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Sueños de Tánger: Extraterritorial Basque Crime Fiction on Immigration to Spain

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Abstract

As the world increasingly turns its attention to the European refugee crisis and to the 1.8 million who have arrived on that continent since 2014 as a consequence of being forced to flee their native countries' war-torn cities and villages, questions continue to arise regarding the ethical and political responsibilities of Western nations to facilitate this exodus and to provide refugee and immigration services en route and at destination. Spain remains the intended port of arrival for thousands of Malians, Mauritians, Moroccans, and Western Saharans who sometimes manage to escape war and extreme poverty only to find themselves stalled on their voyage to the promised land, trapped in the no-man's-lands of refugee camps or the port-city ghettos of neighboring developing nations. The misery, tensions, and violence that arise within these makeshift immigration centers is the subject of Basque writer Jon Arretxe's third crime novel translated into Spanish: *Sueños de Tánger* (*Tangerko ametsak*, 2011), which focuses on the plight of the undocumented that precedes their arrival on Spanish soil. Given the tragic probability of so many of those who eventually manage to set foot in a *patera*, the Moroccan-set *novela negra* invites the opportunity to intersect that eventuality and suggests a Spanish ethical responsibility to do so. This paper analyzes the geographic, ethical, and diegetic borders that are negotiated, imagined, and transgressed in Arretxe's novel within the context of Spanish genre fiction and demonstrates the manners in which *Sueños de Tánger* visually navigates the Moroccan city's medina and the Malian capital Bamako's communes in order to decenter the Spanish reading public to postcolonial territories that remain historically and ethically bound to Spain's imperial legacy.

Keywords

transit city, migration, extraterritorial interdiction, handheld narration, crime fiction, Spain, Basque, Tangier, Bamako

Sueños de Tánger: Extraterritorial Basque Crime Fiction on Immigration to Spain

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As the world increasingly turns its attention to the European refugee crisis and to the 1.8 million people who have arrived on that continent since 2014 as a consequence of being forced to flee their native countries' war-torn cities and villages, questions continue to arise regarding the ethical and political responsibilities of Western nations to facilitate this exodus and to provide refugee and immigration services en route and at destination.¹ While Syrians, Afghans, and Iraqis form the majority of migrants seeking asylum in Europe, Spain remains the intended port of arrival for thousands of Malians, Mauritians, Moroccans, and Western Saharans who, like their Middle Eastern counterparts, sometimes manage to escape war and extreme poverty only to find themselves stalled on their voyage to the promised land, trapped in the no-man's-lands of refugee camps or the port-city ghettos of neighboring developing nations.²

The misery, tensions, and violence that arise within these transit hubs is the subject of Basque writer Jon Arretxe's third crime novel published simultaneously in Euskera and Castilian as *Tangerko Ametsak* and *Sueños de Tánger* respectively ('Dreams of Tangier' 2011). The text situates itself meaningfully at various crossroads, both in terms of Arretxe's oeuvre and within Iberian crime fiction. On the one hand, the novel is in line with the author's repeated textual interrogation of assumptions about guilt and responsibility within the intersection of immigration and criminality. This topic is most notably explored through his Touré series, in which an undocumented Burkinabé immigrant investigates crimes in Bilbao's marginalized neighborhoods that official security forces seem poised to ignore or enable.³ The text also exemplifies Arretxe's tendency to focus on themes such as the plight of the disabled or the cleansing of marginalized populations in settings beyond Spanish borders, such as Istanbul or Lisbon.⁴ On the other hand, Arretxe's 2011 novel extends Basque Country's crime fiction trajectory as outlined by critic Stewart King, a genre that in the 1980s was deployed in the region primarily in the service of nation-building and in the 1990s as a tool for a more critical approach to nationalism (64-65). I argue that as a text written and set in the new millennium, *Sueños de Tánger* further complicates the limits of nation and national security. It does so by reframing the all too familiar topic of extrajudicial murder conducted by the Spanish government in a setting outside of the Iberian Peninsula altogether. In this sense, the novel is in tune with a growing body of crime fiction written in all the Spanish languages that interrogates the processes by which state violence is explicitly or covertly promulgated as part of a national strategy for immigration control.⁵

With a multifocal structure reminiscent of earlier, polyphonic Spanish crime fiction on immigration, which similarly narrates the trajectories of Sub-Saharan and North African immigrants to Spain within the framework of detective literature, Arretxe focuses specifically on the plight of transit migrants, that is: on the social, geographic, and humanitarian factors that affect the experience of asylum seekers and economic migrants preceding their (intended) arrival on Spanish soil. Given the likely fatal outcome of so many of those who eventually manage to set foot in a *patera* ‘dinghy,’ the extraterritorially set noir novel identifies the opportunity to avert such tragedy and suggests a Spanish responsibility to do so. At the same time, the novel points to the extra-official means by which Spanish security forces may participate in migration management and interrogates the efficacy and legality of these measures.

