# Representing the Margin and the Center with Interstellar Hassan al-Wazzan in the Heart of Renaissance Italy

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## ABSTRACT

Despite being left out of the limelight of history, Hassan al-Wazzan, a famous Moroccan traveler, figures immensely in Amin Maalouf's novel, Leo the African. As well as being historically lauded by the pope Leo X as a "man with art and knowledge," who is moreover "always welcomed among us, not as a servant but as a protector." The Moroccan globetrotter was thus bestowed with the papal surname, de Medici, as a token of great respect to him. Al-Hassan Ibn Mouhamed al-Wazzan, al-Fasi, had achieved in Europe, as a writer, geographer and papal adviser what many in the same position have not. As he was living in Rome, he wrote in Italian about Islamic culture and the geography of Africa. In the novel of Amin Maalouf Leo the African, we see the writer trying to debunk and dismantle Western stereotyped and prejudiced representations of the other, and then, at a hopefully later stage or during that very gesture, 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.

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# Representing the Margin and the Center with Interstellar Hassan al-Wazzan in the Heart of Renaissance Italy

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*Despite being left out of the limelight of history, Hassan al-Wazzan, a famous Moroccan traveler, figures immensely in Amin Maalouf's novel, Leo the African. As well as being historically lauded by the pope Leo X as a "man with art and knowledge," who is moreover "always welcomed among us, not as a servant but as a protector." The Moroccan globetrotter was thus bestowed with the papal surname, de Medici, as a token of great respect to him. Al-Hassan Ibn Mouhamed al-Wazzan, al-Fasi, had achieved in Europe, as a writer, geographer and papal adviser what many in the same position have not. As he was living in Rome, he wrote in Italian about Islamic culture and the geography of Africa. In the novel of Amin Maalouf Leo the African, we see the writer trying to debunk and dismantle Western stereotyped and prejudiced representations of the other, and then, at a hopefully later stage or during that very gesture, 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.*

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## I. INTRODUCTION

The globetrotter, Hassan al-Wazzan was unfortunately excluded from the limelight of history. Little is known about his legendary life, except through his book *The Description of Africa* (La descrizione dell'africa). However, his achievements, and his participation in rewriting history from below attest to his great achievements.

What is known for sure, however, is that he was a man between worlds, whose shifting and fluxing identity is always in a state of becoming. So, it is difficult, in my opinion, to pin him down as this or that, culturally speaking. I like to think of him as a man of all seasons and of all cultures. Besides, the liminal space of his identy attest to this, as he was baptized at the hand of a pope called Leo X, and was given de Medici as a papal surname, despite his Muslim heritage. Despite being chrstianized, however, some historians say 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 was witness to the fall of Granada, the fall of the Mamluk king in Egypt and the Watasi dynasty in Morocco.

After he had been enslaved, he was sent to the papal headquarters in Rome, and received a heartwarming welcome by the pope Leo X, 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 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, Hasssan al-Wazzan is a flexible persona constantly moving between margins and centers without showing strong adherence neither to its former world nor to the new one.

Concerning his representation in the fiction of Amin Maalouf, the novel titled *Leo the African* is replete with instances where the debunking and dismantling of western stereotyped and prejudiced representation of the other is at work, and where at a hopefully later stage or during that very gesture, 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.

In short, despite being left out of the limelight of history, Hassan al-Wazzan's achievements, which are discovered today, speak for themselves. Thus, putting him back in the limelight of history.

Another thing which is equally important is the representation of al-Wazzan in Maalouf's fiction *Leo the African* through the category of same and different so as to dismantle western, stereotyped images of the self and the other.

## II. HASSAN AL-WAZZAN, A LITTLE KNOWN HISTORICAL FIGURE AND HIS ACHIEVEMENTS

Sadly enough, the historical figure, Hassan al-Wazzan, who was a legendary character; a globetrotter, a geographer, an ambassador, a researcher, a writer, and a scholar, was left out of the limelight 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. 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." (Boussouf).

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 a 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 witnessed as well the Catholic Church struggle of Martin Luther (1482-1546) and Protestantism, and also King of France's alliance with the Ottoman, and the fear of Pope Leo X of an Ottoman Islamic invasion from the south.

