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Spain Is (Not So) Different: Whitening Spain through Late Francoist Comedy

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Abstract

This study argues that the popular comedy cinema of late Francoism (roughly 1960-75), known as *comedia sexy*, *comedia celtibérica*, or simply *landismo*, aimed to shift the international perception of Spain away from racialized stereotypes of the nation's Africanness in order to move it closer to a white European identity. Troubled by the reputation of Francoism as anachronistic in a context of global decolonization, civil rights in the U.S., and rapid social and economic change within Spain, the regime used the popular cinema industry, which was closely aligned with it ideologically, to portray Spain as upwardly mobile on a geopolitical hierarchy that was imagined as a black/white racial paradigm. Specifically, by intertwining the *macho ibérico/sueca* narrative trope with racist caricatures of blacks, this cinema aimed to accentuate Spain's upward geopolitical and racial mobility by contrasting it with the fixity of racial others, while simultaneously retaining a deracialized, commodifiable "difference" as a competitive advantage on the world stage.

Key Words Whiteness, Late Francoism, Landismo, Popular Film, Racialization.

Critical studies of racial ideologies in Spain have tended to emphasize the national context rather than linking Spanish racial discourses to global rhetorics of whiteness.¹ The scarcity of whiteness scholarship on Spain is, to some extent, understandable, given that Spain was long perceived as racially distinct from white countries. This perception was due to the entrenched vision of the Spanish race as derived from a mixture of various racial heritages, including Roman, Visigoth, Arab, Romani and Jewish (Goode 1-3; Woods Peiró 6-8). It was also a consequence of the Black Legend, in which Spain's Northern European rivals linked its perceived cultural backwardness to its racial mixture, thus producing the "Africa of Europe" stereotype (Martin-Márquez 40-42). However, while it is true that Spain was long imagined as nonwhite, or at best, less white than other European countries, it is also inarguable that the country played a crucial historical role in establishing what W.E.B. Du Bois has described as a global color line predicated on worldwide white racial domination.²

Given Spain's legacy as one of Europe's foremost colonial powers, its imposition of Eurocentric racial hierarchies throughout its global empire, and its extensive participation in the transatlantic slave trade, the present study begins from the premise that further examination of Spain's shifting and unstable relationship to global whiteness is both productive and necessary.

Specifically, this article explores a key moment in the whitening of Spain's global image: namely, the later decades of Francoism, roughly 1960-1975.

To understand what I mean by “whitening,” we must consider the marked evolution in how Spain was perceived by other Western nations at the beginning and at the end of the twentieth century. Since the sixteenth century, the propagation of the Black Legend in countries such as Britain, France, and the Netherlands created a widely disseminated imaginary of Spain as a racialized *other* within Europe. As Barbara Fuchs notes, the idea of Spain as “black” served to highlight both its perceived moral depravity, given its purported abuses of indigenous peoples in the New World, as well as its racial associations “with Islam, with Africa, with dark peoples” (117). This international perception of Spain endured for centuries and travelled beyond European boundaries. For example, as María de Guzmán attests, during the Spanish-American War of 1898, United States literary and popular cultures exploited Black Legend discourses to portray Spain, a rival colonial power, as “the colonized” while portraying the U.S. as the “superior race and civilizer” (xxix).

Yet, by the end of the twentieth century, the global imaginary of Spain was not nearly as circumscribed by the “Africa of Europe” or “Black Legend” mythologies as it had been a century earlier. As Baltasar Fra-Moliner points out, this shift in perception can be attributed to at least two major factors. The first is the cultural, political, and economic Europeanization of Spain, a process that began in the later decades of Francoism and reached a symbolic culmination in Spain's admission in 1986 to the European Union, “the unofficial international club of white countries” (Fra-Moliner 147). Secondly, immigration to Spain, which first became significant in the 1980s and quickly transformed Spain into a multiracial society, also played a crucial role in reinscribing the nation's image as white. For Fra-Moliner, the increasing presence in Spain of Latin Americans, Asians, and Africans has caused cultural traits traditionally associated with Spain to be perceived as less different than those of other European or white countries. In other words, “the more immigrants it receives, the whiter Spain becomes” (153).

Although Fra-Moliner's analysis of Spain's racial shift focuses primarily on the post-Franco era—that is, after 1975—the phenomenon can be traced farther back. Cultural efforts to establish Spain's belonging in global whiteness can be found throughout the twentieth century, particularly in the realm of cinema, well before the advent of democracy, EU membership, or immigration. For example, in a study of popular musical cinema from the 1920s to the 1950s, Eva Woods Peiró compellingly illustrates how the “simultaneous whiteness and Gypsiness” of

screen Gypsies, that is, on-screen Romani performers who were played by non-Romani actresses, served to “[index] Spain’s paranoid fears of backwardness” and, consequently, to assert the nation’s modernity (27).

