World Journal of Advanced Research and Reviews
eISSN: 2581-9615 CODEN (USA): WJARAI
Cross Ref DOI: 10.30574/wjarr
Journal homepage: https://wjarr.com/

(Review Article)

The postcolonial condition of refashioning national identity in t*he Riffian*

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World Journal of Advanced Research and Reviews, 2024, 21(03), 2218–2226

Publication history: Received on 13 February 2024; revised on 20 March 2024; accepted on 22 March 2024

Article DOI: https://doi.org/10.30574/wjarr.2024.21.3.0966

Abstract

Novels transcend mere aesthetic creations, embodying potent instruments of both oppression and emancipation. This study analyzes the post-colonial dimensions of *The Riffian*, authored by the American anthropologist Carleton Stevens Coon in 1933, amidst the colonial period of Morocco. Contrary to the prevalent Western narratives about Morocco during the colonial era, which predominantly echoed colonial discourses, *The Riffian* markedly deviates from such trends. It critically undermines the colonial French narrative through its protagonist, Ali, thereby presenting a divergent perspective. Additionally, the novel explores the evolution of its central character, portrayed through the fictional autobiography of Coon's companion and guide in Morocco, Mohammed Limnibhy. This narrative arc follows Ali's transformation from harboring disdain for all ethnic groups outside the Riffians, to adopting a more inclusive stance towards other Moroccan ethnicities in his resistance against French colonial rule. This analysis underscores the novel's contribution to challenging and reshaping historical and cultural perceptions during a pivotal period in Moroccan history.

Keywords: French Colonialism Morocco; Postcolonialism; Literary Analysis; Ethnic Diversity in Morocco; Literary Forms of Resistance.

1. Introduction

The Riffian is by excellence a postcolonial novel. This statement may sound paradoxical since the novel was written by an American anthropologist Carleton Stevens Coon and published in 1933, during the French colonial period in Morocco. The novel is the fictional biography of Mohamed Limnibhy, the hero and narrator of the novel.

During his anthropological expeditions in the Rif regions, Coon enlisted a local man named Mohammed Limnibhy as his interpreter. Limnibhy had previously demonstrated exceptional bravery by serving in the French army against Germany in the First World War and later took part in Abd al Karim's rebellion against Spanish domination. His generous assistance, loyalty, and hospitality forged a strong bond between him and the American anthropologist. “Limnibhy's help,” Coon affirms, “sealed a pact between two clans, the Ulad Abd el-Mumen and the Ulad Coon” [1]. Elsewhere he calls him “my dear friend, guide and informant Limnibhy” [2].

Upon returning home, Coon successfully persuaded Limnibhy to accompany him to America, citing concerns for his safety due to "his record in the French colonial books," as well as Coon's need for him as an invaluable source of information. Coon acknowledges, "Without him, I could not have written my first three books" [1].

In America, Limnibhy went to a night school to learn English, “which he did rather rapidly.” He soon became proficient enough to communicate independently and fend for himself in the foreign country. After a year in Cambridge, Massachusetts, Limnibhy returned to Morocco. Sometime later, Coon learned that his Riffian friend had been murdered.

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Shortly after his return from America, Limnibhy received an invitation to a dinner party in Fez. During the event someone poisoned him. He struggled to reach his beloved Iherrushen, where he ultimately succumbed to the poison.

When Coon eventually returned to Morocco during the Second World War, a French officer explained to him that “it had been necessary to liquidate Limnibhy because he had been drinking too heavily, playing around with other men’s wives, and generally creating unrest.” Coon states, “It was not wine nor women that did Limnibhy in, but a heady aftertaste of freedom—with whom but me to blame?” [1]. With a somewhat guilty conscience, Coon attributed his assassination to “a heady aftertaste of freedom” savoured during his encounter with America. The French colonial authorities likely viewed Limnibhy's exposure to freedom in America as a potential threat to their pacification efforts.

