

## *How Did Early-Modern Slaves in Spain Disappear? The Antecedents*

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DEBATING WHETHER “Spaniards of African descent” should be citizens, delegates to the first Spanish constituent assembly meeting in Cádiz in 1810 assumed that individuals of African descent existed only in the New World.<sup>1</sup> Historians who studied this episode followed in their footsteps. Arguing that the issue of citizenship divided peninsular delegates from their American colleagues, they interpreted the decision not to give Africans automatic citizenship—granted only to Spaniards who on both sides descended from either Europeans or Indians—as proof of the unwillingness of peninsular delegates to give America the representation it deserved.<sup>2</sup> The idea that slavery and thus African ascendance (blood) were a colonial, not a domestic, affair and that Spaniards of African descent existed only overseas was not entirely new to the 1810s. As

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<sup>1</sup> This consideration was openly mentioned, for example, by Agustín de Argüelles on January 9, 1811; see *Diario de las discusiones y actas de las Cortes de Cádiz* (Cadiz: Imprenta Real, 1811) (hereafter *DDACC*), 2:323. In 1811 Vicente Morales y Duárez could thus argue that people of African descent could not be citizens because “the king always wanted to maintain this foreign caste that proceeds from different parts of Africa separate . . . from other classes of Americans”; Morales y Duárez, on February 7, 1811, *DDACC*, 3:281–82 (my emphasis). The original version reads: “Su voluntad [del rey] era mantener siempre a esta casta extranjera procedente de varios puntos de África . . . en prescindencia de las otras clases americanas.”

<sup>2</sup> Citizenship was granted to Spaniards who “on both sides descended from Spanish families from Spain and Spanish America” and who had their domicile in the kingdom (art. 18); to naturalized foreigners who had obtained, after their naturalization, letters of citizenship (art. 19); and to sons of foreigners domiciled in Spain who had never left the kingdom without license and who—when reaching twenty-one years of age—had obtained citizenship (*vecindad*) in a Spanish municipality and were exercising a useful profession, office, or industry (art. 21). Naturalized foreigners who wished to obtain citizenship letters were required to meet one of several conditions: to have brought to Spain some important invention or industry, to have purchased taxable property in Spain, to have established commerce there with their own capital, or to have rendered services to the Spanish nation (art. 20).



early as the seventeenth century, authorities and individuals in both Spain and the New World had already established this equation between slavery and the Americas when they debated, for example, the purity of blood of Africans. In Spain, purity mainly required that individuals not have either Jewish or Moorish blood. Although during the sixteenth century some institutions may have added to their purity statutes the exclusion of Africans,<sup>3</sup> this was the exception, not the rule, and as far as we can tell, individuals of African descent could successfully argue against this extension, demonstrating that African descent was not necessarily indicative of impurity.<sup>4</sup> Nonetheless, during the same period in the Americas, Castilian concepts of *limpieza de sangre* (purity of blood) were habitually, indeed mostly, applied to persons of African descent.<sup>5</sup> What was first a practice soon became a law: in the mid-seventeenth century the council of the Inquisition (*la suprema*) ruled that while Indian blood produced no stain, African blood did. Although this ruling was to be applied everywhere (i.e., also in peninsular Spain) seventeenth-century discussants seemed to assume that it mainly applied to the New World. Indeed, it was in the colonial setting—not in Spain—that the idea of the impurity of Africans and their descendants became particularly powerful, and it was there that it had eventually produced a classificatory system that discriminated systematically against all blacks.<sup>6</sup>

But was slavery a purely colonial affair, as these statements indicate?

