

No Country for Black Women

TIPOGRAFÍA: L&O
ILUSTRACIÓN DE CUBIERTA: GOYO RODRÍGUEZ CREATIVO
AL CUIDADO DE LA EDICIÓN: OLAYA GARCÍA

SILVIA ALBERT SOPALE

No Country for Black Women

IN COLLABORATION WITH Maria Eugenia Santa Cruz,
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KRK EDICIONES • 2019

With the poem
“Me gritaron negra” by Maria Eugenia Santa Cruz



This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under the Marie Skłodowska-Curie grant agreement N° 675378.

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www.krkediciones.com

Álvarez Lorenzana, 27. Oviedo

ISBN 978-84-8367-648-6

Depósito legal AS-1370-2019

Grafinsa. Oviedo

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PAOLA PRIETO LÓPEZ

Introduction

THE PLAY

The relevance of the play *No Country for Black Women* by Silvia Albert Sopale, aside from its undeniable artistic and cultural value, lies in being the first attempt, or one of the first attempts, to represent through theatre the experiences of the Afro-Spanish community, a concept which until recently was not even part of the popular imaginary and which, even today, continues to be used timidly despite the growing presence of this group in Spain.

The above statement must be made with caution and needs revisiting in future studies due to the lack of references or archives of Afrodescendant theatre, as a relatively recent field in Spanish drama studies. Yet, it is undeniable that the play marks a turning point in the history of Spanish theatre, as did others in similar contexts, like *Moon on a Rainbow Shawl* (1957) by Errol John, which laid the foundations of the well-known movement Black British drama in the United Kingdom and which, like the Black Arts Movement, was a criticism of the invisibility

and marginalisation of the black experience in British culture:

These [the dominant cultural and political practices that placed the black experience at the margins] formed the conditions of existence of a cultural policy designed to challenge, resist and, when possible, transform the dominant regimes of representation, first in music and style, and then in literary, visual and cinematographic forms. In these spaces, blacks have typically been the objects, but rarely the subjects of representational practices. The struggle to reach representation was based on a critique of the degree of fetishisation, objectification and negative figuration that are also a feature of the representation of the black subject. There was a concern not only for the absence or marginality of the black experience, but for its simplification and its stereotyped character (Hall, 1996: 443).

Although it might be premature to speak of an artistic movement as such in Spain, the last decade marks the beginning of Afrodescendant theatre, not only with the premiere of *No Country for Black Women* in 2016, which continues to be performed in theatres,

social centres, schools or prisons all over Spain, but also through other initiatives that prove that Black art is here to stay. To mention only a few, in 2016, the theatre company No Somos Whoopi Goldberg emerged, formed by three Afrodescendant women, Sopale herself among them, and the first production in Spanish of the play *For colored girls who have considered suicide when the rainbow is not enough* by Ntozake Shange, directed by Ursula Day also took place in 2016. The following year saw the birth of The Black View, an association dedicated to promoting the work of actors and other black artists in Spain. Also in 2017, the theatrical company Projecte Vaca launched a festival of creative women which foregrounded Sopale's work, as well as other pieces that position the experience of Afrodescendant women at the centre of their discourse, like *La Blanca* by María Folguera or *Cosas de negros or Black is Beautiful* by Cecilia Bellorín. In addition, there has been an increase in the presence of plays by African-American dramatists or with African influences in numerous international and national theatre festivals in the past few years.

While it is true that we can consider these works and initiatives as part of the first steps towards a

greater autonomy of Afrodescendant creators in performing arts, as far back as the sixteenth century we can find representations of black characters in the theatre of the Golden Age in Spain, who, as was the case in other parts of Europe, are impersonated by white characters disguised and painted black. Some of the first studies that have tried to map the presence of black characters in the history of Spanish theatre are introduced by Baltasar Fra Molineiro and Olga Barrios, who identify some of Lope de Vega's plays, such as *El prodigio negro de Etiopía* or *El Santo negro Rosambuco de la ciudad de Palermo*, and other works like Diego Ximénez's *Juan Latino*, or Andrés Claramonte's *El valiente negro en Flandes*, as the first representations of the black subject in our theatre.

