

From Subjugation to Subversion: Power and Resistance in *Leo the African*

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Abstract

This article explores the themes of power and resistance in postcolonial novels set in Islamic Spain, focusing on the historical and cultural dynamics between Muslims in Al-Andalus and Spaniards. The analysis is grounded in critical discourse theory, particularly Foucauldian perspectives on power, knowledge, and resistance. The study investigates how Moorish identity, shaped by hybridity and fluidity, challenges binary oppositions and Orientalist portrayals. The protagonist of *Leo the African*, Hassan al-Wazzan, serves as a key example of how cultural power structures are navigated and contested, both in Islamic and Christian contexts. The article highlights how language and discourse function as tools for both domination and subversion, offering a more nuanced understanding of Moorish identity and history. Al-Wazzan's identity, shaped by multiple cultural affiliations, embodies resistance within liminal spaces, challenging rigid definitions and providing a critique of colonial and contemporary discourses. The study emphasizes the importance of re-examining historical narratives and the role of discourse in shaping knowledge, identities, and social relations. By reconsidering the marginalization of Moors in dominant historical narratives, this research advocates for a more inclusive understanding of cultural and historical identities, particularly in postcolonial discourse.

Keywords: Power and Resistance, Moorish Identity, Critical Discourse Analysis, Islamic Spain, Hybridity and Colonialism

Introduction

Said (2017) said that, the choice of Al-Andalus or Islamic Spain is due to its context, where power relations are played out. It is where two forces centennially mixed, coexisted, and battled for cultural supremacy. There are two major characters in the novels: the Muslims of Spain in the South of Iberia, called Andalucians, and Spaniards in the North, two polarized forces that the analysis tries to come to terms with by gauging their degree of polarization, to overcome Samuel Huntington's theory of "the clash of civilizations." Or rather, the myth of the clash of civilisations (the overly simplistic and dangerously divisive) (Said, 2001) with the force of the ambivalence inherent in Western discourse in the context of sameness and difference.

Putting the article in a larger worldwide contemporary context, the story of Al- Andalus or Islamic Spain figures as a melancholic memory comparable to the loss of Jerusalem nowadays (Elinson, 2004). Arab as well as postcolonial writers on many fronts try to redress the epistemic and the physical violence dealt to Muslim subjects in the Iberian-peninsula by rewriting/reimagining colonial encounters between Muslims in the south of Iberia and Christians in the north.

According to Samuel Huntington, civilisations are not static entities; they are dynamic systems that evolve, rising, falling, merging, dividing, and sometimes vanishing altogether, "buried in the sands of time." Civilizations, he argues, often advance during periods of crisis, only to reach a peak, a "universal state" from which they eventually decline into decay and disintegration (Salzborn & Stich, 2016). Huntington identifies a historical evolution of

intercivilizational relations, which have unfolded in three distinct phases. For over three millennia after the emergence of early civilisations, interactions between them were largely nonexistent, minimal, or confined to sporadic but intense encounters. Over time, however, these limited exchanges gave way to a dominant and sustained one-way impact from the West onto other civilisations.

For four hundred years, intercivilizational relations consisted of the subordination of other societies to Western civilization (Arnason, 2001). Importantly, Huntington contends that the West did not prevail because of the inherent superiority of its ideas, values, or religious beliefs relatively few outside the West adopted them. Rather, it was the West's unmatched ability to apply organised force that secured its dominance. While this reality is often forgotten in Western narratives, it remains vividly remembered by those beyond its borders (O'Dowd, 2010).

In the twentieth century, relations between civilisations shifted from a period marked by the one-way influence of a single civilisation over others to an era characterised by intense, ongoing, and multidirectional exchanges among all civilisations (Trentmann, 2009). As the world transitions beyond its Western-dominated era, the ideologies that defined the later stages of Western civilisation are fading, giving way to religions and other culturally rooted forms of identity and allegiance. Huntington argues that the “intracivilizational clash of political ideas spawned by the West is being supplanted by an intercivilizational clash of culture and religion.” (Seif-Amirhosseini, 2013; Huntington, 2020).

Returning in memory to the pivotal period of 1492, a moment in world history that Spanish historiography sought to conceal by focusing on the Columbus side of the story, by manipulating the truth about the Muslim presence in the Iberian peninsula, an entire Moorish history and cultural ways of life, reemerge from the shadows, warm and gushing. Islamic Spain, its creation of a cultural hub in the Iberian peninsula, together with its fair polity, was blotted out from the annals of history in the Spanish colonial history.

The historical negative effects of power leveled on the Moorish community did not succeed in extinguishing its culture of ideas, as there is a constant reminder to Europe by its Others that Moors were once in Iberia and that Islamic Spain was their rightful home, which pretty much unsettles the Europeans. What these writers are also doing is uncovering everyday actions in the time of the Inquisition that are often silenced in favor of other events.

The celebration and the cherishing of the Moorish, Andalucian culture is at the epicenter of the Arabo-Christian relation of power in these novels. Their writers defend their historical integrity by showing the Moorish characters in the light of the witness, the hero, and the grand contestant. Highlighted also are the Hammam bathhouses, the Moorish architecture, and the general splendor of the time, embodied in *Convivencia*, twinning, miscegenation, and the Arabization of the entire Iberian peninsula, which is a rich and shared history that continues to illuminate and inflect bilateral relations today.

It is important not to forget that the discourse of fear intermingled with hatred, disseminated by Europe, made the Moor accused of barbarism (Boletsi, 2016). The shared identity and hybridity become at once a relation of domination, a strained unilateral relation in intercultural terms. However, there is a discursive tendency by the Others of Europe to write back and reclaim the Moorish subject and its man-made culture by constructing a counter discourse that is factual, by the mighty lever of fact and fiction, to illustrate or re-historicize discourse to change or thwart the Western historiography with spectacular resistances.

The focus of this article is placed on the intercultural relations of power between Muslims, who later sought refuge in the Maghreb, and their Castilian counterparts in Islamic Spain, especially

when their Crusading discourse is a historical continuation that needs a break with the past to establish more harmonious connections with the West, neighboring Spain in particular (Gabilondo, 2003). Andalusia, or Islamic Spain, as a context is also chosen in this article because there should be a will, though analysis, to redress the injustice that happened due to the infamous Inquisition, as a regressive force, due to the failure of *Convivencia* and the restraining, negative power effects of the institution of the Inquisition on the Moors, the others of Europe.