### SLAVERY IN EARLY-MODERN SPAIN: A FEW REMARKS

Despite this general amnesia, slaves and the descendants of slaves were present in early-modern Spain, and their numbers were not particularly small. To cite just a few examples, we know that in mid-sixteenth-century Seville 7.4 percent of censused inhabitants were slaves<sup>7</sup> and that between 1682 and 1729 the slave population of Cádiz was extremely large, making up perhaps as much as 15 percent of the total urban population.<sup>8</sup> In other cities, such as Málaga, Granada, Las Palmas, Huelva, and Palos de la Frontera, as many as one in ten residents may have been slaves. Between 1539 and 1699, 1,384 slave children were baptized in the small Andalusian town of Lucena, with an average of 400 children every thirty years.<sup>9</sup> Similar numbers may have been true al-

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<sup>3</sup> Baltasar Fra Molinero, "Ser mulato en España y América: Discursos legales y otros discursos literarios," in *Negros, mulatos, zambaigos: derrotos africanos en los mundos ibéricos*, ed. Berta Ares Queija and Alessandro Stella (Seville: Escuela de estudios hispanoamericanos, 2000), 124; María Elena Martínez, *Genealogical Fictions: Limpieza de Sangre, Religion, and Gender in Colonial Mexico* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008), 20, mentioning Seville, which excluded the entry of not only conversos and Moors but also blacks, mulattoes, Gypsies, and native peoples of the Canary Islands on the basis of their lack of purity.

<sup>4</sup> In the 1660s the painter Juan de Pareja insisted that despite his African origins he was an old Christian because according to him, Ethiopia had converted to Christianity before Spain did. Even as late as 1720, a litigant in Seville could argue that despite his African origin his blood was pure because he did not descend from Moors, Jews, or heretics. The matter was laid to rest, and the litigant was allowed access to the Capuchin order. Alessandro Stella, "Mezclándose carnalmente: Relaciones sociales, relaciones sexuales y mestizaje en Andalucía Occidental," in Ares Queija and Stella, *Negros, mulatos, zambaigos*, 175.

<sup>5</sup> Martínez, *Genealogical Fictions*, 158–59, 167–70.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 202–5, 225.

<sup>7</sup> Alessandro Stella, *Histoire d'esclaves dans la péninsule ibérique* (Paris: Editions de l'École des hautes études en sciences sociales, 2000), 76.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 51–52, 57.

<sup>9</sup> Françoise Orsoni-Avila, *Les esclaves de Lucena (1539–1700)* (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne—Presses de la Sorbonne nouvelle, 1997), 51–54.

also for Córdoba.<sup>10</sup> Historians who studied slavery in Spain thus concluded that Renaissance and perhaps even early-modern Spain may have had the largest African population in Europe.<sup>11</sup> Where did these slaves come from?

We know that in the fifteenth century slaves arrived in the peninsula through the slave markets of Barcelona, Valencia, and Baleares and that in the sixteenth century Lisbon became the major slave provider. The custom house (*alfândega*) of Mourão, a Portuguese settlement on the border between Portugal and Spain, testified to this trade, registering the massive entry of African slaves to Extremadura from Portugal.<sup>12</sup> Seville was also an important market, selling perhaps as many as 1,000 slaves per year in the late sixteenth century and as many as 1,400 in the early seventeenth century.<sup>13</sup> During this period, secondary markets also existed in Valencia, Málaga, Burgos, and Valladolid.<sup>14</sup> Slavery, in short, was not restricted to some areas: although the presence of slaves was particularly important in the south, slavery was a general phenomenon, present all over the peninsula. Furthermore, slaves were not necessarily luxury items, and people belonging to very different social groups and of radically different economic means could be slaveholders.<sup>15</sup>

Indeed, in some places slavery was so widely present (or rather omnipresent) that contemporaries complained about it. In both the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries the authorities of Seville thus remarked that the number of African slaves was so great that they outnumbered the regular citizens. Because of their presence, Seville looked like a chessboard, alternating between white and black (“se parecían a los trebejos del ajedrez tanto prietos como blancos, por los muchos esclavos que hay en la ciudad”).<sup>16</sup>

Not only did Spain have a huge population of slaves, a population that by the late sixteenth century was mostly composed of individuals of African descent, and not only were slaves present (although in varying numbers) all over the peninsula and in all social milieus, but also their numbers did not necessarily drop at the end of the sixteenth century as historians once believed.<sup>17</sup> Recent research suggests that slavery and the presence of Africans continued to be important factors in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and even into the early nineteenth century.<sup>18</sup> Indica-

<sup>10</sup> Aurelia Martín-Casares, “Cristianos, musulmanes y animistas en Granada: Identidades religiosas y sincretismo cultural,” in Ares Queija and Stella, *Negros, mulatos, zambaigos*, 208.

