
| RESEARCH ARTICLE

Navigating Patriarchies: Postcolonial Complexity in *Riḥla ilā Ḥadā'iq Jahannam* by Mohamed Doublali

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| ABSTRACT

This article studies forms of patriarchy in *Riḥla ilā Ḥadā'iq Jahannam* by Mohamed Doublali (2020). The author, I argue, challenges conventional depictions of patriarchy in both the Eastern and Western worlds. The central argument posits that Doublali offers a complex postcolonial representation of patriarchy as a construct influenced by both Eastern and Western paradigms. This construct is enacted by individuals across gender and generational lines. Through exploring the theme of migration from Morocco to Italy, Doublali presents a plural voice that encapsulates diverse expressions and experiences of patriarchy. Using postcolonial theory as the analytical framework, this study uncovers the multifaceted and hybrid nature of patriarchal structures within the novel. The analysis attempts to expose how Doublali's work transcends monolithic understandings of patriarchy, offering a critical reflection on its pervasive and evolving nature in a postcolonial context.

| KEYWORDS

Mohamed Doublali, *Riḥla ilā Ḥadā'iq Jahannam*, patriarchy, gender, migration

| ARTICLE INFORMATION

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1. Introduction

Mohamed Doublali's novel, *Riḥla ilā Ḥadā'iq Jahannam* (A Journey to the Gardens of Inferno), presents a compelling narrative that interrogates traditional depictions of patriarchy within the Eastern world. This paper argues that Doublali's work transcends simplistic binaries and offers a complex, postcolonial portrayal of patriarchy as a construct influenced by both Eastern and Western paradigms. The novel's narrative structure and thematic exploration provide a rich terrain for examining how patriarchal norms are enacted and perpetuated across gender and generational lines. Through the journey of migration from Morocco to Italy, *Riḥla ilā Ḥadā'iq Jahannam* follows the protagonist, Sara, and her family as they navigate the challenges of cultural assimilation and the harsh realities of displacement. Sara's journey, both physical and psychological, reveals the multifaceted dimensions of patriarchy as experienced in a transnational context. Through the polyphonic voices and diverse experiences presented in the novel, Doublali illustrates how patriarchal oppression is not confined to a single culture or gender but is a pervasive force that transcends national and cultural boundaries. By employing postcolonial theory as the analytical framework, this study aims to uncover the hybrid nature of patriarchal structures depicted in the novel. Postcolonial theory, with its focus on the intersections of power, identity, and cultural representation, provides the tools necessary to analyze the complex ways in which patriarchy is constructed and maintained. The novel's depiction of characters such as Sara, her father, and other figures within their Italian community highlights the fluid and dynamic nature of patriarchal power.

2. Literature Review

Migration from Morocco to Europe has been a significant socio-economic phenomenon for several decades, and it has been extensively studied within Moroccan academia. This review synthesizes key Moroccan literature that addresses the various dimensions of migration, including socio-economic factors and socio-cultural impacts. Moroccan scholars have identified a range of socio-economic factors that drive migration to Europe. Berriane (2017) highlights the economic disparities between Morocco

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and European countries as a primary motivator for migration. High unemployment rates and limited economic opportunities in Morocco push individuals to seek better livelihoods abroad. Similarly, Khachani (2005) emphasizes the role of economic instability and poverty in rural areas as critical factors prompting migration. His research highlights that remittances from Moroccan migrants play a vital role in alleviating poverty and contributes to household incomes in Morocco. The cultural and social impacts of migration on Moroccan society have also been a focal point in Moroccan academic discussion. Sadiqi and Ennaji (2004) explore the gendered dimensions of migration and they noted that while men have historically dominated migration flows, there is a growing trend of female migration. This shift has profound implications for gender roles and family dynamics in Morocco. The authors argue that female migrants often face unique challenges, including discrimination and exploitation, but also contribute to changing perceptions of women's roles both in Morocco and in host countries. I believe that Doublali, in this fictional work, could be positioned within this framework. He uses migration to subvert gender roles and power dynamics.

