

**Juan Latino:  
Racial, Gender, Religious, and Social State Interdictions in Early Modern Spain**

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Juan Latino's (1518–c. 1594/1596), known as a prominent Afro-Spanish humanist who lived in 16th-century in Spain, was born to a mother who was an African slave and an unknown father. Born himself as a slave, Latino managed to become an outstanding Latin professor and writer, which granted him fame in Spain at the time and decades after his death. His Latin verses were praised by Miguel de Cervantes in the introductory verses to *El Quijote*, among others, and his love relationship to Ana de Carleval is mentioned by Lope de Vega in some famous verses in *La dama boba* in 1613. Furthermore, Latino's fame made him the main subject of Diego Ximénez Enciso's 17th Century play, *Juan Latino* (1652). Juan's merits were apparent early on, so by the time he finished his studies, he was already known as "Juan Latino"; Juan, the Latin expert (Martín Casares 2016, 175). Latino soon became professor of Latin at the Cathedral of Granada, considered at the time part of University of Granada, and he published his creative works in Latin in two books, culmination of his career, in 1573 and 1576. Among their pages, we find *Austrias Carmine*, work so many authors considered the most original account of this legendary battle of Lepanto, and which is an extensive poem which praises John of Austria, illegitimate son of Charles V and admiral of the Spanish fleet at this battle (Martín Casares 2016, 177).

This research on Juan Latino's life and work focuses on political, cultural, and social spaces in which Spanish African men and women appear as discursive subjects in dialogue with others, with a different degree of social recognition, despite harsh general conditions for black Africans in early modern and modern Spain. The present study will suggest that, beyond individual abilities and efforts, distinctive hierarchical combinations in Spanish social, cultural, and political early modern paradigm may allow some room for their personal growth despite racist barriers against black people. Juan Latino was protected first by a member of the highest nobility, condition which has granted truly exceptional privileges at different points in Spanish history until at least the 20th-century. Moreover, Latino was protected by the highest religious authorities in his city of Granada, probably at first as a consequence of direct or indirect recommendation by his noble protectors, but soon as a result of Juan Latino's social abilities, remarkable intellectual talent, and useful and dependable religious fervor. Finally, Juan Latino was a black or North African man, not a woman. Some circumstances may help alternatively Spanish black men or women although living in highly constricting conditions, but access to an intellectual or artistic prestige was denied to black women, not even as an exception to be praised and associated with.

The extraordinary social and professional success of Latino, who was able to show his remarkable academic skills and knowledge as a Latin professor and writer, can be also analyzed through the social, religious, and gender hierarchies of the time. It is important to consider the interactions of these normative categories in order to analyze Juan Latino and other Spanish-African men and women not as mere victims, but as people willing to use any opportunity to support and advance themselves. The work of feminist historians on medieval and early modern women could inspire us in that direction. Furthermore, it is helpful to explore dialogical approximations by artists and writers such as Diego Velázquez or Miguel de Cervantes, who actually reflected and gave some room to black subjectivities during this period. More sympathetic

views towards black men and women, such as the ones by Velázquez, Cervantes, or the anonymous author of *The Life of Lazarillo de Tormes and of His Fortunes and Adversities* (1554), can be explained by the relative autonomous nature of their artistic work as well by the historical conditions experienced by each of them as well. For example, Olga Barrios mentions that several writers were descendants of Jewish converts, so they might have some first-hand knowledge of unjust and cruel treatment by Spanish society (303).

There are few representations of black men and women in 16th and 17th-century Spanish painting, even less if we exclude nativity scenes with the three wise men, but black people were a common presence in some Southern Spanish cities such as Seville or Granada. This absence, particularly when common people were represented, speaks of an symbolic erasure which parallels the lowest social position they often occupied. Their use in Spanish theater was more frequent, but it does not contradict the tendency to silence black subjectivities: black characters were used as comic figures of primitive intelligence or as vehicles of Spanish national and religious pride. Still, the described situation was not always the same: there was an gradual evolution that increased in time the identification of black women and men with slavery. Moreover, there were other social intersections and human exchanges (forced or natural ones), gaps or contradictions that could be used by black men and women to improve their lives. Approaching Juan Latino from this paradoxical perspective enriches his achievements and allows us to have a closer look to black African lives in early modern Spain.

