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“The connections between the enemy at home and the enemy in Spain”:

Langston Hughes’ black internationalism in the Spanish Civil War

From July to December 1937, Langston Hughes traveled to Spain to cover the Civil War as a correspondent. The five months he spent traveling throughout Spain gave rise to a prolific repertoire on which the author left a manifest ideological imprint. His observations from within and the ideological perspectives revealed the potential of travel writing as a tool to re-examine the local and international boundaries critically. This paper navigates Hughes's dispatches in wartime Spain, which distanced him from traditional journalistic practices by demonstrating a clear preference for the ordinary, and a subjective interpretation of the events driven by an unambiguous ideological affiliation to the Loyalist faction. The analysis of the texts sheds light on how international travel facilitated Black connections and on the importance of travel to the politics of Black internationalism.

Keywords: Langston Hughes, travel writing, Spanish Civil War, race, Black internationalism.

A writer in quest of answers

Throughout his career, Langston Hughes' literary production grew hand in hand with his aesthetic, personal and, above all, political evolution. The *raison d'être* of his work emerged from a fierce commitment to the injustices and problems around him, to the point that the author conceived literature as an inseparable part of his lived experiences. Proof of this is reflected in the title of his second autobiography, *I Wonder as I Wander* (1956), an alliterative play on words, which captures the essence of Hughes' life: the search for answers to the tribulations and injustices endured both by his peers and himself (Cruzado Soria, 2004). As he would later confirm in his writing, Hughes' desire to find these whys and wherefores permeated the travelogues he wrote from Spain as a war correspondent: "[In Spain] I am a writer, not a fighter. But that is what I want to be, a writer, recording what I see, commenting upon it, and distilling from my own emotions a personal interpretation" (1956, 400-01). His restlessness to observe and understand the Black experience remained in force even after his time in wartime Spain, as evidenced in the lines of "Seven Moments of Love" (1940): "I wonder if white folks ever feel bad, / Getting up in the morning lonesome and sad?" (60-61), (Hughes, Rampersad, and Roessel, 1995, 219); or in those of "Brotherly Love" (1956), when he evoked a desire for reconciliation that, while not harboring resentment, revealed doubt: "If I found it in my heart to love you, / And if I thought I really could, / If I said, "Brother, I forgive you," / I wonder, would it do you any good?" (5-8), (453). However, his wish inevitably made him confront the stark reality of his situation, setting him on a quest for answers yet again: "I wonder why the sky's so blue / And why the clay's so red. / Why down South is always down, / And never up instead" (13-16), (434) —as he wrote in "Vari-Colored Song" (1952).

In his constant search for answers to so many complex questions, Hughes could not turn a blind eye to the situation of Spain in 1937, and was one of the many African American intellectuals to identify the relevance of the Spanish Civil War in the communist crusade against

fascism that threatened the freedom of all races. His courage and determination to contribute to the fight against the Francoist insurrection led him to undertake a trip to wartime Spain that would prove to be of critical significance professionally, ideologically and personally speaking. However, the extent of this sojourn would not only mark a before and after in Hughes's life and literary career, but also integrate him into a lineage of African American writers such as Arthur Schomburg and Claude McKay whose figurative mapping of Spain provides analysis and commentary on racial identity, diasporic dynamics and international Black politics. As Edwards (2003) elucidated, Black internationalism reached its highest point in the interwar years, a period when writers and intellectuals adopted literary, political and transnational practices attesting both to diaspora collaboration and to their intent to forge alliances beyond their national boundaries. In this context, Hughes found in Spain a site for reflection on the individual and the collective, and on the national and the international. In Ramos' (2015) words: "a transnational space that acts as a nexus within a system in which a series of identifications converge, including race, nation and religion" (56). In order to properly convey these identifications between Spain and Black America, Hughes took on the role of a cultural mediator, that of an "inter-American cultural broker" (Kutzinski, 2004, 114). This qualifier underlines, as signaled by San José (2019), that as an arbitrator Hughes expresses the significance of the context in Spain and transfers it to the American sphere by "constantly conveying several cultural, notional and political ideas back and forth between both countries" (25).

The development of Hughes' leftist ideology

Before delving into Hughes' writings on Spain, it is crucial to understand the factors that led the writer to disengage from the ethnic nationalist trend that characterized his work in the Harlem Renaissance and made him develop an unambivalent class consciousness and an

explicit rendering of a committed anti-fascism.

The late 1920s and early 1930s witnessed a worsening economic situation and the unstoppable advance of capitalism in the US, circumstances that generated profound inequalities among the American working class. The few changes in terms of racial equality and social justice had begun to promote an atmosphere of weariness, demotivation and poverty among minority groups. Political instability in the US from the second half of the 1920s onwards, social division, Ku Klux Klan radicalization and the stock market crash of 1929 further aggravated the desolation of the African American community. As an author committed to social causes and deeply sensitive to the circumstances of his peers, Hughes was sensitive to the demoralizing situation that was fracturing the country into an irreparable social and racial divide. This circumstance led to a gradual reflection and a subsequent ideological and personal turn in Hughes. As stated by Dawahare (2003): “Hughes’ move to the left was in large part a recognition of the limitations of a cultural nationalist perspective of social relations” (94). This ideological inflection caused him to abandon the resilient attitude towards injustice and oppression characteristic of his early years as a writer (Fernández-Alonso and Barros-del Río, 2019). The emerging new ideological phase soon materialized in a literary production without reservations or detours, more revolutionary in tone and aesthetics that many considered an aberration and an isolated stage in his career —“cursory or anecdotal at best, nonexistent at worst”— notes Soto (2014, 130). Although during the Harlem Renaissance racial identity had been for Hughes the banner of his literary production, as “he would need the race, and would need to appeal to the race, to an extent felt by few other blacks, and by no other important black writer” (Rampersad, 1986, 22), his new ideological views stimulated the introduction of other concepts converging with the racial question. Notions such as anti-fascism, anti-colonialism, anti-capitalism, and class consciousness intersect and cross his primary motivation: race. Thurston (1995) employs the word *thresholds* metaphorically to refer to this idea: “Hughes

stands upon several cultural thresholds, his feet placed in multiple discursively created and maintained fields. Thresholds of course, are meant to be crossed” (35). This new lens translated from the late 1920s into a socially engaged and involved body of work and soon prompted an aesthetic and literary transformation committed to and supported by a political militancy based on a communist ideology and an internationalist vision. This system of beliefs was consolidated and reaffirmed upon his return from the Soviet Union in 1932, where he reinforced his sense of identification with oppressed foreign communities, as he clearly described a year later in his essay *Moscow and Me* (1933): “Moscow and freedom! The Soviet Union! The dream of all the poor and oppressed, like us, come true” (56). In the next lines, Hughes further elaborated on the reason for his trip: “Of course, we knew that one of the basic principles of the Soviet Union is the end of all racial distinctions. That’s the main reason we had come to Moscow” (58). This perspective was soon evident in his poetry, eliciting a shift from his nationalist perspective as a Harlem Renaissance writer and toward a combined view of class and race rather than race alone as the basis for both economic racism and collective struggle (Dawahare 2003).

