

The Exotic as Repulsive: Edith Wharton in Morocco

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Abstract:

The engagement of western writers with Morocco is part and parcel of a wider long running encounter with exotic cultures. The exotic world and its chanting appeals have, in fact, stimulated the interest of a host of travel writers and anthropologists around the globe. The exoticist and orientalist appeals associated with North Africa prompted many American and European travel writers to venture to Morocco in an attempt to embrace a new cultural otherness. Edith Wharton represents the vogue of American travel writers whose main goals and interests are both to accommodate the exotic and to represent it as a commodity to be consumed worldwide. This paper aims at presenting both Wharton's assessment of the Moroccan cultural otherness as well as her orientalist and exoticist approaches toward the Moroccan landscape and its people.

Keywords: The Exotic, Orientalism, Exoticism, Ethnography, Anthropology and Cultural Otherness.

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1. Theorizing the Exotic and Exoticism

Thinking of foreign cultures and civilizations often entails thinking of the exotic. At this stage, one might wonder what the concept “exotic” means in the first place. It seems that this word has a long and deep rooted history in the west and is, therefore, open to different interpretations. According to the editors of *Post Colonial Studies*, the word exotic was first used in 1599 to refer to anything which is alien and to something which is introduced from outside and is not essentially indigenous. (Ashcroft et al.,2000: 94). By the year 1651, the meaning had, consequently, shifted and was extended to encapsulate or to include exotic lands or “an exotic and foreign territory, an exotic habit and demeanor”.(p.94). Still, this concept gained ascendancy with the spread of European powers in diverse parts of the globe. The exotic was, then, associated with colonialism and the empire and, therefore, encompassed “the connotations of a stimulating or exciting difference, something with which the domestic could be safely spiced”. (p.94). The emphasis is on the movement and decontextualisation of exotic objects from their original location to the new domestic economy. In fact, the sixteenth century was marked by the tremendous vogue of the European geographical explorations which contributed much to the constant search for the exotic.

The exotic in its commodified form has a long history and first appeared in French literature when François Rabelais used the adjective “exotique” to describe the imported merchandise in his *Quart Livre et Faictes et Dicts Heroiques du Bon Pantagruel*:

On that day and the two subsequent days, nothing new appeared on the ground. Because Adoncques harboured, yet contemplating those procuring fresh water, diverse paintings, diverse tapestries, diverse animals, fish, birds, and other exotic merchandise and peregrinations, that went to and from the embankment and by the arcades of the port. Because it was the third day of the big and solemn markets of the milieu at which annually all the richest and most famous merchants of Europe convene. (White, 2004:3).

The Rabelaisian “exotique” evokes here the classical etymology of the term whose origin goes back to the Greek period, meaning “exotikos”, that is to say, strange and of distant lands. Yet, this is not the only meaning of the exotic in Rabelais’ sixteenth century view. The above passage from *Le Quart Livre* reveals that the notion of diversity is inseparable from the term “exotique” and is repeated three times in Rabelais’ invocation of the exotic merchandise.

In the same vein, it is important to point out that the emergence of the term in the English language happened in the last period of the sixteenth century. In his book, *From Cannibals to Radicals*, Roger Celestine traces the first appearance and recording of the term by stating that in

the “western tradition, the term exotic was first applied specifically to products, flora and fauna that came from far away”. (p.217). Yet, the concept cannot be pinned down to one particular approach. The exotic, rather, offers different perspectives. Researchers in the field of anthropology, for instance, argue that the exotic is not “something that exists prior to its discovery”. (Mason,1998:1). Hence, it is the act of exploration and discovery “which produces the exotic as such, and it produces it in varying degrees of wildness or domestication”. (p.2). In other words, the exotic is “the product of the process of exoticisation”. (p.2). Peter Mason asserts that the exotic as a cultural construct is always open to a kind of renegotiation. According to him, the exotic is “always open to reinvention as a field of forces in which self and other constitute one another in a lopsided relation; it is always open to contestation”. (p.2). Mason further explains that the exotic is the outcome of a “process of decontextualisation”, which means that the setting plays a significant role in the construction and the interpretation of the exotic object.

It is, therefore, an “elsewhere” which renders an alien object exotic and which in the long run turns out to be familiar once it is examined and taken from its original setting to a new one. In the view of some anthropologists, the exotic is transferred to a different location and recontextualised. In other words, “it is not the original geographic or cultural contexts which are valued, but the suitability of the objects in question to assume new meanings in a new context”. (p.3). New interpretations and qualities are actually attributed to the exotic object once it is taken from its original setting to a completely different one. In his article “The Exotic as a Symbolic System”, Stephen Foster stresses that the exotic operates

dialectically as a symbolic system, domesticating the foreign, the culturally different and the extraordinary so that the phenomena to which they apply begin to be structured in a way which makes them comprehensible and possibly predictable, if predictably defiant of total familiarity. (Foster,1982:21).

The exotic, following Foster’s approach, means the whole process of rendering and making the foreign, the culturally different and the extraordinary as familiar to the center. The exotic in this sense is intertwined with the notion of exploration and geographical escape from the mundane industrialized west to the peripheries. Foster further qualifies the exotic as “a source of hope as well as of fear”. (p.21). At the same time, the exotic is not a mere cultural construct, but it is rather “an image which asserts infinite possibilities for social transformation, cultural reconstruction and geographical escape”. (p.21). What is valued in the whole process is the total assimilation and domestication of other far and distant cultures.

The question that might, therefore, be raised here is whether the exotic can be fully domesticated and assimilated by the west. Foster makes it clear that the exotic evokes a whole range of symbolic connotations as well as “a world of infinite complexity, surprise, colour, manifold variety and richness”. (p.21). Taking into account Michel Foucault’s approach, Foster proceeds toward considering the exotic as a kind of episteme and “a relatively fixed cultural problematic which becomes operational as internalized gestalt and structures discursive activities pertaining to cultural difference...with anthropologising... as one such discursive activity”.

(p.21). This definition brings up the different discursive activities in the west and in particular anthropology, as a colonial discipline, which in fact has translated and assimilated the cultural difference of other distant nations. At the heart of this debate, Foster moves on to distinguish between the concept of culture and that of the exotic which operate in different and comparable manners in the discourse about “human difference”.

