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Recovering memory, reasserting Europeanness. Modern *Convivencia* and *Hispanotropicalism* in *Palm Trees in the Snow* (2015) and *Neckan* (2015).

Marta F. Suarez

"Coloniser's daughter?", asks Iniko, "Farmworker. It is not the same."[1], replies Clarence in her father's defence. The exchange takes place between the Equatorial Guinean and Spanish co-protagonists in *Palmeras en la nieve/ Palm Trees in the Snow* (Fernando González Molina, 2015), the box-office hit based on the novel of the same name. As the dialogue encapsulates, Spain's revision of its African colonial past is yet to acknowledge the abuses and inequalities of the period, grounding itself instead in notions of collaboration, exchange, and conviviality. Whereas Spanish colonialism in the Americas has been approached on-screen with revisionist tones, Spanish incursions in Africa have been given much less attention and even less critical awareness. Nevertheless, it is worth noting a recent increase of Spanish films around themes of (post)colonialism in the African colonies; in post-Franco's Spain this debate was conspicuously absent.

Twenty-first century Spain is interrogating the past and collective memory. At the turn of the millennium and the foundation of the ARMH (Spain's Association for the Recovery of Historical Memory) in 2000, numerous literary works, testimonies, and films were produced around the themes of the Civil War and its aftermath (Labanyi, 2007, p. 95). The debates that 2007's *Ley de Memoria Histórica* (Law of Historical Memory) reignited have encouraged the examination not only of the war and the dictatorship that followed, but also, as Triana-Toribio (2016, p.16) identifies, of the transition, its political agents, and the decisions taken. The reinstatement of a collective memory around Spain's colonial incursions in Africa must

[1] (INIKO) Hija de colonial? (CLARENCE) Empleado de finca. No es lo mismo. (01:05:38)

be understood in the context of a national identity in crisis and a desire to revisit the past. This chapter seeks to explore the articulation of Spain's colonial African past through the analysis of two contemporary fiction films, *Palm Trees in the Snow* and *Neckan* (Gonzalo Tapia, 2015). In particular, I seek to determine the way in which these colonial narratives work *transtemporally*[2] to connect the historical past and contemporary Spain. In addressing this question, I approach the historical events of Spanish colonialism in Africa and the construction of national identity, particularly in the context of European membership and democracy. After a brief account of Spanish films set in these colonies, the chapter offers a reading of *Palmeras* and *Neckan.* It goes on to suggest that these films reaffirm Spain's Europeanness at the same time that they encourage acceptance and forgiveness to deal with the past. By situating these films during the final years of colonial rule, the narratives focus on moments of change and transformation, where discovering the past does not lead to conflict but to opportunities for unity and progress.

In recent years, there has been a surge in narratives around national collective memory, in particular about Spain's African colonies. Since the Francoist Regime (1939-1975), very few films had addressed these territories and those that did had little commercial impact, as noted by Isabel Santaolalla (2002, pp. 66-67) when discussing the "surprising reticence towards narratives that deal with the country's colonial past". It is not the place of this chapter to provide an exhaustive discussion of films set in the African colonies, for which the reader

[2] I use here *transtemporal* to refer to meanings that do not just repeat over time, but that are shaped by the context in which they are located. The past in this way is reimagined through present signifiers, but also carry to the present connotations rooted in historical memory. In the context of Spain's revision of African colonialism, the notions of Convivencia and Hispanotropicalism are inherited from past colonial experiences, but are shaped by understandings of Europeanness set in contemporary times. For example, conversion to Catholicism is absent from *Palm Trees*, despite being one of the pillars of Spanish colonialism in Equatorial Guinea. By doing so, the film moves the religious experience to the private and leads audiences to assume a secular rule with Christian values, more akin to Spain's notions of contemporary Europeanness.

might want to approach the excellent work of Alberto Elena (2001, 2002, 2005, 2010, 2014), Jo Labanyi (2001), Susan Martin-Marquez (2008), and Brad Epps (2017). These scholars analyse films such as *¡Harka!* (Carlos Arévalo, 1941), *A mí la legión!/Follow the Legion* (Juan de Orduña, 1942), *Misión blanca/White Mission* (Juan de Orduña, 1946), *La manigua sin Dios/The Godless Swamp* (Arturo Ruiz-Castillo, 1948), *La mies es mucha/Great is the Harvest* (Jose Luis Sáenz de Heredia, 1949), or *Cerca de la ciudad/On the City's Edge* (Luis Lucía, 1952). Instead, this chapter provides a summary of films and themes with a view to set the background upon which to approach the analysis.