The trip to Spain

In late June 1937, Hughes sailed for Europe on the *Aquitania* as the exclusive correspondent for the *Baltimore Afro American* newspaper (*The Afro*, hereafter). His first stop was Paris, where he attended the Second International Writers’ Congress and soaked up the social and cultural life of the French capital. Paris provided Hughes with an escape valve from the reviled situation in the US and a place to reconnect with old friends. While in Paris and shortly before traveling to Spain, Hughes began to recover the enthusiasm and spirit that he felt had been drained from him while in the US given the economic and social conditions there: “Langston’s spirit [...] became honed again under the pressure of the anti-fascist struggle in wartime Spain. [...], he would begin to feel life with an intensity he had not known since his

first weeks in the Soviet Union” (341). In spite of this, his verve and eagerness were partially overshadowed by the fear and worry of traveling to a country engulfed by war. Years later, he would acknowledge this conflicting emotion in his second autobiography (1956): “One of my dreams had always been to go to Spain. But at first I was not sure I wanted to go in the midst of a Civil War” (315).

After almost a month in Paris, on July 24, Hughes took a train from Orsay Station to the Spanish town of Port Bou in Girona and, both literally and metaphorically speaking, he was not traveling alone. His admired and beloved friend the Cuban poet Nicolás Guillén, “(who) occupies somewhat a position like that of Carl Sandburg in the United States” (Hughes, 1938, 5) was also traveling to Spain as a correspondent for the magazine *Mediodía*. In later writings, Hughes recounted his arrival in wartime Spain by substituting the physical railway tunnel for obscurantism in a figurative sense, thus employing a semantic field that would become a symbol of its own in his work on Spain, the light-darkness binomial:¹

There is a tunnel between France and Spain, a long stretch of darkness through which the train passes. Then you come into the sunlight again directly from Port Bou on the Spanish side of the mountain, with a shining blue bay below where children are swimming (Hughes and De Santis, 2002², 158).

Two days after their arrival in Barcelona, Hughes and Guillén set sail for Valencia, a city on the Mediterranean that Hughes had visited in the early 1920s during his time as a sailor on a merchant ship. Once there, Hughes employed similes to describe the beauty and purity of the landscapes he witnesses, fruit of its ancient civilizations: “through villages as old as the Romans, and out along the Mediterranean, bright and blue as the morning sky” (161). However, this new-found optimism and clarity was soon challenged by the rawness of totalitarianism and war, which he conveyed metaphorically, “The old days were dark days indeed, and the fascists

want those old days back” (176). However, his confidence in the overthrow of fascism made him put his hopes on the fighting soldiers of the Loyalist side willing to stop the perpetuation of ignorance and submission: “and these very soldiers to whom I talked were learning to read and write, and to escape from the darkness of ignorance” (176).

Once in Valencia, Hughes and Guillén made their way to the city’s *Casa de la Cultura*, where Miguel Hernández and other local writers welcomed them warmly. For a week, Hughes enjoyed the city’s abundant food and drink, the bustling atmosphere of bars crowded with resting Republican troops, and the packed beaches that reminded him of Coney Island on a 4th of July —“But we were in our bathing suits on the crowded Valencia beach on a Sunday afternoon —which is like Coney Island” (167), Hughes wrote, presumably in attempt to draw an analogy between both geographical references. Hughes took advantage of this anecdote to introduce a change of scenery, “I left for Madrid” (167), even informing the reader about the difficulty of transportation in wartime and the haste with which he faced this trip: “Transportation being difficult to find, since there are no trains to the interior, I had to take the first chance opportunity offered me” (167). His departure for the capital, in the first week of August 1937, was motivated by the news that *La Niña de los Peines*³ was still performing in a theatre in Madrid. Thus Hughes (1956) would confess: “When I learned in Valencia that La Niña was still singing in Madrid under fire, I decided it was time I got my permit validated for the front. Madrid was the front” (332). Hughes’ impulsiveness on this matter underscores that his reporting was not driven by events on the ground, but rather based on personal and ideological motivations. This distinctive feature distances his reporting from traditional journalism standards and places it closer within the field of literary journalism.⁴

Madrid: a besieged city in the midst of cultural life

The Spanish capital, where Hughes spent most of his stay and from where he made his trips to different points on the front, become his base camp. His time in Madrid enabled him to indulge his passion for observation and curiosity as he toured around the most picturesque neighborhoods and places such as: “the beautiful Arguelles section” or “the world-famous Telefónica”. He also visited the Gran Vía, where “Sundays, the town-folks, too, are walking (170), the Puerta del Sol, “that big and busy square that is the heart of Madrid” (189), and even one of the city’s most iconic sites. “the Cibeles Fountain in front of the Post Office” (192). Fulfilling his professional duties, he visited the city’s most representative spots devastated by the bombardments providing particulars on the extent of the damage to the most iconic landmarks: “The Madrid Post Office has no window-panes left whatsoever”, “The Cibeles Fountain [...]with its lovely goddess is now concealed by a specially built housing of bricks and sandbags” (192). Not to mention the city’s most emblematic hotels: “a few days ago four shells went through the walls of the Hotel Florida, making twenty that have fallen there” and “The Hotel Alfonso a few blocks away has several large holes through each of its four walls” (191). In an exercise of professional bravery, he even walked around the trenches: “A few days ago, I went to visit a section of the trenches of Madrid” (173), of which he observed their zigzagging design, very different from the one shown in the films he had seen until then.

In the capital, Hughes stayed at the *Alianza de Intelectuales Antifascistas para la Defensa de la Cultura* (the Alliance, hereinafter), a republican propaganda center brimming with political and cultural activity where he was welcomed by Rafael Alberti and María Teresa León. Despite the luxurious antique collectibles that the building still housed, the paintings by El Greco and Goya, the medieval tapestries or the ancient armors that Hughes and other guests tried on secretly to improvise costume balls, Madrid was facing strict food rationing and restaurants and food shops remained closed:

War and hunger were daily companions there. [...], Potato peelings and sausage skins were boiled in Madrid to make soup. At the Alliance even horse meat became a luxury, its coarse-grained flesh was prepared to look as much like pot roast as possible by our skillful cook. (Hughes, 1956, 391).

