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Review of *African Immigrants in Contemporary Spanish Texts: Crossing the Strait*, edited by Debra Faszler-McMahon and Victoria L. Ketz

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REVIEWS

Faszer-McMahon, Debra, and Victoria L. Ketz, editors. *African Immigrants in Contemporary Spanish Texts: Crossing the Strait*. Ashgate, 2015. 304 pp.

Spain has a long and fascinating history with Africa, which most recently results from the migration of peoples from several African countries, most notably Morocco. *African Immigrants in Contemporary Spanish Texts: Crossing the Strait* is thus an excellent read for scholars looking to explore the wide cultural impact that African immigration is having in Spain today, finding itself a much needed niche in the academic works in this area. The volume contains thirteen chapters concerning different texts, which are divided into two sections: autochthonous perspectives (Chapters 1–7) and African perspectives (Chapters 8–13). There is also a foreword by Brad Epps, which succinctly asserts the significant contribution of this volume, stating that all of the essays “share a general commitment to the values of hybridity, dialogue, unencumbered movement, mutual respect, and cultural plurality” (xvi).

In the introduction, the editors are clear to define all of the terms used in their title, so as not to create a monolithic image of Africa, immigration, or Spanish texts. They theorize the use of these terms by citing several postcolonial scholars including Mbembe, Said, and Ferguson. In doing so, to cite Michael Ugarte’s estimation of the book, “This collection of essays provides readers with both specific and theoretical explorations of Spain’s most pressing issue today: a new presence of Africa.” This presence and the cultural reverberations that it produces are the core of the essays in this collection. In several chapters, there is a reiteration of the notion that national anxiety around African immigration is reminiscent of the anxieties experienced in eighth century Spain after the “Islamic Invasion” of the peninsula. Though Moroccans are currently the largest African migrant group in Spain and the presentation of Islam as incompatible with the Western world is common trope in political discourse, this historical view of anxiety fails to consider Spain’s relative racial homogeneity until the 1990s as contributory to the sociopolitical angst.

In terms of genres discussed, there is a wide range, from novels to film to poetry, and more. However, despite that the title refers specifically to Spanish texts, there is a clear privileging of film over other literary genres such as theatre, which is distressing considering the large corpus of plays concerning African immigrants since the early 1990s. The editors state, “Part of this collection’s unique contribution comes from including, not only traditional literary texts, but also online forums, web sites, visual art, documentary films, and analyses of translations” (2). This being said, the title does not accurately encapsulate the innovative scope of the volume.

The chapters generally flow well within the bifurcated framework that the editors have established in their introduction. Whereas most of the chapters in the volume conceptualize migration in terms of those African bodies moving to Spain, Benita Sampedro Vizcaya's chapter on Ekomo expands migration to include the text itself. The issue of translation, being textual immigration from one cultural framework to another, is an important cultural repercussion of migration, and Spanish colonialism. Even though it takes us away from the general conceptualization of the volume, Sampedro Vizcaya's analysis of the novel is exemplary, especially in explaining how idiosyncrasies of Equatoguinean Spanish were erased when Ekomo was published in order to make the novel more palatable to the Spanish audience. Thus we must begin to question how the linguistic choices that African writers, in Africa and in Spain, make to represent migration are as critical as the stories they choose to tell in that language.

The volume's subtitle focuses on the Strait of Gibraltar as a "third space" between Spain/Europe and Morocco/Africa. As Raquel Vega-Duran mentions in her chapter, "These works suggest that the sense of shared experiences with immigrants will ultimately lead to greater acceptance, painting an image of two shores with the Strait in the middle, working not as a divide but as a space of contact and exchange" (143). In addition, Brian Bobbitt posits in his chapter that the Strait, similarly to death, functions for many immigrants as the liminal space between poverty and prosperity, Morocco and Spain. As the treacherous migrations across the sea continue, understanding how bodies of water mediate the "Tale of Two Shores" for Spaniards and Africans alike will result in a recognition of mutual bonds between them.

This volume is an excellent contribution to the field as it gives in depth insight into the varying ways in which Spanish and African cultural texts contend with migration, its effects and its cultural repercussions. One final note, Spain's contentious place among European nations, often summarized as "Africa begins in the Pyrenees," has resulted in constructing a modern national identity that rejects Africa's past, and present, in Spain. This rejection is the reason why volumes like this one are so necessary and so impactful.

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Contributors

Andrés Acevedo es escritor dominicano. Empezó a publicar poesía en los periódicos *La Información* y *El Nuevo Diario* en los años ochenta. Como ensayista ha publicado frecuentes trabajos en revistas dominicanas y extranjeras, así como en los periódicos *La Información*, *Listín Diario* y periódicos ya desaparecidos, *La Noticia*, *El Siglo* y *Última Hora*. Promotor cultural de oficio, ha promovido y organizado numerosos eventos culturales, fundando grupos y talleres literarios en su ciudad natal, como: “Núcleo Colectivo Literario” (1985), “Taller Literario Littera” (1985), “Círculo de Escritores de Santiago” (1992), “Letras Unidas” (1993) y el “Taller de Narradores de Santiago” (1996). Sus textos poéticos han sido traducidos al inglés, al alemán y al catalán, además, han sido antologados en diversos libros nacionales y extranjeros. También ha publicado los siguientes libros: *Arcoíris Derretido* (1997); *Vuélvete mi niño* (2003); *Versos para niños recitadores* (2005); *Sueño de sombras* (2006) y *Leyendo versos para niños* (2007). Actualmente es Director de Creatividad del Departamento de Cultura y Educación del Ayuntamiento Municipal de Santiago.

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Jeffrey K. Coleman is an Assistant Professor of Spanish at Marquette University where he specializes in twentieth century and Contemporary Peninsular Spanish and Catalan theatre. He is currently working on a book manuscript entitled *Shockwaves: Immigration and its Reverberations on the Contemporary Spanish Stage*, which will examine the representation and social hierarchizing of immigrants in plays dating from 1992-Present.

Kathleen Honora Connolly is Assistant Professor of Spanish at Western Oregon University. Her research focuses on African migration to Spain and representations of race and mixed-race in Spanish literature, film, and online. Recent articles have been published in the *Arizona Journal of Hispanic Cultural Studies*, *Revista Canadiense de Estudios Hispánicos*, and the volume *African Immigrants in Contemporary Spanish Texts: Crossing the Strait* (2015).

Ramón Gil es cuentista, novelista, poeta y miembro fundador del grupo “Jueves Literarios de Sosúa”. Fue ganador de tercera mención en el renglón poesía del Concurso Eugenio Deschamps 2006 de la biblioteca Alianza Cibaëña de Santiago por su poemario *Poemas obsoletos*. Fue ganador de tercera mención en el renglón Cuento del Concurso Juan Bosch de la Fundación Global Democracia y Desarrollo FUNGLODE 2007 por su cuento “Desidia”. En marzo de 2008, ganó el segundo

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