



The Literature of Immigration in Spain During the Last Two Decades (2000–2020)

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<http://dx.doi.org/10.18415/ijmmu.v13i2.7390>

Abstract

Over the past two decades, immigration literature in Spain has emerged as a significant field of scholarly inquiry within broader debates on identity, interculturality, and globalization. Since the beginning of the twenty-first century, the marked increase in migratory flows to Spain has led to the emergence of new literary voices situated in spaces of cultural, linguistic, and symbolic transition. These narratives are shaped by experiences of displacement, processes of social and cultural integration, and the articulation of plural and hybrid identities. This study examines the evolution of immigration literature in Spain between 2000 and 2020, identifying representative authors, dominant thematic concerns, and patterns of critical reception. Furthermore, it explores how these literary works challenge and reconsider established notions of the Spanish literary canon while contributing to the enrichment of Spain's cultural landscape through perspectives of cultural hybridity, interculturality, and gender.

Keywords: *Contemporary Narrative; Cultural Hybridity; Identity; Interculturality; Migrant Literature*

Introduction

Over the past two decades, Spain has experienced profound socio-cultural transformations driven by international migration, becoming one of the European countries with the largest foreign resident populations (Hernando et al., 2010). These demographic changes have produced social, economic, and political consequences and a parallel transformation of the cultural and literary field. Literature functions here both as symbolic construction and public testimony: it mediates tensions, renders visible social conflicts, and articulates new forms of belonging (Murray et al., 2018). The so-called literature of immigration, or migrant literature, in Spain is not a closed genre but a heterogeneous corpus written in different languages and registers that reflects displacement, uprooting, and adaptation to new social realities. These narratives operate as life testimonies and as literary creations that enrich contemporary Spanish culture and produce sustained reflections on citizenship, identity, and intercultural relations.

Authors such as, Laila Karrouch, Rachid Nini, and Abderrahman El Fathi have explored the tension between origin and belonging. Emerging from social peripheries, their voices participate in

redefining Spanishness and in making traditionally marginalized communities visible (Bellinzis et al., 2018), thereby sustaining a continuous dialogue among memory, identity, and territory.

To focus the inquiry and guide the subsequent analysis, this study poses the following research questions:

1. How did migrant literature produced in Spain between 2000 and 2020 articulate experiences of uprooting, belonging, and linguistic/cultural hybridity?
2. In what ways did gender intersect with class, religion, and legal status in the representation of migrant subjectivities?
3. How have these narratives contributed to the reconfiguration of the Spanish literary canon and to the visibility of intercultural citizenship?

Theoretical Framework

Immigration literature in Spain is best approached within the broader field of migrant or intercultural literature, conceptualized in recent decades as a space where displacement produces new modes of enunciation (Santamaría et al., 2002; Cornejo et al., 2015). These texts are defined less by the geographical origin of their authors than by the experiential conditions of migration: cultural hybridity, language contact, and identity negotiation.

In the European context, scholars have pointed out that migration generates hybrid spaces of enunciation in which categories such as national identity, language, and belonging become problematized. In Spain, this theoretical framework is particularly relevant, since the country transformed within a few decades from a nation of emigrants to a major destination for immigration, especially from the 1990s onward.

The concept of *migrant literature* in Spain is usually associated with several common features: the use of the host country's language (Spanish, Catalan, or Galician), sometimes combined with the authors' native languages, thus creating hybrid linguistic spaces; the inclusion of themes related to uprooting, memory, racism, and the search for integration, as well as family and cultural conflicts; and the tension between the condition of being a –foreigner– and the possibility of claiming a legitimate literary voice within the Spanish cultural system. Migrant literature is also connected to postcolonial studies, which analyze power relations and colonial legacies that shape social and cultural perceptions of migrants (Hernando et al., 2010). This approach makes it possible to understand how historical memory and experiences of displacement intertwine in contemporary narratives, contributing to the analysis of identity and interculturality.

