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Michael Ugarte
University of Missouri-Columbia

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Abstract

The commonly heard statement "Spain is different" contains a series of contradictions, paradoxes, and questions concerning Iberia's place within the global community, a community that is itself deeply contradictory—more and more the same and yet more and more fragmented. Immigration highlights the sameness/otherness dichotomy in Spanish culture, and the situation of African immigrants has especially caused the Spanish national consciousness an ethical quandary. Here I examine four recent cultural representations of African immigration in Spain—two journalistic works: Mikel Azurmendi's *Estampas del Ejido* and Antonio Elorza's articles in *El País*; and two documentary films: Básel Ramsis's *El otro lado: un acercamiento a Lavapiés* and José Luis Guerín's *En construcción* in order to assess the ways in which Spaniards are projecting their sense of national identity in the face of large-scale immigration, a most revealing mirror.

Keywords

Iberia, global community, Spain, Latin America, fragmentation, immigration, sameness, otherness, Spanish culture, African immigrants, ethics, Mikel Azurmendi, Estampas del Ejido, Antonio Elorza, El País, Básel Ramsis, El otro lado: un acercamiento a Lavapiés, JoséLuis Guerín, En construcción, national identity

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Michael Ugarte
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"Spain is different." This familiar phrase, uttered as often by Spanish intellectuals as everyday citizens, manifests a desire to distinguish Spain from other nations and cultures and argue for its nonconformity. From José Ortega y Gasset's *España invertebrada* (1921) through Américo Castro's *Realidad histórica* (1954) to a contemporary writer as radical as Juan Goytisolo in his critique of Spanish intransigence in the face of worldly change, we find an explicit and implicit affirmation of difference, an attempt to separate Spanish culture from its European counterparts, to inspect the ways in which Spain is familiar only to itself.¹ The canonical essays written by members of the so-called Generation of 1898—Unamuno, Azorín, and Maeztu—also explore unique Spanishness as *intrahistoria* (intrahistory) and *el alma castellana* (the Castilian soul). Paradoxically, Spanish "difference" might be characterized as an archetype, for what nation is not considered by many of its citizens as unique?

Yet, in the twenty-first century, it is difficult to argue convincingly for uniqueness for a variety of reasons, among them the dramatic rise of immigration, not only in Spain, but also throughout Europe. Indeed the statement "Spain is different," a seemingly straightforward articulation of cultural identity, contains a series of contradictions, paradoxes, and questions concerning Iberia's place within the global community, a community that is itself deeply contradictory—more and more the same and yet more and more fragmented. As Nestor García Canclini and others have shown, immigration more than any other socio-cultural world phenomenon

highlights the sameness/otherness dichotomy in Spanish culture.² The dramatic change immigration has brought to Spanish society has shifted discussions and perceptions of Spanish difference. In a new global dialogue, the world of the other and the material everyday presence of the other flaunt themselves as they foreground ethical questions about the relation of self to other.

The postcolonial critique of the Enlightenment focuses on the ways in which the "othering" of non-European people became the foundation for the rational European subject, who could identify with peers and also study and explain the less rational others. In a preface to one of Michel de Certeau's major books, *Heterologies: Discourse on the Other*, Wlad Godzich (xv-xvi) elucidates a series of philosophical discrepancies in the notion of the other by positing twentieth-century dissatisfaction with the enlightenment idea that the other is always within our reach: the goal of understanding the other is to understand the self. But with notions of fragmentation of the self, modernist divisions of labor and knowledge, alienation, existential anxiety, the other becomes less apprehensible. Indeed, the very act of apprehension of the other may be seen as a power-reductive act of subjugation. Enlightenment universalism can lead to enslavement of the other.

In postcolonial theory "othering" is a necessary step toward colonization. The historical patterns of colonization point to an ideological attempt to bring colonial others into the subject's fold by forcing them into sameness, a process that becomes the justification for economic exploitation. An awareness of this process has led anthropologists like Clifford Geertz to pioneer a radical critique of their own discipline, warning against the separation of the human object of investigation from the investigator. In a variety of ways, the consideration of the other is, for postcolonial critics, an ethical situation. The reemergence of Levinasian ethics is significant in light of the social dilemmas posed by globalization, especially the dramatic increase in immigration and its attendant human tensions. Despite the problems it has created, immigration has also fostered social, political, cultural understanding as a necessary tool for dealing with competing interests. Ethical challenges arise in the everyday experiences that affect social, political, and economic choices; thus immigration is often left to the scrutiny of sociology, leaving aside

important cultural and symbolic matters, upon which I focus here.