Although there are more consolidated studies on the presence of people of African descent in the field of cinema and television series, in response, as indicated by Isabel Santaolalla (2005), to the social changes experienced by Spain after its entrance into the European Union and consequent attraction of immigrants (20), the same has not been true in the case of theatre, with the exception of studies such as those mentioned above.

Added to this scarcity of representations, the limitations of plays and films which do include black subjects continue to focus on immigration and stereotyped images, therefore ignoring the Afrodescendant community born in Spain, who are beginning to produce their own plays. In this sense, it is significant to note the late arrival of these plays in the case of Spain in contrast with other countries such as the United Kingdom, where there was an emergence of theatre produced by Afrodescendant playwrights and dramatists as early as the decade of the 1950s and, especially in the 1960s and 70s. As Jeffrey K. Coleman (2017) argues, “Spanish drama has failed the Spanish public by not promoting a new conceptualisation of who is Spanish”(2).¹ Although it is possible to trace the presence of Afrodescendant actors in theatre since the 1990s to a greater or lesser extent, the presence of plays produced by and for the Afrodescendant community in Spanish theatre is practically non-existent, which makes the work of Sopale even more relevant.

In his study of the representation of black characters in the theatre of the Golden Age, Baltasar Fra Molinero (1995) points out that in Spain and Portu-

¹ All translations from Spanish sources are my own.

gal, due to their geographical location, the figure of the black character in literature was frequent. Theatre therefore contributed “the greatest production of images of blacks, documenting in great detail aspects of their life in the Spain of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries”. However, he also acknowledges that “theatre is also the best example of the ‘official’ vision of imperial Spain towards the blacks” (16). As Stuart Hall argues, in addition to the question of the right of access to cultural forms of representation such as theatre, a strategy of “contestation of marginality” is also required, offering positive images that contrast with the stereotyped versions of the black community present in hegemonic discourses (443). In this sense, Silvia Albert Sopale has not only opened the way for Afrodescendant women within the world of theatre, but she has also promoted a reinterpretation and rewriting of the images and stereotypes typically associated with this community. In a similar way, Desirée Bela-Lobedde in her book *Ser mujer negra en España* (2018) argues that black women grow up “lacking real referents, beyond those that do appear, which are almost always stereotyped” (12) and emphasises that “at this point, there are enough black people for us to represent

ourselves, so it is no longer necessary to characterise anyone at all” (49).

Mar García (2018) claims that “art reactivates possibilities that have been repressed by hegemonic power” (12). However, it is also true that this potential is often suppressed in plays produced by white playwrights and dramatists who tend to reproduce stereotyped views of the Afrodescendant community and Africa. Here lies the main interest of the work of Silvia Albert Sopale, in its being the first play in the history of Spanish theatre co-created by a woman of African descent and that directly delves into issues that affect this community:

There are people in the world of theatre, including women, who think of a woman from a remote village who is walking carrying a pitcher of water on her head when you talk about African women on stage. There are also plays by African male authors, although the treatment of women is not the same as ours, even when they believe they speak from a feminist perspective. In addition, they privilege their view of Africa, the idea of returning to the land of their ancestors, and show in their plays idealised women of an also idealised past. Although they are full of good inten-

tions, these characters do not respond to our conception of women. Also, I do not want to talk about the African woman, but about her daughter who was born here and belongs to the diaspora. The new dramaturgy that we want to promote in this country is based on a very simple principle: we are the ones telling our stories (García, 2018: 145-146).

Although recent plays that focus on the experience of Afrodescendant or immigrant women attempt to visualise the presence of this community in Spanish theatre and, consequently, in the imaginary of what it is to be Spanish, many continue to endorse stereotyped or limited readings. Hence the importance of Afrodescendant playwrights and dramatists, as well as directors, who tell their own stories. The same is true of the field of cinema, in which, as Isabel Santaola (2005) points out in her monograph *Los otros*, despite the fact that the presence of Afrodescendant characters and the topic of immigration begins in 1990 with the film *Las Cartas de Alou* directed by Montxo Armendáriz, “the very act of giving visibility to a group, of producing ‘knowledge’ about it, has the potential to generate all kinds of effects, from the most enriching to the most discriminatory” (258).

