

A Sixteenth-Century Enslaved Moor in the New World The Story of Estebanico Al-Zamori Reconstructed in Laila Lalami's The Moor's Account



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ABSTRACT

The Spanish relaciones tell us that Estebanico/Mustafa was a slave, that he was a Moor from the town of Azemmour on the Atlantic coast of Morocco, that he was captured by the Portuguese, Latinized, Christianized and sold in Spain, and then shipped across the Atlantic to the American Southwest around 1527 as servant and guide, and that he was killed by the Zunis between 1539 and 1540. Although some historians have tried to understand Estebanico in New Spain, these attempts are inscribed within the Spanish master accounts. The latter which are written from the point of view of Fray Marcos or the conquistadors miss the constitutive role of the Moor, who throughout the conquest provided assistance and mapped the colonial road to the New World's pueblos and deserts. Estebanico's story as explorer in Spain's colonial writings is erroneously twisted by the distorting lenses and representational practices of early overseas expansionist aspirations and imperial exigencies. With the aim of disorienting racial aggression, our study is concerned with the analysis of the story of Laila Lalami's Estebanico from a counter-stereotypical discourse far from bias. The research has concluded that by giving voice to this historically marginal explorer and by resurrecting his agency and by raising him to the position of narrator and main protagonist, Spanish enslavement and appropriation, through historical fiction, are vehemently obliterated, offering Estebanico ample opportunities to pen down his own account.

Keywords:

Laila Lalami, *The Moor's Account*; historical fiction; agency; Estebanico Al-Zamori; historiography; la relaciones.

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نشرت هذه الدراسة في دورية كان التاريخية للأغراض العلمية والبحثية فقط، وغير مسموح بإعادة النسخ والنشر والتوزيع للأغراض تجارية أو ربحية.

Introduction

The history of events of the “Six-Day War” (“The Third Arab-Israeli War”) is widely known. However, opinions about the causes of the outbreak differ. A common position among historians is that the war broke out “accidentally” as a result of the interplay of several misinterpretations of actions. The growing tension of the “Arab Cold War”, the hesitation of the great powers, the extremist views of the leader of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), the lack of realistic and balanced analysis of

Since its rise, the novel has sought to make its artistic methods diverse and miscellaneous so that it can give the imagination a continuous attraction, which allows it to open up to many fields of knowledge, literature and art. It is the literary genre that is capable of combining knowledge, pleasure and thinking in life and in all human dimensions. So novelists choose to move in time to construct other choices that reshape our knowledge about historical events, personalities, and issues.

In recent years, many Arab novels have attempted to shed light on prominent personalities in Arab Islamic history such as Ibn Battuta, Ibn Khaldoun, Ibn Arabi, Ahmed Ibn Qasim Al-Hajari (Afokai), Al-Hasan Ibn Mohammed Al-Wazzan Al-Fasi – better known as Leo Africanus ([1600] 1876) – and *Estebanico*, *inter alia*, by bringing to the fore the biography of these characters in history and fiction so that they can be attractive and real; that is, by making the actual reality that has really been worn in the past by a fictitious framework, these characters can be retrieved and revisited differently by means of imagination, which could be bereft of preconception and stereotyping.

Laila Lalami’s *The Moor’s Account* (2014) is a good example in this context. Through the deployment of historical fiction, Lalami sheds light on and reconstructs the story of Estebanico Al-Zamori as the main character and protagonist in her historical memoir. Historical fiction, as a contemporary Western literary genre, has its foundations in the early nineteenth century works of Sir Walter Scott and his contemporaries in other national literatures such as the Frenchman Honoré de Balzac, the American James Fenimore Cooper, and a later Russian, Leo Tolstoy, to name the most prominent figures. However, the melding of “historical” and “fiction” in individual works of literature has a long tradition in most cultures; both western traditions as well as Eastern, in the form of oral and folk traditions, which produced epics,

novels, plays and other fictional works describe history for contemporary audiences.

This paper explores the way the slave capitalizes on historiography to reconstruct the Western monolithic history. In so doing, the slave’s/re-creator’s memory performs a number of roles. It registers the history of the European conquest of La Florida using micro narrative frameworks that underscore outstanding differences from the official record. It is comprised of alternative memories that are marked with slipperiness and ambivalence. With the aim of disorienting racial aggression, this article is concerned with the analysis of the story of Laila Lalami’s *Estebanico* from a counter-stereotypical and hegemonic discourse far from bias. Thus, it can be said to defy the authoritative forces that characterize the discourse of Grand Narratives.⁸ The research has averred that by giving voice to this historically marginal explorer and by resurrecting his agency and by raising him to the position of narrator and main protagonist, Spanish enslavement and appropriation, through historical fiction, are vehemently obliterated, offering *Estebanico* ample opportunities to pen down his own account.

