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# Tourism and Representation: Digital Expressions and Implications of Orientalism

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Tourism and Representation: Digital Expressions and Implications of Orientalism

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**Abstract**

As the tourism industry in Morocco expands, so does Morocco's online presence. Digital representations of Morocco are often written by and geared toward Westerners; these are often projections of an imagined Morocco, one that is informed by Orientalist conceptions of the Arab/Islamic countries. This study aims to analyze a selection of online articles about touring Morocco in an effort to determine how the underlying Orientalist attitudes in these pieces fit into a larger narrative of exploitation and Western dominance.

*Keywords:* History, Peace & Social Justice, Sociology

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**Table of Contents**

<b>Abstract</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Acknowledgements</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Methodology</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Literature Review</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Content Analysis</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>References</b>	<b>28</b>

## Tourism and Representation: Digital Expressions and Implications of Orientalism

### **Introduction**

The history of tourism in Morocco is one of colonialism, forced assimilation, and appropriation. From the early days of the French protectorate to modern day Marrakesh, developments in the industry are ongoing-the Moroccan government's "Vision 2020" anticipates a whopping 20 million tourists by the beginning of the next decade. It is the follow-up to "Vision 2010", which reached its goal of over 10 million tourists in 2016 (Kingdom of Morocco Ministry of Tourism, 2017). With the number of visitors per year on a steady incline and investments being made by both the state as well as private companies, Morocco's online presence has gained significant notoriety.

From Pinterest to Instagram, Morocco has garnered serious attention; pictures of souks, camels, and scenic vistas advertise different "must-see" destinations and offer tips on everything from what to eat to what to buy. It's a virtual deluge of thin, white women in tunics and wearing hats, usually posing in front of doorways or shops. Otherwise, the pictures lack people altogether; they feature empty medina streets, towers of spices, piles of rugs. One is sure to come across the occasional camel-a trip to Morocco is surely incomplete if it does not include a personal encounter with a camel. The increase in online attention is, in many ways, a positive thing. Tourists have access to more information about the country than ever before-facts about its history, culture, and communities are available to anyone with a browser. Whereas just fifteen years ago, one would have had to track down dozens of books, references, encyclopedias, and

maps; today, the process of learning new things has been streamlined significantly. That is, ultimately, one of the most powerful aspects of the age of digital media.

Nevertheless, unlimited access comes with its share of problems as well; I believe that one of these problems lies in the ways in which Orientalist ideology is proliferated in the modern world. Edward Said defines Orientalism as

...the discipline by which the Orient was (and is) approached systematically, as a topic of learning, discovery, and practice. But in addition I have been using the word to designate that collection of dreams, images, and vocabularies available to anyone who has tried to talk about what lies east of the dividing line (Said, 1978, p. 73).

He argues that the distinction between East and West (what he refers to as “imaginative geography”) is a European construct that penetrates all disciplines interacting with the Orient including political, intellectual, and economic. The distinctions historically served to promote European supremacy and justify the colonization and exploitation of “Orientals”, a term Said uses to refer to Arab/Islamic countries in the Middle East and North Africa.

The internet creates a new and improved medium for broadcasting Orientalism; information is shared and consumed at remarkable speeds; almost anyone can contribute to ever-growing discourses on any topic. In a society where first-hand experience is often conflated with expertise, social media amplifies voices on a whole new scale with little regard for credibility or positionality. It’s time to have a conversation about the responsibilities of online platforms to critically engage with content, to use digital spaces to challenge preconceived ideas about the world around us.

In this paper, I take a critical look at five articles written by and for tourists in Morocco in order to determine whether or not they promote Orientalist ideologies and if so, what the

implications of those ideologies are. I argue that the perpetuation of Orientalist dogma in the modern world, with all of its claims to globalism and progressivism, serves much the same purpose as it always has: to uphold Western political, economic, and social dominance over Arab/Islamic countries and people.

### **Methodology**

Turning to the methodology of this study, I chose to utilize a historico-conceptual research approach, relying heavily on texts and online source materials. I conducted an interview as a means of gathering evidence from a reliable source. Professor Mokhtar Bouba studies indigenous issues in Morocco and teaches with the SIT Graduate Institute. I was introduced to Professor Bouba through a mutual acquaintance. Corresponding through email and later by Skype call, our conversation centered around the role of tourism in the Moroccan (social and fiscal) economy and the images associated with tourism in the West. His commentary on the significance of exotification and exploitation provided key insight for my research.

