



**Christian H. Ricci.- *New Voices of Muslim North-African Migrants in Europe* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2019), 189p.**

Research interest in the study of migrant literature is striking. This burgeoning interest has often been explained by the modern day's processes of frequent mobility and mass migration. In this vein, a vigorous debate on the migrants' experiences has been initiated across different fields such as geography, history, culture, language and ethnicity. Christian H. Ricci's *New Voices of Muslim North-African Migrants in Europe* contributes to this debate through a crucial intervention into the field

of North-African migration literary studies, mainly Moroccan literature in European languages. Through the lens of postcolonial and intercultural theory, H. Ricci examines a medley range of fiction, poetry and autobiography in a bid to unearth topical issues explored by Moroccan writers in European languages. These areas include history, culture, migration, trauma, memory, language, identity, belonging, colonialism, and postcolonialism.

The book opens with a revealing introduction entitled "A Transmodern-Postcolonial Approach to Afro-European Literature." In paving the way for the understanding of the textual analysis that the book carries out, H. Ricci accounts for the interest in Moroccan literary productions. In so doing, he refutes ascribing the label of 'Maghrebi' to this literature, given that the colonial and postcolonial history of Morocco is not akin to that of other Maghrebi countries. Moroccan literature written in European languages is inscribed within the framework of borderline studies. Thus, it occupies a 'third space' in Bhabha's sense; a space which endows writers/characters with a contrapuntal consciousness in Said's sense, granting them a transcultural and intercultural perspective. In broaching varied issues in the selected texts, the book adopts a postcolonial approach. Postcolonialism does not seek any 'decolonial project', but it rather delves into Europe as a site of migration, and thus of decentering identities. H. Ricci's postcolonial approach is informed by Ella Shohat's theory of postcolonialism which pivots around the experiences of displacement and the intersections between First and Third worlds, Enrique Dussel's concept of 'transmodernity' as a heterogeneous theory seeking pluriversality, and finally Mohamed Abed al-Jabri's *Arab-Islamic Philosophy*

which calls for ‘contemporaneity’ in the reading of the tradition, providing a fertile ground for different cultures and traditions to encounter.

In addition to the decisive introduction, H. Ricci divides the book into five chapters. H. Ricci begins by addressing several poems by the Moroccan poet Abderrahman El Fathi. In this line, H. Ricci is interested in the linguistic pluralism of the literatures from the Maghreb to debunk the oft-cited idea of these literatures as “Francophone” or “Arabophone.” In exploring El Fathi’s poetry, H. Ricci is keen on examining different images of the al-Andalus. Doing so, he comes to the conclusion that El Fathi’s poetry is informed by a yearning for the Muslim Spain/al-Andalus, and, at the same time, by responding to the modern need for “shared economic-cultural-religious parameter” (49). Inscribed within “borderless literature,” El Fathi’s work is interestingly concerned with other issues beyond the Hispanic Moroccan context. His poetry does not only communicate different experiences of Africa, mainly those pertinent to the consequences of globalization and global economy, but also explores the traumatic experiences of Palestinians and Iraqis, successively because of the Israeli and American conflicts. Thus, his poetic voice is one which speaks for humanity. Acknowledging the striking phenomenon of cultural hybridity through which “roots” lose ground for “routes,” El Fathi thereby calls for a move beyond conflicts and confrontations through promoting chains of dialogue, respect, tolerance, and “embracing fruitful human, economic, and intellectual exchanges” (27).

H. Ricci turns to Moroccan authors who write in Castilian and on Amazigh authors who write in Catalan. In this vein, he aims to foreground the plural and hybrid feature of the North African migrant literatures which disrupts any simple categorization. Examining the works of these authors, H. Ricci seeks also to show their attempts to break up with fervent attachment with the tradition, hence their interest in ‘contemporaneity’ in reading this tradition. This can be achieved by the language of African literature which leaves room for “intracultural,” that is, “South-South,” and “intercultural” exchanges. In his discussion of Moroccan migrant literature in Castilian, H. Ricci avers that this literature bears the stamp of a “trans-modern pluriverse” in that it encompasses “many universalities: European, African, Islamic, Christian and Latin American” (54). Representing the Moroccan folklore and customs, Moroccan literature aims to deconstruct different stereotypes that inform European literature about Morocco, but without “destroying” the Andalusian and Mediterranean common heritage. Moroccan borderland literature is also preoccupied with the different problems that migrants across the Mediterranean come across, as well as the socio-economic situation

brought about by corruption. With regard to Amazigh-Catalan literature, H. Ricci focuses on works by women authors. The aim is to show the existence of female/subaltern voices that also dwell on the immigration and exile experiences, aspiring to bring equality to the fore through the destabilization of power structures. In this, there is again a call for a rereading of the tradition in order to resist religious and patriarchal stereotypes. Interestingly, the works H. Ricci examines highlight the situation of Moroccan womenmigrants not only in Morocco but also in Europe where they lived through hardships.