In films produced during the dictatorship, the Latin American characters were usually conforming to notions of *Hispanidad*, the idea of a cultural identity between Spain and Hispanic America. The peoples from the African continent, however, were not depicted in these terms and although the notion of a shared past would permeate films set in North Africa, the narrative kept the similarities at a distance. Instead, trends of *Convivencia* appeared in the North African narratives, reimagining the medieval period when Jews, Moors and Christians lived in supposed harmony in Spain. Attitudes derived from *Hispanotropicalism* permeated narratives set in Sub-Saharan territories, alluding to an innate Spanish ability to colonise African territories, based on the legacy of Al-Andalus and a history of colonisation. Elaborated by Nerin (1998), the term reconciles the apparent contradiction between an orientalised and orientalising Spain, a conflict acknowledged by Said (2002) in the first pages to the Spanish edition of *Orientalism*. Franco had used the colonial narratives to resuscitate ideas of empire and "future glory" (Santaolalla, 2002, p. 67) with films that "celebrated the greatness of Spain" (Stone, 2002, p. 38), where Spanishness was constructed against the African Other in portrayals that "served to reaffirm a sense of superiority and to clarify ethnicity and identity in Spain" (Elena, 2014, p. 67).

The *othering* of the African in this period differed between the colonies, as Susan Martin-Márquez (2008) and Aixelà-Cabré (2017, 2018) carefully describe. Instead, in Equatorial Guinea, conversion into Catholicism and the values of the dictatorship were at the forefront of the colonial rule, but with discouragements of miscegenation. In contrast, in Morocco the Spaniards based in the Protectorate were encouraged to learn Arabic and the presence of the church was not to indoctrinate but to provide services to the Spanish colonisers (Martin-Marquez, 2008, p. 280). Whilst the Protectorate invoked narratives of brotherhood, Equatorial Guinea was twice *othered*, against Spain and against North Africa. For Okenve (2016, p. 53),

> Equatorial Guinea, hence, became the other Africa, the one that Spain could not be linked to; the one that could highlight the adequacy of Spanish culture; the one that could offer a new frontier in which to expand Spanish Civilization-Hispanidad, even if Equatorial Guinea was too small to redeem Spain.

The expansion into the African territory offered ways to heal the internal identity crisis of what became known as the "Disaster of 1898", or the final loss of the last colonies in the Americas. Furthermore, by aligning itself with the European powers that would occupy and colonise Africa in the nineteenth century, Spain saw a way to "affirm the nation's 'whiteness' and its membership in the larger European community" (Martin-Marquez, 2008, p.50). Spanish occupation of Morocco followed several armed conflicts in North Africa, such as the Spanish-Moroccan War (1859-1860) and the Rif Wars (1909-1910, 1921-1926). When France established the Protectorate of Morocco in 1912, tensions between France and Great Britain increased. As a solution, Spain was given part of the territory in a role of "neutral" ruler. The Spanish occupation created conflict with the Berber groups in the area, who reconquered most of the territories in a series of battles during the Rif War of 1921-1926. A

humiliating defeat for Spain, the conflict moved towards the French Protectorate, and the two countries coordinated a counterattack that recovered most of the territories by 1926. It is in this period that Franco built the networks that would allow him to front the Army of Africa against the Republican side during the Civil War, under a dubious promise of independence (Sharpe, 2018, p. 94). After the pacification of the territory in 1927, a narrative of "brotherhood was sought, and the discourse of the shared Andalusian past recovered by Arabism was renewed to this end" (Aixela-Cabré, 2018, p. 8). After the Civil War, the bonds between Morocco and the Nationalists would invoke narratives of *Convivencia*. In this context, Franco held the false idea that revolts against the French Protectorate were a reflection of Moroccan loyalty towards Spain (Payne, 2011, p.45). After France conceded independence to Morocco in 1956, the revolts turned to the Spanish side, and Franco saw no other choice but also to grant independence.