Reaching out to colleagues and academic professionals, I received literature recommendations, among them Edith Wharton's 1919 travel account *In Morocco* and F. Robert Hunter's 2010 essay "Manufacturing Exotica: Edith Wharton and Tourism in French Morocco, 1917–20". These recommendations, along with my interview with Professor Bouba, helped to inform the focus of my work. Throughout this study, I reference Edward Said's *Orientalism*, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's "Can the Subaltern Speak", Arjun Appadurai's "Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy", and Claudio Minca and Rachele Borghi's



“Morocco: Restaging Colonialism for the Masses”. The utility of these texts is detailed further in the literature review section of this paper.

Conducting research on epistemic modalities required me to develop the following binary procedure: firstly, to search for definitions and examples of Orientalism and its effects in the aforementioned texts, secondly, to identify instances of Orientalist ideology being espoused in articles related to tourism in Morocco. These articles were collected through a Google search of the phrase “going to Morocco”. I analyzed the first five results: World Nomad’s “5 Things I Wish I Knew Before Going to Morocco”, Huffington Post’s “What You Need to Know Before Travelling to Morocco”, Nomadic Matt’s “9 Ways to Stay Safe and Sane in Morocco”, Local Adventurer’s “21 Things You Must Know Before Visiting Morocco Travel Tips”, and USA Today’s “7 things you need to know before going to Morocco”. I used the information gathered in the former component not only to critique the language observed in the latter, but also to understand the historical processes that culminate in this type of rhetoric and its effects.

Prior to beginning my research, I assumed that this critical endeavor would be a linear one; intending to draw upon tried and true academic literature, I was under the impression that these theories were portable. Indeed, many have proven to be very helpful to me in the course of my research, but to approach a study without regard to the context in which the research will be conducted is dangerous, particularly in a postcolonial country. I quickly found that my findings would not be linear, but rather would circumscribe themselves, history and theory woven together, circling a point which would become my conclusion.

## Literature Review

In his 1978 *pièce de résistance*, Edward Said quotes renowned marxist Antonio Gramsci's posthumous exposition *Prison Notebooks*, "'The starting-point of critical elaboration is the consciousness of what one really is, and is 'knowing thyself' as a product of the historical process to date, which has deposited in you an infinity of traces, without leaving an inventory.'" *Orientalism* is a consummate representation of this existential imperative; aimed at Western society and armed with over 500 years of historical evidence, Said takes on the role of plaintiff, lawyer, judge, and jury in his comprehensive critique on European imperialism, coloniality, and iterative ontology. He offers his piece to academics, politicians, economists, anthropologists, philosophers; the bastions of Europe are harangued in perfect prose for the creation, dissemination, and elaboration of Orientalism.

Orientalism is the way in which people know, and come to know, about "the Orient", specifically Arab/Islamic countries. At the center of the study lies a critical element of Said's argument: the formation and preservation of a false-hierarchical binary between "Oriental" and "Occidental". Whereas the West is conceived of as rationality, power, masculinity; the East is "strangeness", "difference", "exotic sensuousness".

To the Westerner, however, the Oriental was always *like* some aspect of the West...the Orientalist makes it his work to be always converting the Orient from something into something else: he does this for himself, for the sake of his culture, in some cases for what he believes is the sake of the Oriental (Said, 1978, p. 67).

The Orient is subject to the linguistic and cultural competencies of Orientalists, thus manifesting definitions of entire civilizations based on how they are like or unlike Europe.

Said goes on to outline the history of Orientalism, beginning in the 14th century with the Church Council of Vienne's decision "to establish a series of chairs in 'Arabic, Greek, Hebrew, and Syriac at Paris, Oxford, Bologna, Avignon, and Salamanca (Said, 1978, p. 50).'" He traces Europe's academic and political encroachment upon the region and how geography comes to be imbued with notions of "otherness". Much of his historical analysis is punctuated by literature, both academic and commercial, published by Orientalists, including D'Herbelot's *Bibliothèque Orientale*, Nerval's *Voyage en Orient*, Scott's *The Talisman*, Lane's *Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians*, to name a few. These references emphasize the far-reaching consequences of Orientalist doctrine and the ways it builds upon itself, cementing opinions and observations into self-referential, discursive reality.

