

# HUELLAS

SPANISH JOURNAL ON SLAVERY, COLONIALISM,  
RESISTANCES AND LEGACIES



## PRESENTACIÓN

Texto de coordinación editorial



## EN EL FOCO

El fantasma del colonialismo y sus voces

- Del atardecer en el Támesis a la espesura de la selva. “Salvajismo” y “civilización” como categorías de dominio en *Heart of Darkness* de Joseph Conrad. Lucía Martí Mengual
- La narrativa hispanofilipina gótica y sobrenatural de Adelina Gurrea Monasterio: Espíritus, naturalezas vivas y tensiones postcoloniales desde la nostalgia. Jorge González del Pozo
- “*Is It Licit to Eat Human Flesh?*”: Vitoria and the Politics of Disgust in the Making of the Colonial Order. Ever E. Osorio
- “El Arbolito”, el parque de la resistencia. Discusión abierta sobre memorias y patrimonio. Fernando Guerrero Maruri
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- Pasen y vean. La intertextualidad literaria afroespañola en *No es país para negras* (2016) de Sílvia Albert Sopale. Alfonso Bartolomé



## TRAZAS

Afro-Latin Americans Living in Spain and Social Death: Moving from the Empirical to the Ontological. Ethan Johnson, Joy González-Güeto and Vanessa Cadena



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## **PRESENTACIÓN**

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Marx y Engels arrancaron aquel breve texto que conmovió el mundo, El Manifiesto Comunista, con la evocación de un fantasma que recorría Europa. Hoy otro fantasma recorre no ya Europa sino el mundo entero. Es notable cómo, también en este caso, lo reprimido retorna: no deja de ser significativo que tantas décadas después de la abolición de la esclavitud y de las emancipaciones coloniales, se dé un urgente análisis crítico en numerosas disciplinas que se ocupan de estos dos hechos históricos cruciales, de cómo configuraron nuestro mundo, de la variedad de resistencias que suscitaron, y de sus legados en el presente. Quizá en nuestro ámbito -amparada por la Universidad de Valencia, si bien con voluntad de trascender sus límites- la revista que inauguramos, Huellas: Spanish Journal on Slavery, Colonialism, Resistances and Legacies, sea también un síntoma de ese fantasma que recorre como culpa nuestra conciencia histórica pública. Por ello, este primer número está dedicado a explorar diversas perspectivas y acercamientos que confluyen en ese malestar moral y político, sí bien es cierto que con cierta primacía de los análisis literarios. Sea como fuere, la óptica de la revista tiene voluntad multidisciplinar y pretende en los números sucesivos que este inaugura contribuir a una cartografía teórica y crítica que coadyuve a trazar nuevas rutas en el estudio de la esclavitud, el colonialismo, las resistencias que suscitaron y los legados de todo ello, que configuran el mundo que habitamos. La Historia, la Antropología, la Filología, la Sociología y la Teoría Política, sin olvidar la Filosofía, habida cuenta de las distintas ramas y especificaciones que hoy las vertebran, constituirán nuestra caja de herramientas. Desde esta perspectiva, en la medida de sus posibilidades, esta revista también tiene la voluntad de convocar una variada pertenencia internacional y académica de sus colaboradores que esperamos ir ampliando.



**NUEVAS LETRAS**

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**Jerome C. Branche (ed.). *Trajectories of Empire: Transhispanic Reflections on the African Diaspora*. Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2022. 310 pages. ISBN: 9780826504593**

**Alain Lawo-Sukam.** DOI: 10.7203/huellas.1.27121

*Trajectories of Empire: Transhispanic Reflections on the African Diaspora*, edited by Jerome C. Branche, provides an in-depth understanding of the presence of Africans in the Iberian Peninsula and the Ibero-American empire. This collection of eleven essays expands on the work previously done by other scholars on African diasporas in Europe and the Americas, including Yolanda Aixelà-Cabré, Elisa Rizo, Carmen Fracchia, Fassil Demissie, William Phillips, S.K. Bryant, Joaneath Spicer, Natalie Zemon Davis, Kate Lowe, Alastair Corston de Custance, Maxwell Saunders, Kathryn Joy McKnight, Leo J. Garofalo, Niyi Afolabi, and George Reid, among others. However, most of the existing scholarship on the historical trajectory of the African diaspora either focuses on the Iberian Peninsula or on Ibero-America, but *Trajectories of Empire* combines both worlds, to highlight both their interconnectedness and the extent of Iberian colonialism.