In considering Juan Latino, specialists had emphasized both his exceptional talent and the encouragement and protection from duke of Sessa, his owner, as main reasons for his remarkable success. His protector was no less than Gonzalo Fernández de Córdoba II, grandchild of national hero “El Gran Capitan”, first duke consort of Sessa. Latino was allowed to study alongside his young owner in Granada and soon his talent distinguished him from others. His ability to master social and political relationships is also mentioned as one of his outstanding qualities, which partially explains the direct and continuous protection by archbishop Pedro Guerrero. In sum, he was born as a slave, like his mother, but he became a famous professor of Latin at University of Granada, married a white woman from nobility, and lived a long peaceful life with his wife and four children a long life in the city of Granada, particularly after he secured his position at the University, a professorship he maintained for over sixty years. By the time he received his academic degree, he was a free man according to his own words (*Juan Latino* 129).

According to Aurelia Martín Casares, the most comprehensive specialist on Juan Latino nowadays, Andalusian society seemed to be more tolerant to difference in skin color than what it would be in the 18th Century, when being black was synonymous of slave in Spanish Antilles, and there was scarce memory of the Homeric Ethiopia (2016, 124). Nevertheless, as a slave, Latino could not have studied at any school in normal circumstances, and his life and work would have been determined by any need his owner may have at all times. He would have continued his life as a slave at least for decades to come. Even if Martín Casares’ hypothesis is correct and Juan Latino was likely the natural son of one of the men inside the highly distinguished family, forced sexual intercourse with slave women was common and legally acceptable and the biological relationship frequently did not provide any advantage to the following Afro-Spanish son or daughter (2016, 47-48). Olga Barrios also points out to a gradual negative consideration of Black Africans in Spain, however, in any case, it still meant a perception that would hinder or preclude the association of Black African origin with intellectual intelligence. She reminds us that 16th-century Spanish theater diminished and/or praised stereotyped Black Africans through “el habla

de negro” or “black talk” (288), although dialectal variations caused by learning Spanish as a second language were not as common as it happened at earlier times (288).

Along the same lines, Jeremy Lawrance emphasizes social experience and a gradual negative consideration of Black Africans as domestic slaves behind black characters in 17th-century Spanish Literature. Therefore, the historic character and protagonist Juan de Mérida in *La gran comedia de el valiente negro en Flandes* (before 1634), is praised by his heroic contribution as a soldier against William I, Prince of Orange (he became captain and obtained noble status in real life), but the “gracioso” or funny character is a slave who maintains inferiority Black stereotypes by his dialectal representation (77). Francisco de Quevedo in *La hora de todos y la fortuna con seso* (1634-35) satirized Black slaves, and incidentally Jews, for not recognizing their inferiority by nature (77). Consequently, despite recognizing differences between the 16th and 17th-centuries, Juan Latino continues to embody a paradox.

We can also redirect this paradox and affirm that Juan Latino’s difficulties and achievements speak of systemic contradictions within Spanish society. More precisely and following the information provided by past research, we can conclude that high nobility superseded race to a decisive extent. The young duke of Sessa’s wish for Juan Latino to have an academic future prevailed over racial interdictions. It should not be a great surprise, nobility’s extensive privileges in early modern Spain helps us to understand, for example, Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz (1648-1695) or Catalina de Erauso (1585 or 1592-1650). De la Cruz was temporary protected by the Viceroy and Vicereine of New Spain, so despite her high-rank enemies in the Catholic Church, she could carry out with her studies and creative work for some time and being published in Spain. Similar reasons can explain, perhaps not exclusively, the lenient punishment and subsequent pardon of noblewoman Catalina de Erauso for her gender and sexual defiance, escaping her convent in San Sebastián at age fifteen, and crossdressing as a Spanish male soldier. Once she confessed her previous identity as Catalina, she quickly became the famous the "Lieutenant Nun" and was rewarded for her gender transgression with a soldier's pension from the Spanish monarch Philip IV and dispensation from Pope Urban VIII to continue dressing in men's clothing.