The Orient needed first to be known, then invaded and possessed, then re-created by scholars, soldiers, and judges who disinterred forgotten languages, histories, races, and cultures in order to posit them-as the true classical Orient that could be used to judge and rule the modern Orient (Said, 1978, p. 92).

This is the history of how Europe came to exploit the near East in an effort to solidify political power and assert economic dominance over its neighbors. It is the history of white supremacy, of eurocentrism, of the self-aggrandizing condescension with which Europe interacted with Arab/Islamic countries and peoples. It is also a history of philology, where do our words come from, and semiotics, what do our words represent. The answer to these questions are the foundations for this study: by what modes have these ideologies been handed down? What limitations are there on a person's capacity to understand a place, its history, or even another human being? Is it possible to extract oneself from this colonized-colonizer paradigm? Where

are the ethics in cross-cultural interaction? Said's text informs many of the conclusions I come to about the nature of cultural authenticity, the colonizer's positionality, and hope for reciprocity.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's "Can the Subaltern Speak" is an exhaustive assessment of the role of the "Subject" in modern Europe, analyzing the relational processes of power, desire and interest. The piece begins with a comprehensive critique of 20th century champions of critical theory Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze. Spivak problematizes their inadequate theoretical interaction with the Subject and moves through international division of labor and Marxian notions of class consciousness toward an answer to the question "can the subaltern speak?" The text recalls the British imperialist project in India and its interpretation of Hindu legal codes. The abolition of widow sacrifice, *sati*, by the British in 1829 is Spivak's central example of colonizer speaking for-or, rather, silencing-the subaltern class. Before investigating the consequence of this point, let us first return to the definition of subaltern: "difference from the elite." Spivak includes in this taxonomy an intermediary group, "the buffer group, as it were, between the people and the great macrostructural dominant groups (Spivak, 1988, p. 284)."

The text points out the distinction between indigenous elites and the subaltern on numerous occasions so as to not confuse an individual's being a member of a colonized group with being subaltern. I return to this distinction to clarify the intended subject of my argument; whereas Orientalist rhetoric harms Arab/Islamic communities (countries, enclaves, entities seeking representation [or re-presentation]) as a group irrespective of class status, the subaltern subject is disproportionately affected in its lack of discursive (as well as political, economic, historical) authority. My analysis expands on how indigenous elites in Morocco benefit from tourism strategies that promote Orientalism and colonial nostalgia.

My proposal centers around the idea that the Moroccan subaltern subject (or rather, to compensate for the ever-evolving exchange between nationality and ethnicity, the subaltern subject living in Morocco) endures the consequences of these (ultimately essentialist) attempts at representation. Historical and colonial roles act as a dual sieve; even as the (Western) Intellectual attempts to articulate material conditions, observations, interactions; they are incapable of communicating objectivity. Bound by the same inability to separate historical biases from information and obliged to assign meaning to the unfamiliar, the Westerner at the receiving end of the Intellectual's discussion further diminishes the content. Western knowledge of the Orient is predicated on "...a category that allows one to see new things, things seen for the first time, as versions of a previously known thing (Said, 1978, p. 58)." Therefore, irrespective of intent, Western production of the subaltern subject (or the conditions in which they live) are invariably incomplete, distorted, problematic.

Indeed, the concrete experience that is the guarantor of the political appeal...is disclosed through the concrete experience of the intellectual, the one who diagnoses the episteme. Neither Deleuze nor Foucault seems aware that the intellectual within socialized capital, brandishing concrete experience, can help consolidate the international division of labor (Spivak, 1988, p. 275).

"Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy", written by Arjun Appadurai, coins the term mediascape and offers the following description,

...[mediascapes are] image-centered, narrative-based accounts of strips of reality, and what they offer to those who experience and transform them is a series of elements (such as characters, plots and textual forms) out of which strips can be formed of imagined lives, their own as well as those of others living in other places (Appadurai, 1999, p. 224).

Along with ethnoscaples, technoscaples, financescaples, and ideoscaples; mediascaples shape (and are shaped by) global exchanges and influence the ways in which people construct and interact with what Benedict Anderson termed “imagined communities”. Appadurai’s thesis explores the ways in which (social, political, technological, fiscal) capital moves through the disjunctures that exist between the *scapes*, offering a more complex understanding of the ever-expanding global cultural economy. Online travel blogs are an example of mediascape cyclically influencing and being influenced by ethnoscape. My analysis is built on Appadurai’s theory; his conception of interconnectivity as fluid and constantly shifting expands my argument from a critique of travel blogs as an isolated form of media to a investigation of the larger implications of Western mediascaples.