Indeed, 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. He 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" which has 8 different editions.

The legend Hasan ibn Muhammad 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 to Hasan al-Wazzan as a welcoming speech. 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" (quoted in Boussouf).

The spoken words by the pope Leo X singles out Hasan 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 Hassan al-Wazzan, which is Pope Leo's surname, "is famous in the city of Florence, Italy, and all over Europe" (ibid).

Despite being little known to the world, Hasan al-Wazzan or Leo Africanus was the subject of much research and study in the west. "The research and studies were initiated by many orientalists, 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" (ibid).

Thus, Leo Africanus or Hassan al-Wazzan, 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 (ibid).

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."

## III. HASSAN AL-WAZZAN AND WRITING HISTORY FROM BELOW

According to Aziz Nouhaidi, " 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 Moorish serf 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 about Islamic culture and the geography of Africa."

He is considered "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 diuide : but why it should be so called, there are two opinions ; the first is this: namely, because this part of the worlde is diuided 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 giue credite vnto the writers of that nation, being men of learning, and most skilful Cosmographers) beginneth southward at certaine riuers issuing foorth of a lake in the desert of Gaoga. Eastward it bordereth vpon the riuer Nilus. It extendeth northward to that part of Egypt, where Nilus at seuen mouthes dischargeth his streames into the Mediterran sea: from whence it stretcheth westward as farre as the streites of Gibraltar, and is bounded on that part with the vtmost sea-towne of all Libya, called *Nun. Likewise the south part thereof abutteth vpon the

> Ocean sea, which compasseth Africa almost as farre as the deserts of Gaoga (Africanus 122-123.)

At the age of 18, he 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" (Nouhaidi).

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" (ibid).

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" (ibid).

Besides, he was capable to rise in the ranks of scholarship as an "unrivaled authority capable of establishing himself as a trustworthy source of knowledge whom his patrons admired 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" (ibid).

He also put to question Europeans' "lubricious preconceptions about Africa and the African Other." Aomar Boum discreetly affirms 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."

Verily, 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, therefore, that "Della descrittione dell'Africa" should be read. 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 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" (ibid).

## IV. REPRESENTATION & RESISTANCE

Taoufiq Sakhkhane confirms that there is a veritable "resolution" on the part of poscolonial 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 inter-dependence and interpretation of same and different" (Sakhkhane 57).

> 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 (Maalouf 1).

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, we see the 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 strking 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 either since Third World literature such as Maalouf's interrogate the existing relations of knowledge and power between the Crescent and Christendom. Hereby, we do not see a Christocentric vision of the world inunciated 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 (Maalouf 1).

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 discrursive 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 another word, he is not othered, but recognized as same but different.

Despite being different, Hassan 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 in Rome. Al-Wazzan talks of himself almost with a sense of pride, for breaking asunder the binary opposition that Edward Said has brough into the intellectual debate with the West in the shape of Samuel Huntington's the 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" (Maalouf 1). 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 delSol. In one of these portraits, Alarcón gazes intently at the viewer from under neath 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) (Calderwood 30).

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 is as simple as slipping on a djellaba and a pair of leather sandals" (Calderwood 33). From his early Orientalist writings to the end of his life, Alarcón brandished Granada's Muslim heritage as a sign of identity and a badge of honor. Upon expressing concern over the health, yellow-complexion and obesity of Alacron Alarcón stoically replied: "You know well that I'm a Moor . . . and, therefore, fatalist. Allah is great, and He will do with me

what ever he wishes" (Quoted in Calderwood 33). In this instance Alacron and al-Wazzan are cultural luminaries, despite the wide duree of time separating them, one in the sixteenth century and the other in the nineteenth. They both fall within the category of the hybrid as they constitute both same and diffeent at the very same time. They, so to speak, play with culture at their own leisure, donning the Other's clothes and style as to herald a new kind of specimen anthropologically speaking. They are both historically and culturally apocryphal for doing so, one in the Neapolitan habit and the Other in the Moorish garment, the Jellaba.