The vicissitudes of Spanish consciousness in relation to the ethical responses to the recent rise of African immigration manifest themselves in myriad ways, not the least of which is representation.³ The plight of African immigrants as they enter Spain is frequently reported in the Spanish press with much hand wringing. Statistical data provide numbers and hard facts about the realities of the crossings from Africa—the politics, motivations, the transit itself, and the subsequent conditions of life—all of which allow Spaniards to assess how their identity is changing through encounters with the other. The national discussion on immigration renders opinions and proposals about immigration; Spanish intellectuals air ideologies and suggest remedies in essays on immigration, and documentary films also address the issue. In these discussions, essays, and films, the real comes into contact with the symbolic, or in Edward Soja's understanding, the "real/imaginary," a keyword in his analysis of urban space in his well-known book, *Thirdspace*. Within Soja's Framework telling genres of the "real-imaginary" are not only journalistic essays and commentaries, but the documentary film, which by nature has to do with the ordering of reality. But documentaries are different from fiction (both print and filmic) in that the subject matter is "copied" as in a photograph. The ordering, structuring, and interpretation of the copies of reality place it within the realm of the creative or imaginary. In this essay I will explore first the so-called facts of Spanish immigration and secondly some journalistic and filmic interpretations of those facts. I attempt to understand how Spaniards represent the reality of immigration through a dialogue with the other in four representative real/imaginary cultural products—Mikel Azurmendi's *Estampas del Ejido: Un reportaje sobre la integración del inmigrante*, Antonio Elorza's articles in *El País*, Básel Ramsis's documentary film *El otro lado: un acercamiento a Lavapiés*, and José Luis Guerín's documentary *En construcción*.⁴

The March 2004 defeat of José María Aznar's Popular Party (PP) in the national elections is one of many contradictory political/ethical manifestations of the importance of immigration. On March 11, 2004, ten bombs exploded on Madrid commuter trains at the height of morning rush hour, killing 191 people and wounding 1,800 others, all on their way to work. The desire to know the

identity of the culprits was particularly urgent in the light of national elections scheduled for two days later. It is generally agreed that the desperate attempt on the part of high-ranking PP officials to blame the bombings on Basque independence group ETA (*Euskadi Ta Askatasuna*) influenced the subsequent defeat of José María Aznar's Popular Party and the victory of the Socialist Party (PSOE) (Argullol 13; Cebrián 28). Just prior to election day, however, it became clear that ETA was not responsible, and that the perpetrators were Islamic fundamentalist immigrants like those alleged to have attacked the World Trade Towers in New York and the Pentagon in Washington on September 11, 2001. When Aznar forged an alliance with George W. Bush in the 2003 invasion of Iraq, Spain had entered the world political arena in a way not evidenced since the Spanish Civil War, and Spain's leaders seemed unwilling to acknowledge the dire consequences of such action. By insisting that the bombings were perpetuating the tradition of Spanish "difference," government leaders affirmed that problems within Spanish national boundaries were particular to Spain and that any attempt to understand them in a more global context would be fruitless.⁵

For all its determination to direct the blame for the March 11 crimes away from immigration, Aznar's conservative Popular Party was never a champion of immigrants. In fact, none of the most visible political parties has confronted the problems of immigration in a coherent, meaningful way because they conceive of Spain, as does the rest of the European Union, as a gateway nation, a stepping-stone for immigrants to move illegally from Africa to the rest of Europe. During Felipe González's Socialist Party administration (1982-1996) as well as Aznar's eight-year presidency, many initiatives attempted to curb immigration via physical, political, and cultural controls. In what might symbolically be called the construction of another medieval "fortress," at the turn of the twentieth century barbed wire fences around detainment centers were built to contain people who had entered Spain illegally. These barriers symbolically hold back the Arab hordes that appeared to be invading the Peninsula in a symbolic repetition of the conquest of Iberia in 711 AD (Agrela, "Spain" 13). The illegal crossings, the arrival of new people, cultures, and religions, and the detainment centers have made for a lively, and at times vitriolic, discussion of the relationship of the

Spanish self to the Arab other. Indeed, what we perhaps too often call "national character" (or "difference") is now placed squarely in the fold of the historically fraught relations between the individual Spanish self and the Arab other.

