

De-Orientalizing Gender Relations in David Butler's *Road to Morocco* (1942)

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Abstract

The interest of American cinema in Morocco was established during the nineteenth and twentieth century, when North Africa became a central concern of the West in general. At this time many westerners travelled to the region as part of colonialist agendas. Like the Middle East and Asia, North Africa became a fertile ground for western fantasies. The shift from textual to visual narratives did little to change the imperialistic fake view towards the Orient. One of the most influential visual arts which took the East in general and Morocco in particular, as a subject of interest was cinema, particularly Hollywood cinema. This study seeks accordingly to disclose a number of stereotypical images that are fashioned in David Butler's (1942) *Road to Morocco* as one of the most influential visual landmarks of early film. The interest of the present article is to deconstruct gender complexities as expressed in Butler's movie as one of Hollywood's most classical productions. The objective is to show how gender relations are problematized in the film between the Orient and the Occident. Intercultural bias, involving the Western male vis-à-vis the Oriental female, is put to strong questions to reconsider the Western ideology on how gender regulations are screened. By closely reading various scenes from Butler's movie, this article intends to show how the Western power of stereotyping is shifted from a state of vantage position and refocused in terms of Western authority. The camera in the movie is, in ample situations, inverted and subverted by placing the White Orientalist supremacy in a state of anxiety and ambivalence.

Keywords: Moroccan woman, gender relations, sensuality, Road to Morocco, early film

Introduction

The link between cinema and gender predicament continues to enjoy ample consideration in cinematic literature. It seems that the means of connection between the notions of gender, sex, sexuality, and patriarchy as a hierarchical social system, is a viable scope of study, given the complex social and cultural realities of different ethnicities. Throughout visual art, mainly cinema, the Orient has unfailingly constituted a freshly adequate space for Western ideology. Sensuality-related themes have turned into necessary ingredients for Orientalists and colonialists to demystify some of the Orient's complexities. In its turn, Hollywood cinema had its own vision *vis-à-vis* this issue. This study seeks to unveil some of the gender intricacies as those expressed in David Butler's (1942) *Road to Morocco*. Looking into interracial relations in Butler's movie, I shall examine how the negotiation of gender and sexuality is visualized in one of Hollywood's masterpieces of the first half of the twentieth century. Intercultural bias, involving the Western male *vis-à-vis* the Oriental female, is put to strong questions to reconsider how the interplay of Western ideology and gender regulations is screened. The article is thematically organized in terms of sections. The first section delineates the theoretical scope of the study depicting the visual dynamics of cinema in relation to distinct ethnicities and cultures. This article inspires its theoretical insights from postcolonial writing of Edward Said (1978), Gayatri Spivak (1993) and Reina Lewis (2004), as well as from prominent film scholars like Ella Shohat (1990, 2006) and Jack Shaheen (2001). The second section sheds light on how the Moroccan harem is portrayed in Butler's movie from the perspective of filmic representations. The analysis places focus on the two Western males, who have developed such a haunting obsession with the Oriental boudoirs, with eager for the native female princess. This 'White' male/native female encounter soon inspires "signs of spectacular resistance" (Bekkaoui, 1998)ⁱ, whereby the supposedly superior authority of the 'White' men collapses. The point is to detect a few sites/scenes in which the native females are able to adopt the position of authority and power. The fourth section analyses incredible sequences that display a subversion of Western authority by inverting the fantasy of rescue. That is, the native female proves able to adopt the status of a 'savior,' and thus refutes the Orientalist topos that has regularly ascribed roles of heroism to Western characters. The article ends with a general conclusion.

The visual politics of an ethno-racial view

For Ella Shohat (1990), "gender and sexuality are significant in colonial discourse" (p. 40)ⁱⁱ Given such a claim, Hollywood would have never been more prolific and persuasive without relying on and resorting to the significance of such appealing issues as sex and sexuality. These markers have been an effective inspiration for Western fantasy and alluring sagas that better titillated the viewing audience's excitement. From time immemorial, according to Shohat (1990), the mystique of the Orient has, to a great deal, been a fascination for Western cinema. Ever since the emergence of motion picture, Oriental characters, or rather subjects, have undergone processes of sexualization and eroticization, which the camera employs as persuasive techniques to dramatize the gender issue and satiate the Western thirst for a sexually lascivious 'Other'. The deployment of gender problem is indeed a lame pretence for visual mechanics of representation. Shohat (1990) contends that "Hollywood's Orient became in some ways a pretext for eroticized images, especially from the 1930s through the mid of 1950s" (p. 41)

