interpreting this piece, homing-in on the interplay of languages throughout the text as an expression of hybridity. Much like Donato Ndongo-Bidyogo, who insists that literature is important for “winning over” or “conquering” the largest number of people to African causes,<sup>3</sup> Agboton describes the storytelling sessions she offers for children at local elementary schools and adults at other educational institutions as “un modo de conquistar, lentamente, su atención” (a mode of conquering, slowly, their attention”; Agboton 112). However, unlike Ndongo-Bidyogo she views this as a process in which intercultural bridges are built and she is able to establish a certain complicity with the audience, insisting: “Es como si se levantaran las barreras, aunque sólo sea un poco, y yo pudiera depositar una pizca de la lejana imaginación que fructificó en mí hace ya muchos años, en unos paisajes muy distintos a aquellas aulas” (It’s as if their barriers are raised, even just a little, and I can deposit a pinch of the distant imagination that bore fruit in me so many years ago, in landscapes very different from those classrooms” (Agboton 112–13). This perspective has led some scholars to focus on Agboton’s praise of her new home and declare that *Beyond the Sea of Sand* is intended to mollify a Spanish audience (García de Vinuesa, Vega Durán), while others, conversely, stress her strategic use of ambiguity to unsettle monolithic narratives about “European” or “African” culture (Borst, Gallego). However, they are all primarily concerned with her role as an intercultural agent. These studies have been fundamental for confirming M’Bare

---

<sup>3</sup> See my interview with Donato Ndongo-Bidyogo in Appendix A.

N’Gom’s early assertion that what can be described as “Hispanic African Literature”<sup>4</sup> can no longer be restricted to Equatorial Guinea, given that “there are new cultural constituents who come from non-Hispanic African countries but who write in Castilian” (N’gom, “Writing, Migration and Identity in African Hispanic Literature” 103; Borst 170). And indeed, this body of criticism has managed to secure Agboton’s status as “una de las voces femeninas afroespañolas más importantes” (“one of the most important female Afro-Spanish voices”; Borst 170), establishing her place within Spanish letters and in the Global Hispanophone.<sup>5</sup> Yet, insufficient attention has been paid to the angle Agboton herself chooses for her memoirs; that is, writing as a Black woman married to a White man and writing for her bi-racial children, all in predominantly White Spain. Engaging with Andrea O’Reilly’s notion of empowered mothering and bell hooks’s

---

<sup>4</sup> Hispanic African Literature is N’Gom’s label. For her part, Dorothy Odaty Wellington uses “literatura afrohispana” but has also come up with the neologism *trans-afrohispanismo* to describe the transcultural and transnational character of creative expression in Spanish produced by the African diaspora (Odaty-Wellington 2). Sabrina Brancato proposes Afro-Spanish for the corpus of texts produced by “Afrosporic authors in Europe” (Brancato 1 and 9-10). Martin Repinecz distinguishes between the “global Hispanophone” to refer to the contemporary Spanish-speaking world, “Hispanic” to refer to historical theories of Hispanism, and “Afro-Hispanic” for African or Afro-diasporic communities that speak Spanish (Repinecz 121).

<sup>5</sup> Adolfo Campoy-Cubillo and Benita Sampedro Vizcaya chart the institutionalization of the “Global Hispanophone” as an area of study within the US academy, consolidated by the Modern Language Association’s approval of an ongoing Global Hispanophone Forum. As Campoy-Cubillo and Sampedro Vizcaya suggest, the Global Hispanophone proposes a serious reconfiguration of the approach to Spanish-language studies and the prioritizing of territories or collectives previously treated as marginal (Campoy-Cubillo and Sampedro Vizcaya 4). One of the most exciting possibilities of this rubric (especially for the purposes of this study) is the further exploration of how the hegemonic and imperial imposition of Castilian has conversely served preserve a multitude of indigenous languages that now find a conduit for greater recognition through Spanish. We could argue that in the case of Agboton, her training in Spanish Philology and choice to write her autobiography in Spanish uses the language a political platform to disseminate important cultural artifacts in Gun.

Black feminism, I will demonstrate that, when read between the lines, as it were, *Beyond the Sea of Sand* offers a significant critique Spanish society and its attachment to a particular, consumer driven model.

## **4.2 Criticism**

In the final chapter of *Emigrant Dreams, Immigrant Borders*, Raquel Vega-Duran turns from cultural production concerning Spanish encounters with the “migrant other” to what she characterizes as the migrant’s interest in these same interactions (Vega-Durán 210). Contrasting Agboton’s memoirs with Donato Ndongo-Bidyogo’s *El Metro* and Francisco Zamora Lobo’s *El caimán de Kaduna*, Vega-Durán concludes that “*Más allá del mar de arena* offers a different take, “presenting Spain in a fundamentally positive light, focusing on basic similarities between the Beninese and Spanish identities, and suggesting that both identities can coexist in harmony” (Vega-Durán 216). While overlooking crucial differences between the two aforementioned novels and Agboton’s autobiographical nonfiction, this interpretation of the text does happen to coincide with that of Maya García de Vinuesa, who has conducted interviews with Agboton on several occasions. During these conversations, García de Vinuesa has tried to understand what Serrat Crespo describes as Agboton’s “stubborn struggle to sprinkle her work, self translated [sic] into Castilian and Catalan, with the music of her tonal mother tongue—

that Dahomeian Gun" (García de Vinuesa 210).<sup>6</sup> García de Vinuesa's interest in the creative process has yielded beautiful and, indeed, endearing reflections about Peninsular languages from Agboton: "The first time I listened to Catalan (not understanding a word of it, of course) was in Ivory Coast, on the veranda at Bingerville, listening to Manuel's [her husband's] conversation with his mother...Catalan felt then a very sweet and tender language...And it still feels so now" (García de Vinuesa 218). This description coincides with how Agboton portrays the same moment in *Beyond the Sea of Sand*. But, despite the obvious emotional ties she has created with Castilian and Catalan, Agboton's perspective on multilingualism should not be conflated with her view of Spain.

For García de Vinuesa, Agboton's avowed positivity is a direct result of the connection between self-translation and intercultural mediation, to the extent that "Agboton's poetry and narrative is a departure, not only from African women writers in Spain, but also from other African European woman writers," all because "Agboton's texts are far more conciliatory and optimistic" (García de Vinuesa 213). There is no denying that translation—and self-translation at that—is an act of intercultural mediation in and of itself. However, "conciliatory" is a strong claim. It ignores what it

---

<sup>6</sup> This is García de Vinuesa's translation into English of Serrat Crespo's Spanish from his introduction to her most recent volume of poetry: "Y es verdad que he sido un privilegiado testigo de su empeñada lucha por lograr que la musicalidad de sus lengua tonal, ese gun dahomeano, salpicara de extrañas flores el castellano o el catalán a los que se traducía" (Agboton, *Voz de las dos orillas* 9; García de Vinuesa 210).

means for Agboton to take on the mantle of being a Black woman writing in a White country and what that might require of her. By emphasizing Agboton's optimism, both Vega-Durán and García de Vinuesa fail to notice her strategic use of silences to mark subjects that are either too hard to broach—or that she perceives a Spanish audience may not be ready for. Agboton may not dwell on these topics, but she is always careful to indicate that there's more beneath the surface.

In contrast, Mar Gallego and Julia Borst have rightly highlighted the importance of ambivalence in Agboton's writing. Mar Gallego's assessment of *Beyond the Sea of Sand* focuses on Agboton's own emphasis on the importance of perspective. In the second chapter, "Bajo el signo del trueno" ("Under the Sign of Thunder"), Agboton addresses her parents' fraught relationship with the concession that, "No lo sé, esta historia, como todas las historias, depende de quién la cuenta, y las versiones son a veces contradictorias" ("I don't know, this story, like every story, depends on who tells it, and the different versions are sometimes contradictory"; Agboton 33; Gallego 40).<sup>7</sup> Here, Gallego points out that Agboton opts for a much more "flexible and pluralist vision of history," one that is rooted in "an African conception of not only what constitutes a 'story,' but the act of storytelling itself" (Gallego 72). This rootedness is fundamental to Gallego's reading of *Beyond the Sea of Sand*, which she interprets through the image of a

---

<sup>7</sup> Gallego cites this as page 40. I am using the 2018 republication by Verbum in the form of eBook and the pagination differs.

tree Agboton introduces in the chapter entitled, “El gran árbol” (“The Great Tree”). In discussing her struggles to establish herself in Barcelona, Agboton explains: “me gusta pensar que soy un gran árbol, con las raíces hundidas en la tierra roja de Hogbonu y las ramas levantándose hacia el cielo azul del Mediterráneo. Ya sé que os parecerá cursi; no es una letra de rap que os guste ni tampoco podríais hacer con ello una canción ska. Pero lo siento así” (“I like to think of myself as a big tree, with the roots buried in the red soil of Hogbonu and the branches reaching up to the blue Mediterranean sky. I know you will think it’s cheesy; it’s not the rap music that you like, nor could you make a ska song out of it. But I feel that way”; Agboton 81). For Gallego this image captures the essence of Agboton’s proclaimed *mestiza* identity. It crystallizes the internal conflict brought on by investing oneself in two—or more—homelands (Gallego 76–78). Julia Borst, however, takes issue with this trope. Following the logic of Deleuze and Guattari, she argues that a tree is not only a static metaphor, but one that impedes us from envisioning the inherent multiplicity of Agboton’s hybrid identity. For her, the simultaneity of *mestizaje* and the contradiction it encompasses is better captured by the notion of having a foot in both Spain and Benin, thus physically spanning the gap between two cultures.

In either case, the painful condition of dwelling in and on the border between two cultures, as Gloria Anzaldúa so famously describes in her seminal *Borderlands/La frontera* (1985), ultimately produces what Anzaldúa calls “a tolerance for ambiguity” (Anzaldúa 101). This resulting “mestiza consciousness” is insightful, enriching and, in short,

generative. In a world where borders also take the form of entrenched behavior, flexibility is survival: “*La mestiza* constantly has to shift out of habitual formation; from convergent thinking, analytical reasoning that tends to use rationality to move toward a single goal (a Western mode), to divergent thinking, characterized by movement away from set patterns and goals toward a more whole perspective, one that includes rather than excludes” (Anzaldúa 101). Given Agboton’s clear fascination with *mestizo/a* identity, it seems only natural that the testament to self-expression driving her memoirs would bring to bear a similar “mestiza consciousness.” However, what this ambivalent approach means for Agboton’s writing on a structural level remains unaddressed by critics. Furthermore, the fact that the entire book is framed as the discourse of a mother addressing her children has received little notice. If mestiza consciousness is characterized by continual creative motion, can what is, effectively, an extensive letter to Agboton’s two sons serve as a roadmap for the next generation? And if so, where does it lead us? Lastly, what does it tell us about Spain’s cities, both in the present and the future?

### **4.3 Storytelling as Mothering**

I would argue that, rather than detracting from the testimonial value of the text, an appreciation for *Beyond the Sea of Sand*’s matrifocal orientation is vital for understanding its intellectual and political contribution. For, as Dani McClain insists (albeit in the American context), “Black mothers haven’t had the luxury of sticking our

heads in the sand and hoping that our children learn about race and power as they go. Instead, we must act as a buffer and translator between them and the world, beginning from their earliest days” (McClain). This argument should realistically be extended to Black parents on the whole—regardless of gender—given that it animates not just works like Imani Perry’s *Breathe: A Letter to My Son’s* (2019) but also Ta-Nehisi Coates’s *Between the World and Me* (2015), a letter written to his 15-year-old son that describes how the Dream of White America is built on the backs, on the bodies, of individuals labeled as black. Within Spanish letters, we could point to Saïd El Kadoui’s *Cartes a meu fill* (*Letters to My Son*, 2011) and Najat El Hachmi’s *Jo també soc catalana* (*I am also Catalan*, 2004). Yet while all these epistolary autobiographies are motivated by a parental impulse to protect their children by informing and warning them about the pernicious effects of racism, Agboton takes a different approach.

Although she readily admits that, “cuando eres africana no resulta fácil ser una ciudadana más en una urbe europea,” (“when you’re an African woman it’s not easy to be just one more citizen in a European metropolis”; Agboton 17), when it comes to her sons’ situation, she promotes a more positive perspective—and perhaps obliviously so. As she muses in the opening paragraphs:

A veces pienso que vosotros dos, los hijos que he tenido con mi marido, un hombre blanco, sois mi aportación a un nuevo mundo, a un mundo necesario, a un mundo imprescindible para frenar esa locura que parece sumergirnos. Somos

una familia, un grupo mestizo. En todos los aspectos que el mestizaje puede adoptar. Y estoy orgullosa de ello. Creo que el color de vuestra piel es el signo, casi una metáfora, del mundo por el que luchamos, por el que hemos luchado vuestro padre y yo.

