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## Representation and its Discontents: Maghrebian Voices and Iberian Diversity

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On February 1, 2008, the Spanish dailies announced the winner of the Ramon Llull literary prize, the most prestigious award for novels written in Catalan. Most Spaniards were surprised to find out that the winner of that year's edition was Najat El Hachmi, not only a relatively unknown writer, but the daughter of Muslim, Maghrebian immigrants. El Hachmi's novel, *L'últim patriarca*, the chronicle of a young Maghrebian girl's efforts to find her place in Catalan society, was published by Editorial Planeta, undoubtedly the most important commercial press in Spain and most of Latin America, translated into Spanish and French, and actively promoted by Planeta's well financed, marketing department. The selection of El Hachmi as the depositary of this award was significant at several levels; on the one hand, it represented an attempt to embrace the increasing multicultural nature of Spanish society; on the other hand, the fact that this endorsement to multiculturalism came from a group of intellectuals in Catalonia, not Madrid, was indicative of the conflicting policies to manage cultural diversity undertaken by the Catalan and the central governments in Spain. Unlike most other countries in the European Union, the debate over the integration of immigrants in Spain is not only played out as the confrontation/conciliation of a hegemonic Western culture and those of the immigrant communities, but also as a debate over the sustainability of both traditional Peninsular minority languages and those languages spoken by immigrant communities. Despite the interest of the different political parties in aligning immigration issues with the integration of Spain's peripheral national identities, and despite the fact that El Hachmi's novel became an editorial phenomenon overnight, her success continues to be the exception to the norm. The Muslim, immigrant community in Spain continues, for the most part, to be faceless, a situation complicated by the fact that El Hachmi herself has repeatedly expressed her reluctance to be considered as a representative of the Maghrebian, immigrant community, let alone Spain's Muslim community.

This article explores the often convoluted relation between Spain's traditional multiculturalism (the coexistence of Castilian and other peripheral national identities) and the new cultural identities brought about by immigration. I will try to explain the reasons why Maghrebian intellectuals and intellectuals of Maghrebian descent are still struggling to articulate a coherent position in the Spanish

field of cultural production. The premise for my analysis is that cultural analysis needs to concentrate not only on more or less successful cultural production, but also pay attention to those elements that are either intentionally edited out of, or merely unable to find articulation in the Spanish literary market.

More than twenty years after Spain started seeing a sustained surge in the number of Maghrebian immigrants in the country, the absence of visible representatives of the Maghrebian community in Spain continues to be striking for a country in which 3 percent of the population declared itself Muslim in 2010 (Comisión Islámica de España), that in 2011 received more than 30 percent of its immigrants from the Maghreb and other Muslim countries (Morocco 29.6 percent, Algeria 2.03 percent, Senegal 1.7 percent, plus other traditionally Muslim countries represented in smaller numbers), and whose percentage of Maghrebian nationals continues to increase (Observatorio n.p.).

The most successful efforts to integrate Maghrebian identities into the mainstream social discourse have come not from Spain's hegemonic cultural center, Madrid, but from its periphery, Catalonia<sup>1</sup>. Maghrebians have begun to occupy relevant positions not only in Catalan cultural production like El Hachmi, but also in Catalan politics. Catalonia has been the first region in Spain (exception made of Ceuta and Melilla, Spain's north African colonies) to have incorporated politicians of Maghrebian descent to its institutions. Two of the most visible ones are Mohammed Chaib and Fouad Ahmad Ellassadi, both of them members of the Catalan Socialist Party (PSC), but the Catalan nationalist party *Convergència i Unió* (CIU) and the left-wing / ecologist coalition *Iniciativa per Catalunya Verds* (ICV) have followed suit and added representatives of Arabic descent: the Syrian Jamil Ajram (CiU), and the Palestinian Jamal Labadidi (ICV).

The reasons why Catalonia has become the engine of a concerted effort to articulate hybrid Maghrebian-Catalan identities are twofold. On the one hand, Catalonia is one of the main destinations for Maghrebian immigrants in Spain. While other areas of the Spanish Mediterranean coastline receive similar numbers of Maghrebian and Subsaharan immigrants, Catalonia has a greater concentration of urban areas, which results in higher visibility for the immigrants and an increased daily interaction between immigrants and locals. On the other hand, Catalonia was quick to understand that a disorderly assimilation of the immigrant population could put its national culture at risk. As sociologist Zapata-Barrero has argued: "The demands coming from the immigrant community and from the minority nations are, at least initially, conflictive, since immigrants will tend to integrate into the hegemonic culture, and will become yet another obstacle in the nation-building process. Accordingly, we need to transform this obstacle into an advantage that contributes to the

development of the national project."<sup>2</sup> The national project that Zapata-Barrero is referring to is, obviously, the Catalan national project, not the Spanish national project. If immigrants integrate into the hegemonic culture, which in Spain is Castilian culture, Catalonia may have a hard time maintaining the viability of Catalan as an official language since a Castilian-speaking, transient (or not so transient), immigrant population could hardly be integrated into the bilingual (Castilian-Catalan) society that Catalonia has struggled to maintain since the country's transition to democracy in 1978. The schooling of younger immigrants in Catalan helps diminish this risk, but the Catalan regional government is well aware that, since new immigrants arrive constantly, failure to integrate them can make the viability of the Catalan language in the schools difficult. The, at times precarious, balance between the two official languages in Catalonia could easily be upset if the majority of immigrants decided to ignore Catalan in favor of Castilian thus forcing the Catalan regional government to choose between the integration of its immigrant communities (which would have to be done in Castilian if immigrants chose to acculturate to this language) and providing administrative support to the Catalan language, a language that is always at risk of being pushed over by hegemonic Castilian.

