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Research Article

Colonialism and Gender in British Travel Writing and Literature: Re-imaging Morocco as Terra Nullius and Feminized Land in Walter Harris's *Morocco That Was* (1921) and Margaret Rome's *Bride of the Rif* (1972)

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Abstract

The Moroccan landscape with its cultural diversity and historical heritage has always been a tourist destination for early British travel literature and colonial fictional representations. Drawing on postcolonial theory and iconographic geography as conceptual paradigms, this study explores the theme of imagining Morocco as terra nullius and sexually feminized geography in British travel writing and literature with particular focus on Walter Harris's *Morocco That Was* (1921) and Margaret Rome's *Bride of the Rif* (1972). It unravels the discursive connections of gender and colonialism by demonstrating how this interplay legitimizes imperial domination. With this in mind, this scholarly inquiry examines how the existential ontology of the Moroccan cultural memory is de-materialized and thus (mis)represented as abstract idea instead of picturing it as tangibly concrete realia in the Orientalist literary imagery. In this frame of reference, this paper emerges as a critical attempt to revisit the discursive ways in which Morocco is framed as sexually eroticized female body. This feminizing metaphor is surfaced in the analyzed texts through the symbolic association of Morocco with the recurrent trope of the 'virgin land' (Shohat, 1991). In the explored narratives, such invasive strategy is recounted in expansionist fashions that ultimately justify the interventionist policy of imperial conquest and warrant foreign political control.

Keywords: Gender, Colonialism, Feminized Land, British Travel Writing, Terra Nullius.

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Introduction

Morocco as a melting pot of diverse cross-cultural encounters often triggers the inquisitive curiosity of the Orientalist fantasy. The complex social composition and cultural elements of Morocco are widely portrayed in British literary imagery (Ammari, 2017). These aesthetic representations are produced in the shape of multiple textual depictions, ranging from travel writing to literary fiction (Ammari, 2018). Since the early 13th century, Morocco continued to engage in an interlocking network of diplomatic relations, maritime trade exchanges, and co- military alliances with Britain as one of its most trusting political allies (Erzini, 2002; Alami,2013). Mutual commercial interests and political coalitions against common competitive enemies, particularly France and Spain, brought Morocco and the United Kingdom to intercultural dialogue and collaboration. Sooner than later, these collaboration networks dissolved and transformed into conflictual tensions when Britain declared its military occupation of Tangier from 1662 to 1684 (Laamiri, 2010,p.3).

In the post-independence phase, the Moroccan-British relations and their enduring cultural reminiscences have culminated in the production of an eloquent tapestry of literary narratives embellished with an Orientalist flavor (Chaouch, 2018). Hence, as a spectacular geography with remarkable cultural heritage and rich folkloric patrimony, Morocco has ever since gained a longstanding momentum in Anglophone Orientalist writings. As Laamiri (2010) reminds us, Morocco "for a long period remained a mystery for Europe and what was known about it was tainted by legend and fantasy" (p.3). Based on Pratt's (2007) 'transculturation' concept, I argue that Morocco in British travel texts and literature is rendered a transcultural contact-zone. In this respect, the Moroccan-British diplomatic interactions reflect the cultural diversity which Morocco still cherishes to the present day. Their trade relations across the Mediterranean have deeply shaped the cultural connections and impacted in various ways the intertwined historical intersections forged between the two countries. Parallel to the rise of postcolonial theory in the Third World academia, there is a growing critical interest in investigating the colonial implications embedded in metropolitan travel accounts on Morocco (Laamiri, 2010). In so doing, emerging postcolonial interpretations of mainstream British travel texts are concerned with highlighting the influential roles these narratives have played in re-mapping the cultural geography of the Orient (Behdad,1994).

