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NEITHER *YOUR* HISPANIC NOR *YOUR* WHITE: TRANSITIONING BETWEEN WHITENESSES FROM SPAIN TO THE UNITED STATES

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Abstract: This essay succinctly combines the historical trajectories of whiteness in Europe and the United States regarding Spanishness underscoring the situationality of whiteness at large as an ideological means that goes beyond the mere physiology of white bodies. Firstly, the essay probes into the trajectory of Spain's racial rhetoric in relation to whiteness, and its European counterparts' historical processes of racialization of Spanishness. It is, then, followed by an exploration of racism against, and racialization of, Hispanic whiteness in the United States. Lastly, this essay offers reflections on the current emergence of Hispanic Whiteness in the United States. Theorizing the case of White Spaniards who transition between 'whitenesses' from Europe to the United States –while revealing some specificities on the conceptualization of parallel rhetorics of whiteness– informs readers about the historical, ideological fantasies of race discourse as a whole.

Key Words: Whiteness; Hispanic Whiteness; Spanish Identity; Racialization; Racism; Race Relations;

Resumen: Este ensayo combina de manera sucinta las trayectorias históricas de la blanquitud en Europa y Estados Unidos con respecto a la españolidad para subrayar la situacionalidad de la blancura como ideología que trasciende la mera fisiología de los cuerpos blancos. En primer lugar, el ensayo indaga en la trayectoria retórica racial de España puesta en relación con la blancura para revelar los procesos históricos de racialización de la hispanidad ejercida por sus homólogos europeos. A continuación, se exploran tanto el racismo hacia, como la racialización de, la blanquitud hispana en los Estados Unidos. Por último, se ofrecen reflexiones sobre el actual auge de la blanquitud hispana en Estados Unidos. Teorizar el caso de los españoles blancos que hacen una transición entre 'blanquitudes' de Europa a los Estados Unidos revela algunas especificidades sobre la construcción de retóricas paralelas acerca de la blancura, al tiempo que informa sobre las fantasías tanto históricas como ideológicas insertas en el discurso sobre las 'razas' en su conjunto.

Palabras clave: Blanquitud; Blanquitud hispana; Identidad española; Racialización; Racismo; Relaciones raciales;

The Ghostly Matter: Race is Everywhere

Race is everywhere, all the time. It runs between your lips when you have a sip of your morning freshly made Colombian coffee. It is in your mouth when you chew burritos or sushi while your eyes are entertained watching TV on a South Korean flatscreen made in China. It becomes your second skin when you wear clothes that are imported from Vietnam or Bangladesh. It is there between your hands, too, when you hold a cell phone "Made in the USA" or Asia with LED batteries that rely on coltan extracted in Africa; and of course, it is also in our workplace, classrooms, streets, and institutions lurking as a ghostly subject matter.

Nonetheless, everyone soon learns that race is a subject best to be avoided having in the public sphere, because race conversations can easily go wrong and either turn into an awkward, uncomfortable silence of discomfort or burst into an abrupt storm of accusations, guilt and hurt sensibilities. As such, race may indeed turn into a topic that obstructs cross-cultural communication and mutual understanding amid the levels of anxiety and tension that it tends to raise. Silence is also preferred because conversations about race evoke the atrocities of the past, as much as troubled current social issues. As a result, altogether race becomes a painful, sometimes unbearable, mirror.

Of course, however, people do talk about race, race relations and racial issues, one way or another. Ten years ago, Princeton University sociologist Dalton Conley wrote a piece reflecting on race and how he learned to be white. Conley's explanation about the process of learning race transited an avenue to question traditional views of race as biologically determined: "There's an old saying," Conley explained, "that you never really know your language until you learn another. It is the same with race. In fact, race is nothing more than a language, a set of stories we tell ourselves to get through the world, to organize our reality" (25). Discarding the idea of inherent, biological differences to explain racial disparities regarding access to wealth and social status, race becomes in fact supplanted by a historical process that

induces individuals to acquire beliefs about the existence of races as factual reality.

By the historical preservation of the belief in the existence of different races, race discourse became in Western societies –to adapt Bret Weinstein’s innovative concept to racial terms– a metaphorical truth: that is, a persistent belief, as pernicious as viral, that is neither factual in a rational sense nor scientifically true, but one that, when acted out as if it were true, turns out to be either beneficial or detrimental. According to metaphorical truth, given that the belief in the existence of different races has a tremendous impact on society, to simply say that races are untrue would be inaccurate, because acting whiteness or blackness –or any other ‘race’– out as if they were true still invests the individuals with advantages and disadvantages in contemporary societies.

In other words, racial types become historical encapsulations of ethnocentric stories and prescriptions for the present that, if you know them, you can use them as a conceptual map to obtain certain gains. In historical terms, Western racial associations have preestablished a Eurocentric collective unconscious along the black/white divide. This black/white divide has generated a long-lasting paradigm of perception that sets up an array of *a priori* fantasy lives where blackness is fixed as a point of reference for building white identity throughout history.

Because of the latter paradigm, the demystification of the existence of races should, perhaps, remain at the center of race conversations as well as their cultural representations, especially when scientific discoveries on DNA and the genome already showed that “no consistent patterns of genes across the human genome exist to distinguish separate races or ethnic groups. [and] There is no genetic basis for divisions of human ethnicity” (Transpacific Project n. p.). In that sense, the ideological blackening of Hispanic Whiteness remains to date a prime example to reveal the workings of the already explained racial paradigm.