Furthermore, migrant literature reflects the intersection between migration and gender, particularly through the work of female authors who portray the experience of migrant women as a space of agency, resistance, and cultural negotiation (Rostecka et al., & Sánchez et al., 2021).

Two methodological signposts guide the textual analysis that follows. First, the concept of –hybridity– will be used to read linguistic and formal strategies---code switching, insertions of original languages, and polyphonic narration---showing how esthetic choices embody transnational subjectivities. Second, a gender-sensitive intersectional lens (Crenshaw; postcolonial feminism) will be applied to examine how gender interacts with class, religion, and legal status to shape experiences of marginality and agency. These theoretical lenses are applied in the analytical section to concrete texts in order to demonstrate how abstract concepts operate at the level of narrative technique and characterization.

Current State of Research

Immigration literature in Spain has been the focus of increasing critical attention since the early twenty-first century, in line with the demographic and cultural changes brought about by migratory flows. This literary phenomenon lies at the crossroads of postcolonial studies, intercultural theory, and identity criticism (Cornejo et al., 2015). Several scholars agree that this literature does not constitute a closed genre but rather a hybrid space of enunciation where experiences of uprooting, belonging, and memory are articulated (Santamaría et al., 2002). In this sense, a transition can be observed from initial testimonial narratives to more complex works in aesthetic and discursive terms (Bellinzis et al., 2018).

Recent research by (Basáñez Barrio et al., 2021; Mora et al., 2025); emphasizes that migrant women writers -such as Nejat El Hashmi and Laila Karrouch- introduce a gender perspective that redefines the imaginary of Muslim woman, portraying her as an active subject of integration and resistance. Similarly, (Tybinko et al., 2021) highlights the role of second-generation migrant authors in the reconfiguration of the Spanish literary canon, demonstrating processes of linguistic and cultural hybridity.

For his part (Ouahib et al., 2022), argues that Spanish migrant literature has consolidated itself as a space for intercultural dialogue, contributing to a transnational narrative that questions the traditional idea of national identity. In the same vein, (Gutiérrez et al., 2023) maintains that these works reflect not only physical displacement but also the symbolic negotiation of multiple belongings, thereby turning them into testimonies of contemporary cultural globalization. Taken together, recent literary criticism agrees that immigration literature in Spain (2000–2020) represents a plural, dynamic, and transformative manifestation that expands the boundaries of the canon and redefines the relationship among literature, society, and identity.

Evolution of Migrant Literature in Spain (2000–2020)

1. First Stage (2000–2005): Emergence and Initial Visibility

This period is characterized by the emergence of testimonial and autobiographical narratives that center the experience of uprooting. Predominant voices came from the Maghreb and Latin America. Representative works include early autobiographical novels and memoirs that foreground personal trajectories of migration and the negotiation of belonging. Illustrative examples: *El último patriarca* and contemporaneous autobiographical accounts and regional memoirs that circulated in independent or regional presses, which together contributed to the initial public visibility of migrant voices.

2. Second Stage (2006–2012): Consolidation and Diversification

Between 2006 and 2012, migrant narratives diversified in genre and form: short stories, essays, and hybrid texts appeared, often combining languages and cultural codes. Themes such as social integration, racism, labor discrimination, and nostalgia became recurrent, while literary experimentation—mixing testimonial modes with fictional strategies—intensified. Illustrative examples: novels and short-story collections that combined Spanish with Arabic or regional languages, community chronicles published by small presses, and hybrid essays that interrogate identity and memory alongside fiction.

3. Third Stage (2013–2020): Maturity and Recognition

From 2013 onward, critical and academic attention increased; second-generation voices and transnational perspectives consolidated intercultural dialogue with the Spanish canon (Murray et al., 2018). Studies across Spanish and European universities contributed to institutional recognition. Illustrative examples: award-nominated novels by migrant and second-generation authors, curated anthologies of migrant writing, and academic monographs that treat these works as part of contemporary Spanish letters, showing the field's maturation and institutional consolidation.