Hughes' interest in giving the republican struggle a certain international projection was channeled through highlighting the work of the Alliance, "one of the liveliest artistic and intellectual centers in the world at the moment" (149). Presided over by the writer José Bergamín and with Rafael Alberti at the helm of its secretariat, the organization was backed by a large national and international artistic and literary community. Hughes portrayed the institution as a democratizing agent making culture available to a wider audience "a place where now, today, art becomes life and life is art, and there is no longer any need of a bridge between the artists and the people" (152). In Hughes' imaginary, the Alliance's aspirations were reminiscent of those that underpinned the Republican army, constituted by and for the people: "for the thing created becomes immediately a part of those for whom, from whom, it was created" (152). His time in the Alliance left a deep impression on Hughes' perception of the role of writers internationally and made him reflect on the scope and power of words in times of political and social instability. An example of this is the speech *Writers, Words and the World* that months later, in July 1938, Hughes gave at the Second Congress of the International Executive Committee of the International Union Against Racism and Antisemitism, where he represented the League of American Writers. Among its lines we find clear allusions to the stance writers should embrace in the fight against oppression, and to their accountability in the creation of a fairer society: "Writers have power. The better the writer the greater that power to impel people toward the creation of a good life" (198). Hughes judged the writers' role as a social commitment and highlighted the importance of employing the right words at the right

time and for the right purposes: “Writers who have the power to use words in terms of belief and action are responsible to that power *not* to make people believe in the wrong things” (198, italics in the original). Hughes’ radio broadcast *The Alliance of Antifascists Intellectuals, Madrid* sits along these same lines, and places on the shoulders of its members the responsibility of stirring the conscience of the population to promote a reflective and militant attitude, or as he would underline in Paris “to make people *believe and do*” (198, italics in original).

Inevitably influenced by his contemporaries in Spain, among them Rafael Alberti, Federico García Lorca and María Teresa León, Hughes (1956) conceived his professional duty in Spain as promoting his political ideology to the advantage of the Republic: “Now our art is at the service of the Republic to help win the war” (387), a purpose he likewise expressed on the airwaves. According to Barrios (2007), in his search for a typically black aesthetic that would define his work, Hughes’ racial identity and ideology became his main source of inspiration. In Spain, his art was open to all who fought in the name of the Republic and were worthy of the very art they inspired: “The poem, the picture, the song is only water drawn from the well of the people and given back to them in a cup of beauty so that they may drink, and in drinking, understand themselves”(152).⁵ This invitation glimpses a pedagogical objective aimed at underlining the importance of art and literature as indispensable vehicles in the struggle against fascist insurrection. Hence, the premise of democratizing art and making it available to all, including his own racial peers in the US, a population who, according to Hughes’ own personal experience, was stigmatized by illiteracy and condemned to a second-rate education.⁶

Hughes’ radio broadcast radio speech on the Alliance underlined its struggle relegating the entire population to a bygone era —“back to the dark ages” (152)— by employing the light-darkness binomial used elsewhere in his dispatches. The duties of the Alliance were developed from an integrating point of view in terms of race and gender, “women of letters from all over

the world, of all races and colors”, “these men and women, many of international fame” (152). This gender-inclusive perspective highlights Hughes’ contribution to the reflection on the received construction of black masculinity and the establishment of symmetries between men and women of color in the subjectivity of the African American mind. Chinitz (2013) named this “ethic of inclusion” (63), which refers to Hughes’ efforts to “undermine the hypermasculine version of authentic blackness” (63). In this same vein, Joyce (2004) and Borden (1994) concur in pointing out the merging of gender and race in Hughes’ work and his desire to emphasize this union, an aspect that draws on his feminist perspective as a black man and that leads to an aesthetics that both scholars refer to as *genderracial*. As stated by Borden (1994), the *genderracial* perspective detected in Hughes’ repertoire emphasizes that oppression is common to both men and women for the simple fact of sharing a common race, but it is manifested dissimilarly because of the gender difference between both (Borden, 1994).

The defence of culture as an integrating element of the working class present throughout Hughes’ work in Spain reached its peak in this broadcast on the Alliance and answered the rhetorical question the author asked himself about the role of writers and artists in times of war, that of creating a recreational but useful beauty and making it available to all. Through the airwaves, Hughes succeeded in informing his listeners about the importance of this organization and at the same time delved into the transcendence of culture in the progress of Spain and the US as a device to avoid the dreaded “return to barbarism” (152). To do so, he emphasized its scope and magnitude not only in the present, but also in the future, referring to the Alliance as “a center for today’s work and tomorrow’s dream” (152). Worth noting here is Hughes’ notion of *dream*, a recurrent and transversal axis in his literary imagination, which from his early works “had been perhaps the central motif of his poetry” (Rampersad, 1988, 152). In Spain, the dream aligned with his desire to support an audience oppressed by fascism, as Tracy (2013) observed in the totality of his work: “Hughes’s work is devoted to outlining, celebrating, and agitating

on behalf of the dreams of oppressed and marginalized peoples worldwide” (223). Hughes’ dream for the oppressed classes was reminiscent of his own aspiration essay *The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain* (1926), in which he expressed the determination and naivety characteristic of a younger author that “we build our temples for tomorrow” (694) —a manifesto which was “an early place for Hughes. An imaginary lookout post, a lighthouse of sorts” (Trotman, 1999, 36).

Hughes ascribed to the members of the Alliance an almost heroic performance, “a place where creative miracles continually happen” (152), which he placed on the same level as that of the African American volunteers of the Lincoln Battalion, to whom he also conferred a redemptive and emancipatory value in a message charged with hope “A great many Negroes know better [...] All the Francos in the world cannot blow out the light of human freedom” (158). The sacrifice and persistence detected in Hughes’ description of these writers who sometimes “leave the house to continue their work as fighters or thinkers or artists at the front and they do not come back again” (150)— recall the black writer’s spirit of sacrifice, constantly confronted with obstacles, “the road for the serious black artist, then, who would produce racial art is most certainly rocky and the mountain is high” (Hughes, 1926, 693).