The March 11 controversy brought to the fore the dramatic changes in Spanish demography in the last decade. In 2002 there were 1,324,000 foreign residents in Spain (Rodríguez 20, citing a source from the Ministry of the Interior). It is further estimated that the figure increased dramatically in just one year to 1,448,671 as of June 2003. Translated into percentages, approximately two percent of the Spanish population is foreign-born, still the smallest percentage of immigrants among European nations (Agrela, "Spain" 2-3). While these figures may be inaccurate, due to the number of unreported immigrants (the real number is likely to be much greater), it seems that Spain, with a population of about forty-one million, is still far behind France, Germany, and England in terms of the percentage of its foreign born population. But an equally important statistic is the rate at which the non-Spanish population has been growing over the last twenty years. Spain's rate of increase surpasses that of most countries in the European Union: between 1987 and 2003, it has more than tripled (Rodríguez). Tomás Bárbulo (23) calculates that there were some 8,000 illegal immigrants living in Spain in 2004, an extraordinary number considering the perils of the journey; between 1997 and 2001 3,286 cadavers of would-be African immigrants washed up on both sides of the Mediterranean between southern Spain and Morocco/Algeria (Cembrero 11).

In 2002 Pablo Ordaz dubbed the Strait of Gibraltar "El Estrecho de las Pateras" (the Strait of the Rafts). While general impressions point to the illegality of many immigrants, one must also ask just how illegal they are. Many, in fact, enter legally and do not return to their countries of origin when their visas run out; others enter with work contracts. According to Mikel Azurmendi, now repentant former ETA member and today a leader of the Spanish Forum for the Social Integration of Immigrants sponsored by the European Union, illegal immigration has come about partly because certain companies, mostly in the agricultural sector, enable it, while the government often looks the other way (Tertsch 8-9). The many anecdotes and individual or collective stories about immigrant experi-

ences also provide further insights into the realities of immigration in Spain. For example, Javier Valenzuela, a writer for *El País* from Torre Pacheco, a little town (population about 30,000) thirty kilometers outside of Murcia, recounts that in an attempt to deal with the high rate of unemployment in 1989, the municipal government offered 1,800 jobs for agricultural workers, construction laborers, hotel workers, and attendants in nursing homes. Only thirty Spaniards applied. Thus, Valenzuela surmises that there was a proactive attempt on the part of the local governmental and business authorities to seek labor from sources outside of Spain (6).

The bulk of immigration across the Mediterranean, however, is illegal in the conventional sense. The word seems to have spread in Northern Africa that if you get to Spain, chances are that you will find work. In typically laconic journalistic fashion, the title of another article in *El País* sheds light on the complex issue: "Nadie quiere vivir en Marruecos" (Nobody Wants to Live in Morocco). The problem is how to get out of Morocco and into Spain, and here too there are enablers. If you can scrounge up a little money (between a hundred and a thousand dollars) and more importantly, if you have the drive to escape poverty and the willingness to take risks, you can pay a smuggler to help you make your way into the Peninsula via "patera" (Bárbulo 23). The "patera" (raft), typically some forty meters long and five meters wide, has become a powerful symbol in Spanish consciousness as the vehicle out of misery and a vessel of death.

The Strait of Gibraltar, however, is not the only gate into Spain from Africa. There is a sixty-mile stretch off the coast of the Canary Islands that also can be crossed by "patera," something of a geopolitical imitation of the other Strait separating the two continents. The following headline on an April 2004 article from the wire services in *La Voz de Galicia* is typical of articles appearing in recent Spanish media: "15 immigrants die as 2 rafts sink near Fuerteventura. Another two disappear, including an infant; 46 arrested after reaching land" ("Mueren" 15).