Sometimes I think that you two, the sons I have had with my husband, a white man, are my contribution to a new world, a world that is necessary, a world that is indispensable for putting the brakes on this insanity into which we seem to be sinking. I think the color of your skin is the sign, almost a metaphor, of the world we are fighting for, for the one we fought for, your father and I. (19)

Agboton's notions of cultural mestizaje may be reminiscent of Gloria Anzaldúa's new mestiza consciousness as theorized in her celebrated *Borderlands/La frontera* (and discussed in the previous chapter), but we should be cautious of the anti-Black racism undergirding the latter. Anzaldúa was clearly taken with José Vasconcelos's idea of *una raza cósmica* that she describes as "una raza mestiza, una mezcla de razas afines, una raza de color—la primera raza síntesis del globo" (Anzaldúa 99). However, her defense of Vasconcelos's concept as "opposite to the theory of the pure Aryan" is unfortunately erroneous. Vasconcelos famously tried to repurpose colonial notions of *mestizaje* with his 1925, *La raza cósmica*. Yet, he simultaneously bought into the notion of separate and distinct races to formulate the idea of a future "fifth universal race" — "una quinta raza universal" — that would emerge out of the Americas and become the future of humanity

(Vasconcelos 4). He claimed that this race would improve upon and eventually dissolve Mexico's African heritage. Which begs the question: what kind of futurity does Agboton envision as the potential of her Afro-Spanish *mestizaje*? Writers like Coates insist that "race is the child of racism, not the father" (Coates Chapter 7). What exactly would Agboton say in response?

In direct contrast to the *exiliados del neoliberalismo* mentioned earlier, Agboton describes the circumstances that brought her to Spain as follows: "Para mí, Barcelona fue una ciudad a la que llegué enamorada y con un hijo en el vientre, tú, Didac. Ya hacía tiempo que vivía con vuestro padre, y desde entonces, desde mi llegada, he ido creciendo, he ido cambiando" (For me, Barcelona was a city that I arrived to in love and with a child in my belly, you, Didac. I had already lived with your father for a quite a while, and since then, since my arrival, I've grown, I've changed"; Agboton 18). As we will see, Agboton not only suggests that her experience as a mother conditions her interaction with Spanish culture, but also that mothering represents a form of integration that does not necessitate participation in a corrupt, capital-driven system that she, and all migrants, come up against in their new urban environs.

The term "empowered mothering," as coined by Andrea O'Reilly, emerges from a long debate in feminist studies about maternity and maternal practice. On one hand, Shulamith Firestone's *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution* (1970) galvanized the second-wave feminist perspective that the reproductive burdens of

childbearing and childrearing are central to the patriarchal subjugation of women. On the other, Adrienne Rich's 1976 *Of Woman Born* confirmed that while motherhood might be a powerful ideological tool of the patriarchy, mothering as lived connection with one's children could be exhilarating, even empowering. As O'Reilly explains: "Rich's distinction between mothering and motherhood was what enabled feminists to realize that motherhood was not naturally, necessarily, or inevitably oppressive, which is a view held by some second-wave feminists. Rather, if freed from the institutional shackles of motherhood, mothering could be experienced as a site of empowerment and social change" (O'Reilly, "Maternal Theory: Patriarchal Motherhood and Empowered Mothering" 19). As O'Reilly notes, in differentiating motherhood from mothering, Rich paved the way for what can now be called Maternal Studies. However, she did not delineate what this "mothering" meant in practice.

O'Reilly has dedicated much of her career to developing the theoretical framework for a "matricentric feminism" — a feminism for mothers. Rich's now-famous concept of "mothering" and Sara Ruddick's definition of "mother" as one who engages in maternal practice, or "motherwork," lie at the heart of this theory (O'Reilly, "Matricentric Feminism: A Feminism for Mothers" 51). Central to a reading of Agboton that accounts for her engagement with empowered mothering is the fact that "Ruddick's concept of maternal practice and thinking — divested of biology, nature, instinct, and sentiment — foregrounds what all mothers know: motherwork is inherently an

intellectual activity” (O’Reilly, “Maternal Theory: Patriarchal Motherhood and Empowered Mothering” 21). Far from the assumption that maternity somehow comes naturally to women, Ruddick asserts that a mother is someone—anyone—who puts the necessary thought into the active love, nurture and training of children. Turning our attention back to *Beyond the Sea of Sand*, it can be said that the entire memoir itself is an act of mothering, an intellectual expression of Agboton’s lifelong investment in rearing her children.

Furthermore, Agboton espouses two other tenets of empowered mothering and matricentric feminism in her writing. The first is the matrifocal nature of her writing and the second is a subtle but forceful eschewing of a neoliberal conception of motherhood. Borrowing from Elaine Showalter’s term “gynocentric,” O’Reilly draws heavily on the idea of a “matrifocal narrative” as developed by Marianne Hirsch, Brenda O. Daly and Maureen T. Reddy to envision a matricentric feminism. Told from a mother’s perspective and attending specifically to what motherwork meant for her transition from Bingerville to Barcelona, Agboton’s narrative epitomizes a text in which mothering is structurally central. As Inmaculada Díaz Narbona astutely points out in her introduction to *Beyond the Sea of Sand*, Agboton manages to translate the lively oral traditions from the Gulf of Guinea—or what she calls “the ritual of orality”— onto the

written page.<sup>8</sup> A key facet of this ritual is the interaction with one's audience; in this case, the frequent use of the second person, as if she is engaging her sons in conversation. Much like the West African griots, or bards, who played an edifying role in their communities, Agboton sets out to inform Axel and Didac of their origins through a lengthy genealogical tale. It seems important to recognize that from the very first line, "Hijos míos, os lo diré como cuando erais pequeños, como me lo decían a mí hace ya mucho, mucho tiempo..." (My sons, I will tell it you like when you were young, like they told it to me a long, long time ago now...), Agboton's memoirs emanate from her role as a mother, and the act of narration itself constitutes a maternal practice. In her first chapter, Agboton gives a folkloric account of Benin's origins; a story of how the landless sons of a princess and a leopard (Los hijos del leopardo or *agasuvi*), set off in search of somewhere to call home. A brief aside interrupts the narrative to remind us: "Hay muchas leyendas africanas que comienzan así, con un éxodo, pero también las europeas están llenas de pueblos que buscan un lugar para vivir. También en eso las leyendas se hermanan" ("There are many African legends that begin this way, with an exodus, but European legends are also full of people in search of a place to live. In this

---

<sup>8</sup> Inmaculada Díaz Narbona says "Como no podía ser de otra manera, Agnès Agboton emprende el hecho de contarse en este libro de memorias, siguiendo el ritual de la oralidad: en primer lugar se dirige a su público (sus hijos), les muestra la utilidad de lo que les contará (parte de sus orígenes) e inicia su relato, el relato de su vida por donde lo hacen los *griot*, por la genealogía" ("Since it couldn't be any other way, Agnès Agboton takes on the act of narration in these memories, following the ritual of orality: in the first place she addresses her public directly (her sons), she shows them the utility of what she will tell them (it's part of her origins) and she starts her story, the story of her life as the griots do, with a genealogy"; Díaz Narbona 11).

aspect the legends are related"; Agboton 15). From there, she goes on to describe how the sons of the leopard chanced upon the kingdom of Dan and took advantage of his African hospitality to establish themselves. They eventually engaged in a bloody battle with the monarch, took over his lands and built their house over his cadaver. The famous Kingdom of Dahomey, that resisted French colonial rule until 1904, got its name from this violent act: "*Dan-homè huégbé*, 'la casa sobre el vientre de Dan'" ("the house on top of Dan's stomach"; 17). As Agboton astutely observes, colonization at least served to preserve this name (and therefore origin story) in the Western archive.<sup>9</sup> This gruesome story is presented in a matter-of-fact tone. Compared to the type of children's entertainment prevalent in the occidental world, it seems particularly brutal—and could therefore be misinterpreted as confirming stereotypes of African barbarism. However, Agboton strategically introduces an important parallelism, presenting the foundational tales of Africa and Europe on the same symbolic level. She thus insinuates that one version of history is no more or less accurate than the other (Gallego 72). In doing so, she makes clear that human mobility, conflict—and even conquest—have shaped both civilizations, and, furthermore, that they will continue to shape their futures.

By jumping from this particular story to her discussion of the "hombres de las pateras" and their attempts to reach the "mítica Europa" (Agboton 18), Agboton normalizes the

---

<sup>9</sup> "Y mi país se convirtió en una colonia llamada Dahomey: el vientre de un rey había entrado en los atlas de geografía" ("And my country became a colony called Dahomey: the stomach of a king managed to make it onto the geographical atlases"; Agboton 17).

movement of people from one place to another while making it patently clear that contemporary mythology revolving around an idyllic Europe is, perhaps, the greatest fiction of all. This initial pairing of topics establishes an important pattern for interpreting the rest of the text. In weaving together what could be seen as distinct thematic threads, Agboton positions the reader to consider their connection—without addressing it directly herself. In this case, we are set up to question what role the enslavement of millions of Africans over the centuries (and even earlier than the establishment of the Atlantic slave trade, as we will see below) played in the development of major European metropolises like Barcelona, and what the history has to do with today's mass migration from Global South to North.

Despite the more comfortable circumstances of her arrival in Spain, Agboton's writing reflects an acute awareness of how the historical construction of Europe in opposition to Africa continues to be felt on the ground in Barcelona. As if echoing Sara Ahmed's assessment from the previous chapter that "the colonial project was not *external* to the constitution of European identity: rather, the identity of these nations became predicated on their relationship to the colonized others" (Ahmed, *Strange Encounters* 10), she points out how the city has been formed around these constructs. Reflecting on her first reactions to her new home, she writes:

Han pasado muchos años pero todavía sigue viva en mí la impresión que me produjo la ciudad, los primeros meses que viví allí: faltaban, sobre todo, los

colores. Estaban todos aquellos edificios tan altos y muchas estatuas que me gustaban, y escaleras y más escaleras...Y todos aquellos blancos que, a veces, me vendían una bolsa de patatas o me hacían de chófer cuando tomaba un taxi o me servían en un restaurante. Pero faltaban colores. Barcelona era una ciudad en blanco y negro.

Many years have passed, but the impression that city provoked in me the first months that I lived there is still vivid: it was missing, above all, colors. There were all those tall buildings and the many statues that I liked, and stairs and more stairs...And all those white people that, sometimes, sold me a bag of potatoes or were my chauffer when I took a taxi or served me in a restaurant. But it lacked color. Barcelona was a city in black and white. (Agboton 71)

Here, the lack of color here symbolizes the inhospitable nature of the Western model of urban development and the structural racism inherent to its success. Gesturing toward the complexities of inhabiting majority-White spaces as a Black, African woman, Agboton shows us that even when the power dynamic is flipped; when she has the purchasing power or is the customer riding a taxi, barriers to integration still exist—especially for those wishing to find make a more meaningful connection to the local community rather than merely participate in the consumer driven transactions.

