

Rocking the Boat: The Black Atlantic in Spanish Pop Music from the 1980s and the '90s¹

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It is telling that the pop group Mecano and the rock band Barricada came into prominence at the same time that Spain was establishing itself as a model democracy, postmodern cultural haven, and rising economic presence in Latin America: that is, during the decade of Spain's postmodern and global transformation: 1982-1992. The arrival of the Socialist Party (the PSOE) of Felipe González in 1982—the same year “Mecano” and “Barricada” released their first records—allowed for the so called *transición* and meant widespread changes that are still shaping the Spanish State. Among the salient changes is the institutionalization of Spain as a nation-state made up of Autonomous Communities (stateless nations such as the Basque Country, Catalonia, Andalusia, and Galicia) that legally recognized Spain's multilingual configuration. Another visible change was the Europeanization and globalization of Spain in 1992, the year of the Barcelona Olympic Games. As a result Spain became a new postmodern cultural site as well as the promised land of riches for immigrants mainly from Latin America and Africa. Therefore, Spain's new geopolitical location made it “The North” to immigration flows from both southern regions.

On the cultural front, this decade was marked by a creative energy that impacted both social behaviors and imaginaries in several realms at once: film, magazines, fashion, newspapers, and popular music.² This last realm, music, offers us a rich spectrum from

which to evaluate Spain, Africa and Latin America. Indeed, it is in very specific songs of the 1980s and 1990s that transatlantic issues such as immigration and border crossing are brought into the open by groups such as “Mecano,” “Amistades Peligrosas,” and “Barricada.” The implications of considering Spanish cultural productions of the last two decades within a Hispanic-Atlantic intersection have been forcefully argued by Joseba Gabilondo. By asking us to consider “the Hispanic Atlantic” as a necessary and structural position and location from which to rethink the global aspects of postcoloniality and postnationalism in both Spain and Latin America, Gabilondo offers us a point of departure from which to evaluate Spain’s recent cultural production. While Paul Gilroy’s *The Black Atlantic* evaluated the British Empire’s role in the slave trade, no such study can be found within Spanish Cultural Studies. This is a very telling void since there is a multitude of cultural artifacts—the musical form of the “Habaneras” comes to mind—that would allow us to access that repressed historical memory of Spain’s Atlantic imperialist past. This is not an irrelevant task considering the complex issues facing Spain in regards to the immigration of people of color in the twenty-first century.

The impact of the powerful yet unpredicted socioeconomic forces unleashed by transatlantic and transnational flows is made evident by facts such as the decision made by national newspapers *El País* or *El mundo* to have ongoing sections on immigration on their web pages. What is most important about the virtual images and information provided particularly by *El País* on its webpage, is that they reflect in an acute manner the shock with which Spain experiences the influx of people of

the Third World as people of color. In fact, the perception that the color of immigration is black is evidenced by the electronic image accompanying the “Inmigración en España” section showing three young black men appearing to have just arrived on a *patera* and immediately being captured by the *Guardia Civil* (Spanish police). In the foreground, one of the two young black men—the third one is shown in the background being escorted by a policeman—appears struggling not to fall while the other holds him by the arm. Interestingly enough, the current statistics provided in one of the subsections for the year 1999 show the ever-changing face of the migrant worker: a total of 5,000 Moroccan nationals were granted permits, followed by 4,000 Chinese, and 3,000 Ecuadorians. Thus, the current migratory trends show a very different landscape from that offered by the image chosen to emblemize the “face” of immigration. More importantly, *El País*’s website is not the only one assigning a black face to immigration, also “*Huelva Acoge*” posts the image of a black person; this organization is one of the nongovernmental associations constituting the network “*Andalucía Acoge*” created to help immigrants arriving in Andalucía. In this case, however, an illustration depicts the profile of what appears to be a black woman dressed in her native attire. That the agency’s aims are to empower immigrants by giving them a space to voice their experiences is made apparent by the fact that below the above mentioned image there is a quote by C. Nzuji, a Zairian. The text articulates Zaire as the epitome of unity as follows:

I come from the country that is not like
any other]
from the country where the male friend
becomes a brother]

and the female friend a sister.
(my translation)

While the expression fails to recognize the dire realities of that African nation, the immediate objective of such a quote appears to call for an empathetic and sympathetic thinking formulated by María Lugones in her “Hablando cara a cara/Speaking Face to Face: An Exploration of Ethnocentric Racism” (47).

In the pages that follow, I argue that the fixation on a black face for the immigrant worker arriving in Spain was articulated in the late 1980s and the early 1990s when African and Caribbean immigrants—mostly Dominicans and Cubans—constituted the major component of transnational and transatlantic flows. Although the gender of this immigrant is usually represented as being male, the space limitations of this essay give priority to the geopolitical aspect of this always-gendered reality. Thus, I offer the musical productions of Mecano, Amistades Peligrosas, and Barricada as specific cultural artifacts offering us an insight into the global cultural flow that constitutes what Arjun Appadurai describes as “the landscape of persons [made out] of the shifting world of immigrants, refugees, exiles and other moving groups” (222). Indeed, the specific landscape of black immigrants from Africa and the Caribbean is brought into the limelight by songs such as “El blues del esclavo” (The Blues of the Slave), “Africanos en Madrid” (Africans in Madrid), and “Oveja Negra” (Black Sheep), which are the focus of my analysis. However, these are not the only ones, and the fact that so many songs have been written since the mid 1980s about the presence of people of color in Spain—for example by the group “Revolver” and by songwriters Carlos Cano and Juan Guerra—needs to be evaluated as a

wake up call to the fact that the brutalizing nature of border crossing for many people of color is eluded when discussing the relations of movement and displacement as bell hooks already pointed out.