In tribute to his Riffian friend, Coon composed his novel, *The Riffian*, in 1933, featuring Mohammed Limnibhy as the hero of the story. In a letter to his granddaughter, explaining why he devoted himself to Riffian themes in his novels, Coon writes:

> I can only answer this by telling you what happened. Limnibhy went home to his death in 1929 . . . In 1928-9, I had debriefed Limnibhy of all the information he could tell me, as well as what he had told me in Morocco, and (having written my Ph. D. thesis in 1928) I rewrote it as *Tribes of the Rif* and I cut the saga of the Ulad Abd el-Mumen into two books, both about Limnibhy. In *Flesh of the Wild Ox* he was Moh Umzien. It took me 14 Sunday mornings from about 5 to 11 A. M. to write it . . . . I just wrote it. It came right out of my head and heart. I was like a medium. I never changed a word of it . . . . Then I wrote *Ali the Jackal*, which turned out to be called *The Riffian* . . . . While Moh Umzien, a cripple, stayed at home, Ali the Jackal went to France, the Middle Atlas, and all over . . . I wrote this second book with the same combinations of organs as in *Flesh*. Nothing I have written ever since compares with these books because I was a Riffian [1].

The Riffian is, therefore, a fictionalized autobiography of Limnibhy narrated through Coon. Coon saw himself as merely the vehicle for bringing Limnibhy's tale to life, with the story flowing from a combination of his deep understanding of and connection to Limnibhy's life, as well as from his own intellect and emotions. Coon felt deeply connected to Limnibhy's experiences and narrative, channelling them into his writing in a way that was almost beyond his conscious control. He expresses a profound personal connection to the subject matter of his works and, by extension, the Riffian community itself. Coon's declaration "I was a Riffian" conveys a deep identification and a transformative experience in the process of writing his Riffian novels. This was not just a project for Coon but an immersive journey that enabled him to transcend his own identity and channel the spirit, struggles, and perspectives of the Riffian people. Consequently, narrating Limnibhy's story became akin to a process of cultural and linguistic translation into English, echoing the collaborative relationship between Mohamed Mrabet and Paul Bowles.

The novel weaves together two quests: the search for identity and resistance against the colonizer. These quests are intricately combined within a picaresque narrative structure that unfolds across various locations, starting in Fez, moving to France, then to the South, Taza, and finally returning to Iherrushen. Throughout this postcolonial spatial and political journey of struggle against the colonizer and exploration of the Moroccan fabric, this paper argues, Ali the Jackal discovers his own national identity.

In addition to trying to capture Limnihy’s voice, Coon keenly enriches his narrative with vivid local colour and authenticity. He extensively weaves into the fabric of his text Riffian proverbs, songs, anecdotes, oral traditions, poems, cultural symbols, and stories collected during his ethnographic fieldwork or learnt from Limnibhy, the hero of the novel, whose life and adventures significantly inspire the plot. Coon highlights this deep connection with his hero by noting that Ali the Jackal "was the adventurous half of Limnibhy" [1], and admits that in the process of writing his novel, he felt truly a Riffian himself. This approach not only lends credibility and depth to the storytelling but also pays homage to his Riffian friend and hero, bringing his story and rich culture vividly to life within the pages of his work.

2. Ali’s imagined identity and community

The novel begins with two Riffian youths, Ali the Jackal and his cousin Moh Umzien, walking into the Arab city of Fez through the gate of Bab el Guissa. They have arrived from El Hajeb, a Berber village where their tribe of Ulad Abd el Mumen is in exile after it was driven by a rival tribe from the Vale of Iherrushen.

Ali harbours strong disdain for the Arabs, viewing them as lacking moral integrity and cowards who merely pay lip service to French colonizers. He notes the stark difference in customs, particularly taking issue with the Arabs' indifference towards their women engaging with the French. He disdainfully says “They have been here now but five years, yet in a few more the country of the Arabs will be filled with children, toad-faced like these Christians... These things will never happen in the Rif. We will never let the Christians in” [3].