Sakhkhane further states that "since she has been closely concerned with both forms of representation (debunking the unread and silenced in representing the other and making a portion of that other represent herself) Spivak presses ahead with much more momentum and trenchancy to unskein the meta-narratives of the Western mind" (Sakhkhane 59).

Representation has called forth the majority of analysis and revaluation. It is, as Sakhkhane mentions "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" (Sakhkhane 57) Therefore, "resisting these images and exploiting the same canals, 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" (Sakhkhane 58). 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*,

> 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 clamour which reached us from the hill, from the very place known as al-Tabla, gave an unerring indication of winners and losers (Maalouf 13).

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 are swayed to think about what is exterior to its frontiers as it constitutes the imagined other; a barbarian, a savage, a threat to social fabric and community. However, what is considerably at odds, he furthers, 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 (Said 53).

> Devoted intirely 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 [his concubine] brought forth oaths and curses and sometimes pushed the people to the edge of revolt (Maalouf 17).

In this quote, the other is treated as a threat to social fabric and security. Hence, it is othered and resisted against, by invoking the feat 'revolt' as a salient resistance 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 impaiety for all the faithful to know, withuot a shadow of doubt, who was being criticised 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 abbove their hands,' all the while darting looks of hatred in the direction of Alhambra (Maalouf 17).

The fact of the matter is, alas, "every time there is a crisis between the 'Orient' and the 'West' 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" (Sakhkhane 70).

After the Second World War, there was a proliferation of national liberation movements sprouting in formerly occupied countries by imperial powers. In opposition to this political 'seism', "the former passive object of knowledge has defied its status in colonial discourse and became a full subject in its own right, creating a disconcerting sense of unease and confusion for representative Western discourses" (Sakhkhane 71).

Sakhkhane further comments saying that "as an 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" (Sakhkhane 71). Edward Said looks for the reasons for this "critical state of affairs in domains that gained their renown and legitimacy through complicity with imperialism" (quoted in Said 207) 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 (Quoted in Said 215).

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." But when Ali Mazroui produced a series of films about Africa, he was criticised harshly in the *New York Times* as "a latter-day Jeremiah" who blames the West for "the atrocities and horrors in his continent." The rationale behind this 'voracious' attack on Mazrui, comments Said, "stemmed 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" (Said pp. 136–9). His unpardonable mistake, in effect, was to have represented his own people in a way totally opposite to authoritative Western representations, Sakhkhane ironically furthers (Sakhakhane 72).

Through the situation of Ali Mazrui, Edward Said highlights the fact 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" (Sakhkhane 72).

However, *Leo the African*, as a Thirld World text goes against the imperialistic 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 Abu'l-Hassan 'Ali who fared badly as a ruler, but much as a poet in his rule, 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." However, 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" (Maalouf 16). Here it is quite striking that the multivocality of voices is ushered in to dilute the one-sided, monologic prose of the empire, which claims to know everything about the Orient and about the Muslim world. Rather, the empire also fares badly in its relationship with the Islamic world, Spain, to be particular, because it denies it the multivocality of voices when it brings it into literature or into the intellectual debate, unlike what Maalouf does, which is to question even one's rulers for their lack of a better political will to uphold the state of Granada.

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 "undercut and deconstructed those representations by showing them for what they are as ideological constructs designed, first and foremeost, to colonize the minds" (Sakhkhane 72).

Maalouf's narrative does entirely the opposite, since it celebrates a renown Granadan, by birth, historical figure who is interstellar so to speak; not of any origin exept that of the road. However, we see him yearning for Granada that he lost and remembers in retrospect throughout his life as a traveller. So the center seems to be Granada and the celebration of this figure in Maalouf's text is telling. In a way, it decolonizes the minds of the colonial and postcolonial subjects and intellectuals.

So vehemently criticising empire that sees itself in a purely cultural light, Said "emphasizes the material, pragmatic and down- to- earth aspect of discourses that when he brings up Silvester de Sacy and praises him for the scientific character of his work, Said also highlights the barely visible aspect of that charater – how Sacy helped colonizing France to deal with its Arab subjects in Algeria" (Ahmed 165–70).