As an approach, the article draws on the notion of discourse relationally speaking, which means that the analysis treats discourse as latent cultural forms and burgeoning acts of resistance(s), which are heretofore taken for granted or are unnoticed by critics and scholars within these texts. In approaching this topic, power is brought to light, its manifestations, and forms of resistance(s) by detecting and contesting its diffusion at the same time. The article relies on two postcolonial approaches to resistance, namely rewriting colonial narratives by subverting the negative images attached to colonized peoples and culture in the case of *Shadows of the Pomegranate Tree*; the second highlighting “cultural negotiation and the formation of human subjectivities” that touch down upon the cultural encounters of the colonizer and colonized in the hybrid space [Islamic Spain], which undermines the total domination of the colonial power,” (Bhandari, 2022) Exemplified in the infamous Inquisition and its negative power modalities.

Methods

The method outlined above centers on using critical discourse analysis (CDA) to explore how discourse functions within power structures, focusing on the relationship between Moorish know-how, femininity, and power dynamics. Discourse, as defined by key theorists like Mikhail Bakhtin, Jacques Lacan, and Michel Foucault, is seen as a social practice that shapes and is shaped by power, knowledge, and identity. Foucault, in particular, emphasizes that discourse is both a form of power and a mechanism through which truth is constructed, often reflecting the dominant ideology of an era. This perspective allows for the analysis of how certain social realities are produced, maintained, and contested through language and interaction. The methodology involves juxtaposing different definitions of discourse from various scholars to build a comprehensive understanding, which will then guide the analysis of the texts in question. Foucault’s idea of discourse as historical and ideological provides the theoretical backbone, framing discourse as not just a reflection of reality but an active agent in constructing and altering societal norms and relationships. This approach also emphasizes the importance of understanding discourse in its historical context and its links to power relations, where power is both centralized and diffused throughout society. A key aspect of this methodology is understanding resistance within discourse. Foucault's concept of power and resistance is crucial, as it demonstrates that power is not solely repressive but can also be contested. In the context of Moorish culture, resistance is explored through the intersection of gender, power, and identity. The article focuses on how Moorish femininity and cultural practices serve as forms of resistance against dominant discourses, particularly the colonial and imperial narratives that marginalize the Moors. This resistance is framed as a counter-discourse, challenging and subverting established norms and power relations. Finally, the methodology draws on postcolonial theory, particularly Edward Said’s concept of Orientalism, to examine how the West’s discourse on the East constructs a hierarchy that legitimizes domination. The analysis will focus on how these power dynamics are encoded in language, shaping knowledge and identities. By examining how the Moors and their culture were represented in Western discourse, the research will reveal how power, knowledge, and resistance intersect in the creation of social realities. The critical discourse analysis in this study

aims to uncover these hidden dynamics, providing insights into how language and power shape the world we live in.

Results and Discussion

This chapter briefly introduces the novel *Leo the African* (1986) and its author. Provided also are some supplementing ideas and comments on the review of literature. Among the key issues it raises are the relation between Al-Wazzan and some women folk to cultural forms of resistance. Thematically, the notion of resistance is discussed through Bhabhan sameness and difference. Themes such as the power of witchcraft, charms, patriarchy and surrender are discussed. Formally, the cultural forms of amulets, charms and the *suq* stalls are listed as resistance to negative power implications within the world of the novel.

Maalouf's novel *Leo the African* tells the story of a young Granadino by descendent called Hassan al-Wazzan Al-Fasi. He was forced to leave Al-Andalus, his rightful home, to North Africa, where he served under the Wattasi dynasty in Morocco as an emissary to Timbuktu. His travels made his identity an amalgam of different cultures, which he cherished and respected in keeping with the spirit of entente and *convivencia* promulgated by Islamic Spain. Al-Wazzan was captured while trying to perform pilgrimage to Mecca by a corsair that later recognized his erudition on the geography of Africa and introduced him to the Roman Pope Leo X, who welcomed him with open arms. The novel stresses the aspect of being a nomad of the road, with no strong adherence to one culture over the other.

Born in Lebanon on February 25, 1949, Amin Maalouf comes from a family of teachers. He left home for France because of the war, studied economics and sociology, and worked as a journalist. As a Christian expatriate, his career in writing fiction began in 1984. He received multiple honorary doctorates from universities the world over (Parmegiani, 2022). Maalouf states that "it's likely that if I hadn't been forced to leave my country, I wouldn't have devoted my life to literature." His debut novel, *Leo the African*, propelled him into literary renown. His way of writing is "enriched with diverse origins," as he "finds inspiration in the narratives woven through generations by his ancestors."

Ideas, responses, comments, and analyses of historical novels can enrich the unique reading experiences, where recipients could arguably undergo a distinct reading or re-reading from various perspectives, but Moorish novels such as *Leo the African* should be contextualized within the historico-cultural milieu of Islamic Spain, as well as the power dynamics animating the relationship of the Moors with the cultural Other, the Spaniard. In this juncture, key ideas about *Leo the African* as perceived by its readership are listed, while incorporating some remarks distinguishing the textual analysis from their comments.

Initially, French-Lebanese writer Amin Maalouf offers a distinct analysis where history is intertwined with the novel's structure, supplying a unique, rich, and divergent reading with both historical and cultural insights. For instance, Maalouf's portrayal of the protagonist's quest involves dismantling Western stereotypes, reinscribing descriptions that counter binary oppositions, and celebrates the interdependence of Bhabhan sameness and difference.

Latent aspects of the text are treated as recurring forms of resistances, challenging entrenched perspectives. An in-depth reading is provided, where homogenization or polarization are avoided, while remaining mindful of the limitations of structuralist approaches. This analysis, infused with Foucauldian perspectives, emphasizes the writer's voice, vision, and subjectivity, triggering ideas backed by reasoned arguments within the field of Cultural Studies.

