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THE OTHER MOROCCO: HOW AMERICA PERCEIVES THE ORIENT

Abdelghani El Mitry
Mohammed I University, Faculty of Letters and Humanities (FLSH-UMP) CEDUC Laboratory, Oujda, Morocco
abdelghani.elmitry@ump.ac.ma
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Abstract

This paper examines the portrayal of Morocco in American culture throughout different historical periods. Its main objective is to provide a critical analysis of cultural encounters, particularly focusing on how the American perspective shapes the representation of Morocco as the "Other." The aim of this paper is not only to highlight the various textual and visual depictions influenced by Orientalist discourse used to represent the country and its people, but also to explore America's historical involvement in the narrative of Orientalism. The examination of American and Western perceptions of Morocco leads to a discussion on Edward Said's Orientalism, reconsidering some of its theoretical limitations. Specifically, Said's neglect of American Orientalist knowledge systems and the oversight of American fair exhibits in shaping popular Victorian perceptions of the Orient. The paper also addresses Orientalism's failure to critically engage with the agency of natives within an orientalized context and its limited exploration of how the Oriental Other, when displaced to the center, reacts and acts, as well as the implications of the Orient transitioning from the "Other" to the "Self" and from the margins to the center of the paradigm.

1. INTRODUCTION

European discourses have intricately controlled and influenced the identity and history of North Africa from the inception of the civilizing mission. Distortion or incorrect portrayal or "worse still, no representation at all has characterized the West's depiction of the colonized 'Other' in the archives of Western history" (Orlando, 1997). These misrepresented representations, along with a wide range of images, metaphors in text, and symbolic icons utilized in cultural contexts, became essential in upholding and advancing the West's establishment of a binary division between the 'Self' and the 'Other'. Similarly, this division ensured the persistence of fantasies and aspirations aimed at maintaining the weakness, submissiveness, and servitude of the oriental ruler. These stereotypical portrayals "have rooted themselves in Western culture, promoting stereotypes that remain prevalent even in post-colonial era" (Orlando, 1997).

Similar to their European predecessors, Americans have also embraced idealized and deeply conflicted stereotypes about North Africa. These cultural clichés often manifested in visual and

written depictions and significantly influenced the collective imagination of Americans. They contributed to the formation of influential mental frameworks that projected compelling images of the Oriental Other as decadent, foreign, and passively submissive, in need of the White's guardianship and America's "civilizing mission." According to Khalid Bekkaoui, in relation to the cultural discourse on Morocco in America, it is argued that "there has been an increasing interest in Western representation of Morocco in various genres" (Bekkaoui, 2008). Consequently, the exploration of Moroccan cultures gained popularity through travel accounts, American international expositions in the nineteenth century, where various aspects of Moroccan life were showcased in structures referred to as "Moorish Palace" or "Moroccan Pavilion," as well as through anthropological research and scholarly writings. These intricate intellectual commitments were not simple endeavours to acquire factual knowledge about Morocco. Instead, they significantly contributed to the continuous existence of Orientalist perspectives in multiple ways and disseminated assertions about Morocco and its inhabitants that reinforced the cultural and racial dominance of the white Self.

During the early nineteenth century, American travel narratives regarding the East experienced a substantial surge in popularity. The interpretive dimension of these diverse narratives held great significance, as authors conveyed their astonishment while documenting the landscapes and the "degenerate state of the local population" (McAlister, 2000), At the same time, they presented exaggerated and idealized portrayals of the land and its people. An often-disregarded text from the 19th century, recounting American experiences in Morocco, is Mark Twain's renowned travel epic The Innocents Abroad (1869) in which the "America's premier traveling spokesperson" (Melton, 2005) Provides his readers with a passage recounting his arrival in the Empire of Morocco. What might have lingered in the memories of American readers is not just the author's sarcastic humour and cynical remarks, the size of Tangier shops being "about that of an ordinary shower-bath in a civilized land" (Twain, 1869); but also, the strongly harmful stereotypes he associated with the indigenous people who "lived in the rudest possible huts, and dressed in skins and carried clubs, and were as savage as the wild beasts they were constantly obliged to war with" (Twain, 1869). The primary purpose of the mocking tone employed throughout The Innocents Abroad is to dehumanize the locals, portraying them metaphorically as objects and likening them to animals using "zoological terms."

Interestingly enough, as Reinaldo Silva contends, it is important to consider how Twain's

"portrayals of Otherness reflect a colonial mind at work. The man travelling on board of the Quaker City who sent letters to the Atlas California viewed himself as belonging to a superior culture and society as he came more in contact with Otherness." (Silva, 2003).

During his visit to Tangier, Twain deploys rhetorical tropes of "Othering" from the outset, and offers his readers glimpses of an "imaginative geography" that enhances his travel account with fantasy, subjectivity and individual reflection. Mark Twain's travel account helped so much in shaping nineteenth- century American views of the Orient as was unquestionably the case with international fair expositions that took place in various parts of the country at that time.