I argue that another effort to articulate Spain’s whiteness can be found in the popular cinema of late Francoism, especially in a widely consumed, yet aesthetically uninventive genre known as the *comedia desarrollista*, the *comedia celtibérica*, or simply *landismo*. This highly formulaic subgenre, which garnered great commercial success in its day and remains well-known to contemporary audiences,³ epitomizes the later regime’s anxiety about Spain’s place in the geopolitical hierarchy of nations. Troubled by the international perception of Francoism as anachronistic in a context of global decolonization, civil rights in the U.S., and the postwar democratization of Western Europe, the regime relied on the popular cinema industry, which was closely aligned with it ideologically, to suggest to Spaniards that Francoism could offer unmatched modernity and prosperity. Yet, as I will demonstrate, these promises were intertwined with global racial discourses.

In what follows, I will offer an overview of the *comedia desarrollista* subgenre and its sociocultural context. I argue that this cinema’s effort to locate Spain’s place on a racial spectrum with black and white poles ultimately aims to represent Spain’s ascendance into European whiteness while still conserving a deracialized, commodifiable version of Spanish “difference.” I will then offer a close reading of two films—*El alma se serena* (dir. José Luis Sáenz de Heredia, 1970) and *Una vez al año ser hippy no hace daño* (dir. Javier Aguirre, 1969)—that are especially emblematic of the regime’s desire for Spaniards to see themselves as belonging to a global modernity racialized as white.

Unearthing Racial Discourse in Late Francoist Comedy

In the 1960s, numerous social and economic changes were underway in Spain, such as the tourism boom, increased urbanization, shifting gender mores, and a marked increase in ownership of television sets, automobiles, and other appliances. For these reasons, as Teresa Vilarós has argued, late Francoist comedies functioned as a “tecnología estatal” whose function was to manage the construction of a citizen-subject newly integrated into global consumerism (52). The construction of this new subject is perceptible in the genre’s recurring tropes and plotlines that often revolved around the humorous hijinks of rural Spanish bumpkins in a predictable range of modern settings, such as large cities (*La ciudad no es para mí*, dir. Pedro

Lazaga, 1966), newly built beach resorts (*El turismo es un gran invento*, dir. Pedro Lazaga, 1968), or in a Northern European country (*Vente a Alemania, Pepe*, dir. Pedro Lazaga, 1971). An extremely common narrative trope is that of the *macho ibérico/sueca* plot, in which a sexually repressed Spanish Everyman, usually played by an emblematic actor such as Alfredo Landa or José Luis López Vázquez, was constantly either chasing or being chased by *suecas*, the sexually uninhibited female tourists from Northern Europe. As Justin Crumbaugh has demonstrated, in late Francoist rhetoric, although the *macho ibérico*'s sexuality was considered deviant by some for chafing against traditional sexual mores, his penchant for "selling himself to foreigners" only served to reaffirm his virility, thus allegorizing Spain's successful modernization (103).

The *macho ibérico/sueca* formula was legible through racialized discourses. An emblematic example is the opening scene of *Manolo, la nuit* (dir. Mariano Ozores, 1973), which begins by showing a gaggle of *suecas* rubbing sunscreen on their tanned skin under a blinding Spanish sun. Curiously, the *suecas* are unimpressed when a chiseled, blonde *sueco* struts past them; however, they are titillated by the sight of a scantily clad Alfredo Landa, who sports a short frame, a receding hairline, plain looks, dark body hair, and a stocky physique. A narrating male voiceover explains this conundrum by declaring that only one kind of man can fulfill the women's romantic fantasies: "el racial celtibero español," which he defines as "ese colosal producto que salió del cruce de dos pueblos fuertes, rudos y primitivos: los celtas y los iberos."

As this scene illustrates, the *macho ibérico* and the *sueca* were portrayed as representing different degrees of whiteness. On one hand, the *sueca*, who was svelte, attractive, and unburdened by the conservative sexual mores of Francoist Spain, was visually identifiable with a global, white modernity associated with Northern Europe. In addition to her physical perfection, the fact that she is naturally pale-skinned yet tanned is a key indicator of her whiteness. As Richard Dyer explains, tanning became a ubiquitous marker of whiteness in global twentieth-century visual culture, not only because of its associations with wealth and luxury, but also because it "displays white people's right to be various"—that is, it underscores the malleability of whiteness as one of its distinctive qualities (49-50). The *macho ibérico*, on the other hand, was recognizable through his off-whiteness, which the voiceover explicitly links to his distinct racial origin. It is precisely this racialized difference that makes him exotic and desirable to the *suecas*.

Yet even as they underscored the exoticism of the *macho ibérico*, late Francoist comedies also sought to undermine the idea that the *macho ibérico* and the *sueca* were essentially different. For as Crumbaugh has noted, the regime's marketing of Spain's exoticism to attract European

tourism through the “Spain is Different” campaign paradoxically underscored Spain’s resemblance to the rest of Europe by “skillfully refashioning difference as a commodity” (68). In popular cinema, the regime’s effort to transform tropes of backwardness into signs of modernity is perceptible in the seemingly infinite malleability of its protagonists, whose incessant, often barely coherent changes of costume and identity within a single film represent Spain’s capacity to shed its anachronism and don the guises of an imported modernity. In this way, despite their apparent off-whiteness when compared to *suecas*, Spanish characters of these films were portrayed as possessing the elasticity and flexibility necessary to establish parity with *suecas*—and, therefore, their belonging in the *suecas*’ white modernity.