All these facts, anecdotes, newspaper headings, and articles are remarkably similar to those denoting the cultural and social climate of many other countries. Indeed, Spanish "difference" or exceptionalism seems less viable when one considers the Cubans and Mexi-

cans who enter the United States illegally, the former via the often-deadly "patera." There is also a haunting resemblance between the "patera" and a slave ship, or, perhaps between the "patera" and the perilous "coffin ships" that brought Irish immigrant workers to the United States after a horrific voyage in which many died or became deathly ill.⁶

The numbers and issues relating to immigration point to an ethical quandary about the crossings in the national consciousness. Spaniards are pondering their relationship to immigrants who reach the Iberian "promised land." The African diaspora is a relatively new issue in Spain and thus has an unsettling effect on Spaniards' sense of self. In an attempt to understand immigration as a Spanish cultural phenomenon that not only questions Spain's difference but places the nation squarely within patterns of globalization, I turn to the realm of the real/imaginary: essays and documentary films. Intellectuals Mikel Azurmendi and Antonio Elorza, both of whom are professors whose essays appear frequently in *El País*, imagine immigration in their writing, even if they may not characterize their work as imaginative, much less fictional. Azurmendi's book *Estampas del Ejido* (2001) is a series of "vignettes" (estampas) of life in Almería, where just one year prior to the publication of the book there had been racially motivated riots against immigrant Moroccan agricultural workers. As a vocal and highly visible Spanish member of the European Union's Forum for the Social Integration of Immigrants, Azurmendi intends to explain the causes of the riots and to offer ideas on how societies might begin to deal with the reality of immigration.

Yet, *Estampas* does not take the traditional form of a book-length opinion piece written by an authority (he is a professor of social anthropology at the University of the Basque Country in Donostia). His book has the style of prose-poetry—indeed Azurmendi has written collections of poetry in Euskera (the Basque language)—and the book's rhetorical flare is notable, especially in the opening pages filled with Judeo-Christian biblical references and a few winks to the Koran. The book has literary precedents in Spanish travel literature of the 1950s and 1960s—Camilo José Cela's *Viaje a la Alcarria* (1948) and Juan Goytisolo's *Campos de Níjar* (1960) and *La Chanca* (1962)—that have become foundational texts for the

understanding of Spanish literature in the aftermath of the Civil War. And the tradition of Spanish social criticism has earlier precedents in Mariano José de Larra, disguised as “costumbrismo,” or local color. Yet, unlike Larra, Cela, and Goytisolo, Azurmendi writes his *Estampas* as a man of authority, an officially designated governmental consultant, even a bureaucrat. Larra, Cela, and Goytisolo, for all their differences of opinion on virtually everything Spanish, are anything but bureaucratic as they criticize the poverty of Spain with false objectivity.

By contrast, Azurmendi's objectivity has the imprimatur of truth, the words of one who knows the situation he describes both from the inside (he constantly relates anecdotes about the friends he made in Almería), and from the outside, as he dazzles his readers with cultural erudition and global awareness. Paradoxically, his political position, again very much unlike that of his predecessors of the 1950s and 1960s, might be characterized today as “politically incorrect,” as he resoundingly opposes “multiculturalism.” In *Estampas* and other writings and pronouncements in the communications media, he states that the solution to immigration lies in integration, the immigrants' adoption of the native residents' cultural, religious, ethnic, and linguistic norms:

The real triumph of the African immigrant can only come about through his ability to change as a person and culturally overcome his pipedream of remaining in his tribal role. . . . When the immigrant decides to establish a home and regroup his family within the new situation, he is taking the first positive—although not definitive—step against frustration. . . . In this expansive area of El Ejido it would not be imprudent to affirm that there are probably less than a thousand African immigrants in that crucial phase of overcoming frustration and tracing new and unknown patterns of cultural integration. (303-04; my translation)