<sup>11</sup> Aurelia Martín-Casares and Marga G. Barranco, “The Musical Legacy of Black Africans in Spain: A Review of Our Sources,” *Anthropological Notebooks* 15, no. 2 (2009): 52.

<sup>12</sup> João Cosme, “A solidariedade e a conflitualidade na fronteira portuguesa do Alentejo (séculos XIII–XVIII),” *População e sociedade* 6 (2000): 89–90, citing Fernando Cortés Cortés.

<sup>13</sup> Stella, *Histoire d’esclaves dans la péninsule ibérique*, 74.

<sup>14</sup> Orsoni-Avila, *Les esclaves de Lucena*, 36–39.

<sup>15</sup> José Luis Cortés López, *La esclavitud negra en la España peninsular del siglo XVI* (Salamanca: Universidad de Salamanca, 1989), 18–24, 64–71; Orsoni-Avila, *Les esclaves de Lucena*, 85–86; Vicente Graullera Sanz, *La esclavitud en Valencia en los siglos XVI y XVII* (Valencia: Instituto valenciano de estudios históricos, 1978), 135. Also see Antonio Domínguez Ortiz, *La esclavitud en Castilla en la edad moderna y otros estudios de marginados* (Granada: Comares, 2003), 12–17; Alessandro Stella, “L’esclavage en Andalousie à l’époque moderne,” *Annales ESC* 47, no. 1 (1992): 46–56.

<sup>16</sup> The municipal council meeting of September 18, 1461, cited by Antonio Collantes de Terán Sánchez, “Contribución al estudio de los esclavos en la Sevilla medieval,” in *Homenaje al professor Carriazo* (Seville: Universidad de Sevilla, 1972), 2:121. Also see Domínguez Ortiz, *La esclavitud en Castilla en la edad moderna*, 9–10, citing the words of Damasio de Frías and others.

<sup>17</sup> Antonio Domínguez Ortiz criticized this assumption already in the 1950s; see Domínguez Ortiz, *La esclavitud en Castilla en la edad moderna*, 31–39.

<sup>18</sup> Graullera Sanz, *La esclavitud en Valencia*, 179–83.

tions for this continuity are everywhere to be found: in 1837 the Cortes debated a law to abolish slavery in the peninsula; and in 1851 the proposal for a new civil code included the issue of peninsular slavery (neither in 1837 nor in 1851 was action taken, and indeed slavery was never formally abolished in Spain—it is possible that it gradually died out on its own). We also know that slaves were massively present in eighteenth-century Cádiz, still forming perhaps as much as 10 percent of the local population, and local newspapers continued to advertise their sale.<sup>19</sup> The situation in Granada may have been similar.<sup>20</sup> In both cities, however, there are indications that while slavery may have persisted into the early nineteenth century, by the mid-eighteenth century the numbers of slaves may have been dropping. It is also possible that, by that time, most slaves were held by people who had contacts with the Americas or were recent arrivals, which perhaps helps explain the connection made between slavery and colonialism.

### HOW DID AFRICANS DISAPPEAR?

Most historians studying African slavery in Spain were mainly interested in uncovering how and why this population disappeared. That is, they wanted to explain why there were no Africans or people with clear African traits in present-day Spain.

The answers they gave differed over time. Many historians dismissed the problem altogether by offering common sense solutions. Following this method, an older generation of scholars suggested that most slaves had integrated into Spanish society. Spanish society, they claimed, was not racist: it allowed for mixed marriages and it produced mixed offspring. It also allowed many ex-slaves to become well-known and successful individuals.<sup>21</sup> Rather than race, social divisions in early-modern Spain followed religion. Thus, Africans who “freely accepted Christianity and Spanish culture” were allowed to incorporate fully into the economic, social, and religious life, helping to create the so-called ethnic diversity of the early-modern age.<sup>22</sup> Among other things, this was possible because most slaves were brought to Spain at a young age. As children or adolescents, they learned to speak Spanish and adopted Spanish customs, Spanish manners, and Spanish names and surnames.<sup>23</sup>