Estebanico Al-Zamori: A Moor in the New World

Laila Lalami was born and raised in Morocco. In 1992, she moved to the USA and got Ph.D. in linguistics from the University of Southern California where she is working for the moment as an associate professor of creative writing. Lalami is the author of four critically and widely acclaimed works of fiction, *Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits* (2005), *Secret Son* (2009), *The Moor’s Account* (2014) and *The Other Americans* (2019). Regarding *The Moor’s Account*, it received the 2015 American Book Award, the Arab American Arab Book Award and the Hurston Wright Legacy Award, and was nominated for the Pulitzer Prize and long-listed for the Man Booker Prize, and, recently, she has released her last novel entitled *The Other Americans* (2019). Lalami’s award-winning fictional memoir *The Moor’s Account* reconstructs the pioneering and epic odyssey of Estebanico, a Moroccan slave who was among the four survivors of the disastrous Spanish Narvaez expedition to Florida in 1527.¹ He is a historical figure, mentioned in Cabeza de Vaca’s eyewitness account of that journey during which the members of the expedition were lost in alien North America and separated from their known world until they reached Mexico (New Spain) eight years later.²

Lalami is entailed as a historical novelist in this work, as Alessandro Manzoni avers in his *On the*

Historical Novel, to give “not just the bare bones of history, but something richer, more complete. In a way, you want [her] to put the flesh back on the skeleton that is history.”³ J.A. Buckley and W.T. Williams, in their *Guide to British Historical Fiction* (1912), describe historical fiction as “a handmaiden to history proper”⁴. Helen Cam, in *Historical Novels*, describes the historical novel as “a form of literature ancillary to the study of history,”⁵ while Ernest Baker, writing in 1968, suggests that “[it] gives us something beyond the scope of the historian.”⁶

Diverse colonial writers represent Estebanico as a versatile device in varied attempts to realize the objectives of their writing. Those who incorporate Estebanico into their writings would appear to take license from the in-betweenness of his identity and social status or even to appropriate the African’s own creative strategies of representation. Matthew Restall stresses that:

“Africans were ubiquitous not only to the Conquest of Mexico but also to the entire endeavor of Spanish invasion and colonization in the Americas. Because the majority of such Africans arrived as slaves, and because of their subordinate status in the increasingly ethnocentric Castilian worldview, the widespread and central role of blacks was consistently ignored by Spaniards writing about the Conquest.”⁷

The novel is a retelling of Spanish conquistador Pánfilo de Narváez’s disastrous real-life expedition to Florida in 1528. By 1536, there were only four survivors. Álvaro Núñez Cabeza de Vaca’s chronicle *La Relación* and other accounts mention the names of everyone except Estebanico, who is relegated to racial (and, in this case, social) classification: “negro.” Taking as her starting point Álvaro Núñez Cabeza de Vaca’s throwaway remark of “Estevanico, an Arab Negro from Azamor” – which demarcates three discrete categories: protagonist, companions, and “negro” – Lalami has created a vivid portrait of the invasion of the New World and the role of black slaves in conquest. Using the tools of historical fiction, Lalami has superbly rectified this omission by penning an account of Mustafa/Estebanico’s experiences. Lalami dares to unearth the archive of official history that passed over the testimonies of a Moroccan slave during the Discovery Age.

Closely related to the implication of grand narratives with the creation of desired realities, the narrator sheds light on the related sinister nature of the phenomenon of naming. Upon his loss of his native name and being named Estebanico by the Castilians after they had bought him from the Portuguese traders, he tersely remarks “A name is

precious; it carries inside it a language, a history, a set of traditions, a particular way of looking at the world. Losing it meant losing my ties to all those things too. So I had never been able to shake the feeling that this Estebanico was a man conceived by the Castilians, quite different from the man I really was.”⁹ Being sold to slavery, the Moor is supposed to lose every contact he used to have with his native roots. The displacement of minorities into the whites’ world in the context of slavery has wrought an effacement of their local identity.