Azurmendi affirms his faith in the democratic state—a position Joseba Gabilondo calls “State narcissism”—capable of absorbing new immigrants as long as they want to be absorbed, a sentiment echoed in the writing of Antonio Elorza.⁷ However, different concerns arise in Elorza's writings. His frequent editorials in *El País*, the most powerful Spanish news daily, are at times polemical. Elorza is

a hard-nosed professor of political science at the University of Madrid (Complutense) and a well-known Spanish pundit, a man gesticulating rationally against terrorism of all kinds, that of ETA along with that of the "integristas" (Spanish journalism's word for Islamic fundamentalists with a propensity for violence against the west or anyone who does not agree with their interpretation of Islam). Elorza's area of expertise is modern Spain, and when he ventures outside of his area, he often, if not always, supports his arguments by drawing comparisons with the history and culture of the Iberian Peninsula. He might be considered the Bernard Lewis of the Spanish intelligentsia without Lewis's extensive background of study and knowledge of the Middle East.

Tracing his contributions to *El País* since September 11, 2001 (probably more widely read than any book he has written), one notes a dominant argument that could be summarized as a protest against those who refuse to acknowledge Islamic fundamentalist terrorism as having historical and religious roots. He argues that westerners should not fool themselves about the structural base for Islamic violence; he notes that the religion itself calls for intransigence and force and that one need only look (without relativist blinders) at the history of Spain in the Middle Ages for evidence (See "Mensajes de Bin Laden"). As a man who had made a name for himself as a visceral critic of ETA terrorism, Elorza has parlayed his comparative approach to terrorism into something of a signature position. The reduction of difference to terrorist sameness in his arguments allows him to condemn defenders of Islam as apologists for violence, much as sympathizers with Basque separatist pretensions are accused of condoning ETA's bombings. In a commentary in this vein titled "11-M" published in *El País* two weeks after the March 11 bombings, he levels an invective against intellectuals (specifically Juan Goytisolo) who criticize attempts to explain the killings in terms of its source in Islam as a religion:

Islam is not terrorist, nor is the Basque Country, and Germany was not Nazi prior to 1930, but it is perfectly valid to speak of Islamic terrorism, Basque terrorism, or German Nazism. In the case of Islam, this is *because the terrorist strategy has an exclusive foundation in a partial yet orthodox interpretation of the sacred texts of Islam*. One must read the Koran and the commentaries, since the precepts contained therein,

and not the foreign policy of Aznar in Iraq, are the pillars on which Al-Qaida justifies its actions. (27; emphasis in original)

Azurmendi and Elorza are public intellectuals, and, as such, they ground their commentaries on today's Spain in certain philosophical hypotheses. Their implicit (in the former's case explicit) articulation of the concept of the other is of crucial importance to their views on the violence arising from African immigration. From the second chapter on, Azurmendi's *Estampas del Ejido* frequently refers to "un otro" (19). This word, as well as the social/political arguments for remedies to the problem of immigration, suggests Jürgen Habermas's *The Inclusion of the Other*. In a presentation delivered in Madrid at a conference on "Immigration and the Labor Market" titled, "Is Multiculturalism Helping or Hindering Integration in Spain?," Azurmendi answers the question with a definitive condemnation of multiculturalism, stating unequivocally that the key to integration must be the law and the political agreement to uphold it. Citing Habermas, he calls for counterbalancing the notion of "minorities" by redefining the word in terms of every citizen's obligation to enter into and accept the decisions of the body politic. Indeed for both Azurmendi (and to a lesser extent Elorza), immigration threatens to unravel that very body politic, and the last means of solving the problem is through multiculturalism:

Multiculturalism, which is not integration but juxtaposition, segmentation into societies, into micro-societies, into monocultures, cannot lead to any kind of democratic future. Moreover, this is a great illness. I called it gangrene, and I continue to think of it as such. . . .

On the plus side, however, there is now a capacity to respond to the challenges we face. Our society is 25 years old. . . . After Franco died, the inclusion of Spaniards into one society became possible, precisely because we all forsook something in order to accept a common future, of tolerating each other, respecting the same laws and being equal before the laws but with guarantees that each human being is different from the next.

Our democratic tradition is short. But we have others, for example, Madrid. Madrid is a mix of generations and generations of different Spaniards, much more so than any other European capital. . . .