The persecution of Muslims and Jews during the Spanish Inquisition led many to flee to Fez, including the young Hassan al-Wazzan, marking the end of Muslim rule in Spain. Shammas

describes *Leo Africanus* as a narrative of individuals coerced into accepting choices imposed upon them. His keen perspective visibly contrasts with the dominant Columbus narrative. For the Western reader who is familiar only with the Columbus side of the story, it is a "back at the farm" of sorts. It recounts, poetically and often imaginatively, the story of those who did not make it to the New World." (Shammas, 1989). Hassan al-Wazzan's eventual journey subverts the negative effects of coercive power, transforming his journey into a temporal and spatial exploration, and exemplifying the dialectic of power/knowledge.

The Fluidity of Identity: Hassan al-Wazzan in Leo the African

The novel's chapters are neatly divided into four parts, each depicting the cities where al-Wazzan resided: Granada, Fez, Cairo, and Rome. These sections chronicle his experiences, from witnessing Granada's fall to his friendships, love affairs, and eventual capture, providing a rich portrayal of his life journey. "Since he had few facts, or none, about the life of the al-Wazzan family in Granada," Shammas praises Maalouf's "unbound imagination" that has produced Salma, the mother of Hasan, her Christian co-wife Warda and her daughter, Mariam. Muhammad, their procrastinating husband and Hassan's father can be found in the world of the novel contemplating the ultimatums of conversion or exile, and the Jewish perfume-seller, Sarah, who is practically a member of Hassan's family is part of this family. "This invented family album," Shammas remarks "is set against the falling Granada, whose effete grandeur is described through the eyes of the infant Hasan, as recalled by him many years later in Rome." (Bashir & Saeed, 2025).

The constant mobility and adventurous spirit of the polymath, al-Wazzan, renders him a rare specimen in Arab and world histories. His ability to integrate into the Western fabric and his utilization and contestation of various forms of power warrant critical examination. Studying such figure, from his transient life in Granada to his later experiences in Rome, has the potential to challenge negative Orientalist portrayals, given his intellectual versatility and expertise on geography. His fictive assertion is that he is

[t]he son of Muhammad the weigh-master, I, Jean-Leon de Medici, circumcised at the hand of a barber and baptized at the hand of a pope, I am now called the African, but I am not from Africa, nor from Europe, nor from Arabia. I am also called the Granadan, the Fassi, the Zayyati, but I come from no country, from no city, no tribe. I am the son of the road, my country is the caravan, my life the most unexpected of voyages ... and my eyes have seen cities die and empires perish.

Hassan al-Wazzan, a famous hybrid traveler was historically lauded by the pope Leo X as a "man with art and knowledge."The novel's relevance to the analysis is linked to his ability to integrate into different alien contexts, like Rome, which allowed his development/agency for both interrogating and contesting different power structures through his abundant geographical savoir. The famous globetrotter, al-Wazzan, was thus bestowed with the papal surname, de Medici, as a token of great respect. Al-Hassan Ibn Mouhamed al-Wazzan, al- Fasi, had achieved in Europe, as a writer, geographer, and papal adviser unprecedented status for someone of his rank. While he lived in Rome, he profusely wrote in Italian about Islamic culture and the geography of Africa.

Al-Wazzan emerges as a notable figure, dedicated to the pursuit of human knowledge, as depicted by Maalouf in the world of the novel. Having ascended the pathways of knowledge and served in various capacities within the Wattasid court in Morocco, he seized the opportunity to traverse African and Asian lands, meticulously investigating and documenting his observations. His erudition and encyclopaedic mind did not go unnoticed, catching the attention of both a corsair who enslaved him and the Pope, who immediately recognized his

expertise on the African regions he had explored firsthand. Pope Leo X sought to nurture and protect al-Wazzan, and recognized his immense value and the wealth of knowledge he possessed, which Europe lacked at the time.

Al-Wazzan is revered as one of the early pioneers of geography, credited with providing Europe with unprecedented insights into uncharted territories through his writings. His book, detailing the description of Africa, garnered widespread acclaim, and helped elevate his political significance in Rome. Despite the advent of modern scientific exploration, his research remains a primary source, endorsed even by French and German Orientalists. Additionally, he is celebrated for being among the first to offer precise descriptions and cartographic representations of distant lands and the African continent, further cementing his importance to the Roman Court. Pope Leo's patronage and benevolence towards al-Wazzan stemmed from the invaluable contributions his manuscripts offered to the realm of knowledge.

Unfairly, the globetrotter al-Wazzan was excluded from the limelight of history because he happens to be a Muslim. Excluding him from the limelight of history made his identity too complex and fluid to fit neatly into dominant historical narratives. The way for him to resist is to straddle multiple worlds Muslim and Christian, African and European that his shifting identity made him difficult to categorize, whose ambiguity, combined with colonial and Eurocentric tendencies to marginalize hybrid or nonconforming figures, led to his historical erasure. Despite this, his contributions, especially *The Description of Africa*, testify to his intellectual legacy and his role in rewriting history from a position of cultural in-betweenness. Furthermore, little is known about his legendary life, except through his book *The Description of Africa* (La descrizione dell'africa).

However, his participation in rewriting history from below attest to his great achievements. What is known for sure is that he was a man between worlds, whose shifting and fluxing identity is always in a state of becoming that it is difficult to pin him down as this or that, culturally speaking. He can be thought of as a man of all seasons and all cultures. Besides, the liminal space of his identity attest to this, as he was baptized at the hand of the Pope Leo X, and was given de Medici as a papal surname, despite his Muslim heritage. Despite being Christianized, some historians believe that he safeguarded his Muslim faith secretly in what is known as the practice of *taquia*.

Like many Granadans, he was homesick for a Granada remembered as the best of times, as well as the worst of times with the Catholic, infamous Inquisition. Sadly enough, he has witnessed to the fall of Granada, the fall of the Mamluk king in Egypt and the Watasi dynasty in Morocco, and after he had been enslaved, he was sent to the papal headquarters in Rome, where he received a heartwarming welcome by the Roman Pope, who acknowledged his erudition and great knowledge, saying that a “man with art and knowledge is always welcomed among us, not as a servant but as a protector.” According to Abdellah Boussouf, Moroccan “integration, distinction and social and professional prominence in foreign societies of multiple languages, religions and ethics did not come from nothing. It is a natural extension to the diversity of the Moroccan personality, which encourages shedding light on other Moroccan legends who have influenced the world.”