The rationale behind dissecting British travel texts on Morocco derives its epistemological significance from the era of full-blown British imperialism and its geographical expansions across north Africa. In his magnum opus, *Orientalism*, Edward Said (1987) points to the imperial complicity of 'geographical knowledge' in consolidating European colonial domination in the Orient and North Africa. In this regard, Said (1978) exhorts that "geography was essentially the material underpinning for knowledge about the orient" (p.216). Drawing on postcolonial theory and iconographic geography, this study intends to problematize how British geographical knowledge of Morocco as vacant *terra nullius* and feminized space informed the imperial designs of the foreign colonial powers.

This article interrogates how British travel writers and adventure fiction authors recorded their travel experiences in aesthetic cultural forms that endorse gendered colonialism and unequal power hierarchies. It unearths the reasons behind framing Morocco in stereotyped portraits that imagine it as a virgin feminine land. However, before initiating a detailed thematic interpretation of these eroticizing tropes, it is noteworthy to pinpoint the multifaceted roles British travelers to Morocco have played in the discursive formation of these stereotypical images. In British travelogue literature, cross-cultural itineraries and adventurous peregrinations have always implied a travelling subject and by the same way a moving consciousness (Laamiri,2010).

According to his theoretical notion of 'ideoscapes', Appadurai (1990) insinuates that travel involves not just physical movement. It also alludes to the diffusion of prioritized ideologies and the widespread circulation of preferred cultural perspectives. When British envoys, ambassadorial diplomats, and merchants visited Morocco, they also brought in their Orientalist fantasies and feminizing discourses. British travelers' preconceived judgements shaped not just their attitudes and perceptions towards Moroccan culture and society but also influenced their textual representations of Moroccan natives. This brings to mind De Botton (2002) who states that "the pleasure we derive from a journey may be depending more on the mindset we travel with than on the destination we travel to" (p.242). Hence, the adventurous experiences inherent in human voyages reflect not just the dynamic fluidity of moving physical bodies but also denote the transmissive transference of ideas, ideologies, assumptions, and thoughts reminiscent of what Said (1983) terms 'travelling theory'. Therefore, travel, as Laamiri (2010) posits, "is above all an experience of otherness [in that] travel moves identities and cultures across territories" (p.2). It is in these mutual interactions and frictional collisions, occurring between different communities, that Orientalist fantasies of Otherness, feminizing eroticism, and stereotypes of cultural alterity emerge.

In the literary contexts of Harris's *Morocco That Was* (1921) and Rome's *Bride of the Rif* (1972), travel stands not only for the actual encounters these British writers have experienced in Morocco. However, travel experiences and documentary trips have also acted as an expressive mode that helped those British travel writers to disseminate their Orientalist flights of fancy. In this respect, both Anglophone travel texts and literary fiction, as Laamiri (2010) reiterates, become a 'spatio-narratological frame' whereby exoticizing images and eroticizing inscriptions are textually circulated and rationalized as regimes of truth while interacting with othered non-European societies(p.2).

Imagining Morocco as a Terra Nullius: British Interventionist Policy and The Rhetoric of The Vacant Land

Walter Harris's *Morocco That Was* (1921) is a prominent British travel text which illustrates the interventionist discourse of the British foreign policy. This narrative of

conquest is often articulated through the discursive interplay of knowledge production and imperial incursion alongside the strategic paradigm of iconographic geography. In the colonial context, the descriptive narratorial lens of Harris's travel account epitomizes Foucault's (1975) notion of the panopticon and the watchful eye of imperial surveillance. In *Morocco That Was* (1921), the author associates the commanding view of visual surveillance and thick description with the symbolic power of land appropriation. This representational strategy reveals how the author's descriptive eyesight of scriptural documentation correlates with, and enacts, the proprietary discourse of claiming total ownership over the framed spatial sites (Pratt, 2007; Berger, 2008). In the same vein, Spurr (1993) posits that 'when we speak of the role of the eye in establishing knowledge of the world and authority over space, we are referring to a fundamental characteristic of Western thinking' (p.25). This narratological frame points to the rhetorical shifts and the intricate transitions of the colonial vision. The travel account under scrutiny highlights certain symbolic metonymies by which the narrator moves unnoticed from the aesthetic iconography of textual depiction to the expansionist cartography of geographical annexation.