When questioned by an American captain about his roots, he declares, "I am from Morocco, but I am not an Arab, and Arabic is not my language...I am a Riffian" [3]. This clarification is vital for his self-concept, differentiating him from the Arabs whom he holds in disdain. Upon being mistakenly identified as an Arab by a French officer, Ali's response is fervent: “Call me a bastard if you will,” he shouted, “and then we are brothers! But an Arab, never! I am insulted!” [3].

Ali is equally disdainful of the Berbers of the Atlas, especially when he finds his beloved Rowazna, a beautiful Berber girl he financially supported and planned to marry, in the arms of an Arab. Enraged, he chides her “So you lie with negroes” and in a fit of fury, he kills the Arab [3].

In the novel, Ali's initial firm emphasis on his identity as exclusively Riffian, anchored in the idea of tribal blood purity and the exclusion of other ethnicities undergoes a significant transformation as the story unfolds. Ali has never seen his homeland Iherrushen. His childhood overflowed with tales of this place. Through these narratives, Ali becomes familiar with his imaginary home, “How Ali the Jackal yearned for the sight of these things! He who had never seen the Rif! He pictured the Vale of Iherrushen in his mind’s eye, with its wet terraces and pale shoots, and goats grazing on the steep slopes overhead” [3].

Ali’s homeland is imagined, a construction largely shaped by tales and stories told to him by his father and relatives. According to Benedict Anderson's concept of “imagined communities” (Anderson, 1983), such homelands are socially constructed spaces, conceived through stories and shared histories, rather than through direct, personal experience. He says in the novel, “It is beautiful there, my country,” he goes on, “There are fig trees, and almonds, and olives, and in the winter you can see the tracks of wild boar in the snow. No Arabs ever come there and no Jews, and — if God is willing — no Christians” [3].

What further complicates Ali’s approach to tribal identity is the circumstances of his birth and upbringing. Born in a brothel in Fez to a Berber mother, Ali’s beginnings are marked by societal stigma. After the death of his father in the Sultan’s dungeon, Ali is removed from his mother's brothel by his uncle and raised in exile in al Hajeb.

When Ali decides to enlist in the French colonial army to steal rifles, he wears an Arab disguise and tries “to imagine himself an Arab” [3]. To conceal his Riffian origins, he adopts the name Mohammed, the son of Mohammed, from the Arab nomadic Tsoul tribe. When asked by the French officer if he likes the French, he responds:

“You and I are like two bones in the same leg. We will stand up or lie down together.”

“Where did you get your yellow hair and blue eyes? You don’t look like an Arab. You could pass for a Christian.”

“I was born in my mother’s tent. How do I know what happened before that? Perhaps you are my father, who knows?” [3].

Ali adeptly manipulates the colonizer's sexual fantasies, steeped in a longstanding tradition of Orientalist stereotypes that depict the Oriental woman as both submissive and erotically available [4]. By playing into these stereotypes, Ali ingeniously leverages the colonizers' own prejudices and desires to his advantage.

Upon observing a group of countrywomen passing by, Ali once again plays into French fantasies about Muslim women. He remarks to the officer, “Fatima is good?” [3]

This dialogue is reminiscent of a passage in Bhabha’s article “Sly Civility” where Indians native use evasive language as a refusal to satisfy the colonizer's narrative demand for narrative. The Other’s refusal is interpreted by Bhabha as a refusal to unify or stabilize the colonizer, leaving his Self fractured by persecutory paranoia [5].

Ali, a robust and tall, young giant with yellow hair and blue eyes, is often mistaken for a European due to his fair complexion and hair. While in a café in Paris, Ali and a fellow Riffian overhear a conversation between two young French prostitutes debating their race. Henriette is convinced that they are not Moroccans but her friend insists “They are Moroccans — you can tell by their uniforms. You can’t trust those Mohammedans.” Henriette is adamant asserting that “They aren’t Moroccans, they are too light.” She approaches Ali the Jackal, remarking to him, “You are too light! Look, you have nice blue eyes, and your hair is the color of gold. You should let it grow longer; it would be very nice...You know what my friend thinks? She thinks you are Moroccans! Isn’t she silly?” Ali is curious to know about France’s perception of Moroccans and Henriette replies, “Moroccans are horrid black men, whom we bring here to fight in the front lines. They get killed” [3]