The dispute over how to integrate the Maghrebian population has been played out not only in terms of the language that they should learn to integrate into Catalan/ Spanish society to, but also in terms of what language (and culture) of origin should be preserved in that integration. Since 1994, the Moroccan government funded the Arabic Plan within the Enseñanza de Lengua y Cultura de Origen program<sup>3</sup> (ELCO). The purpose of this program, similar to bilingual programs in the United States, is to provide instruction to immigrant school-age children in their mother tongue so that they can develop competence in both the language spoken in their country of origin and the language spoken in their host country. The implementation of the plan in those Spanish regions that authorized it was irregular; it took hold in traditionally monolingual areas like Andalusia where the presence of Maghrebian immigrants is considerable, but took longer to become consolidated in other areas of Spain. When in 2004, Nouzha Chekrouni, the Moroccan Minister of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation, offered Catalonia the possibility of teaching Arabic in its public schools through the ELCO plan, Josep Antoni Duran i Lleida, president of the Catalan regional government, was quick to question the benefits of the offer which he argued would “denaturalize the country [referring to Catalonia]” (“¿Árabe en la escuela pública?” n.p.). For many in *Convergència i Unió*, Durán i Lleida's political party, as well as for other Catalan nationalists, Morocco's offer to teach Arabic was perceived as a way to complicate the already precarious balance between Catalan and

Castilian in the Catalan educational system. If each immigrant community demanded to be taught their own language, according to Duran I Lleida, the Catalan government would have a hard time deciding how many languages should be taught in school thus weakening the Catalan's government's efforts to normalize the teaching and use of Catalan in Catalonia.

It may sound far-fetched to argue that by promoting the teaching of Arabic, Morocco was aligning its interest with those of Spain's central government and thus promoting the expansion of Castilian over Catalan, but the way in which the Catalan government eventually responded to what it perceived as a threat to its cultural integrity indicates that this may actually have been the case. In 2005, the Catalan government, then governed by the PSC (Socialist Party of Catalonia), created *Linguamon - Casa de les Llengües*, an institution devoted to raise awareness about the sustainability of linguistic diversity throughout the world. The commitment of the Catalan government to linguistic diversity has had a high media profile since then. Josep Carod-Rovira, vice-president of the Catalan government from 2006 to 2010, has actively promoted his administration's support of multilingualism, often arguing that the linguistic diversity brought to Catalonia by immigrant communities is part of the cultural patrimony of the region. It would seem that the Catalan government had ended up agreeing with the central government in its promotion of the teaching of the languages of immigrants, but the reality is that the creation of *Linguamon - Casa de les Llengües* intended to outmaneuver the Spanish government's promotion of multilingualism.

On October 7, 2007, the Catalan government created the Observatori Linguamón de la Llengua Amaziga (Linguamon Observatory of the Tamazight Language) as part of a consortium with Barcelona's Autonomous University and the University of Cadiz.<sup>4</sup> The objective of the Observatory is to support and increase the visibility of the Tamazight language "whose presence is important in Catalan society" ("Observatori Linguamón de la Llengua Amaziga" n.p.). Tamazight, according to the website of the Catalan regional government, could be the third most spoken language in Catalonia right behind Catalan and Castilian ("Sabadell I Cornellá..." n.p.). This same website provides a demographic segmentation by native language of inhabitants of Catalonia in which Arabic appears as the third most spoken language with 162,000 speakers. This disparity of results can be justified in many different ways. Arabic may be used as a generic for the many dialectal varieties of Arabic spoken in Catalonia (Darija, Algerian Arabic, and Hassaniya Arabic among others), although this is also true of Tamazight that is spoken in six main dialectal varieties. It is also true that many Tamazight speakers are bilingual (Arab/Tamazight) which means that an argument could easily be made for Arabic or Tamazight as the third most spoken language in Catalonia. The

choice between one or the other, however, has political significance both in the Maghreb and in Catalonia. Tamazight has, to date, not been recognized as a national language in most Maghrebian countries with the exception of Algeria (Morocco finally recognized Tamazight as an official language in the 2011 constitution draft that King Mohammed VI submitted to popular referendum in summer 2013).<sup>5</sup> In all of these countries Arabic has gradually displaced Tamazight from all socio-political relevant roles since the Maghreb was invaded by the Arabs in the eighth century. In the last decades, Amazigh nationalism has been on the rise throughout the Maghreb. Different Berber communities have made demands for autonomy from the Arab states of which they are subjects. Amazigh and Catalan nationalism, consequently, share a minority status versus the hegemonic position of Arabic and Castilian, and a similar desire to increase their autonomy from the central government.