### **Content Analysis**

To begin, I take a look at the history of tourism in Morocco. Claudio Minca and Rachele Borghi briefly discuss this history and its modern-day implications in their essay “Morocco: Restaging Colonialism for the Masses”. Ushered in with the French Protectorate in 1912, General Marechal Herbert Lyautey established Moroccan tourism was both a means of advertising the success of the French in securing compliance from the Moroccan people as well as a justification for continued “[military] stabilization” (2009, p. 26). The success of the industry relied on swift expansion of roadways and railways, both of which were essentially non-existent in the country pre-French occupation. Within a matter of years, trains and cars were moving between the imperial cities, opening up the way for tourists to explore areas that had been inaccessible prior. American author Edith Wharton capitalized on the opportunity to write a

narrative about her travels through Morocco in 1917. Welcomed by General Lyautey, Wharton moved from Tangier to Marrakesh, stopping in Rabat, Salé, Meknès, Fès, and Moulay Idris. Shortly after her visit, a number of foreign-authored Moroccan guidebooks were published, each adhering to a specific brand of Orientalism: that of hyper-exotification and classical nostalgia. Wharton's book followed suit.

More than any other writer, Edith Wharton embedded these ideas in the minds of American and British readers, and doubtless drew many new travellers to Morocco's shores. Wharton's gift of imagination, her power of observation, and her brilliant expository skills gave these ideas force and clarity, and her considerable reputation lent them authority (Hunter, 2010, p. 76).

Subsequently, commercial developments in some of the larger cities such as attracted a growing number of eager spectators; tourism continued to prosper through the years of occupation. After gaining independence in 1956, the Moroccan government invested in strategies to promote tourism, including developments along the Mediterranean coastline, partnerships with international hotel companies, and "open air agreements" with European airlines.

By and large, the Moroccan authorities came to the realization that...the country's real attraction was still very much its colonial legacy, with its corollary of exotic and Orientalist images that had not yet been 'exploited' in all their potential (Minca and Borghi, 2009, p. 31).

Today, tourism is the second largest contributor to the Moroccan economy and the second largest job sector (Kingdom of Morocco Ministry of Tourism, 2017). The ministry of

tourism reports that the total number of visitors reached 10.33 million by the end of 2016; this number is expected to rise in 2017.

As stated previously, as tourism in Morocco increases, so too does Morocco's online profile garner more attention. My Google search of the phrase "going to Morocco" yielded 59,400,000 results. I look at the first five. Result number one comes from a travel insurance agency called World Nomads. The company website hosts articles about a wide range of different topics—from tricks offered by veteran travellers to country profiles to advice on luggage safety. The article I analyze is titled "5 Things I Wish I Knew Before Going to Morocco". Lining the page are article suggestions; it appears that "X-Number-of-Things-I-Wish-I-Knew-Before-Traveling-to-Y" is a popular structure for pieces on this website. Replace "Morocco" (with Myanmar, Egypt, Australia, Fiji, Kenya, just to name a few) and find an almost identically structured article. The remainder of my analyses would prove that this pattern is not confined to a specific web domain.

At the top of the page is a sub-header reading "Morocco might just be a short trip away by ferry or by one of the many budget airlines from Spain, but it's a different world culturally. (Sylvester, 2015)." It is here that I would like to return to Edith Wharton's *In Morocco* briefly; published in 1920, the book is widely regarded as an Orientalist text for, among other reasons, its blatant exotification of Morocco and its citizens (Hunter, 2010). Only three pages into the narrative, Wharton remarks "Hardly has the rock of Gibraltar turned to cloud when one's foot is on the soil of an almost unknown Africa (Wharton, 1920, p. 3)." Take note of the similarities between these sentences; firstly, the structure. They begin by referencing Spain and the relatively short distance separating it from Morocco. This observation is followed by their first description



of Morocco; one must consider the lexical implications of “almost unknown Africa” and “different world culturally” in the Moroccan context. In many ways, the legacy of imperialism lives on through language. Continuing to rely on phrases that reproduce a narrative of immutable difference between East and West encourages the West to perceive Morocco and Moroccans as other.

