

ESPAÑA TRANSFETANA: WRITING THE PROTECTORATE AND THE *PATRIA* IN *LA LLAMADA DEL ALMUÉDANO* AND *EL TIEMPO ENTRE COSTURAS*¹

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¿Será que nos separa el Estrecho? No; porque el Estrecho no nos separa como si fuera una cordillera; el Estrecho nos une, como si fuese un río. Ríos hay en el planeta que miden doble anchura que el Estrecho de Gibraltar... y, sin embargo, sus dos riberas pertenecen a una sola nación.

Joaquín Costa y Martínez. “Los intereses de España en Marruecos”

Beginning in the 1950s, the Spanish African Empire slowly began to dismantle. Spain and France recognized Moroccan independence and returned their protectorates in 1956 (minus the enclaves of Ceuta, Melilla, and Ifni); Equatorial Guinea was granted independence in 1968; Ifni was returned to Morocco in 1969, and Spain withdrew from the Spanish Sahara in 1975. In the few decades between the Spanish Civil War and the relinquishment of the colonies, there was significant migration from Spain to Africa. A census of the Spanish Sahara shows that in 1950 there were 1,320 Europeans in the colony; by 1974 that number had risen to 20,126. In Equatorial Guinea the European population grew from 3,937 in 1950 to 9,137 in 1966. The Spanish Protectorate of Morocco experienced the highest European population; between 1935 and 1955 the expatriate population doubled from 44,379 to 90,939 (Gozálvez Pérez). From the very end of the nineteenth century, with the loss of the American colonies, Spain's renewed focus on Africa brought about almost seventy-five years of intense interaction with and colonization of the Spanish African territories.

Long before the frenetic immigration of the twentieth century, from as far back as the Moorish invasion in 711 ACE, Spain has defined itself both through and against its relationship with Africa. The almost eight centuries of *convivencia*² on the Peninsula left enduring architectural legacies on the countryside and psychic impressions on Spanish collective memory. Indeed, Isabel la Católica was not content with ending the Reconquista in Granada, but hoped that her successors would continue “la conquista de África” across the Strait (28). In 1860, Antonio Canovas del Castillo, invoking the Roman legacy, affirmed that “[e]n el Atlas está nuestra frontera natural, que no en el canal estrecho que junta al Mediterráneo con el Atlántico; es lección de la antigua Romana” (77), and in 1884, José de Carvajal y Hué expressed that “[m]írandonos en Africa percibimos nuestra imagen como en clarísimo espejo” (119). Spain's expansion into North Africa, therefore, was not simply a colonizing move to compete with other European powers; Heriberto Cairo explains that

[n]aturalized geopolitics represents national destiny as dominated by nature. From the 1860s to the 1950s the geopolitical image of a Euro-African Spain was formulated in different ways. The basic argument was that there is a spatial continuity from the Pyrenees in the north to the Atlas in the south. There would be two Spains: one peninsular in the European continent and one Transfetana or Tingitana in the African continent. So the Spanish national destiny would be to achieve the unity of both Spains. Thus the incorporation of colonies in Northwest Africa or the establishment of the protectorate was not in a way an act of colonization but one of unification. (64)

Therefore, the very concept of Morocco as a geographically Other space is diminished under the conceptualization of the Protectorate as an extension of Spain across the Mediterranean, and Spanish immigration to the African colonies has carried concomitant ideas of redefining the borders and construct of peninsular Spain, the fatherland.

Thus was the ideological, official justification behind Spanish immigration to North Africa in the twentieth century, although, as is always the case, individual reasons for emigration are much more varied and personal. Many Spaniards fled the impending Civil War and sought refuge in the Protectorate, still others sought economic opportunity. Whatever the motivating reasons, Spain and the Maghreb have been entwined in the Spanish national consciousness for centuries, such that distinctions between the *patria* Spain and the African Protectorate are often blurred in literary representations.

Throughout Spanish letters, from *Cantar de mio Cid* to *Reinvidicación del conde don Julián* and up to the present, Africa has served as a discursive construct that Spanish authors have employed to redefine conceptualizations of the nation and self. As the tides of immigration have recently turned and Spain now struggles to redefine itself in the face of changing demographics and increased immigration from Africa, some contemporary authors are returning to the period of heightened Spanish immigration to Africa for setting and inspiration. Concha López Sarasúa and María Dueñas are two contemporary authors who have taken up the theme of Spanish immigration to the Protectorate in Morocco in the mid-twentieth century. López Sarasúa's *La llamada del almuédano* (1990) writes an Africa that rethinks ideas of the fatherland and exile while Dueñas' *El tiempo entre costuras* (2009) offers an African colony that is an imagined land of possibility and opportunity for Europeans, a space for personal reinvention. Almost twenty years separates the publication of these two novels; and yet, as they share much in common thematically, examining them can throw light on Africa as a literary *topos* in contemporary Spanish letters. An analysis of these themes will serve to articulate my thesis that the representation of Spanish immigration to the Protectorate employs Africa as a lens through which to reimagine the physical and the psychic borders of the *patria*, Spain.