2. Morocco Through World Fairs or Exhibit Fairs:

Living exhibits, "human rarities", objects and cultural artefacts from Morocco and from different parts of the world were regularly put on display at international expositions known as world fairs or exhibit fairs. These were reordered and remodelled both to satisfy the concrete visual desires of the American public eager to encounter the romanticized splendour of the Orient and to act as a catalyst for the circulation of imperial ideas as well. Also, and as will be discussed later, they offer ample grounds to go beyond the temporal manifestations and geographical locations of Orientalist discourse as theorized by Edward Said in his Orientalism.

The first World's Fairs held in Europe –London (1851, 1862), and Paris (1855, 1867, 1889. 1900) – established standards that would continue at American World Fairs as well. Their influence soon became widespread and were very popular in America where there was a growing appetite for overseas expansion and imperial hegemony. The Philadelphia Centennial Exposition of 1876 was the first most remarkable of a series of American exhibitions and fairs. America's leaders of the time, namely President Ulysses S. Grant joined by the Emperor of Brazil during the Opening ceremony of the Philadelphia Exposition, and President Grover Cleveland who opened the Columbian Exposition (1893), and supported by Chicago officials who were prominent businessmen, politicians and civic leaders "used the occasion to flaunt the nation's rapidly accumulating wealth and to produce an ideal national self-image around which Americans could unite" (Maxwell, 1999).

The myth of progress, filtered to some extent through the display of Oriental fantasies for the Victorian audiences, was of vital significance at the turn of the century as American society was innovating, changing, and developing. This myth was enacted and reinforced in popular entertainment and leisure activities whereby performances that capitalized on Orientalist aesthetics highlighted tropes about the alluring sensuality of the Orient and "evoked Orientalist fantasies about traveling to distant exotic places and indulging sensual appetites" (Edwards, 2000).

The World's Fairs, showcasing the marvels of the world, played a dual role as promoters of the dissemination of the positive aspects of modernity and as bastions of civilization. Inextricably linked to this perspective was the notion that these exhibitions glorified colonial and imperial ambitions. Emerging as a dominant imperative, the world exposition became a grand spectacle that involved the gathering of people and artifacts to further imperial objectives and foster interactions within the context of the modern nation-state, ultimately constructing a distinct "cultural identity." One of the requirements "for the construction of [this] cultural specificity, particularly in relation to the development of the nation-state, was a concept of the cultural other, for these new […] routines and rituals of rule were frequently developed in relation to this imperialized or imperializing other." (Breckenridge, 1989)

By engaging with global exhibitions and international expositions, which must be interpreted within the framework of the "imperial setting" they represented, and within the concept of "commodity spectacle" (McClintock, 1995) during the era of imperialism around the turn of the century, people were presented with a variety of entertainment options. These activities prompted American fair visitors to adopt a shifted perspective on their own culture and distant lands, as well as on the indigenous populations and the objects they showcased.

The Fairs in the nineteenth century were part of a world-wide movement among the industrializing countries of the west, and developed into "elaborate mechanisms of cultural production, systems of representation on a grand scale [whereby] scenarios of a reductive presentation of different cultures generated easily apprehended, symbolic imagery" (Çelik & Kinney, 1990). In other words, they were powerful institutional expressions which revealed complex social and cultural growth while acting as display platforms as to how America and European countries viewed themselves in comparison with other countries at specific historical junctures.

The displays involved archaeological recreations and ethnographic inventions which exhibited the "fluidity of racist stereotyping and its centrality for re-constructing a racially-based American national identity" (Rydell, 2005). They were carefully ordered to articulate relations of power and reveal "a desire to enhance supremacy through representation" (Çelik & Kinney, 1990). They "set the patterns of national representation and provided the channels of cultural expression through which the knowledge produced by the expositions would be fashioned" (Çelik & Kinney, 1990).

Also, the world's fairs were influential enough in stirring up the curiosity of Americans to move beyond borders and discover cultural geographies that were once represented in various displays. Their importance, though staged as ephemeral events, turned to be one of the leading forces in shaping audiences' memories and images of foreign places and destinations. They contributed to the transatlantic movement of people and paved the way for those driven by the need to experience the exotic to venture into the continually shifting and forbidden foreign sights. Travel, hence, became increasingly popular and tourism flourished in the early beginnings of the twentieth century, opening up North Africa and its inhabitants to extensive encounters and interactions that contributed to what Mary Louise Pratt considers the global "planetary consciousness" through the construction and narration of travel experiences. Obviously, Morocco became an inevitable juncture of cultural interest and inquisitiveness to Americans.

Probably, the accounts to have appeared in early twentieth-century America about Morocco were those that featured Tangier massively in various newspapers after the 1904 incident about the captivity of Ion Pedicaris by Raisuli. One of these was published in The Desert Evening News in 1907. Frank G. Carpenter's The Land of Othello: Strange Features and Characters of a Mohammedan Stronghold narrates the experience of a newspaper correspondent in Tangier and invites the readers into a detailed description of the city and its people. Governed by an orientalist view, the text moves across various boundaries whereby the author surveys the city's landscape from " the citadel… near the Governor's

palace" before moving forward to take a close " look at some of the odd things in this land of Othello" where the "somber-faced Moors are going to and fro through the streets" and where "the faces of their Desdemonas" shall not be seen. The Othello syndrome, or what I have termed "the brown threat" is activated in various sexual and interracial encounters of Moroccan acrobats with American women as discussed in the section on Acrobats.