In what follows, this essay succinctly combines the historical trajectories of whiteness in Europe and the United States regarding Spanishness underscoring the situationality of whiteness at large as an ideological means that goes beyond the physiology of white bodies. Firstly, the essay probes into the trajectory of Spain’s racial rhetoric in relation to whiteness while putting it in relation to its European counterparts’ historical processes of racialization of Spanishness. It is, then, followed by an exploration of racism against, and racialization of, Hispanic whiteness in the United States. Lastly, this essay offers reflections on the current emergence of Hispanic Whiteness in the United States.

Spain’s racial rhetoric and its northern European counterparts’ historical processes of Spanish racialization off-whiteness

In contemporary Spain –as it happens in most parts of Southern Europe– whiteness is often taken for granted, and race does not seem to play a critical role neither in the formation of individual identities nor in the construction of their perception of the national outlook. Nonetheless, the formation of Spanish white identity signals a complex, troubled history.¹

Racism entails the assertion of one own’s moral authority in order to claim cultural superiority, in turn this helps to justify the discrimination against others. Amid the rise of the Spanish Empire, as Elvira Roca Barea proved in *Imperiofobia y Leyenda negra: Roma, Rusia, Estados Unidos y el Imperio español* (2017), Italian humanism of the sixteenth century began to use Spanish religious tolerance towards Jews and Moors and Spanish miscegenation as a source of weakness. The entrenched prejudices of Italian humanism against Spain found a linguistic reflection to racialize Spaniards: the term “Marrani” –a term that Spaniards had long used to refer to Jewish *comversos*– became in the sixteenth century synonym for “Spaniard” in Italy (128-160).² Of course, Italian

humanism’s anti-Semitic rhetoric toward Spain disseminated extensively across Europe.

German humanism, for example, absorbed Italian prejudices regarding the impurity of Spaniards because of their Semite contamination. Obviously, the suspected impurity of Spaniards became Martin Luther’s primary accusation towards Spain in coalescence with their Catholicism.³ In the same vein, Juan Calvino and William of Orange mirrored Germanic Lutheranism against Catholicism in the Netherlands propagating Hispanophobia. The emergence of Henry VIII’s Anglicanism in England confirmed the rise of national churches in northern Europe as a political apparatus to counteract Spanish hegemony in the continent (Roca Barea 165-166; 195-264. Persánch, “Impurity of Thought...” 112-113). Hence Hispanophobia and anti-Catholicism became integral parts of European –and later transatlantic– Protestantism in liaison with nationalism.

Besides Protestantism, the French Illustration, the Napoleonic wars, the War of Spanish Independence, the Bourbon Dynasty and elite of *afrancesados* Spaniards, the Latin American independences, and the Spanish-American War of 1898, all molded the European understanding of Spain as inferior, and informed about their insidious, impure Spanishness. To the gradual loss of control over physical territories, Spain began to lose the production of cultural hegemony. In the nineteenth century, France began to disseminate the image of Spain as an exotic, non-white, or at least, less white racial “Other.” It was, then, when France produced the racializing discourse of “Africa begins in the Pyrenees” to recast their assumption of Spain’s cultural backwardness, as well as the alleged Spaniards’ racial inferiority. Consequently, it was in this period when the anti-Semitic “marrani” trope morphed into an African trope originating the off-whiteness image of Spain.

As I already elucidated elsewhere, the origin of this Africanizing expression had been attributed to M. de Pradt (Dominique Georges Frédéric) when, in *Mémoires historiques sur la révolution d’Espagne* (1816), he wrote: “c’est une erreur de la

géographie que d’avoir attribué l’Espagne à l’Europe; elle appartient à l’Afrique: sang, moeurs, langage, manière de vivre et de combattre; en Espagne tout est africain” (168). At this junction, to understand Pradt’s reasoning the reader must be reminded to contextualize his words to two years after the Spanish War of Independence against Napoleonic France –which is why he mentions the way Spaniards fight– as much as to Spain’s imperial decay. The alleged backwardness, to a great extent in coalescence with Spain’s proximity to Africa, provoked the production of the aforementioned Spain’s off-whiteness image.

Be that as it may, this French blackening expression on Spain was widely propagated across Europe in the nineteenth century, for example, through the literary production of Victor Hugo (as well as travelers and Spanish Romantic writers) in the same fashion Italian Renaissance had circulated the anti-Spanish “marrani” rhetoric. The following extract from *Les Orientales* (1829) signals how well-established this trope was:

les couleurs orientales sont venues comme d’elles-mêmes empreindre toutes ses pensées, toutes ses rêveries; et ses rêveries et ses pensées se sont trouvées tour à tour, et presque sans l’avoir voulu, hébraïques, turques, grecques, persanes, arabes, espagnoles même, car l’Espagne c’est encore l’Orient; l’Espagne est à demi africaine, l’Afrique est à demi asiatique. (69)

In part, Spain’s inadequate response to, and absorption of, the long-standing tropes of the Black Legend were to remain at the core of Spanish claims of racial exceptionalism.