In the chapter “Una cuestión de equilibrio” (“A Question of Balance”) she reveals how the resulting lack of interpersonal connections has frayed Spain’s social fabric. Even

while discussing the intellectual community that she and Manuel have formed throughout the years, Agboton circles back to the isolation she has felt in the Spanish city.<sup>10</sup> She remarks with dismay: “En Barcelona podías vivir en un bloque de pisos donde había doce o catorce familias vecinas, y mantenerte aislado de todas ellas, sin saber si estaban contentos o tristes, si tenían algún problema o alguna alegría, sin más contacto que el ‘¡buenos días!’” (“In Barcelona you could live in an apartment block with twelve or fourteen neighboring families without knowing if they were happy or sad, if they had a problem or source of joy, without any more contact than ‘good morning!’”; Agboton 88). For more than a page she laments the missed opportunities for impromptu interaction, whether it be sharing a recently cooked meal or simple daily tasks like hanging the laundry. Although she’s learned that privacy is practically sacred in the West, she admits that “todavía hoy sigue sorprendiéndome lo poco que la gente necesita compartir, su voluntad de estar sola pese a que luego se queje de su soledad” (“even today I continue to be surprised by how little people need to share, their choice to be alone despite that they’ll later complain about their loneliness”; Agboton 88). This depiction of Spanish urban life is far from rosy. Therefore, we can speak of Agboton’s “positivity” and “optimism” about Spanish culture only if we accept the premise that

---

<sup>10</sup> Agboton reveals to her sons: “Pese a todo lo que os he dicho sobre el ajetreo de gente que había en casa, he de reconocer que echaba en falta el contacto, tan fácil y directo, que estaba acostumbrada a mantener en África” (“Despite everything I’ve told you about all the comings and goings of people that we had at home, I have to recognize that I missed the type of contact, so easy and direct, to which I was accustomed to maintaining in Africa”; Agboton 88).

these critiques are motivated by the desire to shape a better tomorrow for her adopted country. For Agboton this means an ability to form affective bonds with those around her: “Hace casi treinta años que vivo en Barcelona; me recibió una familia catalana, la de vuestros abuelos paternos, que me permitió introducirme enseguida en la intimidad de la vida ciudadana” (“I have lived in Barcelona for almost thirty years now; I was received by a Catalan family, that of your paternal grandparents, which allowed me to enter straight into the intimacy of civic life”; 82). Here, “la vida ciudadana” does not have to do with one’s legal status. Instead, it’s about engagement with the place she lives and its other inhabitants.

Unlike the many Equatorial Guinean authors who write from exile in Spain, or the many Moroccan authors who choose Castilian and Catalan as their languages of literary expression on the either side of the Strait of Gibraltar, Agboton grew up between two countries where French is the colonially imposed official language. She admits that, given this linguistic connection, both for her and her compatriots in Benin and later in Côte d’Ivoire, “de un modo algo ingenuo, debido sin duda a la antigua colonización, Europa era París,” (“in a somewhat naïve way, due undoubtedly to former colonization, Europe was Paris”; 71). She describes how, as a young woman, the dream was to make it to Paris, “ciudad a la que, en gun, llamamos Yovotomé, ‘el país de los blancos” (“a city that, in Gun, we called Yovotomé, “the country of white people”; 71). Thinking back to her earliest days in Barcelona she realizes that, as an epicenter of whiteness, it was one

and the same, concluding: “vivía en Yovotomé, para bien y para mal” (“I lived in Yovotomé, for better or for worse”; 71). She cleverly draws a parallel with France to illustrate how Spain’s colonial past has shaped its present. In *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition*, Cedric Robinson explores how as early as the thirteenth century the Mediterranean slave trade served as a model for Atlantic colonial slavery, with the vital difference that slaves, European, Asian and African, were primarily employed in domestic service rather than agrarian production. For this reason, slave women were preferred and “were to be found in the households of wealthy and ‘even relatively modest Catalan and Italian families’” (Hay 76; Robinson 15). Therefore, while Barcelona’s development may more famously have depended on slavery in terms of the investment of surplus from the Spanish colonies, the labor of enslaved women in particular, nurtured the growth of a merchant class from the medieval period on. Agboton is well aware of the ugly history that unites her place of origin and her new home and even comments: “A veces me resulta gracioso pensar que vivo en Barcelona y que nací en la Costa de los Esclavos. Ahora sé que algunas de las grandes fortunas de Barcelona se consiguieron gracias al tráfico de esclavos y se puede decir que soy amiga de algunos descendientes de aquellas familias” (“Sometimes I find it funny to think that I live in Barcelona and that I was born on the Slave Coast. Now I know that some of the great fortunes of Barcelona were made thanks to the slave trade and one could say that I’m a friend of some of the descendants of those families”; Agboton 21). We have to

assume that this observation is ironic. After all, there is nothing funny about the long and damaging legacy of the Atlantic slave trade. Nor is Agboton the first West African writer to call attention to how the opulence of certain Spanish cities reeks of dirty money, wealth acquired via the exploitation of enslaved labor.<sup>11</sup> But this almost sardonic commentary seems to insinuate that her presence in Barcelona is a triumph: an affront to the exploitative, racist, sexist system upon which this cosmopolitan center was built. In this light, Agboton's determination to make literary and literal space for herself in a city that was built for White men, on the backs of generations of Africans is a radical move in and of itself.<sup>12</sup>

It is Agboton's feminist Africanity that allows her to think beyond the limitations of the European conception of "the good life." While she may reject the nativist, Eurocentric projection of the migrant subject as a perpetual other, she embraces her own "otherness" as a means of challenging this construction from within. Rather than go on a diatribe about the constant equation of Blackness with foreignness in Spain, Agboton

---

<sup>11</sup> As Equatorial Guinean author Francisco Zamora Lobo describes in *Cómo ser negro y no morir en Aravaca*, how Madrid too, was built on the wealth acquired during colonization and the slave trade: "no es nada raro que más que un banco de los que hoy sacan pecho Castellana arriba, huela a negro de Guinea" ("it is nothing strange that of the many banks today that strut their stuff up the Castellana, more than one smells of black Guinean"; Zamora Lobo 20). Here, he is referring to Madrid's most prominent boulevard, *Paseo de la Castellana*, which is home to many of the country's most important financial institutions.

<sup>12</sup> See Deborah Parsons's *Streetwalking the Metropolis: Women, the City and Modernity* for how modern cities were "constructed by and around masculine culture" (Parsons 15). Today's Barcelona, like Madrid, bears remnants of earlier eras but is a largely 19<sup>th</sup> century city. These cities of capitalist modernity were built for men's participation in the public sphere and women's relegation to the private. The male urban wanderer is epitomized by Walter Benjamin's *flâneur*. However, Parsons argues, nineteenth and early-twentieth century women writers claimed a space for themselves as well: "their urban narratives are based in these locations, on the pavement of the city rather than floating detachedly above" (Parsons 14–15).

quips that: “A veces, cuando alguien me pregunta qué estoy haciendo en España, me gusta tomarle un poco el pelo, mostrarme irónica si queréis, y, recordando todos los “estudios críticos” sobre culturas tradicionales africanas que se han publicado en Europa, le respondo que estoy haciendo una investigación antropológica, un trabajo de campo sobre los blancos” (“Sometimes, when someone asks me what I’m doing in Spain, I like to mess with them a little, be ironic if you will, and, remembering all the “critical studies” about traditional African cultures that have been published in Europe, I respond that I’m doing anthropological research, a field study about white people”; Agboton 81). In this passage, she not only refutes the argument of insurmountable difference between cultures that feeds what thinkers like Etienne Balibar call “neo-racism” (Balibar 21–22), but she inverts it. According to Agboton, the story behind her name “a la africana,” “se trata de una historia sin escritura, que no tiene pretensiones de exactitud ni de objetividad como en Occidente” (is an unwritten history, that has no pretensions of exactitude or objectivity like in the West”; Agboton 26). Likewise, by turning a feigned anthropologist’s objective gaze on her (presumably) White interlocuter, Agboton lays bare the fallacy that her skin color might somehow be indicative of her nationality — and therefore, be brought to bear on whether she “belongs” in Spain or not.

Her ability to toy with perspective gives Agboton particular insight into the nature of Spanish society. As a perpetual outsider writing from within, her critiques are

acerbic if read for their nuance. This is particularly true when she assesses Spain's urban landscape:

¿Qué diría un observador que, sin conocer bien Barcelona o la cultura occidental en general, viera como un hijo lleva a su padre a una residencia de la "tercera edad" porque no puede ocuparse de él, y luego, saca a pasear dos o tres veces al día el perro que tiene en casa, y recoge además la mierda que éste va dejando por las esquinas...? Seguro que sacaría un artículo muy jugoso, sobre todo si tuviera fotos, pero está claro que no se ajustaría a la realidad.

What would an observer say who, without knowing Barcelona well or Western culture in general, saw how a son takes his father to a nursing home because he can't take care of him, and then, takes his dog for a walk two or three times a day, and even picks up the shit it leaves on the curb...? I'm sure they would publish a pretty juicy article, above all if it had photos, but it's clear that it wouldn't match with the reality. (Agboton 83)

Agboton not only suggests an ethnographic study of Spanish social norms as a mere thought experiment but actually follows through with it. Her use of anthropological pretense is important because, as Balibar explains, the particular manifestation of racism that emerged out of the era of decolonization is a "racism without races" or a "differentialist racism" that repurposed valuable developments in anthropology to construct an argument about insurmountable cultural difference that would prevent

diverse peoples from the Global South from truly integrating in Europe.<sup>13</sup> Showing how grand constructions like “culture” cannot be understood at a glance, Agboton slyly attacks the perversity of a value system in which individuality is prized. Rather than be revered as the most knowledgeable community members, elders are sent away from their families so that the younger generation can be “free” to invest in themselves, their work and financial gain. While Agboton is cognizant of the fact that the logic behind this type of decision stems from a different definition of care than one might find in Benin, her anecdote nonetheless casts a shadow of doubt over the European model.

A constant give-and-take is fundamental to Agboton’s own definition of integration. She excoriates words like “tolerance” and “integration,” as they are often employed under the presumption of political correctness. Above all, she finds “tolerance” particularly noxious because “el verbo ‘tolerar’ incluye un saborcillo de algo no deseado, de algo desagradable que debe soportarse con resignación” (“the verb ‘tolerate’ includes an aftertaste of something undesirable, something unpleasant that one has to bear with resignation”; Agboton 74). Moreover, as she notes, this establishes a hierarchy in which the one being “tolerant” is superior to the person that is “tolerated.”<sup>14</sup>

---

<sup>13</sup> According to Balibar, advances in anthropology that validated the importance of preserving diverse cultures for the progression of human thought were mutated instead into an argument for the “harmfulness of abolishing frontiers” that sustained “differentialist racism” (Balibar 21–22).

<sup>14</sup> “Ser tolerantes, para mí, significa soportar la presencia del otro, sus costumbres o sus ideas, aunque no nos gusten, dando así pruebas de nuestra generosidad, de nuestra paciencia. Eso supone, a mi entender, que el “tolerante” se sitúa en una posición de superioridad en relación con el “tolerado”. Es como si le dijera: “Eres feo, eres distinto o estás equivocado, pero yo soy tan bueno que, a pesar de ello, te acepto” (“To be tolerant, for me, means putting up with the presence of the other, their habits or ideas, even if we don’t like them,

These words clearly bear personal significance for Agboton because she sums up her critique with the statement: “la verdad es que no me gustaría que nadie me ‘tolerase’ u os ‘tolerase’ como algo inevitable y a la fuerza” (“the truth is that I wouldn’t like anyone to ‘tolerate’ me or ‘tolerate’ you [two] as something inevitable and [imposed on them] against their will”; Agboton 74). Following this logic, true integration is based on a voluntary exchange between parties. Agboton claims: “Estoy integrada porque recibo y porque doy; porque acepto y, muchas veces, comparto los valores que prevalecen en la sociedad donde vivo” (“I am integrated because I receive and because I give, because I accept and, often, I share the values that prevail in the society I live in”; Agboton 75–76). But as she makes clear, this also depends on there being interest in what she brings to the table: “pero estoy integrada, también, porque mis propios valores, los de mi cultura de nacimiento, pueden ser aceptados y compartidos, pueden ser conocidos, al menos, por la gente a la que amo y por la sociedad en la que vivo. De no ser así, no sería “integración” sino “asimilación”. Y no es lo mismo, no es lo mismo...” (“But I am integrated, also, because my own values, those of the culture of my birth, can be accepted and shared, they can be recognized, at least, by the people I love in the society where I live. Otherwise, it wouldn’t be ‘integration’ but rather ‘assimilation.’ And it’s

---

thus giving proof of our generosity, our patience. This entails, to my understanding, that the “tolerant” is situated in a position of superiority in relation to the “tolerated.” It’s as if they said: ‘You are ugly, you are different or you’re wrong, but I am so good that, despite all of that, I accept you’”; Agboton 74)

not the same, it's not the same..."; Agboton 76). Integration in these terms is vastly different from the one-sided or unidirectional assimilation: it is a bilateral process and a collective effort on the part of everyone involved.