In this sense, I argue that Harris's diplomatic sojourns in, and documentary excursions throughout Morocco, cannot be merely confined to a commissioned official delegation dispatched to negotiate potential alliances with the Moroccan Sultan. Harris's exploratory adventures in Morocco resulted in pro-imperial ramifications insofar as they enhanced colonial conspiracy thinking and illuminated the strategic vision of its expeditionary enterprise (Roslington,2014). In colonial Morocco (1912-1956), British travel records were in fact deliberate attempts of collecting ethnographic reconnaissance and anthropological data necessary to expand the invisible networks of imperial diplomatic espionage (Abdelkrim,2023). Later, Harris's historical surveys were exploited by other European empires, particularly France and Spain, which harnessed these textual archives to strengthen their military intelligence (Pennell,1986). Hence, chronicles of British travel literature on Morocco have been influentially productive in contributing to the building of imperial settlements and the bureaucratic establishment of colonial administrative control. Furthermore, this assertion is adeptly illuminated by Chrisman (2003) who emphasizes that "African political relations with Britain influenced metropolitan accounts of African cultural identity" (p.3). This explains the symbiotic interface between literary representation and the imperial international politics concerned with expanding overseas networks of diplomatic foreign relations. As Edwards (2020) confirms, the West was trained to imagine the foreign Other through literary and cultural production (p.82). This absorbing argument draws our attention to reconsider Edward Said's definition of Orientalism in light of the Foucauldian knowledge-power nexus. In the context of this study, Orientalism is no longer a purely impartial academic discipline of knowledge production. Nonetheless, Orientalism operates here as a warmongering ideology or a politically expansionist enterprise that is complicit in, and aligns with, the imperial designs of colonial domination.

By re-imaging Morocco as a vacant land and alien 'terra-incognita' (unknown land) that is yet to be settled and discovered by Western visitors and ambassadors, the British traveler disavows the material history of the Moroccan culture. In light of this Orientalist view, the British traveler denies Morocco ontological presence by framing its native inhabitants as silently absented interlocutors (Said,1989). In this sense, Harris (1921) writes: "Morocco was still an almost 'unknown country' in those days. Europe paid little attention to what was passing within its boundaries" (p.7). Discursive traces of constructing historical difference and spatial Otherness are plainly explicit in this instance. Europe's political indifference to Morocco showcases how the Moroccan geography and society were relegated to historical oblivion and erosive amnesia. This, in turn, indicates the negative colonial consequences following the ascent of Europe's economic dominance and the hegemonic influence of its global political power. The dismissive disregard of Morocco implies here the cultural alienation and the geographical negation of the Moroccan territorial presence as a living social entity. The abovementioned extract captures the extent to which Morocco seems to be denuded from its material geographical visibility in British travel narratives. Until it is unveiled and explored by travelling Orientalist visitors, any spatial territory, located beyond the geo-cultural boundaries of the metropolitan West, is (mis)represented as mysteriously unrecognized, and hence, nonexistent blind spot. Morocco, as an exemplary case, is seen as an exotic Moorish barbary, whose notorious history of Mediterranean piracy and captivity practices, adds to its alleged spatial remoteness (Matar, 2005).

For Harris (1921), Morocco remains enshrouded in the darkening shades of inscrutable cultural ambiguity and marginal peripherality. Morocco is pictured here as a spectral shadow or an abstract nonentity, whose tangible existence, finds its actual reification within, but not outside, the omniscient narratorial voice of the Orientalist literary imagination. This further demystifies the distorting representational modes by which Western travel accounts concretize the narratorial voice of the wandering traveler as a 'being presence' while fictionalizing other de-