Yet these claims for (an almost) white legend have been rebuffed by a new generation of historians who have stressed, on the contrary, that in Spain as elsewhere slavery was a repressive institution.<sup>24</sup> Because over time slavery became associated with Africans, and Africans with slavery, in Spain as elsewhere freed Africans were discriminated against both legally and socially.<sup>25</sup> That is to say, religious conversion may have been important and may have won some acceptance, but by the late fifteenth century and certainly thereafter even in Spain “identities were no

<sup>19</sup> Pedro Parilla Ortíz, *La esclavitud en Cádiz durante el siglo XVIII* (Cádiz: Diputación de Cádiz, 2001), 18, 154.

<sup>20</sup> Aurelia Martín-Casares, *La esclavitud en la Granada del siglo xvi. género, raza y religión* (Granada: Universidad de Granada, 2000), 464–69.

<sup>21</sup> Domínguez Ortíz, *La esclavitud en Castilla en la edad moderna*, 29.

<sup>22</sup> Ruth Pike, “Sevillian Society in the Sixteenth Century: Slaves and Freedmen,” *Hispanic American Historical Review* 47, no. 3 (1967): 359.

<sup>23</sup> Aurelia Martín-Casares, “Freed and Freed Black Africans in Granada in the Time of the Spanish Renaissance,” in *Black Africans in Renaissance Europe*, ed. T. F. Earle and K. J. P. Lowe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 251–52.

<sup>24</sup> Stella, *Histoire d’esclaves dans la péninsule ibérique*, 19; Graullera Sanz, *La esclavitud en Valencia*, 125; Debra Blumenthal, *Enemies and Familiars: Slavery and Mastery in Fifteenth-Century Valencia* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2009), 5.

<sup>25</sup> Cortés López, *La esclavitud negra en la España peninsular*, 18–24, 89–97.

longer so easily shed by embracing new faiths, learning new languages or accepting new laws.”<sup>26</sup> Contrary to the older generation, the newer generation of researchers thus insists that in Spain (as elsewhere) there was no rapid integration and that most descendants of slaves, even after they were freed, remained marginalized.<sup>27</sup>

For those maintaining that there was no integration the answer to the mystery of where this African population went lies in demographic trends. According to their calculations, many slaves and freed Africans may have immigrated back to Africa or ended up in the Americas. Furthermore, many Africans had no descendants or their descendants died at a young age. This may have happened because slaves were not encouraged to marry or reproduce, and many Africans were freed when they were too old to bear children.<sup>28</sup>

But even if we believe that biological mixing, immigration, or reproductive failure explains the lack of African descendants after the demise of slavery in the early nineteenth century, we still have no answer to the question of why in the seventeenth and eighteenth century people living in Spain (and witnessing the large African population there) still considered slavery a colonial affair. Were all these people blind?

## FACTS AND MEMORY

The literature offers a single answer: the disappearance of Africans was contemporary to their omnipresence because the existence of things does not necessarily make them visible. That is, visibility, or even protagonism, is one thing, and existence is another.<sup>29</sup> Africans, we are told, were habitually depicted in Spanish American art and in early-modern European paintings in general. Nevertheless, they were mostly absent from Spanish Golden Age paintings, in which if they appeared at all, they were normally depicted as Christians and by extension also as whites.<sup>30</sup> This happened because these Golden Age paintings were pedagogically oriented. They were meant to convey the message that conversion was important. Of course, conversion did not change the external color of Africans, but it sufficiently affected their interior constitution to lead artists (at least) to depict them as ordinary Spaniards, not Spaniards of African descent. Artists of African descent seemed to have followed the same interpretation, depicting themselves as fairly white-skinned individuals who were dressed as Europeans. Among other things, this self-presentation was useful to demarcate the distance between *libertos* (freed slaves) and slaves; while *libertos* were white, slaves continued to be African not only in culture and faith but also in color.<sup>31</sup>

Africans, in short, may have been present and may have remained present, but their contribution was silenced because, among other reasons, it had no place in the social imaginary. After all, at stake was never reality as such but rather those parts of reality that were important and

<sup>26</sup> Blumenthal, *Enemies and Familiars*, 270.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 7, 240–42, 264; Martín-Casares, *La esclavitud en la Granada*, 448, 450.

