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

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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, no 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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Andrés Acevedo is a Dominican writer. He began publishing poetry in the newspapers *La Información* and *El Nuevo Diario* in the 1980s. As an essayist, he has published frequent works in Dominican and foreign magazines, as well as in the newspapers *La Información*, *Listín Diario* and discontinued newspapers, *La Noticia*, *El Siglo*, and *Última Hora*. Promoting cultural activities, he has organized numerous cultural events, founding literary groups and workshops in his birthplace, such as: “Núcleo Colectivo Literario” (1985), “Taller Literario Lítttera” (1985), “Círculo de Escritores de Santiago” (1992), “Letras Unidas” (1993) and the “Taller de Narradores de Santiago” (1996). His poetic texts have been translated into English, German, and Catalan, as well as anthologized in various national and foreign books. He has published the following books: *Arcoíris Derretido* (1997); *Vuélvete mi niño* (2003); *Versos para niños recitadores* (2005); *Sueño de sombras* (2006) and *Leyendo versos para niños* (2007). Currently he is Director of Creativity at the Municipal Department of Culture and Education of Santiago.

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Ramón Gil is a novelist, poet and founder of the group “Jueves Literarios de Sosúa”. He was the third place winner in the poetry section of the Eugenio Deschamps 2006 award at the Alianza Cibaeña library in Santiago. He received an award for third place for his novel “Desidia” at the Juan Bosch Foundation 2007 award. In March of 2008, he won the second place award at the Concurso Juan Bosch de la Fundación Global Democracia y Desarrollo FUNGLODE 2007 for his short story “Desidia.”

Contributors