After the Spanish Civil War, the Franco Regime embarked on a foundational process of ideological reaffirmation that sought political legitimization, as well as the renovation of national identity through whiteness. However, after the German defeat in WWII, Spain ideologically and racially “self-camouflaged” to avoid being overthrown in the rise of European democratic states. Thus, while the multicultural revolution began

to reformulate the logic of European states, their structures, and their social and racial practices, Spain –a dictatorship– remained excluded from all international organizations during the European post-WWII reconstruction period. Hence, internationally isolated and unable to follow the democratic processes toward multiculturalism, Francoism conflated an amalgamation of parallel, self-contradictory racial counter-discourses to preserve Spain’s moral authority.

The Francoist regime found in Portugal’s Lusotropicalist model a legal stratagem that sought shelter from the United Nations’ push for decolonization in Africa. Therefore, Spain skewed its national rhetoric to endorse the propagation of Hispanotropicalism aiming to regulate the status of overseas colonies in Africa as national provinces. Moreover, to make these cultural transformations effective, the Franco Regime reshaped the ideals of a grandiose imperial past which promoted simultaneous national narratives that emphasized the strength of racial fusion such as, for example, the “*Reserva espiritual de occidente*” image in Europe, the discourse of *hispanidad* in Latin America, the use of hispanotropicalism in Equatorial Guinea, and the claim of Spain’s brotherly ties regarding North Africa. This manifold discourse signals how Spanish whiteness has traditionally been “situational,” that is, conceived as a highly rhetorical, cultural tactic of assimilation of non-whites aiming to subsume their racial difference’s experiences into the margins of Spanish whiteness, thus totalizing, silencing dissidence (Persánch, *Blancura situacional...* 2016). In essence, unable to respond militarily after the Desastre of 1898, Spain’s situational rhetoric aimed to capitalize on its colonial legacy of *mestizaje* in order to legitimize neo-colonial enterprises in Africa.

Altogether, I have suggested how Italian humanism, central and northern Protestantism, the French Africanization rhetoric of Spanish Whiteness, as much as Spain’s colonial legacy, all contributed to largely shaped an ambiguous conception of Spanishness that has often been held off-whiteness; a trope that finds its genesis in Northern Europe’s blunt anti-Semitism. As a

result, anti-Semitism and northern European Hispanophobia forced Spain to forge a situational rhetoric of racial exceptionalism articulating the nation both alien and integral part of Europe.

The Institutionalization of Racial Amnesia in Contemporary Spain

Spain, a country that had long been shaped by her ‘historical enemies’ “as the dark child of Europe and the light child of Africa” (Piedra 304), and whose access to Europeanness had been troubled –racialized– by European antisemitism, imperiaphobia and Hispanophobia, was no longer a dictatorship. In 1978, following a civil war (1936–1939) and forty years of dictatorship (1939–1975), democracy was restored in Spain involving various forms of historical amnesia.

The generation of *La Transición* (circa the 1980s) grew up in a period when the Francoist dictatorship’s ideological misuse of history was repudiated by the new democratic state, and when the regime’s cultural appropriation of national heroes to exalt traditional, Catholic values was ridiculed. As a consequence, this generation of Spaniards was raised in a context when any cultural production that served to glorify the Spanish Empire, colonial past, national history or ‘race’ were stigmatized and referred to as *facha* –broadly translated a fascist– when one dared to invoke and advocate such legacy as source of historical pride (dominant thinking that persists to date in the collective imaginary of the left regarding the nation, her past and symbols). Consequently, Spanish colonial past mostly vaporized from both the national outlook and individual identity.

Likewise, the re-emergence of strong regional identities after *La Transición* contributed to the vanishment of race in contemporary Spain because these regional identities competed to define often-contradictory ethnic conceptions of Spanishness. Hence, the racial specificity historically imbricated in Spanish identity diluted into seventeen ethnic identities easily accepted by

the Basques, the Catalans, the Galicians, and the Andalusians, among others. This ethnic fragmentation contributed to invigorate the traditional Hispanic displacement of race to invisible margins in contemporary Spain, blurring the facts of race and whiteness twofold.⁴

Far from being unique to Spain, however, as Peter Jackson noted regarding whiteness in the United Kingdom, “any discussion of the meaning of white, subcategories of whiteness (Irish, Jewish, British, etc.) immediately take over, so that the particularity of whiteness itself begins to disappear” (100). Hence in the United Kingdom as much as in Spain, unlike the United States, the centrality of whiteness in race discourse and national identity diluted into the emergence of the democratic, post-WWII ethnic, multicultural societies.

Such turn to multiculturalism and the replacement of any use of racial rhetoric in public spheres happened, in fact, all over Europe due to the atrocities of World War II. During the post-war period, Europe stigmatized race and whiteness as the result of Fascism and Nazism’s inflammatory predicament of white supremacist principles. After decades practicing the ideology of multiculturalism, Europe managed to erase most vestiges of race diluting them into immigration discourses where nationalities raised as categories to indicate cultural as well as racial differences. In turn, whiteness was constructed as transparent as benign, and predicated in the new moral imperative of white guilt.⁵

This transparency phenomenon of whiteness, as Barbara Flagg rightfully stated over two decades ago, became the “tendency of whites not to think about whiteness, or about norms, behaviors, experiences, or perspectives that are white-specific” (1). Or, to put it more acutely, in Bonnie Kae Grover’s words, “That’s the point of being the dominant race. Sure, the whiteness is there, but you never think of it. If you’re white, you never *have* to think of it . . . blacks, Indians and Asians have to handle their own racial and ethnic selves with some level of awareness whites are not used to” (n. p.). Yet, the presence of

Spaniards in North America evokes a completely different experience regarding both racial awareness and whiteness.