The parallelism between the situation of the Imazighen (the Amazigh people) in the Maghreb and Catalans in Spain, while not symmetrical in all aspects, is certainly significant.<sup>6</sup> Like any other diglossic societies where two languages coexist, one of them being the hegemonic one, Catalan was gradually displaced by Spanish from all socio-political relevant roles since the early 18th century. While the period known as the *Renaixença* at the end of the nineteenth century represented a revival of Catalan cultural production, the Spanish Civil War disrupted this recovery in 1936 and the conservative Francoist regime that came to power after the war forbade Catalan to be used publicly during most of the 40 years that it stayed in power. Since the end of the Francoist regime in 1975 and Spain's transition to democracy in 1978, Catalan was once more recognized as the official language of Catalonia together with Castilian. While the Spanish and the regional Catalanian governments have worked to secure the rights of both official languages in Catalonia with the intent of turning a diglossic society into a bilingual one, the line between diglossia and bilingualism is a fine one. The Catalan government has often expressed its concern for the devastating consequences that an equal distribution of linguistic rights between Castilian speakers and Catalan speakers would have for the latter. Since Castilian is the language spoken throughout Spain, despite Catalan's recognition as an official language, demographic movements can easily alter the balance between both languages, reversing Catalonia to a diglossic situation in which Castilian becomes the only, de facto, official language.

Jordi Pujol, leader of the Catalan nationalist party *Convergència i Unió* from the late 70s to the late 90s, coined the term *llengua pròpia* (which can be loosely translated as “autochthonous language”) to express the idea that while both Catalan and Castilian are the official languages of Catalonia, only

Catalan is a product of Catalan culture (Pujol 1996).<sup>7</sup> The objective of this distinction between autochthonous and non-autochthonous languages is to justify the preferential treatment of one language over the other, namely the active promotion of the public use of Catalan over Castilian. The concept of *llengua pròpia* is not without problems since Catalan is also spoken in regions in which it is not originally autochthonous of (Valencia and Balearic Islands). Catalan was “imported” to these regions and consequently not a *llengua pròpia* in the strictest sense. For this reason, Catalan nationalists have expanded the notion of *llengua pròpia* to mean *llengua històrica* (historical language or the language that has been spoken in an area during most of its history) (Süselbeck 169-170).

One can easily see how the concepts of *llengua pròpia* and *llengua històrica* can also be applied to the diglossic relation between Arabic and Tamazight throughout the Maghreb. Tamazight, unlike Arabic, is autochthonous to the Maghreb. Tamazight is also the language that has been spoken throughout the Maghreb from ancient times, even if, in some areas of the Maghreb, Tamazight speakers have become isolated from one another thus no longer being part of a linguistic community in the strictest sense. Tamazight, unlike Catalan, has not benefited from a process of linguistic normalization which, as David Crawford and Katherine Hoffman argue, has resulted in the fact that “[a]ttempts to secure, Amazigh linguistic and political rights, and to promote Amazigh culture, are plagued by the conceptual difficulty of defining what is essentially Amazigh in Morocco and in the crowded global village” (Crawford & Hoffman, 127). It is true, however, that, in the past ten years, there has been a more concerted effort to teach a more standardized form of Tamazight.

The Catalan government has repeatedly highlighted this parallelism, and the objective of the *Observatori Linguamón de la Llengua Amaziga* becomes clearer in the context of the discussion over the *llengua pròpia/ històrica* that I have referred to before. The purpose of the Observatory is not a mere celebration of the multilingual nature of most societies, but an effort to defend minority languages from the invasion of hegemonic ones. In doing so, the Catalan government has managed to present the integration of immigrant communities in Catalonia not as a process that requires the abandonment by the immigrant of his or her language and culture of origin in order to integrate into the (Castilian) hegemonic one, but as a simultaneous vindication of Catalan and Tamazight as minority languages.<sup>8</sup> Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya (ERC), the Catalan nationalist party that most ardently advocates for the use of Catalan as the main vehicular language in Catalonia, has tried to export the controversy surrounding the teaching of Tamazight to regions other than Catalonia asking that Dariya, Morocco’s Arabic dialect, and Tamazight be recognized as official languages in Ceuta and Melilla, something that the leaders of the Partido Popular in Ceuta and Melilla have