For Foster, the exotic is what is attributed to the unfamiliar. This criterion encapsulates all what lies beyond the center with all its surprises, articulations and its symbolic connotations. In the attempt and in the whole process to make the unfamiliar comprehensible, the familiar becomes anew once it is associated with the far and the remote. As a consequence, a relation is established between the exotic and the common location. The exotic is a symbolic and interpretive construction that paves the way for some members of a particular social group to understand another group which they consider and see as different.(p.22). The cultural difference is at the center of the debate here as one cultural group has the upper hand over the other. As a matter of fact, the western world throughout history had the upper hand over exotic nations. The center, whether it was Europe or the United States of America, was interested in the radical alterity of other distant cultures and civilizations. One of the center’s basic missions and objectives was the translation, assimilation of the cultural difference of alien people and, by the same token, to avail of the diversity inherent in these cultures.

This further brings to the surface the implications of the concept in anthropology and ethnography. The exotic is never found or given as “exotic” but is rather produced as the exotic by the discourses of ethnography and anthropology. In other words, the savagery of the savage and the primitivity of the primitive are not found but rather are the result of anthropological inquiry. From an anthropological perspective, “in order to benefit from the experience of the exotic, people must remain as far apart as possible”.(Forsdick,2000:21). However, such a cultural distance does not in any way hinder the western self from embracing the path of the exotic other. Rather, the exotic becomes the product of a kind of cultural and epistemological encounter between a powerful west and distant cultures. Such an encounter usually helps the anthropologist to interpret his object of study. The exotic in its unfamiliarity becomes comprehensible once it is involved in a series of interactions and collaborations with the anthropologist. It is interesting to note that new forms of anthropology have reinforced the position and the role of the exotic in the cultural encounter. Among these trends, we can mention the emergence of “dialogical anthropology” which has contributed to the consolidation of the voice of the native informant who has usually been inscribed in anthropology as an exotic other. The process of making the unfamiliar comprehensible to an audience is always coupled with expectations and surprises. Hence, once involved in a sequence of dialogues with the exotic, the anthropologist can expect a kind of opposition on the part of the exotic other. (Gualtieri, 2003:5). This means that the cultural negotiation in any dialogue between the anthropologist and his or her object of study does not necessarily end in agreement.

In Johannes Fabian’s view, such a discipline silences the other in the sense that the anthropologist speaks for the other who is merely presented as an exotic human being incapable of representing himself and expressing his views in a logical way. Fabian asserts that the other is a dominant figure in ethnography and an object to be subjugated and manipulated by the anthropologist. Thus, the mere fact of not writing about the other does not give the latter the chance to liberate himself from the authority of ethnography since the ethnographer and the

anthropologist speak for him. The anthropologist's claim may be that it is his duty to give the exotic other the opportunity to speak and to be represented. In other words, for Fabian the other is not an interlocutor. He argues that the other is denied the chance to become an interlocutor in the ethnographic text. He states that "to be dominated, it takes more than to be written about. To become a victim of the other must be written at (as in shot at) with literacy serving as a weapon of subjugation and discipline. Conversely, to stop writing about the other will not bring liberation". (Fabian, 1990: 760).

In a similar fashion, Clifford Geertz points out that the exotic other and the western self are not on equal footing. This is due to the nature of the cultural encounter itself. The dialogue involving both the anthropologist and the exotic other is based on a kind of detachment and distance. Geertz explains:

Anthropology inevitably involves an encounter with the other. All too often, however, the ethnographic distance that separates the reader of anthropological texts and the anthropologist himself from the other is rigidly maintained and at times even artificially exaggerated. In many cases this distancing leads to an exclusive focus on the other as primitive, bizarre, and exotic. The gap between a familiar "we" and exotic "they" is a major obstacle to a meaningful understanding of the other, an obstacle that can only be overcome through some form of participation in the world of the other. (p.14).

According to Geertz, the binary opposition between the western self and the exotic other makes it hard to attain a mutual understanding or communicability. To achieve such a goal, the anthropologist has to divest himself of his authority as a representative of the center. In other words, he has to bracket out his authority for some time and participate in the world of the natives without any kind of supremacy. Taking into account, both Geertz' and Fabian's theses, we could strongly argue that the exotic other is endowed with some qualities that can only be found in remote and distant lands. In his description of the natives of Sepzia, Remak draws the reader's attention toward the strange movements of women in an attempt to contain the exotic and reveal its characteristics. Remak describes the natives of the bay of Sepzia as:

Wilder than the place. Our near neighbours were more like savages than any people I ever before lived among. Many a night they passed on the beach singing or rather howling, the women dancing about among the waves that broke at their feet, the men leaning against the rocks and joining in their loud wild chorus. Polynesia? South America? No Mary Shelley on her house in the bay of Sepzia between Genoa and Leghorn. (p.59).

The exotic here is that quality which is attributed to the dancing women among the waves of the bay as well as the movement evoked by the men joining them by the rocks. This passage provides an insight into the sensual fantasies which are conjured up by the far away countries as well as the irresistible temptations triggered off by the complex and yet alluring habits and rituals practiced by the inhabitants of other distant and exotic nations. Mason confirms that the exotic is

never to be found at home. Following such an approach, the exotic then might be intertwined with the modalities of alterity. Yet, the two concepts must not be confused. For Mason, to understand the other and to come to terms with him, the western self has to reduce the other to the same. Such a process entails a sense of violence on the part of the western self whose relationship to the other is intense and marked by resistance. The other clings to its otherness and consequently resists the western self's frequent and repeated acts of assimilation. In this respect, the exotic "would be that which is refractory to the egocentric attempts of self to comprehend the other". (p.159). Above all, one of the hallmarks and features of the exotic is its staunch resistance to give itself to a large degree to the penetrating gaze of the western self. Mason strongly maintains that the exotic "would be the trace of alterity that remains after the act of comprehension has taken place". (p.159). The exotic, in this respect, is the outcome of all the representations that are "produced through the process of exoticization". (p.160).