This paper analyzes the geographic, ethical, and diegetic borders that are negotiated, imagined, and transgressed in Arretxe’s novel within the context of Spanish genre fiction. I demonstrate the manners in which *Sueños de Tánger* visually navigates the Moroccan city’s medina and the Malian capital Bamako’s communes in order to decenter the Spanish reading public to postcolonial territories that remain historically and ethically bound to Spain’s imperial legacy.⁶ I suggest that Arretxe’s innovative text extends the scope within which contemporary immigration to Spain is considered a national polemic by documenting the itinerancy, precarity, and insecurity experienced by migrants while in transit spaces beyond Spain’s national, physical borders while at the same time broadening the limits of responsibility to include extraterritorial stages of migrants’ trajectories toward that country. In particular, I focus on Arretxe’s exposé of Tangier as a transit city. Drawing on Étienne Balibar’s considerations of unimagined frontiers and on Robert A. Davidson’s notions of interdiction and the nonplace, I propose that the text interrogates the ways in which Spain’s practice of veiled migration prevention outside of its national territory implies a remapping of ethical complicity.

Transit Migration: Reflections *a posteriori*

While there is no standard definition of transit migration, several international policy groups have identified features that characterize the status of migrants who find themselves en route between their geographic origin and intended destination. These characteristics include the intention to continue on with the journey; the perception that the status is temporary; and the expectation that an opportunity will present itself, thus allowing for the next stage of the voyage to begin. Migration expert Aspasia Papadopoulou-Kourkoulou defines transit migration as “the situation between emigration and settlement that is characterized by indefinite migrant stay, legal or illegal, and may or may not develop into further migration depending on a series of structural and individual matters” (4). This

understanding of transit migration comprises persons of different legal statuses including (future) refugee claimants, asylum seekers, students, trafficked persons, and economic migrants. What is most striking about this indefinite period of the migrant's journey (even if also the most common feature highlighted in developing research on the subject) is that so often, what is intended as a short stopover eventually translates into a much longer stay and what the migrant might have expected to be merely a necessary point of passage becomes a place of permanent settlement (Papadopoulou-Kourkoula 5). The precarity and insecurity that result from this extended impermanence is fruitful territory for exploration within the parameters of crime fiction, particularly in its continental European tradition of exposing institutional corruption.

Even a superficial reading of *Sueños de Tánger* may lead one to argue that Tangier is the protagonist of Arretxe's novel. The ubiquitous sights, sounds, and smells of that port city's winding medina filter the narration of the human characters' existence and draw attention to the bidirectional impact that physical space and urban inhabitant have upon each other in the context of transit. In this reality, both main parties (local institutions and migrants themselves) typically resist acknowledging the extent of their interconnectedness, assuming instead that its temporary nature will not require any formalization of their interaction. Indeed, in contemporary, global migratory mappings, it is transit cities—even more so than the transit countries, the level at which national and international policy makers have just begun to address worldwide issues relating to transit migration—that become loci of negotiation: temporal, practical, economic, and legal. Urban planning and public policy expert Giovanna Marconi notes the strategic role that these urban hubs play for the migrant seeking to travel further and, conversely, the tangible impacts felt by local economic, social, and spatial settings as a result of pressures caused by migrants who become residents by default. Yet, “the management of [transit migrants'] urban inclusion, [even] when foreseen, is difficult and marked by conflict, while living conditions are increasingly characterized by alarming levels of marginalization, vulnerability and violation of basic human rights” (Marconi 1). As shall be seen, Arretxe's novel invites the reader to experience Tangier as a person in transit all the while evincing Spain's marked interests in lengthening the stay in that city of those with their eyes on Europe.

Another important characteristic of transit migration is that it is a status that can only be ascertained *a posteriori*, since the observer (or migrant) can only know after the fact if a particular stay was indeed temporary (Papadopoulou-Kourkoula 5). This required retrospection complicates attempts to address *in situ* issues related to the identification, integration, health, and safety of transit migrants at the level of international and local policy. However, the reflective nature of transit migrants' status provides rich opportunities for literary exploration, which Arretxe exploits in

his crime novel by juxtaposing past and present temporal frameworks that reference the migrants' transit through Tangier. His text comprises five subtitled sections, each further divided into various enumerated chapters. Notably, the first chapter of each section is narrated in the present tense and takes place in Bamako, Mali, whereas the remaining chapters, and bulk of the novel, are written in the past tense and transpire in the former international zone and current Moroccan port city. While the reader can quickly ascertain that these temporarily distant fragments will eventually become interconnected, it is not until the last section that the exact nature of this relationship is elucidated.