There are many recent works that take up the theme of Africa. Authors such as Lorenzo Silva, Ramón Mayrata, Ignacio Martínez de Pisón, and Javier Reverte have all found literary inspiration in North Africa. However, their focus is often on the wars and conflicts of the twentieth century. Silva and Martínez de Pisón return to the Second War of Africa in *El nombre de los nuestros* (2001) and *Una guerra africana* (2000), respectively, and Mayrata and Reverte have examined the controversy of Western Sahara in *El imperio desierto* (1992) and *El médico de Ifni* (2005). The two novels examined in this study represent a more pacific inspiration, and I believe that this narrative focus can illuminate hidden dynamics and nuances in the representation and reconceptualization of identity and nation. As María Dueñas herself says, the phenomenon of Spanish immigration to North Africa is one “casi desvanecido de la memoria colectiva y apenas evocado en la narrativa española contemporánea” (“El trasfondo”). In this essay, I do hope to bring attention to the way in which López Sarasúa and Dueñas write the Protectorate and the *patria* at the threshold of the twenty-first century.³

I. Concha López Sarasúa: África, un “clarísimo espejo”⁴

Concha López Sarasúa's *La llamada del almuédano* (1990) was a finalist for the XXI Premio de Novela Ateneo de Sevilla. She is also the author of almost a dozen other books, many of them focused on Morocco and the Arabic world, and including both fiction and travel narratives. She was herself a long-time resident of Morocco, spending over twenty years there, and she credits that experience as the source of her “passion for the written word” (“Concha López Sarasúa”). Her writing has been positively received by critics, and the Moroccan Hispanist Mohamed Abrighach praises the manner in which she

resucit[a] la tradición hispánica de moros y cristianos, dando lugar a una nueva aljamía literaria que ostenta una islamofilia de nuevo cuño. Encierra, sobre todo, una verdadera poética de las dos orillas, esto es, una especie de poética de la diversidad a través de la cual se exaltan los rasgos cruzados y comunes [de] las dos riberas del *Mare Nostrum*. (“Novelista de las dos orillas”)⁵

He further writes that López Sarasúa's work actively strives to denounce “la frontera imaginaria que existe entre las dos orillas, consagrada por la amnesia hispánica” (“Novelista de las dos orillas”). As López Sarasúa

diminishes the power of this “imaginary border,” her novel *La llamada del almuédano* reflects on the historical ties between Spain and the Maghreb and sentiments of national identity and belonging, creating a reflection that suggests a conceptualized historical and contemporary unity across the Strait. As Foucault suggests in his reflections on Borges at the beginning of *The Order of Things*, López Sarasúa’s work “disturb[s] and threaten[s] with collapse our age-old distinction between the Same and the Other” (xv).

The novel centers on the quotidian lives of the expatriate and cosmopolitan community living in Morocco in the 1940s and early 1950s. The text offers very few references to specific dates or events that could contextualize the plot within a specific year or years. Francisco Fernández arrives in Morocco in 1930 (93) and Fermín Gironés on January 20, 1946, at the end of World War II (163), but these references are secondary information and the amount of time that has passed since their arrival is unclear. Their reasons for emigration are also varied and not examined in detail; Fernández came to work with his father for a fishing company; Gironés’ past is unclear, but immediately upon arrival in Arbua he tore up his passport “para acogerse desde aquel instante a las leyes del país” (91). The other Spaniards present are a mixture of political refugees, diplomats, and businessmen who interact despite their opposing political viewpoints. The central character, and the primary focus of this examination, is the aging doña Natalia who has spent the majority of her adult life in Morocco and is now considering returning to Spain due to health concerns and at the urging of her children. The plot is backdropped by the span of time encompassing the Spanish Protectorate in Morocco up to its end in 1956.

This general time frame of roughly two decades (1935-1955) coincides with the cosmopolitan reality in which the expatriates go about their daily lives and also aligns with the few specific dates that are mentioned in the text. *La llamada del almuédano* effectively traces the arc of Western presence in Morocco in the mid-twentieth century, from the frenetic Western immigration during the Spanish Civil War and the Second World War, to the slow return migration around the time of Moroccan independence.

The novel centers on the situation of doña Natalia, a 70 year-old Spanish woman whose children encourage her to return to Spain so that she can receive better medical attention for her rheumatism and be closer to family. Doña Natalia has spent the majority of her life in Morocco: “¿Cuántos [años] hacía ya? Había perdido la cuenta...” (157); her husband is buried in Kenitra where she also has a burial site reserved. She is torn between her attachment to Morocco, the changing political situation brought about by Moroccan independence, and her family’s concerns for her. Morocco is her sentimental and literal home, Spain is a frightening unknown for her.