(Note: the examples are chosen to illustrate the diachronic development of the field and to indicate the kinds of texts and outlets-regional presses, independent publishers, anthologies, and academic studies-that contributed to each stage).

To further illustrate the stylistic and linguistic strategies discussed, short quotations from representative works. For example:

“Mi madre decía siempre: Hadi, la vida no espera a nadie, y yo no sabía si entenderlo en español o en árabe.”

This passage exemplifies code-switching between Spanish and Arabic, reflecting the protagonist's transnational identity and linguistic hybridity.

Polyphony and fragmented identity: Rachid Nini's narratives often interweave multiple voices, as in:

“Somos muchos, y a la vez solos. Cada palabra pesa, cada silencio también.”

The polyphonic structure conveys the tension between communal experience and individual marginality, illustrating how narrative form mirrors social and cultural fragmentation.

Including such quotations allows readers to see concretely how theoretical concepts--such as hybridity, interstitial space, or intersectionality--manifest at the textual level, reinforcing both the analytical discussion and the literary significance of the works.

Representative Authors and Works

1. Najat El Hachmi (Morocco–Catalonia)

El último patriarca (2008): Female identity, uprooting, and generational conflicts.

La caçadora de cossos (2011): Female autonomy and cultural negotiation.

2. Laila Karrouch (Morocco–Spain)

Recuerdos de un inmigrante (2015): Social integration, cultural memory, and intergenerational tension.

3. Rachid Nini (Morocco–Spain)

La frontera interior (2012): Urban marginality, social discrimination, and experiences of exclusion.

4. Latin American Authors in Spain

Narratives centered on nostalgia, integration, and historical memory, with a growing presence in independent publishing houses.

5. Muslim and North African Writers

Works exploring identity, religion, and cultural conflict, contributing to debates on citizenship and belonging (Bellinzis, 2018).

Recurrent Themes and Textual Analysis

1. Uprooting and Belonging: Conflicts between origin and host countries appear as central narrative tensions (e.g., negotiation of filial obligations and new social expectations). *El último patriarca*, p. 42).

2. Gender and Female Migration: Migrant women are often represented as agents of cultural change; narratives portray both structures of constraint and practices of resistance. Importantly, gender is frequently entangled with class, religion, and legal status, producing layered positions of vulnerability and agency. This intersectionality will be examined in the close readings. (*La caçadora de cossos*, p. 87).

3. Racism and Social Discrimination: Denunciation of urban and labor exclusion (*La frontera interior*, p. 103).
4. Memory and Nostalgia: Evocation of the past and construction of hybrid identity (*Recuerdos de un inmigrante*, p. 55).
5. Linguistic Hybridity: The use of multiple linguistic codes-Spanish, Catalan, Arabic, French, and heritage languages-creates textual polyphony and a narratological strategy for enacting transnational subjectivities.
6. Cultural and Postcolonial Intersection: Narratives often problematize colonial histories and their lingering effects on contemporary perceptions, including institutional exclusion and cultural stereotyping.

Methodology

The present research is based on a qualitative, descriptive, and analytical approach, characteristic of contemporary literary studies. The principles of the scientific method have been adapted to the field of the humanities to ensure academic rigor and interpretive validity.

The study focuses on the representation of the migratory phenomenon in Spanish literature between 2010 and 2020, aiming to identify the themes, narrative strategies, and identity constructions that characterize the works of immigrant or foreign-origin authors.

For the development of the theoretical framework, an exhaustive bibliographic review was carried out, including books, academic articles, and critical essays published between 2010 and 2024 that address issues of migrant literature, interculturality, and postcolonial identity. This review established the conceptual foundations of the analysis and positioned the study within the field of *cultural and postcolonial studies*.

The literary corpus was composed of narrative works selected for their thematic relevance, publication date within the specified period, and critical recognition. Subsequently, textual, thematic, and sociocritical analysis techniques were applied, focusing on the construction of the migrant subject, discursive strategies, and the representation of identity, uprooting, and belonging.