Making a connection between power and knowledge, once more, Said touched down on Mazrui's generated critique, who has been criticised by "those who still argue for the innocence of their disciplines from any blemish of imperialism." Morreover, 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." However, sympathiezers also criticized Said. For instance, in his *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."(Sakhkhane 72-73).

*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 Muslims. We see Hassan al-Wazzan instead 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 internesine 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 profering it to his cabinet to drink, and imprisoning the eirs to the throne with their mother in the tower of Comares.

The fact of the matter is that, while Maalouf denies the West the modalities of speech, he is himself responsible for representing the Muslim characters in the light of the traveller, 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 centre as Bekkaoui states in *Signs of Spectacular Resistance*.

Furthermore, colonialism was an 'authority expressed in pageantry and symbolism, as well as military power', as Elleke Boehmer argues in Colonial and Postcolonial Literature (Boehmer 2). 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 (Sakhkhane 73) 'darting the barbed iron from one side of the world to the other', as Herman Melville's Ishmael narrates (Melville 119). Indeed, 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" (Sakhkhane 73).

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' (Triffin 95).

The postcolonial writer Amin 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 was wont of doing, grotesquely imagining and representing the Other, negating him a sense of selfhood, community and nationhood or state. On the contrary, in Third World written 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 Boabdil in Maalouf's *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 (Maalouf 24).

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 text is not hegemonic nor monologic vis-à-vis the people of Granada. 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 Boabdil was split between two parties; those that want to reach an everlasting peace with Castille and those who want resistance by taking arms against them:

> 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 poeople of the Sabbath but for the Muslims as well! How can we stop this, exept by resistance, mobilization and *jihad*? (Maalouf 24-25).

In the same vein, postcolonial critic Frantz Fanon justifies the use of violence in order to dismantle colonialism, root and branch, because the enemy is evile. Here the enemy is the Castilian Reconquestadore. Fanon's reasoning is such that "because colonialism is both created and sustained by violence, it can be destroyed only by violence" (Quinn 10). The war campaign launched against the Moorish capital Granada is no exeption if we entertain the continuing discourse of Orientalism that spanns much of the Mooro-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" (Quinn 14).

According to Fanon, once more, the use of violence has its purpose, which are two-fold. First, it erodes any system that level 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 (Quinn 14).

However, Helen Tiffin argues in 'Postcolonial Literatures and Counter Discourse', 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" (Sakhkhane 96).

Therefore, the solution is for the postcolonial writers to 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" (Sakhkhane 73).

In fact, taking into his own hands and words the prerogative of representing Granada, as a historical space, together with representing Hasan al-Wazzan, Amin Maalouf seems to valorize the self and erroding it at the same time, since al-Wazzan is of no origin exept that of the road and travel, a space in between, which bespokes 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, so to speak, makes al-Wazzan integrate easily in the world of text as well as outside 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 pindowns and ready-made judgements of his character as being this or that so we cannot really make judgement on his round character easily:

> My 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 (Maalouf 1).

As a last note, Sakhkhane speaks of this 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 (Sakhkhane 74) 'to evolve textual strategies which continually "consume" their own biases at the same time as they expose and erode those of the dominant discourse' (Shape 100). Jean Rhyss 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" (Sakhkhane 74).

Somewhat similarly, Maalouf not only decolonizes the Eastern mind, as we have mentioned, but also it goes against the grains of the western narrative as its main character, al-Wazzan, denies the Western discourse the prerogative to speak in its 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 innunciation" from which to voice out and celebrate difference. Hence, through these strategies that I call 'recalcitrant', the interstellar Other resists the Orientalist pindowns of identity, and metaphysical essences.

## V. CONCLUSION

Eventhough 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 this geographical account, he managed to participate in the rewriting of history from below.

However, his identity was not stable in so doing as he was interstellar so to speak. He was a man whose persona was situated in-between different cultures and in-between different worlds as we try to invoke his memory and spirit nowadays.

Moreover, his smooth integration in the Italian society on social and professional grounds granted him adequate access to multiple languages, religions and values. So, he wrote a lot about Italian and Islamic culture and 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. Instead, what Amin Maalouf is trying to do, following his novel, is to construct images of the self and the other that go beyond the fixity of binary oppositions, and where the celebration of same and different is at hand.

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