During the drought of 1520-1521, Mustafa Al-Zamori, who was born around 1500 in Azemmour, was captured by the Portuguese and then sold into slavery to Andres Dorantes, a Spanish nobleman. He was Christianised and baptised Estebanico.¹⁰ The latter is stripped of his name, identity and history; he becomes historyless: Lalami’s protagonist manifests: “Estebanico was the name the Castilians had given me when they bought me from Portuguese traders—a string of sounds whose foreignness still grated on my ears. When I fell into slavery, I was forced to give up not just my freedom, but also the name that my mother and father had chosen for me.”¹¹

Estebanico’s transatlantic journey began sometime on 17 June 1527 when five vessels set sail from the western coast of Spain and headed towards America with the aim of governing the provinces of the American Southwest. After a brief stop in Santo Domingo and Cuba some three hundred men landed on April 14, 1528, at a point on the Florida coast that was probably Sarasota Bay. Most of the expedition moved inland, but it soon divided, one part continuing overland and the other seeking the coast. Hostile Indians who almost certainly knew of the fatal results of other encounters with Spaniards decimated the ranks of the Europeans. Practically every hardship endured by explorers plagued them: hunger, thirst, sickness and threats of desertion. Eventually, there remained only four explorers, namely, Cabeza de Vaca, Castillo, Andres Dorantes, and Estevanico, the personal servant or slave of Dorantes. These four survivors spent some six years as slaves of Indians in what is now western Louisiana or eastern Texas. They finally escaped and crossed over the Rio Grande into Mexican territory in 1536. Like Cortez, Antonio de Mendoza, Viceroy of New Spain, constantly sought to discover new regions. The reports brought back by Cabeza de Vaca and his companions naturally inspired new efforts. But Cabeza returned to Europe; Castillo disappears; and the attempt to send out an expedition under Dorantes proved abortive. There remained only

Estebanico whom Mendoza had purchased from Dorantes in order to make sure that there remained in Mexico one of the four survivors. A part of this force, under Fray Marco de Nizza, crossed over into what is now Texas. Estebanico was the guide of this detachment.

The Moor's Account brilliantly captures Estebanico's voice and vision, giving us an alternate narrative for this famed expedition. As this dramatic chronicle unfolds, we come to understand that, contrary to popular belief, black men played a significant part in New World exploration, and that Native American men and women were not merely silent witnesses to it. In Laila Lalami's deft hands, Estebanico's memoir illuminates the ways in which stories can transmigrate into history, even as storytelling can offer a chance at redemption and survival.

Lalami's skill lies in giving Estebanico a voice and a different perspective from that expressed in Spanish accounts. Estebanico, a Christian, also carries another older identity, that of a well-born Muslim, Mustafa ibn Muhammad ibn Abdussalam al-Zamori. As such, he embodies a vanquished people and the suppressed narratives of Europe and the New World.

The fact that, in "New Spain", the Narvaez survivors are welcomed by the governor, Antonio de Mendoza, and the renowned conquistador Herman Cortes, provides an interesting intertextual link to *Shadows of the Pomegranate Tree* by Tariq Ali (1992). Ali's historical novel portrays the old family association of Antonio's father, Don Inigo Lopez de Mendoza, Mayor of Granada, with Spain's Moorish clan, the Banu Hudayl; the book culminates in the victorious and brutal Captain Cortes, having vanquished the Moors, surveying the riches of the New World. This is but one of the many different ways that Andalus "enters into the story of the American empire" (Menocal 2002, loc. 3650 of 4397 Kindle).

To recreate the adventures of Mustafa/Estebanico and to tell a story which is also American, Lalami also studied the landscapes of America and the history of its native American tribes. In an interview, Lalami postulates that "in the fall of 2009, I was reading Anouar Majid's (2009) *We Are All Moors* – a scholarly work on the historical connection between attitudes towards immigrants today and the perception of Moors in the 16th century – when I came across a mention of Estebanico, a Moroccan slave who was said to be the first African explorer of America."¹² She continues on to manifest that she thought she would

find out more about Estebanico in Cabeza de Vaca's (2002) *Chronicle of the Narváez Expedition*, but that travelogue only inspired more questions. For example, the other three survivors were all aristocrats – men who typically received better rations and rode horses. But somehow, this slave had managed to survive as well. He quickly became the translator for the Spaniards, the man who made it possible for them to communicate with indigenous people. Still, Estebanico was not able to confirm to the Spanish authorities about the expedition. And Cabeza de Vaca's travelogue mentioned only one indigenous person and no women at all. These silences and lacunae intrigued Lalami, and she wanted to explore them in her novel.