<sup>28</sup> Stella, *Histoire d’esclaves dans la péninsule ibérique*, 28, 179. Also see Manuel López Molina, *Una década de esclavitud en Jaén: 1675–1685* (Jaén: Ayuntamiento de Jaén, 1995), 173–74.

<sup>29</sup> Fra Molinero, “Ser mulato en España y América,” 124.

<sup>30</sup> Carmen Fracchia, “(Lack of) Visual Representation of Black Slaves in Spanish Golden Age Paintings,” *Journal of Iberian and Latin American Studies* 10, no. 1 (2004): 23–34; Carmen Fracchia, “Representación de la esclavitud negra en la España imperial y la problematización del par ‘original-copia,’” in *Original-Copia . . . Original? III Congreso internacional de teoría e historia de las artes, XI jornadas CAIA*, ed. Gabriela Siracusano (Buenos Aires: CAIA, 2005), 272, 274–75; Carmen Fracchia, “La problematización del blanqueamiento visual del cuerpo africano en la España imperial y en Nueva España,” *Revista chilena de antropología visual* 14 (2009): 1–12.

<sup>31</sup> Fracchia, “La problematización del blanqueamiento visual del cuerpo africano,” 6–7.

meaningful. Perhaps like all other societies, early-modern Spanish society clearly understood the difference between fact and its representation, between fact and memory. Contemporary debates concerning purity of blood celebrated this distinction. At stake was never who converted when and who descended from whom, but whether the memory of conversion and of forefathers had already disappeared.<sup>32</sup> Those who were discriminated against because of impurity were not the only ones who could be accused of “impurity,” nor were all those declared pure truly pure. Indeed, most testimonies supporting the purity of individuals pointed to a negative fact: the fact that no one remembered, knew, or heard publicly that these individuals were impure. To return to Cádiz, discussants in 1810 clearly understood this reality. They concluded that citizenship should be denied only to individuals who were “reputed and held to be of African ancestry” (que son habidos y reputados por originarios del África).<sup>33</sup> The delegates explained that they preferred reputation over hard facts because doing otherwise would force all Spaniards to demonstrate that they had no African blood; thus, they placed the burden of proof on those who wanted to be admitted rather than on those who could potentially be rejected.<sup>34</sup>

To sum up, the disappearance of slaves and Africans from peninsular consciousness may have been tied not to facts (how many integrated, how many died, and so forth) but to memory. Memory loss may have operated on different levels: it allowed contemporaries to distance slavery in time and space, relegating it to the Middle Ages, on the one hand, and to colonies, on the other, or when suitable, it allowed them to convert blacks into whites. But it is precisely because representations of alterity could be manipulated in this way that it is more than possible that Africans may have left in Spain important traces that we still fail to recognize. This is, at least, what some historians have concluded recently, maintaining, for example, that Africans left a substantial legacy in Spanish popular songs and dances, most clearly in the south but also elsewhere.<sup>35</sup>

### WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

In June 2007 an author who identified himself as a second-generation African living in Spain complained that Spain’s enthusiasm for Europe had brought about, among other things, the wiping out of “the contribution of Africans, the fact of the Africanity of Spain, and the importance of Black community and Black elements to Spanish history.”<sup>36</sup> Insisting that the “African began in the Pyrenees” was not an insult but the expression of a historical reality, and arguing that many descendants of Africans still lived in Spain, mainly in Andalucía, the author suggested that it was time Spain recognized its “Africanity”: the fact that it had a mixed African-European back-

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<sup>32</sup> Martínez, *Genealogical Fictions*, 203, 207–8.