opposed. Mercedes Cabrera, Minister of Education in 2009 when this controversy began, went even further blaming the use of Dariya and Tamazight for the high percentage of school drop-outs (“Dos lenguas autonómicas más” n.p.). The opposition of the political right to the teaching of Arabic and Tamazight in Spanish schools has been proportionate to the success of the Catalan government’s strategy. In 2008, at a press conference held in the Ateneu, Barcelona’s main cultural center, twenty immigrant organizations presented a public statement in defense of the Catalan language as the language of choice by immigrants in Catalonia. The event gathered Moroccan, Amazigh and Subsaharan immigrant associations as well as associations representing Latin American and Spanish immigrants (Spaniards from regions other than Catalonia that have migrated to Catalonia). In 2010, the Catalan Parliament (still governed by the PSC at that time) approved the Ley de Acogida de Inmigrantes (Law for the Reception of Immigrants) whose main objective is to facilitate and promote the integration of those immigrating or returning to Catalonia paying special attention to helping them develop basic linguistic competence in both Catalan and Castilian, as well as knowledge of the local culture and juridical system. Despite the fact that the law was passed with 88 percent of the votes, the section concerning the required linguistic competence for immigrants to Catalonia remains controversial to this day. The Catalan Social Services delegate, Carme Capdevila, explained to the Catalan Parliament that immigrants would be taught Catalan first, since Catalan is, according to her, the *lenguaje común* or common language (the language used by the majority) in Catalonia, and would teach immigrants Castilian only if they request it. The People’s Ombudsperson has appealed to Spain’s Constitutional Tribunal arguing that the law is unconstitutional, although this court has not issued a decision on this appeal to date.

It is unclear, however, to what extent the imbrication of the debate over how to best integrate immigrant populations with the equally heated debate about how to manage the coexistence of Castilian and other minority languages like Catalan contributes to the articulation of an effective plan to solve either problem. It could be argued that Spain should resolve its own issues regarding its own cultural diversity prior to making any decisions about what it is that immigrants should integrate to. But this would be an unreal expectation since linguistic identities, the national identities that they help represent, and the political structures by which they seek this representation are always fluid. Since the coexistence between Castilian and Catalan is directly affected by the presence of other minority languages in Spanish society, one cannot expect to figure out a solution for the first problem without tackling the second one. In real life, one issue is bound to get entangled with the other, and, thus, they need to be considered simultaneously. This being said, however, the debate



over which languages facilitate the integration of Maghrebian immigrants in Catalonia and Spain at large does not seem to consider all aspects of cultural diversity with the same intensity. Catalan nationalists have displayed a commendable sensitivity to issues of cultural identity as affected by linguistic rights that is understandable given Catalonia's own struggle to have its own linguistic rights recognized.<sup>9</sup> But this sensitivity to issues of multiculturalism seems, as I mentioned before, not to include other expressions of cultural identity to the same extent. The integration of Islamic practices in Catalan society has encountered similar problems to those found in other societies throughout Europe, namely, the conflicting relation between a lay state and forms of religious expression that go beyond the individual. Catalan society, and Spanish society at large, have not been immune to endless debates about the appropriate use of the niqab and the chador (hijab), often expressions of a societal concern about the possibility of integrating Islam into a democratic, lay society.

Ironically, while Catalan nationalists have vindicated the defense of the linguistic rights of Tamazight and Arabic speakers, the multicultural model which they seek to develop seems to be more limited when it comes to other expressions of cultural diversity. In a televised forum in October 2007, Duran i Lleida debated with a Muslim woman residing in Catalonia about the relative acceptance of the niqab and the chador by Catalan society at large. Duran i Lleida argued that both these type of clothing is acceptable as long as it is the result of a free, individual choice, but that he would not consider it acceptable in a democratic society if it is the result of a coercive, religious mandate. While Duran i Lleida has tried to maintain an ambiguous position about this issue for a long time, in the last few years the position of his own party has veered right to a staunch refusal to allow the use of the niqab, the chador, and the burka in public spaces, a move that echoes the 2004 ban of the burka in schools in France. The Catalan Regional Government, however, has been supportive of the use of the hijab. In fact, in 2007, the same year of the televised debate between Duran I Lleida and a Muslim woman, the Generalitat ordered a public school in Gerona to allow a female student to attend classes with a hijab. The ambivalent tolerance of the Catalan Regional Government towards some religious garments contrasts with the decision of Esperanza Aguirre, president in 2010 of the Madrid Autonomous Community and a prominent politician of the Partido Popular (PP), to support the decision of a local school to forbid a female student from entering the building with a hijab.

The argument that different types of veil (hijab, chador, niqab, burka) are representative of different degrees of religious fanaticism and its implication in women's oppression seems to be informing the position of the Generalitat. Artur Mas, current president of *Convergència i Unió* and of the

*Catalan regional government*, has openly supported the ban on the burka in Catalonia, and argued that this is a decision that needs to be made by local, as opposed to the central/national government. By doing this, Mas is vindicating Catalonia's tradition of juridical independence from the rest of Spain. Unfortunately, despite the fact that both the Socialist Catalan Party (PSC) and the central government had repeatedly tried to avoid the futile debate over the use of the veil, the current economic crisis has led to a public opinion that favors promoting the interests of the Spaniards over those of the immigrant communities. Gradually, the majority of Spain's political parties have abandoned their positions of conciliatory ambivalence about this issue to support the ban on the burka and the niqab. This change of position was evidenced by the announcement by Spain's justice minister (Minister of Justice?) in June of 2010 that the regulation of the use of the niqab and the burka will be included in the upcoming *Ley de Libertad de Conciencia Religiosa* - Religious Freedom Law - ("Caamaño avanza..." n.p.). The Spanish government decided not to pursue the revision of this law because it considered that there was not the necessary quorum to have it approved, but it is significant that the initial strategy of deliberate ambivalence that suggested tolerance towards the use of the veil has been abandoned in favor of an equally deliberate ambivalence that suggests the need to regulate its use.