The aim of popular cinema to portray Spaniards as capable of achieving the whiteness of *suecas* becomes especially conspicuous when we consider its highly stereotypical representation of non-European racial groups such as blacks, Chinese, and indigenous people. Significantly, racist humor about these groups features prominently in many films of the *comedia desarrollista* subgenre. In a multi-year study of over 200 popular Spanish films produced from 1966 to 1975,⁴ a team of researchers headed by Miguel Ángel Huerta Floriano and Ernesto Pérez Mora enumerate a plethora of proregime, popular films that deployed transnationally recognizable, stereotypical humor about these nonwhite groups in an effort to “mofarse de lo extranjero y a ensalzar por contraste lo hispánico” (*El cine popular del tardofranquismo*, location 5993). Spanish caricatures of Chinese and indigenous people during this period were often attributable to the Spanish film industry’s mimicry of foreign genres, such as martial arts and Western films, where these groups featured prominently. Examples of films featuring racist caricatures of Chinese people include *Operación Cabaretera* (dir. Julián Esteban, 1967) (*El “cine de barrio tardofranquista,”* location 1154-1185), and *Los Kalatrava contra el imperio del kárate* (dir. Francisco Martínez Celeiro, 1973) (*El cine popular del tardofranquismo*, location 4786-4831), among others. Similarly, films featuring racist depictions of Native Americans include *La carga de la policía montada* (*El cine popular del tardofranquismo*, location 495-544), and *Los que tocan el piano* (dir. José Luis Dibidos, 1968) (*El “cine de barrio” tardofranquista*, location 1368-1411), among others.

However, further analysis is necessary to understand the recurrence of racist black caricatures in late Francoist comedy—especially in films featuring the homegrown *macho ibérico/sueca* narrative. Despite the scarcity of critical commentary on this issue, such caricatures are abundant in these films. A notable example is *Ligue Story* (dir. Alfonso Paso, 1972), where the most striking racist joke (indeed, there are several) occurs when a large, aggressive black woman

vigorously kisses a Spanish male protagonist at an international orgy, thus enabling him to prove his sexual prowess to women from all over the world. Another example is *El alma se serena*, where two *macho ibérico* characters demonstrate their lack of sexual judgment by attempting to seduce black African women, thus prompting a racist rant from the Spanish female protagonist. We may also recall a boxing scene in *París bien vale una moza* (dir. Pedro Lazaga, 1972) where Alfredo Landa's character, nicknamed "El oso de los Pirineos," unexpectedly defeats an African muscleman dubbed "el Gorila de Camerún" in a whimsical David-and-Goliath scenario. Similarly, in *Una vez al año ser hippy no hace daño*, the hippy-inspired song "Los negros con las suecas" is accompanied by a visual montage in which black men—a clear stand-in for Spaniards—chase *suecas* on a beach without regard for taboos against interracial sex.

Given Spain's extremely limited black population in the 1960s and 70s,⁵ the recurrence of racist black caricatures in films of the period may be interpreted as a visual signifier of Spain's efforts to free itself from the Black Legend. In all of the above-mentioned films, the remixing of familiar stereotypes such as black hypersexuality, animality, or stupidity underscores Spain's capacity for modernization by contrasting Spanish elasticity with the fixity of blackness. In addition, in numerous films, racialized humor also served as an indicator of Francoism's attitude toward a variety of post-World War II global racial shifts, such as the disintegration of European colonial empires and the U.S. Civil Rights movement. In Francoist popular cinema, these global antiracist currents were often parodied alongside other transnational countercultural movements, such as feminism and hippy culture. As Rosalía Cornejo-Parriego observes, Spaniards of the late Franco era, especially those who were restless for political change, became intimately familiar with countercultural movements from abroad through mass media, and thus began to feel that they belonged to a "comunidad imaginada global" despite the ideological strictures of Francoism (159). She particularly notes that the Spanish left developed a fascination with the U.S. Civil Rights movement, although their coverage of it often failed to transcend racist stereotypes of African Americans (169). But it was not only the Spanish left that paid attention to decolonization and civil rights. The Franco regime too watched these processes with apprehension.

Having long glorified Spain's imperial legacy, the regime was loath to embrace the trend toward global decolonization; consequently, it tenaciously resisted international pressure to relinquish control over its African colonies in Equatorial Guinea and Spanish Sahara until 1968 and 1975, respectively.⁶ At the same time, the regime was also suspicious of the U.S. Civil Rights

movement because it, like other anti-establishment movements of the time, underscored the power of organized dissidence to subvert the social order—a prospect anathema to any dictatorship. Yet, ever keen on convincing Spaniards that Francoism would bring about modernity and prosperity, the regime endeavored to exploit these movements' popular appeal while neutralizing their political radicalism. The global black/white racial imaginary provided a convenient, accessible language to do just that: by reducing antiracism to a faddish commodity of white modernity, pro-regime filmmakers suggested that Spain could shed its “Africanness” and approach fuller participation in European whiteness.