Having thus dealt with some of the connotations of the concept "exotic" in literature and anthropology, I shall now devote the remaining section of this theoretical framework to an interpretation of the concept "exoticism". This term seems to be intertwined with a whole range of colonial and cultural connotations so much so that it is extremely hard to pin it down to one particular approach. One of the authors who have grappled with the notion of exoticism in literature and post colonial theory is Victor Segalen. In the beginning of his *Essay on Exoticism*, he asserts that exoticism is mainly tropical and that it is a cliché of the exotic. The colonial connotations of the term cannot be denied here because Segalen refers to the "colonial Junk" which is, in fact, brought back from other "Negro Kingdoms" by colonial adventurers. Consequently, it is thanks to exoticism that Europeans have actually become aware of the differences between humans:

The word exoticism was just a synonym of "impressions of far away countries", of climates and foreign races, and a misused substitution for that which is even more compromised, "colonial". Under these dreadful terms "exotic literature", "impressions of exoticism"... We grouped together, and still associate all the attributes of a homecoming from a Negro Kingdom, the tacky junk of those who come back from who knows where...I do not dismiss that there exists an exoticism of countries and races, an exoticism of climates, fauna and flora, an exoticism subject to geography, to the latitudinal and longitudinal position. It is precisely this exoticism, which most obviously imposed its name on the thing, and which gave to men, who too carried away with the beginning of their terrestrial adventure, who considered themselves identical to everyone, the conception of worlds other than their own. It is from there that this word comes. (White, 2004:51).

What can be discerned from the above is that exoticism is open to different interpretations. Segalen, one of the pioneers of the exoticist approach in western culture, applied great effort to trace the differences between the types of exoticism. His long years of extensive research on the subject led him to distinguish between artistic, geographic, natural as well as colonial exoticism. His oblique criticism of colonialism finds its resonance in his attempt to define the term in relation to diversity. After all, the recognition of diversity has to be taken into account before

understanding the differences between humans. Hence, exoticism is that quality of conceiving things in a different way. At the same time, it is that immense and intense feeling and quality of embracing difference. As a matter of fact, “the delicious sensation of exoticism contains a strong element of surprise which results from inadaptation to one’s surroundings: It is opposite to a feeling of déjà vu”. (Hsieh, 1988: 13).

In his article, “Exoticism in Literature and History”, Alec Hargreaves traces the historical evolution of the concept exoticism and brings to the fore its colonial implications. He first of all maintains that there is not an agreed upon definition of the concept. Hence, exoticism is “a complex and necessarily imprecise word, for it describes, not an object, but a feeling, an emotion”. (p.7). It is significant to stress that western travelers were pretty much preoccupied with what Segalen called “diversity” to the extent that Europe’s relations with distant and faraway lands were essentially marked by the rise and the fall of exoticism. (p.9). To back up his approach, Hargreaves drew his readers’ attention toward Pierre Loti’s exotic experience in his novel called *Madame Chrysantheme*. The description of the flat shared by Loti and Chrysantheme reflects, therefore, the exoticism that is deeply rooted and inherent in the relation between the center and the peripheries:

The closet doors consist of white paper panels, the lay out of the shelves and interior compartments made of finely chiseled wood, is too complicated, too ingenious. It makes me fear they may contain false bottoms and things designed to play tricks on you.

You are not happy about leaving things because of an ill-defined feeling that the cupboards might, of their own volition, conjure away your belongings. What I really like looking at in Chrysantheme’s belongings is a box in which she keeps letters and souvenirs, it is a tin box, made in England, and on the lid there is a colored picture of a factory somewhere near London. (p.13).

So much focus here is on the oddity and the strangeness ascribed to the shelves and other interior compartments. Such objects are to be feared as they may contain some things premeditated to attract the other’s attention and, thus, to be even the target of tricks. Chrysantheme is qualified here as an exotic and enigmatic character who is able to stimulate the interest of Loti despite her physical absence. The complexity and ingenuity of the shelves give a deep insight into the mysterious world of Chrysantheme and the kind of lure the author is exposed to. Despite the fact that the picture of the London factory is essentially something usual for Loti, Chrysantheme has her own reasons for keeping it in the tin box. Such a picture reflects in a sense the exoticism and the mystery of the London factory. It is something unfamiliar that she has been exposed to in London. Now, it is kept as an artistic object. It has become something familiar.

In a similar vein, Graham Huggan underscores that exoticism is intertwined with the world of politics and relations of power. He avows that this concept is “repoliticised, redeployed both to unsettle metropolitan expectations of cultural otherness and to effect a grounded critique of differential relations of power”. (pp.ix-x). Huggan strongly asserts that the concept “exotic” has a very “widespread application, it continues possibly because of this to be commonly misunderstood”. (p.13). This misunderstanding stems from the fact that the exotic is not an easy

cultural or “inherent quality to be found in certain people, distinctive objects or specific places”. (p.13). For this reason among others of course, exoticism is qualified as “a particular mode of aesthetic perception which renders people, objects and places strange even as it domesticates them and which effectively manufactures otherness even as it claims to surrender to its immanent mystery”.(p.13). So much focus here is on the aesthetic perception of other distant cultures and on the domestication process. After all, the western colonial powers objective is to transform and render the exotic as strange in the first place and then making its radical alterity as familiar as possible. The exotic other in the first instance appears to be strange, mysterious and savage, but everything changes once the cultural encounter between the western self and the exotic other takes place.

It is the contact between the western self and the exotic other that matters much here, because it is only through the domestication process that the western self makes sense of the radical difference. Through the encounter, the western self assesses the exotic that becomes familiar in the long run. Graham Huggan further expounds that the whole exoticist production of the radical otherness is “dialectical and contingent, at various times and in different places”. (p.13). As a matter of fact, this type of production might “serve some conflicting ideological interests, providing the rationale for projects of rapprochement and reconciliation but legitimizing just as easily the need for plunder and violent conquest”. (p.13). This definition of exoticism evokes the intricate bond between the geographical exploration and the colonial conquest of other far away lands. Apart from this, Huggan further provides another definition of exoticism. According to him, “exoticism might be described as a kind of semiotic circuit that oscillates between the opposite poles of strangeness and familiarity. Within this circuit, the strange and the familiar, as well as the relation between them, may be recoded to serve different even contradictory political needs and ends”. (p.13). Such a definition consolidates the relations of power between the center and the peripheries.