It is important to understand the songs for what they are: narratives textualizing in musical form the oppression, repression, and pain inflected by the illusions of (post)modernity and progress upon people of color. Thus, the songs bear witness to the specific effects that border crossing and transnational movements have on immigrants reaching the Spanish shores. They give testimony but are not and cannot be *testimonios*, since the actual agents of such events are neither the ones singing nor the ones producing the music nor the records. Let us not forget that only immigrants can voice the harrowing experiences of transatlantic and transnational journeys and because they belong, in this case, to the first generation of immigrants little or no cultural texts are usually produced until the second generation. However given the recent discussion on Latin American *testimonio* (Beverly), this early production must be incorporated into the genealogy of testimonials, as a phase in which the Other is represented as immigrant and as geopolitical and economic subject while at the same time is contained as racially marked and thus ultimately other in what could only be considered an anxious testimony where the subaltern does not speak (to use Spivak’s term) but is represented and thus, ultimately, witnessed.³ Ultimately, even though each song functions within a popular music paradigm that aims to sell records and entertain, any interpretation of “El blues del esclavo,” “Africanos en Madrid” and “Oveja negra” requires that we respond to their double work of consciousness-raising and racial containment, which is ultimately At-

lantic. In this sense, music, because of its position in culture and geopolitics, must be hailed as the first Atlantic site where immigration was given testimony; other cultural artifacts such as literature or film (Martí-Olivella) engaged this reality later on.

Textual Specificity and Race

Although a number of issues can be raised in regard to the rise of musical groups such as Mecano, Amistades Peligrosas, and Barricada in the context of late twentieth-century Spanish political and economic history, this essay focuses on the textual specificity of each one of the songs. Needless to say, Adorno's shadow looms large here. And, while his insistence on the "exploration and analysis of the economic base of music" (310) is one aspect I am considering here, I am also aware that this consideration is not enough. Furthermore, Adorno's analysis also fails to expose the ethnographic strategies used by some of the songs to represent the transnational and transatlantic movements of Black people. The reasons for what I call "Adorno's shortcomings" have to do with his functionalist reduction correlating the consumption and production of popular music. This reduction to an economic base cannot fully describe nor explain the terrifying experience of many people of color of the transatlantic and global border crossing addressed by the songs I am inviting you "to listen to" by reading their lyrics—the racial anxieties registered in these songs by their Spanish subjects do not respond to a solely economic base.

Let me be very clear about the economic base of the issues at hand. It is unquestionable that the transatlantic success of Mecano—more than Amistades Peligrosas and Barricada who were mainly

successful within European boundaries—is without a doubt intimately tied to transnational capitalism. It is also transnational capitalism that brings to Spanish shores both the boats—the infamous *pateras*—with human cargo from Africa, and planes from all over Latin America with women to serve as maids or prostitutes. It is within the new modes of flexible production and financial deregulation of transnational capitalism that African and Caribbean immigrants came to Spain in the late 1980s and the very early 1990s to form an easily-exploited labor force.⁴

It is within the supposed certainty provided by statistics and the assumed certainty that the numbers are much higher when considering illegal immigrants and that the transnational flow of workers is actively prevented by the Spanish State. This happens in two ways. On the one hand, the flow of workers is prevented by racist laws such as the Ley Orgánica de Inmigración, with its latest version approved by the Spanish Congress in April of 2000 by a majority from the Partido Popular.⁵ On the other hand, the flow of immigrants is also prevented by the situation encountered by the immigrants themselves: a racist climate, which is more troubling because its racism is constantly and historically denied.⁶ It is within this landscape that people of color in Spain come to symbolize all that is most feared: drug trafficking, prostitution, and "primitive" cultural practices. For one, the Spanish media is constantly reporting on prostitution rings of African and Caribbean nationals. One of the most recent examples was the presentation on "Antena 3" of a feature titled "Esclavos del siglo XXI" prepared by "El Mundo TV" (March 28, 2001). The program focused on how African nationals sell fellow female citizens to work as prosti-

tutes in Madrid, implicitly suggesting that the issue of “slavery” is a strictly African affair: a problem between “them.” It is within these media images that immigrants come to emblemize all of the Third World’s problems and issues that, according to Spaniards’ (mis)perceptions, are threatening to bring Spain down from its Second-World-nation status as described by Gabilondo. These fears and anxieties are projected onto the immigrants that are symbolized as the “dark, degraded, and degenerated” other. A caveat is in order here to help explain these adjectives. Oliver C. Cox’s *Caste, Class, and Race* (well before Gilroy’s *Black Atlantic*) already clarifies how race was factored in the division of labor in the Atlantic. As he states:

The exploitation of the colored workers, it should be observed, consigns them to employment and treatment that is humanly degrading. In order to justify this treatment the exploiters must argue that the workers are innately degraded and degenerate, consequently they naturally merit their condition [...]. Moreover, we [...]tend to dislike people who are degraded or brutalized. A degraded person is a contemptible person who should be despised and kept at a distance—The Christian Gospels notwithstanding. (334, 336)

My invitation to pay attention to the lyrics of “El blues del esclavo,” “Africanos en Madrid,” and “Oveja negra” aims to produce a sobering effect on what Katharyne Mitchell calls “the celebratory representations of transnational cultures” (220). I believe the songs expose the oppressive cultural and socioeconomic forces that are not addressed by Appadurai’s touted “ethnoscapes” (222) while they represent race

within contained Spanish cultural parameters. In the specific case of Spain, we can see that while Spain’s transatlantic enterprises have what I like to call the “Empire Strikes Back” effect in moves such as the national Spanish telephone company Telefónica taking over most of the South American market: the movement of people back from Latin America and Africa to Spain is brutally prevented. Thus, while the economic benefits of border crossing and transatlantic enterprises are very obvious, more attention needs to be paid to the social and cultural implications of such movements.

Let’s Talk about Slavery: Mecano and “El blues del esclavo”

“El blues del esclavo” is from the record entitled *Descanso dominical* released in 1988, which is also the year “SOS Racismo” is founded in Madrid with 27 headquarters within the Spanish territory. “SOS Racismo” was created with two very specific objectives. First, it was created to help immigrants and refugees with problems of acculturation. Secondly, and most importantly, it was created to promote antiracist levels of social consciousness and to denounce and report any racist and xenophobic activities in the Spanish territory. Thus, by 1988 it is very apparent that there are serious social difficulties understanding racial and ethnic problems. In fact, the impact on the Spanish social imaginary of immigration and the xenophobic reaction to the flow of transnational and transatlantic workers had been made apparent by the enactment in 1985 of the “Ley Orgánica de Extranjería” under Felipe González’s presidency. To contextualize such an event, let us not forget that between 1985 and

1988 the political and the labor landscape of Spain was dramatically changing: the so-called “honeymoon” between the labor unions and the PSOE came to an abrupt end on June 20, 1985 with a general strike protesting the pension reductions. The second general strike of December 14, 1988 was a hard political blow to Felipe González and his government: this time the unions protested the PSOE’s economic plan and in particular the “Plan de Empleo Juvenil.”

The economic anxieties behind these social reactions were nowhere to be found, neither in the unprecedented commercial success of Mecano nor in the fact that they were becoming a cultural phenomenon on both sides of the Atlantic. Indeed, by 1988 they were already “flesh for national fantasy” in Spain (borrowing from Lauren Berlant’s evaluation of Madonna in her “National Brands/National Body: *Imitation of Life*” [110]). It is in the context of the renewed interest of Spanish audiences, but also in Latin America, that a song such as “El blues del esclavo” can resonate with all of its symbolic and testimonial significance. The lyrics read as follows:

The Black being
Is a color
I just can’t swallow
This slave thing
I’m burnt out
From working sunrise to sunrise
In the fields of the damned owner

My fellow workers
Think the same
Either there is a new Spartacus
That destroys the place
And there is change
Or everyone goes to Gambia
From Kunta Kinte to our time
There have been few improvements

Let’s see whether the War of Secession
Allows for our cotton union
Let everyone know
It’s looking to get
Rest on Sundays, a decent salary
Two paychecks a month
A one-month vacation
And a retirement pension
And that they treat us
With dignity
Like other, fellow immigrants
That they end
Their dirty tricks
And physical abuse

And whomever wants to can return
To Senegal
To run naked through the jungle
With his woman and his child
To go natural
With his neck and chin high
Like sister ostrich
So they can’t say
That we are a bunch of Zulus
To go on singing these blues
(editor’s translation)

Framed within historical narratives of revolt against slavery and the rise of race consciousness, the song forces us to consider diverse labor conditions. Thus, from slavery—as in the references to “Spartacus,” “The War of Secession,” and “Kunta Kinte”—to wage labor—with its references to “labor union” and “Sundays off”—the listener is asked to consider the intersection between class and race in a global and Atlantic context, where there are imperialist references to ancient Rome, because of Spartacus, the Thracian gladiator that revolted against his Roman captors in 71BC, and the USA. Noteworthy in the song is the insistence on the depiction of the physical and territorial suppression suffered by black persons in the history of slavery. To acknowledge the intricate forms of slavery

a historical anachronism is used to expose both the social issues relevant to labor in 1988 in Spain and how social injustice knows no national boundaries, or historical contexts. For example, the narrating voice of the song—that of a black male slave who speaks also in the name of his comrades—demands precisely the array of social benefits: “Two paychecks a month,” “a one-month vacation,” “And a retirement pension” that were slowly being taken away from union workers by the new economic policies of the González government.