3. Synopsis of the novel *Rihla ilā Ḥadā'iq Jahannam* and reflections

Rihla ilā Ḥadā'iq Jahannam is a novel by Mohammed Al-Douballi. The story revolves around Sara, a young girl who later becomes a young woman, and her journey of migration, both psychologically and culturally, to Italy. The events take place in Italy, which serves as a free space to express the complexities of migration in its psychological, cultural, and social dimensions. The story begins with Sara, along with her father and siblings Omar, Khaled, and Afaf, migrating to Italy to reunite with their mother, who had been previously living there and brought them under a family reunification law. Sara and her brother Omar join school to learn the Italian language, at the suggestion of the mayor of the town, Sondondo. Sara quickly assimilates into the Italian society, mastering the language and forming extensive relationships with Italian youth of both genders. She falls in love with the town of Sondondo, seeing beauty in everything it encompasses—its people, streets, way of life, and customs. The only thing that dampens her happiness is her failed, violent, irresponsible, and unmanly father, who wouldn't even have a job if it weren't for his wife's efforts in finding one. Sara's mother is a beloved figure among the neighbors and townspeople, highly respected and cherished. She regularly visits her neighbors and sends traditional Moroccan dishes, such as couscous, to her friends Katrine and Stefanie every Friday. Sara, the protagonist of the novel, falls in love with Nicola, a kind and handsome Italian young boy, whom she sees as the embodiment of hope, in contrast to her father, who represents despair. Nicola becomes her ladder to safety and security, while her father is associated with violence and intense fear. The novel delves into Sara's perception of these characters and their relationships. Under these circumstances, Sara decides to escape from home to Milan. Her journey begins with the church bells of the town, leading her towards the unknown. All she knows about Milan are its beautiful gardens and huge, clean streets filled with global brands. She had previously visited Milan with her beloved Nicola, spending enjoyable moments together amid the enchanting streets and captivating gardens. Now, she embarks on this journey without knowing what awaits her there, fleeing from her father's inferno (Doublali 2020, p. 19), into another inferno awaiting her there. Dario meets Sara in one of Milan's gardens and realizes that she is alone and in need of help. Dario, a sixty-two-year-old man dressed in luxurious clothes, gives the impression of being wealthy. He is friendly and kind towards Sara. He offers her a ride in his luxurious car and invites her to a fancy restaurant. Later, he suggests that she stays with him in his luxurious house until she finds a solution to her problem. He serves her orange juice laced with a drug, rapes her (Doublali 2020, p. 38), and gets her addicted to drugs (Doublali 2020, p. 41). He promises to marry her, but it never happens. She discovers that she has become a victim of a criminal who uses prostitution as a source of wealth (Doublali 2020, p. 45). Sara becomes a drug addict and a prostitute, and the money she earns goes directly into Dario's pockets. Due to her forced involvement in prostitution, Sara ends up in prison and is sentenced to six months. However, she receives decent treatment in jail, in court, and from social services that helps her with her addiction problem. After her release from prison, her feet lead her to the train station, where she feels safe, and where people bestow upon her some money. She has breakfast at the station and remains there throughout the day. Later, Sara encounters a group of young vagrants who spend their nights and days on the streets involved in prostitution. Manuela is one of these young people, whom Sara sees as a companion and support. Manuela later dies in a car accident, and Sara describes her as an angel who has passed away. Jalal, another Moroccan living in Italy, owns a small restaurant and proposes marriage to Sara, but she refuses. He believes that the reason for her rejection was his disability, but in fact, she declines the marriage due to her feeling unworthy because of the squalor and debauchery she lives in. Sara describes him as genuine and kind, especially after he starts checking on her weekly and providing her with some money to take care of her needs. Later, Sara is imprisoned on a murder charge, and Jalal affirms his authenticity and nobility by appointing a lawyer for her and covering all the legal expenses. One day, Sara sees Dario with another girl and decides to expose him in front of that girl, so that she wouldn't become his victim as well. She approaches him and screams in his face, hurling all the fitting epithets at him. Dario attacks her, grabbing her by the hair, and in self-defense, Sara pushes him, causing his head to collide with the ground, resulting in his death. Sara is arrested again and sent to prison, where she discovers that she is suffering from acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS). She is sentenced to twenty years in prison. The novel conveys the message that the inferno is nothing but patriarchal thought that has no gender, color, race, or nationality. If Abdelqader, Sara's father, ends up with a life sentence in prison, and Dario meets his demise, representing inferno for Sarah, on the other hand, Nicola represents love and hope, while Jalal embodies nobility, generosity, and authenticity. Additionally, the author portrays male dominance as a social construction (Butler 1990, Beauvoir 1989) in which both men and women participate. Thus, the grandmother represents inferno (Doublali 2020, p. 22), while Manuela and others symbolize the gardens of life. Sara's

journey starts with church bells and ends up with her saying "Oh, would that I had died ere this and had become a thing of naught forgotten!" (Qur'an, Surah Maryam, 19:23). This could be only understood within the world of diaspora and more specifically within what might be called in common space or in Bhabha's words incommensurability.