Exoticism, following Graham Huggan’s approach, is a process through which two different cultures assess each other in order to attain a common understanding. Exoticism, in this sense, is considered as a kind of cultural encounter between the binary poles of strangeness and familiarity through which both entities are invited to make sense of each other. After all, the western colonial powers are in constant search of something different, beyond the confines and the aridity of the center. To embrace a new radical difference and a new cultural otherness, the center has to move on toward the peripheries. Still, exoticism is also defined as the process of translating the cultural difference of other foreign and distant nations. Such an idea is echoed in Graham Huggan’s interpretation of the term. According to him, exoticism is a cultural tool and mechanism which translates the cultural radical difference and whose goal is to annex “the other inexorably back again to the same”. (p.14). To back up his arguments, he contends that any attempt “to domesticate the exotic would neutralize its capacity to create surprises”. (p.13). As a matter of fact, to preserve the exotic from a probable erasure, it has therefore to be integrated into “the humdrum of everyday routines”. (Foster, p.22).

In a similar context, the exoticist production of cultural otherness or exoticism as a cultural entity aims at describing “the systematic assimilation of cultural difference, ascribing familiar meanings and associations to unfamiliar things. It also denotes an expanded, if inevitably distorted comprehension of diversity which effectively limits assimilation”. (Huggan,p.14). An important issue is raised here, which is the attribution of familiar meanings and connotations to

unfamiliar objects. The process of rendering something unfamiliar familiar is part and parcel of the exoticist assessment and production of cultural difference. Yet, this process following Huggan is coupled with a sense of distortion when it comes to the understanding of diversity which confines assimilation. Huggan strongly backs up his approach by maintaining that the exotic is not always a mere cultural entity to be adopted. Such a thesis is supported by Foster who argues that the exotic is “kept at arms length rather than taken as one’s own”. (p.22).

In his article “*Travel Writing and Ethnography*”, Joan Pau Rubies (2002) points out that travel writing and ethnography are essentially intermingled. He, then, backs up his approach by maintaining that the ethnographic impulse and the strong interest in people’s customs and radical difference find their resonance in the massive number of travel accounts produced in the sixteenth century. The importance of ethnographic descriptions lies in the fact that it enables the ethnographer to get a good vision of the world and to be much concerned with the anthropological inquiries. (Hulme and Youngs,2002:243). Rubies further argues that the fascination with human cultural difference, which is in fact a type of exoticism has actually shaped travel writing. This also led him to question the ramifications of the ethnographic impulse. Accordingly, the fundamental ingredients of the ethnographic impulse within the travel literature genre are worth to be assessed. Historically speaking, travel writing and ethnography are the outcome of colonial expansion. Since the sixteenth century, travel writers and ethnographers were very much preoccupied with cultural otherness, diversity and empirical observation. Marco Polo best exemplifies this vogue. His eastern journey enabled him to contemplate the marvels of the world and to get in close contact with kings and with the different and strange races of men. (Hulme and Youngs,2002:248). The constant empirical curiosity within travel writing was rooted in European history. Ancient ethnographers like Herodotus were entranced by the other’s radical difference. His interest in the Egyptians stemmed from the fact that they “seem to have reversed, in their manners and customs, the ordinary practices of mankind”. (Herodotus,1972:142).

Above all, the element of self representation is crucial in both travel writing and ethnography as it helps to depict the other and to assess it better. This article seeks to explore the affiliation of travel writing and anthropology with the orientalist and exoticist vogues. My argument is that most of the European and American travelers who went to the East and to some Asian countries were not just interested in the radical difference of other distant cultures, but their objectives were both to bring and to assess that cultural otherness with the intention to commodify it.

2. Wharton Embracing the Moroccan Exotic World

Morocco offered a thrilling prospect for the western travelers who were looking for a sort of freedom, paradise, wisdom and ecstasy. Most of the European and American travelers headed toward this country in order to experience a new cultural otherness that would totally be different from the civilized and mundane world they came from. Morocco was, therefore, considered as a new haven and horizon where the American traveller’s imagination and creativity could be “sparked and enlivened by the romance and charm of Moorish culture”. (Hibbar, 2004:20). Like other American travelers of the period, Wharton was driven by her own intense desires to discover the Moroccan cultural otherness with the objective and intention to commodify its diverse exotic features. Wharton’s *In Morocco* (1920) is the account of her journey through the mysterious land of Morocco. In this travel account, Wharton explores Morocco, its people and

records her impressions of the exotic non western world. Throughout her journey, Wharton describes many Moroccan cities and offers her observations concerning the country's architecture. She further provides accounts of some religious ceremonies and at the same time depicts the sultan's palaces. Wharton's trip across Morocco enabled her to capture the diverse aspects of the Moroccan culture and to have access to the exotic and mysterious world of the harem.

As a travel narrative dealing with Morocco, Wharton's book best represents the orientalist vogue. For Wharton, Morocco is an exotic land par excellence. It is perceived as the exotic other. On the opening page, she says that "there is no guide book to Morocco", suggesting that the lack of tourist information "rouses the hunger of the repletest sightseer". (p.21). Her observations establish Morocco as "Unknown Africa". This, of course, is a clear indication that the country is exotic, remote and hence untouched by the tourist industry. Still, her first Moroccan images show North Africa as a place immersed in mystery. Such a mystery has, in fact, remained unsolved by Glossam or Baedeker. For Edith Wharton, Moroccan otherness best suited her innate desires. This otherness was the target of her deep enquiry and was, consequently, a kind of blank slate upon which she inscribed her insights and pioneer impressions because of the absence of any English or American travel writing about the country.