By inscribing the song in a socially charged musical tradition such as the blues, Mecano bears witness to the denunciatory origins of this manifestation of black culture in the United States.⁸ Black persons developed blues sometime after the United States Civil War. In his *Popular Music and the Underground: Foundations of Jazz, Blues, Country & Rock 1900-1950*, Chuck Mancuso explains that “the first blues songs were performed by migrant freedmen who put words and storylines to the moans of field hollers” (70). He goes on to clarify that in the case of rural or country blues, the music was in the oral tradition and “was a form carried by men roving from town to town seeking work” (74). Thus, it is not surprising that “El blues del esclavo” articulates a discourse of labor issues within the rejection of enslavement—“I just can’t swallow/ this slave thing”—and demands for equal and just treatment for those seeking work beyond their national boundaries.

The fact that Mecano uses the musical form of the blues to offer a singular and plural first-person narrative needs to be evaluated within the paradigms of Gilroy’s “Black Atlantic”—by the diasporic and transatlantic references to Gambia and Senegal—and within the articulations of

postcoloniality. It is not a coincidence that the song’s liberatory strategy is foregrounded, by the reference to Alex Palmer Haley’s *Roots* (1976) and the tracing back of his own ancestry to Africa with the enslaving of Kunta Kinte. It is only after the enunciatory stance evoking the images of the television miniseries that the allusion to the War of Secession and the defeat of a powerful slaveholding class resonates with cultural meaning. Thus, Kunta Kinte’s refusal to be (un)named speaks to his resistance to slavery, while *Roots* as a whole can be taken as speaking against the legacy of slavery and its aftermath. Let us not forget that the *Roots* television miniseries produced by ABC in 1977 attracted worldwide attention, and was, therefore, a cultural reference clearly understood by the Spaniards of the late 1980s.

By singing in the voice of the enslaved, Mecano exposes slavery in general as a horrifying social practice that looms large in human history. The mentioning of Spartacus, the Thracian gladiator who led a slave revolt against his Roman rulers, brings this fact home very early on in the song. As in the case of Kunta Kinte, the name of Spartacus also resonates because of the 1960’s film in which a young Kirk Douglas plays the lead role. However, above and beyond these particularities, Mecano’s intelligent contribution is making the issues of the Black Atlantic bear relevance on the labor situation of 1980s Spain.

At the same time, there are problems with “El blues del esclavo” by the “going native” ending of the song—as in the “to run naked through the jungle/With his woman and his child/To go natural” lyrics—as well as the derogatory and very Spanish use of the word “Zulu.” It is a strategy by which the immigrant, as economic

subject, is de-colored as new Spanish-global worker, and at the same time, as colored subject, is exorcised as “savage” and pushed back to the African continent. While bearing witness to immigration’s hardship, the song does not abandon Spanish anxieties towards colored people and race. This tension ultimately points to the irreducible Atlantic formation of race and immigration in Spain.

Yet “El blues del esclavo” foreshadows immigration and race as transatlantic issues that will shape Spain’s social and political agendas of the next decade and into the twenty-first century. It is only after such a song that Amistades Peligrosas will further question the specificity of these two issues in “Africanos en Madrid;” and both will ultimately be echoed in Barricada’s “Oveja negra.”

“Black Skin” and Everyday Life: “Africanos en Madrid”

Amistades Peligrosas was a pop music duo formed by Cristina del Valle and Alberto Comesaña that recorded and performed together from 1991-1998. Their first recording project in 1991 was titled *Relatos de una intriga*, to which “Africanos en Madrid” belongs.

Comesaña was already well known in the musical milieu of the 1980s because of his participation in the Galician “rock-erotic” group called “Semen Up” and was also a recognized figure on Galician television as a host and as an actor. As for Cristina del Valle, she was not involved in music before Amistades Peligrosas but, later on, went on to be part of the group “Vodevil.” She has now embarked on a solo musical career as has Comesaña. As a duo, Amistades Peligrosas was famous within the Spanish

state for songs such as “Me quedaré solo”—that went on to win the *Organisation Générale des Amateurs D’Eurovision* Song Contest in 1996—and “Estoy por ti,” among others. Despite their success within the European continent, the duo never achieved the transatlantic success of Mecano. Nonetheless, Amistades Peligrosas managed to sell an impressive number of records, enjoying a following receptive of their eclectic musical style within the paradigm of pop rock.

Inscribed in Calypso rhythms that speak musically more of the Caribbean than of Sub-Saharan Africa, “Africanos en Madrid” sets out to tell the everyday struggles African nationals face from the moment they embark on transnational migrations because of economic needs to their daily life in Madrid. From the ways in which the immigrant workers’ journeys begin to the terrifying experiences awaiting them in the capital city of the Spanish state, the lyrics aim to humanize the individuals grouped under the semantically loaded term “Africans:”

Madrid, night turns into a rough cloth
The Madrid night turns rough and dry
When goodbye arrives
There is a ready-made hole
For the cop.
He went far away from home
With his heart pumping
In exchange for that ticket
He sold his soul to the Devil.

Today I saw him pass by again
Kind of sad but friendly
Always tireless
Going after his bread and salt.
Today I saw him pass by again
His eyes were happy
Someone gave him news
From his native village.