In 1917, and in an attempt to perform the ideological vocation of legitimizing the goals and philosophy of French expansionism in Morocco, General Herbert Lyautey officially invited the American novelist Edith Wharton to the yet safe and culturally comfortable “French Morocco”. Edith Wharton was dedicated to assisting the French authorities in the nation as “an unofficial propagandist and ‘spokesman’ for the French war effort and for France’s imperialist policies in North Africa” (Sensibar, 1999). In Morocco (1920) emerged from her time spent in an unfamiliar country and presents concise descriptions of Moroccan culture, while also providing profound insights into Wharton's perspectives on the concepts of self and Other. It is therefore impossible to dissociate Edith Wharton's In Morocco from the interconnected narratives of gender and empire that influenced her experiences during her stay in Morocco. Her engagements with various Moroccan environments hold great significance and take on symbolic significance when examined in light of the Orientalist ideologies that have long influenced the encounters of Western travelers.

3. Morocco the Exotic land:

American representations of Morocco from a different cultural register show how Morocco soon became an interesting location for America's "tales of Oriental splendor" and exotic ideas. Films such as Morocco (1930), Road to Morocco (1942), for example, engaged in processes of Orientalizing and exoticizing otherness; they were visually busy elaborating "orientalist portraits" of a fascinating land of wonders and magic. Their filmic "network narrative", to use Paul Kerr's phrase in his discussion of Babel (2006) (Kerr, 2010), included scenes of crude stereotyping triggered by essentialist renderings and fixed paradigms and patterns of thought whereby the country is reduced into a set of frozen images, and whereby the natives are shunted off to the backgrounds where their agency is denied and where their history is blurred.

The 1950s and early 1960s made Morocco, namely Tangier, an attractive site and an alternative destination for Americans dissatisfied with what Brian Edwards calls the US "dominant national narrative" (Edwards, 2005) of the cold war. Literary manifestations of expatriate figures living in "queer Tangier" such Jane Bowles, Paul Bowles, William Burrough, Tennessee Williams, to name but a few, and which were replete with an Oriental abundance of "freedoms" (sexual and intellectual) would help in shaping the counter culture of the 1960s whose main outcome would be the "Hippie Orientalism" as discussed by Brian Edwards (Edwards, 2005). Morocco turned out to be an attractive destination for young Americans seeking physical connections, sensual adventures and open use of drugs.

The instability of sexual boundaries between Self and Other in these encounters are constrained by the discursive implications of Orientalism, its illusionary stereotypes and its racist anxieties. Morocco for the hippies is an exotic timeless locale, “a place of escape, a pastoral retreat for contemplation” (Edwards, 2005) imbued with fantasies of desire; a

cultural space in which homoerotic expressions find an outlet, where the tourist's sexual identity is predominantly rejuvenated through encounters with the exotic "other" and also revitalized through interactions with far-off lands believed to be unconstrained by the norms of "civilized" sexual morality. The natives are concurrently mere objects of desire where the White's sexual experiences could be inscribed. This racial longing operates within the context of orientalist traditions that view "otherness" as both erotic and exotic, to be dominated and exploited by Westerners. Simultaneously, it operates against a backdrop of imposed colonialist stereotypes that portray the Other as hypermasculine, serving to fulfil the sexual desires of the colonizer (Hayes, 2000). It is within this context that Mrabet's text could be best conceptualized as will be discussed in my reading of his Look and Move On.

By mid 1960s until late 1970s, Morocco became also a "prestige zone" for American cultural anthropologists. Questions of self and other were at the heart of Paul Rabinow's Reflections on Fieldwork in Morocco (1977). His stated objective, and in a suggestive phrase he borrows from Paul Ricoeur, was to define the problem of anthropological interpretation upon which his books was based as "the comprehension of the self by the detour of the comprehension of the other" in the study of Sidi Lahcen Lyusi, a Marabout in Morocco.

According to Robert N. Bellah in his foreword, Reflections is an account of Rbinow's fieldwork experience in Morocco during 1968 and 1969 under the supervision of Clifford Geertz, and it is mostly "concerned with the enormous difficulties and complexities involved in the comprehension of the [cultural] other […] the project of the comprehension of the other has been motivated by a profound perplexity about the comprehension of the self" (Rabinow, 1977). His anthropological experiences in Morocco were meant to "break through the double-bind which had defined anthropology in the past" (Rabinow, 1977). What we get instead is a memoir about what it meant to live as an outsider with otherness; or as Brian Edwards has pointedly put it, Rabinow's work is "an intellectual autobiography" which is in part "an interrogation of the epistemology of cross-cultural encounters based on the author's experience in a small Moroccan village" (Edwards, 2005). Such experience in Reflections mobilized a "condensation of a swirl of informants, places and feelings" (Rabinow, 1977). to reconstruct a "set of encounters," as the author calls them; and has treated the people it was involved with as radically different, as culturally "alter", not to be understood as the Self should be, in order to fill the needs of the anthropological project. One of the main tenets of anthropology is that "If radical alterity did not exist, it would be anthropology's project to invent it" (Lewis, 1998). That's exactly what Reflections was busy doing via the informants and villagers it went through. Rabinow's undertaking invents its culturally constructed Other that is different from the Self to fulfill the epistemological demands of his anthropological thought.