The debate over the appropriate use of the veil (be it niqab, chador, burka, shayla, al-amitra, or khimar) is, as Miguel Ángel Moratinos, Spanish minister of Foreign Affairs until 2010, has argued "un falso debate," a false or made-up debate, one in which Spanish society is expressing its anxious desire to engage with and control the Muslim community in the country ("Moratinos rechaza el falso debate. . ." n.p.). The problem is that there is not one Muslim community, but many, and even within each community the ways in which Islam is followed vary just like they do throughout the many Catholic communities in Spain. This desire to homogenize Maghrebian immigrant communities by including all of them under the generic group "Muslims" in order to be able to control them is a deeply rooted societal fantasy not only in Spain, but throughout the West, but it is also a very real issue when it comes to the governability and legal protection of these communities. Since the political vindication of one's rights requires that isolated individuals associate themselves in a group in order to negotiate with the State, or to put it differently, since the State cannot negotiate the articulation of civil rights on an individual basis, but with a representative community, the homogenization of Muslim communities (of any group of immigrants or locals) is not a process that can just be criticized hoping that it will go away.

After Spain transitioned to a democracy in 1978, the Spanish Government approved the

1980 Religious Freedom Law (*Ley Orgánica de Libertad Religiosa*) which contemplated the creation of a Religious Freedom Informative Commission (*Comisión Asesora de Libertad Religiosa*) which initially included the Islamic Association of Spain (*Asociación Islámica de España*) later to be reconfigured as the Islamic Commission of Spain (*Comisión Islámica de España, CIE*).<sup>10</sup> The government began to explore the available intermediaries among the different Muslim communities in Spain that could be part of the CIE. By 1989, two Islamic federations had been constituted: the Spanish Federation of Islamic Religious Entities (*Federación Española de Entidades Religiosas Islámicas, FEERI*) and the Union of the Islamic Communities of Spain (*Unión de Comunidades Islámicas de España, UCIDE*) (Tatari Bakry 165-69). The FEERI, led by Mohamed Ali, has been associated with more traditional forms of Islam and has a close connection with the Moroccan Government, while the UCIDE is associated with moderate versions of Islam and more is considered to be more approachable by the Spanish Government. The relation between both institutions has gradually worsened to the point that they refuse to meet at the same negotiation table. This has caused innumerable problems for the Spanish Government that finds itself incapable of making the CIE fulfill its mandate. In June of 2011, the Spanish Government approved a decree forcing both the FEERI and the UCIDE to decide on the acceptance of any Islamic association that requests its inclusion in the CIE in no more than 10 days, arguing their decision on strictly religious grounds. The FEERI complained that this decree interfered with the independence of the CIE; Mohamed Alí, president of the FEERI, complained: "This [meaning the decree] is comparable to the Spanish government interfering with the Episcopal Conference"<sup>11</sup> ("Justicia modifica la representación de los musulmanes en España" n.p.). Islamic associations that have until now been excluded from the CIE, on the other hand, argue that the FEERI's concern is the possible loss of influence in the CIE. The extent to which both associations represent the Muslim communities throughout Spain is certainly questionable. In the case of Catalonia, for example, where in 2007 there were a total of 140 mosques, only twenty-one were members of the UCIDE and six of the FEERI (Estruch 216).

If the relation of the different Islamic communities with the UCIDE and the FEERI is often problematic, their relation with the Spanish central and local governments is equally problematic. Most regional governments in Spain refuse to hire the religious instructors that they are required by law to hire when they have a minimum of ten Muslim students in one center. According to a series of reports prepared by the Spanish Ministry of Justice, many regions have opted for allowing the Hassan II Foundation (a cultural institution funded by the Moroccan government) to teach religious courses after the regular school day is over. The Spanish Government and the Spanish press have

interpreted the activities of the Hassan II Foundation as a dangerous interference in the socialization of the Muslim communities in Spain arguing that the materials and methods used by this foundation aim to promote Moroccan nationalism over integration in Spanish society. General Felix, director of the Centro Nacional de Inteligencia (CNI), the Spanish central intelligence agency, argued in a report submitted to the Spanish Ministers of Defense, Foreign Affairs, and State Department that Morocco was using religious instruction as a way to gain control over Moroccan immigrant communities in the peninsula as reported by the *El País* newspaper to which the report was leaked (“Marruecos utiliza la religión. . .” n.p.). These harsh critiques of the role played by the Moroccan government in the acculturation or lack thereof of Spain’s Maghrebian, immigrant communities fail to explain that the Alauite dynasty has traditionally based its legitimacy on the grounds of its kinship to the prophet Mohammed. The king of Morocco is considered the supreme Islamic religious authority as the “commander of the faithful,” a status that has been validated in the 2011 constitution draft presented by king Mohammed VI (Arief 3). This is partly the reason why the foundation’s website quotes one of Hassan II’s speeches on the occasion of the creation of the foundation in which he refers to Moroccans living abroad as “my sons and daughters”<sup>12</sup> (“La Fondation Hassan II pour les Marocains Résidant à l’Etranger” n.p.). One would not expect Spanish politicians and media to accuse the representatives of the Anglican Church of hindering the integration of its faithful in Spain, but in the case of Maghrebian immigrants the genuine concern for their integration into Spanish society tends to be represented in extreme black or white terms.