To illuminate late Francoist cinema's various strategies of affirming Spain's whiteness, I will offer a detailed reading of two emblematic films. In *El alma se serena*, Spain's status as an exotic “Africa of Europe” is celebrated as a path to prosperity, even as the embodied sexuality of black women is disparaged as detrimental to Spain's whiteness. Similarly, although the musical numbers in *Una vez al año ser hippy no hace daño* superficially extol the virtues of global antiracist movements, the film's plot demonstrates that Spain's modernization is contingent on expelling its racial alterity while conserving a marketable, deracialized difference. Consequently, both films aim to move Spain upward on an imaginary black/white racial spectrum while protecting the nation's ability to profit from its perceived exoticism. These films, therefore, suggest that in order to be modern, Spain must be different, but not *too* different.

Playing in the Mud: The dangers of miscegenation in *El alma se serena*

José Luis Saenz de Heredia's 1970 film, *El alma se serena*, tells the story of a young, small-town woman, Chelín (Concha Velasco) who attempts to wean her childhood crush, Manolo (Alfredo Landa), off of his dissolute, urban lifestyle so he will marry her. Once she succeeds, Manolo's “soul” becomes “serene”—in other words, his sex drive decreases drastically, leaving Chelín constantly searching for ways to arouse his sexual interest. A recurring ideological message in the movie is that Spain's capacity for modernization is contingent on transformation of its perceived backwardness into a competitive advantage. However, as we will see, this theme is dependent on racist humor that explicitly displaces the idea of blackness as an internal contaminant of Spanish heritage by portraying it as a fully external *other* of the nation's identity. Given that Black Legend discourses conflated Spain's cultural backwardness with its supposed racial difference, the film illustrates that Spanish backwardness must be deracialized if it is to be reimagined as a signifier of modernity. To this end, the film promotes two distinct visions of Africanness: first, the idea of

Spain as an “Africa” of Europe, which is redefined as a source of national triumph; second, the embodied Africanness of black women that must be denigrated to illuminate Spain’s belonging in European whiteness.

The idea that Spain can profit from its historical portrayal as an “Africa” of Europe first surfaces when the urban revelers Manolo and Bernabé decide to take the naïve, provincial Chelín to a hippy orgy, where the men expect to engage in free love, drugs and abundant alcohol. In this film, hippy women substitute the *sueca* stereotype: although Spanish, they are contaminated by Anglo-European mores, and are presented as attractive and sexually carefree. Predictably, Chelín stands out because of her rustic demeanor; she is especially befuddled when several hippies around her order unusual cocktails such as “astronauta muy seco,” “descaptable con petardo,” and “vietnamita doble.” When the waiter asks Chelín for her order, she requests a “congoleño con mochila,” a fictional drink from her region that no one other than the waiter has ever heard of. Her hippy companions look on in shock when the waiter brings her a tall glass filled with a dark green liquid with a clam shell on the rim (the clam, she says, “es la mochila”). Downing the drink in one gulp, Chelín is suddenly transformed into a hippy who seeks to overcome her “complejo de paleta.” She quickly changes clothes, interrupts the band, and belts out a traditional tune in *ye-yé* style, declaring coarsely that “¡las de provincias... sabemos hacerlo como la que más!” The next morning, Chelín wakes up as her normal self, embarrassed, and hung over.

Chelín’s circular transformation from rural prude to hippy hedonist and back again is a telling metaphor for the late Franco regime’s desire to portray its own metamorphosis from backwardness to modernity. The cocktails that Chelín and her hippy companions consume are especially emblematic of the regime’s geopolitical ambitions. On the one hand, the hippies order drinks whose names glorify Western technology. “Astronauta,” for example, evokes the Cold War Space Race between the U.S. and the Soviet Union that culminated in the 1969 U.S. moon landing; similarly, “vietnamita” refers to the then ongoing Vietnam War, another example of U.S.-led anticommunist efforts; finally, “descaptable” recalls the rapid assimilation of Spain into a market-based, consumer economy during the 1960s. On the other hand, Chelín’s drink, the regional oddity called a “congoleño con mochila,” draws on the stereotype of African backwardness in order to reinforce Chelín’s status as a *paleta* and, by extension, Spain’s outsider status as a “Congo” within Europe. The fact that this drink catalyzes her sudden transformation into a *chica ye-yé* who defends rural sexual prowess mirrors the regime’s goal of turning Spain’s Africanness into a competitive advantage.