The chapters set in Tangier detail the urban, lived experiences of a set of characters, including local citizens and transit migrants who represent the asylum-migration nexus. Fátima is a young woman from the Rif region working in the sex trade in order to support her daughter with cerebral palsy, whose birth out of wedlock became the reason for their familial expulsion and motivation to seek asylum in Spain. Moussa is a Malian economic migrant who has made his way through his home country, Mauritania, and the Western Sahara before also traversing Morocco with the aim of boarding a *patera* bound for Spain. When traffickers abandon the dinghy within minutes of leaving shore, he is among the few survivors who return to Tangier, indefinitely. Monés is a physically disabled adolescent Tangerian who lives off of swindling tourists and begging on the streets. Finally, Soraya is Fátima's middle-aged friend and co-worker in whose modest home the Riffian resides while dreaming of a future for herself and her differently abled daughter in Spain. However, as the novel progresses, so too increases the relative protagonism of Mohammed, a Moroccan-born man who was previously smuggled into Spain as a teenager under a transport truck and granted asylum under the minor-foreigner's act but who now works as an assassin in a covert trans-Mediterranean operation between Spanish Secret Services and the Tangerian Police.⁷ The crimes committed as a result of the collaboration between these two forces form the backbone of the novel's noir plot. Their aim is to systematically execute known smugglers in Tangier with three explicit purposes: first, to stem immigration that is ultimately intended to conclude in Spain; to reduce the number of transit migrants in limbo in Tangier and relieve infrastructural stresses on that city; and, consequently, to eliminate any barriers to urban development and security that may prevent international investment in Tangier as a potential goldmine for the extranational coastal hotel industry. The resulting racialized cleansing is an example of what French philosopher Étienne Balibar has identified as capitalist powers seeking to impose a "Western-style" economic model globally ("Unimagined" 36). The murders may further be read as what Balibar expresses as prophylaxis (segregation, the need to purify the social body), one of several practices, discourses, and representations in a network of affective stereotypes which enable us to give an account of the formation of a racist community ("Neo-

Racism” 17-18) and which “since the internationalization of social relations and of population movements within the framework of a system of nation-states, will increasingly lead to a rethinking of the notion of frontier and to a redistributing of its modes of application” (“Neo-Racism” 27). Thus, the assassination of racialized individuals and the correlated redrawing of geographic, legal, and ethical borders remain vital to contemporary national projects such as migration prevention and resemble a modernized and covert extension of colonial practice.

While the characters who move through Tangier intersect at various junctures, the magnitude of the urban interaction between them, as well as their shared plight and connection to the worlds of itinerancy and trafficking as they await their opportunity to migrate to Spain, is only fully understood *a posteriori* through the present-tense narration of Laura. She is a Spanish surfer who one night attempts to save the lives of the twenty-nine migrants on an ill-fated *patera* near the Andalusian coast but is able to save only five, among them the Malian Moussa. After Moussa’s tragic death from tuberculosis, Laura travels to Bamako to deliver the news to his family personally. While she believes their sadness will be subdued when she notifies them that she is carrying Moussa’s child, the Malian family informs her that her pregnancy too will end in tragedy, a fact about which they have been warned by local *echadores de cauris* ‘medicine men’ (266).

The juxtaposition of the present-tense, retrospective fragments whose action takes place in Bamako with the past-tense, active chapters set in Tangier, recreates literarily the *a posteriori* identification of the characters’ stay in the Moroccan port city as temporary and allows for its relevant characterization as a transit city. More importantly, the protagonist of the present-day Bamako chapters is the only character born in Spain in the novel’s entirety and she is the one who Arretxe ultimately deploys in order to catalyze the novel’s denouement and elucidate the meaning of the other characters’ intersection in Tangier. This narrative strategy suggests that the extraterritorial reality of transit migration is of direct Spanish concern, regardless of whether the migrants in question ever end up setting foot on Spanish soil. It is in this context that Arretxe’s novel explores the ethics of an existing practice by which nation-states extend their power to manage and control migratory movements beyond the limits of their geographic borders. As a form of interdiction, these practices in turn allow nation-states to circumvent the obligation to uphold national and international human rights standards.

Spain’s Extraterritorial (Veiled) Interdiction

In its most general sense, an interdiction is an authoritative prohibition. In military terms, interdiction involves disrupting enemy forces or supplies en route to the battle area. Within the phenomenon of migration, interdiction may involve acts of “prohibiting, intercepting, or in some cases, deflecting unauthorized

movements” of peoples and may even go so far as to include pre-emptive practices such as “placing immigration officers in foreign airports for detection purposes; intercepting marine vessels in international or territorial waters; and . . . ‘excising’ state territory so as to create migration zones where the rights of asylum seekers are lessened or eliminated” (Davidson 4-5). In cultural critic Robert A. Davidson’s analysis of contemporary migration-related interdiction practices as manifestations of the constant expansion and contraction of state authority and autonomy, he argues that these in turn imply the changing of national frontiers in both the literal and figurative senses: “[b]y employing apparatuses to extend itself extraterritorially, the state expands its influence so as to effect anticipatory or preventative action against potential refugee claimants or migrants” (5). Indeed, this type of extraterritorial reach of state authority is an important aspect of *Sueños de Tánger* and its consequences are addressed in the crime novel through the genre’s trope of exposing police corruption.