No Country for Black Women has been defined by its author as a tragicomic one-woman show, although it is difficult to label such a diverse play as Sopale's, which incorporates so many influences. Not only the text, but also the use of the body, dance, the play on words, the use of light or music tell us as much as the words.

Is Spain a country for black women? This is the question that Silvia poses throughout her piece. The play, which draws on Victoria Eugenia Santa Cruz's poem "Me gritaron negra", takes the audience on a journey through the life of the actress, putting the experiences of Afrodescendant women who must negotiate and build their identity in a racist country like Spain, centre stage.

The play is structured in brief extracts in the form of flashbacks that are related to various episodes in the life of the actress and playwright, from her childhood and adolescence, to the current maturity with which she affirms her Afro-Spanish identity, while stressing the urgency of building referents for future generations. As a whole, the play takes the structure of a journey of initiation and personal discovery in which the public and the reader are also forced to question and rethink some of the cultural aspects that are tak-

en for granted, from the use of humor or popular expressions to songs or advertisements that deal with black characters and that contain a hidden racism that the author intends to dismantle. Through this journey through the past, through the experiences of Sopale, with which many other members of the Afro-descendant community will feel identified, the play builds an alternative future in which national identity, being Spanish, goes beyond a white homogenous identity. At the same time, the play also crosses geographical boundaries. The actress speaks of the journey to her origins, to Africa, and to the recurrent dilemma of belonging in diasporic literature.

As is the case with many diaspora writers, transnational references are incorporated into the play, such as the “Duerme negrito”, a lullaby from the Venezuelan-Colombian border popularised by the singer Mercedes Sosa (1970), which opens the piece, or the poem “Me gritaron negra”, mentioned above, which stirs a feeling of transnational solidarity based on a feeling of a shared oppression. This transnational framework also helps us to approach other theatrical productions by Sopale, such as her latest play *He contado manchas del leopardo hasta llegar a la luna* (2017), directed by Eva Hibernia, in which the

actresses Kelly Lua, Maisa Park and Silvia Albert Sopale retell the stories of Afrodescendant women like the Kenyan scientist Wangari Maathai, the African-American mathematician Katherine Johnson, or the Brazilian writer Carolina de Jesús. However, *No Country for Black Women* places the emphasis on a generation of Afrodescendant women born and raised in Spain, whose experiences and identities are often ignored within the national imaginary. Thus, the author embarks us on a journey from the intimate to the collective, from the personal to the political, through which she delves into global issues such as black sexuality, covert racism, the imposition of Western beauty canons or the micro-racism prevalent in Spanish society.

The use of humor is one of the strategies Sopale uses throughout the piece to examine such serious subject matter. As Fra Molinero (1995) rightly argues, “laughter and humour were the literary responses to the slavery of blacks, who were represented as funny and innocent beings” (3). Sopale reverses this idea in her play and parodies humor on black people through word-play, resorting to jokes and popular expressions that confront the reader and viewer with a discomfort that makes us question the colonial legacy that

still today informs our relationships with the other. This strategy of imitation and mockery through repetition, to which Homi Bhabha (1992) referred in his article “Of Mimicry and Man”, supposes not only a practice of resistance but also a way to disrupt the authority of the normative discourse to which we are used, while functioning as an empowerment strategy.

Finally, the perceptible social mission of Sopale’s play is explained by the actress herself: “What I do is not exactly therapeutic theatre, but it is very important that the theatre has a social function and that it has an emotional function that serves us all, both the spectator and me, to make us grow” (Sopale, 2016). It is undeniable that the viewer or reader takes a fundamental role in her play.

In times in when blackface is still prevalent in Spain, a common practice every Christmas, when white men are painted black in many cities to play the role of the beloved Wise King Balthazar, the work of Silvia Albert Sopale acquires, if possible, a greater significance. It is not only a challenge to what it means to be Spanish, but it also acts as a catalyst to rethink both the racist attitudes embedded in our daily actions and our white privilege. But, above all, *No Country for Black Women* is a self-referential play for

the Afrodescendant community that opens a door to new possibilities in what has traditionally been defined as Spanish theatre.