Why was the Orient a target for American cinema? The gender constituent, including sex and sexuality, outlines a remarkably specific historical context in Hollywood cinema in its relation with the Orient. To put it differently, when sex and nudity were ostensibly restricted issues in the West, especially with the Production Code of censorship, the Orient provided a recourse with full freedom to tackle the problem of the taboo in terms of visual vulgarism. The Orient was imagined and believed to be an appropriate site of profanity and corruption with free access to practices of raping and illicit sex. That was so because in the West, "[m]iscegenation, nudity, sexually suggestive dances or costumes, 'excessive and lustful kissing' were prohibited. Illicit sex, seduction, or rape could only be suggested, and then only if absolutely essential to the plot and if severely punished at the end" (Shohat, 1990, p. 41).

Being regulated in visual productions in the West during the first half of the twentieth century, these sensual practices, as being all incorporated within the gender scope, were to be governed through a decent conduct; the transformation of gender kinetics was allowed only when space was altered. Thus, what was restricted, or viewed as morally offensive, in the USA was considered as fair in the Orient. The history of American cinema in the 1930s and 1940s was labeled as a 'Blue Period,' referring to films with sex and sexuality content. The prevalence of a genre of films that was believed to transgress ethics and morals called for the urgent need for censorship. This was an outcome of a pledge that issued from religious institutions in America. Accordingly, several archbishops in the United States passed on a solemn request to the audience to join the 'Legion of Decency' (Doherty, 1999, p. 321) as a code of morality. Some of them, with radical views, encouraged even a boycott of going to movie theaters.. Likewise, political institutions came into the company of the church on the censorship stratagem, compelling American cinema to morality rules. Thomas Doherty (1999) reported the recitals that governed Hollywood cinema during the 'Blue Period.' He exposed us to the religious statements that exhorted the patrolling of American movies of that time. An illustrative affirmation of the discourse at issue appears on the first page of his book:

I wish to join the Legion of Decency, which condemns vile and wholesome moving pictures. I unite with all who protest against them as a grave menace to youth, to home life, to country, and to religion. I condemn absolutely those salacious motion pictures which, with other degrading agencies, are corrupting public morals and prompting a sex mania in our land (p. 321).

This episcopal covenant sounds to hold and call for principles of idealism for American society with the aim of living in a pure state of decency, but the statement in essence focuses solely on the lustful and salacious side of corruption, as if sex and sexuality were the only defects to moral perversion. Still, underscoring the banning of such issues entails an intense impact on the film narrative compared with the other assortment of vices such as crimes, office corruption, violence, out-of-wedlock births, racial discrimination, etc.

In the midst of this peculiar combination of historical incidents, the inter-war period, the U.S. depression, the beginning of sound in motion picture, the Golden age and the Blue Period, the Orient presented an alibi for Hollywood filmmakers. In her article "Gender in Hollywood's Orient," Shohat (1990) displayed how filmmakers and, by extension, artists found an exculpatory haven in the other side of the world. Most Hollywood visual productions shot about, if not in, the Orient, contain scenes of nude bodies and playacts of belly dancing. Hence, perfect implementations of processes of eroticization was copiously present in Hollywood films at the expense of Oriental female characters who were viewed as enthralling embellishments for the movie plot. In other words, As Edward Said (1978) put it, "the relation between the Middle East and the West is really defined as sexual" (p. 309). Hollywood seemed to have paid hardly any heed to the production of serious movies on American-Maghreb encounters without resorting to erotic drama. 'Sexually defined' or eroticism-bound Orient is an argument many theorists brought to the surface. Beside Said, other postcolonial scholars such as Woll and Miller (1987) also believe that "the movie Arabs, and the television Arabs, have appeared as lustful, criminal, and erotic villains or foils to Western heroes and heroines" (p. 179). Such inflicting terms as 'erotic', 'lustful', like Said's 'oversexed degenerate' (p. 287), are indeed visually more satisfactorily attached to native females of distinct ethnicities. As it is mentioned before in this article, even notions of 'heat' and 'desire' might be said to be issuing from the articulation of gender, and native women in Hollywood movies hypnotically fill in the screen as a perfect gleaming site for these themes. On the whole, all that was taboo in the West was legitimate, or rather legitimized, in the Orient. Butler's *Road to Morocco* is one of the best instances whereby the negotiation of gender and sexuality problems is operated.