“It is enough for ‘us’ to set up these boundaries in our own minds; ‘they’ become ‘they’ accordingly, and both their territory and their mentality are designated as different from ‘ours.’ (Said, 1978, p. 54)” The danger here is not exaggerating difference, it is the maintenance of false hierarchical binaries between Occident (i.e. Europe and the United States) and Orient. It is the creation of an omnipresent “otherness” and the ways in which Westerners have been socialized to approach difference with condescension and, historically, violence.

Directly below this scripture is a scenic photo of camel-riders in the Moroccan Sahara (variations of this photo appear on almost every site I visit for this study), followed by a blurb that reads

The regular stereotypes of Europe vanish quickly, replaced by a hybrid of Africa and Islam. Whether you visit the star studded cosmopolitan Casablanca, or head inland to the great imperial city of Marrakesh, you will enjoy the same scene as visitors have for centuries (Sylvester, 2015).

For an article claiming to promote advice that previous tourists gained only from first-hand experience in Morocco, the author thus far has made no effort to depart from traditional Orientalist ideas about the country. The unchanging, mystical, land-before-time rhetoric employed here has its foundations in the same Orientalist doctrine that saturates Western understanding of modern Arab/Islamic countries.

“Orientalism assumed an unchanging Orient, absolutely different (the reasons change from epoch to epoch) from the West. And Orientalism, in its post-eighteenth-century form, could never revise itself (Said, 1978, p. 96).” Its significance is in the epistemological neutralization of Arab/Islamic countries and the people that live in them, which culminates in the construction of a flaccid Orient, specifically a flaccid Morocco, that can be negotiated and exploited with ease.

The piece goes on to articulate the following five tips: find a trustworthy guide, refrain from showing people the bottom of your feet, make sure to wear appropriate clothing (this piece of advice was directed toward women specifically), not to haggle, and not to drink tap water. The author provides no practical geographical information, no historical background, no recommended sites to see. In a feature that dedicates three out of its five tips to naming things tourists must avoid while in Morocco, noticeably absent from the narrative presented is guidance about how to interact with Moroccans socially. In fact, the piece lacks any meaningful reference to actual Moroccan people whatsoever. The author only mentions Moroccans twice: first as prospective tour guides and later as “almost all...friendly and honest...be careful about pickpockets and petty thievery, in the major cities (Sylvester, 2015).” It would appear that the citizens of this country exist as either tools at the disposal of tourists or as threats. These archetypes have material consequences; narrow conceptions of the humanity of Moroccans affect the ways Westerners interact with and relate to the citizens of this country. Professor Mokhtar Bouba recalls the image of French soldiers in pre-independence Morocco, one not so far removed from images of tourism we see today.

...we still have French people; they have similar vehicles, similar costumes- their guns are replaced by cameras, but we still use words like shoot...The image of those tourists and

the soldiers is the same. They are speaking the same language, they come from the same background, practice the same culture, they still look at people from a superior standpoint, they look down upon people, pay them money to do things for them. They are still the authority of that specific cultural space. They combined their presence as white men, their authority gained from colonialism, their ability to contribute to the economy-they use all of that for their own gains.

Visually, culturally, and behaviorally; Westerners in Morocco have benefitted from the French colonial regime and the roles it imposed on foreign and Moroccan subjects alike. “5 Things I Wish I Knew Before Going to Morocco” makes no effort to challenge these roles, and indeed, preserves them.

The next article is titled “What You Need to Know Before Traveling to Morocco”, hosted by Huffington Post. This piece presents a more practical array of tips, including vaccination recommendations, language information, and facts about obtaining a visa. The author doesn’t engage in scare-tactics; instead, examines many of the nuances of Moroccan culture, people, and cuisine. This is a wide departure from the essentialist tone of the previous example; nevertheless, this no-nonsense, information-packed post conveys Orientalist sentiment in its discussion of *Aissawa*, a religious ceremony, which it describes as “basically a Sufi rave” (Evelyn, 2014). Developed in the 15th century, *Aissawa* is a sect of mystical Sufism endemic to Western North Africa. Describing it as a “rave” to a Western audience invokes images of drunken partying and drug usage. Associating those ideas with a religious ceremony undercuts its spiritual significance.

Furthermore, framing a sacred tradition as a site of potential voyeurism perpetuates the idea that Morocco exists for tourists, that everything about the culture and its people is accessible

and available to everyone who comes here. To enter a space believing that one has an inalienable right to possess it is to assume the quintessential colonial perspective. “What [Orientalist rhetoric] is trying to do...is at one and the same time to characterize the Orient as alien and to incorporate it schematically on a theatrical stage whose audience, manager, and actors are *for* Europe, and only for Europe (Said, 1978, p. 72).” The ceremony is stripped of its significance-or else imbued with exotified ideas about Islam-and offered up as a spectacle, thus allowing the Western traveller to sample exotica without ever having to critically engage with the elements of their positionalities that allow them to occupy that space.