Clifford Geertz is another cultural anthropologist who did extensive and longstanding fieldwork in Indonesia and Morocco, published in his Islam Observed in 1968. Geertz chose Islam as a subject of fascination to explore the dynamics of religious development in both countries. From the outset, Geertz's main objective is both to set forth "a general framework for comparative analysis of religion and to apply it to a study of the development

of a supposedly single creed, Islam, in two quite contrasting civilizations, the Indonesian and the Moroccan" (Geertz, 1986). He juxtaposes and compares both the traditional and the modern styles of religion that are characteristic of these distant and unconnected countries. Drawing upon his experience as anthropologist, and driven by anthropological desire to study and interpret the mystically colored Islam in Morocco, Geertz focuses on the popularly known figure of Sidi Lahsen al Yusi; a seventeenth century "religious scholar who has been transformed into an important Moroccan saint" (Geertz, 1986).

The focus on the deep-rooted power of the past visible enough in Maraboutism is what governs Geertz's and Rabinow's anthropological works. Both studies deal with the maraboutic shrine of Lyusi and both authors have remained in various degrees under such a strong spell of Islam. This makes us think of the whole range of fraudulent assumptions behind Western textual descriptions and inscriptions of Morocco in other genres such as travel writing which is more often than not motivated by a strong desire, clearly detectable in theses anthropologists' works, to experience the exotic and search for the radical otherness that would give the Self meanings and cultural legitimacy.

A point which seems more worthy of consideration is that both works, in dealing with Maraboutism, have produced a complex Moroccan religious geography of Saints' graves and Saints' cults that reduces the country into a frozen picture for a self-privileging Western gaze. Their interpretations are sealed within a tunneled vision of history whereby other meanings assigned to Marabouts are overlooked. In these writings, as well as in numerous other studies in anthropology, the primary emphasis lies on the mystical aspect and the perceived supernatural blessings and healings associated with the shrine. This focus tends to overshadow the diverse nature of Maraboutism as a space that encompasses various cultural forms and expressions originating from the marabout cult. Sidi Ahmed O Moussa, a revered saint in Southern Morocco, serves as an illustrative example, highlighting this notion. Apart from the saint's designated sacred status in theory, his followers have developed unique forms of performance and expressions that imbue maraboutism with significant cultural significance.

The lineage of most Moroccan acrobats who appeared in American entertainment industry could be traced back to the legacy of the marabout of the Oulad Sidi Ahmad O Moussa in the Southern part of the country. The followers of this mystic brotherhood introduced by Sidi Ahmad O Moussa al-Jazouli in the mid-Sixteenth century were bound together by strict loyal ties to their spiritual founder and followed his mystic doctrine, his religious preaching and his social rules. They rejected the peasantry mode of life and led a nomadic lifestyle, moving from village to another while developing an acrobatic tradition that was geared mainly towards earning a living and satisfying their needs for travel, discovery, and encounter with people inside and outside Morocco. The power they had received from their Saint transformed their itineraries from experts in therapeutic healings into dexterous and energetic performers in the arts of acrobatics, extending their skills beyond national borders to become indispensable novelties and exotic rarities for audiences on theatrical stages in America, Europe and Australia. These Moroccan acrobats were consistently praised in American newspaper reviews for their spectacles that showed physical strength and skills, vigorous pyramid-building and somersaults, superb elasticity and dexterity. Their

performance, as was reported, “cannot be compared to any act with which the American public is familiar because it is utterly unlike anything ever before seen in this country”. (Children of the Desert, Frankfort Roundabout- September 9th, 1989)

4. The Self Vs. the Other:

The understanding of the Self by the detour of the understanding of the cultural Other, as is the case in the American cultural anthropological enterprise pioneered by such figures as Clifford Geertz, Paul Rabinow, Vincent Crapunzano and other undertakings produces contexts of racial denigration and cultural boundaries as well as hierarchical relations of power which reduce otherness into a constructed set of Orientalist images where meanings are lost and where history, which is often transformed into recaptured mythological tales, is blurred and relegated to the backgrounds. Such history is often fashioned within self-reproducing structures of western assumptions which are superimposed on the country and on the people.

Another interesting work which is engaged in finding a cultural self through the detour of the cultural other, and which nonetheless remains an interesting contribution to the recurrent debate on Orientalism and its intricate grid of representations, is John Maier’s Desert Song: Western Images of Morocco and Moroccan Images of the West (1996). The author makes it clearer that “the quest for the other is as often as not a quest for the self, in these studies, though, both self and other are called into question” (Maier, 1996). As suggested in the book's title, Maier has attempted to reflect on Western representations of Morocco, more specifically America's ideas, images and stereotypes; and Moroccan representations of the West. He argues from the outset that the images that Morocco and America have of each other are epistemologically cohesive and common in the sense that both places happen to be “seen as marginal to the historically deep traditions that formed West and East” (Maier, 1996); Morocco being geographically in the “farthest west” of the Arab-Muslim world, and America being “on the margins of the west” until very recently.