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No Country for Black Women

I.
Sleep Little Black Child

(With her back turned to the audience)
[Popular Latin American lullaby, words modified]

Sleep, sleep, little black child,
Your mommy's in the fields,
Little black child.
Sleep, sleep, little black child,
And don't come to my country, little black child.

There are two six-metre fences for you.
There's surveillance on the fence for you.
There are barbed-wire fences and blades for you.

And if the black man crosses the fence,
The Spanish police will come and zap!
They send him home with a good beating,
Chicapumba, chicapumba,
Apumba chicapum.

Sleep, sleep, little black child,
Your mommy's in the fields,

Little black child.
Sleep, sleep, little black child,
Your mommy's in the fields, being exploited.

Sleep, sleep, little black child,
Your mommy's in the fields, being raped.
Sleep, sleep, little black child.
And while you sleep, her blood runs.
And while you sleep, the pain breaks her.
And while you sleep she howls.
Don't then say it was none of your business.

Sleep, sleep little black child,
Your mommy also sleeps amongst graves.

(Camera Profile Close-up)

I've never had a farm in Africa, at the foot of Basilé peak. I've never woken up in the highlands and thought, am I where I should be?

The world exists without the streets of Malabo. Once I was asked:

What is Africa for you? For me, Africa is the land of my parents, my lineage, a place to go when I feel lost, a refuge, a point of departure. It's the mother

that accepts you as you are and that, imperceptibly, transforms you or marks you, like it did to me. It's the mother you want to embellish, save, improve... and then I was left speechless.

(Long pause)

Embellish? Save? Improve?

My name is Silvia. My name is Silvia, Silvia Albert Sopale. The black woman to my friends. Chivita to my mother, although she really wanted to call me Wineyla, but in 1976 you couldn't give people names like that in Spain, and they had to give me a proper name. My name is Silvia. My African name was given to me by my great aunt Ifeyinka and means: all love. And I gave myself the name of Adelaida for party nights. And as a child? What did they call me as a child?

[Advertising song for famous chocolate covered peanuts]

We are the little Congo boys and we are delicious,
Dressed in chocolate and with a peanut body.
We are round and we are always racing around,

Bouncy, rhythmic and lively
So that you have fun...

[Famous 1960's advert for chocolate drink]

I'm that black boy
From tropical Africa
Who, while working in the fields,
Sang the Cola-Cao song...

[Famous song]

Ay mama Inés. Ay mama Inés.
We blacks all drink coffee.

[Famous advert for chocolate ice-cream]

This summer "have a blackie" [chocolate ice
cream].

2.
At recess

CHILD 1: Your hair is like a scouring pad.

CHILD 2: Why do you have white hands?

CHILD 3: Do you taste like chocolate or like poo?

(Recess bell and giggles)

[Girls nursery rhyme]

As the boat went past,
The boatman said to me:
Pretty girls
Go for free.
I'm not pretty
Nor do I want to be.
Long live the boat
One, two and three.
When the boat came past again,
The boatman said to me:
Pretty girls go for free.
I'm not pretty.
Am I pretty?
I am pretty,

I am pretty and
I want to be
And I pay my money
Like any other woman.

When the boat went past again,
He said to me:
I like this "little coloured girl".
What a disgusting boatman!

When the boat went past,
The boatman said:
Foreign girls go for free.

CATALAN WOMAN: Look how well she speaks Spanish,
the blacks are intelligent, of course they want to stay
in our country.

GIRL: I am not a foreigner. I am not a foreigner, I was
born in San Sebastián madam. Here's the money for
the candy.

CATALAN WOMAN : Don't worry, my beauty. This ti-
me it's on me.

When the boat went past again,
The boatman said:

Little girls...

GIRL: I am not little, I am not little...

Go for free...

GIRL: I said I am not little! I am not little, I am not little!

When the boat went past,
He said again: pretty girls,
Little black girls,
Blonde girls,
Chubby girls,
Slutty girls,
Lonely girls,
Quiet (*pause*) girls.

GIRL: I am not quiet nor do I want to be. I pay my money like any other woman.

When the boat went past,
When the boat went past again,
Up with the Saint Isabel boat.