However, the film later stipulates that any capitalist exploitation of Spanish exoticism must be accompanied by a clear affirmation of Spanish racial whiteness. As the film develops, Chelín's efforts to woo the promiscuous Manolo toward traditional married life are frustrated by Bernabé, who wants to keep Manolo as a companion in his sexual escapades. Roughly halfway through the film, Bernabé brings two black, African women to his house in hopes of seducing them. Specifically, he invites Manolo to play drums with him while they watch the women dance, a strategy which Bernabé hopes will serve to "calentar el horno." The scene spectacularizes the women's blackness through a dizzying concatenation of camera angles that accentuate the frenetic movement of their hair and bare feet, as well as their revealing, pseudo-tribal attire. Although Bernabé also wears a skimpy, pseudo-African costume to express his eagerness about the encounter, Manolo feels decidedly conflicted about it, yet remains at Bernabé's side to protect his own womanizing reputation. The tension eventually produces a heated confrontation between Manolo, Bernabé and Chelín in which Chelín, enraged that Manolo would choose "unas negras" over her cooking, declares that Manolo must "dejar de ser un degenerado que se refocila en el lodo arrastrado por un gurrumino sin escrúpulos." She also screams that the only meal Manolo deserves is "¡que [le] frían las negras un explorador!"

In this climactic scene, Chelín's strident reaction to Manolo's fraternization with African women marks a key juncture in the film. For shortly after Chelín's outburst, Manolo reconciles with her and agrees to marry her; the plot then veers toward Chelín's machinations to maintain his sexual attention. Thus, the film depicts Chelín's intervention as a turning point where Manolo is rescued from sinking to the inconceivable moral low of racial miscegenation. Unlike the symbolic Africanness of Chelín's "congoleño con mochila," which is presented as a sign of Spain's capacity for modernization, the function of embodied Africanness in this scene is one of abjection: black skin, including the desire for it, is portrayed as external and inferior to Spanishness. For Chelín, sex between Spaniards and blacks is a problem precisely because it brings Spain, long racialized as an Africa of Europe, too close to that which it yearns not to be. This fact becomes especially conspicuous when we consider that the black women in this scene are clearly an inversion of the *sueca* stereotype. Like *suecas*, they are foreign and beautiful; yet, their spectacular, racialized primitiveness marks the exact opposite of the *sueca*'s white modernity that, as we saw in the hippy scene, is closely associated with Western capitalism. Despite late Francoist comedy's celebration of Spanish male sexual prowess, which exalted sex with *suecas* as a universal Spanish fantasy, in this film, the combined factors of Manolo's ambivalence and Chelín's

derogatory tantrum clarify that sex with black women should be regarded as beneath Spanish men's dignity.

Chelín's remarks during her angry eruption are especially revealing of her desire to separate Africanness from Spanishness. For example, her reference to miscegenation as "refocilarse en el lodo" conjures the image of a white-skinned person sullied or contaminated by dark mud. Similarly, her insinuation that Manolo must rid himself of Bernabé's "mud" suggests a need to wash racial contamination off the national body. Chelín further calls attention to need to improve Spain's racial stature by calling Manolo a "degenerado," a term that connotes deterioration, and Bernabé a "gurrumino," an epithet that connotes weakness and effeminacy. These insults indicate her perception that sex with black women will degrade Spain's already tenuous racial stature. She reiterates this idea by sarcastically wishing that the women "frían . . . un explorador" for Manolo. With this comment, she implies that the men's perverse sexual "exploration," which she likens to the explorations of early modern colonizers, may result in the cannibalization of the Spanish race altogether. However, despite portraying Manolo and Bernabé as emasculated by their perverse desires, her statements ultimately reinforce not only the black/white racial binary, but also, and more importantly, Spain's decision to be identified with the white side of the racial line. After all, her reference to past Spanish colonizers is ultimately a call to restore a destabilized racial order in which Spain, formerly at the vanguard of European imperialism, established itself as unquestionably superior to, and distinct from, inferior races such as blacks.

The contradictory meanings of Africanness surface again toward the end of the film, after Chelín and Manolo have wed and are presumably living a happy married life in the countryside, away from the temptations of Madrid. The problem, however, is that Chelín's sex drive now exceeds Manolo's, whose libido has lessened with the passing of time. The film shows several scenes where Manolo tries to escape his wife's advances, suggesting that Chelín's sexual intensity far surpasses that of his previous life as a hedonistic bachelor. In one scene, Chelín plans to seduce Manolo by dressing up as a flamenco dancer. Declaring that "¡Yo estoy dispuesta a ser sueca, negra, chica de cabaret o tanguista!" to meet her husband's desires, she pounces on the unsuspecting Manolo in full *flamenco* costume, and then forces him to drink a spicy potion that she hopes will increase his sex drive. When that fails, she chases him around the house shouting, singing, and blocking every possible exit.

The scene's logic is patent: Chelín, aware of her husband's past penchant for foreign women, must harness stereotypes of Spain's racialized hypersexuality, such as the screen Gypsy trope, to gain his attention. In doing so, Chelín's performance recalls Woods Peiró's argument about how musical films featuring Gypsy characters played by white female stars enacted "both the whitewashing and the racialization of the face of Spain" (2). Nonetheless, given Chelín's forceful disavowal of black/white sex earlier in the film, her Gypsy performance in this scene serves to accentuate the whiteness of that stereotype. For although Chelín can embody a variety of exotic, racialized identities, such as Gypsy, black, Northern European, and Latin American, she is never bound to any of them; rather, her malleability as a performer calls attention to "white people's right to be various" (Dyer 49-50). Black women, by contrast, must remain forever associated with colonial stereotypes that uphold the superiority of white societies—a category in which, the film argues, Spain must be grounded.