The colonisation of Equatorial Guinea is not too dissimilar, albeit with a much more painful withdrawal process. A Spanish colony since the Treaty of el Pardo (1778) with Portugal, the final territory was agreed in the Treaty of Paris (1900) with France, where Spain was to keep the isle of Fernando Po (Bioko) and the area of Rio Muni in the mainland area. With forced-labour programs and exploitative hiring systems based on advancements, the conditions in the colonies were not very different from the human trade system (Martin-Marquez, 2008, p. 280). Francoist Spain became more involved in the control of the region, but a desire to be more involved in international trade lead to seeking certain levels of approval from international powers. With the admission of Spain into the UN in 1955, Spain was confronted about its colonies (Campos, 2003, p. 97) and Morocco obtained its independence shortly after that. Yet, the process of withdrawal in Equatorial Guinea was slow and marked by different attempts to continue to control the territory in alternative arrangements. For example, Franco

invoked *Hispanidad* in the territories as a goal that had finally been achieved through the imposition of Spanish language and Catholicism. In doing so, the Francoist regime provided the locals with Spanish citizenship and later changed the country's status to Spanish province. Disagreements with the UN around these attempts to hold onto power forced a referendum in 1963. Independence would be won five years later.

Upon withdrawing from the colonies, Franco proclaimed that the colonial period was a "reserved matter", in order to avoid scrutiny of human rights violations (Martinez-Saez, 2016, p. 27). By doing so, research on the colonial exploitation or the post-colonial condition of these territories was silenced. Contrary to what might be expected, the end of the dictatorship in 1975 did not bring a revision of the colonial project. In fact, during the Transition to democracy and the years that followed under the PSOE (Spanish Labour Party), Spain avoided engaging with the Francoist past and it was not until the 1990s that a series of films on the Civil War started to reach popularity. Yet, this incursion into recent history on screen was mostly limited to the war and the Spain of the dictatorship would wait at least another decade. For their part, the colonies were rarely touched upon, with just a handful of examples of limited success. And, although the recuperation of the memory of Francoist Spain and the Transition started to be addressed more widely and critically with the new millennium, the recuperation of collective memory of the African colonies has been a more recent phenomenon. In this regard, there has been notable criticism in relation to an *amnesia* of Spanish film to address the African colonial past (Labanyi, 2001; Santaolalla, 2002; Elena, 2010; Bayre and Valenciano-Mañé, 2014). This circumstance is not exclusive of film, and both Martínez-Sáez (2016) and Aixelà-Cabré (2018) conclude that in contemporary Spain there is still a lack of knowledge regarding the history of the African colonies overall.

EU membership and a booming economy suddenly increased Spanish immigration in the 1990s, with a number of films exploring narratives of integration, highlighting Spain's prejudices and calling for tolerance. With the sensationalist media comparing arrivals by sea to invasion, many films turned their gaze to Africa and African characters. It is not the place of this chapter to discuss immigration cinema, but the reader might find valuable in this regard works by Santaolalla (2002, 2005), Castiello (2005), Ballesteros (2001, 2005), Davies (2006), Elena (2005), Gordillo Álvarez (2007, 2019), Iglesias Santos (2013), Peralta García (2016), Vega-Durán (2016), or van Liew (2019). Despite an increasing presence of the African *other* in fiction films, these narratives are mostly mediated by Spanish filmmakers, with the notable exception of Santiago Zannou, a director of African ancestry. As a consequence, these narratives position the *other* as an object of the gaze, not originator of their representation, as argued by Santaolalla (2002, p. 68):

> the visibility of hybridity in contemporary Spanish film, TV and advertising cannot be read as a subversive strategy used by the subaltern. Rather, it should largely be seen as a manifestation of Spain's eagerness to follow the global fashion for incorporating the hybrid intro mainstream culture.