This encounter marks a profound moment of revelation for Ali, unveiling the deep-seated racial stereotypes and misconceptions that are woven into the fabric of French colonial society. Henriette's comments not only reflect her own biases but also encapsulate the broader colonial ideology that sanctions violence against colonized natives on the basis of race. As noted by Chris Tiffin and Alan Lawson, “Colonialism (like its counterpart racism) is a formation of discourse, and as an operation of discourse, it interpellates colonial subjects by incorporating them in a system of representation” [6]. For Ali, the interaction is a pivotal learning experience, illuminating the harsh realities of colonialism and underscoring the critical importance of cultivating a national identity rooted in resistance.

3. Voyage in and politics of resistance

Ali’s ultimate dream is to steal rifles and go to recover his tribe’s position. This is the reason why he enlisted in the French army. He has no intention to fight for Morocco or France. But he finds himself drafted to the war front.

When he heard the Arab officer wearing a turban and French uniform recruiting speech, Ali says to his cousin Moh Umzien, “Maybe if we went to France we could kill many Frenchmen” [3]. Ali eventually enlists. When the officer asks him for the reason he explains, “I should like to see the country of the Christians, and all the marvels in it, of which I have heard. I should also like to fight the Germans, who are the Children of the Unclean One” [3].

The journey to France was the journey to the centre of the empire. Here he discovers that France is weak, defeated, and vulnerable. This is first illustrated in a very telling scene of his encounter with a Parisian prostitute.

She takes him to her room through many streets, into a dark alley in a desolate neighbourhood. By the time he undressed her she was fast asleep. He gazed at her body laying before him: her feet were covered with corns. “Ha!” he exclaimed in disgust, “So these are Christian feet!” She began to snore. He is disgusted and bored. “She is like, a corpse,” he said to himself, ironically recalling her racist statement, “And I am a black man, brought here to have my throat slit like a sheep!” [3].

This scene marks Ali's first encounter with a white woman, a moment that begins with intimate anticipation but quickly transforms into disillusionment and disgust through an act of uncovering and discovery. Through Ali's postcolonial gaze, the body of the white woman—and by extension, her culture—becomes defamiliarized and disfigured, laying bare the complexities and contradictions inherent in cross-cultural encounters and the critique of colonialism.

In Malek Allula *The Colonial Harem*, the Oriental woman returns the gaze and confronts the colonizer and his libidinous energy. “The Algerian woman does not conceal herself, does not play at concealing herself. But the eye cannot catch hold of her. The opaque veil that covers her intimates clearly and simply to the photographer a refusal. Turned back upon himself, upon his own impotence in the situation, the photographer undergoes an *initial experience of disappointment and rejection*” [7]. She gazes at him without being seen. In The Riffian, the naked Parisian woman is asleep, unable to return the gaze.

Under the Moroccan soldier’s eyes, the white woman becomes the subject of his gaze, an act of uncovering and objectification of the de-sexualized body where libidinal attraction is disavowed and desire turns into revulsion. In literary works from Shakespeare’s *Othello* to E. M. Foster’s *A Passage to India*, the white woman has been constructed as a site of racial superiority, colonial power, and native sexual fantasies. As in Tayeb Salih’s *Season of Migration to the North*, *The Riffian* subverts the colonial fetishization of the white female body.

In his article “The Man of Color and the White Woman” in *Black Skin, White Masks* Franz Fanon says “When my restless hands caress those white breasts, they grasp white civilization and dignity and make them mine” [8]. Commenting on Fanon’s statement in her book *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest*, Anne McClintock says “The white woman is seized, possessed and taken hold of, not as an act of *substitution*, but as an act of *appropriation*” [9]. Ali the Jackal displays no interest in the *appropriation* of the white body or the civilization it signifies. His act of gazing upon the plump, sleeping body of the white woman embodies not attraction and desire but rather a deliberate dismissal of the allure traditionally attributed to whiteness within colonial discourses. This stance allows him to maintain his cultural identity and integrity, resisting the psychological colonization that often accompanies physical subjugation. “In Fez,” he comments, “she would be stripped and thrown out into the street. She is too fat, anyway, and what feet!” [3].