Religious norms were also markedly present in Juan Latino’s life as well as those of de la Cruz and Erauso, none of them defied Catholicism per se, they believed and/or use Catholic doctrine in their own advantage whenever possible. Juan Latino, as Martín Casares reminds us, showed a high degree of social integration, and repeatedly identified himself as an Christian Ethiopian (Martín Casares 2016, 124). Finally, individual will and exceptional talent are equally important as to explain achievements of these historic figures. Individual creative autonomy, particular in the artistic works of Latino and de la Cruz was key.

Undoubtedly, Latino was deeply committed to Catholic views and institutions which will coincide with the popular representation of Black Africans as sincere and devote converted Christians. As Annete I. Dunzo points out, “Blacks of Subsaharan African origin in Spain: image in the Theater (1500-1700)” Black Africans clearly received more positive representations than Jews and Muslims in Spanish theater (288-89), as spokespersons of national values, however as Barrios emphasizes, that it did not eliminate their frequent racist literary treatment.

The fact that religion played a more prominent role than race to define Spanish national identity at the time also helped Latino, who could become a champion for Catholicism far from Judaism, Islam, and Protestantism. Although of limited effect, as Barrios points out, Latino was able to use common concepts during Middle Ages, still familiar in his time, such as his alleged Ethiopian origin. Well-versed in classic literature, Latino claimed to be born Ethiopian since doing

so granted him discursive superiority in regards to black slaves but also, even momentarily, white free men as well. In the 16th-century, it was still believed there was a Christian Ethiopian prince whose kingdom was located in Africa, that will help Europeans to get rid of the infidels (Martín Casares 2016, 119-20). Enrique Martínez López and Martín Casares emphasize that Latino was the first black European to express to describe ironically white individuals (Martínez Lopez, 20; Martín Casares 2016, 119), affirming that white people were unpleasant to the eye in Ethiopia, kings and nobles were black, in that kingdom and black color was always present, whereas white foreigners were scorned (*In catholicum & invictissimum regem Philipum Elegia per Magistrum Ionannem Latinum* (1576).

In clear contrast, by being slaves or often assumed to be ones, Black African men and women were often invisible as individuals in dominant social discourses; they were susceptible of extreme corporal punishment and had little say as to their destiny at all times. Similarly to what Mary Beard described for Roman slaves, owners' disdain and sadism equaled their fear and anxiety about their dependence on slaves and an imagined vulnerability (330). We can exemplify this vulnerability and contempt for slaves during this time in Spain with a quote from Ximénez Enciso's play, in which Professor Villanueva, rival of Latino for the permanent academic position, states: "los esclavos no son hombres; / son nada, son cuerpos muertos; slaves are not men; /they are nothing, they are dead bodies<sup>1</sup>" (Barrios, 268, 293.) Therefore, Juan Latino comes across in Spanish history as a formidable Afro-Spanish humanist: a black freed man who, despite common ideas, overcame his rival and got his tenure, and in time his prestige and fame became commonly known so that king Philip II commissioned Latino's portrait to be shown alongside of other wise men's portraits at Alcazar Real of Madrid, although we only have notice through an assets inventory of 1636 (*Juan Latino* 177).

*Austrias Carmen*, Juan Latino's most important literary work, presents a long and detailed laudatory account of the Battle of Lepanto from the Spanish perspective, a two-book epic poem, which seeks to follow Virgil's model. By recreating this war episode he asserts his abilities and usefulness to the nation, his worship to Spanish kings and his pious reverence to Catholic faith. It constitutes a constant praise of Spanish righteous superiority, and it highlights the Turks as despicable and evil, deserving a complete humiliation: "Los hispanos vencedores no dan crédito a su triunfo, ni los turcos soportan que se les llame vencidos en el mar/ Triumphant Spanish cannot believe their victory nor Turkish can bear to be called defeated ones on the sea" ; "Los turcos y los nuestros confiesan que Dios es el vencedor/ Turkish soldiers and ours confess that God is the winner (140-41)." Latino continuously insists in Turkish malevolent nature, "las fuerzas de los persas están totalmente aniquiladas, la cólera demente del Tirano destruida por las armas hispanas/ Persian forces are completely annihilated, the Tirant's insane fury is crushed by Spanish forces" (170-71). Simultaneously, Latino portrays citizens and priests, young men and virtuous maidens happily celebrating all over the city of Granada, the leader for this victory, Don Juan de Austria or John Joseph of Austria, and his soldiers: "alaban al vencedor y les veía cantar alegres por toda la ciudad/they praise the victorious and they are seen happily singing throughout the city (170)."

