



## **SPEAKING BACK TO EUROPEAN'S IDEA OF GREATNESS IN *THE MOOR'S ACCOUNT* (2014) BY LAILA LALAMI**

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### **Abstract**

The purpose of this analysis is to expose the issue of speaking back to European's idea of greatness which is done by a Moorish slave. Fictional devices such as character, plot (conflict), and setting are used to analyze this novel. The analysis is done through text and context-based interpretation. This study relates to the concept of orientalism and otherness by Edward W. Said. The result of this study shows the character succeeds to speak back to European's idea of greatness by showing his dignity and his high intelligence.

**Key words:** Speaking back, idea of greatness, resistance

### **A. INTRODUCTION**

In this world people can be divided into several groups, one of the group is a group that based on physical and cultural forms called race. In *Apologetics Press* 2013 (The origin of human races and blood groups) says, there are major races of humans: Caucasoid, Mongoloid and Negroid, three great and clearly marked types, the black, the yellow and the white. The black is the lowest and the white is the superior among all. This idea of the superior and inferior makes people treat the others badly and motivated them to be the greatest among all.

According to Anthony N. Demaria in *Journal of The American College* (2009), idea of greatness implies a uniqueness of achievement and one that affects a very large group of people. Greatness is a concept of a state of superiority affecting a person or object in a particular place or area. Greatness can also be attributed to individuals who possess a natural ability to be better than all others. The concept carries the implication that the particular person or object, when compared to others of a similar type, has clear advantage over others. This is seen when white European colonized and ruled the other nations and constructed their identity as superior and the others as inferior.

The oppression of being treated unfairly makes people fight-back the colonizers. However, it was not easy to fight the colonizer physically. Therefore,

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the colonized tried to find the other way to fight back that is by speaking back to the European's idea of greatness.

The analysis of *The Moor's Account* (2014) by Laila Lalami that focuses on speaking back to European idea of greatness has not been found yet. However, there are two studies that give contribution and inspiration in analyzing this novel. The first analysis entitled *The Story of How Estebanico Became Mustafa in Laila Lalami's The Moor's Account* by Linea Ungewitter from Lund University (2016) focus on how the multi voiced aspects of retelling stories promotes the diversity and how storytelling serves its function as a way to form an identity and to gain a sense of integrity. Ungewitter use character, setting and plot to reveal the meaning of this novel. This analysis dealt with the concept Homi Bhaba's hybridity. The result of this study has portrayed the difficulties of migrant living in diaspora and how identities are in "eternal quest for home".

Another analysis that shows how the East speaks back to the West is by Desvalini anwar (2016) whose work entitled: *Finding myself in someone else's land*. In this study she focuses on how teachers of literature in Padang choose to teach English literature for their own purposes. Thus, as Anwar explains, the teachers make attempt to teach English literature against standard of English literature teaching.

The phenomenon of speaking back to European's idea of greatness is represented by the novel that is written by a Marrocoan, Lailalalami in *The Moor's Account* (2014). The novel shows how the character refuses the European idea of greatness.

Lalami began writing fiction and nonfiction in English in 1996. Her literary criticism, cultural commentary, and opinion pieces have appeared in *The Boston Globe*, *Boston Review*, *The Los Angeles Times*, *The Nation*, *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *The Daily Beast*, and elsewhere. In 2016, she was named both a columnist for *The Nation* magazine and a critic-at-large for *The Los Angeles Times Book Review*.

*The Moor's Account* novel (2014) by Laila lalami shows the issue about speaking back to European's idea of greatness. In this analysis it refers to the actions of the non-European to fight the European idea about greatness. It is represented by the narrator, a Moorish slave (Estavanico). He is a merchant and also an Arab Negro from Azamor. He begins being a slave of European after Azemmur controlled by Portuguese. As a slave and as a non-European, he struggle to fight the European perspectives and the way they treat the non-European. European believes that non-European are uncivilized, cruel and poor. In this novel, the narrator struggle to speak back that the European idea of greatness are wrong. The character of this novel speaking back to European idea's of greatness by showing his dignity and his high intelligence.