While doña Natalia is the recurring and central protagonist of the novel and this study, the narrative is not explicitly focused on her, but is rather composed of a series of vignettes in individual chapters that present a spectrum of characters. Other characters given textual preference in specific chapters include Rosette (María Rosa) the daughter of a Spanish political exile from the Civil War and currently romantically involved with Rachid, a Moroccan law professor at the University Mohamed V (who also warrants his own chapter); Mme. Mechbal (María) of Spanish origin and a former cabaret dancer now married to a Moroccan; Fermín Gironés, Spanish political exile, and Halima, a Moroccan girl who works for and is mentored by doña Natalia. As a whole, the cast of characters represents the variety of personages that comprise the cosmopolitan centers of mid-century Morocco. It is true that they represent a predominantly privileged class, and the politically or economically marginalized portion of Moroccan society is not given much diegetic consideration, but they do also represent a spectrum of privilege and wealth within that substrate.

These varied characters interact within an ethnic, linguistic and/or religiously diverse setting. The narration itself shifts between Spanish, French, Arabic, and even occasionally English. The polyglossic nature of the text reflects the cosmopolitan reality of the Moroccan Protectorates.⁶ The narration is primarily in Spanish—such that one can reasonably follow the narrative without significant knowledge of French, Arabic, or English—but slips into the other languages without warning and without translation. Dialogue frequently contains multilingual expressions. Just as the language shifts, so does the narrative viewpoint. Narrated

primarily in the third person singular, it also often changes to a first person narration at points, even within a single sentence as is the case in the chapter titled “Gilbert:” “Cerró los ojos resignado y en su rostro se dibujó una leve sonrisa; reconocía que era un soñador; no puedo remediarlo, sobre todo cuando vengo a esta ciudad” (51). The linguistic hybridity of the Moroccan Protectorate is recognized and represented in this narration. This constant shift in both language and narration creates a narrative instability that avoids privileging either language or narrative viewpoint. That is, even though Spanish is the language of the text, other linguistic realities of the plot are offered narrative space and consideration. The fact that the non-Spanish phrases and words are presented without translation emphasizes the characters’ ease of maneuverability within a linguistic setting that is presumably strange and foreign to monolingual readers. In similar fashion, the shifting narrative viewpoint allows multiple voices the opportunity for consideration and expression, creating a literal narrative coexistence of voices.

The polyglossic narration and the diversity of the characters evoke the historic era of coexistence on the Iberian Peninsula. López Sarasúa’s text narrates a space that does not privilege West over its African Other but rather, at times, reverses this assumed hierarchy, and consistently provides a transcultural space in which West and Orient contribute to a unique cultural reality. The multicultural and intercultural interactions in the plot subtly recall a past when Jews, Muslims, and Christians all coexisted in Spain. The language of exchange is not simply the colonial languages of French or Spanish, but rather a blending of all languages represented in the territory. The text effectively recreates a space of transculturation, what Mary Louise Pratt calls “a phenomenon of the contact zone” (6).⁷ The Protectorates of Morocco—this “space of colonial encounters”—becomes “the space in which peoples geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations” (Pratt 6). As the narrative depends on personal and intimate story-lines for plot development, rather than adrenaline-fueled action or mystery, these contact zones become ones of interpersonal exchange and active coexistence.

While the multiple linguistic and narrative voices emphasize linguistic and cultural diversity, the narrative also deemphasizes racial difference between Spain and North Africa. At one point, doña Natalia comforts María by recounting her arrival to Africa and the preconceptions that she held then: “pesadillas en las que un moro, negro como el ébano, le arrebatava a uno de sus hijos y se perdía con él en la lejanía montado en un brioso corcel” (157). She admits that “[m]ás tarde, a su llegada, se sorprendió al comprobar que existían árabes con la piel incluso más blanca que la suya, ¡que ya era decir!” (157). This statement subtly highlights the phenotypical similarities that Spaniards and Moroccans share. It also suggests that unverified preconceptions are untrustworthy; the contact zone of the Protectorate serves as a space where such stereotypes are replaced by an appreciation for the similarities over a fear of difference.

The most explicit link between Spain and North Africa occurs in the final chapter, “La última aleya.” Doña Natalia and Halima are shopping in the Calle de los Cónsules in Rabat and decide to stop at a café for tea. They hear music, and, intrigued, approach the café from which it emanates. Doña Natalia inquires about the music and is told that they are “[c]anciones andalusíes, señora” by a waiter “en perfecto castellano, jactándose de su procedencia tetuaní” (249). The elderly doña is captivated by the melancholy music and further questions the waiter as to its significance. As it is in classical Arabic, he explains that “es un poema de exilio, de cuando los árabes estaban en España; este poeta se llamaba Ibn Amira; creo que había nacido en Valencia” (250). Surprised, doña Natalia exclaims “[d]e Valencia soy yo, ¡fijese!” (251). The waiter translates the song of exile for her, and afterwards she comments to Halima:

¿Has visto, Halima?, he tenido que venir aquí para enterarme de que aquellos poetas querían tanto a mi tierra. Ni sabía que hubiese existido este Ibn Amira... Los moros eran infieles, sólo te enseñaban eso; infieles e invasores; de lo que sí estoy segura es que el que los expulsó de Valencia se llamaba Jaume, primero o segundo, ¡ya ni me acuerdo!... Bueno, sí, era Jaume el Conqueridor. ¡Lo que son las cosas!... (251)

She is deeply moved by this newfound knowledge. Not only does this explanation recall the cultural diversity of Spain's past, but it also subtly evokes the diversity of contemporary Spain by employing the Catalan spelling of "Jaume el Conqueridor."⁸ The café becomes a contact zone where the Spanish, Arabic, and Catalan presences are all evoked and entwined. With few substantial changes, a similar scene can be imagined occurring in Valencia in the early thirteenth century.