While conceiving of both cultural locales to symbolize the binaristic cognitive paradigm of self and other, west and orient, the author selects his examples from an array of literary texts and filmic representations which cover a variety of historical junctures pertaining to both cultures. In mobilizing literary, anthropological, historical and psychological approaches to unveil the implied cultural concepts produced by Moroccan American cultures about each other, Maier offers a broad sketch of different forms of cultural production, including “modern and postmodern fiction and folktales, advertising copy and oral histories, travel literature and ethnographic studies” (Maier, 1996).

In dealing with western classical images held of the cultural Other, Maier starts with Virgil's The Arneid. The text, though not specifically about America's images of Morocco, turns, according to Maier, around the early orientalist fantasy of the Eastern woman, and by extension around the Orient, as mysterious and feminine. He then moves to discuss a set of American writers such Edith Wharton, Jane and Paul Bowles, and Elizabeth Fernea in order to disengage specific questions inherent in the understanding of the American Self through the detour of the cultural other. Needless to mention how the self in the works of these writers is positioned in various degrees within a complex western tradition of orientalist

representations and within the dynamics of western encounters with othereness that perpetuate racial hierarchies and relations of power.

To give a subversive twist to his undertaking by "opening the mouths of people who seemed to be silent because they did not write" (Maier, 1996), or accurately because they seemed to be silenced by the "epistemic violence" of western narratives, Maier brings into focus "texts produced by the "Orientals" themselves" (Maier, 1996). To this end, and using the metaphor of the mirror by which the Other also constructs itself in images, he devotes a chapter entitled "Insider Views: Five Moroccan Writers" to discuss a couple of more recent texts whose images of the West "reflect deep ambivalence about modernity, modernization and Westernization" (Maier, 1996). The Moroccan texts surveyed in this chapter are Abdelmajid Benjelloun's A Stranger (1947), Mohamed Berrada's Life by Installments (1979), Mohamed Choukri's Flower Crazy (1978), Leila Abouzeid's Divorce (1983) and Jilali El Koudia's Rolling Rubber (1990).

Now turning to a few methodological reservations about Maier's work, the most striking feature about the Moroccan texts he has chosen is that they do not fall within the scope of the work's discursive intentions and do betray the book's title as well. When the readers expect the author to critically read and scrutinize texts dealing with Moroccan images of America, given that the set of Western images of Morocco discussed in the first section of his book are basically American ones, they nonetheless feel betrayed by the author's inconsistency and unstable discussion in the portrayal of the sites of "heterogeneous axes of signification" (El-Outmani, Fall 97) in cultural discourse. In other words, Maier fails both to acquaint his readers with Moroccan texts dealing with Moroccan images of America and to offer a balanced discussion about how Moroccans understand and negotiate American modernity and Self as well. The texts evoked by the author are read against the background of how Moroccan writers represent their own culture and not America and Americans. Jamila Bargach, in an interesting review of Maier's Desert Song, reflects on the author's failure to offer a cross-cultural study of "both ends of the spectrum" and states that the inevitable question to be raised is that "in exploring only a single kind of image in Moroccan and American writers, isn't Maier then falling into the very trap from which he seemed to seek escape?" (Bargach, Aug. 1998) Certainly, the detour that Maier engages to understand the Self through otherness becomes a mere cultural "retour", or a discursive return, to textual production that further enhances tropes of the exotic and the mysterious Oriental Other. In seeking to understand the Western Self through the Other, Maier is already positioning himself within asymmetrical structures of power relations whereby the other is reduced into a mere object of study by an essentially American Self. In here, the author falls back in an unsuited manner into the Orientalist legacy and his argument becomes implicitly complicit with the Orientalist tradition of representation that has shaped the Western epistemological grounds of knowing the Other.

Prominent Moroccan writers of the postcolonial era, including Abdallatif Akbib, Youssouf Amine Elalamy, Sellam Chahdi, and Fatima Zahra Zriouil, among others, have made multiple visits to America for various reasons and have written about their experiences. Their literary works are rich with powerful situations and memories that provide insightful perspectives on a thought-provoking and problematic critique of the modern empire.

Through their writings, they aim to challenge and contest the American portrayal of "Otherness," thereby fostering a counter-consciousness. These authors endeavor to transcend both physical and imaginative boundaries in their narratives, creating a tension between the notion of "here" and "there."

Maier's project has overlooked a collection of Moroccan travel-inspired stories that explicitly delve into postcolonial themes. These narratives explore the revival of indigenous cultures and question historical and cultural accounts, which Maier has failed to acknowledge. He has, for example, failed to consider texts such as Abdelkrim Ghellab's Ṣaḥāfi fi Amirīkā [A Reporter in New York] (1960s), Mohamed Mrabet's Look and Move on (1976), Leila Abouzaid's Amirīkā, Al Ouajho Al- Akhar [America's Other Face] (1992). Hence, the Occidentalist approach that he invokes as "the reverse of Orientalism" (Maier, 1996) is simply obscured by the choice of texts discussed in the second part of his book. Though this approach creates a reproduction of a binary opposition which freezes cultural difference since it is essentially derivative of the power legacies that have characterized Orientalism, the author misses to reflect on its dynamics as a reactive discourse of resistance to classification which seeks to constructively question and negotiate the West's cultural and political hegemony.