Racialization of Hispanic Whiteness in the United States

Spaniards are subject to a process of racialization in the United States despite having white skin and being European. This shocking disruption of a majority-Spanish-European-white-identity mindset causes a sense of disorientation that forces Spaniards to quickly learn to navigate the several simultaneous discourses where race and ethnicity imply obsessive categories affecting everyday life. Theorizing the case of White Spaniards who transition between whitenesses from Europe to the United States –while revealing some specificities on the construction of parallel conceptions of whiteness– informs about the historical, ideological fantasies of race as a whole as well as about the processes of gaining awareness in relation to race and ethnicity.

In the United States, unlike in Spain and other parts of Europe, race surfaces as the preeminent, constant floating signifier. According to Klor del Alva, Earl Shorris and Cornell West, there are “two mechanisms at play in the construction of identities. One is to identify folks from a cultural perspective. The other is to identify them from a racial perspective” (59). For Spaniards, culturally, this means –as nuanced below– ‘becoming Hispanics,’ and, racially, too often to be considered non-whites. What Alva, Shorris, and West did not underscore enough was that the cultural and racial perspectives are overlapping and interdependent, because these perspectives rely on one another to function. For example, one can commonly hear Americans say: “You look white, *but* you are Hispanic.” The translation of “but” may take several interpretations, the most common inference being “almost, but not *really* white.” Overall, these innocent interactions show the interdependence of race and culture, as much as they are evidence of the ethnocentric, cultural, and racial dynamics.

On the one hand, the term “Hispanic” was used for the first time in the 1970s in the United States and officially categorized in the US Census in the 1980s as an umbrella to group peoples relating to Spain or to Spanish-speaking countries. Rather soon, it became a misguided blanket term and an imposed identity. Since then, “el uso del término institucional ‘hispano’ como marcador racial y étnico dentro de los Estados Unidos se cree como sinónimo sustitutivo del término ‘latino.’” However, the term differs with the Spanish –and European– conception of ‘hispano’ on many grounds, being the most relevant fact that in the US the term is “el resultado de una creciente preocupación política frente a razas mestizas . . . por lo cual, el único factor importante era marcar a los latinos como no blancos obviando la piel del individuo. Con ello, la raza se transforma en una imagen mental imaginada y arbitraria” (Persánchez, *Psicotectura de la sociedad estadounidense*... 36).

More recently, the US Census Bureau explicitly reshaped to the aforementioned dynamics distinguishing –a euphemism for “marking”– white Hispanic individuals ethnically from non-Hispanic whites along cultural lines and linguistic assumptions. The term “White Hispanic,” therefore, defines an American citizen or resident of Hispanic ancestry who is racially white (having origins in any of the original peoples of Europe). The Census Bureau also classified separately those who reported ancestral origins in Spain (Europe) from those who do so in Hispanic America (Hispanic and Latino Americans). These classifications of the census partially explain why many Americans are troubled about acknowledging the different notions of race and ethnicity, as well as their obliviousness to the nature of both whiteness and white hispanicism.

As the last couple of paragraphs have shown, in the United States race discourse and institutional mediation expose a deeply ingrained association of whiteness primarily with those former northern European colonizing nations of North America. Such an ideology can be traced to the expansionist rhetoric between 1800 and 1850 when, as Reginald Horsman, professor

emeritus at University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee, points out, the emphasis was placed on “American Anglo-Saxons as a separate, innately superior people who were designed to bring good government, commercial prosperity, and Christianity to the American continents and to the world” (2). In other words, interactions in contemporary everyday life as well as institutional mediation echo the racial presuppositions of the Manifest Destiny’s doctrine for the racialization of White Spaniards and Hispanic Whiteness in the United States.

Manifest Destiny –the U.S. justification for nineteenth century expansionism– was not racially neutral but rather imbued in white supremacy. Congressional debates over the annexation of Mexico to the Union, for example, are testament to the entrenched institutional racism of the period’s ideology. On January 4, 1848, U.S. Sen. John Calhoun of South Carolina feverously protested against annexation of vast portions of Mexico, saying:

We have never dreamt of incorporating into our Union any but the Caucasian race —the free white race. To incorporate Mexico, would be the very first instance of the kind of incorporating an Indian race; for more than half of the Mexicans are Indians, and the other is composed chiefly of mixed tribes. I protest against such a union as that! Ours, sir, is the Government of a white race. The greatest misfortunes of Spanish America are to be traced to the fatal error of placing these colored races on an equality with the white race. (98)

Therefore, while the Manifest Destiny accentuated American whiteness, it also placed the burden of failure explicitly on miscegenation and implicitly on the racial degradation of Hispanic whiteness. Regarding this condemnation of miscegenation, anthropologist Karen Brodtkin Sacks reminded us how