Ibn Amira's poetic melancholy reframes conceptualizations of exile and belonging for doña Natalia.⁹ The waiter translates the poem for her:

*una distancia nos aleja de los nuestros
cuando ya la patria está lejos,
en un desierto convertida.
Un exilio nos entristece
y ahora no esperamos otro.
La separación, como siempre, ha cumplido su tarea.
No volveremos nunca más
el Júcar azul a ver
si los de los cabellos rojos
sus lanzas apuntan hacia nosotros... (251)*

She responds by reflecting: "¡Cuánto había aprendido esa tarde! Nunca se le habría ocurrido pensar que aquellos versos los había inspirado Valencia, su propia tierra, ¡cuán grande era su ignorancia!, ¡y qué inhumano el exilio!" (254). The poem comforts her as she feels that she is about to embark on her own personal exile in moving back to Spain. The poem upends conventional usage of terms such as "*los nuestros*" or "*la patria*" in Spanish literature, re-appropriating them and reinserting them into the discourse on Spanish identity.

This final chapter is not only the moment when doña Natalia comes to terms with the reality of her return to Spain, but also makes a conscious effort to connect the contemporary reality of the mass exodus of expatriates with the thirteenth century Arab reality. She is able to emotionally connect with the exiled suffering of the poet Ibn Amira and it causes her to reevaluate what she was taught growing up: "Los moros eran infieles, sólo te enseñaban eso; infieles e invasores" (251). She resigns herself to a return to Spain, accepting a self-imposed exile from the land she loves. López Sarasúa complicates the concept of the *patria* by re-establishing it not along lines of cultural difference or indigenous heritage, but on personal connection. Doña Natalia's perception that a return to Spain will be her own exile turns on its head the very concept of "exile" as being distanced from one's "native" land, and connects her with her historical and cultural Other, the poet Ibn Amira, as she finds solace in his poem.

Just as José de Carvajal y Hué says in 1884, "[m]írandonos en Africa percibimos nuestra imagen como en clarísimo espejo" (119), so does Doña Natalia become a mirrored reflection of Ibn Amira. Carvajal emphasized the geographical similarities of the Peninsula and the Maghreb, while López Sarasúa writes the affective ones. López Sarasúa juxtaposes the period of coexistence on the peninsula with the realities of the Protectorate in the twentieth century, creating a broader understanding of identity and belonging. Spain, the fatherland, is converted into a land of exile for her just as Ibn Amira was exiled to the Maghreb centuries ago, but these separations do not have the effect of establishing strict geographic divisions between the two, instead they create a sense of unity and an expansive understanding of the *patria*.

As her narrative unfolds within the colonial setting of the Moroccan Protectorate, López Sarasúa writes an intercultural contact zone that suggests a Spain that once was and could be again. As Costa y Martínez suggests, the Strait of Gibraltar serves more to unify Spain and Africa than to separate them. *La llamada del almuédano* offers "una sincera forma de repensar la historia rehuyendo el maniqueísmo" (Abrighach, *Superando orillas* 128), by weaving a nuanced understanding of Spain and its historical relationship with North Africa. Furthermore, the complimentary sentiments of the fictional doña Natalia and the historical Ibn Amira

hint at a conceptualized España Transfétana. The *patria* and exile of Ibn Amira and doña Natalia exchange conceptualizations of Same and Other until both are united in similarity and history. López Sarasúa's transcultural narrative space evokes Spain's era of coexistence by creating a mirrored image where Spain's past is reflected in the Protectorate's present. Spain and Africa are no longer Same and Other, but rather part of the same history, a history that is truly *transfétana*.

II. María Dueñas: The Protectorate as Fashion Symbol

María Dueñas' 2009 novel *El tiempo entre costuras* was a runaway bestseller. It is listed as one of the most requested books in Spanish libraries (Eulalia) and has sold over a million copies and the publication rights to over 27 countries (*María Dueñas*). It is Dueñas' first work of fiction; she wrote it while a professor of Philology at the Universidad de Murcia, where she also completed her Ph.D. in English. She holds a Master's degree in Romance and Classical Languages from Michigan State University and throughout her career has taught at a number of other universities including the Universidad de Castilla-La Mancha, the Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia, and West Virginia University (*Universidad de Murcia*). At this point in time, there exists little, if any, critical examination of Dueñas' first book. I do not doubt that this oversight will be amended soon, due both to the significant commercial success of the novel and also to the literary quality with which it is written. Dueñas has already promised a sequel, titled *Misión olvido*, that is slated to be published in the fall of 2012, and the first installment has also been adapted for a mini-series on Antena 3 which also debuts in the fall of 2012.