First, the way to speak back to European's idea of greatness is by showing his dignity. He is a slave who has self-esteem and responsibility to safe

his family. He has a good self-control. He still thinks about humanity even when he is in danger. He has rational thought and he is good in making decision. He prefer to be hungry than to be a cannibal. This is in contrast to how the Europeans appear in the story. The analysis reveals that the European are barbaric and uncivilized.

Second, the way to speak back to European's idea of greatness is by showing his intelligence. He is a smart person and can speak some languages. He uses his knowledge to help Ramatulai find her daughter. He becomes the interpreter between his master and the Indian during the expedition to make him treated better than the other slaves. He is good in memorizing the medicines. He became a healer for Indian tribes. On other hands, the European appear to be unintelligence and ignorant.

## **B. RESEARCH METHOD**

The analysis of novel *The Moor's Account* (2014) by Laila lalami is done through text and context-based interpretation. Fictional devices, such as character, plot (conflict), and setting are used to analyze this novel. To reveal the European's idea of greatness, character reactions towards conflicts are used in this analysis. Then the setting deals with the circumstances and atmosphere. It gives contribution in process of analysis by giving help in revealing the meaning. Plot and conflicts in this novel give important role to show how the character speaks back to European's idea of greatness. This analysis is dealing with the concept by Edward said *Orientalism*.

## **C. RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

This section reveals the acts of *speaking back to European's idea of greatness* by using the fictional devices such as narrator, plot and setting. There are two main points discussed in this section. The first is about how the character shows his dignity .The second one is how the character shows that he has high intelligence.

### **1. Showing Dignity**

Showing his dignity one of the ways the character speaks back to European's idea of greatness. The idea of greatness created by European is "the other races are barbaric and uncivilized". In this analysis, the good behavior of the character ( Estavanico) seen from how he always being wise, he use hi rational thought, good self control, and self esteem to solve the problem.

First, the character is a wise person. He uses his rational thought to keep his humanity and avoid to being brutal. It can be seen from this following quotation:

The island is not that far from the continent,I said,  
but this raft won't carry us there in its present

state. Perhaps we can go to the Indian village for help.

With his God's eye, the soldier Ruiz gave me a vicious look. No, we cannot there was an authority to this stone that I resented immediately. We must, I countered. We have no other choice.

Did you forget what happened to us the last time we went to an Indian village?

Ruiz asked. Echogan's men turned against us. And that was when that were two hundred of us. No there are thirty-nine of us left, and not ten can bear to walk, let alone fight. El moro says he saw a dozen huts how many Indians does that make?

At least a hundred, Dorantes concurred. Maybe more.

See we cannot go.

We cannot go stay either, I said. We have to find food and shelter.

What if the savages sacrifice us to their idols and eat us? (p.146)

The text above shows that the narrator has rational thought than the European. He chooses to try asking the Indians tribe to help them than face the storm. The words "perhaps we can go to the Indian village for help" show that instead of facing the storm that they cannot face, the character choose to face the Indian people. It emphasize that he believe that people will treat the other people depend on their attitude. This act shows that he is a wise person and good in making decision. While the words "what if the savages sacrifice us to their idols and eat us?" shows that European labeled the Indian savages but the real savage is the European itself. European comes to the Indian land to colonize them. The way the Indian treats the European only to protect their nation. European is the real savage is shown through the following quotation:

We did not know you could fish with spears. Why you did not return earlier?

Why are you asking me so many questions?

We just want to know. We want some fish too.

Do you think I am lying?

You need not be so prickly. Where are the others?

They have the fever.

But you said they did not want to come. Which is it?

Rufz , where are the others?

I ate them! There , I said it, is this what you wanted to hear?

.....

In a low voice , he continued : after we went away , Palacios became sick with the bowel disease and died . we were going to bury him , but then Lopes said we should just eat his flesh. We had not had anything to eat in five or six days. I said no . I swear to God Almighty , I said no. But Lopes did it anyway. And I was so hungry .so hungry . and then Lopes Killed Sierra. And Corra after him.(p.156)

The text above shows that the real savage and barbaric are not the non-white. While the narrator uses his rational thought then try to ask the Indian to save them from hunger. The white choose to face the storm and end up being a cannibal. They are irrational and can't control them self. The words “ I said no. But lopes did it anyway. And I was so hungry. So hungry.” show that the white cannot control himself. He can use his rational thought. He shows his hypocrite with victimize the other to acknowledge what he has been done.