Her civically minded understanding of citizenship is evident from the moment Agboton sets foot in Barcelona. Recalling her minimal exposure to Spanish in elementary school, she confesses that prior to her first visit "De Barcelona, de España, yo sabía muy poco. Había estudiado castellano como segunda lengua, y como ejercicio de clase había traducido los textos que incluía el libro que utilizábamos, *Pueblo 1* se llamaba. Había uno que empezaba así: 'La plaza de Cataluña, sin público, parece más grande. Y en la fachada blanca del Banco Español de Crédito...'" (Of Barcelona, of Spain, I knew little. I had studied Castilian as a second language, and as an in-class exercise had translated the [excerpts of] texts that were included in the book we used, *Pueblo 1* it was called. There was one [excerpt] that started like this: 'The Plaza de Cataluña, without people, seems much bigger. And on the white façade of the Banco Español de Crédito..."; Agboton 68–69). After these lines, written as if recited from memory, Agboton switches topics, to the memory of meeting their author, Luis Romero. Her "recitation" of *La noria* brings to mind a vision of the monumental city, the architectural essence that captures both its charm and coldness. But this reference to Romero's 1951 social realist smash hit also alludes to the intense poverty and rampant inequality that plagued postwar Barcelona. Romero sought to create a portrait of the different "layers"

of society.<sup>15</sup> Likewise, Agboton makes it clear that what she encountered in real life had nothing to do with this textbook image: “También recuerdo que, aquel mes de septiembre, Manuel nos llevó a una inmensa manifestación... Ese día, tres jóvenes africanos gritamos aquello de “Libertad, amnistía y estatuto de autonomía” sin tener la menor idea de lo que aquellas palabras significaban realmente” (“I also remember that, that month of September, Manuel took us to an immense demonstration... That day, three young Africans screamed the phrase, “Liberty, Amnesty and Statute of Autonomy,” without the slightest idea what those words really meant”; Agboton 68). At 17 years old, Agboton’s father gave his legal authorization so that she could travel with Manuel to Barcelona on vacation—as long as she was also accompanied by family friends. This 1977 trip coincided with Spain’s constitutional proceedings following the death of the dictator, Francisco Franco, in 1975. Thus, vis-à-vis her husband-to-be, Agboton was immediately catapulted into grass-roots political involvement: in this case protesting for Cataluña’s right to self-government.

To this end, Agboton offers another metaphor for her existence in Barcelona, one that has yet to receive critical attention. She reflects back on her adjustment to a European environment, likening it to a construction project: “La base seguía siendo

---

<sup>15</sup> Although *La noria* won the Premio Nadal the year of its publication, Luis Romero was gradually ostracized from the creative scene in Barcelona for his Francoist leanings. As David García Mateu reports, the novel was only recently republished by Comanegra in 2016. Comanegra also sponsored a spin-off of *La noria* entitled *Gira Barcelona* to be published in time for the Setmana del Llibre en Català, featuring stories by 12 contemporary Catalan authors—including Najat El Hachmi (García Mateu).

beninesa, pero sostenía el edificio que poco a poco, casi sin darme cuenta, iba yo construyendo” (“The foundation remained Beninese, but it supported the building that, little by little, almost without realizing, I was in the process of construction”; Agboton 87). Having made the permanent move to Barcelona in 1978, just as the country transitioned out of nearly forty years of isolation and economic stagnation under dictatorship, Agboton’s own personal development mirrors Spain’s period of rapid expansion. But unlike the “boom del ladrillo,”<sup>16</sup> that was built on an unstable credit base, the cityscape that Agboton envisions rests on the solid scaffolding of her African traditions and an appreciation for the common good.

Writing from the context of the 1970s United States, bell hooks addresses how the ongoing and systemic devaluation of Black womanhood determined the dynamics of interracial marriage after Jim Crow. As hooks explains in the second chapter of her breakout *Ain’t I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism*, “White Americans have legally relinquished the apartheid structure that once characterized race relations but they have not given up white rule. Given that power in capitalist patriarchal America is in the hands of white men, the present obvious threat to white solidarity is inter-marriage between white men and non-white women” (hooks 63–64). According to hooks, Black

---

<sup>16</sup> See, for example, newspaper articles like Sandra López Letón’s “La burbuja que embriagó a España.” *El País*, 25 Oct. 2015. Or the photographic collection of the haunting ruins of this construction boom (“ladrillo,” or brick, is shorthand for construction) as shot by Markel Redondo and prepared by Fernando Goitia for *XL Semanal*: Goitia, Fernando. “Boom de la construcción en España: miles de viviendas abandonadas.” *XL Semanal*, 24 Apr. 2018.

men started marrying White women in ever-growing numbers, but these same men often judged Black women “who exercise the same freedom of choice” (hooks 69).

Within this schema, White women are cast as victims of anti-feminist sentiment and the White men are the true oppressors. But, as hooks points out, this first of all elides a long history in which White women “have shown themselves to be as capable of being racist oppressors as white men” (hooks 70). Exploring this in terms of patriarchal sexual politics, hooks concludes that:

Since white women represent a powerless group when not allied with powerful white men, their marriage to black men is no great threat to existing white patriarchal rule. In our patriarchal society if a wealthy white woman marries a black man she legally adopts his status. Accordingly a black woman who marries a white man adopts his status; she takes his name and their children are his heirs. Consequently, if a large majority of that small group of white men who dominate decision-making bodies in American society were to marry black women, the foundation of white rule would be threatened. (hooks 64)

Although the cultural context of contemporary Europe is vastly different, it’s hard not to wonder if Agboton is suggesting that her own interracial marriage represents a similar threat. Under the auspices of colonialism, relationships between Black women and White men were caught up in the entanglements of sex, power and exploitation whereas today, the legal union of Agboton and Serrat Crespo represents a challenge to that same

legacy. She never making reference to their (nearly 20-year) age difference, yet Agboton does describe her and Manuel's relationship as "antipodal" (Agboton 64). She promotes the idea that the amalgam of these two opposing worldviews has paved the way for an entirely new generation of European citizens, a generation of "meztizos."

#### **4.4 Mestizaje and Beyond**

One of O'Reilly's principal contributions to the field of maternal scholarship has been to highlight how institutional motherhood—as a cultural construct—has always stemmed from the presiding economic model. From the "Cult of True Womanhood" that produced the nineteenth century "Angel in the House" model (*Ángel del Hogar* in Spanish), to the 1950s housewife and the more recent "helicopter mom," the pressures on women to perform a certain role as mother have been determined by capitalist patriarchy.<sup>17</sup> In particular, O'Reilly focuses on the notions of sacrificial motherhood that emerged in the second half of the twentieth century, as women were forced to first give up their wartime employment and then elbow their way back into the workforce during the following decades. The difference between the postwar period and today is that the stay-at-home-mom was more of a custodial approach in which childrearing was one of many household demands, whereas the recent privatization and government deregulation of social services like education, healthcare, recreation, etc. "downloaded"

---

<sup>17</sup> For more on this paradigm in the novels of Benito Pérez Galdós see Bridget Aldaraca's *El Ángel del Hogar: Galdós and the Ideology of Domesticity in Spain*. Gabrielle Miller has addressed the uneven transition from "Ángel del Hogar" to "Nueva Mujer Moderna" under the Second Spanish Republic in her reading of empowered mothering in Mercè Rodereda's *La plaza del diamante* (Miller 868).

those responsibilities to mothers (O'Reilly, "Maternal Theory: Patriarchal Motherhood and Empowered Mothering" 24). While normative discourses about motherhood have always banked on gender essentialism and the false biological assumption that women are somehow natural caregivers, this neoliberal iteration insists that "good mothers" spend quality time with their children—that they practice "intensive mothering," as O'Reilly calls it—all while balancing full-time employment.

Agboton does not shy away from remarking on the difficulties that mothering at such a young age—and in a foreign country—imposed. She exclaims about the financial burden,<sup>18</sup> the stress of trying to obtain permanent residence,<sup>19</sup> or running home between classes to nurse as she tried to finish her degree in Spanish Literature. At the same time, she expresses the satisfaction gleaned from the maternal bonds formed with her children. Furthermore, at a distance from the maternal figures she refers to as *maestras* [teachers], she reminisces about having fearlessly formed her own methods of care regardless of whether "esos conocimientos adquiridos resultaban exóticos y extraños en la sociedad donde ahora vivía" ("this acquired knowledge seemed exotic and strange in

---

<sup>18</sup> De hecho, las únicas preocupaciones que teníamos eran de tipo económico. ¡Cómo nos costaba llegar a fin de mes!" ("In fact, the only worries we had were of the economic sort. It was so difficult to make it to the end of the month!; Agboton 79).

<sup>19</sup> "El asunto del permiso de residencia era también un dolor de cabeza, y cuando se acercaba el momento de renovarlo, sólo con pensar en las inmensas colas que se formaban en la Jefatura de Policía de Via Laietana y, más tarde, en la comisaría de la Plaza España, se me revolvían las tripas. Eran días muy penosos, para mí y para mis compañeros de infortunio" ("The issue of attaining permanent residence was also a headache, and when the time neared to renew my permit, just thinking about the immense lines that formed outside police headquarters on Via Laietana and, later, at the station in the Plaza de España, made my stomach turn"; Agboton 79).

the society where I now lived"; Agboton 93).<sup>20</sup> These included singing lullabies in Gun to foster contact with the language and, most prominently, strapping the boys to her back so that she could go about her own work:

Yo era muy joven, es cierto, y estaba en un país que me resultaba extraño, pero vosotros erais mestizos; África corría también por vuestras venas, y digámoslo todo, resulta mucho más cómodo y mucho más cálido, también en Europa, ocuparse de las cosas de casa, ir de un lado a otro con tu hijo bien pegado a tu piel, en vez de tenerlo siempre agarrado a tus faldas o dejarlo aparcado, en un rincón de la casa, en uno de esos 'parques' para niños.

I was young, it's true, and I was in a country that was unfamiliar, but you two were mestizos; África coursed through your veins too, and to be frank, it's so much more comfortable and warm-hearted—in Europe as well—to do things around that house or move around with your child firmly glued to your skin, instead of always clinging to your skirts or left parked in a corner of the house, in one those "play pens." (Agboton 93)

This particular practice, she insists, was not only freeing, but it helped her form a special bond with her sons. While she seems to feel it was an especially appropriate way of

---

<sup>20</sup> "Os he llevado a ambos atados a la espalda, pegados a mi piel, como lo hacemos las madres en África, aunque eso, en una Barcelona que no era la ciudad de inmigración que es hoy, despertara cierta sorpresa cuando los amigos venían a visitarnos a casa" ("I carried you both strapped to my back, adhered to my skin, like we mothers do in Africa, even though, in Barcelona, which was not yet the city of immigration that it is today, that caused certain surprise when friends came to visit us at home"; 93).

caring for Axel and Didac, given their African heritage, it is also cast as more pragmatic than the “intensive mothering” expected of her and other Catalan women at the time. From the working definition of *mestizaje* that Agboton develops we can ascertain that she envisions Barcelona as the site of this amalgamation, precisely because it is the site of her mothering efforts. As she remarks to Axel; “Eres un hijo de esta ciudad y se te nota” (“You are a child of this city and it shows”; Agboton 64). Her sons are without a doubt *barceloneses*. Their claims to belonging in Barcelona are the product of Agboton’s own integration—her give and take with her adopted hometown. As she affirms in the conclusion of “Barcelona en blanco y negro”: “Lo que sí sé es que he aprendido a amar Barcelona. Ahora es mi ciudad, sí, la siento así” (“What have learned is to love Barcelona. Now it’s my city, yes, that’s how I feel about it”; Agboton 72). This comment follows one of her few references the overt racism she has suffered throughout the years, the suggestion that she “return to her country.” Clearly, her means of overcoming these racist aggressions has been to raise and foster the next generation, making a place for Africanity in the Spanish city. Writing as a mother also means that she writes herself into Barcelona’s urban landscape. Despite the fact that the more intimate acts of care as described above took place behind closed doors, her children are the living legacy of her career as a public intellectual.

Nonetheless, it can be difficult to discern what Agboton means by *mestizaje*—precisely because of her affinity for contradiction. This is most salient in the chapter “Ser

o no ser...different" (To be or not to be... different") when she discusses her sons' experiences with racism in Spain, rather than her own. Although she will occasionally break with the second person plural with which she frames the majority of her stories, this is the only chapter that is divided into sections wherein she addresses first Didac, and then Axel, individually. These particular pages, directed at each son, are hard to synthesize in that they seem to be the cumulative response to years of conversation. In the case of Didac, she stresses his observative nature and distanced, almost theoretical approach to his identity formation: "A menudo me has dicho que el mestizaje no sólo supone una mezcla de sangres sino, también, un cúmulo de influencias tan heterogéneas que ni siquiera se puede intentar catalogarlas. Aunque tampoco es necesario. Estoy de acuerdo contigo cuando dices que, de hecho, te hacen mestizo los ojos de los demás" ("Frequently you've told me that mestizaje is not just the mixing of blood, but also an accumulation of such heterogenous influence that they can't even be catalogued. Even though it's not necessary to try. I agree with you when you say that, in fact, you're made *mestizo* in the eyes of others"; Agboton 104). In this sense, "*mestizaje*" is relative and dependent on context. It's about being identified as different from those around you while also adapting to—or "appropriating" (as Agboton puts it)—the norms of your present environment.