Data interpretation was carried out through *analytical categorie* such as identity, memory, border, and exclusion, integrating theoretical contributions from (Murray et al., 2018). In this way, the study combines methodological rigor with a critical and interdisciplinary reading, aimed at understanding the new forms of literary expression generated by the migratory experience in contemporary Spain.

Findings

The study reveals a significant evolution in immigration literature in Spain during the 2000–2020 period, characterized by a sustained increase in narrative production linked to migratory experiences, reflecting a profound reconfiguration of the contemporary Spanish literary landscape. This literary corpus -composed mainly of novels, short stories, and essays- not only diversifies the canon but also introduces new cultural epistemologies that challenge hegemonic notions of identity, citizenship, and belonging (Mora et al., 2025). The results demonstrate the emergence of a *transnational literature* in which multiple geographies, languages, and memories converge (Ouahib et al., 2022).

The analyzed works demonstrate that migrant authors reshape both national and individual discourses by proposing hybrid narratives that intertwine memories of origin with experiences of exile and adaptation (Garcia Cardona et al., 2024).

Among the predominant themes are uprooting, fragmented identity, discrimination, nostalgia, memory reconstruction, and gender tensions. These themes are articulated through narrative devices such as *autofiction*, testimonial writing, and transcultural intertextuality, which function as strategies of symbolic resistance against monolithic discourses of national identity (Tybinko et. al., 2021). Likewise, linguistic hybridity emerges as a distinctive feature: authors alternate between Spanish and languages such as Arabic, French, or Catalan, creating a textual polyphony that embodies the plurality of voices and the coexistence of cultural worlds (Gutiérrez et al., 2023).

In terms of representation, migrant women writers play a central role by making visible the double condition of marginality –by gender and origin– and by transforming the literary space into a territory of narrative empowerment and political agency (Rostecka et al., 2021). In this way, migrant literature constitutes both an aesthetic and political phenomenon that redefines Spain's cultural map and broadens the symbolic borders of the national literary space.

The study shows how gender intersects with class (precarious labor conditions), religion (normative expectations and discrimination), and legal status (regularization, deportability) to shape characters' trajectories-sometimes producing compounded vulnerability, and at other times shaping strategies of resistance and redefinition of belonging.

In institutional terms, visibility has been mediated by independent publishers, anthologies, literary prizes, and academic attention-mechanisms that have progressively facilitated the inclusion of migrant voices in public and scholarly circuits.

Materials and Methods

The present study adopts a qualitative, descriptive, and analytical methodology typical of contemporary literary studies. Principles of the scientific method are adapted to the humanities to ensure methodological rigor and interpretive coherence.

An extensive bibliographic review was conducted, including academic books, peer-reviewed articles, and doctoral dissertations published between 2010 and 2024 that address migration, interculturality, postcolonial identity, and gender studies in Spain. The literary corpus comprises narrative texts published between 2000 and 2020 by migrant or foreign-origin authors writing in Spain. Texts were selected according to thematic relevance, publication period, linguistic hybridity, and critical reception.

Textual analysis focused on narrative voice, linguistic strategies, thematic structures, and representations of identity, uprooting, gender, and belonging, integrating theoretical perspectives from (Murray et al., (2018).

Results

The analysis reveals a clear diachronic evolution of migrant literature in Spain between 2000 and 2020. Three major stages can be identified: initial testimonial emergence, thematic and formal diversification, and institutional consolidation.

The results show a sustained increase in literary production and visibility, accompanied by greater thematic complexity and narrative experimentation. Linguistic hybridity emerges as a defining feature, with frequent code-switching between Spanish and languages such as Arabic, Catalan, or French.

Gender-focused narratives play a central role, particularly in texts authored by migrant women, where gender intersects with class, religion, and legal status to produce layered experiences of vulnerability and agency. These works contribute to the gradual incorporation of migrant voices into the contemporary Spanish literary canon through independent publishers, anthologies, and academic studies.

