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## Special Focus Introduction. Set Up and Shut Out: Immigration and Criminality in Contemporary Spanish Fiction

### **Abstract**

The beginning of the twenty-first century has seen mass immigration from the Global South to the Global North. Unfortunately, the geopolitical and racial dynamics of this migration flow often lead to a purported nexus between immigration and criminality. In immigrant-receiving nations, this is especially the case, where sometimes the government, the media, and even the population support a xenophobic perspective based on the interconnection between immigration and criminality. Spain serves as an interesting case study for understanding how cultural productions reflect and/or critique that tendency because between 2000 and 2010 it had the world's second largest net immigration rate. The large demographic shift that immigration has produced in Spain over the past three decades ultimately created a laboratory for the creation of a multiracial and multicultural nation. This special issue provides a more nuanced understanding regarding the criminalization of immigrant communities in Spanish fiction. The authors that form this special issue demonstrate how the staging of this criminalization is reworked in genres like novels, short stories, theater, and cinema to expose and problematize the purported nexus between criminality and immigration. By bringing together crime fiction and immigration studies scholars, this issue seeks to reformulate and reconsider what has been traditionally thought of as the “immigrant problem” and its relation to crime in contemporary Spanish fiction.

### **Keywords**

immigration, crime, criminalization, criminality, Spanish literature, Spanish film, Spanish fiction

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## Set Up and Shut Out: Immigration and Criminality in Contemporary Spanish Fiction

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The beginning of the twenty-first century has seen mass immigration from the Global South to the Global North. Unfortunately, the geopolitical and racial dynamics of this migration flow often lead to a purported nexus between immigration and criminality. The onset of the twenty-first century, with its mass immigration movements, new forms of globalized terrorism, and profound economic crises on both sides of the Atlantic, have increased concerns about criminality and foreigners. In immigrant-receiving nations, this is especially the case, where sometimes the government, the media, and even the population support a xenophobic perspective based on the interconnection between immigration and criminality. Etienne Balibar reflects upon this in his book *Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities* (1988) when he discusses notions of prophylaxis and differential racism, in which cultural incompatibility is used as a way to marginalize and exclude immigrants in Western nations.

Spain serves as an interesting case study for understanding how cultural productions reflect and/or critique that tendency because, as David Moffette points out, “Between 2000 and 2010, Spain ranked second in the world, behind the United States, as the country with the highest level of annual net immigration” (3-4). The large demographic shift that immigration has produced in Spain over the past three decades ultimately created a laboratory for the creation of a multiracial and multicultural nation. However, as Teun A. van Dijk demonstrates in his article “Racism and the Press in Spain” (2008), Spain can be recognized as a country where immigration is continuously portrayed in the media using criminalizing discourses, especially in the coverage on border control and the so called “invasions” and “assaults” in Ceuta and Melilla. In a nation where anti-immigrant sentiments are on the rise as a result of far-right parties such as Vox gaining ground in Spain, the link between criminality and immigration is being purported now more than ever.

The timing of the publication of this special issue is particularly apropos considering that according to the U.N. Migration Agency in January 2019, this year for the first time since the “refugee crisis” in Europe in 2015, Spain is receiving more migrants than Greece or Italy. The new level not only accounts for African migrants crossing the Mediterranean, but also asylum seekers from Venezuela and other parts of the world. The increased flow has led to renewed debates about immigration, integration, and criminality on the national level, in regions such as Andalucía (in which the anti-immigration party Vox achieved increased support in

the regional elections in November 2018), and in major cities such as Barcelona and Valencia that in 2018 received the migrant vessels Open Arms and Aquarius, respectively, which other Mediterranean nations refused to accept.

This special issue of *Studies in Twentieth and Twenty-First Century Literature* provides a more nuanced understanding regarding the criminalization of immigrant communities in Spanish fiction. The authors that form this special issue demonstrate how the staging of this criminalization is reworked in genres like novels, short stories, theater, and cinema to expose and problematize the purported nexus between criminality and immigration. By bringing together crime fiction and immigration studies scholars, this issue seeks to reformulate and reconsider what has been traditionally thought of as the “immigrant problem” and its relation to crime in contemporary Spanish fiction. Some questions that have provided the framework for this special issue are: How do the politics of visibility affect immigration and its connection with criminality, and how do rural and urban spaces affect this nexus? Why is Otherness linked to crime, and how is that link established across different genres? What is the role of a nation’s politics and media in the criminalization of the immigrant? How can gender be explored in relation to the criminalization of the immigrant? The articles in this special issue dialogue with one another in their attempts to answer some of the questions posed and demonstrate the ways in which criminality is projected onto, rather than instigated by, immigrants in these representations. This projection ultimately says more about the autochthonous community than it does about the immigrants at the center of these artistic productions.