The correlation between the Spanish and African American writers is not the only parallel that aspires to foster cultural identification between the two countries. The radio broadcast *Around the Clock in Madrid* is set along the same lines and presents, at first sight, a detailed account of a city at war. However, as the broadcast developed, Hughes pivoted on the crudeness of the conflict —“there’s very little to eat” (202)— and its impact on social life, underlining the resilience of the madrileños, accustomed to living with the harshness of war — “the firings keep us all night [...]. But the madrileños are used to it” (202). Among the brutality and sheer dread endured, Hughes laid emphasis on their courage, which represented “an amazing record of bravery under fire” (200). A first reading suggests that we are before a radio

speech of colorful *Costumbrismo*, a detailed interpretation of local and everyday life in which Hughes meant to describe the daily life of Madrid under siege, as if he were a tourist guide. Nevertheless, a second analysis reveals a pedagogical strategy aimed at placing Spain on the mental map of the African American listener by introducing thematic strands that associate both countries culturally. This technique, also employed in his dispatches, focuses on this occasion on linking flamenco with the blues:

Flamenco is to Spain, I suppose, what the blues are to America, attributing to them the same impact on their audiences “flamencos [*sic*] seem to have the same effect on their audiences as blues do when sung in the Negro theatres of the Deep South (200).

Similarly, Hughes attributed the same qualities to both musical styles which, seeming to emulate the character of the African American, oozed vitality and strength despite the sadness: “the flamencos [*sic*] are like blues in that they are sad songs, with a kind of triumphant sadness, a vital earthiness about them from which life itself springs” (200). By this association, Hughes went beyond linking their nature and traced a timeline that related flamenco to laments from Africa, “a long-drawn-out wail that must have come up from Africa with the Moors centuries ago” (200), touching on the critique of the Moroccan soldiers fighting with Franco — to whom he referred as *Moors*— and underlining the irony of two peoples with a related musical origin but at odds on the battlefield. In the rhythms of flamenco, Hughes observed how sadness was expressed in a deep lament, similar to the blues he described in *The First Book of Jazz*: the “sad old weary wailing tune” (Hughes and Tracy, 2003, 297).

As detected in his witnessed accounts, the stark reality of Madrid at war did not prevent the city from remaining a hive of cultural life, “Even though there is a war in Madrid, its material and cultural life goes on” (202). The city resisted while the bombings continue and the

“main buildings are smashed and broken by shell fire, and no longer run (202). Still on the run, Madrid resisted, “Life goes on! (202) — Hughes remarked, perhaps emulating the famous song of the city’s defence: “Madrid, ¡qué bien resistes los bombardeos! ¡De las bombas se ríen los madrileños!”⁷ (Díaz Viana, 1986, 14).

The analogies between the writers of the Alliance and the Black writers, his attempts to draw parallels on cultural and social grounds between Spain and the US, and the relationship established between the antifascist and anti-racist movements in Spain in the US was partly a joint effort with other African Americans fighting on Spanish soil. Such was the case of Canute Frankson, an African American volunteer in the Lincoln Battalion, who articulated international and interracial solidarity in a letter to home from Spain in 1937: “If we crush fascism here we’ll save our people in America, and in other parts of the world from the vicious persecution, wholesale imprisonment, and slaughter which the Jewish people suffered and are suffering under Hitler’s Fascist heel” (Nelson and Hendricks, 1996, 33-34). Welding his best weapon, the pen, and well aware of the perils of Franco’s victory, Hughes voiced this same point in one of his dispatches for *The Afro*: “if Fascism creeps across Spain, across Europe and then across the world, there will be no place left for any Negroes —because Fascism preaches the creed of Nordic supremacy and a world for whites alone” (156). By identifying anti-fascism with anti-racism, both Frankson and Hughes understood race as a “transnational term, linking slavery, colonialism, Jim Crow and capitalism into a single frame of analysis” (Balthaser, 2016, 16). Informed by a shared experience of race and transcending the limits of their nation, Hughes and other countless Black activists exercised a politics of internationalism in Spain that fits aptly in Bergin’s (2016) definition of back internationalism in the 1930s: “a form of race-centered, anticolonial, anti-fascist, inter-racial class politics” (1-22). Hughes testimony reveals a commitment to a network of international solidarity as a “relation forged through political struggle which seeks to challenge forms of oppression” (Featherstone, 2012, 5).

The Spanish common people, “many of them armed only with courage”

In addition to his inclination toward the racial question, a fondness for reflection beyond the purely informative is detected in his dispatches. This allowed Hughes to masterfully portray “the ‘feel’ of the facts” (Connery, 1995, 211) in order to interpret them from his own perspective. Hughes’s capacity for observation and his sensitivity to portray the human and quotidian are two clearly identifiable aspects of his work as a journalist. It is therefore essential to situate him as a correspondent in a setting in which his work is manifestly different from that of most of his fellow correspondents covering the Spanish conflict.⁸ This distinction helps to understand how Hughes transcended the journalistic reporting, as he did not limit himself to the tasks of documenting and reporting but also of interpreting (Connery, 1990). The question of the quotidian in war journalism is an easily identifiable aspect in Hughes’ dispatches. In the African American press, the ordinary takes on special relevance because news about the Black community has traditionally been excluded from the popular press.⁹ The focus on the everyday makes it impossible for Hughes to avoid observing the daily life of the Spanish civilian population, especially their tenacity and perseverance in the face of wartime misfortune. This portrait of Spain transports us to a politically charged imaginary centered on the ordinary people, whose bravery in times of war is underscored “working people, many of them armed only with courage” (174), and their hospitality to foreigners, “the Spaniards are most hospitable and helpful [...] Generosity seems to be a national characteristic” (171). Likewise, Hughes also identified in the Spanish population the resilience of oppressed populations, their fortitude before adverse circumstances “Madrid so entirely calm and brave in the face of the guns, and the almost daily bombardments” (172) and the determination to continue with their routines “they seldom alter their plans on account of cannon fire” (169). In his dispatch for *The Nation*, Hughes offered a humanized war portrait that underlined the resilience of the madrileños, “resolved to live, not die!” (193) who, like the city’s buildings, “proud but ragged” (192) still

stand despite the aggravation. The madrileños who continue to laugh at the bombs falling around them are reminiscent of the African American people's fortitude in defiance of adversity: "people still laugh in Madrid" (192). The deepening in their routines invites African American readers to establish a relationship of proximity that stems from the empathy they feel for the struggle being waged in Spain. The madrileños who laugh to keep from crying inevitably evoke the voice of Hughes's poem "Homesick Blues" (1926) whose lines read "To keep from cryin' / I opens ma mouth an' laughs" (17-18), (Hughes, Rampersad and Roessel, 1995, 72), and the piece "Laughers" (1922), devoted to his African American peers —"My people / loud-mouthed laughers in the hands / of Fate" (5, 31-32), (28).