This novel is directly relevant to this study in that it is centered on the most active period of Spanish immigration to Morocco and develops largely in the Protectorate. The novel's timeframe begins in the early twentieth century and concludes in the years leading up to World War II. Geographically, it takes place in Spain, Portugal and the Protectorate in Morocco with the most significant portions occurring in Tétouan and Tangier. Dueñas is admittedly fascinated by Spain's colonial presence in Morocco. On her blog, she explains her attempts at historical fidelity through first-hand interviews, but her explanation hints at other subtle nuances hidden within her narrative as she writes:

Gracias a los recuerdos cargados de nostalgia de todos ellos [los antiguos residentes del Protectorado], los personajes de la novela han podido recorrer las calles, los rincones y el palpito de nuestro pasado colonial en el norte de África, un contexto casi desvanecido de la memoria colectiva y apenas evocado en la narrativa española contemporánea. (“El trasfondo”)

This statement is revealing in its use of the phrase “recuerdos cargados de nostalgia,” perhaps inadvertently uncovering a collective mourning for the lost African colony. It also suggests that this literary representation may attempt to be a faithful one, but relies on ideal constructs formed in nostalgia. Dueñas effectively employs this image of Africa to create a space of potential for a young, marginalized Spanish girl. Africa serves as a fashion accessory for the protagonist, and, in this role, Dueñas highlights how Africa is not only a construct “charged with nostalgia” but also with exotic potential for the Western public.

Even though the plot of *El tiempo entre costuras* develops largely within the geographical space of Tétouan and Tangier, the characters are predominantly European, and the African Other is a marginal figure within the novel. There is little interaction between European and African; the colonial cities of Tétouan and Tangier are frenetic cosmopolitan zones where Europeans come to live and play and only infrequently interact with the indigenous population. Therefore, this novel lends itself to an analysis of Africa as a discursive construct as it is a representation “cargado de nostalgia” within Spanish collective memory. Why Africa? If the primary characters of the plot are Portuguese, French, British, Spanish or German, why could the novel not have taken place in France, Spain, or Portugal? The colonial paradigm contains the answer to this question; the opportunity available in a colony combined with the mystique and exoticism of Africa creates an Othered space that is full of potential and possibility for the Westerner. Western Orientalist

discourse confers upon the colonial territory a certain cultural capital, an exotic value, which is not available from European geographical counterparts. This novel presents Africa as a playground for the European colonial powers and the exotic imagery of Africa as a transformative space for the European.

This consideration of *El tiempo entre costuras* focuses primarily on the portrayal of Dueñas' protagonist, Sira Quiroga, as she leaves Spain for Morocco and establishes a successful sewing business in Tétouan. Africa serves as a stage where Sira is able to rebuild her life after a series of personal disasters, and, when she later returns to Spain under an assumed, Arabized name, the exotic flair that she adopts—a slightly Othered Africanness that is palatable to the upper echelons of European society—confers upon her an exotic cultural capital that she is able to convert into literal capital through the success of her *haute couture* sewing shop. Sira Quiroga finds in Africa a space where an unprivileged, poor Spanish girl can find opportunity unavailable to her in her homeland.

The novel is narrated in the first person singular voice of the protagonist, the singular Sira Quiroga. The story traces her life from a young girl in a poor neighborhood in Madrid, to Tangier and Tétouan immediately before, during, and after the Spanish Civil War, and a return to Madrid and Lisbon in the time leading up to World War II. She tells of her misfortunes and fortunes as she witnesses and participates in some of the most dramatic moments for Spain and Europe in the 20th century. From her youth in Madrid, Sira elopes to Tangier with a charming man who soon leaves her pregnant and robs her of all her money. She flees to Tétouan, destitute, and miscarries. As the Civil War breaks out in Spain, the local police commissioner takes her passport and forces her to pay the pending debts of her disappeared lover from Tangier. With the help of friends, she is eventually able to open a high-fashion boutique serving the wealthy expatriates who are trapped in the Moroccan territory due to the war in Spain. Sira's skills as a seamstress allow her business to flourish and she becomes the premier *modista* of the Moroccan territory. She is eventually able to get her mother out of Madrid, and she is brought to join her in Tétouan where they begin to work together.