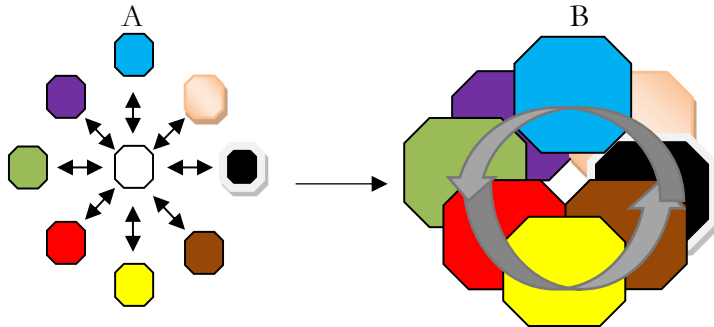
the late nineteenth and early decades of the twentieth centuries saw a steady stream of warnings by scientists, policymakers, and the popular press that ‘mongrelization’ of the Nordic or Anglo-Saxon race —the real Americans— by inferior European races (as well as inferior non-European ones) was destroying the fabric of the nation. I continue to be surprised to read that America did not always regard its immigrant European workers as white, that they thought people from different nations were biologically different. (78)

This historical thinking about race —which coincided with, and was informed by, Charles Darwin’s theories of evolution and natural selection, among other pseudo-scientific validations— continues to affect all Hispanics —White and non-White alike— in the United States today, because vast numbers of Americans in the twenty-first century still equate —like Calhoun did in the nineteenth century— the core values of Americanness to those of the so-called Nordic or Anglo-Saxon race; that is to whiteness.

In the United States, thus, the conceptualization of whiteness was much more constrained than it would be (and still is) across Europe and other parts of the world. Anglo-Americanism begged for the persistence of well-defined identities and clearly demarcated non-white racial and ethnic others to be socially used as permanent outsiders. This dual emphasis on ethnically and racially crafted others, in turn, granted so-called “real whites” immediate cultural, racial invisibility that was transformed into social normalcy (the sign of full citizenship). These Anglo-centric premises can be visually represented as follows in Figure 1:

Figure 1: From occupying centrality to becoming invisible.

(A) White Centrality entails (B) white racial, cultural invisibility hence normalcy through the racialization of others as ethnic



Through this racialization process White racial identity and White culture remain central in society, racially invisible, and conceived as the cultural and social norm, while non-white individuals are conceived purely by their minority groups’ historical, cultural and physiological differences (bodies, histories, music, food, clothes, languages, religious beliefs, to mention just a few). Due to its invisibility, whiteness becomes an interpretive framework for race relations that privileges white individuality while establishing White cultural practices as neutral and common sense which in turn make other practices deviant.⁶

In contrast, white identity is construed both post-cultural and anti-cultural. What this means, as Pamela Perry explained almost two decades ago regarding Whites’ presentism, is that “whiteness must deny culture to the extent that culture is understood as sets of practices that carry affective and valued continuities with the past. Rational whiteness is post-cultural. It is anticulture” (62). In other words, whiteness must remain invisible and only non-white otherness is to be cultured; as Figure 1 illustrated. In this sense, White Spaniards and Hispanics carry that “cultured-self” making them visible as ethnic Whites.

“White ethnic” is a term used in the United States to refer to any Whites who are not White Anglo-Saxon Protestant. It is worth noting that such ideological differentiation along religious lines mimics a similar process of racialization to those implemented by the already discussed Italian and German anti-Semitic terms as well as the French Africanization trope to try and

hold Spain off-whiteness despite the genetic evidence given that, according to Genetic Anthropology, Ancestry, and Ancient Human Migration project:

Roughly 70% of English men, 95% of Spanish men, and 95% of Irish men have a distinctive Y-chromosome mutation known as M173. The distribution of people with this mutation, in conjunction with other DNA analyses, indicates that the men's ancestors moved north out of Spain into England and Ireland at the end of the last ice age. DNA studies indicate that there are no separate classifiable subspecies (races) within modern humans. (Transpacific Project n.p.)

Nevertheless, the belief in the existence of different races as discussed in the introduction keeps lurking as a ghostly matter and having a tremendous impact on society to date; of which the US Census and the fragmentation of whiteness between ethnic and non-ethnic whites are a prime example.

Interestingly enough, Charles A. Gallagher, an expert in interracial group relationships, noted that American ethnic invisibility can temporarily be suspended claiming that white Americans may also make their European ethnicity visible at two junctures. In his survey on ethnically mixed families far removed from the immigrant experience, Gallagher noted that white Americans "selectively resurrected and appropriated ethnic family history to compare and equate the immigration experiences." He continued:

Playing the 'white ethnic card' was the means by which whites could construct a story of how ethnocentrism towards whites and racism against blacks and Asians were an equally shared past of white, black, and Asian history . . . Many whites who were still able to draw on these immigrant tales played 'the ethnic' card to maintain, ignore, or discount white racial privilege by using ethnic

narratives as a medium through which they could list a host of race-based grievances without appearing racist. (145–146)

Above and beyond, in fact, the previous quote may actually hint how Whiteness can morph by appropriating discourses to pass for caring and benevolent. To provide a contemporary example of what I mean, take the usurpation of the Black Lives Matter movement, a space for racial justice that soon became a White sight to claim equality while racially destigmatizing liberal, progressive whiteness.