materialized spaces as 'non-being absence' (Spurr,1993). Interestingly, Edward Said (1978) refers to the asymmetrical power dynamics and the discursive systems of inclusion and exclusion found in Orientalist literary discourse and Western cultural representations. While reading a Western literary text with a Third World eye, the postcolonial critic, Said (1978) writes, "must not forget [how] the Orientalist's presence is enabled by the Orient's effective absence" (p.208). Accordingly, the colonizer's dominant imperial presence is justified under the exclusionary pretext of rationalizing the absence of the colonized Other as an illusionary shadow. This constructionist Orientalist view is alluded to by various postcolonial theorists and historians. For example, Chakrabarty (2009) investigates how imperial metropolitan centers invent spurious ontological distinctions and epistemological divisions based on ideological artifices of historical difference and geographical distance. In this context, Morocco, with its versatile cultural memory, architectural art, and religio-historical legacy, is reduced to a remotely distant geography. It is framed as an extraterrestrial *Other*-world that is unknown to, different from, and unacknowledged by European centers. Similarly, in the Eurocentric binary logic of cultural representation, the periphery/center hierarchical polarity is shaped by dividing ideologies that reinforce constructed geographical dissonances. In this vein, Said (1994) posits that colonizing narratives of East/West spatio-cultural ruptures are primarily premised on "geographical or territorial assumptions that assign centrality to the Atlantic world and congenital and even delinquent peripherality to non-Western regions" (p.317). This commanding view suggests imperial attitudes related to the architectural configuration of space, the unilateral control of global political power and denial of coevalence. This Othering strategy tends to de-territorialize the ghettoized margins. It displaces the Third World peripheries to a temporally decelerated time-frame marked by abstract non-presence, spatial vacancy, and historical stagnation when compared to the advanced civilization of modern Europe (Fabian,1983). Thus, the de-materializing discourse of 'spatial nullity' crushes the concrete social reality of Morocco and obliterates its geo-cultural ontology. This way, the Orientalist enterprise renders a profitable service for foreign colonial powers. In turn, these constructed literary images, despite their fictional falsity and illusionary nature, contribute to initiating a traceable pathway for imperially embedded narratives of British racial superiority and white cultural supremacy.

In Harris's *Morocco That Was* (1921), Morocco, as a geo-strategic country located on the coastline of the Mediterranean, is portrayed as a fruitfully fertile soil and a feminized virgin land. It is constructed as a ripely fecund territory waiting for European colonizers to inseminate it with the fertilizing sperms of agricultural cultivation, enlightening cultural civilization and industrial urbanization. Walter Harris's travel text is emblematic of the enlightenment pro-imperial logic. It epitomizes the capitalist aspirations of colonial territorial annexation and maritime trade profits legitimized under the religious protocol of dispatching Christian missionary expeditions. This travel account embodies the pragmatic thinking of Western industrial capitalism. Thus, in its ideological underpinnings, *Morocco That Was* (1921) provides a tempting invitation for foreign colonial powers to declare Morocco a subjugated Western protectorate. In this context, Harris (1921) writes: "Morocco was at the very gates of the Mediterranean […] the great garden of olives and oranges which surrounded the kiosks of Miamounieh palace" (p.7). In the British conquering imagination, Morocco is textually constructed as an exploitable geography full of commercial profits and lucrative trade routes. For imperial Europe, the Moroccan landscape holds a multifarious ensemble of remunerative advantages and beneficial rewards that serve the capitalist interests of predatory empires.

Similarly, Pennell (1986) espouses this belief by highlighting the fact that Morocco, for the Franco-Spanish imperial regime, has always provided a wealthy space imbued with "economic and strategic significance [for] it was believed to contain rich economic prizes, in both agriculture and mineral reserves" (p.22). Indeed, like any other occupied North African colony that suffered the ravages of imperial plunder, Morocco was for Europe a supposedly lucrative treasury. Morocco is believed to be impregnated with profitable raw materials, mineral wealth and inexhaustible natural resources that could be exploited by foreign empires to thrive their economic prosperity. The colonial ideology posits that all the potential terrestrial riches and energy resources of Third World comprador countries (in this case Morocco) should be economically exploited by the European capitalist superpowers. By imagining Morocco as an emptily vacant land, Harris's *Morocco That Was* (1921) extends its far-reaching implications to various economic sectors and geo-political domains of regulatory power and social governance. In other words, if Morocco wishes to flourish its agricultural growth and develop into a culturally civilized society or a full-fledged industrial nation, it has to fully embrace the secular modernity introduced by European empires. In other words, any African nation that pursues a future of social development and economic prosperity must succumb to the geo-political interventions of external foreign powers by allowing them to monopolize its domestic state affairs. In hindsight, this inferential reflection proves that the British interventionist policy was found on propagating rescue rhetorics which