The special issue opens with Julia Barnes’s examination of a recent corpus of contemporary Spanish films that center on immigration and the new Spanish family. Barnes highlights how heterosexual romance between migrants and native-born Spaniards serves as a metaphor for a romanticized version of the new Spanish national family. Building on Daniela Flesler’s study of films from 1990 to 2002 about immigration to Spain, Barnes focuses on films produced between 1999 and 2013, where instead of a male immigrant love interest the films switch to a female migrant as the love interest for Spanish-born men. Barnes suggests that immigrant women are signaled as the saviors of the Spanish national family or as epitomes of romantic love, whereas immigrant men are portrayed as detrimental to these relationships, often threatening and criminalized. While immigrant women emerge as essential to the Spanish national project, Barnes signals that non-autochthonous males are depicted as a threat or endanger the reimagined national family in films such as *Flores de otro mundo*, *Biutiful*, *Un novio para Yasmina*, and *15 años + 1 día*. According to Barnes, immigrant women both repopulate and mother the nation, but also acquiesce to heteronormative and patriarchal roles, thus conforming to male desires.

Furthermore, Barnes proposes that two types of masculinity are in dialogue in these movies—a hapless, romanticized though flawed version with the Spanish-born male love interest versus a more threatening, unsympathetic, and even criminalized version with the depiction of immigrant men in these films. As the article demonstrates, immigrant women, on the other hand, emerge in these films as foils to both Spanish women and immigrant men. Although love forms a part of the Spanish national project, Barnes reveals that the economic and immigration crises have produced a significant shift in Spanish film to expose particular immigratory anxieties.

In her article, Maureen Tobin Stanley examines six films to establish a trajectory of Spanish immigration cinema that captures how the exocitization and the eroticization of the Other contributes to reinforcing established power dynamics through criminalization. The films studied by Tobin Stanley include *Cartas de Alou* (Montxo Armendáriz, 1990), *Bwana* (Imanol Uribe, 1996), *Flores de otro mundo* (Icía Bollaín, 1999), *Princesas* (Fernando León de Aranoa, 2005), *14 kilómetros* (Gerardo Olivares, 2007) and *Retorno a Hansala* (Chus Gutiérrez, 2008). Tobin Stanley proposes that a binary is established in these films: what the author refers to as “the seeing-hegemonic-subject against the seen-non-hegemonic-object.” The cinematic gaze, as Tobin Stanley argues, contributes to examining how the politics of visibility function with respect to immigrants in these films because now, the seeing, the viewer, takes the position of “the seen,” of the migrants in these films. Tobin Stanley claims that this shift in the cinematic gaze is transformative because it fosters a deeper understanding and identification between the spectator and the viewed, even contributing to a new sense of empathy. The author’s examination of these films explores the balance between “reflection, representation, and creation” in their portrayal of immigration and criminality. While the hegemonic group is either pardoned for its crimes or its crimes remain invisible, those outside of the hegemony, the “out-group,” are punished for less severe actions than those of the “in-group.” The in and out dichotomy refers to where you are in terms of the law—either inside or outside legal boundaries.

What is compelling about Tobin Stanley’s argument is that these films encourage the viewer to now “see” from a non-hegemonic perspective and denounce the violence that is perpetrated against the migrant body, which is oftentimes excused because these migrants have acted outside the law. According to Tobin Stanley, the films refocus this discussion by highlighting that the real criminal actions are rooted in the hegemonic community that continues espousing racist, xenophobic, and misogynistic values and perspectives. Although initially aligned with reigning power structures, the cinematic gaze, in fact, forces us to repudiate and censure these biases and victimizing conduct. Tobin Stanley’s contribution accentuates how these films complicate or problematize our definitions of criminalization by studying these crimes in parallel. As immigrants

commit crimes like crossing borders or working illegally in order to survive, those in power act in inhumane and truly harmful ways because they know how to manipulate a system that preys on the vulnerable.

Shifting the focus to the crime genre, Nick Phillips's article examines how José Ángel Mañas's 2010 novel *Sospecha* interrogates the neoliberal foundations of the 2008 economic crisis and questions the sustainability of Spain's economic and political models that rely heavily on foreign investment, immigration, and unstable practices of construction and home ownership. As a work of crime fiction, the novel's main focus is Pachecho's investigation into the rape and murder of Inmaculada in the town of Sagrario, a fictional suburb in Madrid. However, the author delineates that a second crime, the speculation and overdevelopment of the urban periphery, is occurring simultaneously. Through a spatial examination of the dichotomy between Madrid and its periphery, we learn that the urban periphery is not simply a possible subject in the development of the financial crisis, but is the crime itself.