In contrast, Axel is described as a gregarious child who more easily accepts “being educated between two cultures” (Agboton 106).<sup>21</sup> Agboton recalls an incident during a visit back to Benin when Axel was still small: “me comentaste muy extrañado que todo el mundo te llamaba *yovó*, ‘blanco’ en lengua gun, y que, en cambio, en Barcelona eras el *negritu*” (“you commented to me, totally shocked, that everyone called you *yovó*, ‘white’ in Gun, and that, conversely, in Barcelona you were the *negritu*”; Agboton 106). And while this clearly an intimate moment, shared between mother and son, it is also one of the few instances where Agboton reveals she is not just reviving this memory for Axel’s sake. In the original Spanish the word *yovó*, for white in Gun, and the word *negritu*, for black (or worse, “blacky”) in Catalan, are written in italics, indicating that they are foreign. Yet, while the Gun (that Axel clearly understood at the time) is accompanied by a definition, the Catalan is not. It is through these small details that, while discussing Axel and Didac’s multicultural background, it becomes clear that Agboton’s anecdotes are also aimed at a capturing the imagination of a Spanish

---

<sup>21</sup> It can seem as though Agboton greets Axel’s outlook with more approval: “De todos modos, te resultó mucho más fácil que a tu hermano admitir que habías crecido entre dos formas de vida, que tenías un padre blanco y una madre negra, y que eso te hacía una persona distinta ante los ojos de los demás” (Anyway, it was much easier for you than for your brother to admit that you had grown up between two lifestyles, that you had a white father and a black mother, and that this made you different in other people’s eyes”; Agboton 106). To this she adds: “Presumes de sentirte educado entre dos culturas, de sentirte al mismo tiempo occidental y africano. Y me gusta que eso te enorgullezca porque, aunque las circunstancias del nacimiento no deben ser motivo de orgullo, cierto es que has tenido la suerte de ser el heredero de un patrimonio de culturas muy distintas” (“You boast of feeling educated between two cultures, about feelings Western and African at the same time. And I like that this makes you proud because, even though the circumstances of one’s birth shouldn’t be a cause of pride, it’s true that you’ve had the fortune of being the heir of the cultural patrimony of two very different cultures”; Agboton 106).

audience for the sake of vivifying the experience of miscegenation. She perceives of her family's story as an augury of what is to come.

Seen through this lens, we can better understand Agboton's hesitancy to directly name issues of structural and—even overt—racism. What might at first glance appear to be a rather meandering narrative is rife with purposeful juxtapositions, digressions, and asides. As she engages her sons in conversation, she likewise offers anecdotes and snippets of information, inviting the reader to draw their own conclusions. Agboton asks directly of her sons: “¿Soy una madre africana que vive en Barcelona? ¿Soy una madre barcelonesa de origen africano? No lo sé, y si queréis que os diga la verdad, me es indiferente. Soy una madre, eso sí. Vuestra madre” (“Am I an African mother that lives in Barcelona? Am I Barcelonian mother of African origin? I don't know, and if you want me to tell you [plural] the truth, it's irrelevant to me. I'm a mother, that's for sure. Your mother”; Agboton 99). By insisting on her maternal role as the most important, she is opening the door for future generations to decide where to place the hyphen (as it were) in their hybrid identities—and hers. But not without offering an African linguistic lens through which to view their European reality. These are, therefore, anything but rhetorical questions. Agboton is intentionally including Axel and Didac in her own process of self-definition. But while she claims indifference, the baseline terminology is implicitly established. Her overall Africanity is met with the specificity of being from Barcelona. Not a continent, not even a particular country, or region of that country but a

single city. She and her sons all belong, their embodied *mestizaje* is the essence of Barcelona's present—and future.

## Conclusion

This dissertation opens with an excerpt from Marcelo Hernandez Castillo's poem "Immigration Interview with Don Francisco" that conveys how daunting—if not impossible—it can be to recount the travails of the migratory process. Like many of the poems in Hernandez Castillo's collection *Dulce*, "Immigration Interview with Don Francisco" confronts the ways in which the border is present even in the most quotidian of interactions. In wrestling with the social divisions created by borders material and otherwise, his poems point to the speaker's attempt to connect intimately with the self and with others. Hernandez Castillo was born in Zacatecas, Mexico, and crossed the border through Tijuana with his family at the age of five. Along with his literary endeavors, he is one of the co-founders of *Undocupoets Campaign* which has successfully lobbied against the discriminatory practices of first-book poetry contests that stipulate U.S. citizenship as a requirement for submission for publication. Both these efforts, and the migratory dynamic he reflects upon in his work, resonate with the situation of the Afrodiasporic authors covered in the previous four chapters. In reference to Nini's *Diario de un ilegal* in Chapter 2, I cite Gonzalo Fernández Parrilla, who, in discussing the act of what he calls "autorrepresentación textual" (textual self-representation) in Spanish on the part of former colonial subjects and/or migrant communities in Spain, establishes a parallelism between the fate of author and text. He explains that the texts, like their

authors, encounter similar barriers to entering the cultural sphere in Spain.<sup>1</sup> He reminds us that: “Como a las personas, a los textos procedentes de «otras culturas» les cuesta entrar y, una vez dentro, son mejor acogidos si se atienen a los estereotipos. Si no es así—si no corroboran la tiranía política, el peso de la religión, la opresión de la mujer en la sociedad patriarcal, etc.—, suelen quedar relegados, como mucho, al gueto de los especialistas” (“Like the people that write them, the texts that come from other cultures have trouble entering [the Spanish literary context] and once inside, they are better received if they abide by presiding stereotypes. If this is not the case—if they do not corroborate the political tyranny, the weight of religion, the oppression of women in patriarchal society, etc.—they tend to be, at best, relegated to the ghetto of specialist”; Fernández Parrilla, “De indígena a catalana: representaciones textuales entre lo colonial y lo poscolonial” 256). This is but one example of the way the U.S.-Mexico border has offered fruitful comparison for my study of African migration to Spain.

Whether it’s Gloria Anzaldúa’s notion of a *borderland*, or Amarela Varela Huerta’s more recent conceptualization of the “vertical border”—her terminology to express how, with the extreme militarization of the formerly horizontal dividing line between the United States and Mexico, this border regime now extends throughout

---

<sup>1</sup> Si estableciéramos un paralelismo entre el inmigrante y sus textos, podríamos tal vez inferir que las dificultades que encuentran las personas para entrar y establecerse en el país de acogida son similares a las que encuentran los textos” (“If we establish a parallelism between the immigrant and their texts, we could perhaps infer that the difficulties that people encounter in entering and establishing themselves in a host country are similar to those that their texts face”; Fernández Parrilla 256).

much of Central America and Southern North America in the form of erratic policy decisions and the consequent human trafficking networks, cartel operations, and long-term detainment of undocumented migrants that follow in their wake — these examples of how lines of imperial of difference continue to pit the “Global North” against the “Global South” are pertinent to our understanding of the Spain’s relationship with its African neighbors. Drawing from research on the U.S.-Mexico case has allowed me to frame the work of African-born authors who publish for a Spanish audience as contributing to new knowledge within Border Studies, instead of fixating on their own immigration status, and the attendant questions of integration versus assimilation. In other words, by centering my research on what their works can tell us about Spanish borders, I am asking what they have to say about the contours of contemporary Spanish society rather than about the migratory process alone. Indeed, I have often reached the conclusion that each of these texts; Donato Ndong-Bidyogo’s *El Metro*, Rachid Nini’s *Diario de un ilegal*, Najat El Hachmi’s *L’últim patriarca* and Agnès Agboton’s *Más allá del mar de arena: Una mujer africana en España* harnesses the power of storytelling to counter misinformation surrounding migration. While the Spanish news media focuses on migrants trying to enter Spain by jumping the border fences or braving treacherous Mediterranean crossings, authors who have actually lived the migratory process make it clear that the border exists in other forms as well. Their descriptions emphasize the perils found in the heart of Spanish cities as opposed to the drama of the journey. I do

not frame them as newcomers—or worse; outsiders—to the field of Spanish letters, but I regard them as experts about the realities of this “new Spain.”

To this end, the chapters of this dissertation have followed the overarching trajectory of Spain’s rapid transformation from a country of net emigration in the 1970s and into the mid-1980s, to a significant “polo receptor” (host country) by the time the Great Recession of 2008 hit. For years, the number of registered foreign-born nationals residing in Spain hovered just below 1% of the total population, but with the 1985 *Ley de Extranjería* these numbers began to climb; on the eve of the crisis, just twenty-one years since it had joined the European Economic Community, 12% of the nearly 46 million people living in Spain were migrants. The first influx of “immigrants” in the 1980s were typically coming from wealthier and economically more developed countries elsewhere in the EEC.<sup>2</sup> But by the 1990s, Spain was among a handful of Southern European countries that, despite their own struggles with unemployment, went from being an entry point for African workers to a final destination. Nonetheless, African migrants have never been in the majority. Even in 2015, at the height of the so-called “migrant crisis” in Europe, almost half of the non-Spaniards residing in Spain came from EU or other European countries (CIDOB). However, as identified throughout this study,

---

<sup>2</sup> See Chapter 5 “The Intersection between Integration and the Legal Framework on Nationality in Spain” of Sergio Carrera’s *In search of the perfect citizen?: the intersection between integration, immigration and nationality in the EU*.

racialized migrants from North and sub-Saharan Africa alike suffer from a sort of hypervisibility that is often paired with legal invisibility (albeit in different ways); in fact, only Equatorial Guinea is among the list of countries where Spain once exerted colonial influence that now receive preferential status for visas. Thus, what I have demonstrated is how Spain's borders have changed and shifted throughout this period but have consistently rendered migrant life precarious.

The Spanish stereotype of an "illegal" migrant is a sub-Saharan man, but women authors emphasize the need for an intersectional understanding of the internal bordering processes mentioned above, one that recognizes the multiple forms of discrimination that African women face in their new host country. The dissertation was thus organized into two halves to accentuate the disparities between men's and women's experiences. Chapters 1 and 2 addressed the earliest waves of predominantly male economic migration as represented by *El Metro* and *Diario de un ilegal*. While in contrast, Chapter 3 examined the feminization of the workforce through El Hachmi's fiction, and particularly the debut novel: *L'últim patriarca*. More and more foreign-born women entered the Spanish economy as subsequent versions of the LOE were passed to account for issues like family reunification. However, as El Hachmi makes clear, these women were usually the first victims of seniority layoffs in the wake of the crisis, and many others were forced into precarious working conditions well beforehand. Chapter 4 was intended to complement El Hachmi's feminist critique of neoliberalism with Agnès

Agboton's radical views on motherhood. *Más allá del mar de arena* ultimately suggests that raising biracial children in an overwhelmingly white country represents a form of integration that does not necessitate participation in a corrupt, capital-driven system.

By considering gender as an important axis of bordering—along with race—I have touched upon vital differences in perspective that subsequently shape both style and content. Nini's autobiographical tale is composed as a diary that details the travails of working in the gig economy along Spain's Mediterranean coastline. In contrast, the story of *L'últim patriarca's* Mimoun is told by his anonymous daughter. Both men wrestle with intense discrimination against Moroccan migrants, and the way integration in the Spain's economic structures only brings on an increasing sense of isolation. But while Nini's text essentially takes the form of an extensive monologue, Mimoun's voice is eventually countered by that of his daughter. From her, we learn about the fate of those Mimoun leaves behind in Rif, and the way his earlier choices determine the very texture of their lives once they reach him in Spain. In this sense, El Hachmi's novel underscores the mutual vulnerability of all her characters, rather than the financial precarity of a single individual. In a similar vein, we can observe that while both Ndongo-Bidyogo and Agboton have been likened to the West African *griot*, or bard, their narrative choices could not be more distinct. Ndongo-Bidyogo writes in the vein of the nineteenth-century realist novel, with heavy use of the free indirect style. He is attentive to questions of genealogy, and, indeed, the role of the griot was to preserve local history through an

attention to family lineages. Yet, he never once lets his main character speak for himself, and only in a single instance does he address the novel's public through use of the *tú* form. Agboton, on the other hand, draws us into a lengthy conversation with her sons. She shares recipes, fables, and collective memories. But more importantly, she invites the reader to engage in her process of self-identification as an African mother, raising two bi-racial sons in an increasingly cosmopolitan Barcelona.