emphasized the urgency of transforming Morocco into a modern nation (Ammari, 2024).

Colonial discourse is premised not just on Orientalist stereotypes of feminized spaces and cultural exoticism endorsed under the banner of the so-called civilizing mission (Fanon, 1961). Nonetheless, European colonialism is found on plotted conspiracies which problematize the internal turmoil erupted in the targeted colonies (Cesairé, 2014). Colonial discourse foments contentious discords and warring conflicts among the native population. Internally, the spectrum of these contentious clashes is multifaceted. It extends from ethnoreligious dissensions to divergent ideological tensions and contesting political conflicts. Yet, this incited inimical strife often takes the shape of irreconcilable lingua-cultural differences that result in geographical polarization and provincial regionalism. Excerpted from Walter Harris's *Morocco That Was*, the following extract provides an illustrative manifestation of the divide-and-rule colonial policy adopted by foreign imperial powers. In light of this view, Harris (1921) writes:

> The rivalry of Great Britain and France was its outstanding feature, together with the constantly recurring quarrels and petty local wars of Spain with the tribes […] the northern Morocco has always been the unrestful and the most seditious part of the country […] It presented such danger for the Northern tribes were always at war with each other […] General feelings of the Moors toward the Europeans and Christians amounted to Hate (pp. 7-23).

Morocco is represented here as being fractured into disputatious political factions or disrupted by recurring intertribal feuds and clan wars. The northern part of Morocco is often demonized as a dangerous enclave full of insurgent rebels and local skirmishes. With its unruly dissidents, the northern region of the Rif is presumed to pose a menacing threat that may imperil the sovereign jurisdictional authority of the ruling Sultan. Historically, the northern part of Morocco is often depicted in Western anthropological accounts and historical narratives as *Blad-El-Siba*, "land of insolence" (Pennell,1986, p.24). As a mountainous tribal area located on the marginal hinterlands of northern Morocco, the Rif is portrayed as a lawless jungle and a dangerous war-zone saturated with larcenous banditry and piratical raids (Coon,1931; Pennell, 1986; Cucco, 2025). The Rif is believed to fall outside the institutional power of the central government. It is said to be regulated by parochial insularity and the customary law of honor killing and intertribal feuds (Hart,1976). As opposed to *Blad-El-Siba*, *Bled el Makhzen* or "land of government" is a law-abiding Arab-Speaking community. According to some ethnographic and historical records (Coon,1931; Hart,1976; Pennell,1986; Balfour, 2002), Arabs are thought to have pledged allegiant fealty to the Moroccan Sultan. As opposed to the insurgent rebels residing in the seditious north, the conformist loyalty of the south is expressed in obeisant ways that acknowledge the *Sharifian* reign of the ruling Moroccan Sultan. Unlike the intractable nature of the northern Riffians, Arabs are believed to showcase their faithful goodwill in vowing steadfast adherence to the constitutional legislations of the Sultan and hence act in full observance of the jurisprudential exegesis of the 'Sharia law'.[1] Consequently, it seems evidently salient that the divide-and-rule colonial policy exacerbates the ethnocultural divides of antagonistic enmity while it thwarts any reconciliatory accords of collaborative amity and harmonious coexistence. While Morocco is internally depicted as a dangerous hotspot of inextinguishable warfare, it is externally viewed as an exploitable site that sparked imperial contest ignited over invading its seemingly permeable boundaries.