Commodifying Antiracism in *Una vez al año ser hippy no hace daño*

A second example of late Francoist popular cinema's efforts to portray Spain as moving toward European whiteness can be found in Javier Aguirre's 1969 film, *Una vez al año ser hippy no hace daño*. Also featuring Concha Velasco and Alfredo Landa in lead roles, this film narrates the story of a struggling group of travelling musicians named "Flor de Lis y los dos del Orinoco," which includes three members: Lisarda (Concha Velasco), Ricardo (Alfredo Landa) and Silvestre (Manolo Gómez Bur). To realize their dreams of success in the booming coastal resort town of Torremolinos, they must modernize their kitschy, folkloric repertoire by embracing Beatles-style pop-rock and hippy protest music. To succeed, they must blackmail a powerful guru of Indian meditation, Anaskira Matuti, who is actually a duplicitous Spaniard in disguise. As in *El alma se serena*, the film's dichotomy between backwardness and modernity is interwoven with discourses of whiteness and racial alterity. However, unlike *El alma*, *Una vez al año* explicitly compares Spain's ascent into whiteness to ongoing racial struggles, such as the U.S. Civil Rights movement and global decolonization. This film specifically establishes an analogy between the upward mobility of peoples of color around the world and the imagined upward mobility of Spaniards under Franco. Consequently, the film commodifies and depoliticizes the allure of global antiracist movements to suggest that Francoism could liberate Spain from the "Africa of Europe" stereotype and usher it into full-fledged whiteness.

The film begins by portraying the musical trio as trapped in a cycle of performing outdated kitsch for rural and small-town audiences. In the opening scene, the trio perform a 1940s hit called “Mi casita de papel” as an Alps-themed yodel number, complete with matching costumes and pseudo-yodeling, in a Spanish town nestled in the mountains. The visibly bored audience does not even applaud when the group finishes; instead, they begin dancing immediately when a rock-and-roll recording is played. Soon thereafter, we see the trio in another town performing a Cuba-themed song, “Frenesí tropical,” in which all three musicians, including the men, are dressed in frilly, midriff-baring outfits, and singing a rhythmical song about a “negra linda” and a “negro loco.” Although the audience is initially skeptical, they react with enthusiasm when Lisarda accelerates her hip-shaking.

These two opening performances imply that Spain’s geopolitical position is caught between two racialized poles: the Alps, which evoke Northern Europe, and Cuba, which is explicitly associated with blackness and racialized alterity. On the one hand, the unsuccessful Alps number underscores Spain’s unfulfilled aspiration to achieve the whiteness of Northern Europe. On the other hand, the Cuba-themed song about black lovers, applauded for its extravagant sexuality but not for its musical style, calls attention to Spain’s anxieties about its racial standing and its colonial past. Given Spain’s past colonial relations with Cuba, the caricatured depiction of Cuba as specifically black accentuates Spain’s nostalgia for a past where its racial and cultural supremacy was undisputed. Likewise, this image also articulates Spain’s fear that its status as a former imperial power might cause the nation to be perceived as closer to the colonized rather than the colonizer. The polarity between European whiteness and Spain’s racial and colonial status anxieties is further implicit in the group’s name, “Flor de lis y los dos del Orinoco”: the fleur-de-lis was a symbol of the French monarchy, while the Orinoco, one of South America’s longest rivers, evokes connotations of tropicality and wilderness. Thus, these two opening performances establish a foundational premise for the film: namely, that its narrative arc about cultural modernization is also a narrative of reasserting Spain’s lost colonial prowess. By acquiring a more modern, Anglo-European musical vocabulary, the group’s trajectory allegorizes not only the regime’s desire to participate in modernity, but also its aspiration to revive Spanish colonial power symbolically through its assertion of belonging to European whiteness.

As the film develops, the trio meets Johnny, a Spaniard who joins the group as a fourth member to teach them new musical genres. The foursome’s first effort at a hippy anthem, “Los

negros con las suecas,” portrays the beach of Torremolinos as an antiracist utopia through lines such as: “Los negros a las suecas perseguirán, / las suecas a los negros divertirán, / todos juntos y unidos se abrazarán.” The lyrics also feature several references to the then ongoing American Civil Rights movement, such as: “No existirá el color ni lucha antirracial,” “La playa es un hogar sin discriminación,” and “no se puede jugar con la segregación.” As the group sings, a montage shows fast-forwarded shots of black men and *suecas* chasing each other up and down the beach. At one point, a black man takes a break from chasing *suecas* and sits on the sand, rubbing conspicuously white-colored sunscreen all over his body. Shortly thereafter, the black men are replaced by Alfredo Landa who, wearing an animal outfit with horns on his head, pursues a gaggle of *suecas* in their stead. At the end of the song, we see several shots of (tanned) white women and men running together and holding hands.