In the introduction to the book, Jerome C. Branche emphasizes that the basic objective of this project is “to explore salient issues in imperial domination, accommodation, race/ing, and resistance in relation to these experiences that have largely escaped the attention of traditional, discipline-bound scholarship” (i). Beyond exploring the experiences and challenges faced by Afrodescendants in the Iberian Peninsula and the Americas, there is a subtle insistence on the interdisciplinary nature of the book. The chapters in this volume are written from a methodological framework that transcends disciplinary boundaries: there is an intentional act by Branche to give the readers a greater appreciation of black experiences through an approach that encompasses the intersection of cultural studies, traditional literary analysis, history, visual culture, and anthropology. Research on blackness should certainly not be limited to, or trapped within, the confines of any particular discipline; the histories, lives and experiences of Africans and African diaspora communities are better understood through a critical inquiry that is multidimensional and that transcends disciplinary boundaries.

*Trajectories of Empire* is divided in three parts that cover, chronologically, the beginnings of the settlement of captive Africans in the Iberian Peninsula, and the African presence in colonial and postcolonial Latin America. Part one, entitled “The Iberian Scenario”, has four chapters. The first one, by Elizabeth R. Wright, traces the arrival of enslaved Africans from West Africa to Portugal in the spring of 1444, based on the accounts of Gomes Eannes de Azurara, a chronicler who narrated the painful story and experiences of 235 captive slaves. Azurara’s text compiles first-hand observations in Lagos, in Portugal, and the now-lost textual witness Afonso de Cerveira. In Chapter two, Miguel Valerio

analyzes the social and cultural roles of Afro-Iberian confraternities, made up of freed Africans, which document the reality of African presence in late medieval Iberia. This model of African brotherhood would then be established in the Americas, but contrary to the confraternities in the Iberian Peninsula, the ones in the Americas included enslaved blacks who benefited from their services. In Chapter three, Manuel Olmedo Gobante examines the participation of Afro-Iberians in early modern Iberia's martial arts and uses the story of Alba-Medrano's family to show how swordplay became an opportunity for upward mobility for Africans; martial arts not only offered a way to improve their financial well-being but enabled them to fight discrimination and stereotyping. Finally, in Chapter four, Jerome C. Branche examines the story of Chicaba, a nine-year old girl captured in Africa in the eighteenth century and enslaved in Spain. Her conversion into Catholicism and ascension into Venerable Mother are not only remarkable but reveal the mechanism of whitening used by her confessor and biographer, Father Carlos Miguel de Paniagua, to legitimate her piety.