Foreign colonialism may also take the shape of terrorism allegations and fabricated conjectures of anti-Christian bigotry that normalize the warmongering propaganda of actual military invasion. In this regard, the slanderous vilification of the Islamic religious doctrine was an effective expansionist strategy employed by the French empire to place Morocco under its colonial patronage. For instance, the French colonial power annexed the Eastern regional province of Morocco, particularly the city of Oujda, in 1907. This military incursion was carried out before France officially declared the administrative establishment of its protectorate system in Morocco in 1912. Amster (2013) recounts the insidiously sinister hoax plotted by the French military legion to legitimize the territorial conquest of Oujda city, which later on, expanded into a full-scale domination of the whole Morocco. In referencing the allegation propagated by the French government to place Morocco under its colonial authority, Amster (2013) states:

> In 1907, a doctor of the French government was beaten to death by a Muslim mob in the Moroccan city of Marrakesh. After clubbing him to death and crushing his head, the crowd dragged the naked corpse of Dr.

1. Sharia law is a religious belief system which constitutes a fundamental backbone of the Islamic jurisprudential tradition and its theological exegesis of interpreting the divine text (the Quran). It decrees a set of specific rights, principles and duties to organize people's social relations. It illuminates the life of Arab Muslim believers and guide their spiritual and physical behavior towards encouraged practices of religious sanctity, ascetic piety, moral virtuosity and monotheistic devotion. (See Mernissi, 1987, 1991, 2002; Sadiqi and Ennaji, 2006).

> Émile Mauchamp by the neck through the city streets on a rope. This gruesome spectacle served as the pretext for the French invasion of Oujda in 1907 and the establishment of a French protectorate in Morocco in 1912. At his funeral, the French minister of Foreign Affairs eulogized Mauchamp as "civilization's martyr" to a fanatical Islamic hatred of science. But just before his death, rumors circulated in Marrakesh that the doctor prepared for an imminent French invasion by secretly poisoning his Muslim patients (p.1).

The rumors concerning the tragic massacre of the French doctor, Émile Mauchamp, whether truly valid or inaccurately counterfactual, acted as an expansionist strategy. This constructed narrative supplied the French foreign powers with the licensed permit to precipitate the colonization of Morocco before 1912. Soon, this curious murder mystery turned into a gravely dramatized matter of intense police investigation and introspective detection, sparking an irresolvable Franco-Moroccan diplomatic crisis which escalated conflictual tensions between the two nations. This alleged tragedy became a popular cause célèbre recurrently reported by its print and visual media alike (Katz, 2001). Beyond paying tribute, Mauchamp's presumed murder transformed into a saintly shrine treated with reverential sanctity and sacred veneration in metropolitan France. Mauchamp's affair symbolized sacrificial martyrdom bravely undertaken in the name of spreading the enlightening spirit of white cultural civilization and its scientifically advanced medical knowledge. As described by the French minister of Foreign Affairs, this putative calamity was portrayed as a proudful incident that gained France the meritorious acclaim of legendary heroism and hubristic glory among its neighboring European countries.

In a matter of few days, the whole story evolved into a polarizing rupture between Moroccan Arab Islamophobia and French secular cosmopolitics of altruistic tolerance and liberal democracy. Indeed, the ideological magnification of this criminality rationalized the dividing geo-cultural boundaries that elevated France as the central locus of interfaith dialogue and flexible religious diversity. Contrastively, the same threadbare cliché was used to tarnish Morocco's international reputation by degrading it as the breeding ground of religious violence, belligerent bellicosity and anti-Christian bigotry. This evinces how every constructed colonial text is preceded by an invented ideological pretext that refashions the re-inscribed non-European cultural landscape as a fictionalized hyper-text. Hence, the rumors surrounding Mauchamp's mysterious death were reproduced as the triumphal victory of European pharmaceutical industry and white medicinal techno-science over the bloodthirsty fanaticism of militant Islam and all the prejudices of exotic spiritual mysticism associated with its Sufi tradition (Amster, 2013). This revealing colonial encounter is an exemplary manifestation which elucidates how colonial occupation operates. It illustrates how imperial Europe labels itself a divinely predestined savior entrusted with the mission of civilizing what is often Orientalized as the barbarous parts of the world, notably North Africa and the Middle East (Achebe,1978; Said, 1978).