Writing in Italian about Islamic culture and the geography of Africa, al-Wazzan emerges as a flexible persona constantly moving between margins and centers without showing strong adherence neither to its former world nor to the new one. *Leo the African* is replete with instances where debunking and dismantling Western stereotyped and prejudiced representation of the other is at work, and where at a hopefully later stages or during that very gesture, Taoufiq Sakhkhane believes, the aim is to reconstruct in their stead images of the self and the other,

images that go beyond the fixity of binary oppositions to celebrate the interdependence of same and different.

Despite being left out of the limelight of history, Hassan al-Wazzan's achievements, which are discovered today, speak for themselves, which putts him right back at the center of world history. Through sameness and difference, the representation of al-Wazzan in Maalouf's fiction dismantles Western, stereotyped images of the self and the Other. This historical figure who was a legendary character; a globetrotter, a geographer, an ambassador, a researcher, a writer, and a scholar, was left out of history, except in his book *The Description of Africa*, leaving us "ignorant of his stories and lasting influence." Al-Wazzan was either born in 1483 or 1488 in Granada, Spain, where he "lived at a crossroads of historical events as he witnessed the middle ages, the birth of the Renaissance, the end of Muslim presence in Andalusia, the expulsion of the Jews and Muslims from the region, and the Inquisition."

The scholar, al-Wazzan, experienced, like any other Granadan, the pain of "separation from Andalusia and the migration to Fez or the kingdom of Morocco." He also was witness to the rise and fall of dynasties and empires, seeing with his own eyes the last days of the Mamluk in Egypt and the Al Watasi dynasty in Morocco, and watched the Ottoman empire take its place in history. This religious philosopher have also witnessed the Catholic Church struggle of Martin Luther (1482-1546) and Protestantism, and King of France's alliance with the Ottoman empire, and the fear of Pope Leo X of an Islamic, Ottoman invasion from the South. Hasan al-Wazzan was a scholar who lived in many worlds as he accompanied a number of philosophers, geographers, and travelers.

He studied at the Al Qarawiyyine University in Fez and at the Vatican, and had brought together mosques and churches and went to perform pilgrimage in Mecca, and lived in the Muslim Southern Mediterranean, as well as in the Northern non-Muslim regions, and married a Muslim woman. All these descriptions make al-Wazzan or Leo Africanus a character close to legend, which led some Orientalists to question the credibility of his life, works, and manuscripts, especially his book, "The Description of Africa," that has 8 different editions. The legend al-Wazzan al-Fasi was welcomed by Pope Leo X at the Papal headquarters in Rome, after he had been captured in 1518, while returning home from Pilgrimage from Mecca. "A man with art and knowledge is always welcomed among us, not as a servant but as a protector," said Pope Leo X in a welcoming speech on his honor. Among his quotes, we find: "a community begins to fall apart the moment it agrees to abandon the weakest of its members." Another quote of his: "When a man is rich, whether in gold or in knowledge, he must treat the poverty of others with consideration."

The words of the Pope Leo X singles out al-Wazzan as no average man as the "widely famous family name, Leo de Medici, was bestowed on the traveler, as a show of due respect and acceptance in the Italian society. The globetrotter name, thus, became 'Leo Africanus.' The name which the pope Leo X had given al-Wazzan, which is Pope Leo's surname, "is famous in the city of Florence, Italy, and all over Europe." Despite being little known to the world, al-Wazzan or Leo Africanus was the subject of much research and study in the west. "The research and studies were initiated by many orientalist, historians, and geography scholars, including Italian John Baptist Ramozia in his book, "Sailing and Traveling," in more than one edition since 1550, the Russian Kratchovski in his book, "the history of Arabic Geographical Literature," Canadian and American historian Natalie Zemon Davis, the German Detrick Richenberg, as well as French Orientalists Guillaume Postel and Francois Poyon, just to name a few." Thus, Leo Africanus or Hassan al-Wazzan al-Fasi, is a "personality who was influenced by the world and, in turn, left his mark in it." There is still uncertainty as to whether he died in Tunisia or Morocco. The uncertainty likewise stretches to his religion and whether he

renounced Islam to convert to Christianity, as well as whether it was an obligation or a choice, although his decision to flee to Tunisia suggests that he was under duress.

Hasan ibn Muhammad al-Wazzan al-Fasi is, undoubtedly, an impressive figure in world history, but he is not the only [Moor] to deserve a place there. The success and distinction of Moroccans living abroad are thanks to the natural accumulation of Moroccan identity through our history.

According to Boussouf, Moroccans' "integration, distinction, and social and professional prominence in foreign societies of multiple languages, religions, and ethics did not come from nothing. It is a natural extension to the diversity of the Moroccan personality, which encourages shedding light on other Moroccan legends who have influenced the world." Writing *History from Below*, Aziz Nouhaidi avows that "no other slave could ever recreate what Al-Hassan Ibn Mouhamed Al-Wazzan, Al-Fasi, had achieved in Europe, as a writer, geographer and papal adviser.

This Moor moved through various roles, at different junctures he was a Granadan refugee, a Moroccan explorer of sub-Saharan Africa, a royal ambassador, a Muslim slave and a converted Moor living in Rome. Writing in Italian, Islamic culture and the geography of Africa is centralized." Besides, al-Wazzan is considered as a "flexible persona constantly moving between margins and centers without showing strong adherence neither to its former world nor to the new one. Ibn Al-Wazzan, known to the West as Leo Africanus or Leo the African, is the writer of "Description of Africa," an authoritative early modern account of North African geography which was unquestionably of great assistance to the Europeans, especially to Pope Leo X." In this book, he writes:

*AFRICA is called in the Arabian toong Iphrichia, of the word Faraca, which signifieth in the said language, to divide : but why it should be so called, there are two opinions ; the first is this: namely, because this part of the world is divided from Europa by the Mediterranean sea, and from Asia by the river Nilus. Others are of the opinion that this name Africa was derived from one Ifricus the king of Arabia Foelix, who is said to have been the first to inhabit these parts. ... AFRICA (if we may give credit unto the writers of that nation, being men of learning, and most skillful Cosmographers) beginneth southward at certain rivers issuing forth of a lake in the desert of Gaoga. Eastward it bordereth upon the river Nilus. It extendeth northward to that part of Egypt, where Nilus at seven mouthes dischargeth his streames into the Mediterran sea: from whence it stretcheth westward as far as the streites of Gibraltar, and is bounded on that part with the utmost sea- town of all Libya, called *Nun. Likewise the south part thereof abutteth upon the Ocean sea, which compasseth Africa almost as far as the deserts of Gaoga.*

In this quote, the power of ideas are enunciated as he knows so many far away worlds and places. Due to his extensive travels and contact with them, he constitutes an abundance savoir, a power of ideas, that would later earn him unprecedented access to power as he becomes instrumental to Pope Leo X, which would be in the behoof of the European Enlightenment with its upshoot in Islamic Spain. Aomar Boum avows that his book, "Della descrittione dell'Africa," "remains one of the best sources for political, social, and geographical information about the Maghrib during the first half of the 16th century."