I opened my eyes to see
 The sin of being African in Madrid
 That the sun doesn't reach here
 The sin of being made of ebony,
 Blood and ivory
 If you look under his skin
 One finds the same heart.

Maybe with a little luck
 You will get to the Gran Vía
 Without the police asking you for your
 passport.]

If the moon is on your side
 With any luck you will have your bed
 Made from leaves and branches
 In the Plaza de España.
 (editor's translation)

The song contains a story narrated in the third person by someone who knows the African protagonist: "Today I saw him pass by again." The lyric voice of the song functions as a *de facto* witness who is "giving testimony" to us, the public, about the trials and tribulations of this individual. Moreover, the strategy of individualization—"I saw him pass by"—is an important contribution made by the song since it works against the generalization of the title and against the straitjacketing images of racism that represent black persons from Africa in late twentieth-century Spain as lacking humanity.

It is in the second stanza where personhood is articulated with references to emotions and sentiments that are assumed as human characteristics: "Today I saw him pass by again/Kind of sad but friendly" and "Today I saw him pass by again/His eyes were happy/Someone gave him news from his native village." By touching the familiar—this person has a hometown—the song allows for a complex political and social transnational process such as immigration

to be presented in a personal, experiential vocabulary. It is obvious, then, that the lyrics of "Africanos en Madrid" aim to generate some kind of resistance to the prevailing social order, not only by exposing the abuse to which African immigrants are subjected by the police, but by presenting the dire conditions—such as homelessness—they must confront in Madrid. Actually, the song aims to get to the heart of the matter by resorting to an equation of "sameness in difference": the outside differences of skin color cannot overshadow the fact that we all have a beating heart. The "heart" as the basic metaphor to allude to the humanity in all of us, is used to bring home in uncomplicated terms the message that we should have solidarity with the immigrant community.

Though simple, the message was relevant if we consider that by 1991 the need to protect immigrants from racism was evident. Several associations were formed to protect people of color, and particularly women of color, in Spain. For example, Asociación de Mujeres Dominicanas de España (AMDE) was created in 1991 to help Dominican women cope with the xenophobic environment; while *Andalucía Acoge* was created that same year with the purpose of defending and protecting immigrants arriving to the Andalusian region. The websites of these associations are a key element in the promotion of their causes.

The need for an association such as AMDE was exposed in a tragic and dramatic manner in 1992, with the murder of Lucrecia Pérez, a Dominican woman working as a domestic employee in Madrid. Killed in the Plaza de los Cubos, a habitual meeting place for skinheads in Madrid and with the participation of the Guardia Civil, Lucrecia Pérez stands out as a case that

shows how terrorizing the experience of transnational capitalism and transatlantic crossing is for people of color. In fact, the website of the antiracist association “Derecho para tod@s,” in their article titled “Ley de Extranjería: causas y azares” (2000) links the antiracist movements in the Spanish territory to Lucrecia’s murder:

the antiracist movement has a relatively short history. It develops with the rise of immigrant hand labor and has as its symbolic date the assassination of Lucrecia. (my translation)

Thus, the proclamation of “the weakening of boundaries (among societies, as well as among social categories)” needs to be re-evaluated against the historical and factual realities of the immigration flows in Spain since the 1980s (Dirlik 31).

The issue of boundaries is also at the heart of “Africanos en Madrid.” In fact, the relevance of the square as the location where transatlantic and transnational issues are brutally negotiated and fought over is made evident with the reference to the Plaza de España. Thus, from the Plaza de los Cubos to the Plaza de España we can observe how deterritorialization, as a paradigmatic force within global flows, arises from the presence of immigrants in public spaces in Madrid. Indeed, it is the presence of “laboring populations in the spaces of relatively wealthy societies” (Appadurai 225) that is evaluated in “Africanos en Madrid.” It is under this deterritorialization that Madrid’s emblematic spaces such as la “Gran Vía” and the “Plaza de España” become sites of contention where the new social and political landscape of Spain is constantly drawn and redrawn. It is within this contested landscape that the displaced presence of African nationals populating the semiotic ar-

chitectural space called the Plaza de España displaces Spaniards from the now uncannily and unfamiliar affect of this most familiar place (I emphasize here the presence of African nationals because of the song, but the square functions as a gathering place for immigrants of many nations and ethnic origins).

Located at the heart of one of Madrid’s historic, business and tourist districts, the Plaza de España was built to emblemize Spanish national identity. In a most imperial manner, this identification appears to echo Nebrija’s “language is the empire’s helper” motto, since the monumental sculptural design of the square has the towering figure of Cervantes gazing upon his creations, Don Quixote and Sancho Panza. The three figures are spatial examples of sheer cultural immensity and stand as physical and concrete proof of the linguistic and literary turns of nationalism. Thus, the cultural shock to the Spanish social imaginary by the appropriation by black Africans of the symbolic space of the Plaza de España cannot be overestimated, since what is at stake here is the grandiosity of the physical space and its symbolic national meaning.

