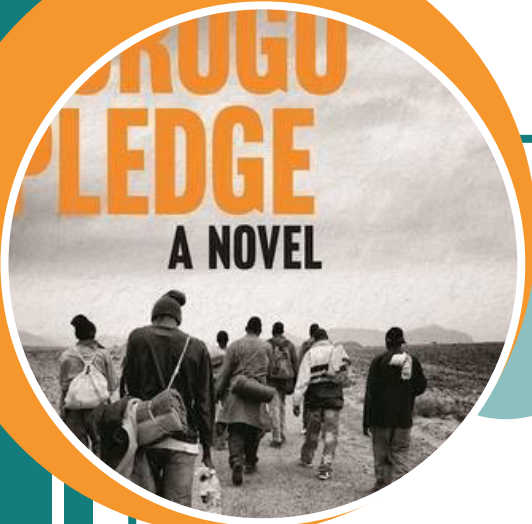


THE GURUGU PLEDGE



Author: Juan Tomas Ávila Laurel
Publisher: And Other Stories
Year of publication: 2017
Pages: 192
Format: 13x20 cm

An urgent novel, inspired by first-hand accounts. Existential, at turns exhilarating and sad, it brings the needed African perspective to migrations, a major issue of our time.

Mount Gurugu is a no man's land: it's the place where desperate migrants from Africa to Europe end up cordoned-off by the Moroccan police and by a high barbed-wire fence that runs along the Spanish border. On the Gurugu everything is lacking, even water and food. Following the oral tradition, gathered around the fire the people on the Gurugu tell us about their own life. Many voices begin to tell about the circumstances that pushed them on the road of exile.

Ávila Laurel creates a polyphonic novel in which every story generates more stories, and the main speaking voice is always connected with the chorus-like reactions of the listening crowd. These tales, coming from the characters' past or from their imaginations, blend into the wider narrative of their difficult survival in the present.

No part of the life on the Gurugu is left untold, from the violence of the Moroccan Police to the difficult challenge of being a woman in such a male microcosm. No matter who they are and where they come from: everyone on the Gurugu has travelled a torturous route and hopes for "a brilliant future awaiting them in Europe".

At times, this novel feels like a piece of dystopian fiction. All the elements are here: an irrationally cruel world, a non-place, impossible obstacles, the collapse of social order. It is a stark reminder of the fact that what looks like dystopia to some could be everyday reality to others.

«Don't ask me where I came from. It was via lots of places, but I came in through Algeria. They told me I no longer have a country, that's what they said at the border: you've no country any more, now you're just black.»



Press:

The Gurugu Pledge is a dazzling relay race of storytelling. The polyphonic pleasure of these pages comes from the effortless way in which Ávila Laurel makes story generate more story.

Kapka Kassabova, The Guardian

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France: Asphalte Éditions (2017).

Juan Tomás Ávila Laurel was born in 1966 in Equatorial Guinea, Africa's only Spanish-speaking country. His parents were from the remote Annobón Island, off the West African coast. The Gurugu Pledge was his second novel to appear in English, following his 2015 Independent Foreign Fiction Prize-shortlisted debut *By Night The Mountain Burns*, which was based on his memories of growing up on Annobón. Ávila Laurel has been a constant thorn in the side of his country's long-standing dictatorial government. A nurse by profession, for many years he was one of the best known Equatorial Guinean writers not to have opted to live in exile. But, in 2011, after a week-long hunger strike in protest against Obiang's regime, timed to coincide with the President of Spain's visit to Equatorial Guinea, Ávila Laurel moved to Barcelona. He writes across all media, in particular as a blogger, essayist and novelist.