In Arretxe’s text, the Tangerian constabulary is shown to be intimately involved in a rather more surprising, yet central element of the novel’s plot: the deployment of a Spanish Secret Services assassin onto Moroccan soil to exterminate human traffickers. This tactic is determined to be the most effective in solving the migrant problem for both local, Tangerian authorities and national, Spanish interests. Yet while this twist might surprise the crime fiction reader, it is very much in line with the increasingly secret practices that have been linked to the physicality of transit spaces and to the correlated blurring of policy. For Balibar, such zones are:

of completely unequal status from the point of view of rights and living conditions. Their apparent autonomy barely conceals that certain of these zones have the right to prescribe to others concerning their right to freely move about, and this is backed up by force. Of course, *anthropological difference* and the extreme violence that comes with it (from the racist model of the division of humanity into civilized peoples and barbarians, humans and subhumans, to police screening and the war on “illegal migrants”) are not clarified by this representation but are rather its immediate counterpart, and I am not surprised that security practices in Europe are increasingly secret, leading to a blurring of the distinction between police actions and war. (“Unimagined” 40)

Indeed, these “frontier wars” require the “hunting-down of people with certain features” (Balibar “Unimagined” 39), which Arretxe executes through the novel’s carefully configured assassin.

The murderer’s name is Mohammed, a detail that is explored extensively by the privileged narrator to suggest a symbolic equivalence between the constantly

highlighted corruption of local police forces and the far-less-known, yet equally unethical exporting of Spanish spy agents as mercenaries. This joint accountability manifests itself in the doubling of Mohammeds: one, the secret services agent; the other, a top-ranking police officer in Tangier; both, collaborators in the novel's several murders. Throughout the chapter that narrates their first encounter, Arretxe emphasizes their near inextricability as a result of their shared name, differentiating them first only by obscure visual factors and then, importantly, by their place of residence. The Tangerian police officer is referred to as "El Mohammed más vulgar" (73) 'The more common Mohammed,' "el otro Mohammed" (77) 'the other Mohammed,' and "el hombre de Tánger" (79) 'the man from Tangier.' His onomastic double, on the other hand, is described as "el Mohammed más joven" (75) 'the younger Mohammed,' "el Mohammed de pasaporte español" (76) 'the Mohammed with a Spanish passport,' "el hombre enviado desde el otro lado del Estrecho" (79) 'the man sent from the other side of the Strait,' and "Mohammed, el mercenario" (80) 'Mohammed, the mercenary.'⁸ The novel's plot requires the complicity of these two Mohammeds; neither can operate without the other nor, according to their superiors, can the problem of (transit) migration experienced by both shores of the Strait of Gibraltar be solved without their joint action.

However, it is noteworthy that the only character who ends up with blood on his hands is the naturalized Spanish Mohammed (at least until the very last section of the novel, when he too is assassinated by those who employ him once he has concluded the execution of his hit list). At first glance, the fact that the text's serial murderer is a Spanish national of Moroccan descent may seem to support reactionary and statistically unsubstantiated perceptions that foreign-born residents in Europe are more likely to engage in criminal activity than those who were born domestically. Yet, Mohammed is not a mere Moroccan-born Spaniard engaging in delinquency; he is a member of the Spanish Secret Forces, a national body that has hired him with the express purpose of deploying him as international assassin for solving multinational problems outside the diplomatic arena. Therefore, Mohammed's Moroccan birth place does not function in the novel to reinforce stereotypes of (undocumented) immigrants as threats to the nation's security and sovereignty. Instead, his liminal membership to the Spanish citizenry is shown to be an asset that his adopted country is willing to exploit in order to exercise migratory control extraterritorially. At the same time, his glocality, both in terms of his origins and citizenship, and in terms of his novelistic function as exported mercenary echoes the transitory aspect of the narration.

Curiously, Arretxe's critique of Spanish veiled immigration-management practices requires that the reader acknowledge the questionable ethics of assassinating human traffickers, persons who are inarguably and in large part responsible for the actual death of thousands of migrants annually in the Mediterranean Sea. The reader must ask herself whether any operation that removes

traffickers from service, whether through covert assassination or legal means, is not ultimately in the best interest of the victims of trafficking. Refugees, asylum-seekers, and economic migrants who procure the services of *tiburones* ‘sharks,’ the Strait’s equivalent to the Rio Grande’s *coyotes*, are left so often to die in the frigid waters. The answer to the query is, of course, that the bi-coastal operation of murdering smugglers, regardless of the latter’s own involvement in the death of the humans they exploit, is morally reproachable and highly questionable on international legal grounds. More importantly, however, the novel’s denouement recreates a well-documented repercussion of Europe’s continued policies aimed at reinforcing immigration control measures: more migrant deaths. As Marconi details, “Smuggling networks have proved to be extremely flexible . . . shifting their activities to others or . . . adopting different smuggling techniques, including the corruption of police and immigration officers” (7). Thus, the suggestion that removing a few smugglers from the equation will translate into a reduction of immigration by irregular means is without basis.