4. Analyzing forms of patriarchy

In Doublali's novel "Rihla ilā Ḥadā'iq Jahannam," Sara's journey serves as a potent critique of patriarchal norms and their profound impact on women's lives. The narrative starkly contrasts Sara's father with her mother, and the author uses these characters to explore the destructive nature of patriarchy within the family structure. Sara's father embodies the failures of patriarchal authority. He is depicted as violent, irresponsible, and unmanly, unable to provide for or protect his family. His dependence on his wife for employment and his overall incompetence highlight the inherent flaws and vulnerabilities of traditional male dominance. His violent tendencies further exacerbate his failure and he is depicted as a source of fear and despair for Sara. In contrast, Sara's mother emerges as a figure of strength and respect within the community. She is cherished and admired by her neighbors, regularly engages with them and sharing traditional Moroccan dishes. This portrayal highlights her role as a nurturer and community builder (Doublali 2020, p. 7), qualities that stand as a contrast to the destructive influence of her husband. Through this juxtaposition, the novel critiques the gendered expectations of patriarchal societies and demonstrates how women often shoulder the responsibilities and burdens neglected by men. Sara's relationship with her father and her subsequent experiences further illustrates the detrimental effects of patriarchal control. Her father's failure drives her to seek escape and solace elsewhere, which leads her into dangerous and exploitative situations. Doublali uses Sara's journey to expose the multifaceted nature of patriarchy and depicts it as a pervasive and destructive force that transcends gender and generational boundaries. The novel presents a complex exploration of how patriarchal norms are upheld and perpetuated by both men and women in an attempt to reveal the systemic nature of this social construct (Lorber 1991). Through the contrasting depictions of Sara's parents, the novel offers a critical reflection on the pervasive influence of patriarchy. It illustrates how patriarchal structures harm not only individual women but also disrupt family and community dynamics. Furthermore, Sara's attraction to Nicola in Doublali's novel, signifies her yearning for a redefined masculinity, one that embodies kindness, gentleness, and support. Nicola's character stands in contrast to Sara's father, who symbolizes despair and violence, which highlights the novel's critique of traditional patriarchal norms and their corrosive impact on individuals. Nicola is portrayed as a symbol of hope (Doublali 2020, p. 12), and safety in Sara's harsh life. His gentle and supportive nature offers Sara an alternative to the oppressive masculinity (Connell 1995) represented by her father. Through Nicola, Sara envisions a world where male figures do not exert control and inflict pain, but rather provide comfort and encouragement. This desire for a different form of masculinity emphasizes the novel's exploration of gender dynamics. Conversely, Sara's father epitomizes the destructive effects of traditional patriarchal authority. His character is marked by violence, irresponsibility, and a lack of empathy, which creates an environment of fear and instability for Sara. His actions and demeanor reinforce the negative consequences of patriarchal dominance within the family unit. The juxtaposition between Nicola and Sara's father serves as a powerful narrative tool to critique entrenched patriarchal values. Nicola's kindness and reliability stand as a counterpoint to the toxic masculinity embodied by her father. This contrast emphasizes the struggle Sara faces and also echoes the social conflict between oppressive patriarchal structures and the emerging desire for more egalitarian gender relations. Through Sara's relationships with these two men, the novel provides a critical reflection on the pervasive impact of patriarchy on personal and social levels. It advocates for a reimagining of gender roles that can foster healthier and more equal connections and a safe environment (Spivak 1988). The character of Dario Valenti profoundly highlights the novel's critique of patriarchal norms through his role as a wealthy, influential older man who exploits and abuses Sara. Dario's character is a portrayal of how power and privilege are wielded to oppress and dehumanize women. His manipulative actions, from drugging Sara to trapping her in a cycle of addiction and prostitution, illustrate the exploitation and objectification inherent in patriarchal systems. Dario's abuse of Sara highlights the severe and systemic nature of patriarchal domination (Walby 1990). He is depicted as a character who views women as mere objects for his pleasure and financial gain and reduces their worth to their utility in satisfying his desires. Moreover, Dario's manipulation and abuse serve as a critical commentary on the intersection of gender, power, and socioeconomic status. His ability to exert control over Sara's life emphasizes how patriarchal oppression is reinforced by economic and social hierarchies. Wealth and power amplify his capacity for abuse which reveals how systemic inequalities perpetuate gender-based violence and exploitation. Sara's descent into drug addiction and prostitution under Dario's control illustrates the dire consequences of patriarchal oppression and the constrained choices available to women in such circumstances. Through Sara's harrowing journey, the narrative unpacks how patriarchal systems systematically contribute to the vulnerability and exploitation of women as they trap them in cycles of abuse with limited avenues for escape. Under Dario's manipulation, Sara's life spirals into addiction and forced prostitution, a trajectory that highlights her loss of agency and autonomy. The depiction of Sara's plight highlights the brutal reality that women often face within patriarchal societies: their value is reduced to their utility in serving male desires, and their humanity is systematically stripped away. Dario's control over Sara's life is not merely an isolated act of cruelty but emblematic of a broader, systemic issue where power imbalances allow men to exploit and victimize women. Moreover, the novel portrays the mechanisms through which patriarchal oppression manifests and reveals how women like Sara are coerced into situations where they endure violence and exploitation. In detailing Sara's experiences, the narrative explores the insidious nature of patriarchal systems that not only perpetrate violence but also perpetuate cycles of victimization. The limited