The Emergence of White Hispanics in the United States

Significantly, for some persons of Hispanic ancestry who make a transition between different conceptions of ‘whitenesses,’ the question of race and whiteness becomes a conscious, labyrinthine disposition that requires careful consideration. In his article “Separated by a Common Language: The Case of the White Hispanic,” Alfredo Tryferis reflected on how the racial classification entails tremendous implications at work:

As an Argentine immigrant, I am technically a member of this minority. I am also white. So, do I check both the ‘white’ and ‘Hispanic’ boxes on job applications? Will it give me an edge I know deep down I don’t deserve, or will it open me up to discrimination? Recently I’ve noticed a puzzling trend: ‘White’ has been amended to ‘white, non-Hispanic,’ making it an either/or proposition; either I’m white or Hispanic, I can no longer be both, thus widening the loophole and *eliminating all trace of the white Hispanic*, the HR department’s dirty little secret. (n.p.; Emphasis added)

According to a study conducted by Sharon R. Ennis, Merarys Ríos –Vargas and Nora G. Albert for the U.S. Department of

Commerce, Economics, and Statistics Administration, as of 2010, 53% of the Hispanic population self-identified as white. The data seem to corroborate a process of cultural assimilation of Hispanics into whiteness understood as an American mainstream identity. However, one can understand why white hispanicism remains conveniently hidden by institutions and the national fabric given that it favors the preservation of contemporary society’s entrenched meanings of multiculturalism and diversity – the main sources for preserving moral authority of traditionally white institutions.

Yet, neither the manipulation of reality nor the political and cultural resistance to changing racial dynamics cannot obscure the neat journey that Hispanics began towards whiteness decades ago. To my knowledge, the first person who foresaw this Hispanic journey towards whiteness was César Chávez in an interview in 1983. Then, Chávez stated:

We Hispanics are, finally, like other immigrant groups . . . The Latinization of America will, in time, lead to Hispanic integration . . . Yes, the Hispanics are going to become more like the majority. Their families will be smaller, better educated, more traveled. Roots will be lost. Language will be lost. Food will be the last to go. We will be eating tacos and tortillas for a long time to come. (Chavez in Morgan 54)

As late as 2011, Sharon R. Ennis, Merarys Ríos-Vargas, and Nora G. Albert’s research for the U.S. Department of Commerce, Economics, and Statistics Administration, corroborated Chavez’s prediction that the Hispanic population would change outlook. This journey of Hispanic assimilation into “the majority” may have just bypassed a stop sign after twenty-five years of steady progress moving ever faster into whiteness.

Following Chávez’s steps, the outstanding political sociologist Eduardo Bonilla–Silva anticipated in the early 2000s the establishment of a new system of racial stratification in the

United States. In his article "We Are All Americans!: The Latin Americanization of Racial Stratification in the USA," Bonilla–Silva hypothesized that "the emerging tri-racial system will be comprised of 'Whites' at the top, and intermediary group of 'honorary Whites' . . . and a non-White group or the 'collective Black' at the bottom."⁷ Bonilla–Silva's argument would explain the current push for the development of a new subcategory within the so-called group of historically U.S. ethnic whiteness (Irish, Jews, Italians) to include Hispanics as well as the emergence of the term Brown to describe non-white Hispanics.

Unfortunately, the emergence of White Hispanics in the United States in the twenty-first century has been misunderstood by many scholars and press contributors, simply, instilling a heedless stance or turning a blind eye on the history of race and the trajectory of whiteness in the United States. Many race commentators problematize the nature of being white *and* Hispanic in the United States. While some scholars call for caution, the approach of other race observers toward white hispanicism ranges from reluctance to disbelief and denial of this growing, changing reality. This problematization elucidates the continued widespread social perception of this community as an internal other –a perpetual, separate pseudo race.

Manuel Pastor, a well-known professor of sociology, American studies, and ethnicity, observed however that the census data could be misleading. In his article "A Response to Linda Martín Alcoff's 'Latinos and the Category of Whiteness,'" Pastor pointed out that the census might be the wrong data maker, given that the questions regarding racial identification were changed. Instead, Pastor argued that ACS Surveys might provide a more reliable indication regarding Hispanics self-identification. According to ACS data, "the share of Latinos marking white has risen by a bit over three and a half percentage points," far from the 53% indicated by the census. In any case, however, what becomes clear is that both the 2010 census data as well the 2014 ACS Survey data indicate a trend of Hispanic self-identification that favors whiteness. This trend parallels what

William Darity Jr., whose research is devoted to scrutinizing public policies, has rightfully called "a flight from blackness." This Hispanic journey toward whiteness, or flight from blackness, describes a consistent trajectory in U.S. history where several ethnic communities –the Irish, Italians and Jews– assimilated into whiteness between the 18th and the 20th centuries.

The historical consistency of the racial assimilation of ethnic groups into whiteness dismantles, for example, the problematization of white hispanicism in the article "Who and What the Hell Is a White Hispanic?" The historical pattern of assimilation into whiteness in the United States demolishes the claim of Hector Cordero–Guzmán, professor of public affairs, for whom "the 'white Hispanic' is a result of the social confusion of Latinos resulting from having to inhabit the border of two different cultures." (Cordero–Guzmán, as cited in Sáenz–Alcántara). Probably, the problem with Cordero–Guzmán's simplistic explanation derives from his underlying assumption that whiteness is exclusively understood as a terrain pertaining to Anglo-America, thus, privileging and validating their conceptions of race and whiteness. Moreover, Cordero–Guzmán is far from acknowledging the malleability of the term both historically in the United States and culturally across the globe.