When, Rowazna, a prostitute in Fez, asks him, “Tell us some things. You have been in the land of the Christians? Tell us about it” [3]. His answer is very postcolonial:

The chief thing,” commenced Ali the Jackal, “is this. We, who sit here in Fez and watch the Christians walk down our streets with great confidence, knocking lesser persons out of their path — we, who say ‘yes’ when they demand money, and tremble when they draw us into their Bureaus for questioning, do not realize that there are poor folk in their own land, humble people, many who cannot read and write, who plough their fields as do we, and are content with their own cattle and grain. These people do not lift their chins when they look at us, but treat us with respect, like our own kind. In his own country the Christian is a bull without horns, but when he comes to live among us he grows long hair about his shoulders and takes on the stature of a wild ox [3].

On the battlefield in France, Ali the Jackal refrains from targeting the Germans, persuaded by the belief that "it is a shame to harm them. It is said that their sultan has made his pilgrimage to Mecca, and is in alliance with the Turks" [3]. Instead, he directs his aim at French soldiers, the true invaders of his country, believing that by killing the French infidels, he secures his passage to paradise. Whenever possible Ali and Allal, a fellow Riffian, hide in the forest and snipe French soldiers. In one particularly successful escapade, they eliminate seven French soldiers, a victory that fills them with elation. Celebrating their deeds, the Riffian friends delighted exclaim, “We have each killed Christians. Now the gates will be opened for us, if we die this very night” [3].

When he is wounded and becomes incapable of further combat, Ali the Jackal finds himself reassigned to a training camp, not as a soldier, but in a role serving his officers—reduced to the status of a servant. Despite the indignity of his new role, Ali the Jackal seeks solace and a form of silent resistance through song. He sings a Riffian song that speaks to the eventual downfall and emasculation of the French soldiers:

Ay, sir, what takes place this year?

The French are fighting with Germany.

What do the nations send to battle?

Only the youths of twenty years.

Ay, ay — what will they do?

The Hajj Giun will castrate them [3] (Hajj Giun is the nickname attributed to the German Kaiser by Moroccan soldiers).

His act of singing, a private act of defiance, underscores the resilience of inferiorized marginal Other, a subtle rebellion carried out in a military camp in the colonial metropolis. Ali the Jackel, converted to a servant, refusal to be broken by his circumstances. To put it in the words of Homi Bhabha, “the natives are both challenging the boundaries of discourse and subtly changing its terms by setting up another specifically colonial space of the negotiations of cultural authority. And they do this under the eye of power” [5].

In the framework of Orientalism, as outlined by Edward Said, the West is portrayed as the active agent, the observer, and the adjudicator of all aspects of Oriental existence. “The West is the actor, the Orient a passive reactor. The West is the spectator, the judge and jury, of every facet of Oriental behavior” [4]. The Orient is positioned as a passive entity, subject to Western scrutiny and interpretation. However, in the character of Ali the Jackal, this dynamic is subverted. Here, the colonized seizes agency, reclaiming from the colonizer the authority to narrate and represent his own story and history. Ali the Jackal embodies the resistance against the traditional Orientalist narrative, demonstrating that the subject of colonization possesses the power to articulate their own identity and reshape the narrative on their own terms.

Unaware of Ali’s sniping French soldiers and singing the defeat of France in the war the French commend him with the Croix de Guerre, recognizing him for capturing German snipers and for "your valiant services in the cause of our *belle patrie*" [3]. With a mix of disdain and insight into the hollowness of such honors, Ali the Jackal discards the prestigious medal remarking “It is the manner of fools and utter idiots . . . to be deceived by such baubles. They lure us here to be cut to pieces and die for no profit of our own, and then seek to satisfy us with trinkets” [3].