choices available to Sara reflect a society that fails to protect and empower women, instead subjecting them to continuous harm. Her struggles with addiction and prostitution are not presented as personal failings but as the tragic outcomes of systemic oppression that leaves her with few options. In exposing these harsh realities, Doublali's work criticizes the social structures that sustain such oppression. Nonetheless, the novel transitions to introduce the character of Jalal who offers a compelling alternative to traditional portrayals of masculinity. Unlike the oppressive and exploitative male figures in Sara's life, Jalal is depicted as genuine, kind, and supportive. His consistent actions such as regularly checking on Sara, offering her financial assistance, and providing emotional support, embody a form of masculinity that is compassionate and empathetic. Jalal's character stands in contrast to the patriarchal figures that dominate Sara's experiences. While others use power to control and victimize, Jalal uses his resources to uplift and assist. Jalal's behavior towards Sara serves as a narrative counterpoint to the toxic masculinity represented by characters like her father and Dario. Where her father is violent and irresponsible, and Dario is manipulative and abusive, Jalal's kindness and sincerity provide Sara with a semblance of stability and hope. His willingness to help without expecting anything in return highlights the novel's critique of patriarchal norms by showing the viability of a more egalitarian and supportive dynamic between genders. Through Jalal, Doublali explores the possibility of redefined gender relations based on quality (hooks 2004). Jalal's actions break the mold of traditional masculinity and present a model of how men can engage in positive, non-dominating ways with women. Furthermore, Jalal's supportive role illuminates the broader social critique embedded in the novel. Jalal's character suggests that breaking free from patriarchal norms is not only possible but also necessary for creating a more just and compassionate society. In this novel, Sara's journey also highlights another dimension of patriarchy, one in which women themselves are active participants in perpetuating patriarchal norms. Characters like Sara's grandmother and the Bulgarian girl (Doublali 2020, p. 96) who testified against Sara in the court exemplify how women also uphold and reinforce patriarchal ideologies and contribute to the systemic subordination of other women. Sara's grandmother represents the internalization of patriarchal values within the Moroccan context. Her adherence to traditional norms and her role in perpetuating them within the family structure emphasizes the deep-rooted nature of patriarchal beliefs. The grandmother's influence on Sara's upbringing and her support for patriarchal practices illustrate how these norms are passed down through generations and maintain their grip on society. Similarly, the Bulgarian girl's actions in court (Doublali 2020, p. 97) reveal how patriarchal ideologies transcend cultural boundaries. By testifying against Sara, she plays a part in reinforcing the oppressive structures that Sara is fighting against. This betrayal highlights the complex ways in which women can be complicit in upholding systems that disadvantage their own gender, whether consciously or unconsciously. The Bulgarian girl's role highlights the idea that patriarchal oppression is not confined to a single culture or society but is a pervasive issue that manifests in various forms across different contexts. Through these characters, Doublali emphasizes that patriarchy is a universal issue, constructed and sustained by diverse components and elements. By portraying women as both victims and enforcers of patriarchal norms, the novel presents a critique of how deeply embedded and widespread these systems are. The novel suggests that true liberation requires not only confronting external oppressors but also challenging the ingrained beliefs and behaviors that support patriarchal systems from within. Therefore, the novel profoundly embodies postcolonial consciousness, which inherently embraces plurality and polyphonic perspectives. The depiction of patriarchy as plural and diverse is a deliberate and significant element within this postcolonial framework. Patriarchy, as a concept, is abstract and complex, which makes it challenging to convey effectively to readers. To address this, the author uses various techniques to articulate and visualize the idea of patriarchy. One notable technique is personification, which Doublali uses to incarnate critical notions of patriarchy. Characters like the violent and irresponsible father, Abdelqader, and the exploitative criminal, Dario, serve as strong embodiments of traditional patriarchal values. Through these characters, Doublali gives tangible form to the otherwise abstract concept of patriarchy. Abdelqader represents the domestic sphere of patriarchal oppression. His violence and irresponsibility illustrate how patriarchal authority manifests within the family, negatively impacting those under its control. This characterization helps to highlight the intimate and personal dimensions of patriarchal power which shows how it operates within the home and affects the daily lives of women and children. On the other hand, Dario exemplifies the broader social and systemic aspects of patriarchal exploitation. As a wealthy and manipulative older man, his actions towards Sara, using her for his sexual pleasure and financial gain, emphasize the ways in which patriarchal structures extend beyond the family unit and into wider social and economic realms. Dario's exploitation of Sara highlights the intersection of patriarchy with issues of class, privilege, and sexuality (Anne 2000). By presenting these varied portrayals of patriarchy, Doublali emphasizes that it is not a monolithic or uniform system. Instead, it is a multifaceted and pervasive force that operates through different channels and affects individuals in diverse ways. This pluralistic depiction aligns with the postcolonial consciousness that the narrative seeks to embody, where multiple voices and experiences are recognized and validated. Sara's grandmother embodies Western patriarchy which reflects social norms that restrict women's autonomy and agency. Her testimony against the protagonist in court exposes the systemic barriers women encounter within legal and institutional frameworks. Her role highlights the ways in which patriarchy manifests through formalized channels of power that perpetuate inequality and injustice. Sara's grandmother, who represents patriarchy from the Moroccan side, adds depth to the narrative by exploring the dynamics between cultural traditions and gender roles. Her character deepens the examination of patriarchy and illustrates its impact on familial and social dynamics within a specific cultural context. The tragic fate of Sara's father, imprisoned (Doublali 2020, p. 58) and ultimately meeting his demise in jail, serves as a crucial reflection of the suffocating grip of patriarchy within the Eastern social framework. His imprisonment symbolizes the confinement of patriarchal ideals. Sara's inadvertent involvement in Dario's death (Doublali 2020, p. 80) emphasizes the