While creating the voice of Estebanico Al-Zamori, Lalami did consider not only who should narrate the story (a 16th-century Arabic-speaking slave from Azemmur), but also why (to tell his own account of the expedition and "correct" the account given of it by the other survivors), and how (in the form of an Arabic travelogue, organized in individual stories):

"I think the truth is very slippery. I like to say you can take the same set of facts and you can shape them into completely different stories, and to me the truth is really on the side of the stories. A fact is something that is independently verifiable, it's something that we know happened. So in 1527 six hundred people departed from Seville, and that was something that was witnessed by a number of people, it's documented. But then truth, the story of what really happened once they got there, we have only one person for it. It's a little grayer there."¹³

Lalami wanted the voice to be genuine, but she didn't want it to feel antiquated, so she had been very careful in her lexical choices. The style of *The Moor's Account* is shaped to resemble sixteenth-century travelogues. To give the impression of historical authenticity without making the novel inaccessible to contemporary readers, Lalami decided to use words that belong to the register of the sixteenth century, but are still in use today. She avoided contractions because they appear too modern.

The novelist opens her story by referring to the temporal space of her account. Contrary to the unexpected deployment of the Western Gregorian Calendar which dominates Western narratives, she opts for Arabic (lunar Muslim) Hijri calendar. In Islamic history, Hijri date literally started to be in use since the first migration of Muslims from Mecca to Medina in an attempt to escape the persecution of the infidels. The account begins like this: "It was the year 934 of the Hegira, the thirtieth year of my life,

the fifth year of my bondage.”¹⁴ Therefore, from the very onset, the writer accents the existence of another different subjectivity, apparently non-European slave, using a different historical prism to approach the story of today’s US. Clearly put, difference is said to destabilize the purported singularity of narration and purity of knowledge as well as unitary thought as claimed by Western history. Thus, this inherited History is open up to dialogic negotiation. The once-excluded subject re-enters History to re-inscribe his/her living difference. Iain Chambers remarks that today we live “in a world in which the unity of knowledge and power meets with resistance and is being interrupted, challenged and decentered.”¹⁵

Lalami’s key interest was to hear a character whose voice has been suppressed and obliterated. She didn’t think of him as embodying anyone else’s story but his own. At the outset of the novel, Estebanico points out that

“I intend to correct details of the history that was compiled by my companions, the three Castilian gentlemen known by the names of Andrés Dorantes de Carranza, Alonso del Castillo Maldonado, and especially Álvaro Núñez Cabeza de Vaca, who delivered their testimony, what they called the Joint Report, to the Audiencia of Santo Domingo. The first was my legal master, the second my fellow captive, and the third my rival storyteller. But, unlike them, I was never called upon to testify to the Spanish Viceroy about our journey among the Indians.”¹⁶

Lalami asserts that the Moroccan slave is mentioned five times as “Estebanico”, but often he is referred to simply as “the negro”. There are no physical descriptions of him and only one line of biography (“The fourth [survivor] is Estebanico, an Arabic-speaking Negro from Azemur”). Cabeza de Vaca acknowledges Estebanico’s role as a translator, but he also says that having someone translate for the three other aristocrats was a way for them to assert their power vis-à-vis indigenous tribes.

The novelist assures her reader that she has to create Estebanico in the same vein as she would any other character. Still, she had to operate under certain constraints: “he had to be from Azemmur; he had to be schooled in Arabic; he had to be in Seville by 1527; and he had to be young enough and hardy enough to be useful to his master on such an arduous expedition. Everything else was the work of imagination.”¹⁷ The novelist manages to get into the mind and heart of a person who goes through an incredible journey and to witness his successive transformations, from the prosperous Mustafa in Morocco, to penury and slavery as Estebanico. This

is followed by his encounter with the New World where he and his masters are the lost in an unknown territory and enslaved by Indians: so the definitions between Spanish master and Moorish slave fall away. He then falls on his own resources and comes to be known among the Indians as a legendary healer but when he reaches New Spain, he is not given his freedom.