The road to the harem

Obviously, *Road to Morocco* paved the American way towards Moroccan and, by extension, Oriental harems. A main feature of 'road to' movies stresses the American masculinist vision towards a 'feminized' Orient; this characteristic finds a good expression in the movie under analysis taking two American males Turkey Jackson (Bob Hope) and Jeff Peters (Bing Crosby) in a mission of discovery and exploration of Morocco's interiors. From the very outset, on stretched sands of the desert, Turkey and Jeff are depicted on the back of a haphazardly found camel heading towards a Moroccan village that is painted on the top of the dunes. Leaving the sea behind, the desert fills the screen and the two Americans managed to get this angulate mammal of arid places (they thought it was a kangaroo). Indeed, as long as it is the Orient, camels, sands, turbans, and women are effortlessly available and accessible everywhere. Said's (1978) existing "motif of the Orient as an insinuating danger" (p. 57) is so much articulated by the two protagonists' opening song:

We're off on the road to Morocco
 Look out clear the way
 'cause here we come
 the men eat fire, sleep on nails
 and saw their wives in half
 For any villains we may meet...ⁱⁱⁱ

On hearing such lyrics, the expectations of the Western audience are heightened because a daunting 'Otherized' culture impends as a desirable locus in the narrative. Aesthetically however, the *mise-en-scene*, which is set for the song, is embellished with a sense of humour depicting the protagonists as fearless jokers. Donald McCaffrey (2005) elaborates on the filmic aspect of the joke articulated by Jeff and Turkey: "mugging toward the audience by looking into the camera lens, sensational, facing-the-camera-head-on, [they] delivered jokes" (p. 119). Soon the wide-angle frame of the desert would fade into a small jumbled village where native women gain some room of display. From an opened space as threatening as the desert, the camera takes us inside a luxurious Oriental palace which is populated with an infinite number of eunuchs, female slaves, and princess Shalmar (Dorothy Lamour). The palace in the middle of the desert is aromatic of the myths traditionally developed in Orientalist travel writings and fiction. The scene is viewed as a "throwback to the colonial narratives of Kipling and Conrad as filtered through jingoistic American eyes" (Cohan and Hark, 1997, pp. 113-142).

Even if the harem is, in the words of Leslie Pierce, "a sanctuary or a sacred precinct," (1993, p. 5) its privacy is broken by the arrival of the two Western men. It is true that the harem denotes and connotes the mystery of an institution that holds much privacy and vulnerability in Oriental culture. It is, Pierce (1993) defines, "a space to which general access is forbidden or controlled and in which the presence of certain individuals or certain modes of behavior are forbidden" (p. 5). Notwithstanding, nothing and nowhere is forbidden and controlled at the presence of Western subjects. For Turkey and Jeff, the palace/harem is to be penetrated for it is part of their mission in Morocco. The essence of this visual narrative is to romanticize and dramatize the relations and interactions between the Moroccan and Western subjects inside the palace. Shohat (1997) reminds us that "[T]he Western obsession with the harem, for example, was not only crucial for Hollywood's visualization of the Orient, it also authorized a proliferation of sexual images projected unto an 'Otherized' elsewhere" (p. 47). The Moroccan harem serves as a site that hosts an assortment of male/female ethno-sexual relations, and manifests the Western ideological and Western myths about native women. In fact, Jeff and Turkey hold and embody various Eurocentric views of the Oriental harem. Because it is for them a "male dominated space" and a sign of "Oriental despotism," it is imperative that the Western males intervene. The Western conception and perception of the harem gives vent to Westerners, both characters and spectators, to become fascinatingly haunted by its fantasies and complexities.

Particularly, the enthrallment of the harem is governed by the fantasies of sex and sexuality in a feminized Orient that is also viewed as “a site of Muslim promiscuity” (Peirce, 1993, p. 7). In *Road to Morocco*, such fantasies are plainly satisfied. Without any delay, the camera jumps to display a panoramically sensual view of Turkey beside the princess in her extravagant boudoir at the palace gazing in clover at a spectacular dance performance of females in translucent attires (figure 1).^{iv} This is one of the most revealing visual manifestations of filmic Orientalism. Not only does it distort the venerated essence of the harem in the Orient, but it also blatantly allows for a fixity and perpetuation of “the sexual order of colonial discourse” (Shohat, 1990, p. 42).