Witnessing a society shorn by war, Hughes remarked the joy and optimism inherent in those who did their best to maintain the essence of their social life "Cafes are lively. Long lines wait in front of the theatres and exhibits are packed" (202). A social life that endures, against all odds, the ordinariness of daily life, "it seems strange and amazing to see people going calmly about their business in the streets, the theatres and cafes open, the street car lines running right up to the barricades and the trenches" (171). Madrid's efforts to resist fascism invoke the African American community striving throughout history in a chronology "inextricably linked to concepts of oppression, degradation, racism, hatred, and trauma" (Fernández-Alonso and Barros-del Río, 2019, 91).

Interpreting the Spanish conflict through the lens of race

From the capital, Hughes travelled to locations such as Tarazona, Belchite, Teruel and the Villa Paz Hospital in Saelices (Cuenca) to follow the trail of the African American volunteers of the Lincoln Battalion who would soon become the protagonists of his dispatches. The reason for Hughes' interest in this small group would be manifested in his second dispatch for *The Afro*, where he openly expressed his motivations as a war correspondent in Spain: "Why

had I come to Spain? To write for the coloured press” (161). As a poet-turned-correspondent, Hughes stood out for permeating his dispatches with a celebratory tone of African American culture. In the Spanish war context, Hughes not only identified an exercise of extreme ideologies, but also distinguished the presence of a racial component in its conception ascertaining that the Spanish Civil War was “a European civil war of culture, [and] was also a race war” (Graham, 2005, 44).

Both in Hughes and a great part of the African American collectiveness, the Spanish war powerfully resonated with the Italo-Ethiopian conflict which had broken out a year earlier. Mussolini’s invasion in the only African nation which, with the unique exception of Liberia, had remained independent during the Scramble for Africa, gave rise to the creation of the Provisional Committee for the Defence of Ethiopia in Harlem in 1934, leading to mobilizations and fundraising events. Although these proved futile, Spain was to inherit those causes to later become the symbol of the struggle against the expansion of racism and fascism. Such was his concern with the cause, that shortly after the Italian invasion Hughes wrote the poem “Ballad of Ethiopia” which would be later published in *The Afro* on September 28, 1935. The lines “All you colored peoples / Be a man at last / Say to Mussolini / No! You shall not pass” (Hughes, 1992, 102) would somehow foreshadow the Loyalist self-determination slogan in Spain “No pasarán” (You shall not pass).

Along with the indignation over the invasion of Ethiopia, the threat of German fascism also contributed to stirring the internationalist spirit of many African Americans, especially in the wake of Hitler’s alleged contempt for the African American athlete Jesse Owens at the 1936 Olympics in Berlin. Owens provided an optimal breeding ground for the Black press to associate the racial discrimination at the event with the struggle against international fascism. In fact, in its September 1936 issue, *Crisis* published the short column “Fascism Now Means Something”, a text which drew a parallel between both mechanisms of oppression. “This is as

bad as Mississippi”, it read in its first lines (Lusane, 2003, 273), to later emphasize the determination of African Americans against the detractors of democracy: “Fascism is the last thing American Negroes want. They are not ready to listen to the most intricate explanations of the true evils of fascism” (272). The atmosphere of indignation and repression fed both by the unstoppable advance of colonialism and fascism in Ethiopia, the rise of German Nazism, and the deplorable economic and labor conditions endured in the US at the time, heightened the political significance of the Spanish Civil War for many African Americans. The Spanish crisis “galvanized African diasporic mobilization” (Umoren 2016, 158) and prompted the arrival of approximately ninety Black men to fight on Spanish soil. As Kelley (1996) observes, their inclusion in the North American Abraham Lincoln Battalion was in large part propelled by a political outlook that merged black nationalist and pan-Africanist ideology with a commitment to the Communists’ understanding of internationalism. Significantly remarkable in identifying the tyranny and oppression in both countries were campaign slogans such as “Ethiopia’s fate is at stake on the battlefields of Spain” (Collum, 1992, 132), eliciting the relevance and shared significance of both wars. Although their backgrounds were diverse, most of the Lincoln volunteers were Party members who, as Hughes, “joined the movement out of the concern for black people” (Kelley, 1996, 124) and, as Hughes, interpreted the communist ideology through the lens of race and considered Spain “the battlefield to revenge the attack on Ethiopia” (126).

In this vein, the African American reaction to the Italian invasion of Ethiopia shall be understood as a foreshadowing of their response to Franco’s rebellion in Spain, or as stated by Kelley (1996) as “an extension of the Italo-Ethiopian conflict” (123-124), an invasion whose defense contributed more than any other event to awaken the pan-Africanist consciousness and to internationalize the struggle in the US (Kelley, 1996). The identification of Ethiopia with Spain suggests an engagement with what Featherstone (2013) coined as *maps of grievance* and defined as “the dynamic practices through which political activity makes sense of and brings

into contestation spatially stretched relations of power” (1408). In this sense, Hughes writings on the Spanish Civil War do not only contest Franco’s determination to entrench a fascist regime by correlating it to Mussolini’s colonial interests over Ethiopia, but also to promote the consolidation of the politics of Black internationalism and articulate its connections through the incorporation of a race component that takes center stage.

Just before his arrival in Spain, in the speech *Too Much of Race* (1937) given in Paris during the Second International Writers’ Congress, Hughes provided the first insights on an anti-fascist narrative that would interweave the struggles in Spain and Ethiopia: “Those who have already practiced bombing the little villages of Ethiopia now bomb Guernica and Madrid. The same Fascists who forced Italian peasants to fight in Africa now force African Moors to fight in Europe” (1937, 272). Once in Spain, the thoughtful and humanistic portrayal of the African American volunteers carefully crafted for their race peers on the other side of the Atlantic gives reasonable grounds to believe that Hughes’ aspirations as a journalist in Spain transcended reporting objectively and solely on a conflict at the local level. As he saw it, both global fascism and capitalism were the main factors from which racism emanated, “the structures of global capitalism, of which slavery and colonialism are the most obvious” —as stated by Reid-Pharr (2016, 131). Hughes envisaged in his trip to Spain a new glimmer of hope, an opportunity to fight the fascist threat that followed in the wake of the Italo-Ethiopian conflict. Accordingly, the identification between Spain and Ethiopia soon became patently clear in the comments of the African American volunteers and Black people in Spain that Hughes deliberately incorporated in his dispatches. “I hope these people win their war. Mussolini wants to take over Spain just as he did in Ethiopia, but the way these people feel, I don’t think he’s going to do it” (163) —pointed out Carter, a medical student who travelled with Hughes on the *Aquitania*. “The same Italians who dropped bombs on Ethiopia have come over here to help Franco bomb the Spaniards!” (167) —noted a Guinean boy that Hughes met by chance on the

beach in Valencia. Likewise, this same feeling would eventually be stated in the memoirs of James Yates, an African American volunteer in Spain who, fifty-two years after the conflict testified: “Ethiopia, a Black nation, was part of me” (1989, 95).