<sup>33</sup> Article 22, which dealt with Spaniards of African descent, stipulated: “A los españoles que por cualquiera línea son habidos y reputados por originarios del África les queda abierta la puerta de la virtud y el merecimiento para ser ciudadano. En su consecuencia, las cortes concederán carta de ciudadano a los que hicieren servicios calificados a la patria, o a los que se distinguen por su talento, aplicación y conducta, con la condición de que sean hijos de legítimo matrimonio, de padres ingenuos, de que estén casados con mujer ingenua, y avecindados en los dominios de las Españas, y de que ejerzan alguna profesión, oficio o industria útil con un capital propio.”

<sup>34</sup> Castillo, on September 4, 1811, *DDACC*, 8:162; and Salazar, on September 5, 1811, *DDACC*, 8:176. These considerations were also openly invoked in the session of September 10, 1811, *DDACC*, 8:231–46, in which some of the delegates (e.g., Ramos Arispe, Mendiola, and Ostolarza) also expressed their fear of the contrary situation: the practical consequences of relying on reputation.

<sup>35</sup> Martín-Casares and Barranco, “Musical Legacy of Black Africans in Spain,” 51–60.

<sup>36</sup> Antumi Toasije, “The Africanity of Spain: Identity and Problematization,” *Journal of Black Studies* 39, no. 348 (2007): 350 (also see 354).

ground. It was also time it faced its responsibility for the crimes it had committed against Africans, mainly the enslavement of millions but also racism and colonialism. Adopting a similar position, in January 2009 one subscriber to a black blog placed on the Internet the news that the Spanish Parliament had begun discussing the possibility of issuing of an apology for black slavery.<sup>37</sup> The news also mentioned that there was no official estimate of the number of descendants of Africans in Spain, and it lamented what it identified as official efforts to distinguish between descendants of early-modern Africans and present-day immigrants.

Public meetings calling for a Spanish apology to Africans were held in Spain in 2005 and 2008. They were matched by conversations with Spanish politicians in which requests were made that both Spain and the European Union support affirmative-action policies to meet the aspirations of descendants of slaves. Also requested was that “the black community, its diaspora and descendants be placed on equal footing and be fully recognized in Spain as an ethnic minority and as a socially excluded group (like Sephardic Jews, Saharawi, Gypsies, Muslims, Buddhists, Protestants, Homosexuals) on the grounds of long-established settlement, historical links and equal treatment.”<sup>38</sup> Perhaps as a result, in January 2010 Spain’s president (at that time also president of the European Union), José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero, speaking to the Fourteenth African Union Summit, indeed condemned “the evils of slavery that, above all, the people of Africa suffered.”<sup>39</sup>

This political awakening was accompanied by an academic awakening. In recent years, the Spanish Ministry of Education and Science has supported collaborative research projects aimed at understanding the African experience in Spain. One such project, based in Granada, has as its aim to “analyze the evolution of the black African population in Spain from the 16th to the 19th century,” “to bring to center stage the presence of both slaves and freedmen of sub-Saharan origin in Spain,” and “to contribute in this way to the recuperation of the social memory and the recognition of African legacy.”<sup>40</sup>

But like all issues of memory, at stake are not necessarily hard facts but how they are integrated, experienced, and reproduced. We already have sufficient evidence that slavery existed in Spain, that it was an important phenomenon, and that during the early-modern period most slaves were of African descent. What we need perhaps are not additional studies but an evaluation of why memory of them disappeared and what it will take to awaken it. A

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<sup>37</sup> <http://theblacklistpub.ning.com/profiles/blogs/spanish-parliament-admit-to>, posted January 24, 2009.

<sup>38</sup> Toasije, “Africanity of Spain,” 354; the “Madrid Declaration of the Black Community” campaign to collect five million signatures, published at <http://www.documentalistas.com/projects/notalone/declaration.php>.

<sup>39</sup> <http://eurasiareview.com/2010/02/31579-gaddafi-says-he-influenced-spains.html>. Apparently, Rodríguez Zapatero had also apologized previously for the trafficking of African slaves to Spanish America when speaking before the Togo Parliament.

<sup>40</sup> “Antropología de la Esclavitud: Los negroafricanos y sus descendientes en España (1492–1866),” proyecto de investigación I+D, <http://antropologiadelaesclavitud.org/web/index.php?idioma=es>.