Figure 1: *Road to Morocco* (1942)- Turkey in princess Shalmar's Boudoir (harem)

The nonappearance of native males inside the harem except for eunuchs affirms and confirms the hierarchical considerations of gender enhanced by the filmmaker. To fulfill one of the Orientalist axioms of sexual discourse, the scene allows for a peculiar co-existence of White males and native females. Shohat (2006) insightfully explains that the legitimacy of such an act in Hollywood's poetics of visualization is justified by ethnocentric views of 'heat' and 'desire.' That is, in Shohat's 'hot/frigid' dichotomy, the sexual interaction between White men and Oriental/Arab women “cannot involve rape” (p. 42) because the female natives are supposed to be in raging heat and desire for their White masters” (p. 42). Accordingly, the native princess is not only safe, but also enjoying the presence of the White man in the middle of her harem. The blazing sexual desire for 'White masters' is even exacerbated at the arrival of Jeff at the palace. The native princess is depicted as a lascivious and promiscuous wanton who wants both of the men. Through a crystal clear close-up (figure 2),^v the camera relishes the very sensual moments in pleasurable delight away from the Hays Office Code of the 1920s. Scenes of “excessive and lustful kissing” (Shohat, 2006, p. 47) fill in the screen, and what was prohibited in the West turned out to be permitted in the Orient. Such scenes of complete lasciviousness are aromatic of Sternberg's *Morocco* (1930) as well, whereby the legionnaires are pictured to freely enjoy kissing and hugging moments with the native females.^{vi}



Figure 2: *Road to Morocco* (1942)- Princess Shalmar between Jeff and Turkey

The Moroccan harem is imagined as a space for sexual adventures and a site for illegal courting encounters. The native princess, the emblem of a higher social status, reciprocates to White desires and obsessions. The “two sex maniacs,”^{vii} to borrow Phyllis Diller’s expression, see in the Orient a school of sex and sexuality. While reading an archaic voluminous book on ‘how to make sex,’ Turkey confesses: ‘The first time I ever saw steam heat in print.’^{viii} In fact, the White male’s (over)desire turns against the Orientalist ideology that places the natives/Arabs/blacks at the climax of lustfulness. Even if “the movie Arabs and the television Arabs have appeared as lustful, criminal, and erotic villains or foils to Western heroes and heroines” (Woll and Miller, 1987, p. 179), the two Americans in *Road to Morocco* reverse this aphoristic myth by personifying the active agents of eroticism and lecherousness. Princess Shalmar orchestrates the plot and frustrates the ethnocentric privilege of ‘rationality’; the two ridiculed Americans have become “oversexed degenerate” (Said, 1978, p. 287) themselves, quarrelling over the native woman. In this regard, even the dichotomous status of frigid/hot is put into question for the White males’ seemingly ‘rational’ civility has demeaned to ‘instinctual’ sexuality.

Native females ridicule ‘White’ males

After this uncontrollable obsession with the princess and maidens of the harem, the two American protagonists have become completely vulnerable, accepting orders from the princess: “No more talk, go to your room and prepare for the wedding,”^{ix} so Shalmar instructs Turkey, who submissively responds to her commands especially after he notices two huge black eunuchs by his sides. The Western man, whose authority and superiority deteriorate, is transformed into a docile being that is frustrated by a retrieved native, both female and male, agency. This sequence would definitely remind viewers of early Hollywood canon of Sternberg’s *Morocco* once again, when one of the native prostitutes explores the weakness of legionnaire Tom Brown (Gary Cooper).^x

The Western lavish quest for the harem continues to enjoy prevalence in the movie narrative by converting Morocco into a fairyland of beautiful women. This purports an image that constitutes an

inextricable pattern of Orientalist discourse: interracial encounters. In Sternberg's *Morocco* and Humberstone's *The Desert Song* (1953 version), for instance, the Western female protagonists (Amy Jolly and Margot Birabeau respectively) govern, to a large measure, the film plot. However, the absence of Western females is a remarkable formula in *Road to Morocco*, and such absence opens the floor for more active display of native females. Hence, the theme of interracial encounters is invited to occupy the essence of the story. The character of the princess is frequently present and voiced, she manages to be almost on equal footing of narrativity with the Western male heroes. This subverts the claim that, in road movies, "the actresses [...] remain bound up in their limitations of a male-oriented and dominated fantasy" (Cohan and Hark, 1997, p. 62). In Butler's movie, the native princess and Mihirmah, (Dona Drake), the maid, relay a considerable portion of aura in the film, they indeed "play integral halves of the heterosexual, antiheroic [male] couple" (p. 62). These facts are explicitly instantiated in the film given the aim of the Western males. Throughout their journey, they long for the princess, they are in continuous argument about prioritizing the right of wedlock with her. This constant sensuality, visualized for the audience in terms of kissing, embracing, and intending to marry native women, translates and validates a legitimate interracial, inter-sensual, and inter-romantic encounter in movies that barely acknowledge such patterns; Jack Shaheen explains that "[a] few films allow Arab maidens to embrace Western males [...] only after the women ridicule and reject Arab suitors, does the scenario allow them to fall into the arms of Western protagonists" (Shaheen, 2001, p. 23).