The Black internationalist spirit increasingly shaping Hughes’ literary imagery, allowed the author to provide a portrayal of the African American volunteers in Spain which “saw echoes of their own struggles against white supremacists and Jim Crow at home in the Republican’s struggle against Franco” (Bak, 2020, 245). Hughes’ commitment to capturing their experiences did not overlook the extraordinariness of their actions within their essentially ordinary lives that would otherwise have remained anonymous. “Profiles of everyday soldiers who he feels have made a meaningful difference while volunteering for service in Spain,” —as stated by Roiland (2013, 20). Hughes gave an almost heroic characterization of the volunteers, “A different kind of soldier and a different kind of man. The members of the International Brigades” (179) whose virtues the rest of the world would soon know by the transcendence of their actions “those you never read of in any book. (But you will, in due time, no doubt)” (169). By juxtaposing the concepts of anonymity and heroism, Hughes automatically elevated the status of these volunteers who, in a matter of one line, came to be conceived of as reputable and prominent. As Roiland (2013) signals, the amalgamation of these concepts unveils a moral teaching detectable in Hughes’ repertoire when exploring the Spanish civilian population on the Republican side: “those who will do the most good will be those who are the least known” (27). With the purpose of illustrating this identification and bringing the volunteers closer to his readership, Hughes referred to them as *sons*, a term that denotes a common origin on an ideological level: “They come from all over the world, the members of the International Brigades in Spain. [...] All the countries of Europe have sons here in Spain. All the countries of America, too, both the English and Spanish speaking lands” (178).

Aware of the profile of the readership that received his dispatches and of the ideological inclination of *The Afro* — “to promote racial advancement and justice” (Farrar, 1998, xiii)—, Hughes offered a portrait of the African American volunteers that sought to attract, motivate and set an example, and he did so by highlighting their more human and ordinary side. Proof of this can be found in the depictions of Ralph Thornton and Abraham Lewis, two African American volunteers that particularly caught Hughes’ attention. Thornton, to whom Hughes dedicated his tenth dispatch for the *The Afro*, was a former paperboy in Pittsburgh who proved his courage by storming a building with hand grenades and succeeded in holding prisoner the vice-president of the Belchite Falangists. For his part, Lewis took on the task of teaching the Spanish cooks the ABCs of American gastronomy along with some basic notions of kitchen hygiene, a task worthy of mention and which reveals Lewis’s capacity for sacrifice, given that the desire of all the volunteers was to fight, “Very few of the International Brigaders who came to Spain wanted to serve as cooks. They wanted to fight” (186) —as attested by Hughes. However, the author reversed this apparent resignation of Lewis to the tasks assigned by introducing a comment to the benefit of both the volunteer and the organizational body of the Brigades: “He is proud of the opportunity which the International Brigades have given him to make use of his full capacities for organizational and administrative work” (186). In addition to having the skills necessary to run the kitchen, Lewis was one of the many African Americans who openly expressed kindness of his white Spanish colleagues due to the respect they showed him in holding such a responsible position: “Here nobody sneers at a colored person because he has a position of authority. A colored person has a chance to develop here. That’s the kind of comradeship that gets things done!” (187). The inclusion of these statements by Lewis in Hughes’ ninth dispatch for the *The Afro* discloses a moral intention underlying the author’s rationale, as he not only sought to reaffirm the lack of racism in Spain, but also to pass on to his readers Lewis’ spirit of self-improvement in a context of interracial comradeship. The

twinning between the volunteers shows that Hughes did not stop at characterization, but went a step further and resorted to the cultural identification between Spain and the US with the intention of shortening the distance between them. Thus, he placed them in the same ideological canon, ready to fight against autocratic regimes that led to capitalist, racist and antidemocratic systems. To this end, he implemented strategies that managed to twin the Black race represented by the African American volunteers with that other democratic race in Spain (Edwards, 1938), whom Hughes called “the people of Republican Spain” (17).

The depiction of the responsibilities assumed by Abraham Lewis, which Hughes valued as commendable, “no small job for one man” (186), and whose future in the US is even predicted, “when Abraham Lewis comes home, he can no doubt help America achieve that unity. That is what I thought...” (187) conveys a message of hope by turning the volunteer into a figure of salvation. Another instance in this same vein is Hughes’s comment on the humility and bravery of the volunteer Ralph Thornton after participating in the attack of a fascist building and capturing two prisoners in Belchite. Hughes praised Thornton’s humility and interpreted it as modesty after been congratulated for his fearlessness in the battlefield: “no doubt Thornton was pleased, but he was too modest to talk about it to a writer” (189).

Aside from Lewis and Thornton, Hughes also focused his attention in Thaddeus Battle, a young Howard University student interested in improving his French and Spanish in his spare time by “taking time out from books to learn from life” (195) —a hobby that Hughes felt helped dilute the stereotype of ignorance placed upon African Americans. In his twelfth dispatch for *The Afro* “Howard Man Fighting as Spanish Loyalist”, Hughes recalled a conversation he had had with Thornton about black college students’ awareness of issues internationally and in the US. For Hughes, Battle embodied the critique of the need for change in racial politics in the US and the lack of leadership by American institutions of color:

When we see certain things happening in Europe and Asia that may involve

America in another world war, then, and only then, do we see clearly the need for combatting such tendencies at home and abroad. [...] And our color campuses should play a much more vital role in national, and even international affairs, than they have done in the past (195).

Former Cuban baseball player and Harlem resident Basilio Cueria was another of the volunteers who captured Hughes's attention, and his description served the same purpose as that of the aforementioned. After spending five months with the Lincoln Battalion in Jarama, Cueria was under the command of the general nicknamed El Campesino¹⁰ —“Spain's most colorful military man, and in a year and a half of warfare has become almost a folk-hero” (197)— in an all-Spanish volunteer battalion. Hughes recounts that, due to the dark color of his skin, many Spaniards had on occasion mistaken him for Franco's Moroccan soldiers, “but never in an unfriendly way, since the Spaniards have no color feeling about the Moors” (197) confirming, reiteratively, the lack of racial prejudice in Spain.

The portrait of the African American volunteers in positions of responsibility aimed to definitively demolish the false and stereotyped conception of the middle-class Black citizen in the US, apparently incapable of actively contributing to social progress. In this sense, Hughes stressed their diligence and usefulness in Spain willing to occupy any position for the benefit of the Republic:

The colored group must fight it wherever it is found. Opposing it in Spain now as members of the international brigades are colored men in every branch of the military service, as officers, as soldiers, as scouts, as transport workers, as teachers in the Brigade training schools (181).