This has led to an over-representation of Sub-Saharan immigration on screen, as it provides a level of *otherness* against which to re-define Spanishness that Latin-Americans, as the "close *other*" (Santaolalla, 2005) cannot provide. The "value of Otherness", argues Santaolalla (2002, pp. 68-69) reconciles "the nation's desire for integration into modernization and globalization processes with a desire to retain the comforting feeling of continuity offered by local traditional culture". The 1990s, thus, initiated in Spain an 'Immigration Cinema', which would see a plethora of films made at the turn of millennium and during the noughties. The cinematic interest towards the immigrant *other* aligns around the 2010s with the desire to explore Spain's collective memory and its past. Suffering from a fractured national identity,

the effects of the financial crisis, and a series of corruption scandals, Spain seeks a way to reinvent itself and its European belonging[3]. In this context, many of the (post)colonial African narratives offer a way to position Spain shoulder to shoulder with the European powers, to transform Spain from a rescued country into a rescuer, and to appeal to notions of *Convivencia* both within the national borders and beyond.

The interest in African colonialism increased around the second half of the noughties, particularly in the form of documentary and short films (Elena, 2014, p. 67), overcoming the previous amnesia of the imperial past (Labanyi, 2001, p.40). Many of these films focus on postcolonial Sahara, a former Spanish colony until 1975, when Spain withdrew leaving the territory open to multiple claims that have given rise to conflict up to the present day. For Elena (2014, p.70), this contemporary trend in the portrayal of the Saharawi conflict can be traced to the mid-1970s solidarity with the Saharawi peoples and comes "with a latent anti-Moroccan sentiment lurking in the background". To this category belong films such as *Los baúles del retorno* (Miró, 1995), *La marcha verde* (García Sánchez, 2001), *Olvidados en el Sáhara* (David Moncasi and Josu Larumbe, 2002), *Cuentos de la guerra saharaui* (Pérez Rosado, 2003), *Often in the world* (2004), *Caótica Ana* (Medem, 2007), *Invisibles* (2007), *El rumor de la arena* (Prieto and Iriarte, 2008), *Wilaya* (Rosado, 2011) or *Hijos de las nubes* (Longoria, 2012).

The 2000s also inspired many films on the Protectorate (Elena, 2014, p. 71), such as *Tánger, esa vieja dama* (Rioyo and López-Linares, 2002), *Blocao* (March, 2003) *Al otro lado de la*

[3] Spain has been suffering a string of corruption scandals, many interconnected, that involved top politicians and figures. Among many others, the King's brother-in-law, a former Minister of Economy, a former Treasurer of the government, or the President of Valencian administrative region. Some of the judicial processes are still ongoing and attract great media attention, with former President Mariano Rajoy even being called to testify in 2019, whilst still in power.

memoria (López Rivera and Sánchez-Montes, 2004), *La vida perra de Juanita Narboni* (Fairda Benlyazid, 2005), the coproduction *Los perdedores* (Deiback, 2006), *Arrhash* (Rada and El Idrissi, 2008) or *Neckan* (2015). It must be said that, as with the other African colonies, not much fiction has been produced and the vast majority of films are documentaries. Perhaps due to a desire to approach these histories first through what might be perceived as a more neutral and illustrative film form, or perhaps due to a difficult funding situation that might only encourage fiction narratives of proven success.

The colonial period of Equatorial Guinea had been approached during the mid-1990s with the film *Lejos de África* (Bartolomé, 1996), a story of autobiographical tones around the coming of age of a young Spanish girl and her Equatorial Guinean friend. The reception was quite modest and it was not until almost ten years later when this period started to acquire more relevance on screen. For Elena (2014, p. 68), *Lejos de África* is "undoubtedly the first film to incorporate a certain postcolonial reflection along the two parallel axes of what the director terms the 'drama of colonialism' and more expressively 'historical amnesia'." During the mid-2000s, a series of documentaries approached the colonial period, such as *El hombre del Salacot* (Gil de Biedma, 2005), *Bajo una misma bandera* (Carabe and Salvatierra, 2005), *Memoria negra* (Montanyá, 2006), and *Mbini. Cazadores de imágenes/* (Pereiró and Ortín, 2007). It is notable that all these films deal with questions of memory in one way or another, not only as a film device to construct the narrative, but also with the intention to fill the gap in Spain's collective memory. Engaging with archives, *El hombre del Salacot* uses No-Do clips of the Francoist Regime and *Mbini* uncovers the story of Hermic Films in Rio Muni. *Bajo una misma bandera* and *Memoria negra* build on testimonies and memories of the colonial past. Yet, all these films had little distribution and in fact only *Memoria negra* is classified with the ICAA (Institute of Cinematography and Audiovisual Arts). By contrast,

the film *Palm Trees in the Snow* not only had ample distribution, but it became a box office hit during Christmas 2015 and won numerous awards, including the prestigious Goya for Best Director.