Wharton's travel book on Morocco reflects her great appreciation of the country as a western travel writer. As such, the book raises the issues of exoticism and orientalism which are intermingled throughout the narrative. Accordingly, Morocco is conceived as "a land of mists and mysteries, a land of trailing silver veils through which domes and minarets, mighty towers and ramparts of flushed stone, hot palm groves and Atlas snows, peer and disappear at the will of the Atlantic cloud drifts". (p.15). Such images convey a sense of wonder and admiration of Morocco. The country is produced here as a mysterious landscape and as the exotic. The absence of tourist guidebooks about Morocco only consolidates and adds to this sense of the unknown and incomprehensible that characterizes the foreign, the unfamiliar and the exotic nature of Morocco. They also provide a basis for more adventure. Edith Wharton comments:

The sensation is attainable by anyone who will take the trouble to row out into the harbor of Algeciras and scramble onto a little black boat headed across the straits. Hardly has the rock of Gibraltar turned to cloud when one's foot is on the soil of an almost unknown Africa. Tangier, indeed, is in the guide books, but cuckoo-like, it has had to lay its eggs in strange nests and the traveler who wants to find out about it must acquire a work dealing with some other country-Spain or Portugal or Algeria. There is no guide book to Morocco and no way of knowing, once one has left Tangier behind where the long trail over the Rif is going to land one, in the sense understood by anyone accustomed to European certainties. The air of the unforeseen blows on one from the roadless passes of the Atlas. (p.21).

The absence of an established tradition of travel writing on Morocco, at the time Edith Wharton was touring the country might seem in a sense normal and liberating. Yet, it also signaled a whole range of representational difficulties. In Morocco, Wharton was supposed to formulate her own observations in order to make sense of the mystery in which the country was

veiled and in a way to lift the “vast unknown just beyond” Tangier. (p.21). Wharton’s trip to Morocco turned out to be coupled with a throng of impressions, visions, challenges and expectations. She was compelled to bridge the gap between her travels in North Africa and to come up with her own signifiers to uncover the mystery and the unknown in which Morocco was immersed. Such signifiers would then be used for the writing up of an authentic account of Morocco, and hence disclose the country’s secrets. Wharton was fully committed to serve the French colonial presence in Morocco. She acted as “an unofficial propagandist” and “spokeswoman for the French war effort and for France’s imperialist policies in North Africa”. (Colquitt et.al, 1999:149). In 1917, she travelled to Morocco as an official guest of the French Resident General Hubert Lyautey and his wife. Such a trip remained on the one hand a sort of escape from the ravages and destructive consequences of the First World War as well as a means to consolidate and to justify the French colonial presence in Morocco. After all, Lyautey’s colonial strategies were clear. Historically speaking, he wanted to gain both England and America testimonies to back up his colonial endeavours and to spread the French civilization in Morocco.

Wharton’s travel narrative encapsulates a whole array of orientalist and exoticist representations of the landscape and the inhabitants. Her first images of Morocco convey those typical orientalist views on the exotic and oriental other. Her vision as well as her cultural encounter with the land is marked by a certain exposure to the unchanged, untamed land of Morocco and by a kind of emptiness that the western traveler is impelled to endure while touring the country. The American traveler’s initial image of Morocco was picturesque. As she was viewing Morocco from the French colonial perspective, everything she happened to see while crossing Tangier reflected her previous preconceptions. On her way to Arbaoua, the frontier post of the French Protectorate, Wharton warns the traveler about the kind of challenges and dangers he would be shrouded in, once he ever decides to travel to Morocco and to go to places like Arbaoua. Her descriptions of her motor trip to Arbaoua consolidate her imperialist vision of Morocco, which in fact is presented as an oriental location where the traveler is invited to see “noble draped figures” walking beside their camels or black donkeys:

At the first turn out of Tangier, Europe and the European disappear, and as soon as the motor begins to dip and rise over the arid little hills beyond the last gardens, one is sure that every figure on the road will be picturesque instead of prosaic, every garment graceful instead of grotesque. One knows, too, that there will be no more omnibuses or trams or motor cyclists, but only long lines of camels rising up in brown friezes against the sky, little black donkeys trotting across the scrub under bulging pack saddles, and noble draped figures walking beside them or majestically perching on their rumps. And for miles and miles there will be no more towns, only at intervals on the naked slopes, circles of rush roofed huts in a blue stockade of cactus or a hundred or two nomad tents of black camel’s hair resting on walls of wattled thorn and grouped about a terebinth tree and a well. (p.25).

In Edith Wharton’s view, once the traveler leaves Tangier and goes to the heart of Morocco, he or she will be exposed to an oriental setting devoid of any sophisticated means of

transportation. Wharton's initial cultural encounter with the Moroccan landscape as well as the new cultural otherness has turned out to be somewhat disappointing and hazardous. The objective of Wharton's journey was to undertake a fascinating trip into the world of magic, to embrace a new cultural difference untouched by civilization, and by the same stroke, to discover the mysterious land of Morocco. Still, in this part of the world, Wharton sought to develop a sort of familiarity and acquaintance with the Moroccan other. Such objectives were somewhat shattered. This was, in fact, due to several factors. In the absence of civilization in the mysterious Arbaoua, Wharton as a gifted American traveler, connoisseur and scholar, took it all upon herself to interpret the cultural significance of the wilderness. This location looks unfamiliar, unusual and strange. In this part of the world, Wharton was invited to make sense of the new cultural otherness. Everything she saw there looked mysterious, unusual and exotic. Wharton in Arbaoua was impelled to endure the stillness and timelessness of the landscape as well as its stretched lines of wilderness. Her cultural experience in Morocco and her encounter with the Moroccan cultural otherness turned out to be full of instances of suffering and enormous risks. Wharton's exposure to a foray of emptiness in Arbaoua is a good instance of the kind of dangers travelers might be shrouded in. Yet, such difficulties will soon vanish as camels and black donkeys will fill in the kind of void that the traveler is compelled to endure during his trip across the exotic Moroccan land. Still, this setting is even characterized by the omnipresence of Moroccan figures that are represented as noble characters walking in a majestic way, which is reminiscent of the Arab nomad in the orient.