The sacrifice and heroism of the African American volunteers is a source of fascination

for Hughes and it is evidently expressed in the portrayal of their struggle and empowerment in the fragments already cited. However, this exploration is not an isolated case, for Hughes magnified and paid homage to all volunteers in the International Brigades in his poetic work as well. The lines “That from your death / New life will grow” (9-10), “Human seed / From freedom’s birth” (19, 20) of the poem “Tomorrow’s Seed” (1952), (Hughes, Rampersad and Roessel, 1995, 431) suggest that their death will not have been in vain, and their courage will be reincarnated in the seed of universal freedom, emphasizing, once again, their saving role. In the poem “Hero-International Brigade” (1952), Hughes adopted the voice of a volunteer killed in combat and insists on honoring his death in the name of a shared struggle and dream whose flame is not extinguished by death “Our dream / My death / Your life / Our blood! / One flame!” (39-43), (431-32).

Despite the power of attraction they exerted on Hughes, the African American volunteers are not the only racialized characters who feature prominently in his dispatches. Before his arrival in Spain, Hughes was already aware of the presence of Moroccan troops fighting with Franco, “I knew that Spain once belonged to the Moors, a colored people ranging from light dark to dark white. Now the Moors have come again to Spain with the fascist armies as cannon fodder for Franco” (161). Hughes’ first encounter with one of these soldiers occurred during a visit to the hospital with Chicago’s *Daily News* correspondents Leland Stowe and Dick Mowrer, whom Hughes had accompanied to cover the Battle of Brunete. Near the end of an empty corridor a figure suddenly burst around a corner and startled him: “one of the darkest, tallest men I have ever seen in my life. [...], the sudden sight of this very dark face almost startled me out of my wits” —he would recall with hindsight (1956, 349). The description of the encounter published in *The Volunteer for Liberty* was expanded in his second autobiography, and exudes the embarrassment Hughes experienced after having been startled by the presence of this man whom he considered to be of his own race.¹¹ In examining the

situation of these Moroccan soldiers, Hughes pointed to the heterogeneity of the construct of race as he sought to unseat its traditional binary conception. Initially, Hughes conceived and pictured these soldiers as victims: “the Moors die in Spain, men, women, and children, victims of Fascism” (157). Despite this, he could not escape the shaping of an identification with their shared skin color, an aspect he also reflected in his poem “Letter from Spain” (1937): “We captured a Moor today. / He was just as dark as me. / I said, Boy, what you been doin’ here / Fighting against the free?” (2-5), (Hughes, Rampersad and Roessel, 1995, 201-02). In the set of opposites that Hughes maintained throughout his dispatches, these Moroccan soldiers are the discordant piece, “the one component that did not fit into this neat arrangement of opposites”, (Girón Echevarría, 2005, 97). However, Hughes could not help feeling drawn to them given their shared race: “the Moors, who are my own color” (157). In fact, Hughes’s fascination with the circumstances of these soldiers and his political passions “were nowhere more apparent than when addressing the subject of Franco’s Moorish troops, brought over from Morocco” (13). In this regard, Kelley (1994) notes the particularity of Hughes’ leaning among the group of correspondents: “[Hughes] who probably devoted more energy to understanding the role of North Africans in the conflict than any other contemporary observer’ (338). Likewise, Sharpe (2018) highlights the relevance of the examination of these troops in linking the relationship between Spain and African communities in the diaspora: “these poetic and journalistic depictions of blackness and colonial subordination in Spanish and Moroccan contexts constitute a recursive, multifaceted view of Spain’s relationship to the African diaspora” (101).¹² By delving into the circumstances of these Moroccan troops, Hughes provided a unique testimony on two crucial aspects of the civil war: the coexistence of different linguistic and cultural codes in Spain and the racial dimension of the conflict (Soto, 2014). Through this exploration, he highlighted the importance of a battle that is not fought in the name of race, but in the name of the union of soldiers and workers —white and black— with a common goal. By establishing

an identification between the African American volunteers and the Spanish people fighting for a shared goal, and characterizing the Moroccan soldiers as victims, Hughes sought to reassess the traditional ideas implanted by colonial ideology. Starting from the damage at the individual level, the author manages to transfer the cruelty of the conflict to international dimensions and to equate the anti-fascist struggle in Spain to an issue of international importance against the same enemy. Furthermore, his dispatches contest received notions of race and culture based on colonial precepts. Reid-Pharr (2016) justifies the relevance of the connection among Americans, Spanish and Africans asserting that the efforts of the two first have been central to “disrupt the sophistry underwriting the idea of a white Europe and a black African” (131) and thus symbolize an endeavor “to restructure received notions of geographic and cultural distinction” (131).

Hughes’ ideological affiliation to the Republic and the inescapable inclination for the racial question evidenced in the above citations did not limit his interest to the African American volunteers. The sharpness of his observation skills aroused his curiosity about the Roma people in Spain, to whom he referred in his dispatches as “copper-colored gypsies” (166) who “are common everywhere” (166).¹³ The examination of this collective testifies to Hughes’s sensitivity to the gradations of color and evidenced that, in his imaginary, race is not static or hermetic, but rather subjective. Nevertheless, Hughes limits this exploration to his poetic repertoire, in which the poems “Song of Spain” (1937), “Girl” (undated) and “Madrid Celebrates Russia’s Twenty Years” (undated) stand out. These pieces exhibit Hughes’ intention to bridge the gap between the Roma and the African American culture not only through the racial aspect, but also through associations at a cultural level while showing “his interest in linking the histories of diasporic communities” (Donlon and Scaramella, 2019, 564).

Conclusion

Adopting an evidently personal and subjective vision biased by his personal and ideological perception of the conflict, Hughes showed himself unambiguous about his affiliations and the driving forces for his reporting to *The Afro*. From his first dispatch, his motivations and focus of interest in war-torn Spain are openly stated. These led to the introduction of the characters that would soon become the protagonists of his dispatches: the African American volunteers of the Lincoln Battalion and the Moroccan soldiers fighting on Francoist side, and are testament to the attachment the notion of race causes in him. Hughes' desire to paint an ordinary portrait of both the volunteers and the soldiers steered at humanizing their profiles. While doing so, he succeeded at giving an account of a country that, despite being besieged and devoured by war refuses to lose its sense of joy; invoking the strength and resilience of the oppressed civilians embroiled in the calamity of war. In his dispatches, Hughes displayed an inclination to picture the everyday, channeled through his interpretation of the war through the lens of race and political ideology that pervades all his reporting, thus earning the alias of "flâneur-of-the-frontline" (Roiland, 2013, 21).