3.
In class

Saint Isabel, now called Malabo, is the capital and main city of Equatorial Guinea, a former Spanish colony. It is located on the North coast of the island of Bioko – an island known in the past by the Bubis, its native inhabitants, as Etulá and as Fernando Poo by Europeans.

(Scenes from the school/sequence of movements)

I used to sit in the second row, in front of me, Ana, “bubble gum face”, who always dressed in pink, with all the pink complements, and who chewed strawberry bubble gum. He used to sit next to me and I wrote him poems and helped him in geography class. He was so cute, so blonde... He was like Anthony, the one in Candy Candy.

HE: Africa is a country. No, no, no! Africa is not a country. Mmmm... it's a continent. Mmm... it's the third largest continent in the world. It's made up of 54 countries. Mmm and it has 1,000 million people. Pfff! Silvia, Silvia. I didn't know Africa was at the

bottom, at the bottom of Europe, Spain. Yesterday I went to buy a map and you won't believe where the map of Africa was. At the bottom of everything, really, it's true what my granma says, that the truth is found at the bottom of everything.

4.
Hop-Scotch

I was just seven years old, only seven. Seven years old? I wasn't even five yet. Suddenly some voices in the class screamed: Black Girl! Black! Black! Black! Black! Back! Black! Black!

SILVIA: And I thought, am I really Black?

VOICES: Yes!

SILVIA: What does it mean to be black?

VOICES: Black!

SILVIA: I didn't know the sad truth hidden behind that word.

VOICES: Black!

SILVIA: And I felt black.

VOICES: Black!

SILVIA: As they said.

VOICES: Black!

SILVIA: And I stepped back a bit! Just as they wanted.

VOICES: Black!

SILVIA: I hated my hair and my thick lips. I was ashamed of my toasted skin. And I stepped back.

VOICES: Black!

SILVIA: And I stepped back.

VOICES: Black! Black! Black! Black! Black! Black!
Blaaaack! Black! Black! Black! Black! Black! Black!
Black! Black!

SILVIA: (*shouting*) muuuuuuummmmm!!!!

5.
Her parents

SILVIA: Mum, why do other kids say I'm black as if it was an insult? Why are we normally the only black people? Why aren't there other black kids at school? I don't like having other people touch my hair. Are all black people descendants of slaves? Why aren't there black people in the books we use in class? Can I paint my nails coloured? Are you sure there are no slaves anymore? Why won't the teacher let me play Snow White in the school play? What colour is flesh colour? I want to wear make-up. Can I go out tonight? Mum, I've met a boy.

6.

The Story of the First Boyfriend

Time went by and I had been going out with Jose for 6 months. Always bitter. I continued to carry my heavy burden on my back. And it really was heavy. I straightened my hair, put powder on my face, and my guts kept echoing the same word. Jose had told me: I want you to meet my people. My mates are really good people, we are lifelong friends. My dad is a joker, he's always playing jokes and my mum believes in God, she's charitable, she helps poor people. If you were homeless, with no money, no food, she would help you out. That's Christian charity. What's more, Silvia, I don't mind you being black and they won't mind either, you'll see.

SILVIA: Excuse me? Imagine if I told you, I don't mind you being white, Catalan, South American or whatever, but I want you to meet my people. That same night I met Jose's friends.

(The Pothead appears)

THE POTHEAD: Look at her, look at the brownie. So

you've managed to get off with my mate Jose, have you? So you won't have to ever work again, uh? You girls really know how to get on. Well, I've known Jose since we were in kindergarten, you know what I mean? Our families are really close, he's like a brother to me, you know? (*Music*). I love this song, mate. I bet you dance really good, let me see how you move, 'cos you black girls... (*The Pothead gets closer trying to grab Silvia by the waist and pressing his groin against her*). If you move your but, I'll fall in love with you. But just for tonight, uh? But where are you going, mate? Wait, Jose will be back in a minute. Hey Big Mouth, Jose's got himself a girl. She's just run off over there. I don't know what's wrong with her. She went into the toilet pulling a right face. Maybe she's having her period.