In *Austrias Carmen*, Latino also shows some compassion towards Turkish forces, particularly in their most terrible hours: "Los barcos turcos estaban llenos de cadáveres; los remeros aparecen colgados, cosa terrible de decir/Turkish ships were full of corpses, rowers were hung, something awful to say." Then he mentions that among the defeated it is possible to see ripped body parts, slopped eyes, a bloodshed paddles, and the unarmed mob, el "populacho desarmado" is ready to loot Turkish ships with sly greed, "furtiva codicia" (140-41). Although, as

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<sup>1</sup> All translations in this article are mine.

Elizabeth Wright maintains, Latino could be portraying Muslims and Christians realities closely intertwining in the Mediterranean at the time<sup>2</sup>, we could also say that Latino's empathy enhances Spanish heroism by showing some mercy. He would be following past epic examples, and also establishing himself as an author capable of worthy literary subtleties. Overall, we can conclude that *Austrias Carmen* as well as other of Latino's achievements or accomplishments shows him with a high degree of social integration.

At the same time, it is important to look at Latino beyond his academic and literary work, since he was an individual who managed to use inconsistencies and contradictions regarding race and slavery during the 16th-century, so we are able to take into account lives and activities of Afro-Spanish men and women not as mere passive victims, but as individuals with different achievements despite difficulties. In this regard, recent research, in particular that of Martín Casares, brings to us as a richer, nuanced representation of Afro-Spanish men and women in 16th-century Granada, that goes beyond a Latino's biography. Latino-Carleval family had their house in an alley behind Saint Anne's Church, and close to Chancillería, court with jurisdiction over territories below Tajo river (Martín Casares 2016, 102-03), it was a neighborhood mostly populated by Christians with urban professions. More importantly for our or topic, slaves and emancipated slaves worked as maids, particularly in the church's vicinity. According to Martín Casares, the 1561 Census points to 51 slaves in Latino's neighborhood, 34 women and 17 men (no specific race), 807 slaves in the city central areas, but we have also to emphasize an important presence of Afro-Spanish emancipated slaves in Granada. Martín Casares mentions several cases of emancipated slaves living together and supporting themselves with their work: in the vicinity of San Matías church, Catalina Hernández, laundress, shared her home with Cecilia Hernández, who traded wool; Juan Ruiz, water vendor, lived with his wife in "Santa Escolástica", and in the same neighborhood, a white shopkeeper was seemingly married to a black woman (Martín Casares 2016, 105).

### **Afro-Spanish Portraits by Velázquez, Cervantes and *El Lazarillo***

Examples of Afro-Spanish women and men living as free individuals does not deny terrible general conditions for most Black Afro-Spanish people, but it adds individual agency as a possibility, to some degree, for all. In this sense, Afro-Spanish men and women in early modern Spain should not be represented as mere passive and invisible victims. Unfortunately, there is a lack of personal accounts of what it was like to live as a slave in early modern Spain, even Juan Latino's artistic portrait is lost to us, a painting we only have indirect notice. Juan Latino does include in his literary works some powerful statements about himself, but very brief ones. Therefore, other contemporary artistic representations of Afro-Spanish men and become even more important. These literary and visual portraits reflect cultural paradigms and prejudice against black people, and they also may offer gaps and interstices from which new responses arise; artistic works are characterized in this sense for being relatively autonomous, since each creative work is original, as German philosopher Markus Gabriel states (*Power of Art*).