In her novels, Lalami asserts that she faces a lot of challenges:

“One of my biggest challenges was that some of the native American tribes that the survivors lived with are now extinct, and the only sources we have on them were written by Spanish conquerors. I had to tread very lightly with that material, as I didn’t want to sink into stereotypes commonly found in these kinds of writings. In my novel, I tried to focus on specific native American characters, rather than on whole tribes, and I gave them all names, families, stories and, I hope, agency.”¹⁸

Whether “black or white, master or slave, rich or poor, man or woman,” Mustafa writes in the introduction to his story (more properly, a series of stories at times rejecting the rigidity of chronological order), we all want to “survive the eternity of darkness.”¹⁹ This is, of course, Lalami’s voice playing with her protagonist’s and telling us of the fears and the courage of those who practice the religion of writing, and rather than being victimized by viewing its goals dogmatically, celebrate the adventure of telling the “truth in the guise of entertainment.”²⁰ According to Laila Lalami, Mustafa/Estebanico seemed to be a thoroughly modern man, because of his ability to negotiate cultures – Arab, Spanish, American Indian. What did this signify in the sixteenth century? Lalami emphatically points out:

“I think of Mustafa/Estebanico as a globalized man, a man who had to live in different countries, but also a man who had to reinvent himself. And he certainly wasn’t alone in that experience, as you can see from the story of Hassan al-Wazzan, for instance. Displacement has always been part of human history, though in the case of Mustafa/Estebanico it was quite extreme. I think that’s probably what attracted me to his story. I know what it’s like to live in a place, without being of it. I know what it’s like to be regarded as a stranger. And perhaps that’s what allowed me to have so much imaginative empathy for him.”²¹

At the very outset of the novel, Estebanico as the character-narrator tells us his story in an overbearing manner by averring that “I, who is neither beholden to Castilian men of power, nor

bound by the rules of a society to which I do not belong, feel free to recount the true story of what happened to my companions and me.”²²

There still remains the question of credibility: can Estebanico’s way of weaving the narrative of his “wondrous adventures” bring us any closer to the “truth” today than the Spaniards’ way of reading various signs could bring them to earthly or heavenly riches then? In a critical discussion of Lalami’s book for *The New York Review of Books*, Wyatt Mason wrote: “The trouble with Lalami’s version – scrupulously researched, dependably in line with the trajectory de Vaca describes in detail – is that the voice she has forged to fill the silence of history, the written voice of Mustafa’s own account in which Estebanico at last speaks for himself, doesn’t seem plausibly that of a singular human being.”²³

What weakens the voice’s plausibility and at the same time empowers it with the possibility of reaching a wider audience is that Mustafa’s text is not in Arabic, or in Spanish, or in Portuguese, but in English. Estebanico’s chances of becoming a successful trader in Morocco, then of surviving in America, and finally of finding there (in a Zuni village) a place he can call his home depend largely on what he declares to be his “love” of and “a certain ease” with languages.

As there is no information about Estebanico’s life, Lalami may invent (and she occasionally lets readers clearly see that she is doing so) her own story that will best serve her purposes and lead its narrator to his experience in America, where it can intersect with that of Cabeza de Vaca’s and the meanings he and his commentators want to give it.

It is not accidental that, years later, Estebanico is entrusted with the task of furnishing sails for the rafts which may hopefully bring a party of lost travellers to the safety of an abandoned ship. He collects and sews together old pieces of cloth: flags, sheets, shirts, vestments, handkerchiefs. When unfurled, the sails, made up of “a great jumble of colors, textures and shapes,” catch wind and the slave’s heart fills with a liberating sense of “boundless pride.”²⁴ Is he suggesting connections between what he manages to accomplish so well for the benefit of his companions and the satisfaction he gets from weaving the text for his readers in the manner both foretelling and reminiscent of Melville’s *sobreviviente*, or his humble, consumptive “Usher” who, to dust his collection of books, uses a handkerchief “with all the gay flags of all the known nations of the world”?

The belief that “a good story can heal” is as much part of the Eastern as of the Western tradition. Mustafa discovers that what he learned in the teeming markets of Azemmur holds true in the barren landscapes of America. It does not seem to trouble Lalami that her narrator’s discovery was that of one blazing the cultural trail of correspondences for the first time while her and the reader’s discovery is mediated by the pleasure of finding analogies between Mustafa’s imagined narrative and the many texts of and about indigenous cultures testifying to such correspondences.

Assuming the role of a shaman or *curandero*, Mustafa “listened to the sick man or woman and offered consolation in the guise of a long story.”²⁵ The story may be one of the many his mother told him when he was a little boy in Azemmour. “Reader,” Mustafa says at some point, “the joy of a story is in the telling,”²⁶ and the reader knows he is speaking of the kind of joy denied in the official Spanish narratives which, whether written or oral, are “synonymous with power.”²⁷ In order to be recounted well, the stories need to be listened to well, the way Mustafa and his companions learn to listen when the Avavares tell them about “their ancestors, their neighbors, good and bad, the spirits that populate their world.”²⁸ In a scene when Dorantes, accompanied by his slave, Castillo and Cabeza de Vaca are having dinner with Cortés (Estebanico is there because he has important information, while no other guests are invited as the conversation is confidential), the host neither enjoys the food nor expects to hear a long story told in a good way. Rather, he demands clear answers to direct questions he asks, although, having spies in the province, he already knows some of them. What really interests him are distances measured in dates and other clues helping to draw “a precise map” necessary for further exploration of the land; the Spanish crown cannot afford to let the territory north of the Rio Grande hide its riches. “We are doers, señores. Doers,” Lalami imagines Cortés saying to his guests.