At the age of 18, al-Wazzan went to Timbuktu with his uncle, the emissary of the Wattasid Sultan, Mouhamed Al-Bourtughali. After three years, he once again "visited this spiritual African capital, showing that the young *Granadino* had gained the Sultan's appreciation and established himself as a reliable notary and diplomat, which would be further confirmed a few

years later when the Sultan sent him as a trusted envoy to the Sublime Porte.” As soon as he accomplished his mission, he decided to return to Fez. On his way through the Mediterranean in the summer of 1518, the notorious Knights of the Order of Saint John sacked his ship and took him to Malta as a slave, where he was thought to be an “elite slave who evidently had important information to offer to the pope.”

In 1520, al-Wazzan was sent to Rome where Pope Leo X baptized him and named him Johannes Leo de Medicis. “Throughout the years he spent in the Roman community, Leo taught Arabic to many Christian scholars craving to know about Islam,” and “translated many documents into Arabic and wrote vocabulary in Spanish, Latin, Italian, Hebrew and his native language, Arabic.” Al-Wazzan was able to rise in the ranks of scholarship as an “unrivaled authority capable of establishing himself as a trustworthy source of knowledge. His patrons admired him so much that they could not help but rely on his ability to provide useful information.”

Indeed, al-Wazzan was a “scholar imbued with abundant savoir that enabled him to flourish across cultural and linguistic boundaries and act as a moving ambassador belonging to here and everywhere.” He also puts to question Europeans’ “lubricious preconceptions about Africa and the African Other.” Al-Wazzan’s “intellectual, cultural and noble backgrounds helped him to shape an identity that seemed to have been less affected by its ambivalent and liminal state between two antagonistic worlds, Dar al-Islam and Christendom. It is in this context that “Della descrittione dell’Africa” should be read as it is a tome whose writer did not bother himself too much with the religious perception and categorization of the Other, probably due to his astute practice of *taqiya* (a precautionary dissimulation/concealment of one's faith under duress), which enabled him to appear as “a man with a double vision.”

In fine, Nouhaidi shows us that “this seems to be reflected in “Della descrittione dell’Africa,” a memoir which chronicles the early cultural and intellectual encounters and interchanges between Islam and Renaissance Christendom. Interchanges which allowed its writer more space to challenge the silences imposed upon his life story and upon the context from which he was stolen.

Embracing Hybridity: Identity and Resistance in Postcolonial Discourse

Taoufiq Sakhkhane confirms that there is a veritable “resolution” on the part of postcolonial critics such as Aime Cesaire, Edward Said, Homi Bhabha and G. C. Spivak to “debunk and dismantle Western stereotyped and prejudiced representations of the other, and then, at a hopefully later stage or during that very gesture, to reconstruct in their stead images of the self and the other, images that go beyond the fixity of binary oppositions to celebrate the interdependence and interpretation of same and different.”

I, Hassan the son of Muhammad the weigh-master, I, Jean-Leon de Medici, circumcised at the hand of a barber and baptised at the hand of a pope, I am now called the African, but I am not from Africa, nor from Europe, nor from Arabia, but I come from no country, from no city, no tribe. I am the son of the road, my country is the caravan, my life the most unexpected of voyages.

In this quote, which is taken from Amin Maalouf’s novel *Leo the African*, it can be observed that there is no fixity to identity whatsoever. Rather, the narrator is self-celebrated through Bhabhan difference and sameness, so that binary oppositions do not exist anymore than as before. To speak of the Saidian model, however, it does not hold as striking as resistance in Bhabhan ambivalence, since Said’s work, *Orientalism*, creates an antagonistic opposite to the self, which is rigid and frozen in time and space, and which makes the West advance unmetaphorically upon the Orient.

While Said contends that the discourse of the West is predominant and powerful at level of representation and notions of the self versus the Other, here Othering the self is not tenable since Third World literature such as Maalouf's interrogates the existing relations of knowledge and power between the Crescent and Christendom. Hereby, we do not see a Christocentric vision of the world enunciated but rather a multivocal image of the self compounded from different layers such as race, language and the voyage/voyage in that makes the self complete vis-à-vis the Western misrepresentative discourse. Consider for instance the following quote on language from Maalouf:

From my mouth you will hear Arabic, Turkish, Castilian, Berber, Hebrew, Latin and vulgar Italian, because all tongues and prayers belong to me. But I belong to none of them.

From this quote, it can be discerned that there is a multilingualism at work with the narrator, Hasan al-Wazzan. It is as though he is the wielder of different discursive powers all put together if we entertain the power/knowledge formula. Here, it is proved that the native, in this case the traveller Hassan al-Wazzan defies Orientalist stereotyped images of the Other. In other words, he is not othered, but recognized as same but different.

Despite being different, al-Wazzan can mold himself into different language forms to integrate within the societies that the caravan or the galley has brought him to, namely the cities of Fez, Timbuktu, Cairo and later, Rome. Al-Wazzan talks of himself almost with a sense of pride, for breaking asunder the binary opposition that Samuel Huntington and Edward Said has brought into the intellectual debate between East and West in the shape of Huntington's Clash of Civilizations, by saying that, while he is scribbling this "to himself, like a merchant working out his accounts at the end of a longue journey," he is all the while "dressed in the Neapolitan style, aboard this galley," which brings about a similar image. That of Alacron's donning the Moorish jellaba:

The Spanish writer Pedro Antonio de Alarcón (1833-1891) posed for a series of portraits in the photography studio of his friend José Martínez Sánchez, located in Madrid's central Puerta del Sol. In one of these portraits, Alarcón gazes intently at the viewer from underneath the tasseled hood of an embroidered djellaba, the tunic traditionally worn by Moroccans. On his feet, he wears leather slippers. From his wrist hang the prayer beads used by Moroccan Muslims to count prayers and perform dhikr (invocations of God's name).