What is interesting about Phillips's examination of the nexus between criminality and immigration in Mañas's *Sospecha* is that even with the lack of foreign immigrants in Sagrario, public opinion emphasizes how such a horrendous crime could not have been committed by a local. Phillips investigates how immigrants are the base of the pyramid that imploded with the housing and economic crises in Spain. However, the novel establishes a contrast between the types of foreigners that are found in the urban center—predominantly tourists—versus the working-class immigrant population that often can be found inhabiting the periphery. Phillips signals that *Sospecha* critiques both the economic model of the construction boom that facilitates spatial reconfigurations caused by immigration as well as the long-term consequences of immigration in Spain in the shadow of the economic recession. According to Phillips, the novel expands on this idea through an ongoing debate on immigration's impact on society, presented by both mass media and Pachecho's police colleagues.

According to Shanna Lino's article, Jon Arretxe's 2011 novel *Sueños de Tánger* provides a thorough study of how extraterritorial interdiction prevents African migrants from reaching Spain. As the title suggests, the city of Tangiers is central both to the novel and to Lino's analysis, as she proposes that the reader is led to experience the city in a transitory manner, just as the migrants do. Through the use of *kino-glaz* or "movie-eye," the reader is able to travel with the migrants on their respective journeys. These journeys, however, are unsuccessful due to an extraterritorial mission led by Spanish forces to prevent smugglers from leaving Tangiers and reaching Spain. Drawing on Étienne Balibar's considerations of "unimagined frontiers" and Robert A. Davidson's notions of "interdiction" and the "nonplace," Lino's article proposes that the Basque text interrogates the ways in

which Spain's practice of participating in veiled migration prevention outside of its national territory implies a remapping of ethical complicity.

Lino emphasizes how this remapping takes place by drawing on two of the main characters in the novel who are both named Mohammed: one is a Tangiers police officer and the other a Moroccan-born Spaniard employed by the Spanish secret service to assassinate human traffickers in Tangiers. In an effort to complicate the relationship between criminality and immigration, Lino investigates the duplicity of these two characters as murderous state-sanctioned agents charged with reducing the number of immigrant crossings. When conducted by the state (be it Moroccan or Spanish), criminality goes unnoticed and, in fact, Lino's reading of the novel's end makes clear that the Spanish state uses violent interdiction to reduce its border insecurity.

Jeffrey Coleman's article explores the perversity of blackmail in Juan Mayorga's 2003 play *Animales nocturnos*, in which a Spanish citizen coerces an undocumented man to spend time with him. Given Mayorga's training as a philosopher, it is easy to see that this play is a representation of Hegel's master-slave dialectic as it elucidates the codependent dynamic between citizens and undocumented immigrants. Using a Hegelian analysis, Coleman demonstrates how Spanish immigration policy not only places undocumented immigrants in a position of entrapment, but also enables autochthonous citizens to commit crimes against these vulnerable immigrants. This play eliminates all cultural and racial markers, distinguishing the two men only by their height, Bajo (Short) and Alto (Tall), the taller of the two being the undocumented immigrant. Coleman argues that this decision by Mayorga enables the spectator to focus solely on their interpersonal dynamic and the nefarious social contract that links them. Alto's inability to escape the snare of Bajo's blackmail highlights the depths to which the Spanish state fails to protect marginalized people while simultaneously enabling depraved citizens.

Finally, Diana Aramburu's article closes the special issue with a discussion of the criminalization of the immigrant mother in Jordi Sierra i Fabra's 2013 short story, "Barrios altos" ("A High-End Neighborhood," 2011). Aramburu's article demonstrates how Sierra i Fabra problematizes the representation of the immigrant mother in contemporary Spanish crime literature by exploring how and why the Filipino maid, Felipa, is criminalized, leading her to poison and kill the high-class Barcelona family that she has been serving. Aramburu argues that Sierra i Fabra combines a narrative of criminalization with a revenge narrative to complicate our reading of Felipa, who, as Aramburu claims, is a hybrid character who cannot be read as a criminal unless she is understood as a victim. Approaching the text through an examination of vulnerability and an analysis of a mother narrative framework, Aramburu proposes that the immigrant mother's hybrid condition in Sierra i Fabra's short story signifies a transformation of the mother in crime fiction by presenting a character type that transgresses the border between victimhood and

criminality. Moreover, drawing on Caron Gentry and Laura Sjoberg's study of women's political violence using the mother, monster, and whore narratives, Aramburu signals that a threatened and vulnerable maternal function due to the economic and immigration crises provides the link to understanding Felipa's transformation from victim to murderer. According to Aramburu, Sierra i Fabra adapts the traditional motherhood narrative to address an immigrant crisis that has led to a heightening in maternal vulnerability. The article concludes that a narrative of vulnerability combines with a mother narrative not only to create the hybrid condition of this immigrant mother, but also to expose and problematize the borders between innocence and guilt.

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