It is, therefore, El Hachmi and Agboton that guide this interrogation of Spain's borders towards future lines of inquiry by making room for the next generation of Afrodiasporic Spaniards both textually and intellectually. Their voices are joined by others in the literary field, and more recently by a cohort of artists and writers who can best be described as "Second Generation" despite the polemic nature of this terminology. These include a growing number of young Spaniards of Equatorial Guinean descent, who address the experience of being a Black woman in Spain—and, in doing so, confront significant ignorance about the country's only sub-Saharan colony, one that it desperately tried to claim was nothing more than several "overseas provinces" before finally giving into international pressure and conceding independence in 1968. These include the journalist and novelist, Lucía Asué Mbomío Rubio (@luciambomio), the "aesthetic activist" and writer, Desirée Bela-Lobedde (@desireebelal), and the playwright Silvia Albert Sopale (@silviaalbertsopale). As denoted by the inclusion of their Instagram handles, all three have a significant public

presence and are avid users of social media to promote their *artivism*.<sup>3</sup> However, as a true testament to the genealogical nature of the way African feminism/womanism in Spain has continued to evolve, we cannot feign to understand this legacy of cultural production in terms of lineage. Rather, it is more of a family tree with roots spanning either side of the Atlantic and Mediterranean, always growing, always changing. In this sense, El Hachmi and Agboton's successors are not just individual practitioners, but anti-racist organizations like the Comunidad Negra Africana y Afrodescendiente en España (Black African and Afrodescendent Community in Spain or CNAAE, (<https://cnaae.org>) and Afrofeminas (<https://afrofeminas.com>). These groups organize in person but also in cyber space. In their efforts to "pon[er] las bases para la construcción de un sujeto político negro autónomo" ("lay the foundation for the construction of an autonomous, Black political subject"; CNAAE Comunidad Negra Africana y Afrodescendiente en España), we can see the same impetus for the inscription of African worldviews into the Hispanosphere that motivates El Hachmi and Agboton to write. However, if we are to recognize the border as fundamentally systemic, what is yet to be addressed is how they will impact those far removed from the migratory process—just by dint of association. In coming years, we will have the opportunity to observe how the organizations and individual practitioners listed above tackle Spanish bordering projects—not from the outside, but from within.

---

<sup>3</sup> Creative activism, activism via creative practice.

## Appendix A

Anna Tybinko, Personal interview with Donato Ndong-Bidyogo

(AT): Has comentado antes que *El Metro* es una novela realista, ¿en qué sentido?

(DNB): En el sentido literal. Aunque tanto la trama como los personajes son ficción, las situaciones descritas sí son verosímiles: hechos que pueden suceder, y de hecho suceden, a millones de africanos.

(AT): También en otro momento has dicho que el reencuentro con tu país, tras el golpe de estado de Teodoro Obiang te llevó a escribir tu primera novela – *Las tinieblas de tu memoria negra* – y eso porque las disciplinas en que habías formado antes, la historia y el periodismo- ya no bastaban para comunicar lo que querías compartir. ¿Cuál es la ventaja de la literatura como medio de comunicación? O sea, ¿Por qué la literatura?

(DNB): El Periodismo es importante porque nos permite informarnos sobre los principales acontecimientos de nuestro mundo, pero es un género efímero: al día siguiente, el papel que contiene tu artículo sólo sirve para envolver un bocadillo, o va directamente a cualquier papelería. Observo, además, que la información se va convirtiendo en un producto de consumo más en esta “aldea global”, perdiendo su otra dimensión, la de formar y hacer pensar; de modo que la tendencia es banalizarlo todo. La Historia, por su parte, es una disciplina acotada a los propios historiadores o, como mucho, sólo interesa a los eruditos. Pero la literatura tiene mayor incidencia y trascendencia, al poder llegar a

un número mayor de lectores, quienes serán capaces de absorber y reflexionar sobre lo que leen. Me interesa, ante todo, comunicar, penetrar en las mentes para “subvertirlas”: que no nos conformemos con un único discurso, esforzarnos en conocer y valorar las percepciones del “otro”, intentar que también vean los temas desde nuestro ángulo; por lo cual es importante “conquistar” al mayor número de personas para que se acerquen a nuestros planteamientos y propuestas. La literatura, además, trasciende las barreras idiomáticas y temporales: a través de traducciones, se puede leer a un escritor en la lengua en que escribe y en cualquier otra, sin que importen ni el país ni el tiempo. Por último, me interesa también la dimensión anticipadora de la literatura: permite propiciar transformaciones sociales (pensemos en los enciclopedistas franceses, en Dickens, en Virginia Woolf, en John Steinbeck, en los africanos durante la colonización o en los afroamericanos de la primera mitad del S. XX, precursores e impulsores de la lucha por los Derechos Civiles...). Pero, como sabes, no abandono ni la Historia ni el Periodismo, pues nuestro mensaje debe ser transmitido desde cualquier resquicio si quiere ser eficaz.

(AT): Y para ti, como autor, ¿cuál es el mensaje principal de *El Metro*? ¿Cómo lo ves en relación con las otras novelas?

(DNB): Creo que el mensaje es claro: humanizar al emigrante africano, dotarle de historia, de presencia, como cualquier otro ser humano. En los países de acogida, sólo se percibe la superficie, la epidermis, y se nos presenta como pobrecitos negros desvalidos que huyen de sus míseros países para buscar una vida mejor. Ese discurso engañoso

distorsiona la realidad y, lo que es peor, provoca percepciones erróneas que a menudo desembocan en planteamientos y actitudes perversos. Además, únicamente se percibe nuestra existencia cuando aparecemos en una playa del sur de Europa, vivos o muertos, como si hubiésemos nacido en el instante en que somos “descubiertos”. Por todo ello, creí necesario explicar las verdaderas razones que provocan nuestra presencia en Europa, por qué somos impelidos a huir de nuestros propios países para buscar nuevos horizontes que, al final del trayecto, tampoco resultan ser el Edén. *El Metro* entronca con mi primer relato publicado, “El sueño” (1973); siempre me interesó explicar -y explicarme- por qué los africanos parecemos incapaces de desarrollar nuestras vidas en nuestro propio suelo, afrontando en nuestro entorno los avatares de toda existencia. Pero es una novela distinta de las anteriores por su temática y ubicación. Siendo el drama de la emigración africana un fenómeno que abarca al conjunto del continente hubiera sido falaz circunscribirlo a un solo país. De ahí que los protagonistas no sean guineoecuatorianos, ni la trama arranque en mi país. Las otras novelas sí están situadas en el espacio territorial y temporal de Guinea Ecuatorial, y abordan realidades específicas de mi propia sociedad.

(AT): Ya hace más que una década desde su publicación. ¿Qué ha cambiado?

¿Cambiarías algo de la narrativa para ajustarlo al día de hoy?

(DNB): No sólo no ha cambiado la realidad descrita en *El Metro*, sino que se agrava cada día un poco más. Las circunstancias presentes permiten comprobar que la narración no

sólo se sitúa cabalmente en la realidad, sino que anticipa hechos que, diez años después, se convierten, por desgracia, en problemas enquistados de difícil solución. Ante la falta de soluciones—que conocemos africanos y europeos—la emigración se convirtió hoy en el gran pretexto para el resurgir del fascismo en el mundo. Lo cual está escrito en la novela, cuyo final es algo más que una metáfora.

## Works Cited

- Abrams, Sam. "Najat El Hachmi: un debut novel·lístic massa precipitat." *El Mundo*, 14 Mar. 2008.
- Agboton, Agnès. *Más allá del mar de arena*. 2nd ed., Verbum, 2018.
- Ahmed, Sara. "A Phenomenology of Whiteness." *Feminist Theory*, vol. 8, no. 2, Aug. 2007, pp. 149–68.
- . *Strange Encounters: Embodied Others in Post-Coloniality*. Routledge, 2000.
- Aja, Eliseo. *Inmigración y democracia*. Alianza Editorial, 2012.
- . "La evolución de la normativa sobre inmigración." *Veinte años de inmigración en España: perspectivas jurídica y sociológica (1985-2004)*, edited by Eliseo Aja and Joaquín Arango, Fundació CIDOB, 2006, pp. 17–44.
- Aja, Eliseo, and Joaquín Arango, editors. *Viente años de inmigración en España: Perspectivas jurídica y sociológica [1985-2004]*. Fundació CIDOB, 2006.
- Álvarez, David Edward. "Recording Daily Life in the Margins of History and of the Nation: Rachid Nini's Diary of a Clandestine Migrant." *Biography: An Interdisciplinary Quarterly*, vol. 36, no. 1, University of Hawai'i Press, Winter 2013, pp. 148–78.
- Álvarez-Blanco, Palmar. "De etnomanías y otros terrores. Literatura e inmigración en la España del siglo XXI." *Contornos de la narrativa española actual (2000-2010): un diálogo entre creadores y críticos*, edited by Toni Dorca and Palmar Álvarez-Blanco, Iberoamericana; Vervuert, 2011.
- Álvarez-Blanco, Palmar, and Antonio Gómez L-Quiñones, editors. *La imaginación hipotecada: aportaciones al debate sobre la precariedad del presente*. Libros en Acción, 2016.
- Andersson, Ruben. *Illegality, Inc.: Clandestine Migration and the Business of Bordering Europe*. University of California Press, 2014.
- Anzaldúa, Gloria. *Borderlands: The New Mestiza = La Frontera*. Aunt Lute Books, 1991.
- Aranda, Diego G. "Usted puede ser la próxima víctima." *Diario 16*, 9 July 1995, p. 2. Biblioteca Nacional de España, Hemeroteca Digital.

- Bakhtin, Mikhail Mikhaïlovich. *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*. Edited & translated by Caryl Emerson, University of Minnesota Press, 1984.
- Balibar, Ettiene. "Is There a 'Neo-Racism'?" *Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities*, edited by Immanuel Wallerstein and Ettiene Balibar, Verso, 1991, pp. 17–28.
- Ballesteros, Isolina. *Immigration Cinema in the New Europe*. Intellect, 2015.
- Bermúdez, Silvia. "'Africa Begins in ...': Donato Ndongo Bidyogo's and Francisco Zamora Lobo's Transatlantic Cartographies." *Transatlantic Studies: Latin America, Iberia, and Africa*, edited by Cecilia Enjuto-Rangel et al., Liverpool University Press, 2019, pp. 338–47.
- . *Rocking the Boat: Migration and Race in Contemporary Spanish Music*. University of Toronto Press, 2018.
- Borst, Julia. "Tropos de transculturalidad en la obra de Agnès Agboton." *Transafrohispanismos: puentes culturales críticos entre Africa, latinoamerica y españa*, edited by Dorothy Odattey-Wellington, Brill Rodopi, 2018, pp. 169–89.
- Boulila, Stefanie C. *Race in Post-Racial Europe: An Intersectional Analysis*. Rowman & Littlefield International, 2019.
- Brancato, Sabrina. "Afro-European Literature(s): A New Discursive Category?" *Research in African Literatures*, vol. 39, no. 3, Fall 2008, pp. 1–13.
- . "Burning Heaven: Southern Europe in Maghrebi Migration Narratives." *Expressions Maghrebines*, vol. 11, no. 2, WIN 2012, pp. 63–.
- Brown, Wendy. *Walled States, Waning Sovereignty*. Zone Books; Distributed by the MIT Press, 2010.
- Butler, Judith. *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?* Verso, 2009.
- Cachón Rodríguez, Lorenzo. "Los inmigrantes en el mercado de trabajo en España." *Veinte años de inmigración en España: perspectivas jurídica y sociológica (1985-2004)*, edited by Eliseo Aja and Joaquín Arango, Fundació CIDOB, 2006, pp. 175–201.
- Campoy-Cubillo, Adolfo. *Memories of the Maghreb: Transnational Identities in Spanish Cultural Production*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2012.