Road to Morocco, accordingly, is one of these few exceptions wherein interracial romance is made possible and plausible. Nevertheless, the narrative would never be perfected and idealized without the incorporation of native 'villains' and 'savages.' The "Arab suitor," (Shaheen, 2001, p. 23), in this regard, is Mullay Kassim (Anthony Quinn). He plays the role of the sheik of *Karameesh*. He is visualized as a 'despotic' chieftain whose 'cruelty,' 'barbarity,' and 'ruffianism' is made explicit at the very inception of the film by rioting the tribe with rash gunfire. Obviously, as the inevitable tradition of Orientalist ideology goes, the representations of the 'Self' and 'Other' are negotiated against the foil of Mullay Kassim. Throughout the plot, the intermittent appearance of the native leader and his men is almost always accompanied with chaos and disorder. The camera depicts men in the tribe of *Karameesh* as desultory traders holding knives and swords, and ready to shed blood. What visually lacks is the scene with such exaggerated clichés as "eating fire and sleeping on nails."

In contrast, the Western males are portrayed as decent and elegant conversers who are cannily able to fend for themselves in 'a strange country.' By personifying 'barbarity' and 'tyranny,' Mullay Kassim's utility in the plot justifies the 'rescue fantasy' paradigm, opined by Shohat, and which Gayatri Spivak explains otherwise pithily as "white men saving brown women from brown men" (Spivak, 1993, p. 93). Spivak's words refer and are applicable to those rescue negotiations that occur between the 'imperial subjects and subjects of imperialism.' The two American actors, accordingly, assume protagonistic roles of protecting and liberating Princess Shalmar and maid Mihirmah from the 'barbarous' Mullay Kassim and his followers. In doing so, rescuing becomes a channel through which the cinematic representation plants the ideology of the Western male's dominance, and therefore, the native woman's unconcealed disownment of her male compatriot. Enlightening our vision on the ploy of 'rescue,' Shohat (1990) elaborates:

The rescue fantasy, when literalized through rescuing a woman from a lascivious Arab, has to be seen not only as an allegory of saving the Orient from its own libidinal, instinctual destructiveness, but also as a didactic allegory addressed to women at home, insinuating the dangerous nature of the uncivilized Arab man and by implication exalting the freedom Western women presumably enjoy (p. 42).

Road to Morocco, accordingly, presents native males as a sign of 'insinuating danger' and a symbol of 'instinctual destructiveness,' but these injurious attributes also unexpectedly apply to the two Western men that happen to be driven by their instinct in a haunting manner. Besides, the freedom enjoyed by native females inside and outside the palace subverts the call for such an urgent rescue on the part of the

West. Simply, such “objectification of nonwhite women as things to be salvaged and saved from barbaric men of color” (Hughey, 2012, p. 39), is instead usefully planted as a recurrent trope in visual narratives of jaunt for entertainment purposes. On that account, the nature of representations portraying the native men manufactures a hostile audience in the West. This audience is susceptible to develop feelings of wrath and clash towards Moroccan men, viewed and, consequently, thought of as ‘villains and buffoons.’ The ‘rescue fantasy’ feignedly rationalizes the American obsession with the Moroccan harem foregrounding also a male/male dichotomous clash. The formula of Western ‘Saviour’ versus Oriental sheik poses masculinist/gender interactions into strong questions.