Despite its antiracist lyrics, this sequence only shows black men at the beginning of the song; by its end, the beach is populated only by white people. Pointedly, the montage implies that the black men do not disappear, but rather, that they are gradually whitened to the point that they become indistinguishable from other beachgoers. The first stage of their whitening occurs when one of the black men stops chasing *suecas* to rub white sunscreen on his skin. Recalling Dyer’s observation that tanning is a quintessential sign of whiteness, this image is the first indicator that the black man is about to undergo a process of whitening (49-50). The second stage occurs when the black man is substituted by a horned Landa in an animal costume. Although Landa’s skin is not black, his animal costume suggests that, as a Spaniard, he shares the black man’s racialized hypersexuality. The next phase in the progression, in which Landa’s animal suit disappears and in which the all-white beachgoers revel in harmonic unison, constitutes a full achievement of whiteness—one where the racial difference between blacks, Spaniards and *suecas* has been negated, and all are equally white.

The whitening of blackness that occurs in this sequence reflects the late Franco regime’s efforts to move the country upward on a geopolitical ladder that was imagined in racial terms. Therefore, the sequence shares a marked resemblance to Chelín’s racist tantrum in *El alma se serena*: in both scenes, blackness represents the various contaminants of Spain’s racial identity that must be overcome or discarded in order for the nation to achieve full belonging in white modernity. Importantly, though, the depiction of Alfredo Landa as a sex-crazed animal self-consciously alludes to the regime’s strategy of selling Spain’s exoticism as a commodity. For although Landa is replaced by racially unmarked whites in the sequence, the entire film, like the

entire corpus of *landismo* cinema, revolves around the premise of Landa's irrepressible sexuality as a source of infinite jokes. Thus, the sequence establishes parity between Spaniards and *suecas*, both by whitening black men and by underscoring the artificiality of Landa's "difference," one that is potently symbolized by his outrageous, over-the-top animal costume.

The film deploys superficially antiracist rhetoric yet again in another musical number, "Ama y odia." By the time this number is performed, Johnny has convinced the group to radically transform their image: their name is now "Los Hippyloyas," they wear Beatles-style costumes and hairstyles, and they advertise themselves as visiting from Liverpool. In the song "Ama y odia," each of the four verses describes the preferences and dislikes of the musicians, stipulating that they love modern activities such as winter sports, free love, and driving, while hating colonialism, segregation, and discrimination. The lyrics that describe the singers' disgust for racial inequality are accompanied by presumably real photographic and filmic images of blacks being beaten by police, marching through the streets, and turning over a car in protest.

However, the song's outward defense of antiracism is further belied by the plot events that unfold before and after it, which imply that Spain's ascent into modernity requires an expulsion of its racial alterity. These plot events specifically concern the highly stereotyped character Anaskira Matuti, an Indian meditation guru who turns out to be a camouflaged Spaniard. Given the large foreign population of Torremolinos, Matuti, whose character is always accompanied by Orientalist tropes such as foreign-sounding music, offers meditation courses to gullible, wealthy socialites so as to extract large sums of money from them. At one point, Alfredo Landa's character, Ricardo, becomes entranced by Matuti's spiritual magnetism, renounces the freewheeling environment of Torremolinos, and gives Matuti all his money. Later, however, he discovers that Matuti's real name is Marcelo Bonet and that he is a cook by profession. The musical group thus blackmails Matuti/Bonet, forcing him to arrange gigs for them at socialites' parties in exchange for keeping his secret. Matuti/Bonet ultimately cannot stand the pressure and, by the film's end, escapes to Tangiers to avoid being exposed.

Although both the musical group and Matuti highlight the malleability of Spanish identity, they represent opposing geopolitical directions for Spain's performance of modernity. On the one hand, the musical group, with its trappings of Britishness, represents a marked turn toward Anglo-European culture, a reflection of many Spaniards' fascination with Europe and the outside world during the late-Franco era. Matuti's character, on the other hand, implies the possibility that Spain might be contaminated by the cultures of an increasingly decolonized

world, which are stereotyped as deserving of suspicion, vilification and ultimately expulsion. Furthermore, Matuti is strongly associated with effeminacy: in addition to his own physical frailty, his closest disciple is Pololo, a flagrantly campy homosexual who accompanies him on his flight to Tangiers. Matuti and Pololo's escape represents a restoration of the established racial, colonial and masculine order: their feminized alterity is banished to Morocco, the perennial *other* of Spanish nationalism, while Spain's performance of Britishness emerges triumphant.

Given the patent contradiction between the Orientalist stereotypes of foreign spiritual practices and the ostensible antiracism of the song "Ama y odia," we must read the song as an attempt to harness the trendy desirability of antiracist movements while emptying them of political content. The film's banishment of Matuti/Bonet, a Spaniard who has been contaminated by racialized alterity, is analogous to the whitening of black men in "Los negros con las suecas" and to Chelín's call to remove the "mud" from the national body in *El alma se serena*. By emphasizing the idea that Spain must be decontaminated of otherness, these cases illustrate the regime's desire to assert Spain's belonging in global modernity by simultaneously affirming its whiteness.