Julien Simon, a researcher with the International Centre for Migration Policy Development, has shown that the increasing risk of being intercepted by European-led security forces has simply led to traffickers changing their *modus operandi*, using more precarious vessels, organizing longer and more dangerous routes, and adapting their provision of services so as to abandon migrants more often at sea with the express knowledge that they will likely drown (40). In *Sueños de Tánger*, “Mohammed, el mercenario” uses his connections with the Tangerian police to ascertain that a particular *patera* will be permitted to leave for Spain. On it will be Fátima and her young, differently abled daughter, as well as Moussa, Fátima’s good friend from Mali. As Laura recounts to Moussa’s family later in Bamako, assuring the *patera*’s departure from a Tangerian beach brings with it no assurance of the passengers’ safe arrival in Spain. On the contrary, as has become commonplace, the dinghy takes on water, the motor fails, one of two oars is lost, and hysteria ensues, leading passengers to attack each other and throw the most vulnerable overboard. With a heart-wrenching scene in which Fátima—fearful of the water and unable to swim—jumps in after her daughter but is unable to stay afloat despite Moussa’s efforts to help her, Arretxe contributes masterfully to the growing compendium of Spanish crime fiction that offers a glimpse into the tragic final moments of migrants capsizing at sea. At the same time, the novel serves to critique the extrapolation of national Spanish security measures, indicating that at the very least these veiled interdiction practices are ineffectual and, more significantly, that they are directly responsible for the escalating numbers of migrant deaths in the Mediterranean.

Handheld Narration

Elsewhere, I have discussed the ways in which Spanish crime novels that deal with immigration—including Jorge Martínez Reverte’s 2001 *Gálvez en la frontera* (‘Gálvez on the border’), Arturo Pérez-Reverte’s 2002 *La Reina del Sur* (*Queen of the South*), and Antonio Lozano’s *Harraga* (‘Those who burn their papers’) and *Donde mueren los ríos* (‘Where the rivers die’) from 2002 and 2003, respectively—have incorporated a number of different narrative techniques to reinforce the reader’s experience while accompanying migrants on their voyage toward Europe.⁹ Cinematographic techniques such as *kino-glaz* ‘movie-eye’ are used in the creation of an internal perspective of the crossing; travel narrative strategies are employed to evoke the fears and thrills that accompany the undertaking of such emotionally overwhelming voyages; and finally, aspects of the *bildungsroman* and of testimonial literature inform the authors’ approach to telling the migrants’ stories from individual perspectives that deconstruct their usual treatment in the media as a conglomerate mass. The incorporation of these narrative strategies does not present a risk of competing with the literary codes of the detective story, which nevertheless form the foundation and overall blueprint of the novels; rather, the borrowed techniques weave in and out of the stories adding meat to the crime fiction skeleton and enhancing the reading experience by allowing the reader to penetrate the psyche and emotional position of the migrant characters. The incorporation of these techniques serves, in the end, to heighten the evocative effects—fear, suspense, horror, thrill, caution—that are so pertinent to crime fiction.

In addition to the frightful narration of the attempted crossing in *Sueños de Tánger* analyzed above, Arretxe deploys other even-more-innovative documentary techniques of the visual media, including what I refer to as narrated handheld camera shots. Cinematographic descriptions of *patera* and *cayuco* ‘canoe’ crossings in earlier Spanish crime fiction on migration served well to counterbalance high-angle shots—continually propagated by much of the Western media—of overfilled boats taken from helicopters, thus providing a more personalized perspective on the dangerous and fearful experience. However, these ekphrastic textual fragments predominantly focused on a constant, single angle (in both the visual and narrative sense), either through a privileged or omniscient third-person narrator, evoking the fears, chaos, and determination of the individual migrant in order to highlight for readers the uniqueness and individuality of each of the humans crammed into those precarious dinghies. By contrast, Arretxe’s film-like descriptions, particularly those that refer to the migrant’s urban experience while in transit, are much more contemporary and more akin to the short, choppy, hyper-individualized videos that might be captured on a handheld smart phone. As a result, they reference more directly the type of post-authorial, multi-focused

storytelling that has become so vital in bringing to the West information from war-torn and media-censored developing regions from which asylum seekers and economic migrants mostly originate.

An important aspect that differentiates Arretxe's handheld scenes from those of his crime fiction predecessors is that they are almost exclusively set in Tangier's medina or, to a lesser extent, Bamako's communes, with only the second-to-last chapter of the novel taking place in the *patera*. Furthermore, these shaky, urban segments constantly overlap in a continuous dialogue between narrative counterpoints, creating a refracted *mise en abyme* rather than a melodic choral text. In previous polyphonic *novelas negras* such as Lozano's *Donde mueren los ríos*, the relational temporality of narrated fragments is diachronic and rarely overlapping, presenting in sequence a collection of individual stories of various migrants who, ultimately, end up on the same trajectory. By contrast, Arretxe's narrative distinguishes itself technically by allowing the reader to view the same scene over and over again synchronically and from different angles.

