Ricci, Cristián, ed. *Letras marruecas. Antología de escritores marroquíes en castellano*. Madrid: Ediciones del Orto, 2012. Print. 183 pp.

ADOLFO CAMPOY-CUBILLO
OAKLAND UNIVERSITY

This new anthology of Spanish, postcolonial literature from Morocco edited by Christian Ricci is a welcome addition to the growing list of anthologies that have been appearing since Mohamed Chakor published *Encuentros literarios: Marruecos-España-Iberoamérica* (1987). While the scope and goals of Chakor's anthology are different than those of Cristián Ricci's, both works, like the other anthologies that have been published in the last twenty years, have aimed to provide a face to the anonymous waves of Maghrebian immigration that have reached Spain since its entrance in the European Union. Ricci's anthology contributes to make accessible to academics and the public at large the literary production of a series of writers that have been, and continue to be, on the margins of the Spanish field of cultural production.

It is important to notice that, after all this time, Ricci feels the need to explain in his title the nature of the literary corpus that he anthologizes. Unlike the *Littérature Beur* in the case of France, or the Commonwealth Literature in the case of England, the literary corpus produced in Castilian by those belonging to Spain's Maghrebian ex-colonies has not consolidated a term by which to be designated. One could attempt to refer to the authors anthologized by Ricci as Spanish Postcolonial writers, but the term, and any variation of it, is insufficient and most readers would fail to understand what one is referring to. Obviously, the frustrating ineffability of this body of work is symptomatic of the marginal position from which it is articulated. Both *Littérature Beur* and Commonwealth Literature share with Spanish, postcolonial literature from Morocco its marginality, but have managed to carve a niche in their respective literary markets. It is true that, at least in the case of *Littérature Beur*, its commercial success and the considerable cultural capital that it has accrued is not without controversy. The polemic surrounding the publication of the 2007 manifestos "Pour une '*littérature-monde'*'en français" and "Qui fait la France?" reminded us that peripheral literatures are constantly at risk of being co-opted from the hegemonic cultural center. Yet, even in the case of *Littérature Beur* the discussion centered for the most part in how to articulate the existing position of Francophone writers in the French field of cultural production. In the case of Spain, we cannot talk

about rearticulating the position of Spanish, postcolonial literature from Morocco since most of these writers are, for the most part, excluded from the Spanish literary market. Ricci's efforts to overcome this situation with the publication of anthologies like *Letras marruecas*, and his academic research into the significance of this body of work promises to change this situation.

The reasons for the failure of Spanish, postcolonial literature from Morocco to find its position in the Spanish market are many and are still evolving. One of the most evident ones is that we are not talking about a homogenous group. Some of the writers anthologized in *Letras marruecas* like Ahmed Ahrarou, Ahmed El Gamoun or Mohamed Lachiri were born in the 1950s, and grew up, if briefly, in the context of the Spanish Protectorate, and the transition to an independent Morocco after 1956. Others, like Larbi El Harti and Abderrahman El Fathi, were born in the 1960s, and were slightly more distanced, at least in time from these events. Finally, the case of Saïd El Kadaoui Mossaoui, born in 1975, and currently residing in Barcelona, is necessarily different from that of the other writers in this anthology both because of his age, and because he has spent most of his life in Catalonia.

The lack of homogeneity of the group is not only a question of age and life experiences, but, most importantly, one of language. All the writers anthologized in *Letras marruecas* write in Castilian, but this linguistic uniformity does not obtain if we consider Maghrebian writers residing in Spain like Najat El Hachmi or Laila Karrouch who write in Catalan. This is not something that Ricci is oblivious to, he has analyzed the phenomenon of Catalano-Tamazight identity both in his most recent book, *Literatura periférica en castellano y catalán*, and in a series of articles that deal with this topic. Certainly the selection of authors for *Letras marruecas* is consistent with the explicit goal of the anthology expressed in the introduction to concentrate only on works written in Castilian. I do not know the specific reasons for the absence of works in Catalan, but one cannot help to observe that while the anthology seeks to expose readers to the cultural diversity brought about by Spain's recent colonial history and by immigration, the cultural diversity of the peninsula seems to be misrepresented by the monolingual nature of the anthology. Since Ricci has written extensively on the subject of Catalano-Tamazight identity, it would have seemed appropriate to explain the reasons for this monolingual selection.