In the years leading up to World War II, Sira is contacted by the British Secret Intelligence Service and recruited to work for them in Madrid. She agrees, leaving her shop in Tétouan to her mother and returning to Madrid to open a business that would service the wives of Spanish and German military and political leaders. In order to return to Spain, she adopts an assumed identity with a Moroccan passport and alias, "Arish Agoriuq"—

¿Extraño? No tanto. Tan sólo era el nombre y el apellido de siempre puestos del revés [...] No era un nombre árabe en absoluto, pero sonaba extraño y no resultaría sospechoso en Madrid, donde nadie tenía idea de cómo se llamaba la gente allá por la tierra mora... (388)

Contrasting sharply with *La llamada del almuédano*, the plot is filled with action and intrigue. She finds great success as a *modista* and as a spy and is sent on a mission to Lisbon to obtain information about a Portuguese merchant who is suspected of making deals with the Germans that work against the British. She runs into a British reporter, Marcus Logan, whom she had originally met in Tétouan, finds out that the Portuguese merchant wants him dead and alerts him to the threat. She gathers all of the information needed and as she is returning to Madrid by train discovers that a hit squad is after her and on her train. Marcus Logan shows up, and they escape the train and return to Madrid by car. In Madrid again, Sira/Arish discovers that Marcus is also a spy for the British and not a reporter, she re-kindles her relationship with him and makes a conscious decision to take charge of her life and control her own future. In the epilogue, Sira narrates what became of her many companions throughout the novel.

The geographical space of Africa—written as the European Protectorates—contributes to the dynamics at work within the plot. Africa offers a significant convergence of place and gender that reflects long-held Western conceptualizations of the continent as a “zone of potential loss or profit” (Van den Abbeele xvi). Sira discovers that, for her, Africa becomes a territory of opportunity and self-discovery, of literal profit. Her decidedly unprivileged rank in Spain is directly contrasted with her position of privilege as a

colonizer in the Protectorates, and this opportunity that she finds enables her to re-create herself, or perhaps more appropriately to re-fashion herself.

While this image of Africa is anchored in colonial nostalgia, and initially problematic, it is also nuanced and still critically significant. In early 1930s Spain, the country is plunged into chaos and Sira is called to come and meet her estranged father for the first time. Sensing the impending fall of the Second Republic and the outbreak of war, he gives to Sira her inheritance and advises:

—Bueno, pues mi consejo es el siguiente: marchaos de aquí lo antes posible. Las dos, lejos, tenéis que ir os cuanto más lejos de Madrid, mejor. Fuera de España a ser posible. A Europa no, que tampoco allí tiene buena cara la situación. Marchaos a América o, si os hace demasiado lejano, a África. A Marruecos; ir os al Protectorado, es un buen sitio para vivir. Un sitio tranquilo donde, desde el final de la guerra con los moros, nunca pasa nada. Empezad una vida nueva lejos de este país enloquecido, porque el día menos pensado va a estallar algo tremendo y aquí no va a quedar nadie vivo. (52)

Europe is unstable and dangerous, in Africa lies opportunity and tranquility that contrast sharply with a crumbling West: “La caída de la bolsa de Nueva York unos años atrás, la inestabilidad política y un montón de cosas más que a mí no me interesaban” (56). The image of West as rational and ordered versus Africa as savage and dangerous is overturned in this moment of Western history. The Moroccan Protectorates are a place of refuge for those escaping the political turmoil of Europe and the tide of immigration from Spain to the Protectorates reflects this reality.

Indeed, these territories serve as an escape and a space of transformation for Sira from a shy young naïf into an independent and strong woman. When Sira arrives in Tétouan recently abandoned by her lover, sick, miscarrying, and in debt to creditors in Tangier, she is at rock bottom. She has nothing to her name and is alone in an unknown city in a foreign country, unable to return to Madrid because war has broken out. As she is questioned by the local commissary Claudio Vázquez, she thinks to herself:

Me sentía incapaz de enfrentarme por mí misma a una realidad desconocida. Nunca había hecho nada sin ayuda, siempre había tenido a alguien que marcara mis pasos: mi madre, Ignacio, Ramiro. Me sentía inútil, inepta para enfrentarme sola a la vida y sus envites. Incapaz de sobrevivir sin una mano que me llevara agarrada con fuerza, sin una cabeza decidiendo por mí. Sin una presencia cercana en la que confiar y de la que depender. (88)

But as the days pass, Sira learns to adapt and to “aprender a vivir sola” (104). In the following months, she looks back on the crises that brought her to Tétouan and reflects that “saqué fuerzas de donde no existían y me armé de valor” (133). She rediscovers her sewing skills, ones her mother taught her as a child but which she had not used in years, and establishes her business, serving the wealthiest and most powerful in the Protectorate. She only confesses the sordid details of her youthful misfortunes to her friend Rosalinda much later, and her friend responds to her humble and tragic history with “a quién demonios importa de dónde vienes cuando eres la mejor modista de todo Marruecos” (264). Her business acumen brings her financial success, and she is soon able to pay off her creditors and begin saving to bring her mother out of Spain and to join her in Tétouan.

Africa’s explicit contributions to her success become apparent when Sira is contacted by the British Special Intelligence Service to move back to Madrid and open up another shop, with the purpose of spying upon the wealthy and powerful wives. As noted above, she is given a new, assumed identity, that of “Arish Agoriuq”—an affected Arabic-sounding name. At this point, she is an almost completely distinct person from the young girl who left Madrid several years before.