To deconstruct the depopulating aesthetics by which Morocco is constructed as a vacant land, Walter Harris's meticulous description of the Moroccan Sultan's death offers a textual allegory. It elaborates the symbolic ways in which Morocco is represented as an empty 'terra-nullius'. The discourse of the 'vacant land' is argued to reinforce the capitalist agenda of settler colonialism. As a colonial ideology, 'terra-nullius' is essentially premised on dismissive politics of abusive dispossession (Conner, 2005). It tends to disinherit the indigenous aboriginals (native inhabitants) from the proprietary agency of claiming residential settlement in and rightful inheritance to a land which legally belongs to them either by violating their ownership rights or refusing to acknowledge their territorial sovereignty.

Postcolonial theory has been critically censorious of the concept of 'terra-nullius'. It challenged and categorized it as an expansionist strategy incorporated by the imperial powers to legitimize the illegal takeover of the colonized lands and establish territorial settlements overseas (Ashcroft et al., 2025, pp. 327-329). This annexationist protocol is repudiated due to its confiscatory practices manifested in land expropriation. In the Case of Harris's (1921) *Morocco That Was*, the conquering imagery of the 'vacant land' takes on the figurative metonymy which links the Sultan's death to the impotent debility of his governance. By applying this metonymic trope, the colonial proprietary desire justifies the assumed absence of the local population's sovereign proprietorship over the Moroccan land. While describing the mournful bereavement of the Sultan, Harris (1921) recounts that "in 1990, he [The Moroccan Sultan] died […] I was at Marrakesh at the time of his last illness when he lingered on day by day, kept alive by inhalations of oxygen" (p.25). The melancholic depiction of the Sultan's last days foretells the tragic demise awaiting the Moroccan society at the time. The poignant tone with which the Sultan's decease is recounted indicates the fragmentary meltdown of the Moroccan sovereign power and insinuates the fragile weakness of its gradually vanishing royal authority. Extrapolating from this interpretation, the death of the Sultan epitomizes the 'vacant land' metaphor which

symbolizes the flimsy frailty and the unoccupied vacancy of the Moroccan throne. Since the ruling Sultan in Morocco is labelled as the supreme leader who accords himself the prerogative of central power and decision-making, his absence prefigures the explosion of social disarray and the ensuing tensions that would escalate over his succession. More succinctly, this interventionist narrative politics suggests the calamitous misfortune that would face the internal geo-political status of the country. Hence, Morocco, in the absence of its ruling Sultan, is preordained to suffer interminable domestic conflicts which threaten to dissolve the commonly shared bonds of national unity, cultural uniformity, religious conformity, and political stability. Looked at from this debilitating narrative point of view, the Moroccan kingdom is downplayed as a defenseless colony. Morocco is subordinated here as a perishable nonentity placed on the deathbed of inevitable historical erasure, corrosive decay and retrograde cultural attrition. The erosive effects embedded in this textual representation reframes the Moroccan landscape in gruesomely pessimistic fashion that portends its socio-political collapse and heralds its impending civilizational decline.

Gender and Colonialism in Walter Harris's *Morocco That Was* (1921) and Margaret Rome's *Bride of The Rif* (1972)

Harris's (1921) *Morocco That Was* and Rome's *Bride of the Rif* (1972) emerge as prominent textual artifacts that epitomize the colonial implications of the 'feminized land' metaphor. The latter, in the selected texts under scrutiny, functions as an expansionist strategy woven into the narrative fabric of the colonial literary discourse. In British Orientalist travel writing, the feminization of the Moroccan geography emerges as a figurative allegory in which the symbolic power of gendered colonialism and sexuality is ideologically instrumentalized (Chrisman,2003). This rhetorical trope has far-reaching impacts manifested in diverse colonial consequences. Sexuality is reproduced in British travel accounts and literary imagery as a political enterprise. It is strategically leveraged to warrant imperial economic exploitation and hence legitimize geo-political control by maintaining the supremacy of white patriarchal authority and imperial governance. This feminizing metaphor is advanced to underscore the potent virility, incontestable military strength, and the phallocentric masculinity of the male patriarchal colonizer.