In particular, works of one visual artist and two writers in early modern Spain will help us to approach Afro-Spanish men and women as real, living, complex subjects under difficult circumstances, and in this sense, to Juan Latino. Some of Spanish Diego Velázquez's paintings offer invaluable examples of the dialogue between the artist and his/her time and its people. His

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<sup>2</sup> Wright considers the poem's emotional highpoint is placed on the death of the admired Ottoman admiral, Ali Pasha. Spanish troops display his severed head as a trophy on the captured Turkish flagship, and his two sons lament this terrible sight (71).

creative work, as well as the literary work of Miguel de Cervantes and that of the anonymous author of *Lazarillo de Tormes* (1554) show us Afro-Spanish men and women as humans who look back at us, live, wish, could be proud or submissive, sad or happy, and try to survive while suffering or taking advantage of the different social dispositions at the time.

During Velázquez's time, the city of Seville had the second largest slave population in Europe, men and women of Black African heritage constituted a 10 percent of the city's population, and African women often were slaves serving upper and middle classes. This is a reality directly alluded in Velázquez's *Supper at Emmaus* (1617-18), and its secular variant, the *Kitchen Servant* (1617-23). The first work represents a young woman of black heritage, seemingly a maid working in the kitchen, but the scene is also accompanied by the mentioned biblical scene. On the painting's left-hand side we can see Christ dining with his disciples at Emmaus, who finally recognize the Lord; simultaneously, the young black maid is in central position, in closer and bigger view to us.



*Supper at Emmaus*, ca. 1617-18, Dublin, National Gallery of Ireland

In both religious and secular versions, the black young woman inclines her head and seems to half turned and listened to the biblical voices or, in the case with no religious reference, to an unknown someone. Either as a slave or freed laborer, because of her African heritage and occupation, she would inhabit the lowest positions in Spanish society, so it makes sense Velázquez's portrait of her, showing submission, but actively watching and listening in a half disguised form.



*Kitchen Servant*, ca. 1617-23. The Art Institute of Chicago, Robert Waller Memorial Fund.

We can safely state that Velázquez portrays a black kitchen maid, who uses his hands for heavy work and protects and hides herself while she senses the world around her. Someone like her, an Afro-Spanish enslaved or free woman, even if she was as talented as Juan Latino, would not have the possibility to become an outstanding humanist like him or a respected painter like Juan de Pareja (1606-1670). She was not only black African or perhaps of Northern African descent, she was a woman, apparently unable to possess any prominent intellectual capability, therefore high social prestige was not possible for her, not even as an exceptional case such as Latino and Pareja.

Juan de Pareja, slave and assistant to Diego Velázquez, was painted by Velázquez himself. In this mid 17th-century painting, Pareja is found wearing rich clothing and with an upfront and confident disposition. Velázquez signed a contract of manumission that would liberate him from bondage in 1654 and Pareja worked since then as an independent painter who reached certain prestige with his portraits and large-scale religious subjects. No black woman would reach such honors at the time, not even as exceptions to the general rule, gender may add an additional injustice.



*Juan de Pareja*, 1650. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City.

The gender distinction will be also apparent in a Velázquez's parallel work. *Christ in the House of Martha and Mary* (1618), painted around the same time as *Kitchen Servant*, has similar dimensions and a framed religious scene on one side. We may interpret the central scene following the biblical narrative, however there is also Velázquez's particular choice of protagonists to impersonate that episode: one very young woman, dressing as a humble woman, possibly a maid preparing a meal and using a mortar, with strong and skin-irritated hands, looking sadly and

desperately at us, while an old lady, possibly a “dueña” or housekeeper, admonishes and controls her as she stays remarkably close from behind and poses her hand and finger to tutor or discipline her. Both young black and white maids endured, although, not exclusively, a patriarchal gender and sexual hierarchy. Nevertheless, it is important to notice that the young white maid is daring to look at us more directly.



*Christ in the House of Martha and Mary*, 1618. London, National Gallery

Diego Velázquez’s *Adoration of the Magi* (1619), will powerfully exemplify as well why a black Afro-Spanish man could decide to emphasize his connection to a mythical biblical narrative like Juan Latino did, since it represented a black man wearing lavish garments as part of a foundational religious story.