(Big Mouth appears, the Pothead goes away)

BIG MOUTH: Really? Has he brought a girl? Where is she? Is it the dark one he was talking about the other day? Is it that one there? Hey! Hi blondie. But you're not that black, mate, you're not black black. When Jose told us he was going to introduce us to his girlfriend I said "cool", then he told me

she was mulatto, I thought: that's real exotic, while I was going back home I kept thinking...a nigger girl, a nigger girl! Fuck me, I've never met a little Congo girl in my life and what do you talk about with nigger girls? What am I going to say? I might go and say something offensive. I don't want you to think I'm ignorant, a privileged white guy that doesn't know what's what. No, mate, I'm educated, and my parents are real lefties, you know? I said to myself oh my God! I haven't met a nigger girl in my life, so I got the encyclopedia out. I looked up black women and I found really negative stuff mate, dark, crappy, devilish, you know? Fuck, that's really dark. Maybe Zulus are bad people, but how can the Colacao people be bad? But I don't know, the dictionary doesn't paint a very pretty picture of you, you know? So I search for something else and I find that the black race is the most ancient race in the world. Then it's like there's not much more information, it's like you don't have a history. Yeah, yeah, and now you're gonna tell me that you do but that, 'cos history's told by us white folk, we whiten it. Come on, fuck you! And then there's this whole story about slavery, that's really crappy! And then I think you've gotta be fuckin' weak to let someone

treat you like that, uh? And then there's this thing about black leaders, the civil rights movement, the Afro-Americans, the Afro-Latino. Do Afro-Europeans exist? Afro-Spanish? No way! That's something just for the foreigners, no, mate, here there weren't any black people. This is nothing to do with us, mate. There's nothing about Afro-Europeans in the library, and even less about Afro-Spaniards. Afro-Spaniards don't exist.

SILVIA: Two days later I met Jose's parents. As soon as I got there, his mum scanned me from head to toe. And then, to break the ice, his dad piped up.

JOSE'S FATHER: What's your name? Wait. Let me guess. Montserrat? (*Laughs*). You don't need to sunbathe, uh? (*Laughs*). I'm just kidding. You don't mind, do you? You look like you've got a sense of humour. Do you know where women have the curliest hair? In Africa!!!! (*Laughs*). I'm just kidding. Why don't black people eat chocolate? Because they'd end up eating their fingers, too. (*Laughs*). You don't mind, do you? It's just a joke. What do you call a pregnant black woman? A Kinder Surprise (*laughs*). It's a joke (*laughs*).

JOSE'S MOTHER: (*pausing and with her mouth open tries to say something but she can't*) Hi, I'm Pilar,

what's your name?

SILVIA: Hi, I'm Silvia.

JOSE'S MOTHER: And where are you from?

SILVIA: From San Sebastián.

JOSE'S MOTHER: Mmm San Sebastián, which San Sebastián?

SILVIA: From the Basque Country.

JOSE'S MOTHER: Our San Sebastián. That's interesting! You speak Spanish really well. And where are you from? Where are your parents from?

SILVIA: My mom is from Equatorial Guinea and my dad is from Nigeria.

JOSE'S MOTHER: And how long have they been here for? Do they work or whatever?

SILVIA: Since 1975. My dad owns a bar and my mum is a nurse.

JOSE'S MOTHER: Mmmm, ok. Jose, can you come with me to the kitchen? Jose, she's coloured, she's black, she's black...she's black. Black! Black! Black! Black! Black! Black! Black! Black! Black! Black! Black! Black! Black! Black! Black! Black! Black!

SILVIA: So what? So what?? WHAT DO YOU KNOW? What do you know? You have no idea what it is like to hear your brothers talk about how they avoid the police so that they don't get stopped by

them and searched for no reason. Do you know what it is like to be a Latin or Arab actress, and the only roles you get offered are those of prostitutes, immigrants, cleaning women, junkies. It's been established that we cannot play Bernarda Alba, Ifigenia or Ophelia, that if we go to an audition where they say "dark actress wanted" they tell us: sorry we are not looking for coloured actresses. Do you know that although we use products, too, advertising is not aimed at us? Do you know what it means to live in a country where you don't feel represented, where you are made to feel invisible and silenced?

