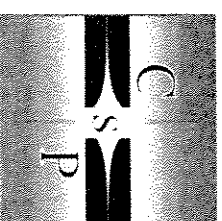


Alternative Orientalisms in Latin America
and Beyond

Edited by

Ignacio López-Calvo



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MOROCCAN LITERATURE IN CASTILIAN:
BORDERLAND LITERATURE—LITERATURE
WITHOUT BORDERS

CRISTIAN H. RICCI, UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA,
MERCED

I have analyzed elsewhere the paradigms of Moroccan literature dealing with Maghrebi diaspora in Spain, which began in the 1970s and continues to the present.¹⁹⁷ The interviews I carried out with the Moroccan authors who write in Castilian and in Catalan have been instrumental in coming to terms with the paradigms underlying this embryonic literature. Building on this previous work, in this essay, I pose a new series of questions: What is the potential readership of this literature? Why doesn't it have a place in Spain's book market? What is the future of this literature? In this essay, I plan to frame Moroccan literature written in Castilian and Catalan within the ampler context of border studies and to approach it from the theoretical perspective of intercultural and postcolonial studies. There is a group of Moroccan authors who show, in their writings, what Enrique Dussel calls "cultural otherness from the post-colonization."¹⁹⁸ Assuming the best of Spanish and European literary and cultural modernity, not subsuming the best of Spanish and European literary and cultural modernity, not to develop a cultural style that tends to a globalized unit, undifferentiated or empty, but to a *trans-modern pluriverse* (with many universalities: European, Asian, African, Islamic, Christian and Latin American).

Zafaf and his successors

Literary works such as Muhammad Zafaf's novel *La mujer y la rosa* (*The Woman and the Rose*; 1972) reflect the transition between the influence (or imposition) of Western values in Morocco, the idea of returning to Al-Andalus,

and the literary productions that addressed the problem of being the "Other" (Arab, Muslim, and poor) in a society that used to be considered ethnically homogeneous, such as Franco's Spain. The latent existentialism of Zafaf's narration works as a testimony to the dilemma and frustration suffered by Moroccan intellectuals during Hassan II's regime. Spain represents, therefore, an exit, "a door to the longed for liberation" (6, my translation)¹⁹⁹ of the main character who, in search for a living, falls into a drug ring. Whereas in Morocco "he cannot steal a chicken" (16, my translation),²⁰⁰ the character dreams about obtaining a visa for the European Common Market to travel around Europe in order "to become a king or an emperor" (16, my translation).²⁰¹ Zafaf's novel re-creates the debate between Muslim, eastern traditional values and the Western, more progressive worldview. At the same time, it leaves the door open to an uncertain future: the idea of prostituting the main character's sister, returning to Casablanca to avoid problems with the law, and the need to marry a European citizen "so she can rescue him" (127, my translation)²⁰² from returning to a life of social displacement in Morocco.

When Edward Said affirms that Orientalism is much more valuable as a sign of European power over the East than as a true discourse on the East (26), he is implying that Western scholars do more than merely distort the truth about the East. Rather, when the latter compare themselves to the "underdeveloped, undemocratic, without a future" Other, they are actually presenting themselves as a model. This image has frequently captivated the "Oriental." A great number of Moroccan intellectuals have conceived Spain and the Spanish through historically sensual stories dealing with the "time of pearls" (Al-Sabag 91, my translation)²⁰³ of the 13th century Al-Andalus, when the kingdom of Castile and the Muslim Caliphate held similar power in the Peninsula. At the same time, they have celebrated a modern Spain that was leaning towards democracy.

Those intellectuals (including Zafaf) who had access to Marxist and existentialist writings, and to authors such as Molière, Racine, Cervantes or Bécquer, chose an incisive approach to the West in both their writing and their thinking. Thus between 1956 and the 1980s, they created a pro-Western discourse that welcomed the idea of a more democratic West, a cultural propaganda that Moroccans "have adopted." Concurring with Gramsci's notions of the "voluntary associations", "Orientals" have concurred with their Western peers on the notion of a superior sociopolitical and even cultural

¹⁹⁹ "Una puerta hacia la ansiada liberación."