This constant retelling of the migrants' movements through space creates a multi-focused collage of each event that is perhaps most analogous to clicking on YouTube videos uploaded by individuals who have captured the same act from several perspectives. Resembling the experience of one who views such videos on social and other digital media, the reader/viewer is invited to formulate her own opinion regarding the accuracy and impact of the event's visual documentation. In a strategy that has been similarly powerful in the Black Lives Matter movement, in which citizens visually documenting police brutality and xenophobia has led to increased public inquiry, the novel's multi-angled narrative style undermines any suggestion of an authoritative voice, deferring instead to the power of individual testimony in unveiling the truth and demanding justice.

The aesthetic value of this informal, polyvalent narration also resides in its ability to mirror on the literary page the constant movement, redirection, and reactive nature of transit migration, a reality that "challenges the traditional view of migration as a clearly structured process, characterized by distinct phases such as *departure, journey, arrival, integration*" (Papadopoulou-Kourkoulou 5). Indeed, transit migration is characterized most markedly by its contingency, that is, by the migrant's dependence upon opportunities presenting themselves in order to determine the next phase of the trajectory. Likewise, Arretxe's handheld narrative technique mimics the spontaneous nature of capturing an event by smart phone, a documentary process that is devoid of premeditation or planning and which instead presents itself as an instinctual response to a chance happening.

As in candid documentarian filmmaking, individuals in *Sueños de Tánger* are as likely to be identified by a narrated detail of their physical appearance as they are by their name, even once it has been made known to the reader and their importance as primary or secondary characters elucidated. The repetition of color

is also a productive strategy that allows Arretxe's reader to recognize the same character being filmed from different angles: Fátima is routinely the woman of the yellow djellaba wearing a white scarf; Soraya is the older woman with the orange djellaba and copper-colored hair; Moussa is the young black man; Monés is the man with the metallic crutches; and the medina's well-known blind mendicant is described repeatedly by her brightly colored, striped socks. The multiple sightings of these characters and their identifiably colored clothing function like an *ex post facto* storyboard of various travelling shots, each representing the physical movement of a different character and her/his intersection with others.

An Urban "Anti-Guide" to Tangier as Transit City

Although no peer-reviewed study has been published on Arretxe's fiction at the time of writing this paper, popular literary critics concur in their assertion that his novels loosely employ codes that are characteristic of travel literature. Indeed, in addition to being a crime novel, *Sueños de Tánger* can be read as a type of urban, touristic "anti-guide" filled with suggested itineraries that should not be undertaken and abounding in colorful ekphrastic descriptions of places to avoid, mostly because they present a real or perceived danger to one's safety or health. Throughout, the physical, urban manifestations of economic inequality are brought to the fore through the juxtaposition of the new and old city; restaurants afforded by haves and those by have-nots; and pedestrian routes that will either have one rubbing shoulders with the city's economic elite or with the starving, sickly, and homeless. The text is unquestionably situated within the codes of crime fiction, a genre whose storylines typically take place in cities' underbellies as loci of insecurity, crime, and violence of multiple kinds. Yet, the superimposition of techniques used by tourist guidebooks is jarring at the same time as it is powerful in that it affords the reader a rare opportunity to trek the urban center as would the least fortunate traveler: the transit migrant.

Spaces to be experienced either by tourists (purposeful transients of leisure) or by migrants (accidental residents by default) are repeatedly differentiated within the novel's pages. If one were to stand in the medina in a spot adjacent to Fátima and Soraya's modest residence, the view would be as follows: "Desde aquel punto, una callejuela subía abriéndose paso entre la amplia oferta de alojamientos cuyos rótulos desteñidos y roñosos difícilmente atraerían las divisas de los turistas. De hecho, allí se aglutinaban las pensiones y hostales más miserables de la ciudad" (17) 'From that point on, there was an uphill laneway that opened up among the ample offerings of boarding houses whose faded and rusty signs would not likely attract the attention of any tourist. In fact, it was there that the city's most miserable pensions and hostels were concentrated.' By contrast, well-to-do locals might dine at "el *Fast Food Brahim Abdelmalik*, la bocatería más popular de la Ciudad Nueva,

situada en la calle *El-Jarraoui*, una vía peatonal muy animada y muy del agrado de los tangerinos con mayor poder adquisitivo” (187) ‘the *Brahim Abdelmalik Fast Food*, the most popular sandwich place in the New City, located on *El-Jarroui Street*, a highly animated pedestrian road enjoyed by Tangerians with greater purchasing power.’ Notably, descriptions of the port city are numerous and explicit in their assertion of the importance that people, as much as the physical/built environment, attain as (semi-)permanent visual features of the urban landscape:

Llevaba una semana en Tánger y, a fuerza de frecuentar aquel lugar, ya se le hacían conocidos unos cuantos personajes que se constituían en parte fundamental del paisaje humano del Zoco Chico. Además del viejo camarero de aquella terraza en la que él era asiduo cliente existía una abundante fauna de gente de lo más peculiar. Le resultaban ya tan familiares que incluso les había puesto apodos a unos cuantos: el Imam, ‘la de la muñeca,’ el Abuelito. . . . El Imam podía aparecer de improviso, a cualquier hora, con su impoluta chilaba blanca. (181)

He’d been in Tangier for one week and, as a result of spending time in that place, he had already begun to recognize a number of characters who constituted a fundamental part of the Zoco Chico’s human landscape. In addition to the old waiter on that patio where he was now a regular, there existed an abundant fauna of the most peculiar people. They already felt so familiar to him that he even nicknamed a bunch of them: the Imam, ‘the one with the doll,’ Grandpa. . . . The Imam could show up on a whim, at any hour, with his spotless white djellaba.

The reader too becomes familiar with the humans that sprout from the city’s winding streets as she crosses paths with these structures once and again through the perspective of various characters. One example of the city’s decaying human monuments is the blind elderly mendicant on the stairs entering the medina, a physical presence that marks the route taken by any or all transients: “En ese trayecto de peldaños desgastados, junto al zaguán de una de las viviendas adosadas a la muralla, se encontró con una anciana mendicante sentada en un pretil. Ella también cubría su cabeza con un pañuelo blanco, y además llevaba una manta negra que le abrigaba la espalda” (16) ‘On that path composed of worn steps, beside the corridor of one of the houses attached to the wall, he bumped into an old beggar sitting on a parapet. She also covered her head with a white scarf and on top of it wore a black blanket to warm her back.’ Moments later, passers-by note the presence of the human statue: “hasta que llegaron al pretil donde descansaba una pordiosera tuerta . . . con las reseca piernas desnudas y amoratadas . . . y unos calcetines deshilachados a rayas y lilas” (26-27) ‘until they arrived at the parapet

where a sightless mendicant rested . . . with her gaunt and bruised legs exposed . . . and her fraying, striped lilac socks,' thus alluding to the revulsion that her appearance and odor produce.

The living, human landmarks of the city stimulate the senses in ways that the built, brick-and-mortar or glass constructions never could. More than just sights to be seen, these (sometimes barely) breathing structures engage with visitors through smell and sound, usually in a nausea-inducing experience worthy of a top-ten list of sites to avoid in a tourist's anti-guide. For example, the blind beggar is known for grasping at the hands of charitable pedestrians in order to smell/register them for future reference. The shock felt by innocent (mostly Western) travelers who experience this invasion of space parallels the strident auditory stimulus that they receive when hearing for the first time the sounds emitted by one of the city's most infamous transit migrants. The Ivoirian burn victim routinely runs through the medina screeching at the top of his lungs, transmitting to all around him the excruciating pain with which he lives after an accident that charred most of his body and that was the direct consequence of his squalid living conditions in Tangier (171). Rather than the clickety-clack of a train, the whistle of a factory, or even just the call to prayer from a minaret, the reader of this novel hears the metronomic rattling of Monés's crutches, smells the putrid latrines of the city's public restrooms, and feels the scaly, rotting skin of a beggar's grasp during Arretxe's walking tour of Tangier, city of despair and decay. Thus, while the narrative's affective practices guide the tourist/reader to engage with the city-in-transit's odorous, shrill, and unsightly bodies, thereby infringing upon the sensory limits that typically distinguish privileged and disadvantaged, tourist and non-tourist, urban subjects, the text simultaneously transgresses the borders that habitually bind its generic form.

One architectural structure that is prevalent in both *Sueños de Tánger* and more typical tourist guidebooks, however, is the hotel. Whether as a space from which locals and foreigners alike may procure sex trade services or as a form of temporary residence, hotels of varying quality make it onto the Basque writer's guide map of the transit city. Similar to the human urban elements whose presence the reader repeatedly encounters, the narration deploys travelling shots in order to capture again and again within its frame the deplorable Hotel Olid's filthy red and white sign, the higher-end Hotel Continental's gigantic red letters, and, toward the end, the extravagant lobby and suites of the Hotel El-Minzah. Yet, the hotel as a space in this crime novel serves more than to highlight the disparity of wealth and buying power of potential and actual clients. The very notion of the hotel as a quintessential urban component, its requirement as a marker of a fully functioning, modern metropolis, becomes intertwined with the seeming unavoidability of corruption at the local and international scale, thus implicating that specific physical space with the life-threatening predicaments of transit migrants on a much

larger scale. In his theorizing of specific built places that are linked to processes of extraterritorial interdiction and immigration management, Davidson argues that the hotel is an example of a space in the “modern built environment that plays a role in articulating a more malleable state frontier” and that “the state’s determination of its own trajectory through overt and veiled interdiction practices activates the latent political potential of the supermodern nonplace” (7). While Davidson analyzes examples of hotels that are used throughout the world (including in Canada) as migrant detention centers and excised territory where (inter)national human rights standards are not easily enforced, the hotel in *Sueños de Tánger* becomes connected to Spanish veiled interdiction practices through the economic potential that it presents for coastal development.