In *The Moor’s Account*, Mustafa never gets a chance to read Cabeza de Vaca’s account. However, because they have experienced the same shipwrecks and shared the horrors and the joys of a long walk as slaves and masters of their fate, Mustafa knows of the double purpose the narrative will serve. It will be delivered, personally and proudly, by Cabeza de Vaca to the imperial court and read officially as the Joint Report for possible signs of the mirage of wealth, becoming an incentive for another journey of conquest which will bring more suffering and

more destruction. He feels compelled to re-affirm his freedom by re-establishing his position of the writer of his own narrative: "I still had one thing. My story". Fiction comes to rescue.

The account does not respect the Western chronological organization of events. It proceeds from the middle of the adventure of the Narvaez expedition and their fight with the native Indians after the protagonist's find of the golden pebble, which would inflict severe persecution on the Indians in an attempt to get hold of their gold map. Then, the narration moves back to the story of the protagonist's birth in his hometown Azemmour, then again to the expedition and alternatively to the experience of bondage in Spain. In so doing, Lalami's historiographic novel undoes the premise of completeness and continuity argued for by modern Western history. The present narrative "derives its sense of incompleteness, as most diasporic narratives tend to do, from the scattered fragments of memories and the abundance of moments of discontinuity. *The Moor's Account's* refusal of centrism, linearity, hierarchies, norms and hegemony indicates its search for alternative voices to get in the way of the absolute flow of history by the whites."²⁹

The writer imagines other alternative versions of history and juxtaposes them with the dominant one. This narrative technique bothers the certainty of the dominant values and linear unicity of historical truths. Chambers concludes that History is to be seen as "a perpetual becoming, an inexhaustible emerging, an eternal provocation, a desire that defies and transgresses the linear flow of historicist reason."³⁰

Lalami engages in the digging up of buried accounts of the subordinated subjects in society. Her other novels, especially *Secret Son* (2009) and *Hopes and Dangerous Pursuits* (2005), are *par excellence* engaged in this reconstructive project. They unearth what is "debarred" and silenced from the dominant History. In the act of unearthing micro stories, the authors tend to envisage reality in a better way by filling the gaps of absences and lacunae created by the hegemonic structures. Another crucial method of reconstruction is what Anuradha Needham calls re-play. It is a kind of reviewing of the past not for the sake of repeating and storing "a prior hegemonic representation."³¹ Still, it consists of appraisals that question the authority of a consistent use of certain topos that are seen as unquestionable pieces of truths. The prevalent narratives of authority have derived their legitimacy from their interrelation with power and its deterring apparatuses. Perhaps, all

that reconstruction can do is to shake the certitudes of the norms that perpetuate the status-quo and relations of power and exclusion. In this context, Elboubekri postulates that "Lalami grants the black explorer of America a chance to retell the experience of discovery as he thinks it must be recounted. This alternative or better called reconstructed black version of history is capable of unveiling the constructive nature of whites' history and its embedment in ideological fallacies and imperial sublimatizing of the European self."³²

The writer tends, through the protagonist's point of view, to openly interrogate the truth evinced by the whites' version of history. Besides, Estebanico tries to reconstruct the history of the Indians as the latter are in the same boat as the black protagonist, so he tries to show a kind of sympathy for the Indian natives; he represents them positively as a noble and peaceful race and as a people that is associated with hospitality and other noble feats, shattering and disrupting the hegemonic macro stories the white man constructs about Indians. Estebanico as the main narrator brings to the fore the premise that the whites are bereft of any sense of humanity; they treat the slaves in an inhuman way.