As Jürgen Habermas says in his great book, *The Inclusion of the Other*, we need to counterbalance what are called 'minorities.'

(www.stockholmnetwork.org/confs)

Achieving that "counterbalance," according to the professor of social anthropology, is to re-conceive the "minority," not as an exclusive group with decision-making rights of its own, but as a category that includes every citizen, every individual as part of a minority that must respect the norms of the society at large. Taxi drivers, for example, might be considered a "minority," but they do not have special rights.

Azurmendi's comments are not only a reading of Habermas as a thinker from whom we might find an enlightened solution to today's postmodern problems but also an insistence on Spanish difference in relation to the rest of Europe. Elorza's insistence on the incompatibility of certain tenets of Islam with the post-enlightenment democratic state echoes Azurmendi's position. Moreover for both Azurmendi and Elorza, who ally themselves with Habermas, the democratic state's ability to absorb ("include") the other is the test of its viability. They argue that ultimately we are all "others," and as such it is our obligation to accept differences, live together (the key word is *convivencia* or living together), and reach consensus.

Yet, as they defend their positions, Azurmendi and Elorza neglect the very notions of critical thought that have made "multiculturalism" (including all the simple-minded uses of the word in recent years) such a prominent topic of discussion in a variety of contexts and disciplines throughout the world. Neither Azurmendi nor Elorza considers the glaring reality of immigration as an issue that goes beyond the specifics of Spain in the post-9/11 century. The crossing of the real/symbolic space that separates Africa from Europe (with Spain playing the role of gatekeeper) is so manifestly present that these two Spanish writers fail to confront it. On the immigration issue Spain is clearly part of Europe, yet for both Azurmendi and Elorza Spain is still different (note Azurmendi's statement about Madrid above). Thus the discussion of Spanish immigration within the perspective of post-colonial alterity is irrelevant in their discussions.

By contrast to Azurmendi's and Elorza's conceptualization of immigration, the contemplation of post-colonial alterity is at the very core of *El otro lado: un acercamiento a Lavapiés*, a documentary film directed by Básel Ramsis. An Egyptian living in Spain, Ramsis

views immigration from a privileged angle as he himself is the other in relation to Spaniards, and thereby he is able to view himself as other, to view himself as Spaniards view him.⁸ As an immigrant director subject to Spaniards' othering gaze, Ramsis films Spaniards watching immigrants as immigrants look back at them. His is not only the gaze of the other; it is that of the self gazing at the other gazing at the self. The main purpose of the film is to make the foreign "other" familiar by showing the many ways recent immigrants to Spain are coping with their new surroundings as they interact in a tense *convivencia* with other immigrants and the native Spanish community.

The film also informs Spanish spectators about Lavapiés, a Madrid neighborhood that is in many ways foreign to them because immigrant residents may even outnumber the homebred Spaniards. This neighborhood is one of the typically in-transition neighborhoods in the metropolis (or post-metropolis) of the so-called first world. A few blocks from the Reina Sofia Museum and not far from the Puerta del Sol, Lavapiés is known today for its resident immigrants (Moroccans, Central Europeans, Latin Americans, Asians, Sub-Saharan Africans) with little means of survival. They live alongside old-time residents, also of meager means, indigenous to the neighborhood. The sights include old buildings, some in better shape than others, run-down dwellings occupied by squatters, street performers, many bars and neighborhood restaurants, signs in Arabic, and gentrification by a new breed of young urban professionals happy and eager to live in the city's center. In short, Lavapiés provides a perfect space for ethical reflection in the wake of the real and symbolic crossing.

The documentary explores how these varied groups of people deal with each other and what they think of the difficult *convivencia*. An ethical narrative voice-over anchors the film, always looming above, around, and between the words of the people/characters. Ethical inquiry is the prime intention of the director, who, after some preliminaries, begins his appraisal of the neighborhood with a four-minute segment that recreates the Gospel according to St John (*New Testament*, 285-86; chapter 13, verses 4-17) in which Jesus washes the feet of his disciples. The narrator, Ramsis himself, reads from the passage as paintings of The Last Supper appear on

screen. This sequence is followed by street scenes of immigrants in Lavapiés (Blacks, Asian street vendors, musicians, idle groups of people clearly not Spanish, whites and "people of color," as we say in the United States) accompanied by a catchingly rhythmic Reggae song (Pastor) whose refrain could not be more apt: "Soy tú, soy él" (I'm you, I'm him).