²⁰⁰ "No puede robar ni una gallina."

²⁰¹ "Llegar adonde quiera, poder ser rey o emperador."

²⁰² "Para que le salve."

²⁰³ "Tiempos de perlas."

¹⁹⁷ "El regreso de los moros a España..." "Ricci, Cristian H. "El regreso de los moros a España: fronteras, inmigración, racismo y transculturación en la literatura marroquí contemporánea". *Cuadernos de ALDELU*, 21 (2005): 1-12.

¹⁹⁸ "Alteridad cultural desde la poscolonialidad."

Europe. This phenomenon—the *westernization* of Moroccan literature—allows one to look into the generally accepted practice of evaluation of all things Spanish, which exists in at least four distinct varieties, as is evident in literary works.

On the one hand, there is a *costumbrista* literature written in Castilian that discusses topics of Northern Moroccan folklore (Terouan, Larache and Tangier, essentially). There is also a realist literature that represents the flagellum of migrants who cross the Strait of Gibraltar in search of the European *El Dorado*. Then, there is a literature that employs irony, neo-symbolism, and a stirring of the historical annals to allow the tracking of the North African presence in Spain as a form of validation of the new migrant experience. There is a fourth group that proliferated in the last seven years, and that, in my view, will place Moroccan literature written in Castilian within the framework of a literature without borders. This literature, written in Morocco by Moroccans, with Moroccan topics and characters, is developing a series of questions about the use of the language of the Other, the aesthetic practices of Western literature, and a deeply critical observation on the influence of the Western media on Morocco.

Some of the Castilian-language texts about the customs and people of Morocco help to demystify a series of ethnocentric clichés that many travelers, historians, and European literati had made about Morocco and the rest of the non-Western world. However, if we take into account that most of these authors do not manage to sell their books in Spain (nor in the rest of the Spanish-speaking world), we cannot measure the impact these texts have in reducing the prejudices that exist about Morocco and its customs, nor do we know if these texts will be taken seriously by researchers. In this vein, Alicia Gaspar de Alba says that a book gives a writer the green card to venture into the world of letters. However, like in all worlds, there are different levels of cultural citizenship (14).²⁰⁴ In order to avoid being a “literary wetback,” these writers would have to fulfill at least two guidelines: to begin writing what the Western market is consuming at the moment, or to be exotic, magical, and sensual enough to captivate the Western reader, “always eager and restless for romanticism” (Said 10). In order to avoid this literary submission to the West, Moroccan writers should begin a new critical vision of their peripheral culture with respect to Europe (and to the United States). Borderland writers would have to reconstruct their alterative position within European modernity from an outsider’s perspective; that is to say, from a world-wide standpoint, as opposed to the provincial perspective of the European (Bhabha 18). Consequently, as Homi

Bhabha proposes, transnational histories of migrants, of colonized (or neo-colonized), or of political refugees would be the fertile lands where a world-wide literature could settle (12).

Regrettably, Spanish publishers are not interested in the Moroccan literature written in Castilian that narrates the crossing of the Gibraltar Strait. At this point, it is necessary to clarify that the realist aesthetic and the didactic-moralizing nature of these writings (chronicles, diaries, memoirs) are common to the sprouting of other borderland literatures that try to show the socioeconomic and cultural problems of the migrants (Leal 60). Simultaneously, this kind of literature essentially responds to a tradition of Arab expression in Moroccan literature. More particularly, the short narratives of the seventies respond to a concept of social intention (M. Amrani, *Relatos marroquíes*, [Moroccan Stories] cit. en Chakor 1996: 159). In this sense, it seems that these texts on the crossing of the Gibraltar Strait have not managed to overcome the immediacy of a testimonial urgency, without greater historical depth (Martín-Rodríguez, “Aztlán y Al-Andalus” 31, El Hakim 19). It is also true that with time, this type of literature will produce a process of maturity towards purer forms of fiction which incorporate myths, the fantastic or supernatural effects, and the use of non-linear time. As Cazemajou states, mythical structures contribute to organize the narrative in order to be presented to distant readers. This rhetoric contributes to the enjoyment of the work by a non-Moroccan reader (qtd. in Martín Rodríguez “¿Quién es el público...?” (255).