Thus, the native is granted a voice, loaded with power and granted a position from which to challenge his masters and the stereotyped images of the self through this grand mimesis. Similar to al-Wazzan, who finds himself in-between cultures, "Alarcón's portraits suggest that cultural identity is like a costume that can be put on or taken off at one's will, and that becoming Moroccan or Italian is as simple as slipping on a djellaba and a pair of leather sandals."

From his early Orientalist writings to the end of his life, Pedro Antonio Alarcón brandished Granada's Muslim heritage as a sign of identity and a badge of honor. Upon expressing concern over his health, Alarcón stoically replies: "You know well that I'm a Moor . . . and, therefore, fatalist. Allah is great, and He will do with me whatever he wishes."

Despite the wide durée separating them, one belonging to the sixteenth century and the other to the nineteenth, Alacron and al-Wazzan emerge as similar cultural luminaries. These historical figures fall within hybridity as constituting both same and different. They play with appearances, donning the Other's clothes and style as to herald a new kind of an uncanny specimen. Historically and culturally apocryphal for doing that, one in the Neapolitan habit and the Other in the Moorish garment, the Jellaba, they both break the norm of race relations.

Challenging the Other: Postcolonial Voices and the Fight Against Negative Representation

Representation has called forth the majority of analysis and revaluation. It is, as Sakhkhane notes: “In reaction to negative representations and characterizations of the other that postcolonialism as a critical practice is defined.” From out the array of lyrical poetry, novels, drama, music, painting to historical records, geographic reports and scientific documents, “the other was frozen in a complex of negative images, jaundiced portraits and timeless metaphysical essences.” Resisting these images, the “‘others’ of Europe have written back with a view to contextualizing and historicizing those representations as means of justifying European subjugation of other people.” Here we can mention some examples of anti-colonial as well as Third-World writers who devoted their entire careers to investing their fiction with the notion of the self as rootless and shifting. Writing back against the Western canon, we find, among others, Hassan Aourid with his *al-Mouriski* and *Rabii Qurtoba*; Muslim writer G. Willow Wilson’s *The Bird King*; Tariq Ali’s *Shadows of the Pomegranate Tree*; Radwa Ashour’s *Granada* trilogy and Rebekkah Scott’s *The Moorish Whore*. With the insertion of the first- and second-person narration, for example, the representation of the self is asserted in novels such as *Leo the African* where:

All morning, my mother remembered, we had cheered and clapped our hands watching games of ‘tabla’, during which one Zenata rider after another tried to hit the wooden target with staves which they threw standing up on the backs of their horses at a gallop. We could not see who was most successful, but the clamor which reached us from the hill, from the very place known as al-Tabla, gave an unerring indication of winners and losers.

According to Edward Said, the way of conceiving the Other looks quite normal and is inherent/essential to all human beings, because each group of people think about what is exterior to them, imagining the Other as a cut-throat barbarian, a savage, a threat to social fabric and community. What is considerably at odds is to turn these systems of accommodating and assimilating the Other into a rooted tradition, a persistent style of thought, a legacy transmitted from one posterity to the next.

Devoted entirely to pleasure, the Sultan neglected the affairs of state, allowing those close to him to amass huge fortunes by illegal taxes and appropriations ... In the city, where there was profound insecurity and fear for the future ... where news of the drinking sessions leaked out regularly through the indiscretions of servants or guests, the mere mention of the name of the Sultan or Soraya brought forth oaths and curses and sometimes pushed the people to the edge of revolt.

In this quote, the Moor (same) is treated as a threat to social fabric and security. It is othered and resisted, by invoking the feat ‘revolt’ to the malpractices of the penultimate Sultan of Granada, Abu’l-Hassan ‘Ali. The notion of resistance is also carried from the pulpit but not directly as to invoke the wrath and tyranny of the Sultan:

Without needing to lay the blame directly on Abu’l-Hassan (which they only rarely dared to do) certain preachers had only to rail against corruption, depravity and impiety for all the faithful to know, without a shadow of doubt, who was being criticized by implication, and they did their utmost to utter loud and recalcitrant cries of ‘Allahu akbar!’, to which the imam leading the prayer would sometimes reply ... ‘The hand of God is above their hands,’ all the while darting looks of hatred in the direction of Alhambra.

The issue with this quote is that “every time there is a crisis between Orient and Occident, such characterizations do crop up to capture the juncture and account for it in some transhistorical, essentialist terms, as if yesterday’s masters and overlords would in no way dispense with their former subjects.”

As Sakhkhane rightfully puts it, the “effect of the dialectically ongoing process of decolonization, each of the discourses and disciplines that conditioned and fixed colonial relationship in a metaphysical logic of binarism has become so perturbed and perturbing as to reinhabit a different field with new horizons for meaning and interpretation” Said looks for the reasons for this “critical state of affairs in domains that gained their renown and legitimacy through complicity with imperialism.” For example, being an avenue to address these issues, anthropology, Said says has “radically changed to unpredictable lengths.” Adding that

For history’s imperial anthropologists who were wont to go on with their work in an off- hand, authoritarian manner have become so baffled that some of them have resorted to textuality, or literary theory in general, as an escapist vocation. What is more distressing and disconcerting for these anthropologists, Said contends, is that the once inert, lazy and passive guinea pigs have grown more clamorous and vehement in their demand to be taken more seriously by their former colonizers.

No longer at ease with European characterizations and images, “these claimants have pressed their own representatives who put in question the claims of anthropology as a whole.” When Ali Mazroui produced a series of films about Africa, he was criticized harshly in the *New York Times* as “a latter-day Jeremiah” who blames the West for “the atrocities and horrors in his continent.” This ‘voracious’ attack on Mazroui stems from his “throwing into doubt European claims about its civilizing mission, and questioning its assumptions to be an emissary of light to the heart of darkness.” Mazroui’s unpardonable mistake was to have represented his own people in a way totally opposite to authoritative Western representations.