In addition, like *El alma, Una vez al año* suggests that even though Spain must stake a claim in global whiteness, it must conserve a deracialized, marketable "difference" to retain a competitive advantage on the global market. After the final performance of "los Hippyloyas" in Torremolinos, where the group sings a euphoric, English-language pop song called "Love, love, love," an abrupt transition transports us back to the rural mountains, where the foursome performs the film's closing number: another Alps-themed rendition of "Mi casita de papel." Given this number's initial symbolism of Spain's failure to incarnate the whiteness of Northern Europe, the fact that it is played at the end of the film is intriguing. Whereas at first, the song was almost immediately followed by the Cuba-themed number "Frenesí tropical," the absence of the latter song from the film's ending implies that Spain's blackness has finally been erased. In this way, the film's ending reiterates the theme of "Los negros con la suecas" that also portrays the erasure of Spain's blackness. At the same time, by returning to kitschy folklore while eliminating the problem of racial inferiority, the film suggests that Spain can achieve its geopolitical objectives: it can successfully portray itself as white while continuing to exploit artificial notions of "difference" to remain competitive on the world stage.

Conclusion

In this article, I have traced how the popular cinema of late Francoism aimed to affirm Spain's capacity for modernization by asserting the nation's belonging in European whiteness. Given the regime's anxiety about being perceived as an anachronism in an era of rapid social and economic change at home and abroad, Francoist popular cinema used the readily recognizable iconography of a black/white racial spectrum to present Spain as capable of reaching a desirable, white modernity while dissociating the nation from blackness and from its legacy of colonial failure. Yet the strongly racialized humor that surfaces in films such as *El alma se serena* and in *Una vez al año ser hippy no hace daño* served not only to reinforce Spain's global racial standing, but also to suggest that the nation could still exploit a deracialized version of Spain's "difference" as a national marketing strategy. Although the expression "lavarle la cara al país" is often associated with post-Franco Spain's efforts to scrub the unflattering traces of dictatorship from the nation's global image, this phrase could also be used to describe the later years of Francoism, when the regime was deeply invested in "washing the nation's face" of its perennial status as a racialized *other* of Europe. Consequently, the popular cinema of late Francoism played a crucial role in articulating and implementing a national vision of Spain's white, European identity—a vision that remains perceptible in many facets of Spanish culture today.

Notes

¹ See monograph studies such as Susan Martín Márquez's *Disorientations* (2008), Christiane Stallaert's *Etnogénesis y etnicidad en España* (1998), and Joshua Goode's *Impurity of Blood* (2009).

² The concept of a global color line, which has been tremendously influential in whiteness studies and in other fields, is drawn from several of Du Bois's writings, and is especially associated with an oft-cited quotation from *The Souls of Black Folk*: "The problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color-line—the relation of the darker to the lighter races of men in Asia and Africa, in America and the islands of the sea" (Ch. 2).

³ Since 1995, *Televisión Española* has featured a weekend program called *Cine de Barrio* that rebroadcasts popular films from the late Francoist era (Smith 113). The familiarity of late Francoist comedy to contemporary audiences is also evidenced by the pervasive presence of its narrative tropes and stock characters in contemporary media. A notable example is the extremely successful *Torrente* saga of the late 1990s and 2000s, which recycles the stereotype of the *macho ibérico* (Triana Toribio 150). Another is the film *Perdiendo el norte* (2015), whose narrative about Spanish emigration during the economic crisis of 2008-2014 bears numerous references to *Vente a Alemania, Pepe* (1971), a well-known comedy that addresses emigration during late Francoism (Gómez Tarín and Rubio Alcover 71).

⁴ In this article, I cite two volumes that were edited by Huerta Floriano and Pérez Mora: *El "cine de barrio" tardofranquista* and *El cine popular del tardofranquismo*. Despite their distinct titles, these two volumes are the fruit of a single multiyear study of late Francoist popular cinema that was funded by Spain's now defunct Ministry of Science and Innovation and that was conducted in collaboration with numerous scholars between 2009 and 2012.

⁵ Although it is difficult to estimate the black population of Spain during this period, it is undisputed that it remained very small until in the 1990s, when immigration from Sub-Saharan Africa began to accelerate. Donato Ndong Bidyogo, a major Equatorial Guinean writer who spent many years exiled in Spain from the 1960s onward, describes Spain's black community during the 1960s as "marginal," "escaso" and geographically scattered, consisting only of small populations of "guineanos, la mayoría estudiantes; los cubanos que huían de la revolución de Fidel Castro . . . y, por último, los afro-americanos de las bases de Torrejón, Rota y Zaragoza." Although the population of Equatorial Guinean exiles increased after the country's independence in 1968 due to the brutality of its dictator, Francisco Macías Nguema, this community remained statistically small, amounting only to about 6,000 in 1978 (Fraguas).

⁶ Although the Franco regime reluctantly recognized the independence of Equatorial Guinea in 1968, it soon designated all news from its former colony as *materia reservada*, or classified material, in an effort to hide the country's descent into the brutal dictatorship of Francisco Macías Nguema, which the Franco regime found unflattering. Similarly, due to the hasty and incomplete decolonization of Spanish Sahara in 1975, the territory, now known as Western Sahara, remains bitterly locked in a dispute for independence from Morocco to this day.

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