In view of the average age of the writers anthologized residing in Morocco, it seems like immigrant writers like Moussaoui, El Hachmi, and Karrouch represent the future of this form of postcolonial literature. The imbalance in *Letras marruecas* between the number of writers representing the Maghrebian community in Spain is certainly troubling, but we cannot blame the editor of the

anthology for this. To date, the literary production from the Maghrebian, immigrant community in Spain is certain scarce.

Ricci does an excellent job in his introduction at summarizing the key aspects of postcolonial theory that one should consider when reading *Letras marruecas*. The possibility that these writers may be able to articulate alternatives to Western, epistemological coloniality, that they may be able to go beyond (as Fanon, Glissant, and Bhaba propose) is certainly exciting. I am, however, not sure that the critical paradigms created for Commonwealth Literature and *Littérature Beur* are applicable to Spanish, postcolonial literature from Morocco; something that Ricci himself suggests when he says that these works "no se pueden reducir a una historia nómade universal como la propuesta por Deleuze y Guattari o al universalismo deconstruccionista [de Walter Mignolo]" (15).

I would argue that marginal cultural production does not necessarily have to be subversive just because of its peripheral position. One of the common themes in the work of the writers anthologized by Ricci, and also among many other Moroccan writers that have chosen to write in Castilian (Mohamed Bouissef-Rekab or Mohamed Sibari come to mind) is precisely the appropriation of what Gustau Nerin has described as Hispanotropicalism: the notion that what the Spanish empire was built on was not cultural superiority, but an emotional bond between colonizer and colonized. The notion of Hispanotropicalism has informed Spanish colonial discourse since the late XVIIIth century. We should not forget that the emotional appeal of Hispanotropicalism does not diminish its ethnocentric bias. If the colonial discourse of the Northern European powers is based on emphasizing the cultural difference (articulated as inferiority) of the peoples it colonized, the Spanish colonial discourse consists on an emotional embrace with the other that reifies the cultural difference of the colonized as yet another expression of a universal *hispanidad*.

Traces of Hispanotropicalism can be found in stories like "Isidoro Molina" by Larbi El Harti in which a Spanish visitor to Morocco discovers that the muezzin that has been disturbing his sleep is actually a distant relative, and both succumb to a night of passion. It could be argued that El Harti's queering of Hispanotropicalism is in itself a form of subversion, but his story is the exception to the rule. In the case of the writers residing in Morocco, the idea of Hispano-Moroccan cultural brotherhood is not problematized but openly, or at the very least ambivalently, embraced. Ricci, himself, seems to promote this ambivalence when he tells us that Abdehrraman El Fathi is an "español atrapado en el cuerpo de un marroquí, para quien la poesía es un ritual de exorcismo del uno y del otro, sin abandonar jamás a ninguno, fundiéndose y confundiéndose" (71).

The situation changes in the case of Moroccan writers residing in Spain like Saïd El Kadaoui Moussaoui. His short story "El artista del silencio" describes how the hybridization of the immigrant is not always lived as a joyful event, but as a painful metamorphosis in which the individual acculturates to his/her new Spanish reality at the cost of losing its Moroccan identity. Moussaoui's existential anxiety over the process of acculturation echo those expressed by Najat El Hachmi in *L'ultim Patriarca*.

Only time will tell whether Moroccan literary production in Castilian, or the work of Maghrebian immigrants residing in Spain will become consolidated in the Spanish field of cultural production. Independently of its commercial success, Ricci's anthology is certainly a contribution to understand Spain's recent colonial history, and the diversification of its population brought about by successive waves of immigration.