American ethnographers saw Morocco as a favorable location for conducting ethnographic research. One instance is the publication of Deborah A. Kapchan's work in 1994 titled Moroccan Female Performers: Defining the Social Body in which she unravels the "artistic and bodily competences of the shikhat as they articulate some of the more powerful metaphors of Moroccan identity" (Kapchan, winter 1994). Her thought-provoking article eventually became an essential part of her comprehensive study Gender on the Market: Moroccan Women and the Revoicing of Tradition (1996). Kapchan draws upon extensive ethnographic research and immersive fieldwork that she initiated in the mid-1980s in Beni Mellal to interpret and read the "bodies" of dancing women in Morocco. According to her, these dancers "whose singing and dancing are central to all festivity, including rites of passage like marriage ceremonies and birth and circumcision celebrations" (Kapchan, winter 1994), serve as exemplars of the subversive female dancers within Moroccan society. Through her study, primarily based on personal interactions and analyzing conversations with the dancers, Kapchan presents diverse narratives surrounding women's performances in an Islamic society. Her work sheds light on the intricate negotiations of the performers' identities within discourses encompassing sexual liberation, societal marginalization, and moral notions of shame and honor.

In Gender on the Market, Kapchan presents a compelling examination of the Moroccan marketplace as a paradoxical space where linguistic and physical interactions intersect. This setting serves as a platform for the construction and firsthand experience of diverse discourses pertaining to gender, tradition, and values, all of which are intricately woven into the daily practices of women. The dynamics of such discourses, for Kapchan, "are apprehended in verbal and non-verbal gestures such as marketplace oratory, ritual behavior, gossip and storytelling, as well as in live and mediated entertainment" (Kapchan, 1996). In mobilizing and revoicing the artistic expressions and convictions within the traditional domain to sell their goods in the market, Moroccan women, "as pretty traders", are in

constant negotiation of gender boundaries and in continuous contestation of social categories. For kapchan, access of women vendors into the marketplace, as a "forum of transition", has enabled much of hidden discourses and practices about women to become revealed namely magical practices, discussions on sexuality, and women's bodies.

When revisiting Kapchan's contribution to the research on Moroccan female dancers, it appears that her primary focus aligns with that of many anthropologists who have explored Morocco. While her aim is to uncover the silenced perspectives of female performers and demonstrate how they challenge and exceed societal boundaries, Kapchan has, nevertheless, adhered to the confines of the traditional ethnographic narrative as a "textual appropriation of difference that rests upon a prior cultural appropriation through colonial contact" (Martin, 1992). This approach emphasizes and reinforces the exoticization of the subject matter as an object of representation in ethnographic research, while Kapchan's primary emphasis lies in rediscovering the voices of female performers within the binary framework of Orientalism's knowledge system that views the "the seamless space of representation in which [the] ethnographer writes" (Martin, 1992) as an overt manifestation of patriarchal systems, oppression, limitations on mobility, and subordination, Kapchan's work exposes these underlying structures. In doing so, her ethnographic approach aligns with Randy Martin's assertion that her research methodology transforms into "more problematic, more contingent, and more susceptible to contention and reformation, because it is constituted by difference rather than merely reflecting difference" (Martin, 1992).

Kapchan's work aligns with the implied ideas of established Western cultural patterns regarding identity and differences. It assumes the manipulation of discussions about women within the Orientalist approach to representation, which emphasizes defining female perspectives as manifestations of patriarchal control, suppression, and subjugation. However, it fails to deliver on its promise of genuinely comprehending Oriental women beyond the limitations imposed by tradition and the Orientalist framework. The narrative seems to homogenize Moroccan women's experiences within a single discourse that encompasses diverse social and sexual constructs, influenced and made complex by the ethnographer's perspective as a White American.

Obviously, writing from within Orientalist structures of representation, and while providing a folkloric view about the dancers and their performances, the historical dimension turns out to be latent in the author's ethnographic undertaking as she fails to read female performers' history beyond the Orientalist tradition of victimization and oppression. She also fails to pay attention to the movement of these dancers beyond borders at specific historical periods, namely their experiences in nineteenth and early twentieth century-American circuses and fair expositions. In so doing, and while endeavoring to narrate the efforts marshaled by these women to resist patriarchy by their access into "public discourse", the author overlooks the various possible ways of looking constructively at history beyond the mythical tropes of Orientalist discourse. Her ethnographic exercise also undermines the possibility of looking at emancipation as a Moroccan cultural discourse with complex discursive and cultural ramifications.