Decolonizing Narratives: The Significance of *Leo the African* in Postcolonial Discourse

Through the situation of Ali Mazroui, Edward Said states that there is an over-arching reluctance of Europe to “do away with its myths of dominance.” Since *Orientalism* was published in 1978, Sakhkhane duly remarks, “Said has met with the same, if not more, severe critique for daring to interrogate European representations of others.” In this book, which is considered as a cornerstone to postcolonial theory, Said “undertakes to bring to light how discourses and disciplines such as philology, history, anthropology and literature were not only involved in imperialism but paved the way for the colonization and control of other peoples.”

As it seems, *Leo the African* goes against the imperialistic, unilateral vision of the world, since it talks about and brings to the fore a decisive and critical moment in world history, which is Islamic Spain under the rule of the poet Abu’l-Hassan ‘Ali who fared badly as a ruler, ignoring the flood that his capital underwent as a sign from the Most High, and, by equally entertaining the pleasures of life saying that “the pleasures of the world were ephemeral, that life was passing by and that he must drain the utmost from each moment.” The narrator, Hassan al-Wazzan admonishes him, saying that “such may have been the wisdom of a poet, but not that of a ruler who had already reached the age of fifty and whose kingdom was threatened” It is quite striking that the multivocality of voices is ushered in to dilute the one-sided, monologic prose of empire, which claims to know everything about the Orient and about the Muslim world, but little does it know its peoples.

The discourse of the empire fares badly in its relation of power with the Islamic world, Spain, to be exact, because it denies it the multivocality of its rich voices when it brings it into literature or into the intellectual debate, unlike what Maalouf is doing, which is to question

even one's rulers for their lack of a better political will to uphold the state of Granada against the Castilians and Aragonese. Yoking knowledge and power together, and bringing forth the connection between disciplines that claim to be purely scientific and imperialism as the practical form of subjugation, Said rightfully "undercuts and deconstructed those representations by showing them for what they are as ideological constructs designed, first and foremost, to colonize the minds." Maalouf's narrative does entirely the opposite, since it celebrates a renowned Granadino by birth. A historical figure who is interstellar so to speak; not of any origin except the road. Still, he mourns the loss of Granada by remembering it in retrospect throughout his entire life as a traveler. The center seems to be Granada and the celebration of this figure in Maalouf's text is thrilling. In a way, it decolonizes the minds of the colonial and postcolonial residues. The empire wants to see itself in a pure cultural light.

Connecting power and knowledge, Bernard Lewis has been most "hostile in attacking Said for having been so presumptuously intrusive in an out-of-bounds realm, where only an Orientalist like Lewis himself is entitled to pronounce verdicts about the Orient, Islam and the Muslims." In *Theory*, Ahmed accuses Said of "discursive exorbitance, the inflation of ideological constituents such as literature to the detriment of the institutional and material aspects of imperialism. Ahmed also assails Said for concentrating his critical focus on major canonical works while overlooking the colonized self-representative modalities."

Leo the African is important as a postcolonial text, because it denies scholars such as Bernard Lewis the prerogative to speak on behalf of the Other. Hassan al-Wazzan can be seen describing to us the process of birth, celebration feasts of the circumcision process; the parades and much more like the modalities and contentions of rule in Granada prior to its disintegration with internecine factors such as favoring the Rumiyya Sorayya over Fatima, and doing all kinds of rituals that defy logic, such as drinking the water that Soraya bathes into and ordering it to his cabinet to be drunk; and imprisoning the true heirs with their mother in the tower of Comares.

While Maalouf denies the West the modalities of speech, he is himself responsible for representing the Muslim characters in the light of the traveler, the hero and the protagonist, against much of the Orientalist tropes that seeks to represent the Others of Europe in the light of the villain, the silent and the marginal. So to speak, the margin enters upon the center as Khalid Bekkaoui states in *Signs of Spectacular Resistance*. Colonialism is an 'authority expressed in pageantry and symbolism, as well as military power', as Elleke Boehmer argues in *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature*, and as Sakhkhane rightly observes: "The empire was also a question of texts, imagination and words," with which the "imperialist expansion grew in zeal and momentum with the possibility of 'darting the barbed iron from one side of the world to the other.'" The literary imagination "waxed extravagantly imperial in scope and idiom, the relationship between imperial words and worlds was so troublingly interdependent that one could not exist without the other."

Understanding the significance of texts and the "ways European Others have been represented in Western discourses, postcolonial writers, critics and theorists have engaged in textual resistance to the dominant Western conceptions," with a variety of adopted strategies, such as the Rastafarians's deconstruction of the power structures of English grammar, and the Commonwealth writers' appropriation and revolutionization of the English idiom and image. The objective in mind has been a "reshuffling of dominant meanings, a 'symbolic overhaul."

The postcolonial writer Maalouf has also engaged in deploying the strategy of writing back to dismantle the European authority over the East and to inscribe images of the self and celebrate it instead of what the Orientalist is wont of doing, grotesquely imagining and representing the Other, negating him a sense of selfhood, community and nationhood/state. In Third World texts, the multivocality of voices is stressed ten-fold against the monologic stance of the West

in discourse as it relates to knowledge and power. Let us consider for example the following quote that celebrates the multivocality of voices in the *majlis* of Sultan Abu Abdel in Maalouf's novel *Leo the African*

... people could speak freely under Boabdil, while in the time of his father they would look around seven times before voicing the least criticism, which would be expressed in ambiguous terms, in verses and proverbs, which could easily be retraced if they were denounced later.

This gives more freedom and ease with which to voice out one's opinions in terms of politics and in terms of matters of the state. Despite the fact that Maalouf is wary that these voices would become more pronounced and threatening to Boabdil, the lenient Sultan, he is nevertheless content to show the West that the discourses of Third World texts are not hegemonic nor monologic. In a way, it was a time of great political and cultural *laissez-faire*, Maalouf seems to suggest. Having a debate amongst themselves, on whether or not to take arms against the solidified, powerful Castilians, the court of Abu Abdel was split between two parties; Those who wanted to reach an everlasting peace with Castille and those who wanted armed resistance:

Those who wanted war said: The enemy has decided once and for all to annihilate us, and it is not by submitting that we will force them to withdraw. See how the people of Malaga have been forced into slavery after their surrender! See how the Inquisition has raised pyres for the Jews of Seville, of Saragosa, of Valencia, of Teruel, of Toledo! Tomorrow the pyres will be raised in Granada, not just for the people of the Sabbath but for the Muslims as well! How can we stop this, except by resistance, mobilization and jihad?