*Adoration of the Magi*, 1619. Madrid, Museo del Prado

In addition to Velázquez's works, other 16th and 17th-century Spanish painters illustrate the common presence of Afro-Spanish men and women in southern cities such as Seville and Granada and the difficulties of survival. That is the case with the following paintings by Bartolomé Esteban Murillo. In the first painting, a black man plays or fights with a white man in the famous Sevillian Alameda de Hércules, while other men do the same. In the second painting, a very young black Afro-Spanish boy who appears to be selling water to white peasants or vagrant boys who do not want to share their food and alleviate his similar misfortune.



*View of the Alameda de Hércules* (1650), Seville, Anonymous. Madrid, Colección Abelló



*Two peasant boys and a Negro boy* (1670), Bartolomé Esteban Murillo. London, Dulwich Picture Gallery

These previous three paintings do not depict Afro-Spanish individuals as subjects, distinctive men or women with a life of their own, as it happens with *Kitchen Servant* and Juan de Pareja's portrait. These Velázquez's paintings speak not only of his commitment to religious mores at the time, but they also establish a dialogue with his "real-life" models as much as writers in works such as the anonymous *The Life of Lazarillo de Tormes and of His Fortunes and Adversities* (1554), *The Jellous Extremaduran* (1613) by Miguel de Cervantes, or the Galley-slaves episode in the first part of *Don Quixote* (1605).

Francisco Rico believed that the only episode in *Lazarillo de Tormes* we should consider unrealistic was the one that presents the "de facto union" between Lázaro's mother and Zaide, an African slave who took care of horses for his owner. According to Rico, no one would have admitted that relationship in the 16th century; however, Lázaro's affection towards this man he calls stepfather and his little half-brother, and the strong alliance among all family members in order to survive actually represent a recognition, a mutual appreciation among Lázaro, Zaide and his very young mulatto brother. In addition, the archival research of specialists such as Martín Casares proves Rico's theory wrong; as we have seen, there real-life examples to contradict him.

Baltasar Fra Molinero's analysis agrees and expands Rico's approach, since he states that *Lazarillo* represents the most clamorous case of Black invisibilization in European literature at the time (Fra Molinero 2014, 14-15.) Molinero highlights a general practice in Spanish early modern literature that erases black subjects by assimilating to white ones, with black characters desperately wanting to become white (Fra Molinero 2014, 14-15). It is easy to agree that social inferiority of black men and women does not disappear and determines Lázaro's perception in *Lazarillo*. At first he is afraid of Zaide because of his skin color and intimidating expression; his little brother is also afraid when he sees him, so Lázaro concludes that many people in the world run from others because they do not see themselves. Nevertheless, the loyal and affectionate relationship among all family members is only stopped from outside, when Zaide's petty thefts, from which they all get by, are discovered. We know those inter-ethnic relationships happened, and Lázaro shows us one credible one.

We should still agree with Fra Molinero that 16 and 17th-century Spanish literature frequently denies humanity to black characters, by assimilating to white Spaniards or by representing them with intellectual a physical, moral, intellectual, and ontological inferiority. On the other hand, Afro-Spanish men and women received a more complex treatment in *Lazarillo* and works by Velázquez and Cervantes, perhaps by other artists as well, a portrait which does not deny Afro-Spanish men and women their humanity, even if the literary or social context, or precisely some of the characters, may do exactly that. Lázaro recognizes Zaide as his stepfather, a "poor slave" who brings all he steals from his owner to support his family, including his little brother, Zaide's son: "con todo esto acudía a mi madre para criar a mi hermanico/ he went to my mother with all of it to raise my little brother (9)." And yes, Lázaro said just before that if his younger brother saw himself as black, he would flee horrified: "¡Cuántos debe haber en el mundo que huyen de otros porque no se ven a sí mismos! / how many people must be in our world who run from others because they do not see themselves for what they are! (8).

Gender is also a variant we really need to take into consideration to analyze *El Lazarillo* as well as Juan Latino's achievements and limitations. Zaide is the one who has regular although scarce access to food or goods, not Lázaro's mother; Zaide is the one risking his life by stealing from his owner. Paintings and literary works showed a consistent paradigm of race and gender intertwined. As we can see in Cervantes's works as well, race and gender paradigms in early

modern Spain consistently point to a perturbing lack of individual freedom, a more horrendous one if applying to race, aggravated if combined.