The 21st century began with a period of re-construction of the collective memory in Spain, further driven by the debates surrounding the Law of Historical Law and an examination of the failures of the Transition. The first years of the 2000s followed a period of prosperity and international praise, which encouraged an idea of a Spain that had finally aligned with European and global powers, epitomised in the Azores Summit of 2003. At a time when this re-evaluation of the past was taking place, Spain entered a financial crisis (2008-2012) and suffered a succession of corruption cases involving highly ranked figures. The perception that the Spanish elite had been involved in fraud, bribery and malpractice for decades, brought mistrust and damaged the self-perceived contemporary image of democratic and financial success. The discourses that had called for internal unity and conviviality in an effort to join the European Union and the Common Market were now fractured under the understanding that, perhaps, the transition had not treated all Spaniards equally and that the elites had found ways to profit in the process. In this context, the financial crisis and the subsequent financial rescue by Europe opened a breach in an already fragmented national identity, built around the notion that it had been the dictatorship what had held back the country. Yet, this last decade has showed Spain that even as a democracy and a member of the Europe Union, the Spanish economy was fragile, corruption was rife among the ruling class, and when it came to important decisions, Spain did not have the same weight in Europe as the founding members.

Against this backdrop, the release of two fiction films set in colonial Africa (*Palm Trees in the Snow* and *Neckan*) can be read in multiple ways. They not only revisit the colonial past and recover historical memory, but they invoke simultaneously ideas of forgiveness, unity and acceptance that apply to both the political context of the films and also to that of contemporary times. These films explore themes that connect the colonial past and contemporary Spain, delineating calls for *Convivencia* and outlining new *Hispanotropicalisms* that re-position Spain alongside other colonial (European) powers. The narrative device of discovering one's roots and identity place the protagonists in the last colonial years of Equatorial Guinea and the Spanish Protectorate, situating the stories during moments of transformation and political change. Similarly, both films end with the reconciliation of past and present, where the main characters leave behind the colonies and their secrets. Far from critically questioning the colonial rule, these films position Spain as a benign colonial power, they suggest acknowledging the past as the sole form of reparation, and they advocate for conviviality.

Palmeras en la nieve is a romance set in Equatorial Guinea that covers two timelines, one of the last 15 years of the colonial period, and another one of contemporary Spain. In the first timeline, Kilian joins his father and his brother, Jacobo, on the plantation they are managing in Equatorial Guinea. There, Kilian falls in love with Bisila, one of the Equatorial Guinean nurses in the settlement. The two of them will enter a forbidden romantic relationship that ends up in separation, after Kilian returns to Spain and Bisila is forced to remain. The present time of the story follows Clarence, Kilian's niece, who decides to travel to Bioko to learn about her family past after finding a broken picture and some documents. At the end, Clarence uncovers the story of Bisila and her two sons. Bisila makes peace with the past and learning of Kilian's death, she appears to end her life on the beach where they had

symbolically married. Bisila's sons travel then to Spain to meet the last members of Kilian's family, the sins of the past forgiven and inconsequential, walking through the domestic space and setting the foundations for new relationships.

Neckan takes place in the Spanish Protectorate in Morocco and ascribes to the crime and thriller genres. In the film, Santiago, the son of an influential lawyer who had been a minister under Franco, travels from Spain to Tétouan to investigate the contents of a cryptic letter and photograph he had received. As he uncovers the fate of the family in the picture, he discovers that they were his biological family. This revelation creates conflict with his adoptive parents, who give him an ultimatum to choose between his two potential identities. At the end, he takes the secret back to Spain, potentially to participate in international negotiations on behalf of Spain. This action also keeps his sister Ángela unaware of her origins, prevents further conflict, and closes the possibility of leaving Morocco that she so desperately wanted. Learning the truth does not change any course of action or calls for reparations. Indeed, in both films the Spanish characters leave the colonies without consequences for their behaviour, whereas other European characters are the victims of revenge by the locals, such as the German in *Neckan* and two British colonisers in *Palmeras*.