On the other hand, through such well-designed, yet fake, pretenses as ‘rescue fantasy,’ the native women are visualized to embody themes of unfaithfulness and adultery. One of the numerous scenes that thematically manifest the princess as an unfaithful figure occurs at the arrival of Jeff at the palace. When he discovers the potential wedding between Shalmar and his friend Turkey, he transforms himself into an adversary trying to win her heart by hook or by crook. Despite their ridiculed characterization, Jeff is still painted in the film as a romantic figure that is able to persuade the princess to get rid of his friend Turkey. Through a romantic serenade ‘Moonlight Becomes You,’^{xi} his role brings about a significant shift in the narrative elevating the film from a trivial comedy to an ideal musical wherein Jeff and Shalmar constitute a perfect couple. This image is admittedly contradictory to Shohat’s claim that “the trajectory of constituting the couple in the musical comedy, for example, could not allow for a racially ‘subaltern’ protagonist” (Shohat, 1997, p. 45). In fact, the poetics of casting have resolved such a problem by resorting to a transformation of characters. That is, Western females and males are ‘nativized’ to play pivotal native roles.

The native female is pictured as a ‘lustful’ woman who whimsically drops Turkey and adopts Jeff. Turkey is not disturbed by her disownment, however, for the Moroccan harem is replete with maidens who are freely available at his command: “I got a girl [Mihirmah], I got her at the harem, right off the assembly line,” so Turkey ironically boasts. Mihirmah is thus an alternative he picked out from an imaginary ‘assembly line’ of wenches, she herself yearns for Turkey and waits for a suitable chance to express her blazing desire and love for him. From a Western perspective, waiting for a chance to be emancipated from the grip of the harem, and striving to escape such tyrannical space with anomalous sexuality, has been an ultimate dream of Mihirmah. Reina Lewis contends that “the harem woman trapped in a polygamous sexual prison was a titillating but pitiful emblem of the aberrant sexuality and despotic power that characterized all that is wrong with the non-Christian Orient” (Lewis, 2004, p. 14). Visually, the space of the palace in *Road to Morocco* does not actually impart an image of disorder and despotism, nor is it pictured as a ‘polygamous sexual prison;’ the space is instead populated with native maidens and eunuchs, who are, according to Orientalist imaginary of ‘castration,’^{xii} conceived of as deprived of power and virility, and thus of masculinity. Be that as it may, a Western intrusion must occur. Be it a ploy or not, a rescuing mission must embellish and savor the plot for a luxuriated suspense and for a better consumption on the part of Western spectatorship.

Shifting the ‘rescue fantasy’

Where there is unfaithfulness, there is also complicity. Both the native female ‘protagonists’ are made guilty of conspiracy against their male compatriots, mainly Mulla Kassim. When the sheik discovers Shalmar’s and Mihirmah’s affair with the Western men, he decides to kidnap the two women to the desert for an immediate wedding ceremony between him and Shalmar. This is an act to remind the viewer of old captivity narratives that have been communicated through travel writings and other visual fiction. In our context, Mulla Kassim captures everybody: Western men and native females, and heads towards his tents in the middle of an ‘insinuating’ desert, leaving the palace behind. The sheik is exclusively associated with abundant violence. Ali Bouânani (1997) corroborates: “Mulla Kassim’s impulsive violence serves two purposes: that of opposition, creating the dichotomy of the civilized versus the uncivilized, and that of propaganda, keeping the image of the violent moor alive” (p. 245). The bipolarity of ‘civilized’ and ‘uncivilized’ in this regard is transfused on the screen in terms of motifs of

peace/violence, sea/desert, romantic dialogue/aggressive actions. All of which are carried out to keep Moroccan space and subjects 'Orientalized.' The 'violent Moor' in the persona of Mullaï Kassim invokes stories and series of historic captivity. When he arrives at the palace to stop the two Americans from leaving with Shalmar, Turkey informs Jeff: "Here comes *murder* incorporated," and later Turkey remorsefully utters: "we're carried off by a sheik, now we're gonna have our heads chopped off," which explicitly declares a representation of the tribe men going beyond the simple guilt of capture to 'murder' and "bloodthirsty dishonesty," (Said, 1978, p. 287). In contrast, Jeff and Turkey embody triumphant epics of rescue and emancipation, "That joint must be their hideout, we must save the girls," so Jeff says, reversing the image that the Arabs are the ones who are breaking the laws in their own countries, and thus resort to their 'hideouts.' Accordingly, it is obvious that the movie transforms the two American gagsters into heroes who managed, through Western tricks and native females' complicity, to embarrassingly defeat a whole tribe of a chieftain, swordsmen, horses, and guns. Simply and satirically, "the entertainers humiliate Arabs" (Shaheen, 2001, p. 398). While jokes and entertainment are used as a tool to reverse colonial discourse and regain a voice of resistance, Western subjects adopt them here instead to triumph over the natives and subdue them to mockery and derision. The particular focus on this 'ridicule' occurs towards the end of the movie when Jeff and Turkey manage to stir a funny 'melee' in the tent between Arabs themselves. To achieve this objective, Jeff and Turkey resort to the policy of 'divide and conquer' or 'brother against brother,' as they themselves reveal, which is a standard principle of colonial discourse utilized in colonies to appease the rage of resistance. Such 'ridiculing' acts constitute perfect scenes wherein the 'Other' turns out to be not the Western/American, but the Moroccan 'Self' itself, a risible fight of "white-robed Arabs" against "black-robed Arabs" (Shaheen, 2001, p. 398). Butler's film perpetuates the need for a Western invasion for the lame pretense that Arab tribes are always in conflict. Consider this dialogue between the two Westerners and a prison guard when Neb-Jolla and his men arrive for the wedding:

Jeff: Who's that? Who are they?
Guard: [in a gruff voice], That's the great Sheik, Neb-Jolla and his men.
Jeff: Friend of Kassim's?
Guard: No, the enemy of Kassim! For ten years they have been at *war*; but Kassim has invited him as a token of *peace*. But I do not trust either one of them. [*Italics mine*]

The incorporation of two sheiks in the narrative consolidates the Orientalist stereotype of an everlasting tribal clash in Oriental societies. Besides, the appearance of Neb-Jolla is to generalize the axiom that all Oriental sheiks are the same, and hold much the same vices of despotism, lasciviousness and lechery. "You are fortunate indeed to win the love of so beautiful a princess," so Neb-Jolla congratulates Mullaï Kassim, who replies: "she cannot wait for my kisses upon her lips." Soon the princess, assimilating the Western role of provoking and re-starting war between the two tribes again, advises Neb-Jolla not to trust Mullaï Kassim.

On the other hand, while the role of the guard requires distance from the detainees, he instead divulges secrets related to the sheiks, which is meant to imply a sense of complicity on the part of the natives, and thus, a drift of destructiveness within the Moroccan 'Self.' Later on, the movie depicts the jail guard as one of the most imbecile natives as they managed to get his rifle with no demanding effort. Such 'ridicule' is addressed to favor, once again, the 'astuteness' and 'wittiness' of the West versus the injurious 'silliness' of philistine Moroccan subjects, a 'silliness' that is made regrettable even by camels, which "disparage humans": "when I see how silly people behave, I'm glad I'm a camel." The theme of compassion (con) fused with complicity towards the detained Jeff and Turkey is immediately carried out from Mihirmah. Pretending to serve them some food through the window, she seizes the chance to avow them some tricks so that they can flee detention: "in this bowl there's a magic ring from the princess! You

can make three wishes. Perhaps it will help us all to escape!" So, even magic, as a crude feature of Orientalist fantasy, favors Western men when they are in trouble. Often, complicity on the part of native females renders them brave heroines who are able to rescue the Western males as well.

Taking this specific scene into account, we spot a very remarkably ambivalent image. That is, the 'rescue fantasy' is reversed in the film. The native females turn into 'rescuers,' forwarding, dissimilarly from Spivak's (1993), another valid factuality: 'brown women are saving white men from the detention of brown men.' This problematizes the ideological premise of the White man as a permanent 'rescuer/agent,' with regard to the Oriental subject as an eternal 'rescued/object,' and, hence, reveals a gender predicament wherein ethno-sexual regulations are varied and inverted. Correspondingly, the White male's power of 'saving' the 'Other' is exposed to anxiety. Being detained in jail and resorting to native females' complicity, or rather sympathy, for liberation poses their presupposed superiority of containment and 'securization' into relevant questions. The movie represents an arena of "sexual anxieties on display" (Simour, 2011, p. 6). So, the end focus is featured with an active agency that is consciously recovered by the two female natives by equating the courage Western male protagonists are believed to exclusively possess. When Mullaï Kassim and his men are embarrassingly defeated, princess Shalmar and maid Mihirmah run away with Jeff and Turkey, they are all heroes now. Onboard for America, they talk about marriage, which invokes issues of interracial intercourse as a 'normal' phenomenon, putting, once again, the White race into problems of miscegenation.