Regarding the significant centrality of narration within Lalami's reconstructive project, the account closes with a powerful note on the role of storytelling on both conquest normalization and resistance. The narrator considers fiction, which is composed essentially of storytelling, as more efficient than guns in both colonization and decolonization. Because the narrator was aware of the Western valorization of fiction/narrative in the mission of conquests, he recommends adopting the same weapon in the Indians' work on resistance. He told the Indians "But they cannot be fought with weapons, I said. I explained to Ahku that the white men's weapons were far more powerful than anything he had ever seen and that his only means of salvation was to create a fiction."³³

The protagonist's narrative eye did not fail to cover the event of his wedding with an Indian woman as did most of the Castilians: "I know that none of the Castilians have mentioned their wives in their joint report, but I feel bound by honor to reveal everything that came to pass without leaving anything out."³⁴ Mustafa insists time and again that his account is addressed directly to the readers in order to give the impression that he is responsibly telling the truth: "so you can imagine, gentle reader, how relieved we were to find another island."³⁵ Additionally, in a blunt critique of the ambiguity that hovers over the European history, the narrator

wants his report to be as accurate as possible. Addressing the readers again he said: "(Gentle reader, if I point out these details, it is not because I was jealous or resentful, but simply because I wish to be as precise as I can about the conditions under which we left La Florida)." ³⁶ To strengthen his claim to thoroughness in the narratological process, he insists once and again on providing better relations by reminding the reader that he is employing the best of his remembered knowledge to relate the story as faithfully as possible. From time to time, he uses expressions such as: "To the best of my recollection, we sailed out on the first of Muharram in the year 935 of the Hegira" ³⁷; "He told us his story, which I record here for the reader, as best as I can remember it." ³⁸

Conclusions

As a conclusion, we can postulate that the narratives of Moroccan slaves and captives within the Atlantic system as "a category" and as a historical and geographical terrain marked by considerable exchanges and interactions is worth retrieving, translating and revisiting. Although often unobserved by both national and Western records of history, the transatlantic routes and journeys started from Moroccan shores by Moroccan slaves in earlier times of modern history is a valid category of historical analysis that sheds light on the questioning of the conventional definitions associated with the Atlantic crossing.

Laila Lalami has brought into sharper focus the forgotten experience of Estebanico Al-Zamori, who took a daring journey across the Atlantic and was part of the cultural fabric of the New World. His route and experience of travel have been decisive in the shaping of the sixteenth century Atlantic system and in turning it into a fascinating space of cultural connections. Through Lalami's Moorish account of Estebanico, we discover specific historical moments about the early beginnings of Moroccan interactions with America. We also discover how the "Moorish Other" played a significant role in the narratives of conquest during Spain's conquest of the Americas. Such a significant role is eclipsed in national and Western historians' chronicles, and obscured in most history textbooks that documented Spain's endeavours overseas. His place in history is worth recovering since his contributions within Spain's colonial enterprise cannot by any means pass unnoticed.

Although Lalami manages to give a voice to the voiceless and the subaltern Estebanico in her fictional memoir *The Moor's Account*, the latter is without shortcomings because the novelist's background of Moorish character cogently hinges around and culls from the author's different readings of accounts about Estebanico, and these historical accounts are forged and woven from omnisciently and imperiously Western perspectives and from the dominant "official" accounts of history. Lalami's account is an attempt to represent Estebanico by the deployment of the tools of historical fiction. In spite of the fact that this narrative tool gives more room to the author to imagine, fictionalize and depict her characters, it is not without its shortcomings as she cannot separate herself from history and its power.

Notes

1. Adorno and Pautz point out that: "The use of the diminutive form (Estevanico) was common practice for subalterns such as slaves and interpreters, African or Indian, in the service of Castilians.' However, after Cabeza de Vaca's arrival in New Spain, most writers refer to the African as 'Esteban' ('Estevan,' 'Este'ban,' etc.) or 'Esteban de Dorantes'" (2:418).
2. See Hsain Ilahiane, "Estevan De Dorantes, the Moor or the Slave: The Other Moroccan Explorer of New Spain." *Journal of North African Studies* 5 (2000): 1–14; Lhoussaine Simour, "(De)slaving history: Mostafa al-Azemmouri, the sixteenth-century Moroccan captive in the tale of conquest," *European Review of History: Revue europeenne d'histoire*, 2013; Khalid Chaouch, "Claiming Estevanico de Azamor in the Labyrinth of Oriental/Western Identities" *Middle Ground: Journal of Literary and Cultural Encounters*, issue N° 6, 2014.
3. Alessandro Manzoni, *On the Historical Novel*. Translated by S. Bermann. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, (1850) 1986, pp. 67-68.
4. Jerome de Groot, *The Historical Novel*. London: Routledge, 2010, p. 48.
5. Helen Cam, *Historical Novels*. London: Historical Association, 1961, p.9.
6. de Groot, p. 47.
7. Matthew Restall, *Seven Myths of the Spanish Conquest*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2004, pp.52-53.
8. Jean-François Lyotard used the term Grand Narrative for the first time in his seminal book *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on*

Knowledge (1984) as another name for “master narrative” that labeled all forms of hegemonic knowledge. This categorization encouraged the critiques of discourses that are tainted with ideological constructions.