Scholars who either ignore or problematize the nature of white hispanicism not only neglect the trajectory of race and whiteness in the United States, but also seem to carelessly line up with Anglo-centered conceptions of race, perhaps, imprudently sustaining Anglo-white hierarchical views and understandings of the world. César Vargas, a *Huffington Post* contributor, exemplifies both of these aspects. For Vargas, white Hispanics are "brokers to and for whites." Not only is he wrong in calling white Hispanics something that sounds close enough to Hispanic traitors, but he is also very much wrong in his main premise to make such claim. Vargas's premise that "white Hispanics do not experience racism or have the same outcomes darker Latinos, yet they are not perceived as a threat to the whites in control . . . white skin gives them dual privileges and access to both communities

that could be used for either personal or communal gain” (Vargas, as cited in Sáenz-Alcántara). This premise is problematic in several ways. For one, Vargas assumes that white Hispanics are a monolithic group who neither suffer the racism nor the discrimination darker skinned Hispanics face in the United States. Quite to the contrary, a 2019 Pew Research Center survey reported by Ana González–Barrera showed how, darker skinned Hispanics are indeed more likely to experience discrimination than those with lighter skin, as 64% of darker skinned respondents reported experiencing discrimination. However, the survey also conveys that 50% of lighter skinned –or white– Hispanics reported that they had experienced discrimination or been treated unfairly because of their race or ethnicity. Hence, not only is Vargas wrong in creating a monolithic group out of white Hispanics, but he is also wrong to claim that suffering less racism equates with having dual privileges and access to both communities that could be used for either personal or communal gain. Lastly, Vargas completely misses the double-binding pressure that results from the entrenched dialectics between race and ethnicity, given that white Hispanics do remain racialized as other. White Hispanics not only experience dual gains but also dual losses, which is something that commentators on race and race relations, like Vargas, seem to ignore.

The double-binding pressure that results from the entrenched dialectics between race and ethnicity, in fact, plays a great role in the construction of white Hispanics. On one side, race compels white Hispanics to subscribe to the norms of white solidarity, while ethnicity, on the other side, demands an assertion of *latinidad/hispanidad*. Thus, I am more inclined to agree with social and data scientist Geoffrey Mullings when he claims that “‘white Hispanics’ are socially positioned somewhere between being a beneficiary of white privilege and victim of cultural racism” (Mullings, as cited in Sáenz-Alcántara). As a result of this tension between race and ethnicity, white Hispanics are able to use the “selective acculturation” described by Nicholle Lamartina Palacios: “the acquiring of certain ‘normative’ aspects of society,

and upward mobility in the United States . . . the privilege of selecting which parts of Latino culture I want to relate to . . . I can hide my Latino identity when needed in order to move upwards in our prejudice society” (n.p.). While she is right to make this statement, the same could be said about her Latinoness, proving the double-binding nature of, and pressures on, white Hispanics in the United States that I referred to earlier in the discussion.

If anything, the Hispanic journey towards whiteness necessary to succeed in, and belong to, American society reveals the intrinsic identification of U.S. whiteness with processes of de-ethnicization. This de-ethnicization becomes a synonym for granting a community with immediate cultural, racial invisibility, which indicates full citizenship, while the various non-white racial classifications provide a conceptual map that measures social distance from the alleged normalcy. Minorities are, therefore, situated in an ideological hierarchy which is used as a means for the stratification of society; a hierarchy that is based on their racial proximity to whiteness. The recurrent conceptual expansions of whiteness in the United States proves that race is an ideological fiction; one that has *real* consequences because it functions to regulate access to material wealth. The historical assimilation of white ethnic groups into American whiteness functions as a sociopolitical tool that contributes to the maintenance of social control in the elite’s interests to preserve their privileges.

Conclusions: Neither *Your* Hispanic Nor *Your* White

This essay has combined the historical trajectory of whiteness and racial rhetoric in Europe and the United States regarding Spanishness and Hispanism to elucidate on the tremendous implications of racial discourses in the formation of individual identities and national outlooks. I began by sharing with readers how Spain induced processes of historical, cultural and racial amnesia. I placed said enforced amnesia in a larger context, that of Europe after WWII, to explain that race and especially whiteness were two stigmatized concepts which soon grew to be

taboo in the public sphere, thus making them vanish from the individual conscience and European outlook; and I revealed that both race and whiteness became culturally transparent amid the rise of ethnic, multicultural post-WWII Western societies.