The issue of the teaching of Islam to the children of Maghrebian immigrant families, of course, is more complicated than either the demonized representation of the Hassan II Foundation made by the Spanish media or the lofty rhetoric of paternal altruism displayed by the Alaouite monarchy in the foundation’s website. The Alaouite monarchy has, until very recently, been more concerned about maintaining its control over the Moroccan communities abroad than in recognizing their right to vote and hence allowing them to have a say in the future of their country of origin. As Abdelkrim Belguendouz comments in reference to a document approved by the Moroccan Governing Council regarding the strategy to deal with Moroccans living abroad, the government expresses its desire to guarantee their right to full citizenship by improving the political participation of the Moroccan community abroad. The syntax of the sentence is deliberately ambiguous, and as Belguendouz tells us this improvement of political participation “is not referring to their political participation in Morocco, which is normally the responsibility of the Moroccan government and should be its main concern, but to the countries where the immigrants reside”<sup>13</sup> (102). Yet, the idea that the teaching of

Arabic language and Islamic doctrine by the Hassan II foundation aims to disrupt the successful integration of Maghrebian immigrants in Spain is deeply informed by what has come to be known as the culturalist discourse: the idea that certain cultures (in this case Islam) are essentially contrary to Western democratic tradition. Fernando Bravo-López indicates that the culturalist bias has pervaded European political discourse in the last decade, although he reminds us that this culturalist bias has always been well entrenched in Western nationalist discourse. The idea of cultural superiority defended by Renan, argues Bravo-López, can be found intact in the words of Italian philosopher, Giovanni Sartori, and Spanish anthropologist, Mikel Azurmendi, who, like many European politicians, defend the need to transcend ethnic identities (by which they mean non-Western ethnic heritages) and to structure the coexistence of immigrants and locals around the notion of the individual/citizen as defined by Western cultural tradition (433-35).

The culturalist critique of multiculturalism imposes a normalized identity, one that has been cleansed of cultural diversity and that proposes its own ethnocentric bias as a way to overcome the supposedly limited perspectives of other ethnic perspectives. This tendency to perceive cultural diversity as a threat, and to impose a monolithic version of identity is what Joseba Gabilondo has described as State narcissism. A type of discourse that is deeply connected to the development of the modern nation-state:

State narcissism - and more precisely State secondary narcissism - emerges when, in the face of a threat such as immigrants, the national (imperialist) ideal ego represses the State ego so that the latter withdraws from the differential object of immigration and retreats into itself, giving rise, in turn, to social anxiety at the level of individual citizens. (71)

In other words, according to Joseba Gabilondo, the nationalist discourse on which the nation-state is built can only recognize individuals/communities that mirror its own image. In as much as the other threatens the stability of the national ideal ego (namely the ideal and cohesive identitarian discourse on which national identity is founded), the state chooses to either deny or assimilate this reality.

While I would not dispute Gabilondo's reading of the narcissistic logic of nationalist discourses, I would prefer to talk about it as a more or less innate tendency of nationalist discourse. One that actualizes itself to different degrees depending on the circumstances. My own take on State narcissism may be wishful thinking, but if we accept the thesis that diversity is to be systematically rejected by nationalist discourses while we still cannot envision an alternative to the nation-state, we

seem to end up in an apocalyptic cul-de-sac. Arguing that these narcissistic tendencies do not always become fully actualized would allow us to contend that cultural diversity is precisely one of the elements that help contain this destructive form of narcissism. To the extent that cultural diversity gains access to the channels of cultural production, elements of dissonance begin to erode the homogenous nationalist discourse which, left unchecked, would certainly evolve into the extreme form of State narcissism described by Gabilondo. In other words, Azurmendi may be right to perceive multiculturalism as a centrifugal force that disperses mainstream identitarian discourses; he is wrong to perceive this process as a negative and destructive one. It is precisely multiculturalism that keeps State narcissism in check.

I would contend that, while the advent of a post-national era may or may not materialize, it may be more productive to expand the paradigm within which national identities are conceived, rather than to advocate for their disappearance. In regards to the cultural production of Maghrebian immigrants in Europe, criticisms of the multiculturalism that they represent had traditionally been grounded on what Jacques Derrida has called the monolingualism of the Other. The notion that identity is perpetually deferred, Derrida tells us, also entails that identity is necessarily monolingual. Claims that traces of other (ethnic) identities may be present in one's language cannot be sustained within Derrida's deconstructive logic since they cannot be more than representations of those foreign identities articulated within the hegemonic linguistic system (Derrida 21). We can find traces of what Gabilondo calls State Narcissism in Derrida's unifying, monolingual logic. Despite his critique of the logocentric nature of all languages (hegemonic or not), Derrida's monolingualism of the Other seems to assign a higher value to the deferred hegemonic identities than to minority ones. The Derridean paradigm, however, can and has been effectively contested by Moroccan literary critic, Abdelkebir Khatibi. The notion of bilingual identity advocated by Khatibi preserves the valuable insights of deconstruction, but argues that languages do intersect, not because a logocentric identitarian presence may be pinned down in one language or other, but precisely because the deferred representation of one language intersects with that of another (Khatibi 211). Identities, consequently, are not monolingual but bilingual in the sense that they are articulated in specific historical and geographical circumstances; it is precisely the intersection of signifying systems what provides the individual with an identity. Khatibi's critique of deconstruction has the advantage of not doing away with it, but rather allowing us to think deconstructively and politically at the same time. It also allows us to understand that multiculturalism does not necessarily represent an abnormal state, but rather a quite common one.