Shortly after this sequence there is a scene in which an Arab woman is struggling to ascend the stairs of the Lavapiés subway station with a baby carriage. A Spanish woman rushes toward her to lift the front of the carriage and help her with her load; it is an act of generosity that takes little effort, but its significance goes well beyond the act. As the camera remains focused on the Spanish woman, her female companion (also Spanish) congratulates her on her kindness. These sequences come relatively early in the film, the rest of which is a series of conversations about immigrants in Lavapiés—their needs and their feelings of being humiliated, all indicating racial, ethnic, and national tensions. At times the dialogues are civilized, at others less so, but the film centers on the interaction (again *convivencia*) with the other. The camera angles, the perspective, the gaze from various points of view—those of the immigrant filmmaker himself, the immigrants, the indigenous Spaniards, and the spectators—add another dimension to the content of these conversations. Thus the subject is presented from an ethical viewpoint, because the very act of watching places the spectator in an experiential interaction between self and other. The film's socio-political intention emerges in the watching, the material presence of the other—the entity that is always within our gaze and within our reach—"Soy tú, soy él."

The eyes of the other represented in the form of a camera are the mainstay of *En construcción*, a documentary by José Luis Guerín. Unlike the director of *El otro lado* who is struggling to make a name for himself in the documentary film world, Guerín has made other films (*Innesfree*, *Tren de sombras*) in addition to *En construcción*, which won the coveted Goya prize in Spain in 2001.⁹ The film is not about a literal Mediterranean crossing, nor is its subject limited to immigration. *En construcción* has many elements of an art film; the pace is slow moving, the shots are framed with meticulous attention to lighting, sound, camera angles, and background in relation to foreground. At times the contrast between the squalor of the cam-

era's object and the beauty of the image is oxymoronic. The subject matter is, however, immigration. The film focuses on the construction of an expensive apartment building in the middle of one of the city's seediest neighborhoods, El Barrio Chino or El Raval, a part of town not unlike Lavapiés, with many African residents.

Over a period of two years (1998-2000) Guerin filmed the construction of the building and thereby created a narrative ending with the building's condos being sold to the few who could afford them. Class, Catalan history, urban history, and the popularization of history are all embedded within the building's construction (for example, Roman ruins were discovered at the construction site, provoking conversations about the people who lived on that very spot some 20 centuries ago). As in *Lavapiés*, the other as an object of observation is the principal frame in Guerin's film. A significant aspect of watching the other is the awareness that many of the other watchers, such as the Moroccan construction workers, are new to the area. Abdel Aziz El Mountassir, one of the workers, intensely observes the Spaniards in his midst; his eyes become our eyes, and his gaze provides a filter through which the spectator views the cultures, classes, ethnicities, and religions that are subjects of the film. Abdel Aziz El Mountassir's understanding of those around him, including his boss on the construction site, begin to usurp the spectator's consciousness in a way that forces him/her to rethink certain commonplaces about immigration and interactions between immigrants and native residents.

As *El otro lado* and *En construcción* attest, stereotypes about immigrants are part of the consciousness of both Madrid and Barcelona. Interestingly, the difference between the documentaries is not so much that they are set in two different cities that engage in cultural, political, and linguistic rivalry. The traditional rivalry between Madrid and Barcelona fades as the two films emphasize the gaze of and on the African other. Through his filmic sequences Guerin asks his viewers not only to reconsider what they think about immigrants but also how they look at them. While the overall effect of Ramsis's politically committed film may be the same, the act of viewing is secondary to the underlying argument for national and local reforms that lessen economic and social burdens on recently arrived immigrants to Spain. Guerin, on the other hand, does not

have reform in mind. The condominium that serves as his film's central focus erupts into contemporary Spanish culture, like the New Church (La Iglesia Nueva) in the lyrical first pages of Azorín's *La voluntad* (the historical layers the new Yecla church uncovers are the same ones revealed at the Raval construction site). In *En construcción*, looking (who looks and who is looked at) is the key to the new building's meaning.