Theorizing the case of White Spaniards who transition between ‘whitenesses’ from Europe to the United States –while revealing some specificities on the conceptualization of parallel rhetoric of whiteness– informed readers about the historical, ideological fantasies of race discourse as a whole as well as about the processes of gaining awareness in relation to race and ethnicity. In addition, this transition between ‘whitenesses’ is testimony to the coercive effects of culture and institutions on individuals. Specifically, this essay showed how the presence of Hispanic whiteness in the United States establishes simultaneous dialectics of racialization which opposes deep, juxtaposed layers of individuality and collectivity already embedded in the sociocultural dynamics of majority and minority groups. The frequent refusal to acknowledge white Hispanics as Whites in the United States demonstrates that fair skin is no longer the principal token for whiteness, but rather a cultural ideal that morphs ideologically in response to the fluctuations of power by some ethnic groups defined against others. Whiteness acts, thus, as a containment barrier linked to power and legitimacy in the best interests of long-term established national elites.

In this view, because the meanings of whiteness in the United States had partly been disenfranchised from the white skin, Whites *learn* to be White while minorities are *taught* to be minorities: being White means that you learn to become an individual, to be the norm, to act as centrality. You learn to not be what *they* are and to not do what *they* do. You learn to become post-cultural, anti-cultural, and erase the use of languages other than English. You learn to be present- and future-oriented. You learn to behave like middle class and learn to perform under those social standards and expectations. To the contrary, being non-white means that you are taught that you are a permanent outsider occupying the fringes of society as a representative member of

your minority group while your individuality is conditioned, undermined or implicitly denied. You are taught that you are primarily nothing beyond your ethnicity. You are taught to see yourself culturally bound up in ethnic traditions, including your non-English language and religious beliefs. You are taught to remain past-oriented, tied up by an affective ethnic history of your community or social group, and often induced to seek a redemption of past generations in contemporary achievements of social justice. You are taught you need to work ten times harder seeking opportunities for social mobility and acceptance.

On a larger scale, the White/non-white divide falls into a majority–minority tension conspicuously delineated in contemporary sociopolitical narratives. For example, as Jupp bluntly put it, they are present in the heated debates over the “vulgar left essentialized ‘identities’ equating individuals with social history and right essentialized ‘individuals’ seeking to erase histories of social oppression” (4). The proclivity to play a part in this progressive–conservative ideological confrontation echoes the way Whites learn to be White and minorities are taught to remain so, where race, in liaison with gender and class, become the front line of an entrenched cultural battlefield. In opposition to the neoliberal myth of individualism and the unconditional right to freedom of speech, we experience how the presence of the trap of identity politics, racial rhetoric and political correctness has evolved to be equally poisonous. As the fear to offend or to feel judged grows rampant, persons very often feel that any divergence of opinion can spark conflict. Race –as is that of gender ideologies– is one of those hot topics where the exchange of ideas is made difficult, and where silence contributes to burn much-needed bridges for an effective dialogue seeking the improvement of society as a whole. Thus, as previously stated, the demystification of the existence of races should, perhaps, remain at the center of race conversations as well as their cultural representations.

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Notes

¹ This section (pages 4-8) on Spain’s racial rhetoric and its northern European counterparts’ historical processes of Spanish racialization off-whiteness revisits and reproduces parts of the introduction of my essay “From Impurity of Thought Towards the Glocalization of Whiteness in Spain,” published in 2018 in the Special Issue on Hispanic and Lusophone Whiteness that I edited for *Transmodernity*. For further reference see volume 8, number 2: <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/1pz3b36p>

² According to Marcos R. Caña Pelayo’s study, although the term “Marrano” is found as early as 1380 in Juan I’s texts, “No existe, pese a ser un debate mantenido durante muchas décadas, un consenso entre los investigadores acerca del adjetivo marrano, empleado como despectiva manera de señalar a los judíos recién convertidos al cristianismo. Buscando el origen de la palabra, algunos autores han apostado por ubicar sus comienzos en el árabe (*murain*, que vendría a significar “hipócrita, o el propio término *mumar*, con el que los islámicos señalaban a los apóstatas). Por el contrario, otros autores han buscado en la propia lengua hebrea el origen del insulto, señalando que la expresión mara ata o maharanna ata, de origen arameo, invocaciones al Señor, y de marrar o errar en su elección de credo. De hecho, hay incluso corrientes que han expuesto que la posibilidad más sencilla sea recurrir al propio castellano, aludiendo al insulto debido a su negativa a comer cerdo” (36).

³ For further reference read *Sobre los judíos y sus mentiras* (1541). Librodot, 2004.

⁴ José Antonio Piqueras argues that Spanish institutions have been invigorating racial amnesia in Spain since the abolition of slavery in 1880. In *La esclavitud en las Españas: Un lazo transatlántico* (2011), Piqueras studies slavery to contend that Spain —as every colonial power did — induced racial amnesia over Spanish colonial past to forget the atrocities of slavery that were perpetrated in the Americas and the Iberian Peninsula. Thus, Piqueras hints that European colonial powers also erased the guilt and shame from the collective memory of the nation.

⁵ For a comprehensive cultural review of the rise and deterioration of multiculturalism as an ideology in liaison with notions of white guilt, consider reading “Towards the End of the White Guilt? The Rise of Nostalgic Whiteness and Magical Populism.” (*Kairos: A Journal of Critical Symposium*, Vol. 5, No. 1, 2020. pp. 120-137).

⁶ “Interpretive framework” refers to a set of assumptions, ideas and principles that define a theoretically informed perspective and a set of practices for the process of interpretation, thus opening the data to interpretation.

⁷ This term has received noticeable criticism as it was borrowed from apartheid South Africa.