On the night of January 31st 2008, after Najat El Hachmi was officially announced as the winner of the Ramon Llull, she repeatedly warned journalists that she did not intend to be viewed as a representative of the Maghrebian community. Her novel describes her character's attempt to break away from a long patriarchal line, and El Hachmi tried to emphasize that her intention in *L'últim patriarca* was not to represent the Maghrebian immigrant community as a whole but to find her own voice. In statements to the press, El Hachmi insisted on the fact that she did not see herself as a representative of the Maghrebian migrant community, but as someone that had certainly been influenced by it, to put it in Khatibi's terminology, El Hachmi was claiming her place at the crossroads of four different traditions: Amazigh, Arabic, Castilian, and Catalan ("He intentado alejarme..." n.p.). Both Catalan and Spanish dailies reproduced these statements while emphasizing El Hachmi's harmonious integration into Spanish/Catalan society often quoting El Hachmi's devotion for Spanish writers like Machado, Lorca, and Rodoreda (all of them exponents of modern Spanish and Catalan identities). Despite El Hachmi's efforts, and despite the fact that her comments were indeed faithfully reproduced by the media, the emphasis was placed on the abandonment of her Maghrebian traditions and the embracement of her newly found Iberian ones as exemplified in the headline of the interview published by the Spanish daily *El País*: "I have tried to distance myself from my painful origins."<sup>14</sup> El Hachmi's public persona, as highlighted by the headlines in these interviews, fit comfortably within the Derridean, monolingual paradigm that I have described before. Spaniards and Catalans could easily accept the success of an immigrant that was willing to leave her cultural heritage behind while embracing the heritage of her host country.

It soon became clear, however, when El Hachmi said that she did not consider herself a representative of any community that she had in mind not only her native Maghreb, but also Catalonia, and by extension, Spain. In an article titled "Aules per desaparitar" ("Delousing Classrooms") published in *El Periódico*, where El Hachmi has a bi-weekly column, she criticized the creation of a set of classrooms by the different regional authorities throughout Spain, including Catalonia, that aimed to educate the migrant student in the language and culture of their host region prior to allowing them into the regular classrooms: "Can somebody explain to me whether what is expected of the newcomers [the immigrant students] is for them to get used to Catalan society or to be special rooms for immigrant kids like them."<sup>15</sup> In critiquing the exclusion of migrant students from the regular classrooms, El Hachmi was vindicating the right of immigrant children, as well as her own right, to be Catalan while drawing on both Maghrebian and Catalan heritages, not by abandoning one to embrace the other.

Throughout her journalistic writing, her essays, and her fiction, El Hachmi has tried to present a highly nuanced identitarian position. By distancing herself from her Maghrebian origins, El Hachmi is not necessarily embracing her new Catalan identity uncritically, but rather rearticulating her position as the intersection of both identitarian discourses. To use Khatibi's words, El Hachmi is vindicating her bilingual identity as a struggle, not an unproblematic expression of a coherent identity. As Najat El Hachmi argues in her long essay *Jo també sóc catalana* (I too am a Catalan),

When somebody tells you to integrate, what they really are telling you is to disintegrate, that you erase any trace of your past, of a cultural or religious heritage, that you forget everything and only remember their memories, their past. Because there is nothing worse than the fear of the unknown, it is better for us all to become one and the same thing so that we do not have to think too hard.<sup>16</sup>

In conclusion, we need to talk about Maghrebian communities, in the plural, and the challenges they find to articulate cultural identities, also in plural, that can circulate in the Spanish field of cultural production. The resistance expressed by different Muslim communities to be coopted by each other, as well as the lack of trust that has permeated the relations among Maghrebian immigrants, and between these communities and the different, “traditional,” cultural identities present in the Peninsula have made it difficult for these immigrant communities to articulate coherent discourses. Certainly, it is dissonance and not homogeneity that makes cultural production interesting, but Spain seems to stand apart from other European nations in that immigrants rather than articulating their identity against a hegemonic, central identity need to define their position against competing nationalist discourses. Castilian and Catalan nationalisms have chosen to engage in what we could call a proxy war over the management of linguistic diversity in Maghrebian, immigrant communities, as I have described in this article. This, however, is not the only possible scenario. One would hope that Spain, in learning to respect the diversity of its immigrant populations, can also learn to respect its own cultural diversity.