Both films, thus, start with the premise of uncovering the past, discovering what secrets were hidden and reconciling with this past through acceptance and forgiveness. In *Palmeras*, for Kilian and Clarence, this involves discovering Jacobo's involvement in Bisila's sexual assault and asking for forgiveness on his behalf. The atrocities committed in Equatorial Guinea are in this way pinpointed to individuals, as both the film and the source novel idealize colonial relations and present them in a discourse of common experience around love and labour,

symbolically represented by Kilian's manual labour on the plantation towards the end of the film. As argued by Colmenero (2018, p. 453), the story "encourages a false interpretation of the colonialism as an equalitarian and symbiotic relationship, as if the colonizer and the colonized would have found themselves in different yet comparable situations, even parallel ones". In *Neckan*, the premise of finding his roots takes Santiago to Tétouan. Santiago is partially manipulated by the duplicitous character of the Alemán (the German), who contacted Santiago anonymously to manipulate him into uncovering the truth, as it would damage a business competitor. During the investigation, Santiago discovers that his mother was of Arab and Jewish descent, that his father was a teacher of the Republic involved in a Masonic group, and that his surviving sister was adopted by a Moroccan businessman and his Spanish wife and is now living under paternal rule, hoping for a relationship that would take her away. Since Santiago had grown up in Francoist Spain, his character represents Spanish Catholicism in a biological family representative of hybrid roots and *Convivencia*. The return of Santiago to Spain might not align with revealing the truth, as he does not disclose it to Ángela, but ultimately this decision prevents further conflict and broken families. Covering and uncovering are themes visually represented in the mise-en-scene of the film through curtains, blinds, drying sheets, hidden hatches, and contrasts between light and darkness. At the end, the German is killed in the shadows and Santiago visits in bright daylight the place where some of the killings took place, revealing a sign that says "Neckan" (revenge), turning his back to it and continuing his trip back to Spain. In this context, the film advocates for reconciliation and acceptance through acknowledgement, but also for letting the past rest to achieve peaceful living. Both films revolve around uncovering the sins of the fathers, but their resolution is acceptance and compassion.

The films do not critically approach the colonial rule and instead the abuse is displaced to other European colonisers or those corrupted by them. Discussing *Palmeras* but also applicable to *Neckan*, Colmenero (2018, p. 447) affirms that these narratives serve to "reinstate publicly the memory of the former colonizers, justify their participation in the colonial system, and defend their historical legitimacy". The idea that other colonisers were less respectful of the local population connects with the notions of *Hispanotropicalism* and the idea of Spain as a kinder coloniser. In *Palmeras*, the audience is immediately aligned with the Spanish colonizer through editing and POV shots, which "foster a nostalgic vision of the past through the fetishization of the Guinean 'other' and the corroboration of the heroism of the Spanish man" (Martínez-Saez, 2016, p. 28). These films perpetuate a discourse of European superiority, where the locals engage in manual and artisanal tasks under the management and planning of the colonizers. For Okenve Martínez (2016, p. 38), the colonial discourses in and on Africa "were characterized by the country's decadence and growing sense of inferiority vis-à-vis their northern European neighbours". In *Neckan*, the dialogue verbalises doubts over the self-governance of Morocco when granted independence. As seen in the opening sentence of this chapter, Clarence claims that her father, Jacobo, was just another worker. By erasing power hierarchies derived from colonialism and eurocentrism, Clarence suggests that Spaniards and locals were just part of the capitalist system and infer, as a consequence, that the positions in the colonial order were not based on racism but skills. In a way, these narratives align with perceptions of contemporary non-European immigration, who are mostly associated with low-paid jobs in the agricultural, farming, sexual and domestic services. Instead of enquiring into the systemic inequalities that prevent these immigrants to access other jobs, most of the films frame prejudice and discrimination at the level of the individual and not the institutional.