How to write from Morocco to the world: Ahmed Ararou, Larbi El Harti, Ahmed El Gamoun, and the future of Moroccan literature in Castilian

The opening towards Western literature can result in the loss of the Oriental flavor of Moroccan literature. As pointed out by Said and Ali Mohamed Laarbi, those same “Orientals,” using Western methods of *Orientalization*, might weaken the raw material. In other words, Laarbi pleads for a multi-cultural and multi-dimensional literature, but not one that is committed to assimilation, because assimilation implies an acceptance of superiority of the target culture (278). I do not believe there is any risk of the latter, because while Western travelers to the East defined their identity in contrast to the image of the Other, Moroccan writers like Ararou, El Gamoun, and El Harti are very conscious of the ontological and epistemological differences between both cultures, and can cross from one side to the other (from Occident to Orient) and criticize both cultures, with no need to request a “visa” from any academic guard, neither from the East nor from the West. Without apostatizing their Arab-African-

²⁰⁴ “Un libro le da a uno la carta verde que necesita para transitar en el mundo de las letras, pero como en todos lo mundos, existen diferentes niveles de ciudadanía cultural.”

Muslim culture, in many cases they have a better knowledge of "their neighbor's house [Spain], than they do of their own" (El-Harti, "La alienada" [*The alienated*] 40, my translation).²⁰⁵

In the narratives of Ararou, El Gamoun, and El Harti, there is a "selective rejection" of the Westernization which is typical of postcolonial literature. These narratives are consistent with the concept of the philosophy of liberation. In this regard, they are not revolutionaries who fight for a return to the beginning of history in the future; they do not represent the typical liberal discourse that mystifies national emancipation against Spain; nor are they Indigenists who deny the history after the French and Spanish invasions. They propose, instead, to reconstruct their integrity from an Eastern and Western historical framework. In this sense, they recapture the historical identity of Morocco, a history that shares some characteristics with other post-colonialist literatures—a history that is conscious of the neocolonial relations that the new world order imposes.²⁰⁶

Ahmed Ararou's fiction is a part of this literary paradigm, still marginal and trying to find its way. When I interviewed him on June 13, 2005, he described himself as a "writer without a portfolio." He is also marginal because of the nature and substance of his statements: they are, paradoxically, reaffirmations of a modern Western literary canon. He talks, for example, about comparative linguistics, applied psychology, and literary criticism, uses stylistic resources taken from Western and Eastern "canonical" writers, and incorporates stories or anecdotes from Moroccan folklore. From this amalgam of literary resources, Ararou constructs a marginal work that is immune to being reduced by categorization. His narratives also contrast with those that pride themselves in being transgressors semantically and structurally. Ararou manages to surpass the artistic flexibility of postmodernism through the recognition of differences and their coexistence with tradition. In this sense, his literary project exceeds, in form and content, the mere tracking of roots and the romanticization of the Arab presence in Al-Andalus. Whereas in the case of Moroccan writers of the eighties, such as Miloudi Chaghmoun and Mustafa Al-Misnawi, the stories of exploitation, submission, and the evolution of resistance strategies are authenticated from the periphery, Ararou situates the reader on what Homi Bhabha and García Canclini refer to as the cultural hybridization of the borderland condition. The hybridization allows Ararou to translate—and

therefore to make a record of—the social imaginary of the metropolis as well as the cultural and technological modernity imposed upon or consented to in Morocco.