(Scream. Silence)

Black! Yes. Black! I am. Black, black, I am black! From now on I don't want to straighten my hair. I don't want to. And I'm gonna laugh at those who, so that we don't feel offended, call black people "coloured". And what colour? BLACK! And it sounds beautiful! BLACK! And It has rhythm! BLACK BLACK BLACK BLACK BLACK BLACK BLACK BLACK BLACK BLACK BLACK BLACK. At last! At last I've understood. At last I don't step back. At

last! And I move forward, confident. At last I move forward and wait. At last! And I thank my lucky stars because GOD wanted my colour to be jet black. I understand now. At last I step back no more. Black, black, black, black, black I am. A Catalan, Basque, Spanish black woman, and olé! And for 40 years, people have been asking me if I was from Nigeria, Guinea, Brazil, New York, France ...but never, ever, has anyone asked if I was from here.

Black, yes, I am black, black, black, I am black like my mother, like Desirée, like Concha Buika [a black Spanish singer], like my aunts, like my cousins, black, yes, black like you, like you!

(The wig on the floor comes to life)

WIG: But what's the sense of all this right now? I'm black, too, but I don't need to be screaming: "black, yes, I'm black", all the time. Obviously I'm black, let's turn the page and that's it. If you ask me, there are a lot of black people with chips on their shoulders, a lot of losers. All this fuss because of the Antonio López statue. Who is Antonio López? Who knew there was a statue and a square named after him?

SILVIA: (*raising her hand*): Antonio López was a slave trader and he got a statue and a square named after him near Layetana street in Barcelona.

WIG: I'll tell you who. Those with chips on their shoulders who always live in the past, always saying that we are descended from slaves, that humanity owes us something. I'll tell you something. I'm not descended from slaves, my parents were born in Catalonia and my grandparents are from Catalonia too and that's it. Because it's not discrimination, it's paranoia. I've never been asked for my papers in the street, well, once I was and I showed them and that was it. They're doing their job, who are they going to stop if not those who look like foreigners?

SILVIA: As Malcolm X said, there are two kinds of negroes: the house negroes and the field negroes. The house negroes love their master and the field negroes hate their master and they hate the house negroes. The field negroes believe they are superior to the house negroes in moral standards, they feel more black. The house negroes live with a bandage over their eyes, that the field negroes want to tear off at any cost. Part of me is a house negro. I've always believed in the story I've been told. I've wanted everything to be peaceful, to avoid problems and

ignore the field negroes' problems. I was afraid of making a noise, afraid of being excluded. I've always been a slave with silk shackles. Now the door is open and I see free people, people who fight for their rights and who scream, implore and wait for me to join them. At home it's cozy; in the fields the stars shine at night. We don't get to choose where we are born but we can choose whether we stay and on what conditions. Black, yes, I need referents. I am black. Mirrors to look at myself in. Black, yes, I am black. Africa, here I come!

7.
Africa

Kereque kereque kereque que si que que.
Kereque kereque kereque que si que que.

(She prompts the audience to sing along with her. When everyone sings, she looks at the audience with a look of surprise)

And they were all black like me. The world turned upside down. The flight attendants were black, drivers, politicians... Being white was what was different. They were experiencing for the first time what we black people felt in Spain. Some of them were practically shitting themselves. They'd been warned about the food, the violence and, what's more, many people stopped them and asked them for money, they were what's called an *easy target*. I walked peacefully, I could sit and observe without being observed. Nobody looked at me, or grabbed their bag when I passed by and if there was a seat available next to me on the bus, people just took it. I walked in the street as if I'd done that all my life. Everything looked fa-

miliar, even the potholes in the roads.

WOMAN: Udat na yu.

SILVIA: I'm Silvia, I replied.

WOMAN: Udat na yu?

SILVIA: My name is Silvia, I said a little bit more slowly.

WOMAN: Silvia? Udat na yu papa den.

SILVIA: Albert, Silvia Albert.

WOMAN: Silvia Albert?

SILVIA: Albert Sopale. Albert is my father's surname.

Or maybe it isn't. On his baptism certificate it says Vins Edeth, son of Manuel Alberto Edeth. I think he changed it to sound more Spanish. Yes, Silvia Albert, Silvia Albert Sopale.