Discussion

The findings confirm that immigration literature in Spain represents far more than testimonial or autobiographical expression; it is a *discursive instrument of resistance* that destabilizes traditional paradigms of national identity and articulates new forms of cultural citizenship (Mora et al., 2025). In line with postcolonial theory, these texts challenge hierarchies of power, Eurocentric narratives, and symbolic mechanisms of exclusion that have historically shaped Spanish literature (Murray et al., 2018).

Hybridity operates both as an aesthetic strategy and as a metaphor for transnational coexistence, allowing authors to inhabit multiple linguistic and cultural worlds simultaneously (Basáñez Barrio et al., 2021).

The *gender perspective* reinforces the transformative nature of this literature. Migrant women writers not only denounce inequalities of class, race, and gender but also construct narratives of agency and self-definition that reimagine female subjectivity from a transnational standpoint. This component aligns with postcolonial feminist criticism, which conceives writing as an act of resistance against patriarchal and Eurocentric structures of representation (Garcia Cardona, et al., 2024 & Sánchez et al., 2021).

Conclusions

This research demonstrates that migrant literature in Spain has evolved, between 2000 and 2020, from occupying a peripheral position to becoming an autonomous and recognized literary field within the Spanish cultural system. Its consolidation responds not only to the increasing number of authors and works but also to the growing critical and academic reception, which has progressively incorporated these discourses into the broader debate on contemporary Spanish identity.

The analyzed works reveal a transformation in the literary function, which moves beyond purely aesthetic concerns to assume a sociopolitical and ethical role. Migrant literature thus not only represents the experience of displacement but also offers a hermeneutics of difference that challenges the foundations of the nation and European modernity (Ouahib et al., 2022). Dominant thematic axes—rootlessness, memory, hybridity, discrimination, fragmented identity, and gender-construct a discourse that revalues diversity as a constitutive principle of Spanish society.

Linguistic and aesthetic hybridity further demonstrates the authors' capacity to create a distinctive literary language, emerging from the interaction of multiple cultures and memories. For example, code-switching and polyphonic narration in works such as *El último patriarca* (Nini et al., 2012) exemplify how hybrid strategies materialize at the textual level.

From a theoretical standpoint, this literature embodies concepts of interstitial space and border thinking (Murray et al., 2018) offering a plural reading of identity and territory. Migrant narratives thus

contribute to the decolonization of the Spanish literary imagination and promote a redefinition of hispanidad grounded in diversity and inclusion.

Institutionally, the visibility and legitimization of migrant literature have been mediated by independent publishers, literary prizes, anthologies, and academic attention, mechanisms that have progressively facilitated the inclusion of migrant voices in public and scholarly circuits. Despite these contributions, the present study has certain limitations. The corpus analyzed is limited in size and linguistic scope, primarily focusing on works in Spanish and a selected set of authors. Future research could expand the corpus to include regional and less widely disseminated languages, additional genres, and underrepresented communities. Such studies would allow for a more comprehensive understanding of the diversity and evolution of migrant literature in Spain.

Future research lines are proposed as follows:

1. Analyzing the second generation of migrant authors, whose works reconfigure the relationship between memory and belonging.
2. Studying the impact of digital media and independent publishing houses on the visibility and dissemination of migrant writers.
3. Conducting comparative studies of migrant literatures across Europe, in order to construct a transnational theoretical framework that transcends the limits of literary nationalism.

In conclusion, migrant literature in Spain is consolidated as a symbolic laboratory of interculturality, where aesthetics, memory, and social critique converge, shaping a plural and essential horizon for understanding contemporary Spain. Incorporating textual evidence, institutional dynamics, and methodological reflection strengthens both the empirical and theoretical contributions of this study.

Acknowledgement

The author gratefully acknowledges the academic and institutional support provided by Kabul University and, in particular, Literature, Faculty of Literature and Foreign Languages, Complutense University of Madrid, Spain, during the course of this research. The author also extends sincere appreciation to the esteemed editorial advisors of the International Journal of Multicultural and Multireligious Understanding for their valuable cooperation and for the publication of this article.

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