Like this war party, postcolonial critic Frantz Fanon justifies the use of violence in order to dismantle colonialism, root and branch, because the enemy is evil, the Castilian Inquisitors. Fanon's reasoning is such that "because colonialism is both created and sustained by violence, it can be destroyed only by violence." The war campaign launched against the Moorish capital Granada is no exception if we entertain the continuing discourse of Orientalism that spans much of the Moorish-Spanish relations. Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* argues that "only violence can destroy colonial rule, both politically and in the psyche the mind of the colonized."

According to Fanon, the use of violence has its purpose, which are two-fold. First, it erodes any system that levels all the might, weapons and power towards the natives, in this case the Granadans. Second, violence is psychological, which means that because of the nefarious effects of colonial war on the native subject, marked by dehumanization, violence emerges as a vindication to topple down Castilian, Spanish colonialism. Tiffin argues that the "channels of resistance and counter-attack cannot be retroactive, a reversion to a nostalgic pre-colonial past for an unblemished image of the self," for colonialism has made that course quite "impracticable with its destabilizing, hybridizing practices." Postcolonial writers should resist, undermine and undercut "European codes and discourses of mastery." In fiction, a 'rereading and rewriting', of the "English canon marked postcolonial literature as a dynamic, subversive and oppositional stance to the dominant Western tradition."

Taking into his own hands and words the prerogative of representing Granada, a controversial space, together with representing al-Wazzan, Maalouf seems to valorize the self and erodes it at the same time, since al-Wazzan is of no origin except the road and travel, a space in between, like Gebel Tarek, bespeaking a tendency to cast him in the mold of a round character not easily defined in relation to the West or East. This fragmented, porous identity, makes al-Wazzan

integrate easily in the world of the text as well as outside of it, as he journeys his way through Granada as a child, the city of Fez's hostelries as a youth, Timbuktu; Cairo and Italy as an adult. Therefore, this makes him recalcitrant/impervious to pin downs and ready-made judgements on his character as being this or that, so we are left with a round character that cannot be readily judged. The fictive assertion of Maalouf is that al-Wazzan's

Wrists have experienced in turn the caresses of silk, the abuses of wool, the gold of princes and the chains of slaves. My fingers have parted a thousand veils, my lips have made a thousand virgins blush, and my eyes have seen cities die and empires perish.

As a penultimate note, Sakhkhane mentions the unrelenting "through and through critique of colonial assumptions and worldviews does not aim, as Tiffin expounds, at substituting the postcolonial for the colonial, but in Wilson Harris's phrase 'to evolve textual strategies which continually "consume" their own biases at the same time as they expose and erode those of the dominant discourse'. Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*, for example, is a "postcolonial paradigm in its rereading and rewriting back to one of the greatest texts of British tradition. Its counter canonical importance emanates from questioning British suzerainty and its representative texts."

Somewhat similarly, Maalouf not only decolonizes the Eastern mind, as we have mentioned, but also goes against the current of the normative Western narrative as its main character, al-Wazzan, denies the Western discourse the prerogative to speak on his behalf, and ponders the question that the Islamic world and the Western is easily navigable through the notion of power/knowledge, and through the multivocality of voices that the text of Maalouf harbors. This multilingualism, on the part of al-Wazzan, makes the text vis-à-vis the Western other same but different, it creates to itself what Bhabha calls a "third space of enunciation," from which voices come out celebrating difference, ideas and cultures. Through these recalcitrant strategies, the interstellar Other resists the Orientalist pin downs of identity, and metaphysical essences, and this is how the Moor emerges victorious all along.

Even though Hassan al-Wazzan was left out of the limelight of history, he managed to produce remarkable geography books, such as *The Description of Africa*. Through writing such accounts, he managed to participate in the rewriting of history from below, but his identity was not stable as he was situated in-between worlds. The text invokes his memory as resistance to historical erasure. His smooth integration in the Italian society on social and professional grounds granted him adequate access to multiple languages, religions and values, and to power. Writing a lot about Italian and Islamic cultures, he managed to influence the world with his great ideas. His representation in the novel of Amin Maalouf, *Leo the African*, dismantles the western stereotyped and prejudiced images and assumptions of the other.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the analysis of *Leo the African* through critical discourse theory reveals the complex and multifaceted nature of identity, power, and resistance in the context of historical and cultural interactions. The novel, with its protagonist Hassan al-Wazzan, highlights themes of hybridity, fluidity of identity, and the dismantling of binary oppositions, which are central to the postcolonial critique of Western representations of the "Other." Al-Wazzan's journey and his ability to navigate and challenge cultural power structures in both the Islamic and Christian worlds exemplify the dynamics of power and resistance, particularly in the context of colonial encounters. The study, framed by Foucauldian perspectives and postcolonial theory, underscores how discourses of power are not only imposed but also contested through intellectual, cultural, and personal resistance. Al-Wazzan's identity, shaped by multiple cultural and religious affiliations, challenges the rigid and essentialist portrayals of Eastern and

Western identities, illustrating the potential for resistance within liminal spaces. The novel, therefore, becomes a vehicle for examining the complexities of cultural mixing, resistance, and the rewriting of history from below, particularly for those marginalized in dominant narratives. Furthermore, the role of language and discourse as tools for both domination and subversion is emphasized. Through Maalouf's portrayal of al-Wazzan, the novel becomes an act of "writing back," challenging Orientalist stereotypes and offering a more nuanced representation of Moorish identity and history. The exploration of hybridity in al-Wazzan's character serves as a critique of both colonial and contemporary discourses that seek to define and confine identity within fixed categories. Ultimately, *Leo the African* invites readers to reconsider historical narratives and the power of discourse in shaping knowledge, identities, and social relations. It calls for a more inclusive and dynamic understanding of cultural and historical identities, advocating for the recognition of marginalized voices and experiences, especially those of the Moors in postcolonial discourse.

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