Interestingly enough, space is also a site of racial anxiety in the song. By equating the urban spaces of Madrid with the new global and Atlantic order triggering Third-World immigration, and the rural village with the African point of origin of the immigrant, the song once again displaces the colored subject to a rural territory from which Spain itself emerged in the 1970s. In other words, the reference to the immigrant and his (her) village, is one of the most widely shared historical memories of Spanish culture of the ‘60s and ‘70s, when large groups of villagers emigrated to North-

ern Europe and the Americas. By displacing the village to the other side of the globalized immigration divide, once again, the song contains anxiety about sharing a historical and economic experience—rural immigration. In this manner the lyrics relocate Spain and its capital as a first-world, transnational white space that does not share any historical relation with past immigration experiences which now have become solely African and black. In this case, then, race also becomes a way to rewrite Spanish history and exorcise its anxieties towards colored people.

Taking all of this into consideration we can see, then, that “Africanos en Madrid” proposes a perspectival shift to gain some insight into social relations framed by race and class brought about by what Arif Dirlik terms “a certain phenomena of global capitalism:” the “global motions of peoples” (31). This last aspect is important since Dirlik’s reflection pays almost no attention to the fact that “the global motions of peoples” resulting from transnational capitalism are dependent on the actual exploitation, for the most part, of people of color. Thus, his claim that those who do not respond to the operations of capital “need not be colonized; they are simply marginalized” (32) needs to be taken with a “grain of salt” if we consider the situation of black immigrants in Spain. Deemed “the salt of the earth,” the immigrant of the song is presented in constant motion looking for any kind of job as suggested by the metonymical reference “siempre infatigable tras el pan y la sal.” Again, while the issue of immigration can only be understood within the paradigms of Transatlantic Studies, we do need to ponder the effects of transnational enterprises that subject people of color to almost colonial labor conditions.

Barricada: Violence and *Misrecognition* in “Oveja negra”

As I mentioned earlier in this essay, Barricada first appeared on the musical scene in 1982. Interestingly enough, the group originated in Navarra, exposing how the musical scene of the Autonomous Communities was a site of intense creative energy. In 1984, the readers of the Basque newspaper *Egin* gave Barricada the title of “Best Group of Navarra.” In 1992, the radio station “Los 40...” named them the “Most Important Rock Band” because their “Balas Blancas” album went platinum (See Iñaki Zarata’s *Barricada*). The relevance of the album’s title is directly connected to “Oveja Negra.” The song I am inviting you to consider is within the paradigms of transnational and Transatlantic Studies, by connecting the “balas blancas” of the (Spanish) police with the “oveja negra” (the black person from either Africa or the Caribbean):

Take his picture, get his fingerprints
Carefully check his teeth
If he resists smash his head
The same old routine
These pigs have to learn
Who is in charge here
Let him be scared within these four walls
Tell him not to bother us.

If they are not treated this way
Power will change hands
Let them grow desperate
Waiting for the miracle.

He wanted to take a step forward
Wanted to walk without chains
Wanted to live in freedom
And nobody understands this.

When the black person is a man
It’s a good time for the hunter

The white man gets nervous
 And begins to load the pistol
 ... It was his [the black man's] fault
 ... To step in his [the white man's] way.

White bullets, white bullets
 For the black sheep.
 (Editor's translation)

Let us first contextualize the historical significance of the year 1992, the year of the song's release, for the Spanish State and for two of the Autonomous Communities: Andalucía and Catalonia. 1992 is said to be the year Spain's newly achieved cosmopolitan and international status—in the jet-set sense of the word—came to fruition on the international scene. In a way, we could say that Spain “went global” that year with a series of public and international events staged to present Spain as the “darling” of the world with The Olympic Games in Barcelona, The World Fair in Seville, and Madrid's designation as “European City of Culture.” While the events celebrated Spain's coming of age as a modern, even Postnational state, they also served to present Spain's “social schizophrenia.” The term, used by social scientists, aims to define the disorienting effect on Spaniards' consciousness of the speed and the complexity of the changes occurring over the last two decades of the twentieth century. Interestingly enough, some cultural critics point to racist and xenophobic attitudes as one of the most negative effects produced by the “social schizophrenia” brought out by the riches of late capitalism. Rosa Montero, for example, argues that the “pretentiousness, ostentation, superficiality, selfishness, and a rejection of the poor worthy of the newly converted” manifests itself “in an increased xenophobia and racism” (319).

Montero is right in correlating racism to a disdain for the socio-economically disadvantaged; this correlation has been argued by many social scientists. For example, Christopher McAuley, in his illuminating “Race in the Process of the American Revolutions,” explains that race becomes a relevant factor when poverty is also involved: “when there is a high correlation between race and class or poverty and ‘persuasion,’ then race matters” (170). The lyrics of “Oveja negra” make abundantly clear how much race does matter in Spain in 1992. For starters, Barricada cleverly uses the dehumanizing metaphor “oveja negra” by showing how racism collapses the distance between the signifier and the referent in the construction of black persons. This was made abundantly clear in the case of Dominican women working in Madrid. Gina Gallardo, a researcher for AMDE, explains in her “Mujeres del Sur en Europa. Dominicanas en Madrid. La vivencia del racismo” (1993) that Dominican women were considered to be invading Madrid's public spaces such as parks and squares because of the color of their skin and because of their large numbers: “It is said of the Dominican women that when they get together ‘they are black and too many. Too many black women are threatening’” (my translation, <http://www.eurosur.org/wide/wspa>).