- Campoy-Cubillo, Adolfo, and Benita Sampedro Vizcaya. "Introduction: Entering the Global Hispanophone." *Journal of Spanish Cultural Studies*, vol. 20, no. 1–2, 2019, pp. 1–16.
- Carbonell i Cortés, Ovidi. "Semiotic Alteration in Translation. Othering, Stereotyping and Hybridization in Contemporary Translations from Arabic into Spanish and Catalan." *Linguística Antverpiensia, New Series – Themes in Translation Studies*, vol. 0, no. 2, 2, 2003, pp. 145–59.
- Carrizosa, José A. "Los tiburones comen corderos: las mafias marroquíes y la exigencia de visado disparan la emigración ilegal en el Estracho." *El País*, 16 June 1992, p. 20. Biblioteca Nacional de España, Hemeroteca Digital.
- Hernandez Castillo, Marcelo. *Dulce*. Northwestern University Press, 2018.
- Celaya-Carrillo, Beatriz. "De victorias o derrotas/El metro, de Donato Ndong-Bidyogo." *Romance Quarterly*, vol. 57, no. 2, 2010, pp. 142–57.
- Cembrero, Ignacio. "El diario marroquí 'Al Massae' denuncia la discriminación que sufre su director en prisión." *El País*, 13 Sept. 2011. *elpais.com*, [https://elpais.com/internacional/2011/09/13/actualidad/1315864811\\_850215.html](https://elpais.com/internacional/2011/09/13/actualidad/1315864811_850215.html).
- Chama, Brian. *Tabloid Journalism in Africa*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2017.
- Claesson, Christian, editor. *Narrativas precarias: Crisis y subjetividad en la cultura española actual*. Hoja de Lata Editorial, 2019.
- CNAAE Comunidad Negra Africana y Afrodescendiente en España. "CNAAE Comunidad Negra Africana y Afrodescendiente en España." *Facebook*, 22 Oct. 2020, <https://www.facebook.com/pages/category/Community-Service/CNAAE-Comunidad-Negra-Africana-y-Afrodescendiente-en-España-111331357272458/>.
- Coleman, Jeffrey K. *The Necropolitical Theater: Race and Immigration on the Contemporary Spanish Stage*. Northwestern University Press, 2020.
- Coleman, Nancy. "Why We're Capitalizing Black." *The New York Times*, 5 July 2020. *NYTimes.com*, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/07/05/insider/capitalized-black.html>. Accessed 4 May 2021.
- Corachán, Jordi. "La policía crea un grupo especial para combatir a los 'skins.'" *El Periódico*, de enero de 1993. Biblioteca Nacional de España, Hemeroteca Digital.

- Cornelius, Wayne A. "Spain: The Uneasy Transition from Labor Exporter to Labor Importer." *Controlling Immigration: A Global Perspective*, edited by Wayne A. Cornelius et al., 2nd. ed, Stanford University Press, 2004.
- Crameri, Kathryn. "Searching for Orgasms in the Dictionary: Language, Literature and Emotion in *L'últim patriarca* by Najat El Hachmi." *Hispanic Research Journal*, vol. 18, no. 6, Taylor & Francis Ltd, Dec. 2017, pp. 507–19.
- Dalmases, Irene. "La joven escritora de origen marroquí Najat El Hachmi gana el Ramon Llull." *El Mundo*, 2 Jan. 2008,  
<https://www.elmundo.es/elmundo/2008/01/31/cultura/1201810933.html>.  
 Accessed 4 May 2021.
- De Genova, Nicholas. "Border, Scene and Obscene." *A Companion to Border Studies*, edited by Thomas Wilson and Hastings Donnan, Wiley Blackwell, 2012.
- . "The Borders of 'Europe' and the European Question." *The Borders of "Europe": Autonomy of Migration, Tactics of Bordering*, edited by Nicholas De Genova, Duke University Press, 2017, pp. 1–35.
- de Hass, Hein. "Trans-Saharan Migration to North Africa and the EU: Historical Roots and Current Trends." *Migrationpolicy.Org*, 1 Nov. 2006,  
<https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/trans-saharan-migration-north-africa-and-eu-historical-roots-and-current-trends>. Accessed 4 May 2021.
- Delgado, Richard, and Jean Stefancic. *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction*. New York University Press, 2001.
- Díaz Narbona, Inmaculada. "Presentación." *Más allá del mar de arena*, Lumen, 2005.
- Dotson-Renta, Lara N. "Translated Identities: Writing between Morocco and Spain." *The Journal of North African Studies*, vol. 13, no. 4, Routledge, Dec. 2008, pp. 429–39.
- Doubleday, Simon R., and Benita Sampedro. *Border Interrogations: Questioning Spanish Frontiers*. Berghahn Books, 2008.
- El Hachmi, Najat. "Escribir en el siglo XXI." *Contornos de la narrativa española actual (2000-2010): un diálogo entre creadores y críticos*, edited by Palmar Álvarez-Blanco and Toni Dorca, Iberoamericana; Vervuert, 2011, pp. 259–61.
- . *The Last Patriarch*. Translated by Peter Bush, Serpent's Tail, 2010.

- Ellison, Mahan L. "Oikos and the Other: Humanizing the Immigrant in Donato Ndongo's *El Metro*." *African Immigrants in Contemporary Spanish Texts: Crossing the Strait*, edited by Debra Faszler-McMahon et al., Routledge, 2015.
- Everly, Kathryn. "Immigrant Identity and Intertextuality in 'L'últim Patriarca' by Najat El Hachmi." *CIEHL: Cuaderno Internacional de Estudios Humanísticos y Literatura*, vol. 16, Fall 2011, pp. 142–50.
- Faszler-McMahon, Debra, and Victoria L. Ketz, editors. *African Immigrants in Contemporary Spanish Texts: Crossing the Strait*. Routledge, 2015.
- . "Rethinking the Home and Rejecting the Past: A Feminist Reading of Najat El Hachmi's *L'últim patriarca*." *Ámbitos Feministas*, vol. IV, Otoño 2014, pp. 45–59.
- Fernández Parrilla, Gonzalo. "De indígena a catalana: representaciones textuales entre lo colonial y lo poscolonial." *La alteridad imaginada: El pánico moral y la construcción de lo musulmán en España y Francia*, edited by Angeles Ramirez Fernández, Edicions Bellaterra, 2014, pp. 253–79.
- . "Emigración y literatura árabe: tránsitos identitarios." *Emigración y literatura: historias, experiencias, sentimientos*, Universidad de Santiago de Compostela, Servicio de Publicaciones e Intercambio Científico, 2015, pp. 203–26.
- . "Translating Modern Arabic Literature into Spanish." *Middle Eastern Literatures*, vol. 16, no. 1, Routledge, Apr. 2013, pp. 88–101.
- Flesler, Daniela. *The Return of the Moor: Spanish Responses to Contemporary Moroccan Immigration*. Purdue University Press, 2008.
- Folkart, Jessica A. *Liminal Fiction at the Edge of the Millennium: The Ends of Spanish Identity*. Bucknell University Press, 2014.
- . "Scoring the National Hym(e)n: Sexuality, Immigration, and Identity in Najat El Hachmi's 'L'últim Patriarca.'" *Hispanic Review*, vol. 81, no. 3, Summer 2013, pp. 353–76.
- Fra-Molinero, Baltasar. "Novela postcolonial, emigración y metáfora de la esclavitud." *Afro - Hispanic Review; Columbia*, vol. 28, no. 2, Fall 2009, pp. 81-96,463.
- "Freed Moroccan Journalist Remains Defiant." *Al Jazeera*, 28 Apr. 2012.  
*www.aljazeera.com*,

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/africa/2012/04/20124281889790655.html>.  
Accessed 4 May 2021.

Fuchs, Barbara. *Exotic Nation: Maurophilia and the Construction of Early Modern Spain*. University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009.

Gallego, Mar. "Integración e hibridez en Más allá del mar de arena de Agnès Agboton." *Afro-European cartographies*, edited by Dominic Thomas, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014, pp. 71–82.

García de Vinuesa, Maya. "Agnès Agboton: Self-Translation and Intercultural Mediation." *AfroEurope@n Configurations: Readings and Projects*, edited by Sabrina Brancato, Cambridge Scholars Publisher, 2011, pp. 210–22.

García Mateu, David. "'La Noria' de Luis Romero vuelve a girar." *El Periódico*, 6 Sept. 2016. *www.elperiodico.com*, <https://www.elperiodico.com/es/ocio-y-cultura/20160906/la-noria-de-luis-romero-con-gira-barcelona-5363700>. Accessed 1 Feb. 2021.

Hay, Denys. *Europe: The Emergence of an Idea*. Edinburgh University Press, 1968.

Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich. *Lectures on the History of Philosophy 1825-6. Vol. 3, Medieval and Modern Philosophy*. Edited by Robert F. Brown, Rev. ed., Clarendon Press; Oxford University Press, 2009.

Heller, Charles, and Lorenzo Pezzani. "Ebbing and Flowing: The EU's Shifting Practices of (Non-) Assistance and Bordering in a Time of Crisis." *Near Futures*, vol. 1, no. Europe at a Crossroads, Mar. 2016, <http://nearfuturesonline.org/ebbing-and-flowing-the-eus-shifting-practices-of-non-assistance-and-bordering-in-a-time-of-crisis/>.

---. "Liquid Traces: Investigating the Deaths of Migrants at the EU's Maritime Frontier." *The Borders of "Europe": Autonomy of Migration, Tactics of Bordering*, edited by Nicholas De Genova, Duke University Press, 2017.

hooks, bell. *Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism*. South End Press, 1981.

Ingenschay, Dieter. "Migraciones e identidades en L'últim patriarca de Najat El Hachmi." *Iberoromania*, vol. 71–72, no. 1, Nov. 2011, pp. 57–70.

- International Organization for Migration (IOM) of the United Nations Migration Agency. *Missing Migrants Project*.  
<https://missingmigrants.iom.int/region/mediterranean?> Accessed 4 Nov. 2020.
- Joan Rodríguez, Meritxell. "Transitando el Mediterráneo: etiquetas literarias y subjetividades híbridas en la tríada migratoria de Najat El Hachmi." *Transmodernity: Journal of Peripheral Cultural Production of the Luso-Hispanic World*, vol. 9, no. 4, 2020.
- Kant, Immanuel. *Immanuel Kant: Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime and Other Writings*. Edited by Patrick R. Frierson and Paul Guyer, Cambridge University Press, 2011.
- Labrador Méndez, Germán. "Las vidas subprime: la circulación de historias de vida como tecnología de imaginación política en la crisis española (2007-2012)." *Hispanic Review*, vol. 80, no. 4, Oct. 2012, pp. 557–81.
- Lalami, Laila. "Journalist Rachid Nini Jailed in Morocco." *Newsweek*, 26 June 2011. [www.newsweek.com](http://www.newsweek.com), <https://www.newsweek.com/journalist-rachid-nini-jailed-morocco-67985>. Accessed 4 May 2021.
- Leavitt, David. "Seduction in Catalonia." *The New York Times*, 10 Jan. 1993. [NYTimes.com](http://www.nytimes.com), <https://www.nytimes.com/1993/01/10/books/seduction-in-catalonia.html>. Accessed 4 May 2021.
- Lewis, Marvin. *An Introduction to the Literature of Equatorial Guinea: Between Colonialism and Dictatorship*. University of Missouri Press, 2007.
- Madhi, Khalid. *Urban Restructuring, Power and Capitalism in the Tourist City: Contested Terrains of Marrakesh*. Routledge, 2019.
- Manuel Pérez Ledesma. "El lenguaje de la ciudadanía en la España contemporánea." *De súbditos a ciudadanos: una historia de la ciudadanía en España*, 1st ed., Centro de Estudios Políticos y Constitucionales, 2007, pp. 445–77.
- Martin-Márquez, Susan. *Disorientations: Spanish Colonialism in Africa and the Performance of Identity*. Yale University Press, 2008.
- McClain, Dani. *As a Black Mother, My Parenting Is Always Political*. Mar. 2019. [www.thenation.com](http://www.thenation.com), <https://www.thenation.com/article/archive/black-motherhood-family-parenting-dani-mcclain/>. Accessed 4 May 2021.