WOMAN: Ah you na sopale, yu nan fatima in piquin o. Tat mind sé yu papa na oñema. so you nan anti yoko in gran piquin. A bin de go na scol with yu anti then. You gret gramama, men, bocu piquin then, nat this contri.

SILVIA: There we were all someone's brother or sister, someone's son or daughter, someone's niece or nephew, someone's neighbor. That's what we are. That's an honour.

8.

The Great-Grandmother's House

I went to get to know my great-grandmother's house, which had been built by her, where my grandmother was born and where she died and where my aunt and all her family lived now (*image of the mango tree – sound effect*). I went out into the courtyard and there was my aunt, sitting under the sacred tree, which my mother had told me so much about, a tree whose roots have been nourished with all the family's umbilical cords for generations so that we don't forget that we belong to this land, so that we always know where our home is. Those were my mother's words. I asked my aunt about my great-grandmother. If it was true that she was sold as a slave (*torch is switched on*).

AUNT: It wasn't exactly like that, my dear. She was kidnapped by some men, some slave traders on Malabo beach. Nobody knows if they were Portuguese, maybe Andalusians. She was chained and put in the hold. They made her suffer the Middle Passage journey. She was exhibited in the slave market, like any other product, but when they were about to sell her to the English, someone asked:

SLAVE TRADER 1: What are those scars on her face?

SLAVE TRADER 2: What scars?

SLAVE TRADER 3: That's nothing, just tribal scars. (*The auctioneer came closer to look at her and shouted*).

Have you gone mad? Untie her! Untie her! Don't you know that she is cursed? Out! Out! Out! Take her back to where you found her.

AUNT: It wasn't a curse. It was just the blessing of our people. However, for those superstitious men, good is evil and evil is good.

(Music. Choreography. While she dances she paints her face, her body with tribal marks...)

[Bubi transcription]

Tue tu pero halo la ocha...
Tuemba poa batola tola
Tuemba poa bacheche
Tuemba poa baho to to
Ovaran aja valotasey j acho ba
Nato ia jalo
Nato a ralupe
Natu a tu cucubia
Nato ia jalo

We were here first and we saw the red men, the yellow men, the white men arrive. We were here when everything was green. We had our rules, our Gods, and you came to impose yours without even asking. We were here.

Africa is like a journey of initiation. I never met my great grandmother. The only memory I have of her is this scarf that I came back with. My family is there, my house is there, but this isn't my country, either. I am a guest, a tourist that takes photos and notes.

There they call me WHITE.

9.
The Return

It's not easy to leave Guinea, especially if you're black. They asked me for my passport. They looked at it from cover to cover.

BORDER GUARD: Spanish? Huh! Let's see... Show me your Spanish ID. But you were wearing glasses in this photo. Do you wear glasses now? What have you got in your suitcase? What's this? You know you aren't allowed to carry drugs, don't you? A pineapple... Who did you buy it from?

SILVIA: I used up all the patience I had left, but finally I managed to get out. If it's not easy to board a plane, I wonder what it must be like to get out of Nigeria, the Ivory Coast, Cameroon, the Congo, Senegal.... walking, walking, swimming, boats, vans... How many border posts can you get past without papers? I guess it all depends on how much money you have. How much hope? How many lives? How much sand? How long do they wait on the other side until they decide to jump? I don't know. Maybe I'll never know. I travel by plane. How much longer must these people who leave their country suffer,

without knowing if there will be someone who'll offer them shelter and a house to live in instead of internment centers for foreigners. Instead of deportations, someone who helps them on their way to their final destination? Someone who offers them documentation, health care and work instead of frisking them and humiliating them. Which will be the first country to understand that whether you're fleeing from war or from hunger, it is your life that is at stake? Which country will understand that when we're dead, we'll all be equal, that there will be no borders? Which country will be the first to say this is a country for black women?

SE TERMINÓ DE IMPRIMIR
EN LOS TALLERES DE GRAFINSA,
EN OVIEDO, EL 23 DE JUNIO DE 2019,
149 ANIVERSARIO DE LA APROBACIÓN EN LAS CORTES
DE LA LEY DE ABOLICIÓN DE LA ESCLAVITUD PARA
LOS TERRITORIOS DE LAS ANTILLAS