Misperceptions, ignorance, and fear are behind the dehumanizing process that allows for the justification of violence against people of color. Thus, with the allusion to hunting images—“When the black person is a man/It's a good time for the hunter”—Barricada exposes how black immigrants are constructed as “savages” and “primitives,” justifying in this manner any

violence exerted on black persons. Moreover, the brutal treatment by the police—“Carefully check his teeth/if he resists smash his head”—aimed at producing the subject’s annihilation is presented as a necessary means to keep the social order: “If they are not treated this way/Power will change hands.” By detailing the procedures associated with the process of being jailed—“Take his picture, get his fingerprints”—the song also exposes the panic with which people of color experience the construction of transnational identities.

That is why I again call attention to the fact that in our rush to celebrate the global cultural flow of ethnoscapas and mediascapas we must not overlook the forces of oppression unleashed by the dynamics of transnational and postnational developments. The need to confront such “dark” forces becomes crystal clear if we recall that the underside of Spain’s celebration of their recently acquired global status was the brutal murder of Lucrecia Pérez. In fact, as Gina Gallardo explains in the above-cited article, the urgent need to confront racism is even more apparent if we become aware that “today many walls are spraypainted with the graffiti ‘Fuck you Lucrecia,’ or ‘whore Lucrecia’” (my translation). It is not surprising then, that all of these events will prompt Carlos Cano to include “Canción para Lucrecia” in his 1994 album “Forma de ser.” This is also one more reason why I argue for the need to study and evaluate the musical production of 1980s and 1990s Spain.

If Lucrecia was killed because she was a Black Dominican woman, it is not difficult to see that the ethnographic fixation on teeth in “Oveja negra”—“carefully check his teeth”—makes abundantly clear that the desire to see “difference” requires paying attention to the body as a marker of social

difference. Hence the need for establishing “features” that would supposedly allow for the “instantaneous” recognition of such a difference. Thus, based on this “visible evidence,” the exertion of violence is justified to prevent a change in the status quo: “If he resists smash his head [...] These pigs have to learn/Who is in charge here.” The misrecognition (to use a term of Étienne Balibar’s) implicit in the naming of black persons as “*cerdos*” by the policeman speaking in the song, needs to be understood as an integral part of racism. Balibar argues this point as follows:

I [...] venture the idea that the racist complex inextricably combines a crucial function of *misrecognition* (without which the violence would not be tolerable to the very people engaging in it) and a ‘will to know,’ a violent *desire* for immediate *knowledge*. (19, italics in the original)

In this way, the song *contains* both racial difference and anxieties in a way that both are *contained* and cancelled by the song. The high degree of violence of the song serves to this double purpose.

Thus, as in the other two songs considered, “Oveja negra” also contributes to present a sobering image of the mostly celebratory nature with which Transatlantic Studies address the issues of border crossing brought about by transnational capitalism in the late twentieth century. In all three cases we are forced to consider how race and class need to be addressed anew within the paradigm of Transatlantic Studies. In all of them the topic of racism resonates loudly calling attention to the complex social dynamics unleashed by transnationalism and the articulation of a global economy. “El blues del esclavo,” “Africanos en Madrid,”

and “Oveja negra” also offer us another cultural arena from which to study the transnational connections between Africa, Spain, and Latin America. In the best possible scenario, the songs recorded and produced in the twenty-first century about these transnational flows will be written and performed by the immigrants themselves, thus achieving not only the goal of “introspection” called upon by Frantz Fanon for the oppressed and exploited but also access to the means of production of popular music. Only then could we celebrate the global movements of peoples and cultures as increasing cultural diversity and mutual tolerance in an equitable context—a context that would require the redefinition of Spain not as a nation-state but as an Atlantic space.

Notes

¹ I would like to thank Joseba Gabilondo for his probing queries and invaluable suggestions.

² Let us not forget that Pilar Miró is named to head the *Dirección General de Cinematografía* in December, 1982 and that the impact of her views on the Spanish film industry can be found in the Royal Decree of January 1984 that has come to be known as the “Miró Law.” In the area of mass media, “El País” becomes the political and cultural newspaper of the transition exposing the Foucaultian paradigm power/knowledge. Other artistic manifestations were channeled through the “movidas,” with Madrid and Vigo being particularly active.

³ One such noted exception is the recent publication by Galaxia (2001) of Víctor Omgbá’s *Callela Sen Saida* [*Dead End Street*]. A native of Cameroon residing in Galicia, Omgbá appears to have written his novel in Galician since no translator’s name is given in the covers of the text. For *testimonios* compiled from immigrants stories see, among others, the following collections: *Yo, Mohamed: historias de emigrantes en*

un país de emigrantes (1995), by Rafael Torres; *Los inmigrantes irregulares en España: la vida por un sueño* (1999), by José Igancio Ruiz Olabuénaga, et al.