In a similar fashion, Wharton's description of the "bled" reveals her colonialist attitude. The Moroccan bled in her view is a huge "waste of fallow land and palmetto desert" which is devoid of life. The emptiness is soon replaced by the omnipresence of the "solitary tomb" which serves as a means of filling up the void the traveler is exposed to once he beholds the bled and its surroundings. Thus, in spite of the fact that the tomb is situated "alone with its fig tree and its broken well-kerb", it still brings a "meaning into the waste".(pp.25-26). The underlying emptiness is extended to include even human beings who are presented as silent bizarre figures that the traveler can meet in such an exotic location. In the absence of dialogue and informants, the western traveler is compelled to resort to Orientalism and to use some orientalist images in order to interpret the Moroccan other. Wharton's first encounter with the veiled woman in the bled is a good case in point. This oriental woman is presented as a threatening and silent figure who just communicates "through the eye-slits in the grave-clothes muffling her". (p.26).

In Morocco, Wharton was confronted with "the featureless wild land" where communication was denied. (p.27). Upon noticing the saint's tomb and its fig tree on the way to Rabat, Wharton's chauffeur, then, expected to get some information from Arab boys to continue his trip but in vain. Since he did not have a good command of Arabic, the dialogue between the informant and the traveler "dies down into shrugs and head shakings". (p.28). Wharton contends that the absence of good informants keeps travelers "in unbroken contact with civilization", and if a traveler loses his way in Morocco, "civilization vanishes as though it were a magic carpet rolled up by a djinn". (p.28). Wharton's opposition of western civilization to Moroccan wilderness is justified by the fact that she views the country from the French colonial angle, and as such Morocco is produced as the antithesis of modernity.

Wharton's trip to the heart of Morocco turned out to be governed by a whole range of preconceived ideas, which in fact find their resonance in the body of orientalist texts, whose

cultural and epistemological configurations are unquestionable. Throughout her journey in the mysterious land of Morocco, Wharton established an analogy between the Moroccan exotic other and Orientals. The trip to the exotic land of Morocco proved to be a constant search for an authentic representation of the country and its inhabitants. Wharton strived to find in the real Morocco some representative aspects that both corroborate and consolidate her preconceived ideas of the exotic Orient. She argues in strong terms that the body of orientalist texts serves as a reference for travelers looking for information about the Orient and the Orientals life. Wharton further contends that “every step in North Africa corroborates the close observation of the early travelers...and shows the unchanged character of the Oriental life as the Venetians pictured and Leo Africanus and Charles Cochelet described”. (pp 71-72). The orientalist notion of the East as an unchanging space is taken for granted by Edward Said who points out that Orientalism as a system of representation is basically “premised upon exteriority, that is on the fact that the orientalist, poet or scholar, makes the Orient speak, describes the Orient, renders its mysteries plain for and to the west”. (pp 20-21).

The combined vogues of orientalist literature and travel writing show that Morocco is caught up within the network of previous references to the past as well as within the web of imported images from other texts. Since the country was not described by any guidebook, it was incumbent upon Wharton to fill in this textual void by projecting her own images, impressions as well as “importing western discourses about other North African countries”. (Edwards,2001:111). Wharton was influenced by her confidante friend Andre Gide whose representations of Algeria and his writings in *Pretextes* all formed good models that encapsulated his orientalist attitudes toward North Africa. Wharton followed the same path. She echoed Gide’s observations on the mysterious world of the *Thousand and One Nights* while describing the military car that carried her throughout the different parts of Morocco, and which in fact was a sort of a “Djinn’s carpet” that made her feel like a “medieval adventurer”. Wharton, proceeded by evoking the image of the “seventeenth century traveler” who “toiled across the desert to see wonders, and...came back dazzled and almost incredulous, as if half-suspecting that some djinn had deluded them with the vision of a phantom city”. (pp.62-63).

Following such an approach, Morocco is frozen in the past and is framed as a space that does not change. The Moroccan soil is described as an “unrolled frieze of a white Etruscan vase patterned with black vine garlands”. (p.51). Moreover, the marketplaces are represented as an old “Oriental...gaiety”.(p.94). Such representations and descriptions set Morocco far from the twentieth century western colonial aspirations, and presented it as “a timeless objet d’art rather than a modern political state”. (Edwards,2001:111). Wharton’s impressions of Morocco as a timeless work of art are congruent with those travel accounts that silence the colonial presence in a sense. However, the picturesque scenes as well as the observed beautiful ornaments come therefore “to stand in for the voices of anger and rage of a colonized nation”. (p.111) The combined romantic and spectatorial tropes were meant to add a sense of mystery, foreignness and exoticness to Wharton’s cultural experience in Morocco. Such an accumulation of different tropes positioned her as an outsider in relation to the Moroccan landscape and its inhabitants. Wharton, then, remained detached from Morocco and stood outside it both in time and space. Her observations and gaze at the incomprehensible scenes tended to be a sort of inspirations for her “dream like feelings”.(p.111). Wharton’s trip to Morocco, in the long run, “becomes a travel back into time rather than a geographical excursion in the present”. (p.111).

Wharton's travel narrative is replete with instances of exoticism. One of the examples which illustrate clearly the American traveler's exposure to the Moroccan exotic culture is her assessment of the Moroccan ceremonies which reflects her deep foreign gaze:

The spectacle unrolling itself below us took on a blessed air of unreality. Any normal person who has seen a dance of the Aissaouas and watched them swallow thorns and hot coals, slash themselves with knives, and roll on the floor in epilepsy must have privately longed, after the first excitement was over to fly from the repulsive scene. The Hamadchas are much more savage...and, knowing this, I had wondered how long I should be able to stand the sight of what was going on below our terrace. But the beauty of the setting redeemed the bestial horror. (pp.54-55).