When she returns to Madrid, she relies on her assumed exotic, African qualities to find financial success and to stand out. For the decor of her new shop, “Arish” describes that

[a]demás de las telas y los útiles de costura, compré [...] algunas piezas de artesanía marroquí con la ilusión de dar a mi taller madrileño un aire exótico en concordancia con mi nuevo nombre y mi supuesto pasado de prestigiosa modista tangerina. Bandejas de cobre repujado, lámparas con cristales de mil colores, teteras de plata, algunas piezas de cerámica y tres grandes alfombras bereberes. Un pedacito de África en el centro del mapa de la exhausta España. (415)

She teaches her assistants to prepare and serve tea “a la manera moruna,” how to “pintarse los ojos con khol,” and she even sews caftans for them “para dar a su presencia un aire exótico” (419). Sira/Arish openly admits that it is a “falso exotismo,” but it functions not only to increase her perceived cultural capital among Madrid’s elite, but also to give her personal strength: “Actuaba ante las clientas con aplomo y decisión, protegida por la armadura de mi falso exotismo” (419). She questions what led her to agree to return to Madrid as a spy and modista, wondering if she did it “por lealtad a Rosalinda” or because “se lo debía a mi madre y a mi país” and she ultimately considers that “[q]uizá no lo hice por nadie o tan sólo por mí misma” (416). She finds her sense of personal agency strengthened by her experience in Morocco, and this identity serves her as a personal armor.

From a Saidian, Orientalist viewpoint, Sira’s appropriation of Africa is an explicit exploitation that perpetuates Western ideas about Africa and marginalizes the complex realities. The novel is, ultimately, ethnocentric and Eurocentric, despite a majority of the plot developing within the geographical space of Africa. It could also be argued that it never departs from the Western paradigm of representation that appropriates Africa for its own ends—“a tradition which, for centuries, has conveyed this exotic idea of Africa” (Mudimbe xi). However, what the novel does not say about Africa, does speak loudly about Spain. The Africa of *El tiempo entre costuras* is not so much a historical reflection but rather a discursive construct that serves as an exposé of Western nostalgia. Africa is a fashion accessory that confers cultural capital on those who possess it.

The power of Africa in the Spanish imaginary is best exemplified in Dueñas’ representation of the historical careers and rivalry of Juan Luis Beigbeder y Atienza and Francisco Franco. As characters within the novel, their historical reality contributes an extra-diegetic element of force to the suggestion that Africa is a powerful topos. Beigbeder—first the “alto comisario de España en Marruecos” (226) and later a high official for the “ministro de Asuntos Exteriores” (351)—is portrayed as genuinely interested in Moroccan life and culture.¹⁰ He learns Arabic, meets with tribal leaders regularly, is respected by the local population, and keeps a Koran open on his desk: “A Beigbeder le definieron como ilustre africanista y profundo conocedor del islam; se alabó su dominio del árabe, su sólida formación, [y] su larga residencia en pueblos musulmanes” (352). Even though Beigbeder is close to Franco, he is also distrusted by the caudillo for initially unknown reasons. It is eventually revealed that Franco’s distrust is a result of his jealousy for Beigbeder’s linguistic skills. Beigbeder explains to Sira the time when he caught a younger Franco sneaking away to take Arabic lessons:

el gran general africanista, el insigne e invicto caudillo de España, el salvador de la patria, no habla árabe a pesar de sus esfuerzos. Ni entiende al pueblo marroquí, ni le importan todos ellos lo más mínimo. A mí, sí. A mí sí me importan, me importan mucho. Y me entiendo con ellos porque son mis hermanos. En árabe culto, en cherja, el dialecto de las cabilas del Rif, en lo que haga falta. Y eso molestaba enormemente al comandante más joven de España, orgullo de las tropas de África. Y el hecho de que fuera yo mismo que le descubriera intentando remendar su falta le fastidió más aún. (436)

Franco—“el gran general africanista”—actively pursues qualities that Africa can confer upon him to fortify his status. In this instance, Africa does not offer merely a cultural value to his reputation, it also has material benefits. Sira offers a somber reminder of what Franco did receive from the African territory:

En términos humanos [...] sí había obtenido algo importante para uno de los dos bandos de la contienda civil: miles de soldados de las fuerza indígenas marroquíes que en aquellos días luchaban como fieras al otro lado del Estrecho por la causa ajena del ejército sublevado. (201)

This reflection makes explicit the exploitation of Africa for Spanish political ends. Beigbeder's linguistic and cultural dexterity cause jealousy in Franco, but both are able to use Africa in distinct ways to further their own political careers.