⁴ In the late 1990s the migratory flow from Latin America appears to have, more and more, “an indigenous face” since most workers arrive from the Andean regions of Ecuador and Peru. A series of *testimonios* coordinated by Andrés Tornos and Rosa Aparicio attest to this fact. See *Los peruanos que vienen: cómo son y cómo entienden típicamente la inmigración los inmigrantes peruanos* (1997).

⁵ Carmen Lozano in her conference paper entitled “Visiones de inmigración en España: la ley de extranjería, Mecano, Barricada y Flores de otro mundo” has studied at length the role played by the different versions of the “Ley Orgánica de Extranjería” in the political aspirations of both the PSOE and the Partido Popular. She explains that

[...] en 1985 el Partido Socialista Obrero Español (PSOE) articula la primera Ley Orgánica de Extranjería [...] para intentar frenar la inmigración ilegal. Sin embargo, desde la aprobación de dicha ley, el PSOE y el Partido Popular (PP) incorporaron el debate de la inmigración a sus intereses políticos y en ningún momento tuvieron en cuenta la realidad social de la comunidad inmigrante.

⁶ One manner in which racism is historically denied is with the widespread cultural assertion that:

in comparison to the British Empire that did not engage in racial mixing, Spaniards, on the contrary, mixed with everyone everywhere they went.

⁷ The original version is as follows:

El ser negrito
es un color
lo de ser esclavo
no lo trago
me tiene frito

tanto trabajar de sol a sol
las tierras del maldito señorito.

Los compañeros
piensan igual
o hay un Espartaco
que entre a saco
y esto cambia
o 'tos pa' Gambia
desde Kunta Kinte a nuestros días
pocas mejorías
a ver si ahora con la guerra de secesión
se admite nuestro sindicato del algodón
que a saber
quiere obtener
descanso dominical, un salario normal
dos pagas, mes de vacaciones
y una pensión tras la jubilación
que se nos trate
con dignidad
como a semejantes
emigrantes
que se terminen
las pasadas,
los derechos de pernada.

Y el que prefiera que se vuelva
al Senegal
correr desnudos por la selva
con la mujer y el chaval
ir natural
'erguiendo' cuello y testuz
como hermana avestruz
para que no digan
que somos unos zulus
ir cantando este blues.

Y el que prefiera que se vuelva
al Senegal
correr desnudos por la selva
con la mujer y el chaval
'erguiendo' cuello y testuz
como hermana avestruz
para que no digan
que somos unos zulus
hemos hecho este blues.

⁸ Mecano is very aware of the implicit social and historical problems of writing such a song in the complex history of African Americans,

and for that reason they added a disclaimer in the booklet of the CD. Thus, at the end of the presentation of the lyrics we can read the following: "The Blues of the Slave" pretends to be a historical desfiguration—"desfiguración histórica"—of the historical event of the end of slavery in the USA without any relation to the actual racial reinvidications of Blacks, which we deeply respect as we admire the figure of Martin Luther King (my translation).

⁹ The original version is as follows:

Madrid, la noche se vuelve de esparto,
cuando llega la despedida
hay un hueco a medida,
para el polizone
se marchó lejos de su casa,
con el corazón en rodaje
a cambio de ese pasaje,
vendió su alma al diablo.

Hoy de nuevo le vi pasar,
algo triste pero amable,
siempre infatigable
tras el pan y la sal.
Hoy de nuevo le vi pasar
tenía los ojos alegres
alguien le dio noticias breves,
de su pueblo natal.

El pecado de ser africanos en Madrid
abrí los ojos para ver
que no llega el sol aquí
El pecado de ser ébano,
sangre y marfil.
Si miras bajo su piel,
hay un mismo corazón.

Quizás con un poco de suerte
llegarás hasta la 'Gran Vía'
sin que la policía te pida el pasaporte
si la luna está de tu parte,
por ventura tendrá su cama
hecha de hojas y ramas
en la 'Plaza de España.'

¹⁰ The original version is as follows:

Hacedle fotos, tomadle huellas
miradle bien los dientes
si se resiste rompedle la cabeza

la rutina de siempre
 Estos cerdos tienen que aprender
 quien es aquí el que manda,
 que pase miedo entre cuatro paredes
 decídele que no moleste.
 Si no se les trata así
 Esto cambia de manos
 déjales que desesperen
 esperando el milagro.
 Quiso dar un paso hacia adelante
 quiso andar sin grilletes
 quiso vivir en libertad
 y eso nadie lo entiende
 Cuando el negro es un hombre
 es buen momento para el cazador
 el blanco se pone nervioso
 y comienza a llenar el cargador
 ...él fue quien tuvo la culpa
 ...de encontrarse en su camino.

Balas blancas, balas blancas
 para la oveja negra.
 Balas blancas, balas blancas
 para la oveja negra.

Hacedle fotos, tomadle huellas
 miradle bien los dientes
 si se resiste rompedle la cabeza
 la rutina de siempre
 Cuando el negro es un hombre
 es buen momento para el cazador
 el blanco se pone nervioso
 y comienza a llenar el cargador
 ...él fue quien tuvo la culpa
 ...de encontrarse en su camino.

Balas blancas, balas blancas
 para la oveja negra.
 Balas blancas, balas blancas
 para la oveja negra.

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