Here, Wharton describes the Hamadchas' exotic dances as being performed amidst pools of blood "from the great gashes which the dancers hacked in their own skulls and breasts with hatchets and sharpened stones". (p.56). She positions herself as a western voyeuristic traveler gazing at the exotic "bloody" festival scenes from a distance. In a similar fashion, Edward Lane's representation of the Egyptians turned out to be coupled with orientalist overtones. The European traveller's predilection for the sadomasochistic tidbits is justified in great part by his interest in the country's cultural otherness and by his intention to restructure it for himself and the western audience. In this way, one may argue that Lane best fits into Said's orientalist structure. After all, he was an oriental expert as he managed to describe in swollen detail the most important oriental ingredients of the Egyptian society. For instance, "the cruelty of judges, the blending of religion with licentiousness among Muslims" (Said, 1978:162) were all portrayed in such a way as to make these images accessible to any western traveler looking for exoticism and alterity beyond the Europeans borders. At the same time, the dervishes' movements and their self mutilation were also the target of his inquiry as they reflected much the exoticness in which the Egyptians were engulfed. To back up his approach on Edward Lane, Said further maintains that the "libidinous passions" were really part and parcel of the European traveler's experience in the East. (p.162). Like Edith Wharton, Lane positions himself as a European traveler whose main concern is "to control the passions and excitements to which the Muslims are unhappily subject". (p.162). Despite the fact that he spent a considerable period of time describing the Egyptians and their culture, he still remained completely detached from "the Egyptian life and Egyptian productivity". (p.162).

Apart from this, the terms that Wharton used to describe the Hamadcha's different exotic practices evoke a typical linguistic structure within which the western observer and the exotic dancers are placed. "Bestial" and "Savage", for instance, are meant to reinforce a strong difference between the observer and the participants. The reason why such a differentiation was maintained between the western traveler and the participants in the exotic rituals, was that Wharton wanted to establish herself as a detached outsider and, by the same stroke, to draw the reader's attention toward her status as a gifted travel writer, tourist, connoisseur who had to remain outside the Moroccan culture in order to represent it using her own cultural background, value judgments and lodged sweeping generalizations.

Wharton's several images of Morocco as "a dream-feeling" would remain ungraspable and incomprehensible to the foreign gaze of the western traveler. While attempting to make sense of the Moroccan otherness and to lift the mystery in which the land was enveloped, Wharton engendered references to some European traditions like "the satyr-plays of Greece", the "Middle Ages" and the "Christian symbols of Gothic cathedrals". All these images would best stand in for the unfamiliar, bizarre, and strange practices of the Hamadchas' ritual dances. The emphasis in Wharton's exposure to the Moroccan ceremonies is on the exotic monstrosity and violent performances of the Aissauas. Observing these people swallowing thorns, hot coals and slashing themselves with knives for an extended period of time might engender both wonder and repulsion. Yet, for Wharton the exotic bloody performances are far from being repulsive. She is rather excited by the movement of these people and remains transfixed to the strange and exotic features of their private world. Edith Wharton's reconstructions of travel narratives are in a sense a defamiliarisation of the North African landscapes as well as "scenes of the twentieth century". (Edwards,2001:112). Such a defamiliarisation is in itself a contribution to the orbit of intertexts, which aim at "filling in the textual void with imaginative projections". (p.112).

It is important to note that the Orient and its exotic features were inculcated in Wharton's mind even before undertaking the trip to Morocco. For this reason, among others, her journey across the Moroccan land was prompted by a strong willingness to grasp the reality that she had learnt about beforehand. Hence, at some stages during her trip she got disappointed whenever the mysterious and exotic land of Morocco did not fit into her preconceived visions. She argued that "The silence and emptiness of the place began to strike us: there was no sign of the oriental crowd that usually springs out of the dust at the approach of strangers". (p.51).

Wharton's encounter with the Moroccan otherness was shaped by the previous body of orientalist literature on the Orient, which in fact was ascribed to the Moroccan exotic land. She managed to establish a strong bond between the Orient and Morocco. While in Sale, Wharton drew an analogy between the mysterious world of *the Arabian Nights* and Morocco. Her trip to the heart of Morocco was meant to explore aspects of the Moroccan cultural otherness, and by the same token, to find in this land, traditions, customs, people that would reflect what she had read in previous orientalist texts. Wharton's representations of the Moroccan otherness are therefore a well established discursive construct of an array of preconceived judgments on the exotic Orient, which in fact was lodged in her mind, and hurled at Moroccans. Following Edward Said's main underlying arguments about the Orient as a system of representation, we can therefore assert that the intertextual paradigm was adopted to represent Morocco and its inhabitants.

Since, there is no accurate and authentic representation of anything including the Orient as a geographical entity, it is incumbent upon the western traveler to fill in this gap by creating an intertextual body of knowledge to serve as a medium of reference. Such was Edith Wharton's methodology for her travel narrative on Morocco and its cultural otherness. Wharton's representation of Morocco as the exotic Orient and her identification of the land with the mysterious world of the Arabian Nights conform to the orientalist and exoticist vogues. Hence, Wharton's travel narrative best exemplifies Edward Said's view of Orientalism:

Every writer on the Orient (and this is true even of Homer) assumes some Oriental precedent, some previous knowledge of the Orient,

to which he refers and on which he relies. Additionally, each work on the Orient affiliates itself with other works. (p.20).

Edith Wharton's identifications of Sale with the sensual, amazing, mysterious and exotic world of the *Thousand and One Nights* are congruent with the Saidian tissue of intertexts, upon which the western traveler can project his own orientalist images, impressions, biases as well as sweeping generalizations. At first glance, Wharton's description of Sale might seem alluring, as a strong analogy is established between the market of Baghdad and the Moroccan one:

Everything that the reader of the Arabian Nights expects to find is here: the whitewashed niches wherein pale youths sit weaving the fine mattings for which the town is still famous, the tunneled passages where indolent merchants with bare feet crouch in their little kennels hung with richly ornamented saddler and arms, or with slippers of pale citron leather and bright embroidered babouches, the stalls with fruit, olives, tunny-fish vague syrupy sweets, candles for saints tombs, Mantegnesque garlands of red and green peppers, griddle-cakes sizzling on red-hot pans, and all the varied wares and cakes and condiments that the lady in the tale of "The three Calendars" went out to buy, that memorable morning, in the market of Bagdad. (p.36).