The Galley-slaves episode in *Don Quixote* by Miguel de Cervantes (part 1, chapter xxii) shows an engaging critique of slavery; after he liberates them, don Quijote states “porque me parece duro caso hacer esclavos a los que Dios y naturaleza hizo libres/ because it seems a harsh case to slave those ones that God and nature made free.) Nevertheless, don Quijote’s faithful squire, Sancho Panza, demonstrates a clearly shrunken margin in Spanish society to a decent consideration of Afro-Spanish men and women. At some point, Sancho finds black people atrocious, but he becomes ecstatic at the chance of selling his black vassals from his future imaginary kingdom of Micomicón because then he would be able then to purchase a title of nobility or just lead an indolent life the rest of his days:

-¿Qué se me da a mí que mis vasallos sean negros? ¿Habrà más que cargar con ellos y traerlos a España, donde los podré vender y adonde me los pagarán de contado, de cuyo dinero podré comprar algún título o algún oficio con que vivir descansado todos los días de mi vida? [...] “por negros que sean, los he de volver blancos o amarillos.  
-Why should I care me that my vassals will be black? ¿I will only need to carry them and bring them to Spain, where I can sell them and I will get paid in cash, and with it I can buy a title or a business and lead an idle life all days of my life<sup>3</sup>. (373)

It raises the question if the inclusion by Cervantes of both extremes, one that questions slavery and one that precisely shows its cruelty and practitioners’ moral numbness, results in the best defense of freedom and respect for all at the time; witnessing the brutality as readers can become more painful, closer to us. And for the purpose of this study, we can appreciate in a deeper sense the very real injustice that Juan Latino had to endure and overcome. The best example of such powerful paradox will be presented by Cervantes in *El celoso extremeño* or *The Jealous man from Extremadura* (1613) the most extreme, tragic and puzzling literary work in early modern Spanish literature regarding Afro-Spanish people. Through telling the story of Carrizales and his wife Leonora, we also learn the sad and humiliating story of Luis, an old black man and a eunuch, who lives imprisoned in a small room above the entrance of the jealous Carrizales house, so he helps to watch and prevent any simple desire to live and autonomous life in his owner’s young wife.

Luis cannot not enter Carrizales’s house. The young Leonora must only leave the house to attend mass at night, consequently, her maids and female black slaves, are as imprisoned as her. This short story by Cervantes illustrates an all-consuming “prison,” and by doing so, he praises individual freedom as a supreme value. Racism (or sexism) is not erased but Cervantes offers some room to empathize with these characters by showing us their dreams and desires. Womanizer Loaysa is able to enter Carrizales’s fortress because the desire to find some happiness cannot not be completely suppressed in Leonora, Luis, maids and slaves.

Luis is described as a naïve, infantile black man, who does not even realize what a terrible musician he is “y no sabía el pobre negro, ni lo supo jamás, hacer un cruzado/he did not know the poor Black, and he would never know, how to play a barre chord” (347). But Loaysa also uses an appealing argument with Luis so he can facilitate his entrance to the house: Loaysa will teach him how to play the guitar and sing, and Luis will have a joyful profession while he is able to support himself. When his dream of extreme submission in Leonora fails, Cervantes offers a kinder

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<sup>3</sup> Translation mine.

although still normative ending for those imprisoned: Carrizales tries to help Loaysa and Leonora marriage, although Leonora would not accept as the exemplary modest woman she is, and he also leaves money to his maids and emancipates all slaves before passing away.

### **Conclusion**

Representations of black men and women such as the ones brought to us by Velázquez, Cervantes, or the author of *Lazarillo de Tormes* make social barriers and horrors endured by Afro-Spanish people more tangible, and they also give some room to their individual autonomy and resistance. In these works, Afro-Spanish men and women in early Spain emerge as a real, individual, human presence. By considering them, Juan Latino's life and achievements become more meaningful, more valuable. Paradoxically, the analysis of social, religious, and gender hierarchies that Latino was able to navigate in order to overcome his point of departure as a slave speak of both extreme difficulties and a few interstices, hence, his work and success appears more realistic and even more exceptional.

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