When examining archives of entertainment newspapers and amusement magazines from the 19th and early 20th centuries in America, one cannot help but be amazed by the presence of Moroccan female dancers like Torquia, Fadma, Rosina, Messouada, Zahar Ben Tahar, Zahra Kader, Fatima Wazzan, and others who were already performing as dancers and acrobats in various amusement venues across America. The historical and cultural significance of their experiences opens up discussions that challenge and complicate traditional historical assumptions about the roles and attitudes of Oriental women. Through their travels and performances in different places, Moroccan female performers raise important questions about how the Western representation of harem and patriarchy disregards any potential opportunities for self-liberation and empowerment for Oriental women. These performers embody narratives of progress and freedom of movement while simultaneously reinforcing the idea of emancipated individuals who venture out from their homes as independent beings. Their influence on Victorian women was profound. Those who were captivated by Oriental dancing shows adopted a Victorian femininity model inspired by Oriental women and pursued careers as professional Oriental dancers. They envisioned Oriental femininity and womanhood as symbols of self-empowerment, liberation, and unrestricted freedom.

The overlooked narratives of Moroccan female performers found in amusement magazines and newspaper archives provide valuable insights into the historical and cultural linkages between different identities: the Self and the Other, America and Morocco, the West and the East. Exploring the gender aspect of these connections sheds light on the discursive implications of the Orientalist ideology's paradigmatic structures, which construct Oriental women within hierarchical knowledge systems that render them silent, submissive, and powerless. The example of Moroccan women as traveling performers and their experiences transcending national boundaries becomes a powerful discourse challenging and subverting the notions of emancipation and independence. By showcasing their artistic talents and engaging in acrobatic performances alongside male partners, these dancers embody qualities that defy the entrenched Orientalist perspectives that deny Oriental women the agency to act and assert themselves beyond the confines of objectification and subordination within domestic spaces.

Deborah Kapchan’s work, which reinforces patriarchal frameworks that primarily define women in relation to men, diminishes the significant contributions of Moroccan female performers as active participants and interpreters of history. By operating within the remnants of Orientalist discourses and adopting a synchronic perspective that overlooks the historical context of the subject being studied, the author’s approach to ethnography has obscured the possibility of “unravel[ing] the tangled skeins” (Grame, Jan. 1970) of the historical background of Moroccan female travelers. Furthermore, her focus on the female dancers' bodies as symbols of complete cultural otherness has overshadowed her attempts to accurately reconstruct the unique aspects of the past and the transformative nature of Moroccan popular culture, particularly regarding the dancers' involvement in historical records. The primary drawback of Kapchan's article, therefore, is her inability to delve into the interconnected relationships between the overlooked history of the dancers as representations of transatlantic mobility, embodiments of freedom and autonomy, and their social and cultural significance in postcolonial Morocco.

In restraining her study to the "artistic and bodily competencies of the shikhat" and to the interference of female performers as entertainers in publically lifestyle and religious manifestations, like marriage observances, birth and circumcision ceremonies, Marabout's festivities, Kapchan fails to go beyond such folkloric view of Gender backgrounded within an Orientalist tradition. She, therefore, misses real opportunity to go back into history and look into the lives of a significant group of female dancers who undertook daring journeys to the West and whose voices have never been heard so far. These were mobile agents within the global entertainment industry. They had their own narratives, their own journeys and their own biographies that contest their inscription as mere ethnic objects used and abused by western narratives.

Within the same vein, with regards to the endeavor to excavate the previously unheard of narratives of Moroccans in the West, namely in America, and to my own knowledge, nothing has been written so far about the physical and epistemological journeys of Moroccan slaves and captives who appeared in America for various reasons and under different circumstances through different historical periods. Paul Baepler, the American literary historian, has paid particular attention to narratives by the enslaved American white captives in North Africa. His anthology includes nine narratives by male and female captives whose experiences revealed some earliest impressions about Barbary and which certainly "aided in constructing the boundaries of 'barbarity' and 'civility' as they came to define 'blackness' and 'whiteness' in the United States" (Baepler, 1999). Obviously, tales of Barbary captivity echoed the conflicting desires of American readers and fueled up their imagination with a myriad of images by which early Americans constructed the North African Islamic world.

What is evident about Baepler's undertaking is that in dealing with Barbary captivity, he has overlooked to mention the other roots and routes of North African captives into America, though he mentions in passing both Job Ben Solomon and Abd ar-Rahman as "Muslim survivors who have written or spoken their own stories" (Baepler, 1999). Captivity and enslavement were not exceptionally a Barbary's activity, they were a concentrated Western preoccupation as well. The archives of history are replete with Barbary names who endured western bondage in various ways. Euro-American and Muslim captives had been enslaving and ransoming each other for years. A number of Moroccan captives were held in America and were an integral part in the great Atlantic passage, but they were occluded in historiographical practice and almost nothing is left about their traces in the annals of history. As will be shown in the section about early Moroccan captives in America, Moorish slaves were exposed to profound interactions with the New World, initiating the earliest instances of cultural, historical, and religious exchanges with Native Americans.

The historical presence and contributions of Moroccan captives in the New World have often been overlooked in historical accounts, and there has been relatively little scholarly research tracing their physical journeys. For example, in an insightful work on The Atlantic Connection: 200 years of Moroccan American Relations 1786-1986 (1990), the editors have included all the major themes in the grand sweep of Moroccan-American history, but have overlooked to give the Atlantic paradigm an all-inclusive status by missing to mention

the contributions of Moroccan captives in the Atlantic passage. Of all the texts that talk about Moroccan-American involvement in piratical activities in Barabry in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, only one has mentioned the name of a Moroccan captive imprisoned with his fellow seamen. During the reign of Mulay Slimane, and around August 1803, "Lubaris succeeded in capturing an American Brig (Celia) near the Spanish coast; but he was taken by surprise by a U.S warship (Philadelphia) and made prisoner along with his one-hundred-man crew." (El Mansour, 1990) Lubaris and his crew were not shipped to America but ransomed and freed "in exchange for the liberation of an American vessel that was detained at Essaouira and renewal of the 1786 peace treaty" (El Mansour, 1990).