“9 Ways to Stay Safe (and Sane) in Morocco” is the third result of the Google search and perhaps the most unsettling in its presentation of Moroccans. The entire article is dedicated to the author’s experience interacting with people in Morocco; from beginning to end, he recalls instances of harassment on behalf of Moroccans he encounters in the Fes medina.

...Morocco is more intense than your average destination due to the sheer number of people who will give you unwanted attention. It takes a lot of energy to always be on your guard in a place where the simple act of asking for directions often leads people asking for money (“The Aissawa Trance Ritual Revealed”, 2009).

Despite the fact that his experiences were confined to the Fes medina, this author finds it appropriate to draw broad generalizations about Morocco and its people as a whole. His list of tips is written completely in negative form; he offers no affirmative advice on what people *can* do proactively to maintain their health and safety in-country. He goes on to expound the advantages of travelling by organized tour versus alone, recommending that visitors do not plan solo trips to Morocco. His perspective is a model for modern-day xenophobia and imperialist

sentiment. He states “Even after a decade of travel, I found myself wishing I had a companion to share the mental burden and wanting to scream, ‘Leave me alone so I can just enjoy your country!’”

“Leave me alone so I can just enjoy your country”. The physical separation of a people from the space they inhabit is a tenet of colonialism, one that most people recognize clearly when they see it. What about the symbolic expulsion of a people from a space? That, surely, bears a resemblance to a physical act. What about discursively separating Morocco from Moroccans, perhaps excluding them from the conversation aside from noting their “badgering” and “pestering”. The brave adventurer is faced with a critical imperative: in order to preserve one’s imagined Morocco, strange and exotic and teeming with ancient possibilities, one must invent the separation, or else the colonial illusion vanishes. It is reminiscent of a letter written by Gérard de Nerval,

I have already lost, Kingdom after Kingdom, province after province, the more beautiful half of the universe, and soon I will no of no place in which I can find a refuge for my dreams; but it is Egypt having driven out of my imagination, now that I have sadly placed it in my memory (Said, 1978, p. 100).

Both men prefer an Orient of the past, one that does not think or speak or act for itself; one of empty streets and shadowy figures, ornate monuments and the lingering scent of spices. “A certain freedom of intercourse was always the Westerner’s privilege; because his was the stronger culture, he could penetrate, he could wrestle with, he could give shape and meaning to the great Asiatic mystery... (Said, 1978, p. 44)” The vocabulary here is important; penetrate, wrestle with, shape: the sexual imagery being invoked is not coincidental. The imagery of a virgin land, one overflowing with mystery and sensuality, very much fits into the historical

narrative of white men claiming what does not rightly belong to them. I wonder, what shape does NomadicMatt give to Morocco in this article? What sexual desire does the country not fulfill for him? Maybe he would prefer a softer, more malleable encounter; men like this want to feel powerful. It is important for these men to believe they are in control. NomadicMatt does not only project his erotic fantasies on the Moroccan landscape, he manages to do so with as little originality as possible. The images he invokes are borrowed, they are not his to lay claim to; his travelers' remorse is secondhand and tired, so what is the value in his representation of Morocco?

"21 Things You Must Know Before Visiting Morocco Travel Tips" presents a thorough commentary on the do's and don't's of touring Morocco. Of the five articles I analyze in this study, this one provides the most culturally sensitive and practical advice for visitors, including tips on how to dress, how to haggle, and what to prepare for. Rather than affirming Orientalist sentiments, the authors approach the subject of touring Morocco by encouraging readers to do so with an open mind. When it comes to post-colonial countries-especially Arab/Islamic ones-there is a tendency to conflate opinion with fact, to confuse first-hand experience with expertise, and to draw broad generalizations from singular encounters. Said comments on this Western inclination,

...to make out of every observable detail a generalization and out of every generalization an immutable law about the Oriental nature, temperament, mentality, custom, or type; and, above all, to transmute living reality into the stuff of texts, to possess (or think one possesses) actuality mainly because nothing in the Orient seems to resist one's powers...(Said, 1978, p. 86)

He is suggesting that making generalizations is a form of asserting control over a people; Western generalizations are particularly harmful because they not only are predicated on a very limited understanding of the culture and history of the Orient, they also have influence on the imaginations of other Westerners. It is, therefore, the responsibility of Western tourists-particularly those with a platform like a travel blog-to maintain critical awareness of their own positionality and to promote narratives that respect the autonomy and humanity of the places they visit.