Writers such as Ararou, El Gamoun, and El Harti are aware that the pact of civilizations is based upon an implicit recognition that is a political space, possessing an enormous variety of traditions from which to choose the elements for a new model of literary development. It does not confine the writer to espouse a single literary technique. At the same time, this type of literature is inseparable from the modernization of Morocco. Yet it supervises analytically Western impositions of products and beliefs, especially those that arrive through the signals of satellite television. Stirring through the annals of mythology is fundamental in the narratives of El Gamoun and Ararou, so that the Spanish reader, regardless if she or he is familiar with Moroccan and Arab myths such as Gilgamesh or the caves of Hercules, can relate the narration to other utopian territories like Aztlán, Atlán, Tollán, Atlas, Atarant, Auru, Aalu, and others in the traditions of the natives of North and South America. In this regard, I see that a peripheral dialogue "South-South" exists between these Moroccan writers and others who face imperialistic cultures. I am referring here to thinkers from Asia and Latin America, as well as indigenous North Americans and Chicanos. El Gamoun's and Ararou's literary projects manifest what Enrique Dussel and the Moroccan philosopher Mohamed Mesbahi call "the popular post-capitalist culture," that is, to surpass the reductive limits of a fallacious monolithic culture, reconstructing the cultural history of Morocco within the frame of global history: from Asia, through the Asian-Afro-European proto-history all the way to Hispanic Christianity; through the Spanish protectorate and onto the postcolonial and the neocolonized Moroccan culture.

In "Trabanxi", a short story included in the collection *La puerta de los vientos. Narradores marroquíes contemporáneos* (2004), Ararou plays with the interpolation of Western and Oriental myths to locate the reader in the imaginary land of literature, where there are no real borders, but rather endless and continuous territories through the narrative act. The narrator shows the importance of the creative process as well as a story teller's ability to illustrate (or fake) the Babylonian or Biblical origins of their humble town, Arcilla ("clay" in English; do not confuse with Asilah or Arcila). Trabanxi, the main character and storyteller, is accused by another man "blinded with Trans-Arab nationalism" of heresy and of conspiring with the Spanish Protectorate (68; my translation).²⁰⁷ Once his story is plagiarized by the same nationalist prosecutor, and is translated into (or, rather, it is written in) Arabic, the Biblical or Babylonian origins of Arcilla become part of the history and foundation of the

²⁰⁵ "La hermosa casa del vecino [España], más que la propia."

²⁰⁶ See chapter "El patrimonio intercultural de los diferentes" in García Canclini's *Diferentes, desiguales y desconectados*; "El sistema mundo: Europa como centro y su periferia" in Dussel's *Ética de la liberación*; and "Unhomely Lives: The Literature of Recognition" in Bhabha's *The Location of Culture*.

²⁰⁷ "Cegado de nacionalismo transárabe."

city of Tangier. All the natives of this plundered town become infuriated with the news of the substitution and begin to venture in "*paternas* (boats) of decayed wood through the border waters of the Strait" (70; my translation).²⁰⁸ The neighbors of the North (Spain) "live [today] for the second time, the terrible Civil War experience known as 'No pasaran' " (They shall not pass) (70; my translation).²⁰⁹ As time goes by, those who manage to cross the Strait produce a radical change in the humble town that now has an annual festival, a soccer stadium, and three-star hotels. All of it is due to money transfers, the sole source of income for ninety percent of the shanty town's inhabitants. The children of the city dream about being professional soccer players for the soccer teams Real Madrid or F.C. Barcelona; marriageable girls dream of marrying their cousins who live on the other side of the border; and everybody in Arcilla, "hypnotized by the irresistible digital whistles of parabolic sirens of the new El Dorado" (70; my translation)²¹⁰ fantasize with "worlds, characters, products, flavors, and colors from the other world" (74; my translation).²¹¹ This story, therefore, shows a diachronic representation of the various stages of Moroccan history, its long history of corruption, and the importance of the incipient Muslim fundamentalism. At the same time that this literature mirrors the modernization of Morocco, it supervises, from an analytical standpoint, the imposition of Western products and beliefs, especially those that arrive through the signals of satellite television. In fact, some Moroccan intellectuals have become obsessed with the First World's interference and misinformation. The narrator of "La Atlantida," Amhed El Gannoun's short story narrated in cinematographic style, fears "a collision of catastrophic proportions" (160; my translation).²¹² Although he describes this danger in ironic and figurative terms, he alludes to the decreased appeal of the North African and Oriental cultural essence in favor of the Westernization of Morocco.