Dwelling on the representation of sexualities by postcolonial, migrant and gendered Moroccan authors, H. Ricci focuses on biographical and semi-biographical fictional texts by Abdelhadi Taia, a Moroccan author. H. Ricci discusses how these texts speak for other voices, mainly of a subculture. Inscribed within this subculture are sexual taboos, marginal sexualities and patriarchy. Being the foci of his narratives, Taia aims to challenge these taboos through the example of Moroccan migrants in Europe. In so doing, Taia is keen on deconstructing the Maghrebi/Islamic discourses which exclude and reject marginal identities. In this line, H. Ricci avers that Taia's two texts, *Salvation Army* and *An Arab Melancholia*, are revelatory of calls for a re-reading of the tradition and the cultural heritage with a view to leave room for the plurality and multiplicity of identities, including "minor" sexual identities. In this context, the intersections and encounters between North African/Muslim cultures and Western Europe are also brought to the fore to show this plurality of identities. Exploring the works of Abdelhadi Taia who writes in French and English, H. Ricci highlights the role of using other languages in writing about and deconstructing sexual taboos in the Maghreb. These writing languages are also testimonies for the plurilingualism of North African literatures, making of its authors transnational agents who go beyond the national language and identity, thus dealing with issues of universal concern.

A discussion of Abdelkader Benali's *Wedding by the Sea*, Hafid Bouazza's *Abdullah's Feet*, and Brick Oussaid's *Mountains Forgotten by God* is then inaugurated. Writing in Dutch, these Amazigh (Moroccan) Dutch and Belgian writers explore many issues related mainly to the Amazigh/Moroccan and European context, including the discursive representation of Moroccans by Europeans, the clash between modernity and tradition, women's restrictions through religious and patriarchal discourses, as well as the socio-economic malaise in the postcolonial state. In delving into these issues, H. Ricci stresses the power of memory and imagination in narrating the characters' stories across different borders. Largely discussing themes like memories of home, longing to belonging, preoccupation with return, and the challenges

brought by the modern conditions in the face of tradition, H. Ricci adopts a comparative and historically based perspective. This choice is justified by the nonexistence of any colonial encounters between Morocco and the Netherlands or Belgium. Interestingly, H. Ricci looks at the authors' literature under study from a non-ethnic angle, a fact that makes their writing transnational, cosmopolitan and multicultural; their literature transcends local and national boundaries.

Addressing Moroccan diaspora fiction in North America, H. Ricci shifts attention to Moroccan Anglophone literature to further evince the plurilingualism literatures from Moroccan. He focuses on four works by the Moroccan acclaimed writer Laila Lalami. For H. Ricci, Interestingly Lalami's texts are also much concerned with the Moroccan European context. She exposes mainly the experiences of Moroccan migrants across borders in search for 'hope' and 'opportunities' in Europe. In doing so, Lalami concentrates on female characters to unravel their hardships as brought about by the socio-economic and political malaise in postcolonial Morocco. In this context, H. Ricci shows that Lalami's interest is manifest in how women are subject to social exclusion and patriarchal injustices, using religious discourses. Likewise, she throws light on pitfalls of the Islamic fundamentalism and calls for an "enlightened" version of the Islamic heritage without breaking with it. What's more, Laila Lalami brings to the fore other issues relevant to the "memories of colonialism," such as racism, slavery, xenophobia, particularly in her novel *The Moor's Account*. Lalami's texts, as H. Ricci informs us, also transcend fixed borders, and her characters are positioned in an in-between space; which enables them to read and level criticism at the situation of their home country as well as of their host country.

Unlike scholarly interest in Moroccan Francophone and Arabic authors, scant critical attention has been paid to Moroccan literature in other European languages. H. Ricci's *New Voices of Muslim North-African Migrants in Europe* touches upon this uncharted area through an excellent analytical reading of Moroccan migrant literature in Europe and North America. In this vein, H. Ricci's use of postcolonial and intercultural theory in examining these literary productions is well-worked, and the arguments are smoothly presented. The division of the book into chapters, each of which concentrating on selected texts with allusions to other texts, helps the reader to picture the crux of the book. This book uses a wide range of literary genres, including poetry, autobiography and fiction to explore thorny and contentious issues related mainly to the Moroccan European context. Having done so, H. Ricci's seminal

work opens new areas of research for students and researchers interested in Moroccan migrant literature in specific and North African literature in general. The book's rich bibliography is also revelatory and further makes it a highly recommended reference.

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