Generating a duplicated picture of the film's inception, worthy of attention indeed is the camera's contrast of the sea with the desert once again. The movie opens and ends with an image of the sea. The desert fades into water, and the four protagonists are depicted through a wide-framed close-up onboard for New York. The sea metaphorically opens new aspirations and venues of freedom and emancipation for the native females. Heading towards the West and leaving Morocco behind, the native females flee the despotism of male sheiks and desert threats. The film ends its journeying into 'primitiveness' and 'backwardness,' it moves now towards modernity and civility. Costumed in modern attires, Princess Shalmar and maid Mihirmah look like 'possibly dark Cleopatra[s], turned by Hollywood's beauty conventions into [American]-looking white women,' to paraphrase Shohat's (2006) words for my context.

Conclusion

A paraphernalia of imaginary portrayals have been constructed by America's biggest image-making machine ever since its inception. Butler's movie, in particular, represents Hollywood's genre of movies that depicted roads in motion, and which presented a formula of early American films going beyond the domestic frontier. During the first half of the twentieth century, *Road to Morocco* contributed to a de-contextualization process premised on the desirability for a wider commercialization of America's visual products at the expense of the 'Other.' However, the (mis)representational project stands, by no means, for the 'true' or 'correct' images that pertained to the social and cultural realities of what Morocco's space and women actually were. The Orientalist and colonialist discourse, that was long established and perpetuated through Hollywood's agenda, seems to be subject to crumble. The native female characters turn out to gain a plausible presence and a pervasive appearance throughout the film narrative. This study has explored a collection of sites wherein the female characterization has placed vigorous annoyance to different 'conceited' Western figures, and in which the camera proves to lose control all through various sequences. The deployment of the Moroccan female character as complementary discrediting figures in early American cinema is consciously and unconsciously contested through a variety of sequences. The social and cultural reality of the Moroccan woman as it was transcends the limits of the Orientalist and colonialist politics of representation. The discourse of colonialism and, particularly, that of Orientalism, is shaken up and falls in paradoxical terms. This article has been ultimately for the purpose of "promot[ing] a new way of thinking about the [discredited] Moroccan woman and to call forth a differentiation between the Moroccan women as-they-are-portrayed and the Moroccan women as they are," to use John Maier's

terms (1996, 229). The film still remains one of the most valuable visual documents that register spans of Morocco's history, and that stores archival records about a specific culture that was believed to be an extension of the Orient.

Notes

ⁱ This expression is inspired from the title of professor Bekkaoui's book: *Signs of Spectacular Resistance: The Spanish Moor and British Orientalism* (1998). I am very much indebted to him for his insightful instruction and tremendous cooperation.

ⁱⁱ Ella Shohat is one of the most genuine scholars and a wonderful reader of film. She has produced various critical writings on cinema studies. 'Gender in Hollywood's Orient' (1990) is of the most useful articles that pertinently relate to the scope of my analysis in this study.

ⁱⁱⁱ The song appears at the outset of the movie when Jeff (Bing Crosby) and Turkey (Bob Hope) are riding a camel in the middle of the desert; It is an inspiration of the *Arabian Nights'* *Entertainment* legacy, and it cocoons Morocco into a simplistic and satiric joke song.

^{iv} The figure displays the Western male in the middle of the palace of *Karamesh*; the shot is meant to prove how Western males are eagerly obsessed with Oriental women at the heart of an Oriental harem.

^v Figure 5 is incorporated to display the sensuality hosted by the Orient when nudity was restricted in the U.S.A during the Censorship Code era.

^{vi} Similar sequences are reiterated in Von Sternberg's *Morocco* (1930). Scenes of kissing and hugging between the legionnaires and native females are displayed throughout the movie turning Morocco into a lascivious space featured with a culture of genuine sensuality.

^{vii} This is a description made by Hope's co-star and friend Phyllis Diller, retrieved from *Bob Hope and the Road to Success*, interview with Phyllis Diller (part of Bonus Materials in the movie DVD).

^{viii} Around minute 39, Jeff is captured in a shot reading a voluminous book entitled: 'How to Make Sex,' by which the director hints to the didactic role of the Orient relaying lessons on sexuality to Western males.

^{ix} The dialogue starts at minute 50.26.

^x In Von Sternberg's *Morocco* (1930), one of the native prostitutes subdues legionnaire Tom Brown (Gary Cooper)- the symbol of authority and superiority- to a state of sympathy, which thus, sets the colonial discourse to anxiety and ambivalence.

^{xi} Although the song was recorded specifically for Paramount Pictures, it has become a very popular song in the American culture.

^{xii} According to Shohat's interpretation, 'Castration' and 'lynching' are two types of punishment that are inflicted upon the 'subalterns/blacks/natives,' and this is rationalized by their potential possibility of 'rape,' which jeopardizes the Western female.

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