The experiences of captives discussed in my work are retrieved from American newspaper archives and documents. They concern individual voices that reached the New World in different ways; either in association with Spanish explorative endeavors and settlements, or unwillingly through captivity and enslavement during Western piratical activities in the Mediterranean. These archives uncover interesting facts about Moroccan captives' experiences in captivity and keep track of their mundane life beyond borders. They offer ample discursive terrains that would help in reordering national and western historical records, in exploring the complex inscriptions and transcriptions of representation within the paradigmatic structures of power relations between Self and Other, West and the rest, and in interrogating the left-out "fragments" of history. In his archaeological and genealogical undertaking of discourse, Michel Foucault contends that history in the knowledge-power nexus is conceived of as discourse that delineates truth as a complex series of statements of power. His approach is based on the fact that history is a discursive phenomenon; a discontinuous practice made up of breaks and of "a multiplicity of discursive elements" (Foucault, 1984) that are "juxtaposed to one another, follow one another, overlap and intersect, without one being able to reduce them to a linear schema" (Foucault, 2002). The main Foucauldian premise consists of "the idea that history is discontinuous, the argument that a given period is better understood as a site of conflict between competing interests and discourses than as a unified whole, and the redefinition of the role and function of power" (Malpas & Wake, 2006). This view of history as discourse, or as set of discursive modalities enmeshed in struggles over power and representation, is what postcolonial critics have deployed to question the grand narratives of western modernity and subvert the legacies of "Occidocentric universalis", as the Australian anthropologist Patrick Wolfe puts it, in order to retrieve the forgotten voices that western historical episteme has obscured for long.

5. Conclusion

The crucial task of recontextualizing the past to recover the voices and experiences of marginalized identities and histories holds immense significance for the postcolonial project. Following the seminal work of Edward Said's Orientalism, a highly influential text in the field of postcolonialism, postcolonial theory has increasingly emphasized the examination of representation within colonial discourse and the agency of native individuals; on how "Europe has perceived and described its 'Others', and how that process itself is symptomatic of a binarist cognitive paradigm that purportedly informs all European thinking" (Van Wyk, 1993). Furthermore, postcolonial theory has also extensively explored the processes through which

postcolonial nations have constructed "various discursive strategies to resist this process as well as to advance [their] own recuperative project" (Van Wyk, 1993).

Therefore, the criticism of modernity and its tendency to employ essentialist narratives continues to be central to the field of Postcolonialism as an area of scholarly inquiry. As Bill Ashcroft and Helen Tiffin assume, "Postcolonialism […] is a sustained attention to the imperial process in colonial and neo-colonial societies, and an examination of the strategies to subvert the actual material and discursive effects of that process" (Ashcroft et al., 1995). The processes of decolonization in the realms of art, literature, and culture "have involved a radical dis/mantling of European codes and a post-colonial subversion and appropriation of the dominant European discourses" (Tiffin, 1995), with the objective of reclaiming the ability of marginalized cultures to represent themselves and reshaping both the European history and the intellectual traditions of the Western world. In his essay on "Postcoloniality and the artifice of History", Dipesh Chakrabarty explores the interconnection between the narrative of history and the concept of the nation-state with Europe and America remaining the "sovereign, theoretical subject of all histories" (Chakrabarty, Winter 1992).

The act of critically examining the dominant theories of history and challenging the underlying assumptions of grand narratives sparks a discussion about the complex connections between discourse, history, society, and power. This approach, influenced by Foucauldian ideas, played a crucial role in the emergence of postcolonial consciousness as a form of critical praxis that "displays an anti-essentialist concern with the social construction of knowledge and identity, and the machinations of knowledge and power" (Clayton, 2002). Therefore, the central objective of Postcolonialism as a critical standpoint is to re-examine, redefine, and reinterpret the entrenched Western epistemological frameworks within "hegemonic centrist systems" present in modes of representation. This approach aims to disrupt the exclusionary binaries created by the deliberate historical amnesia of the West and amplify the voices of those traditionally marginalized in historical narratives. By challenging the Eurocentric biases in historical writing, this endeavour seeks to critically revisit overlooked historical narratives and subaltern cultures that have been subject to distortion, domination, and displacement by Western humanism.

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Author's bio

Abdelghani El Mitry is a Ph.D. candidate at the Faculty of Letters and Humanities (FLSHUMP)CEDUC Laboratory in Oujda, Morocco. He got an MA in cultural studies and a TEFL degrees respectively from Sidi Mohammed Ben Abdellah University in Fes and ENS-Med V University in Rabat, and is a high school EFL teacher in Guercif. Academic interests: African American literature, cultural studies, ecocriticism, and education.