destructive nature of patriarchy, as individuals become entangled in its web of oppression and violence. Her actions, though unintended, carry profound implications for the narrative's exploration of gender dynamics and power struggles. The symbolic significance of jail as a representation of Eastern patriarchy and Dario's death as its fading presence in the Western world juxtapose contrasting manifestations of patriarchal systems. As embodiments of patriarchy, the characters in the novel shape the protagonist's worldview and frame the narrative's exploration of gender and power dynamics. Their interactions and experiences offer insights into the complexities of patriarchy and present both Eastern and Western perspectives on gender roles and social expectations. Through the narrator Sara, the author provides an alternative perspective on masculinity and offers a fresh lens through which to view Nicola, the kind-hearted Italian, and Jalal (Doublali 2020, p. 73-76), the noble Moroccan. Both characters, depicted as young individuals, symbolize a departure from traditional patriarchal norms and suggest a shift towards a more progressive and inclusive understanding of masculinity. Sara's narrative emphasizes the evolving attitudes of younger generations in which Nicola and Jalal are depicted as embodiments of a new breed of masculinity characterized by kindness, empathy, and cooperation. Through Sara's eyes, Nicola emerges as a gentle and caring figure. This challenges conventional notions of masculinity that prioritize strength and dominance. His kindness and compassion towards others stand in contrast to the rigid gender roles often associated with patriarchal societies. Similarly, Jalal is portrayed as a noble and helpful individual who defies stereotypes of masculinity rooted in aggression and machismo. The depiction of Nicola and Jalal as young men suggests a generational change in attitudes towards masculinity. This perhaps signals the gradual erosion of patriarchal ideals within contemporary society. Through introducing these characters as embodiments of a more progressive form of masculinity, the novel creates a narrative where gender roles are more fluid and inclusive. To avoid perpetuating orientalist (Said 1979) stereotypes of the oriental man as inherently violent, and likewise to steer clear of portraying the Western man as inherently corrupt (Lewis 1982), the author meticulously crafts a pluralistic perspective when delineating his characters. Sara's father, Abdelqader or Kader, finds himself disempowered. Ironically, his name, which in Arabic means "capable," serves as a mockery, as he is portrayed as incapable of anything but violence (Doublali 2020, p. 30). This irony is further emphasized when Kader is mockingly referred to as Kaouider (Doublali 2020, p. 7), a diminutive form of Kader, which is also a diminutive name for a mule (Doublali 2020, p. 26). The association of Kader with a mule, a creature traditionally linked with stupidity and violence in Moroccan culture, serves as a biting critique of patriarchal structures. Similarly, Dario Vallenti, whose name suggests goodness and talent in Italian, is revealed to have amassed his wealth through the exploitation and oppression of Sara. This juxtaposition highlights the author's critical examination of social norms and power dynamics and reveals the inherent contradictions within patriarchal systems. Through these characterizations, the author challenges simplistic representations of masculinity and power. Through presenting other Moroccan and Italian characters with complexity, the author avoids falling into the trap of reducing them to mere stereotypes based on cultural or ethnic backgrounds. Instead, he introduces characters such as Nicola and Jalal who problematize the image of patriarchy and emphasize a new form of masculinity. Through criticizing both Eastern and Western patriarchal practices, Doublali profoundly presents the double critique in Khatibi's words (Khatibi 2019).