In *the Country of Others* (2021), by Moroccan-French writer, Leila Slimani, Amine, former a Moroccan in the colonial French army during WWII, is married to the French woman Mathilde. Slimani delineates him as shorter than his wife and dark-complexioned, details that foreground the racial and cultural dynamics at play within their relationship [10]. His representation in the novel subjects him to the same politics of marginalization and stereotyping in colonial fiction such as H. Rider Haggard's *King Solomon's Mines* (1885) or Rudyard Kipling's *Kim* (1901) or Orwell's "Marrakesh" (1939).

In the context of the nationalist struggle for independence in the novel, Amine who fought for France's liberation from Germany, remains neutral. In his response to his daughter Aisha's inquiry about whether he supports the nationalists or the colonists, he says, "We are like your tree: half lemon and half orange. We're not on either side" [11]. In a sharp contrast to Amine's non-involvement stance, Ali's mission is liberating his people and country from the colonial yoke. He carries a clear and active resistance against colonial rule.

The trip to France, the metropolis of colonialism, to fight for it and discover its colonialist ideologies and vulnerability, dramatize the Saidian notion of "the voyage in," a politics of resistance as well as a strategy of postcolonial writing back. Drawing on *The Empire Writes Back*, Said defines the voyage in as a strategy that aims at "disrupting the European narratives of the Orient and Africa, [and] replacing them with either a more playful or a more powerful new narrative style." In Third World Resistance writings there is a conscious effort to enter into the discourse of Europe and the West, to mix with it, transform it, to make it acknowledge marginalized or suppressed or forgotten histories" [12]. Ali the Jackal's journey to France and how it affected his understanding of the colonizer, shaped his politics of resistance, and helped him redefine his identity within his country's national struggle for independence, is a typical "voyage in "in the Saidian sense.

4. Travelling and learning

After his return to Morocco, Ali finds his beloved Rowazna in bed with an Arab. Overcome by rage and jealousy, he slays the Arab and is sentenced to hard labor. He manages to escape imprisonment and is rescued Moh Umuh to whom he becomes a captive. He lives with his nomadic tribe of Beni Mguild. He learnt their language. Being as a war veteran who is perfectly familiar with French armament and war tactics, he leads his captors to victory in their raids against the French legion. He consents to become a Koranic teacher to the children of the encampment, circumcises the children, instructs the Beni Mguild in Islamic rituals, informs them on the days of fasting and feasting, and even writes amulets for them [3].

During his stay, he discovers that the Berbers, though they have different customs and manners than his own people, are equally brave fighters, loyal, hospitable, and men of honor. He leads a comfortable life, yet his resolve to be in the land of his forefathers never wanes. When he learnt about the uprising of Abdelkrim and the French advance of the Vale of Iherrushen he eventually makes his escape and heads to his native land [3].

In the region of Taza, he encounters an elderly Arab who had lost his entire family in battles against the French. This man, once offered the position of sheikh by the French in exchange for his allegiance, had refused, declaring, "Better a dog of the Ait Atta than Sultan under the French!" [3]. Ali is deeply moved by his conviction and noble character, showing his respect by kissing the man's hands and saying, "My uncle, I hold you in great honor" [3].

Ali is even more fascinated when he learns that the man was clearing the road of stones "so the road may be smoother for travelers like yourself. Someday, a great army will emerge galloping from the mountains; and should one horse stumble, it will be my doing." The elder imparts wisdom, suggesting that being armed in defense of one's country is more glorious than wealth or worldly pleasure, stating, "He who has a gun is more fortunate than the man with four wives, and a thousand head of sheep" [3]. The Arab old man gave him a mare and direction on the safest way to reach his homeland. Overcome with reverence, Ali the Jackal kneels and kisses the old man's ankles, tearfully proclaiming, "Truly, my uncle, you are a living saint. When you die a white tomb will be built over your bones, and I will come, with many others, to slaughter a goat at its door" [3]. This encounter carries profound significance, highlighting themes of resistance, honor, and the legacy of colonial struggle. The elderly Arab's refusal to accept a position of power under colonial rule, preferring to remain loyal to his roots and principles, embodies a deep-seated resistance against the oppressor's attempts to co-opt native leadership.