## Notes

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<sup>1</sup>As Tilmatine indicates, among Maghrebians in Catalonia, Imazighen constitute a majority (“La immigració amaziga...” 84). There is an obvious parallelism between the Spanish/Catalan duality in Spain and the Arab/Amazigh one in Morocco as I explain later in the article, but the identitarian paradigm on which ethnic and religious identities are structured in Morocco does not correspond to the one we find in Spain. For this reason, rather than using the term 'Imazighen' unproblematically at this point in my argument, I prefer to use the more generic 'Maghrebian.'

<sup>2</sup>Les demandes dels immigrants i de les nacions minoritàries són, en principi, conflictives, ja que els immigrants tendiran a integrar-se a la cultura majoritària, i es convertiran en un element més de pressió en el procés de construcció nacional. Es tracta, doncs, de convertir aquesta pressió inicial en un avantatge que contribueixi al mateix desenvolupament del projecte nacional. (180)

<sup>3</sup>Teaching the Language and Culture of Origin

<sup>4</sup>The creation of an institution of this nature had long been demanded by academics. As early as 1997, Mohand Tilmatine, professor of Arabic at the University of Cadiz, Spain, had argued for the need to educate immigrants in their language and culture of origin as a way to promote successful integration into European societies. Tilmatine presented a similar argument applied to the Catalan case in an article published by the Catalan regional government in one of its technical journals in 2005. Tilmatine would eventually become one of the main advisers of the *Observatori Lingüamón de la Llengua Amaziga*.

<sup>5</sup>It is still soon to judge the extent to which this new constitution will change Moroccan political reality.

<sup>6</sup>As Abderrahman El Aissati explains, most Imazighen consider themselves to be Muslim first and Moroccans second; “[t]here is reason to believe, especially in the case of Morocco, that many Imazighen view themselves as Arab-Muslim-Imazighen” (63). French colonialists used Amazigh identity as a way to divide and control Moroccans by emphasizing the difference between Arab and Amazigh heritages. In the last ten years, however, we have witnessed a revival of Amazigh identity that El Aissati considers paradoxical because “on the one hand, there are more threats to language and culture preservation [in Morocco and Algeria], due to urbanization among other things, while on the other hand, there is a rising stride among the Amazigh communities fighting for the recognition of their language and the re-evaluation of their culture” (67). El Aissati describes how Amazigh national identity in opposition to Arab hegemonic identity is normally articulated by educated Imazighen as opposed to uneducated ones that consider fluency in Arab as a necessary skill to move ahead, and profess little loyalty to Amazigh. Without disagreeing with El Aissati, I would contend that what he describes is not so much a question of lack of cultural identity on the part of uneducated Imazighen, but lack of ability to articulate that identity in political terms. In this aspect, we do find similarities between the articulation of political discourses of national identity by cultural elites in the Maghreb and in Europe.

<sup>7</sup>The concept of *llengua pròpia* is connected to the notion of Catalonia as a differentiated cultural nation, an argument advanced by Jordi Pujol in *La personalidad diferenciada de Cataluña* (1991).

<sup>8</sup>Certainly, the Spanish central government, in developing the ELCO program with Morocco, was also trying to develop integration models that were respectful with the language and culture of origin of the Moroccan immigrant community. In doing so, however, the Spanish government was choosing to favor the hegemonic languages over the minority ones.

<sup>9</sup>We should not forget that the Universal Declaration of Linguistic Rights, overseen by the UNESCO, was approved in Barcelona on June 6, 1998.

<sup>10</sup>The Islamic Association of Spain was created in 1971 in response to the 44/1967 law that regulated minority religions towards the end of the Francoist regime. This association would eventually become the Comisión Islámica de España, CIE, constituted in 1992.

<sup>11</sup>“Es como si se pusiera a organizar la Conferencia Episcopal.” The Spanish Government has simultaneously announced the creation of an Observatorio del Pluralismo Religioso en España (Observatory of Religious Diversity in Spain) in an effort to provide objective information about minority religions to the Spanish people, but clearly addressed to local governments that may need help managing their own religious communities (“Caamaño seguirá privilegiando las asociaciones de musulmanes”

<sup>12</sup>“tels mes fils et mes filles.”

<sup>13</sup>“no se refiere a la participación política en Marruecos, que es normalmente del dominio y responsabilidad del gobierno marroquí y debería interesarle en primer lugar, sino que se refiere principalmente a los países de residencia”

<sup>14</sup>“He intentado alejarme de unos orígenes que duelen”

<sup>15</sup> “Que algú m'expliqui si el que s'espera d'aquests nouvinguts és que s'adaptin a la societat catalana o als pavellons especials per a nens immigrants com ells.”

<sup>16</sup> "Quan algú diu que t'integris, el que en realitat t'està demanant és que et desintegris, que esborris qualsevol rastre de temps anteriors, de vestigis culturals o religiosos, que ho oblidis tot i només recordis els seus records, el seu passat. Perque no hi ha por més terrible que la por al que és desconegut, es millor que tots siguem iguals per no haver-hi de pensar gaire" (90).

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