Larbi El Harti also proclaims a "selective insubordination" towards the West, writing with the latter's literary codes, but incorporating Moroccan traditions. Along these same lines, El Harti chooses to create characters from the middle class, students or professionals who travel to Europe and then return to Morocco and draw conclusions from their experiences. The trips made by El Harti's characters literally emulate the "going beyond" proposed by Bhabha and Fanon: to go beyond the historical and instrumental hypotheses. In this regard, the trip not only provides the characters with an opportunity to perceive

²⁰⁸ "Pateras de carcomida madera por las aguas fronterizas del estrecho."

²⁰⁹ "Viven hoy [...] por segunda vez, el terrible episodio histórico del 'No pasarán.'"

²¹⁰ "Hipnotizados por el irresistible silbo digital de las parabólicas sirenas del nuevo

Dorado."

²¹¹ "Mundos, personajes, productos, sabores y colores del más allá."

²¹² "La catástrofe de una colisión."

themselves and their culture, but it also leads them to the discovery of barriers to communication that exist in a world in the midst of a cultural collision. It is in El Harti's narrative where it is more faithfully possible to verify that the cross-border contrasts which surge from cultural differences can lead to either compromise or conflict. In "La alienada," the character confuses the definitions of tradition and modernity and begins to feel surprised (suffering from split vision and disorientation) by the relocation of his native country, of his own town, and of the world. He experiences the feeling of surprise or unhomeliness, which is the condition of contemporary extraterritorial and intercultural literary initiatives (Bhabha 13). The texts of El Harti approach the hybrid phenomenon (or syncretism) of peripheral and bilingual literatures more resourcefully than any other writer listed above: they revolve around two different cultural and linguistic systems that are close and antagonistic, but which end up becoming blending, thus forming an identity without borders. In this context, they share a common identity with other post-colonialist texts (the aforementioned peripheral "South-South").

As David Castillo writes in the prologue to the collection of stories *Después de Tanger [Beyond Tangier]*, "we now have a Moroccan writing in Spanish which certifies that only nowhere men are able to make us feel beyond the clichés" (9; my translation).²¹³ El Harti is effective in giving the readers a complex network of experiences that surpasses the binary quality of the Morocco-Spain/ Arab-Castilian perspective, with diverse and conflicting viewpoints that are interrelated in continuous forms. "La alienada" is a short story that takes place in Spain, France, England, Jordan, Syria and a humble, unspecified town in Morocco. There, the cultural conflict becomes obsessive, human, philosophical, and existential: El Harti's character dares to seek out his true cultural identity, which is equivalent to his historical identity. He ultimately becomes aware of his individuality with respect to the social fabric that, in Europe just as in his own country, makes him understand that he is on the outside looking in—into the "schism of humankind" (49; my translation).²¹⁴ In this sense, El Harti follows the thinking of the Moroccan philosopher Mohamed Abed Al-Yabri, who states that modern critical intellectuals are the ones who select instruments from the hegemonic, modern tradition (European) as well as those from the traditional Arabic-Islamic tradition. These tools will be as useful for the critical reconstruction of their own tradition as they are for the evaluation of neocolonized cultures (226).

As in Zafra's novel, the main character of "La alienada" becomes sexually alluring to European women and a minstrel of exotic histories. In

²¹³ "Aquí tenemos a un escritor marroquí en lengua española certificando una vez más que sólo los *nowhere man* [sic] son capaces de hacernos sentir más allá de los clichés."

²¹⁴ "La fiesta del desencuentro y la orgía de la fractura."

Europe, guided by his eagerness to become “a universal man,” he aspires “to be totally fluent in several languages.” Rather than wanting to subjugate others, he attempts “to be accepted as a human being without being treated as a lab rat in experiments of blood, color, and religion” (41; my translation).²¹⁵ Frustrated by his inability to obtain this dominion, El Harti’s character decides “to return to his origins” (43): Jordan and Syria will be his destinations. In these countries, as in Europe, he quickly discovers that he continues to be the Other—that some Muslim brothers are unable to either understand or accept his individuality. Therefore, he returns to Morocco only to realize that his own family also fails to not understand him. His once very religious brother returns from Paris with the “consumer’s attitude of the happy, happy West” (47; my translation)²¹⁶. Rather than interpreting the story’s conclusion with skepticism, I maintain that it is typical of a “nowhere man” (or “nowhere writer”) like El Harti to promote an innovative and politically crucial narrative that reflects the melding of differences (Bhabha 2-4), which the writer approaches from the viewpoint of the contingency and annoyance of his own family and his own culture. As with the short stories by Ararou and El Gammoun, it is necessary—in the scope of hybrid cultural productions—to give sufficient weight to the contradictions, to avoid making the mistake of minimizing that which continues to be foreign to a certain culture. This way, with El Harti’s short story, I can conclude that the intercultural dialogue that I proposed at the beginning of this article “interpellates” cultural Eurocentrism and, at the same time, reminds us of the need to continue questioning peripheral cultures in their dual function of victims and perpetrators of oppression.