9. Laila Lalami, *The Moor's Account*. New York: Pantheon Books, 2015, p. 13.
10. Simour, p.8.
11. Lalami, p. 13.
12. Lalami, “So to Speak.” *World Literature Today*. September. <http://www.worldliteraturetoday.org/so-speak-laila-lalami>, 2009, p.196.
13. Ibid., p. 94.
14. Lalami, *The Moor's Account*, p. 1.
15. Iain Chambers, *Migrancy, Culture, Identity*. London: Routledge, 1994, p. 126.
16. Lalami, *The Moor's Account*, p.1.
17. Lalami, “So to Speak,” pp.197-198.
18. Lalami, *The Moor's Account*, p. 199.
19. Ibid., pp.3-4.
20. Ibid., p.3.
21. Ibid., p.199.
22. Ibid., p.1.
23. Wyatt Mason, “To Be a Muslim in the West.” *The New York Review of Books*. 11–24 Feb. 2016, p.24.
24. Lalami, p.135.
25. Ibid., p.212.
26. Ibid., p.124.
27. Ibid., p.128.
28. Ibid., p.238.
29. Abdellah Elboubekri, “Whichever way you turn, there is the face of God’ diaspora, memory, and historiography from the margin in *The Moor's Account* by Laila Lalami,” p.4.
30. Chambers, p. 135.
31. Anuradha Needham, *Using the Master's Tools: Resistance and the Literature of the African and South-Asian Diasporas*. New York: St. Martin Press, 2000, p. 61.
32. Elboubekri, p.6.
33. Lalami, p. 202.
34. Ibid., p.152.
35. Ibid., p.100.
36. Ibid., p.86.
37. Ibid., p.87.
38. Ibid., p.100.

ملخص الدراسة:

أسير مغربي في العالم الجديد خلال القرن السادس عشر: إعادة بناء قصة إستيبانيكو الأزموري في رواية ليلي العالمي "حكاية المغربي"

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تخبرنا المرويات الإسبانية عن مغربي عرف باسم "استيبانيكو" من مدينة أزموور المغربية، كان قد تم أسره وسبّيه من قبل البرتغاليين، ليتم تنصيره بعدها وبيعته في إسبانيا. تسرد هذه المرويات أنه انتقل بعدها عبر المحيط الأطلسي إلى العالم الجديد، هناك قتل من قبل قبائل "الزوني"، في أمريكا الشمالية، فيما بين 1039 و1040. وعلى الرغم من محاولة فهم خبايا هذه الشخصية من قبل بعض المؤرخين، فإن الأمر ظل خاضعا لنفس منظور الحكايات الإسبانية المشحونة بنوع من التعالي والإقصاء؛ وحتى الحكايات التي يسردها، سكان أمريكا اللاتينية، "فراي ماركوس"، أو المستكشفين تنفي وجود "استيبانيكو" ودوره المتميز في تقديم الدعم ورسم معالم الطريق نحو قرى وصحاري العالم الجديد. لقد تم تناول صورة "استيبانيكو" كمستكشف في الكتابات الكولونيالية الإسبانية من زاوية معرفية متحيرة تتوافق والتمثيلات الاستعمارية ونظرتها الدونية اتجاه الآخر. وانطلاقا من هدف إعادة النظر في هذا التوجه العنصري، فإن دراستنا تتجه إلى تحليل قصة "استيبانيكو" في رواية ليلي العلمي بعيدا عن هذا الخطاب المتحيز والمنمط. ونتوسل لتحقيق هذه الغاية بفكرة مفادها أنه من خلال إعطاء صوت لهذا المستكشف المهمّش، وإعادة إحياء دوره ورفعته إلى مستوى الراوي والبطل الرئيسي، عبر المخيال التاريخي، يتم تلافي هذا البعد الإقصائي ومعه تقديم فرصة أكبر لاستيبانيكو لتسجيل حكايته كما يراها هو.

الكلمات المفتاحية: ليلي العلمي؛ المخيال التاريخي؛ استيبانيكو الأزموري؛ الحكايات؛ العالم الجديد.