Hughes' membership in a traditionally oppressed group, whose circumstances of subordination stretch back centuries to their arrival as chattel slaves, endows him with a vulnerability and sensitivity to the plight of oppressed people worldwide. Settled in Spain as a war reporter, his works on the Civil War are testament to his prolificity and literary versatility but also to his sensitivity to all oppressed minorities. Beginning with trauma, Hughes managed to situate the conflict internationally, and through his reporting showed that the local and specific struggle in Spain had parallels with his racial community, and transcended its national boundaries. Hughes conveyed to his readership the commonalities he detected among the civil conflict in Spain, the systemic racism in the US, and the preceding invasion of Ethiopia by Italian troops, thus motivating his audience to become agents of their own process of change.

In order to do so, he is compelled to develop a repertoire loaded with description that not only instructs, but also stimulates, transforms and pursues the liberation of oppressed populations, including his own. Making a virtue of this necessity, Hughes introduces a series of strategies to achieve this: conveying the messages by way of characterization of the protagonists of his dispatches, the African American volunteers, the Moroccan soldiers and the Spanish civilians, and, to a lesser extent, through his subjective contributions based on his observations. At the same time, and guided by his inescapable nature always on the quest for answers to complex questions, Hughes's dispatches succeed at amplifying and strengthening Black international connections embodying the profile of the "Negro reporter" raised by Prattis (1946): "a fighting partisan" (274).

Equally important, Hughes journalistic travel accounts help restructure general notions of the transatlantic narrative between Spanish, African Americans and Africans. His dispatches prove that he resisted to believe "that there is a clear distinction between the most vicious aspects of slavery, colonialism, and white supremacy and a sort of preciously maintained official culture" (Reid-Pharr, 2016, 131) and undoubtedly certify the potential of travel writing to erase that abstract distinction. By exercising international solidarity, a central practice of the Black left, Hughes shaped political contestation and placed a radical Black agency at the forefront at a time when that often meant making "connections with a variety of struggles whose relationships to the daily horrors of racism was on the face of it quite oblique" (Bergin 2021, 256).

Hughes' repertoire on Spain substantiates the relevance of travel both as a tool to define and shape black internationalism in the late 30s and to strengthen solidarities at the international level. His ideological resistance to struggles against multiple forms of despotism and tyranny on different fronts with different names, i.e. Jim Crow, Nazism in Europe or Ethiopian's invasion, brought him to committedly adhere to the Spanish war against fascism, surprisingly

when “stresses of racial domination would seem to have encouraged resignation or cynicism in the fate of yet another Western war” (Rasberry, 2016, 53). Hughes’ dispatches, poems and radio broadcasts on Spain give recognition of the potential of travel to provide, on the one hand, a source of information that constitutes an archive of international solidarity and, on the other, a device to understand and expand the scope of Black internationalism. Additionally, the centrality of Hughes’ travels throughout Spain incorporate a critical discussion of the benefit of travel for personal, ideological and political development, reflecting the potential of travel both for the individual self and for the establishment and consolidation of social and political networks worldwide.

Notes

¹ The use of this binomial in Hughes’s work is not limited to his repertoire on Spain. The author resorts to the imaginary of light and shadow in his earliest poetry to confront the experiences of oppression endured by the black race through shadows and the coping mechanisms associated with the resilient nature of the African American collective through light. A more detailed analysis of this play of opposites can be found on pp. 101-102 of Fernández-Alonso and Barros-del Río’s (2019) work.

² Further page references of this frequently quoted volume will be given parenthetically in the text.

³ Pastora María Pavón Cruz, better known by her stage name, was one of the few artists who did not join the nationalist side and who remained faithful to its ideology. As Hughes (1956) points out, “she refused to leave the city she loved” (332).

⁴ Placing Hughes' reporting style within the field of literary journalism highlights his role as a champion of oppressed societies, a storyteller of communities that tend to go unnoticed, and a mediator in the conception of a community's symbolic image. Hughes' profile as a literary journalist fits aptly with the characteristics of the African American press of the time, in showing a reality usually not covered by the American white print media, engaging in advocacy and, most importantly, employing subjectivity as a guiding principle. Hughes' unabashed ideological affiliation to the Spanish Republic prevented him from portraying an objective reporting on the civil conflict.

⁵ In *I Wonder as I Wander*, Hughes (1956) attributes this quote to Federico García Lorca (387).

⁶ In *The Big Sea*, Hughes (1993) describes how he fell a victim to this social stigma. Working in Toluca (Mexico) as a teacher, one of his white American classmates is surprised to find an African American teaching. "At the end of the first day, she said: 'Ah never come across an educated Ne-gro before' [...] I said: 'They have a large state college for colored people in Arkansas, so there must be some educated ones there'. She said: 'Ah, reckon so, but Ah just never saw one before'" (79).

⁷ "Madrid, how well you resist the bombardments! The people of Madrid laugh at the bombs!" (own translation).

⁸ The figure of the war correspondent during the Spanish Civil War has been amply studied and recognized (Deacon, 2008; Preston, 2009; Hochschild, 2016, among others). The rise of fascism in Europe and the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War stimulated the rise of a generation of intellectual writers who acquired a commitment and an active social attitude "responding to the rise of totalitarianism, violence, persecutions, and ideological conflicts (Mascaro, 2018, 176).

⁹ Like most of the minority press, the African American was focused on the everyday and focused on covering events ignored by the more popular press, mainly news related to the activities and achievements of the collective (Wallace, 2005). Coverage of this type of content, sometimes labelled “literary populism” (Roiland, 2013, 20), allowed black readers to link their concerns at the local level to issues affecting communities globally.

¹⁰ Valentín González, better known by his nickname El Campesino, was a communist military man appointed general of militias in the republican army.

¹¹ This passage connects with Hughes’ account (1993) in *The Big Sea* of his first voyage to Africa on a merchant ship in 1923, when the Africans of Liberia call him white and are surprised, but in reverse, by the lightness of his skin tone.

¹² On this topic, Blackburn’s (1998) work is worth mentioning. The scholar situates Spain in the history of the African diaspora and highlights its pioneering role in slavery and the development of the concept of race, asserting that the North American colonists “were very much aware of the Spanish practice of African slavery” (156).

¹³ Part of Hughes’s literary inclination towards the Roma people and their aesthetic draws from the influence of Lorca’s work, an author who, as Aguasaco (2018) points out, was considered “the central link though which many American artists and intellectuals would articulate their vision of Spain in the twentieth century” (13).

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