Conclusion

If for centuries the multiethnic and pluricultural Al-Andalus formed a single identity that has given architectonic, literary and philosophical works of universal reach, then why are we not open to the possibility that these new works will create a new literary Renaissance? Martín Rodríguez asserts that it would not be illogical to think that, at some point, there will be a bilingual literature (Arab-Spanish), which would bring a new dimension to the idea of the return to Al-Andalus. Indeed, such literature would transport us to the very beginning of Spanish Literature—the Mozarab *jarchas* (“Aztlán y Al-Andalus” 37). In Spain, it seems, there is some curiosity about this new phenomenon of

Moroccans writing in Spanish. Catalanian publishers have begun printing biographies of Morocco-Catalan writers who bear testimony to the diaspora’s experience. Still, questions remain: why do important Spanish publishers substantially strive to translate novels by Moroccans writing in French about the crossing of the Gibraltar Strait, using the same heart-rending images and the same stylistic resources? It is paradoxical that a book entitled *Literatura y pateras (Literature and boats)*, published recently by the International University of Andalusia (Universidad Internacional de Andalucía)—by professors who definitely have progressive ideas—does not include a single Moroccan writer or researcher. Juan Goytisolo and Andrés Sorrel wondered if Spain still suffers from the same syndrome of Orientalism that Edward Said criticizes. Does Spain need the “literary validation” of France, England, the United States or Germany in order to take into account writers so near its culture as those Moroccans who express themselves in the language of Cervantes?

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²¹⁵ “Dominar, poseer, apropiarse del lenguaje; no para avasallar el mundo, sino para que [le quieran y para [pertenece] a la humanidad sin tener que pasar por los laboratorios de la sangre, el color [y] la religión.”

²¹⁶ “Alquimia consumista de un Occidente happy muy happy.”

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CHILDREN OF IMMIGRANTS AND THEIR PLACE IN FRENCH SOCIETY

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In the last twenty years, immigration has been at the forefront of the daily news in France, as immigrants are often made responsible for various problems such as the unemployment or violence prevalent in low-income housing projects. In the early 1990s, the first confrontations took place between the police and the children of North African immigrants who comprise one third of all the immigrants in France and are concentrated on the outskirts of large industrial cities. With the increase of unemployment, which affects North African immigrants four times as much as other citizens, these underprivileged neighborhoods have become fertile ground for the development of Islamic fundamentalism whose first victims are young women. The controversy concerning the Muslim headscarf worn by female students led to a 2004 law which prohibited conspicuous religious signs in public schools. More recently, in the fall of 2005, riots erupted again and spread throughout the country, forcing the French government to impose a curfew for several weeks. This time, however, the general public became more acutely aware of the precarious conditions in which North African immigrants and their children had been living.

Immigration is not a new phenomenon. Indeed, France has traditionally welcomed political refugees from various parts of the world and has long been considered the country of human rights and freedom. Until the early 1970s, three quarters of the immigrants came from other European countries, mostly Spain and Italy (Milza 16). But a drastic change occurred in the 1960s, during a period of tremendous economic growth which required the influx of manpower. As a result, large waves of workers came from Portugal and from the former French protectorates and territories of Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia (Richard and Tripier 18). Unfortunately, the first oil crisis of the early 1970s put a stop to this economic growth, and forced the French government to suspend the immigration of unskilled workers who did not belong to countries of the European Community. Nevertheless, a policy that authorized the families of