It is not the first time that Spanish crime fiction depicts the development of multinational hotel chains as a bedfellow of human trafficking: consider Balearic writer Maria-Antònia Oliver’s *Antípodes* (1988), for example, a novel in which real-estate speculation and environmental irresponsibility are explored vis-à-vis the growing hotel industry and the exploitation of minors. If Oliver’s detective novel investigated ecological violence through balearization, Arretxe’s text probes state and corporate violence through cleansing. However, cleaning up Tangier in order to attract foreign investors for hotel construction is explicitly listed in Arretxe’s text as a bilateral goal associated with stemming migration between Morocco and Spain. Such foregrounding underscores the extent to which the hotel participates symbolically, as well as spatially, as an actor in extraterritorial interdiction by the Spanish state and builds on the notion of that space as a functional element in the lived experience of the transit migrant and transit city.

Conclusion: *Pesadillas de Tánger* ‘Nightmares of Tangier’ or ‘Dreaming from Tangier’

While Cristina Fernández has translated the Basque title of Arretxe’s novel, *Tangerko ametsak*, to the Castilian *Sueños de Tánger*, ‘Dreams of Tangier,’ the storyline and themes suggest that a more appropriate translation might be *Sueños en Tánger*, allowing for its interpretation as ‘Dreams from Tangier.’ Not one of the novel’s characters dreams of Tangier, of arriving, remaining, or residing in that Moroccan port city. Rather, characters look toward Spain while in Tangier and contemplate the likelihood of leaving that transit city for their intended destination. The short geographic distance separating the location from which the characters dream and that of which they dream is another powerful leitmotiv in the novel, one that references other Spanish literary and filmic texts about immigration and trafficking across the Strait of Gibraltar. For example, Chuz Gutiérrez’s 2008 film *Retorno a Hansala* (*Return to Hansala*) not only deals with the crossing of Spaniards and Moroccans (both alive and deceased) across the Strait by legal and

illegal means, but also visually captures the alluring quality of the Northern coast when gazed upon with yearning from one of Tangier's many *atalayas* 'vantage points.' However close the two coasts appear, the fifteen kilometers that span them have become the final resting place of an average of 2000 migrants per year (Papadopoulou-Kourkoula 2). In this context, and the ever-increasing likelihood that a migrant's attempt to cross the Strait of Gibraltar will end in her death, perhaps dreaming of Tangier, rather than from it, is indeed an aspiration with a potentially more fruitful outcome.

Notes

1. This is a statistic of the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the United Nation's Migration Agency.
2. As of June 2018 and according to IOM, 77,144 migrants have arrived in Spain since 1 January 2015. For weekly updated data on the numbers of migrants arriving in Europe country by country, on their countries of origin, and on the estimated numbers of deaths en route, see the interactive maps of the IOM: <http://migration.iom.int/europe/>.
3. At the time of writing this article, the series includes five novels, all of them published in Euskera and Castilian simultaneously and with the following titles respectively: *19 Kamera*, *19 cámaras* (Erein, 2012); *612 Euro*, *612 Euros* (Erein, 2013); *Hutsaren Itzalak*, *Sombras de la nada* (Erein, 2014); *Estolda-Jolasak*, *Juegos de cloaca* (Erein, 2015); and *Sator Lokatzak*, *Piel de topo* (Erein, 2016, 2017).
4. Examples of Arretxe titles that deal with these subjects are *Xahmaran*, *Shahmarán* (Erein, 2009) and *Fatum*, *La calle de los Ángeles* (Erein, 2010).
5. All citations of Arretxe's text in this essay will be from Cristina Fernández's translation to the Castilian (2011).
6. In his consideration of Italian sociologists Alessandro Dal Lago and Sandro Mazzadra's essay "I confini impensati dell'Europa" 'The unimagined frontiers of Europe,' Étienne Balibar highlights the need to continually recall European history's colonizing and decolonizing phases. He further contends that that continent's pattern of imposing borders was in harmony with its objectives of organizing the whole world and that: "[w]e cannot forget, however, that the tracing

out of these borders is based upon a global delimiting of spaces and of rates of development and incorporates an irreducible anthropological racism into the very notion of political citizenship” (“Unimagined” 38).

7. Spain’s Law Regulating the Right of Asylum and Subsidiary Protection was passed on October 30, 2009. Particularly relevant are Article 25.1.b of Title II, which details the urgency with which asylum applications of unaccompanied minors shall be processed, and Articles 46, 47, and 48 of Title V, which detail the procedures in place to support (unaccompanied) minors formally applying for international protection via asylum in Spain.

8. All translations into English are my own.

9. See “Víctima, detective y femme fatale” and “The *Problem* of Immigration and Contemporary Spanish Detective Fiction.”

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