The final article I analyze is written by a college student working as a correspondent for USA Today. Its title is “7 things to know before going to Morocco”. Following much of the same rhetoric as the first two articles, this one is set apart by its reference to the social media-worthiness of Morocco. The author encourages readers to prepare for the “#instaworthy pic” by scheduling camel rides in advance and deciding whether to actually ride the camel or to just snap a picture on top of it. This is spectacular consumption at its peak-rather than inviting readers to learn about the history of the Moroccan Sahara (or the Sahara in general), the article reduces the experience to its ability to be captured and posted.

What is [the Sahara]? When I ask people what comes to mind when you hear ‘desert’...their answer is not experiential, it is inherited. It is an answer that’s been manufactured...[there is no] connection between the Sahara as we know it and its images, [they] are made somewhere else. If you think about how vast the Sahara is, it is probably the size of the United States. It’s very big...the amount of sand that gets all the publicity is really five percent. The sand dunes are five percent of the whole surface of the sahara desert...That’s what gets the attention. That’s what the image is (M. Bouba, 2017, interview).

Moroccans in the South recognize the lucrative advantages of supporting the popular image of the Sahara and many capitalize on it. Many people support themselves by presenting a fabricated “Sahara experience”. However, “7 things” doesn’t mention those people, or the thousands living in the Southern Morocco, or even the communities working in the tourism industry. Once again, this lack of discursive interaction with (or recognition of) Moroccans is a disturbing pattern in online representations of Morocco.

Based on my analysis of these articles, I argue that there is clearly an issue of Orientalising Morocco in Western representations of the country. Drawing on Said’s *Orientalism*, I identify the specific areas in which each article upholds Orientalist ideology. I attempt to unwrap the framework presented in an effort to establish the need for critical scrutiny, both on behalf of the reader and the writer. I believe it is absolutely necessary to question the descriptions that we’ve been fed and to attempt to communicate one’s experience with respect and self-awareness. While I have provided numerous resources to answer the question of where this Orientalist doctrine comes from and how it saturates our understanding of Morocco and other Arab/Islamic countries, I would now like to examine the question of why it continues to circulate. More specifically, who does it benefit? Said constructs a comprehensive genealogy of the ways Orientalism has benefitted Western powers; from Britain’s imperialist project in India to Napoleon’s conquest of Egypt, the West’s self-proclaimed mastery of the East’s history and culture directly lead to colonial ventures, the effects of which are still felt today. While the primary beneficiaries are Europe and the United States, the secondary beneficiaries of colonial nostalgia in the tourism industry and the stereotypes that come with it are (to invoke the



terminology utilized in “Can the Subaltern Speak”) the indigenous elites-in this case, the Moroccan government.

Recall Spivak’s assessment of the power regime in colonial societies; at the top of this structure are colonizers, directly below are indigenous elites. These groups have access to the broader population in a way that the colonizers do not as well as the power to influence said population. In their essay “Restaging Colonialism for the Masses”, Claudio Minca and Rachele Borghi detail the government’s support of the exploitation of colonial nostalgia as a means of attracting more visitors. “...The country’s real attraction was still very much its colonial legacy, with its corollary of exotic and Orientalist images that had not yet been ‘exploited’ in all their potential.” (pg. 31) The two go on to examine the role of the Office National Marocain du Tourisme in developing new strategies to promote tourism, including an excerpt from the Office’s 2008 catalogue presented in Milan at the *Bourse Internationale du Tourisme*.

Located between the Mediterranean, the Atlantic Ocean and the Sahara desert, Morocco is a country where Nature let its imagination run free. It is a land of stunning contrasts, characterized by a culture and an atmosphere that bring together, in the Moroccan Kingdom, the most vivid dream and Oriental traditions...Morocco offers the traveller a fabulous odyssey, a trip into Wonderland (Minca and Borghi, 2009, p. 35).