Spain is no longer different, if it ever was. The statistics, essays and films about immigration discussed in this essay make clear that Spanish life had entered the conflictive arena of social, economic, and political globalization well before the events of March 11, 2004. The Spanish sense of self in relation to the other is shifting in the context of immigration (along with the global exchange of goods, labor, and human beings) and will continue to shift well into the twenty-first century. The presence of the African "other" is something of a test, an inescapable reality, "always already" there for all to grasp, respond to, and awkwardly gaze at. It is the Spaniard's most revealing mirror.

Notes

1 Juan Goytisolo has written a great deal about the complexities of Spanish culture. His *Juan sin tierra* (1975) and other writings of the 1970s reveal an obsession with the reactionary myths of his country, which attests to the power and perseverance of those very myths. See also his *El sitio de los sitios* (1996, State of Siege) as well as a book he wrote with Sami Nair on immigration, *El peaje de la vida* (2002). The Spanish Civil War in which Spain assumed the role of conscience of the world seems to be the exception to the exception of Spanish "difference." For example, Juan Marichal asserts that the war turned a Spanish problem into a universal one (82). For a classical assessment of the "sui generis" Generation of 1898, see Laín Entralgo.

2 In addition to García-Canclini's oft-cited book on globalization and "strategies for leaving and entering modernity," see de Certeau's essay "California" and Debra Castillo's discussion of Tijuana as a "shadowtext."

3 I have chosen to concentrate on African immigration because Africa's otherness in relation to Spain has a long history. Latin American immigration is also pertinent, but must be the subject of another essay. Immigra-

tion to Spain from Central Europe, the Middle East, and Asia is also considerable but must be studied apart.

4 Mainstream publication of literary works by African immigrants residing in Spain is sparse, yet I have found web-based material, in particular a fascinating series of letters from Moroccan immigrants to their families, fictionally recast by Antonio Polo González. In an electronic message to me he writes, "Having taken into my house a refugee from Western Sahara, I was exposed to a fresh version of the problem of emigration. It's true that despite the tendency toward tolerance among Spanish people, there is still some shameful behavior. On more than one occasion, I had to intervene on his behalf when he left my house and was rejected by neighbors. It was just this vulnerability that helped me write these letters." See also Yeon-Soo Kim. Of note as well is a forthcoming novel dealing with immigration into Spain by the noted exile writer from Equatorial Guinea, Donato Ndongo, titled *El metro*.

5 For a detailed, and in my opinion accurate, explanation and chronology of the events surrounding the Atocha bombs see wikipedia: <http://en.wikipedia.org>.

6 Paul Gilroy argues that slavery was a major factor leading to the economic prosperity and "modernity" of what we call the first world. Juan González makes a similar argument in regard to both the annexation of Northern Mexico by the U.S. in the mid-nineteenth century and to the flow of cheap labor into the U.S. from the Hispanic world.

7 Joseba Gabilondo's concept of "state narcissism" has to do with the discourse of self-celebration on the part of many Spanish intellectuals (Fernando Savater, Juan Pablo Fusi, along with Azurmendi and Elorza) in the wake of the so-called transition from dictatorship to democracy. Gabilondo has written extensively on prominent Basque/Spanish intellectuals who defend the post-constitutional Spanish state against the attacks by Basque nationalists, including Azurmendi and Elorza. I would like to thank Professor Gabilondo for sending me a version of his forthcoming essay, "State Narcissism: Spanish Opposition to Multiculturalism, Racism, and Neoimperialism (on Mikel Azurmendi)." His book, which will include a chapter on Elorza, is in progress.

8. I thank Professors Susan Larsen and Malcolm Compitello for bringing this documentary to my attention when it was shown in Madrid in July of 2003. I also thank Professor Gema Pérez Sánchez for allowing me into

Gables on "Postcolonial Subjects in Contemporary Spanish Literature and Film," winter semester 2004.

9. I thank Professor Steven Marsh for bringing this filmmaker to my attention in his paper "The Surprise of the Everyday: Ghostly Presences in Recent Spanish Documentary Film."

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