- M'charek, Amade. "Harraga: Burning Borders, Navigating Colonialism." *The Sociological Review*, vol. 68, no. 2, SAGE Publications Ltd, Mar. 2020, pp. 418–34.
- Mignolo, Walter. "Afterword: What Does the Black Legend Have to Do with Race?" *Rereading the Black Legend: The Discourses of Religious and Racial Difference in the Renaissance Empires*, edited by Margaret Rich Greer et al., University of Chicago Press, 2007, pp. 312–24.
- . *Local Histories/Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking*. Princeton University Press, 2000.
- Miller, Gabrielle. "Institutionalized Motherhood and Maternal Practice in Mercè Rodoreda's *La Plaza Del Diamante*." *Revista de Estudios Hispánicos*, vol. 53, no. 3, Washington University in St. Louis, 2019, pp. 855–78.
- Missing Migrants Project*. <https://missingmigrants.iom.int/west-and-central-africa-%E2%80%94irregular-migration-routes-europe-january-%E2%80%94november-2020>. Accessed 15 Feb. 2021.
- "Monarch Butterflies Migrate 3,000 Miles—Here's How." *National Geographic News*, 17 Oct. 2017, <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/news/2017/10/monarch-butterfly-migration/>. Accessed 15 Feb. 2021.
- Mora, Miguel. "Un repaso a la España clandestina. El poeta marroquí Rachid Nini publica 'Diario de un ilegal.'" *El País*, 14 June 2002. *elpais.com*, [https://elpais.com/diario/2002/06/14/cultura/1024005609\\_850215.html](https://elpais.com/diario/2002/06/14/cultura/1024005609_850215.html). Accessed 4 May 2021.
- Moreno Caballud, Luis. *Cultures of Anyone: Studies on Cultural Democratization in the Spanish Neoliberal Crisis*. Liverpool University Press, 2016.
- Muñoz Comet, Jacobo. *Inmigración y Empleo En España: de la expansión a la crisis Económica*. CIS, Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas, 2016.
- Murray, N. Michelle. *Home Away from Home: Immigrant Narratives, Domesticity, and Coloniality in Contemporary Spanish Culture*. University of North Carolina Press, 2018.
- . "Migration and Genealogies of Rupture in the Work of Najat El Hachmi." *Research in African Literatures*, vol. 48, no. 3, Fall 2017, pp. 18–32.
- Ndongo-Bidyogo, Donato. *El metro*. El cobre, 2007.

- . *Historia y tragedia de Guinea Ecuatorial*. Cambio 16.
- . *Personal Interview*. Interview by Anna Tybinko, 10 Nov. 2018.
- N'gom, M'bare. "African Literature in Spanish." *The Cambridge History of African and Caribbean Literature*, edited by Simon Gikandi and F. Abiola Irele, Cambridge University Press, 2004.
- . "Writing, Migration and Identity in African Hispanic Literature." *Afroeuropa@ns: Cultures and Identities*, edited by Marta Sofia López Rodríguez, Cambridge Scholars, 2008, pp. 79–107, <https://find.library.duke.edu/catalog/DUKE004066416>.
- Nini, Rachid. *Diario de un ilegal*. Translated by Gonzalo Fernández Parrilla and Malika Embarek López, Oriente y Mediterráneo, 2002.
- Noble, Kenneth B. "French Devaluation of African Currency Brings Wide Unrest." *The New York Times*, 23 Feb. 1994.
- Odartey-Wellington, Dorothy. "Introducción: 'Trans-afrohispanismos.'" *Trans-afrohispanismos: puentes culturales criticos entre Africa, latinoamerica y españa*, edited by Dorothy Odartey-Wellington, Brill Rodopi, 2018, pp. 1–19.
- O'Reilly, Andrea. "Maternal Theory: Patriarchal Motherhood and Empowered Mothering." *The Routledge Companion to Motherhood*, edited by Lynn O'Brien Hallstein and Andrea O'Reilly, Routledge, 2020, pp. 19–35.
- . "Matricentric Feminism: A Feminism for Mothers." *The Routledge Companion to Motherhood*, edited by Lynn O'Brien Hallstein and Andrea O'Reilly, Routledge, 2020, pp. 51–60.
- Pack, Sasha D. "The Deepest Border: The Strait of Gibraltar and the Making of the Modern Hispano-African Borderland." *The Deepest Border*, Stanford University Press, 2019.
- Parsons, Deborah L. *Streetwalking the Metropolis: Women, the City and Modernity*. Oxford University Press, 2000.
- Rancière, Jacques. *The Edges of Fiction*. Translated by Steve Corcoran, Polity Press, 2020.
- Repinecz, Martin. "Raza or Race? Remembering Slavery in Equatorial Guinean Literature." *Hispanic Studies Review*, vol. 4, no. 1, 2019, pp. 121–35.

- Ricci, Cristián H. "A Transmodern Approach to Afro-Iberian Literature." *The Routledge Companion to Iberian Studies*, edited by Manuel Delgado et al., Routledge, 2017, pp. 583–95.
- . "African Voices in Contemporary Spain." *New Spain, New Literatures*, edited by Luis Martín-Estudillo and Nicholas Spadaccini, 1st ed., Vanderbilt University Press, 2010, pp. 203–31.
- . *¡Hay moros en la costa! Literatura marroquí fronteriza en castellano y catalán*. Iberoamericana, 2014.
- . "L'últim patriarca de Najat El Hachmi y el forjamiento de una identidad amazigh-catalana." *Journal of Spanish Cultural Studies*, vol. 11, no. 1, Mar. 2010, pp. 71–91.
- . "The Reshaping of Postcolonial Iberia: Moroccan and Amazigh Literatures in the Peninsula." *Hipanófilo*, vol. 180, 2017, pp. 21–40.
- Rizo, Elisa G. "Review of *El metro* by Donato Ndongo." *PALARA: Publications of the Afro-Latin American Research Association*, vol. 12, no. 84, 2008, p. 6.
- Robinson, Cedric J. *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition*. 2nd ed., University of North Carolina Press, 2000.
- Rogers, Charlotte. *Mourning El Dorado: Literature and Extractivism in the Contemporary American Tropics*. University of Virginia Press, 2019.
- Rodríguez-Rata, Alexis. "La NASA descubre un 'mar de plástico' español donde antes sólo se veía verde." *La Vanguardia*, 15 Dec. 2018, <https://www.lavanguardia.com/economia/20181208/453319751509/campo-de-dalias-el-ejido-poniente-almeriense-pasado-y-presente-mar-de-plastico-antes-verde.html>. Accessed 4 May 2021.
- Ruano Blanco, Irene. *Lucrecia Pérez Matos, asesinada por ser extranjera, negra y pobre* | *Periódico Diagonal*. 13 Nov. 2016, <https://www.diagonalperiodico.net/libertades/32269-lucrecia-perez-matos-asesinada-por-ser-extranjera-negra-y-pobre.html>. Accessed 4 May 2021.
- Russell, Sharon. "International Migration." *Demographic Change in Sub-Saharan Africa*, edited by Karen A. Foote et al., National Academy Press, 1993, pp. 307–49.
- Sánchez, Gabriela. "Cómo es posible que una persona lleve 12 años en España sin papeles, como el mantero fallecido." *eldiario.es*,

[https://www.eldiario.es/desalambre/persona-puede-anos-Espana-papeles\\_0\\_752075669.html](https://www.eldiario.es/desalambre/persona-puede-anos-Espana-papeles_0_752075669.html). Accessed 13 June 2018.

Santaolalla, Isabel. *Los "otros": etnicidad y "raza" en el cine español contemporáneo*. Prensas de la Universidad de Zaragoza, 2005.

Sampedro Vizcaya, Benita. "African Poetry in Spanish Exile: Seeking Refuge in the Metropolis." *Bulletin of Hispanic Studies*, vol. 81, no. 2, Apr. 2004, pp. 201–14.

Sayyid, Salman. *Recalling the Caliphate: Decolonisation and World Order*. C. Hurst, 2014.

Shepherd, N. Michelle. "Migration and Mobility in Rachid Nini's *Diario de Un Ilegal*." *Vanderbilt E-Journal of Luso-Hispanic Studies*, vol. 8, Nov. 2012, pp. 55–64.

Shwartz, M., and C. Lladó. "Primero fueron a por los negros." *El Siglo*, de diciembre de 1992, pp. 22–24. Biblioteca Nacional de España, Hemeroteca Digital.

Silverblatt. "The Black Legend and Global Conspiracies: Spain, the Inquisition and the Emerging Modern World." *Rereading the Black Legend: The Discourses of Religious and Racial Difference in the Renaissance Empires*, edited by Margaret Rich Greer et al., University of Chicago Press, 2007, pp. 99–116.

Soto Bermant, Laia. "The Mediterranean Question: Europe and Its Predicament in the Southern Peripheries." *The Borders of "Europe": Autonomy of Migration, Tactics of Bordering*, edited by Nicholas De Genova, Duke University Press, 2017, pp. 120–40.

Suárez-Navaz, Liliana. *Rebordering the Mediterranean: Boundaries and Citizenship in Southern Europe*. Berghahn Books, 2004.

Tate, Claudia, editor. *Black Women Writers at Work*. Continuum, 1983.

*The Report: Morocco 2013*. Oxford Business Group, 2013.

Traficantes de sueños, and Instituto para la Democracia y el Municipalismo. *Foro DM «Racismo social, racismo institucional: ¿derecho a la ciudad?»*. 25 Apr. 2018, <https://soundcloud.com/traficantesdesue-os/foro-dm-racismo-social-racismo-institucional-derecho-a-la-ciudad>.

Ugarte, Michael. *Africans in Europe: The Culture of Exile and Emigration from Equatorial Guinea to Spain*. University of Illinois Press, 2010.

- UNHCR. "Country - Spain." *The Mediterranean Refugees/Migrants Data Portal*, Operational Portal, Refugee Situations, <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/country/esp>. Accessed 4 May 2021.
- Varela Huerta, Amarela. *Por el derecho a permanecer y a pertenecer: una sociología de la lucha de migrantes*. Primera edición., Madrid: Traficantes de Sueños, 2013.
- Vasconcelos, José. *La raza cósmica. Misión de la raza iberoamericana. Notas de viajes a la América del Sur*. Agencia mundial de librería, 1925.
- Vega-Durán, Raquel. *Emigrant Dreams, Immigrant Borders: Migrants, Transnational Encounters, and Identity in Spain*. Bucknell University Press, 2016.
- Vilarós, Teresa M., and Michael Ugarte. "Cuando África empieza en Los Pirineos." *Journal of Spanish Cultural Studies*, vol. 7, no. 3, Routledge, Nov. 2006, pp. 199–205.
- Vilches, Elvira. *New World Gold: Cultural Anxiety and Monetary Disorder in Early Modern Spain*. University of Chicago Press, 2010.
- Walkowitz, Rebecca L. *Born Translated: The Contemporary Novel in an Age of World Literature*. Columbia University Press, 2015.
- Yagüe, Antonio. "Tres nuevas agresiones de 'skins' en Madrid durante el pasado fin de semana." *El Periódico*, 11 Mar. 1995, p. 29. Biblioteca Nacional de España, Hemeroteca Digital.
- Yebra López, Carlos. "El Hachmi's Postcolonial Narrative of Language Migration in *L'últim Patriarca* (2008): A Close Reading of the Use of the Catalan Dictionary as a Literary Device." *LL Journal*, vol. 13, no. 2, pp. 1–13.
- Zamora Lobo, Francisco. *Cómo ser negro y no morir en Aravaca: manual de recetas contra el racismo*. Ediciones B, 1994.
- Zea, Leopoldo. *América en la historia*. Editorial de la Revista de Occidente, 1970.

## Biography

Anna Tybinko has her BA in History with minor in Spanish and Hispanic Studies from Earlham College (2009). She holds an MA in Social Science Research from the Universidad Pontificia de Salamanca (2012) and in Romance Studies from Duke University (2018). She is the author of the article “Decolonizing the Metropole: Born-Translated Literature as Activism in Spain” in *Studies in Twentieth & Twenty-First Century Literature* (accepted for publication) and co-editor of the volume, *Migrant Frontiers: Race and Mobility in the Luso-Hispanic World* (forthcoming with Liverpool University Press). At Duke University she has received the Duke Romance Studies Graduate Student Fellowship (2015-2020), an Andrew W. Mellon Research Grant from the Council of European Studies (2016), a Summer Research Fellowship (2018), the International Dissertation Research Travel Award (2018), a Bass Instructional Fellowship (2020), a Preparing Future Faculty Fellowship (2019-2020), and the Dean’s Award for Excellence in Teaching (2021). She holds a Mellon/ACLS Dissertation Completion Fellowship for “Urban Borderlands: African Writers in Precarious Spain, 1985-2008.”