The Office’s overt endorsement of Orientalist perceptions of Morocco reflects the government’s position on tourism: one of amassing more visitors every year. In our interview, Professor Bouba commented on the government’s role in tourism,

The government cares about numbers. Morocco’s Vision 2020 is based on numbers, [the government] wants to get 20 million people. The government is investing a lot of money in marketing Morocco-it is the second contributor to the GDP after agriculture. It is the

second largest job sector. So the government has adopted an approach of promoting the tourism *industry* rather than promoting travel as a general concept to get people to come and meet other people. I don't think they're understanding the implications of that in Morocco, as a country, as an environment, as a space.

Endorsing economic growth is part of how modern governments operate; however, the tourism industry's deep-rooted ties to French colonialism carries weight. Why should an independent Morocco want to preserve their colonial history? Why do the powers that be want to perpetuate Orientalist conventions about the mysterious, impenetrable, unchanging landscape of Morocco?

The Vision 2010 plan was launched by the Moroccan government in January 2001, shortly after Mohammed VI succeeded his father, Hassan II, as king. Since his coronation, Morocco has made definitive progress toward liberalization, including the establishment of a national parliament and the revision of the *Moudawana* (also known as the Family Code). While these developments have been well-received on an international level, internally, the government continues to silence voices of political dissent (“The Red Lines Stay Red”, 2017), to refute all claims of the Western Sahara's right to sovereignty (“Morocco King Says No to Western Sahara Independence”, 2017), and to tolerate police brutality (Morocco: King Brushes Off Evidence of Police Abuse, 2017). Morocco continues to gain international clout for its moves toward progressivism despite domestic injustice and the tourism industry is part of the reason why.

By maintaining an Orientalist narrative of mysticism and unlimited cultural accessibility, the tourism industry protects Morocco's exotic image and insulates tourists from the political, economic, and social disputes going on in the country. Tourists consume images presented to them and spread them online, despite the fact that these images were crafted through the

exploitation of a traumatic colonial history. The Moroccan government is able to continue to violate the rights of their people so long as the perception remains that Morocco is indeed an innocuous vacation destination. In his essay “Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy”, Arjun Appadurai posits that “The new global cultural economy has to be understood as a complex, overlapping, disjunctive order... (Appadurai, 1999, p. 221)” By this he means that the forces that connect nation-states and people are far more intricate than modern frameworks given them credit for. Appadurai’s thesis lies in his examination of the disjunctures between the forces, what he calls “scapes”, and how the world as we know it is constructed through these disjunctures. The answer to my inquiry, who benefits from tourism in Morocco and its endorsement of Orientalism, lies in these disjunctures as well. What takes place in the ethnoscape, the physical movement of bodies across borders, is predicated on an unflappable confidence in the credibility of the mediascape. What appears in the mediascape is inexorably linked to ever-shifting ideoscapes encapsulating definitions of modernization and culture. The ideoscape, however, is dependent on finanscape, whose priorities are often directed towards the technoscape. Travel blogs are written because people will believe the media they consume, regardless of the fact that this media is influenced by our conceptions of tourism and globalization, which are in turn constructed through economic channels and labor. Just as one cannot analyze a single scape without acknowledging its external implications, one cannot detach travel blogs from the ideological vestiges of colonialism, or those ideologies from political initiatives. In an increasingly globalized world, it is more important than ever that we are thoughtful in our conversations and critical of what we consume.

## Conclusion

A great deal of research has been done to expose racism, essentialism, xenophobia, and eurocentricity in the travel literature we consume; Edward Said's *Orientalism* is just a sample of a discourse that develops and expands every day. If Said had conducted his study in 2017, I have no doubt that the internet and all of its possibilities-for reinscribing colonial legacies and for the cultivation of liberatory consciousness-would feature prominently. As such, I felt it necessary to analyze a small portion of online representations of Morocco as a modest contribution to a behemoth enterprise of looking at the ways in which the internet has altered our ability to construct "imagined geographies" in the modern world.

*Orientalism* can be read as a profoundly disheartening text; however, Said goes out of his way to emphasize our agency in the creation of a more pluralized, enlightened global society. "Perhaps the most important task of all would be to undertake studies in contemporary alternatives to Orientalism, to ask how one can study other cultures and peoples from a libertarian, or a non-repressive and non-manipulative, perspective (1978, p. 24)." We must endeavor to imagine a better world, one in which Orientalism and all of its fetishistic, essentialist, racist tenets no longer limit our capacity to connect with others. I believe that endeavor starts with practicing critical consciousness as well as a determination to hold our media, our governments, and ourselves accountable for the things we say and do.

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