The absence of a critical evaluation of the colonial process also emphasizes the discourse of *Convivencia.* In *Palmeras*, this conviviality is expressed through the relationship of Kilian with the locals: he learns their language, respects and follows their religious customs, and even works on the plantation. Indeed, the film elides the forced Francoist education and conversion to Christianity in Equatorial Guinea. In *Neckan*, this conviviality is expressed through the variety of religions and customs that are portrayed in the film, towards which Santiago is presented as respectful. The names would also evoke this notion. For example, the restaurant in many of the scenes is called Alhambra, Santiago is the patron Saint of Spain and symbol of Spanish Catholicism, Ángela translates as 'angel', and the title of the film is said to be Hebrew for "Revenge". Furthermore, with a historical nickname of "matamoros" (moor-killer), the name Santiago reinforces the Spanishness of the main character even after the audience learns of his Moroccan ancestry. This is an element also used in *¡Harka!* (Arévalo, 1941), where Martin-Marquez also notes (2008, p. 210) that the use of the name evokes the reconquest and assigns normative Spanishness to the protagonist. Yet, here, Santiago symbolises Spain and the *Convivencia* through his mixed ancestry and upbringing. In *Palmeras*, Clarence is named after Port Clarence, the British base in Bioko devised to stop slave traders, whereas Bisila is the highest mountain in Equatorial Guinea, evoking once more the higher moral status of Bisila against other locals.

If the hegemonic Spanish man is constructed in these films as understanding, tolerant, and conciliatory; the hegemonic Spanish woman is constructed differently depending on the time period: measured and complacent in colonial times, but liberated and outspoken in contemporary Spain, in line with contemporary constructions of the Spanish woman. In *Palmeras*, Clarence acts according to her own convictions and against the advice of others, she often speaks her mind, and is depicted freely engaging in sex on the beach. In contrast,

the women of the colonies are trapped in their environments, their actions are regulated by the men in their lives, and they reject sexual advances outside marriage. Among the locals, Bisila appears as the virtuous healer trapped in a culture that she respects but which constrains her (Martínez-Sáez, 2016, p. 34). In opposition to this representation and constructing a Virgin-Whore dichotomy among the African characters, other local women are portrayed, in *Palmeras*, as prostitutes who enjoy the profession. In *Neckan*, Ángela is portrayed as a suppressed woman who dreams of travelling. She hides from her father her Parisian bikini and smoking habit, drinks wine behind his back, and dances to Spanish music. Ángela evokes the literary trope of the *mora cautiva* (captive Moor woman), who was often revealed to be a Christian in need of rescue. In this sense, here the trope of the subjugated woman allows Spain to imagine the contemporary Spanish woman (and symbolically, Spain), as liberated, thus aligned with the West, and therefore 'European'. This is a characteristic that Colmenero (2018, pp.451-452) also finds in *Palmeras*, when she argues that

> the hegemonic discourses about western modernity considers the freedom of the women as a fundamental factor and measures the modernity of the peoples in relation to the position they occupy in that narrative.

By positioning the women of the past as inhibited and controlled, Spain reinforces the idea of transformation from repression to freedom that is at the core of contemporary Spanish national identities.

Palmeras and *Neckan* approach the colonial period of Spain in the African continent at the brink of independence. This articulation of the colonial past aligns with trends in Spanish cultures that interrogate the past and collective memory. By doing so, they construct a benign version of Spanish colonialism that avoids engaging critically with the structures of power and the systemic racism that perpetuates them. Instead, any reparations are kept at the level of

acknowledging (the Spanish version of) the past, following it by acceptance and forgiveness as the path to the future. This resolution applies to the recovery of a collective memory and an uncomfortable past, but also to the reinvention of a contemporary national identity in a fragmented Spain that, once more and like in Francoist times, has been characterized by recession, internal division, and corruption. The trope of *Convivencia*, thus, is recovered as a solution not only for the colonies and their religions, but also for contemporary Spain and its political divisions. In this context, renewing the Europeanness of Spain allows the country to heal the wound of dependence and inferiority that the financial crisis inflicted. These fictions of the recent colonial period allow for an identification of Spain with 'European colonial power' and therefore with its historical Europeanness. Yet, the trope of *Hispanotropicalism* also allows for difference against these European powers, where Spain is presented as more sympathetic and morally superior, a trope not dissimilar from the one employed by Spain during the recent refugee crisis and sea rescues. If Spanish identity is connected to notions of Europeanness, the Spanish man and the (contemporary) woman are linked to ideas of tolerance, acceptance, and freedom; reinforcing in this way the Europeanness through its practices and its peoples. Further research should address the more recent trend of placing the Spanish gaze in the contemporary and non-colonial African territory. Here, new *hispanotropicalisms* shape stories of sympathy and rescue, whist positioning Spain in more global narratives.

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