5. Conclusion

In *Rihla ilā Ḥadā'iq Jahannam*, Sara's journey serves as a critique of patriarchal norms, contrasting her father's violent incompetence with her mother's strength. Sara's experiences shed light on the detrimental effects of patriarchal control which leads her to seek solace elsewhere, ultimately encountering characters like Dario Vallenti, who exploit and abuse her. Through Sara's relationships with men like Dario, the narrative exposes the systemic oppression and exploitation perpetuated by patriarchal systems. The character of Dario represents the intersection of power, privilege, and patriarchy, as he manipulates and exploits Sara for his own gain. His actions highlight how patriarchal domination extends beyond individual relationships and reinforces systemic inequalities and gender-based violence. Sara's descent into addiction and forced prostitution under Dario's control exemplifies the dire consequences of patriarchal oppression which illustrate the limited choices available to women within such systems. However, the introduction of Jalal offers a contrasting portrayal of masculinity, one characterized by kindness and support (Doublali 2020, p. 85). Jalal's actions serve as a narrative counterpoint to the toxic masculinity embodied by characters like Sara's father and Dario. His willingness to help without expecting anything in return presents a model of egalitarian and compassionate masculinity that challenges traditional patriarchal norms. Through Jalal, the novel explores the possibility of redefined gender relations based on equality (Johnson 2014) and support. His character offers hope for a future where men and women can engage in positive, non-dominating ways, breaking free from the constraints of patriarchal structures. By juxtaposing characters like Dario with figures like Jalal, the narrative critiques entrenched patriarchal values and advocates for more inclusive and equitable gender dynamics. Using migration as a central theme of the narrative, the author effectively presents a complex narrative of masculinity and navigates the world of patriarchy. Through exposing patriarchal practices from both Moroccan and Italian sides, Doublali presents a postcolonial consciousness that is aware of the Orientalist and Occidental images of Man and embraces a pluralistic standpoint that reflects a double critique.

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