The character has a good self control. He uses his positive thought to calm his anger. It is shown in the following quotation:

As I gathered firewood that day , and scraped and washed deerskins, I felt a multifarious anger well up within me. Dorantes Had brought me to the Land of the Indians, where I had known nothing about misery , he was the reason for the beating I was endured ,and he had left just when I had begun to let myself believe that the bond between us had envolved into one of fellowship. In my own attempts at consolation, I had been lying to my self too. When we were finally alone in our tent that night, Castillo asked me : why do you think he left?

He did not want to do the work they wanted him to do.

But why did he not wait for us

Because, I thought, this was Dorantes – he cared only about himself. But just as I was about so much, I wondered if I had left simply because he could no longer bear to be anywhere near the young Castillo, who remind him of the brother he had lost. so I said nothing. (p.184)

The text above shows that the character has a good self control. He can calm his anger. The character show that he doesn't want to have a negative thought about his master and find the other reason why his master leave him. The word “ *I wondered if I had left simply because he could no longer bear to anywhere near the young Castillo, who remind him of the brother he had lost* “ shows that instead of blaming his master for leaving him, he try to understand his master. He knows that his master needs to be alone to get up from his sadness after losing his brother.

Briefly, having good behavior is important in speaking back to European's idea of greatness. Having good behavior is the influential part to make a good impression. The dominant setting refers to the difficult condition which is very different from his origin country. The conflict that the character have faced shows how he speaking back to European's idea of greatness. It proves that he is not uncivilized and barbaric. Thus, it shows the way of the character can speak back to European's idea of greatness by having good behavior: has rational thought and good self-control.

## 2. Showing his high intelligence

The second way the character does to speaking back to European's idea of greatness is by showing his high intelligence. He uses his knowledge to refuse the European Idea of greatness that the other is uneducated. It can be seen from this following text:

The cures we performed may not healed everyone we attended, but I can vouch that they saved at least four lives : our own.( p.208)

The text above shows that he save their live because of his healing skill. He is not a doctor. He learned how to heal from memorizing what he see when he was in his hometown. The utterance *our own* means him and the three whites. He saves himself and his master from hunger and Indian's anger while the three

Indian cannot do anything to save himself. It also shown in this following quotation:

Helplessly , I turned to Castillo.Your father is a doctor.

But I am not.

Surely you must have learned some things from watching him? ( p.201)

The text above shows that he is smarter than the white. He can heal people from what he sees from his hometown. His master's father is a doctor , but he cannot heal headache. The utterance*Surely you must have learned some things from watching him?* Show that he learned how to heal people is only by watching someone. He memorizes what people do when they are healing. It means he is a smart person. He can remember what he sees. The white cannot do anything without him. It can be seen trough this following quotation:

Often , the children came to watch me work and it was from them that I gained fluency in the Caranchua language until then I had had to rely on what I knew of the Capoque tongue, but now I could expand my vocabulary and grammar. (p.177)

The text above shows that he is smarter than the white who in the expedition. They don't understand Indian language at first. He is easy to adjust in a new palace. He learned Indian language from the children who play around him. He plays with the kid and learns their language. While the white did not learn anything. They use him as interpreter..

Clearly, showing his high intelligence in speaking back to European's idea of greatness is important. European or the white think that the other is uneducated, stupid and poor; using his intelligence is the way to refuse that concept. The conflict makes him show that he is better than the white. It proves that the other are not uneducated. The others are educated even more than the white.

#### **D. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS**

*The Moor's Account* novel(2014) by Laila lalami shows the issue about speaking back to European's idea of greatness. In this analysis it refers to the actions of the non-European to fight the European idea about greatness. The

analysis of novel *The Moor's Account* (2014) by Laila Lalami is done through text and context-based interpretation. Fictional devices, such as character, plot (conflict), and setting are used to analyze this novel. It is represented by the narrator, a Moorish slave (Estavanico). As a slave and as a non-European, he struggle to fight the European perspectives and the way they treat the non-European. European believes that non-European are uncivilized, cruel and poor. The way he speaks back is by showing dignity and his high intelligence.

**Note:** This article is written based on the Indah Sri Wahyuni's thesis under the supervision of advisor Desvalini Anwar, S.S.,M.Hum,Ph.D.

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