Part two of *Trajectories of Empire*, entitled "Continuing Expansionism and the Circum-Atlantic", is also comprised of four chapters. The contributors to this section examine the experiences of Africans in colonial Latin America. Agnes Lugo-Ortiz, in Chapter five, explores visual archives and questions the insertion of the black enslaved subjects (especially their faces) in visual representations. Baltasar Fra-Molinero, in Chapter six, uses the 1599 painting by Andrés Sánchez Gallque to reveal the autonomy and political agency of three Afrodescendant leaders from Ecuador. The painting, known as *Los mulatos de Esmeraldas*, offers a counternarrative to the image of blacks as perpetual slaves and as figures subservient to the imperial rule of the Spanish Crown; more than a form of resistance, Fra-Molinero argues that the portrait of these colonized black leaders can also be read as a form of Afrofuturism. In Chapter seven, Lúcia Helena Costigan presents the disillusion and frustration of two formerly colonized Brazilian writers who were victims of discrimination and marginalization in Portugal –Gregório de Matos (white) and Domingos Caldas Barbosa (mulatto)- to demonstrate the linguistic, political, and social ostracism suffered in the metropole by diasporic colonial subjects because of their Brazilian origin (Matos) and dark complexion (Caldas), respectively. In Chapter eight, Cassia Roth explores the reproductive experience and the physical pain of enslaved black women in Brazil. Although miscarriages, stillbirths, and high infant mortality rates were common in the nineteenth-century for women of all ethno-racial backgrounds, they were particularly elevated among the enslaved population due to racialized medical practices, false beliefs about black women's bodies, and projected biological differences.

Part three of *Trajectories of Empire*, entitled "Afro-Latin America", includes the last three chapters of the book, and addresses black marginality in the twenty-first century. Alberto Abreu, in Chapter nine, examines racial dynamics and tensions in Cuba; the pervasive phenomenon of *el miedo al negro* (fear of blacks) rooted in the colonial era is still prevalent in contemporary Cuban society. The construction of the nation as a "racial melting pot" has put Cuban racial problems in the back burner, and it has jeopardized attempts at deconstructing the subaltern place that blackness has held in Cuban consciousness. The legacy of slavery and plantation mentality is also visible in Chapter ten, where Eliseo Jacob uses the images of the *senzalas* and *quilombos* as a metaphor to chastise the justice system, the correctional institutions, and the mass incarceration of black and poor mix-race population in Brazil; meanwhile, Brazilian Hip Hop artists became the voice through which state violence and anti-black racism are condemned, and political and cultural resistance are celebrated. Finally, the collective book closes with Chapter eleven,



in which Maria Andrea dos Santos Soares describes the artistic practices and “Urban Interventions” in the Gamboa neighborhood of Rio de Janeiro, along the Pathway to the Port: a journey through black heritage, memory and resistance. It is worth noting, however, the paradox of the appropriation of African-based cultures by the Brazilian state; while black cultures are celebrated as part of the national foundation, Afro-Brazilians are still suffering daily from institutional racism and exclusion. The folklorization of black cultures has become a commercial enterprise that profits more the white-dominated tourism industry and government institutions than the black communities themselves.

Curiously, the present volume does not engage with the rich African presence in the Iberian Peninsula from 711 to 1492. The exclusion of the history, experiences, and legacy of the Muslim population in Spain might be due to the fact that the book focuses on the notion of Spain and Portugal as imperial and postimperial entities, and the Iberian maritime expansion into Ibero-America. Even though the book discusses the experience of important Afrodescendant figures in the Iberian Peninsula and Ibero-America, it does not cover the role of prominent black leaders of the Atlantic world and beyond, such as Benkos Biohó in Colombia, Gaspar Yanga in Mexico, and King Bayano in Panama, for example. Black experiences in Central America and the Southern Cone are not covered in the volume either. These limitations are understandable, because of the impossibility to address in a single collection of essays the experiences of the black diaspora over such a vast geographical and chronological period.

*Trajectories of Empire* is an effective reading of the journey and settlement of a number of Africans in the Iberian Peninsula from the fifteenth century onwards, and of their living conditions and power negotiations in Cuba, Brazil and Ecuador during the colonial and contemporary period. From enslaved and freed individuals, to swordsman, leaders, and venerable figures, Afrodescendant experiences are neither monolithic nor homogeneous but diverse and multidimensional. By using case studies in their research papers, the authors personalize human experiences at a microlevel, and show how different aspects of an Afrodescendant's life are related to and also different from each other. This method is also a way of relativizing general assumptions that might not correspond to individual context. The present volume is an invitation for further inquiry into the historical trajectory of African diasporas in the Iberian worlds.



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