Wharton's representations of the Moroccan market in Sale cannot in any way be considered as authentic depictions of Moroccans cultural otherness as they spring from her colonial cultural background which is imbued with a whole range of stereotypes, sweeping generalizations and preconceptions. Wharton's representations become, therefore, mere misrepresentations, since the encounter with the true and authentic Moroccan otherness is beyond her reach. Wharton just remained detached from the Moroccan land at the cultural and social levels despite her proximity to its major contours, in some instances throughout her journey. Her depictions and encounters were not genuine as they were collected from a distance. Such distant observations misrepresent and distort Morocco. Wharton's description of Moroccans in the market of Sale encompasses an orientalist outlook. Moroccans are depicted as "indolent merchants with bare feet crouching in their little kennels". (p.36). The Moroccan exotic here is misrepresented and is reduced to a level of base humanity, even an animal. The merchants in the market of Sale have been denied the status of humanity. With her colonial cultural background and her lodged set of stereotypes, she ventures toward the projection of her Eurocentric imagery. She reduces the merchants to the status of animals, by ascribing animal features to them, and hence relegating them to a secondary position. Wharton's preconceived visions of Morocco and the exotic Orient, by extension, enabled her to subordinate the Moroccan exotic and to keep him as an inferior cultural entity. Still, in Morocco, Wharton found it difficult to abstain from her prejudices and the previous imported body of orientalist dogmas. According to her, the Arab Muslim would remain that barbaric, inferior and savage other. Her unquestionable dependence on orientalist projections, justify in great part her misrepresentation of Morocco. Wharton carried on her interpretation of Moroccan otherness by emphasizing that Moroccan natives would remain "barbaric" and just "fierce tribesmen with inlaid arms in their belts". (p.112). The natives were also depicted as "fanatics in sheepskins glowering from the guarded thresholds of the mosques". (p.112).

Wharton has well chosen her diction to represent the Moroccan exotic. Yet, her language betrays her as it is imbued with a whole range of bad sweeping generalizations.

In a parallel manner, the market place in Marrakech has also been the subject of Wharton's misrepresentation. According to her, souks in Marrakech are narrow and dark that it is quite difficult for the traveler to penetrate inside them as they are crowded and the humans inside them are fanatical and fierce. Still, her prejudices are even extended to describe the native life and people in the market as "woven of greed and lust, of fetishism and fear and blind hate of the stranger". (p.112). Fanaticism is a significant aspect that Wharton has attributed to the Souk in Marrakech:

Fanatics in sheepskins glowering from the guarded thresholds of the mosques, fierce tribesmen with inlaid arms in their belts and the fighters' tufts of wiry hair escaping from camel's hair turbans, mad negroes standing stark naked in niches of the walls and pouring down Soudanese incantations upon the fascinated crowd, consumptive Jews with pathos and cunning in their large eyes and smiling lips, lusty slave girls with earthen oil jars resting against swaying hips, almond-eyed boys leading fat merchants by the hand, and bar-legged Berber women, tattooed and insolently gay, trading their striped blankets, or bags of dried roses and irises for sugar tea, or Manchester cottons from all these hundreds of unknown and unknowable people, bound together by secret affinities, or intriguing against each other with secret hate, there emanated an atmosphere of mystery and menace more stifling than the smell of camels and spices and black bodies and smoking fry which hangs like a fog under the close roofing of the souks. (pp.112-113).

Edith Wharton sees the souk as a threatening location rather than a beautiful place for the western traveler to enjoy. The language employed in this narrative account is full of sweeping judgments. The merchants and, by extension, Moroccans daily life becomes, therefore, a leitmotif that takes back the reader to the frequent negative ideas that pertain much to the orientalist discourse. Wharton's representations of the different sides of the market in Marrakech cannot be qualified as objective and accurate. She has opted for subjectivity in her interpretation of the Moroccan culture. Her visions and impressions were adopted as paradigms to justify her objectives, which were in fact to produce a distorted image of Moroccans. Tribesmen, for instance, were described as violent figures ready to get involved in fights as their "inlaid arms" were in their belts. Furthermore, her description of black Moroccans as "mad Negroes standing stark naked in niches of the walls and pouring down Sudanese incantations upon the fascinated crowd" is full of sweeping generalizations, bias and is loaded with erotic connotations. (pp.112-113). As a gifted American travel writer, connoisseur, and scholar viewing Morocco from French lenses, Wharton then judged the Moroccan exotic as a cultural entity which would remain far from western standards. Wharton's sweeping judgments took her so far as to assert that Muslims show their nakedness in public.

Above all, Edith Wharton's trip to North Africa and to Morocco in particular led her to reiterate most of the discourses that other previous travelers had disseminated regarding the

orientalist and the exoticist appeals associated with this geographical space. Gide's discourses of North Africa were adopted by Wharton in the reconstruction of her Moroccan travels. His *Pretextes* (1917) provided, then, a subtle and fitting linguistic repertoire from which the American traveler "could write a travel narrative about the country without guidebooks". (Lewis,1975:400). In the summer of 1917, when Wharton was preparing herself to tour Morocco, she received the English translation of *L'Immoraliste*. After reading the book, she wrote to Gide saying: "your beautiful evocation of the desert I have so loved, far from awakening my nostalgia, gives me a taste in advance of what is waiting for me there". (Edwards,2001:108). The letter suggested that Edith Wharton's first impressions of North Africa were the outcome of her literary collaboration and friendship with Gide. Wharton's narrative account of Morocco would remain a useful reference for travelers looking for a different cultural otherness. After all, the American traveler was commissioned to write a travel guide book about Morocco at a critical historical period, when the country was not yet made known to the rest of the world. She filled in this void and deficiency by commodifying her cultural experiences in Morocco in a travel account conducted under the auspices of the French authorities. Travel guide books are crucial linguistic tools for the commodification of the other. Such an idea is echoed in Ali Behdad's chapter entitled, "From Travelogue to Tourist Guide: The Orientalist as Sightseer". In this chapter, Behdad argues that the travel guide book in its informational assessment and vision of the other contributes to the "commodification of the orient for tourists belatedly searching for the disappearing exotic".(pp.46-47).Wharton follows almost the same path. After all, the guide book reinforces the notion that the Orient and Morocco in particular are alien and far away destinations that can, therefore, be commodified to the entire world and serve as objects of consumption as well as sources of entertainment and pleasure.

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