Ali also admires the elderly Arab's confidence in the arrival of the armies of resistance and his act of clearing the road, in preparation for a future liberation. Similar to the revered Berber chieftain Moh Umuh, the elder Arab man embodies dignity, honor, sacrifice, and a resilient spirit of resistance. This encounter profoundly influences Ali's journey toward self-discovery, dispelling his preconceived notions about Arabs. Traveling and meeting with people of different races, Ali became aware of the ethnic plurality of Morocco, a nation fighting against the colonizer. The struggle against a common enemy has unified the nation, a narrative of resistance and a quest for selfhood.

5. The return

Upon reaching his homeland Vale of Iherrushen he found the stories of his brave exploits in France have preceded him. “I have heard many tales of you,” he said, “how you traveled to the land of the Christians and slew many of them by guile. And learnt that the tribes have lied aside their differences and united against the common enemy. One of his countrymen declares, “The Christians are all around us and we must unite.” [3].

Soon after, he deftly smuggles rifles from a French garrison and sets out to organize Riffian guerilla warfare to fend off colonial encroachments. His arrival and leadership presage the inevitable doom, at least discursively, of colonialism. He has an optimistic vision about the inevitable downfall of French colonialism:

> The French are not the only Christians in the world, and they have their own troubles. The Germans may fight them again, and win. The English, the Americans, or any of the other Christians may become angry with the French and attack them. ... And at any rate, if the French have trouble elsewhere, we can rise against them, and throw them out. Also, we can cast out the Spanish, who can do nothing alone..... some day the Christians will be finished. As soon as we learn their ways, we can defeat them with their own weapons. The Christians are like a piece of fir wood, soggy with resin. It flares up with great light and heat, but soon dies down and its ashes grow cold. We are like oak, we burn slowly, but for a much longer time. Our coals glow dimly all night, and in the morning flame up again with a little fanning [3].

Ali's optimistic vision concerning the downfall of French colonialism and, by extension, the eventual decline of Western dominance, is a profound articulation of resilience and strategic foresight. By recognizing that the French are not invulnerable and that their own geopolitical entanglements could weaken their grip on colonies, Ali highlights the potential for colonial subjects to leverage these weaknesses to their advantage in a strategic approach to resistance. Ali's insight that learning from the colonizers and using their own war methods and technologies against them speaks to a deeper belief in the power of adaptation and assimilation of knowledge in the fight for freedom.

The metaphor Ali uses to compare the nature of the colonial powers with that of the colonized peoples is particularly striking. Describing the Christians (or colonial powers) as fir wood, burning bright but quickly fading, against the enduring, slow-burning oak, symbolizes the transient nature of colonial domination versus the enduring spirit of the colonized. It reflects a belief in the intrinsic strength and resilience of his people, who, despite the immediate intensity of colonial power, possess the enduring capability to withstand oppression and eventually overcome it through sustained resistance and strategic patience.

Having reached his homeland, united with his people, and having an optimistic vision, Ali contemplates founding a family. His uncles introduce him to three potential brides three young girls, “three different Fatimas,” yet they advise against choosing the third due to the social stigmas relating to the circumstances of her birth. “When she was born,” the uncle explains, “her father had been dead over a year, and her mother had not married again. Her mother left her here, and went to Fez, where many Riffians have visited her since... But you wouldn’t want her. Everyone would make fun of you.” Ali responds:

> Don’t forget that my beginnings were not very good either. I know my own father, there is no question of that. But my mother was nothing to boast about in the company of men. I have lived with the Braber, and I myself like them. They are brave, hearty people, but their minds do not work like those of Riffians. What they think is good we think is bad, and what we think is good, they think is foolish. Which of us is right lies between the hands of God to tell [3].

Ali's decision to consider the third Fatima reflects a shift from tribal affiliations towards a broader national consciousness. “I have been many places, and heard many things” [3], repeatedly declares. Ali promotes an imagined identity that is neither fixed nor monolithic; it encompasses geographical, social, and cultural pluralism. Furthermore, Ali embodies an inclusive society and leadership that seeks to foster national unity against the backdrop of the shared struggle against French colonialism.