Likewise, Sira is able to parlay her experience in Africa into a fashion symbol that offers her status and success in her professional ventures as both a British spy and seamstress. The exoticism of Africa is revealed as a powerful topos. Dueñas' inclusion of Franco and Beigbeder also emphasizes this point, as they represent historical examples of the effective power of Africa as status symbol. In this sense, Africa is not only a discursive construct through which concepts of the *patria* and identity are redefined, but also one which serves to refashion and to reimagine personal identity. The Protectorates of Morocco are shown to be laden with nostalgia in the Spanish collective memory, and they are also charged with personal potential. Furthermore, this subtly suggests that extra-national characteristics can add value to an intra-nationally based identity. The cosmopolitan space of the Moroccan Protectorate prepares Sira to maneuver through the upper echelons of Spanish society with ease and to find financial success and personal independence. While she does appropriate an exotic identity to accomplish these ends, Dueñas ultimately shows the affective power of Africa in the Spanish imaginary.

III. Conclusions

From before there was a unified Spain, Africa has been a discursive construct against and through which the Peninsular inhabitants conceptualized identity. The 1492 expulsion of the Jews and Moors established a fixed geographic boundary to attach to the idea of Spain, but Africa has continued to play an active role in the conceptualization of Spanish identity. *La llamada del almuédano* and *El tiempo entre costuras* represent two contemporary works that contribute to this tradition through their focus on Spanish immigration to Morocco. As these Spanish authors write protagonists living in the Maghreb, they create a Spanish literature that is effectively *trans-fretum*.

In López Sarasúa and Dueñas' works, the backdrop of Spanish immigration to Africa serves to reconceptualize the *patria*, Spain, from the vantage point of North Africa. Africa functions as an esperpentic lens through which to see Spain (doña Natalia) or be seen by Spain (Sira Quiroga). It is evident that, at the threshold of the twenty-first century, Africa continues to serve as a literary topos that says more about the West's obsessions than it does about the Maghreb. A conceptualized "España Transfetana," therefore, reveals its continued presence in the Spanish imaginary as the Strait of Gibraltar serves not to divide, but to mark a crease where a familiar Other is reflected on the opposing shore. This familiar Other is the Ibn Amira of *La llamada del almuédano* or Sira's alter ego, Arish. Both of these figures highlight the affective power of Africa to reimagine the concepts of *patria*, identity, and belonging. López Sarasúa's work unites the Peninsula with its North African reflection while Dueñas' novel highlights the extent to which the idea of Africa has power as a discursive construct for the West. By engaging with these histories of Spain and Africa, López Sarasúa and Dueñas invoke the *plus ultra* to engage the *patria*.

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Notes

¹ “España Transfretana” is a term for a conceptualized Spain that extends from the Pyrenees to the Atlas Mountains. In Latin, “Hispania Transfretana” literally means “beyond the strait/water” (“fretum”). In Spanish, it is occasionally spelled both “Transfretana” and “Transfretana.” See García Figueras pages 13-21 for a (contested) explanation of the history behind the idea.

² Thomas Glick explains that the linguistic origin of the term “*convivencia*” was first articulated by Ramón Menéndez Pidal and later employed by Menéndez Pidal’s disciple Américo Castro to explain the cultural coexistence between Christian, Jewish, and Muslim communities in Spain before 1492. I will use the term “coexistence” here for both linguistic consistency and in accordance with recent academic trends that favor “coexistence” over “convivencia” (Glick 2).

³ I must mention that Antonio Carrasco González’s *Historia de la novela colonial hispanoafriicana* (2009) is a comprehensive and useful overview of the Spanish novel on Africa from Pérez Galdós up to contemporary works. Unfortunately, neither López Sarasúa nor Dueñas are included in the study.

⁴ Caravajal y Hué 119

⁵ Abrihach has published a book and several articles dedicated to the work of Concha López Sarasúa. His book length study of her work is titled *Superando orillas: Lectura intercultural de la narrativa de Concha López Sarasúa* (2009).

⁶ “Polyglossia” is a term coined by Mikhail Bakhtin in *The Dialogic Imagination* (1975). The glossary to Bakhtin’s work offers the succinct definition of “Polyglossia” as “[t]he simultaneous presence of two or more national languages interacting within a single cultural system” (431).

⁷ Fernando Ortiz is first credited with employing the term “transculturation” in order to avoid the hierarchical nuances of the prefixes associated with “acculturation” and “deculturation.” “Transculturation” posits equitable contributions from multiple cultures to creating a new cultural reality. See Santí, 169-218, for further explanation of the term.

⁸ James I The Conqueror, Jaime I de Aragón, (1208-1276) was responsible for the “reconquest” of the Balearic Islands between 1229 and 1235 and Valencia in 1238. See Harvey for more information.

⁹ Abū-I-Mutarrif Ibn Amira (~1184 to ~1270) was a poet born in Valencia or Alcira and forced into exile when James I reconquered Valencia. Ibn Amira went to Tunisia in exile. See Lachica.

¹⁰ See Payne, 47 or Halstead, “A ‘Somewhat Machiavellian’ Face: Colonel Juan Beigbeder as High Commissioner in Spanish Morocco, 1937-1939.”