The couple's mixed heritage and circumstances of birth place them at the intersection of complex identities within the novel’s approach to identity construction. The groom, born outside wedlock of a Riffian father and Berber mother, and the bride, with a Riffian mother and an anonymous father, find themselves crafting a shared identity from their blended backgrounds. This act of imagining a new identity, redefining and reconfiguring it within a broader national identity inclusive of diverse ethnicities underscores how Moroccans in general, can envision and embody new forms of belonging in the colonial context of aggression and divide and rule strategy.

Ali celebrates his betrothal and newly found identity by stealing ten rifles from a French garrison, declaring at the end of the narrative "Some day, perhaps, I will have this one inlaid in silver, in a design like leaves" [3].

6. Conclusion

In *Culture and Imperialism*, in a chapter titled "Resistance and Opposition" Edward said argues that native resistance can only emerge in what he calls "Culture of Resistance," in the postcolonial text where the native acquires agency and the prerogative for self-representation itself. In post-colonial texts, "the formerly silent native speaks and acts on territory reclaimed as part of a general movement of resistance, from the colonialist" [12].

Ali is preoccupied with representation while seeming to satisfy the colonial narrative. He plays into the colonizer's stereotypes of the gullible native, but only to elude or subvert colonial hegemony and authority. Ali's adept use of disguises, his extensive knowledge, and his fluency in multiple languages render him an enigma to the French colonizers. These skills enable him to outmaneuver them, successfully killing French soldiers, pilfering the rifles from a well-guarded garrison, and evading capture.

The Riffian was published during a period when Western novels, such as and Edith Maude Hull *The Sheik* (1921), Percival C. Wren's *Beau Sabreur* (1926), and Benno Vigny's *Amy Jolly* (1927), frequently celebrated the conquest and pacification of Morocco. Many of these literary works romanticize chivalrous French heroes fighting the native against the background of an exoticized landscape. The native population is often depicted through stereotypes as savage raiders, religious zealots, or relegated to subservient roles. Contrary to this trend, *The Riffian* eschews the romanticization of colonialism and the denigration of indigenous peoples. Instead, the narrative positions the French occupiers as the antagonists, who exploit the land and oppress its people. The protagonist, a Riffian named Ali, is portrayed as a hero on a noble quest to liberate his country, with his journey and resistance against colonial forces being celebrated. This approach marks a significant departure from the era's prevailing literary norms, offering a perspective that elevates the struggles and aspirations of the colonized over the colonial narrative.

In her travel account *In Morocco*, Edith Wharton praises the civilizing mission attributed to French colonial rule in Morocco. Published in 1920 following her visit to the country during the French Protectorate, at the invitation of Resident General, Marshal Louis-Hubert Lyautey, Wharton's narrative mirrors her views on French colonialism as a vehicle for progress and modernization in the colonized regions. She admires the advancements introduced by the French and critiques the native culture and society, thereby endorsing the colonial administration and its dominating influence [13].

The Riffian markedly diverges from the typical colonial narrative by portraying Moroccans as victims of colonial violence. It transforms the image of the Western colonizer from a herald of civilization to a brutal occupier engaged in the destruction of farms, theft of crops and livestock, and the ruin of native homes. Crucially, the novel articulates the struggles and resistance of the Moroccans through the authentic voice and perspective of a Riffian patriot. The Riffian's postcolonial agency in the novel is a radical challenge of the dominant colonial discourse, offering a counter-narrative that highlights the resilience and determination of the colonized in their quest for national identity and liberation.

Ali's strategy extends beyond merely challenging the colonizer; he aims to unite the Moroccan nation under a single identity and war banner. His approach is not just about confrontation but about mobilizing a collective resistance that transcends individual battles. By envisioning a unified Moroccan identity, Ali seeks to consolidate diverse groups and factions within the country, fostering a sense of common identity and purpose and solidarity against colonial rule. This vision of national unity is crucial for a sustained and effective resistance, aiming to transform disparate struggles into a cohesive movement capable of challenging and ultimately overthrowing colonial dominance.

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