Through the erotic emasculation of the Moroccan socio-cultural habitat as a female land, Orientalist travelers unfold the towering enormity of the imperial armada and extoll the hegemonic influence of their nations' military power. The British narratorial voice seems to insinuate that the territorial annexation of the Moroccan space is as facilely accomplishable as the sexual defloration of a woman's softly penetrable hymen. This metaphorical association further explains the gendered dimension of the colonial encounter.

In the colonialist framework, the metonymic interplay of gender and colonial domination echoes certain symbolic commonalities in which the abusive ravages of sexual ravishment are linked to the corporal violence of imperial military subjugation. By resembling the geology of the conquered land to the sexualized anatomy of a woman, the colonial narrative presents the invasion of Moroccan territories as a preordained fait accompli. Re-imaged as such, the Moroccan geography comes to represent a vulnerably exploitable female body or a virgin land. In this respect, the overall economic richness of the Moroccan land is claimed by the colonial proprietary desire (p.41). In this context, Harris (1921) writes:

> The mother of Mulai Abdul Aziz was a Turkish lady brought from Constantinople to Morocco (…) She maintained her influence over the Sultan till the day of his death…and then one morning, the wail of the women within the house told that death had come (pp.15-25).

Integral to this excerpt is the Oriental femininity/Occidental masculinity gendered binarism. These gender dialectics are imbued with asymmetrical power structures and cultural hierarchies that underscore the discursive formation of dividing ontological distinctions and historical differences. Besides, this dichotomic logic accords European empires the formidable power of political leadership possessed by a man while representing Morocco as the feminine antithesis of the imperial male patriarchal patronage. In the absence of its male ruling Sultan, Morocco remains a widowed female geography which is insecurely susceptible to economic depletion and external geo-political control the way a husbandless woman is vulnerable to various forms of sexual exploitation in the absence of her husband's supportive protection. Similarly, the hegemonic ascendancy and the imperious suzerainty attributed to the colonial administration are justified by assigning masculinist properties or the physical strength of a man to the colonizer. By the same token, the fragile weakness of the Moroccan land is underpinned by ascribing feminine qualities of biological infirmity and sexual frailty to the feminized Moroccan land. In this context, the androcentric history of European imperialism and the colonial male sexual desire are inextricably intertwined (Hyam,1993; McClintock,1995).

In Harris's (1921) *Morocco That Was*, the death of Sultan Mulai El-Hassan is presumed to herald the outbreak of internal political turmoil and riotous social upheaval which threaten to engulf the country. Following this narrative perspective, Morocco is presented here as a weakly debilitated state in desperate need for the intervention of the colonial protectorate system. Although the influential prerogative of the Sultan's Turkish wife held sway in the palace and maintained powerful impact on Mulai El-Hassan's reign, a woman alone, without the supportive patronage of male counsellors, lacks the eligible capacity to rule. Hence, women, in the colonial androcentric history, are prevented from being potential heirs to the throne because they are often led astray by their emotional feelings and blindly deluded by their affections (Mill,1869).

The exclusion of women from leadership positions of political power and royal governance justified on grounds of their inherent emotional instincts was a colonial ideology which contributed to the imperial conquest of Morocco (Wyrtzen,2015). By associating the death of the Sultan with the vacant absence of the male elite and the feminine presence with the ineffectual inability to rule, the colonial narratorial voice denies the Moroccan state the rightful agency of self-governance and claims implicitly sovereign suzerainty over its land. Viewed this way, the patriarchal power of the western self are rationalized at the expense of the inferiorly feminized Oriental Other (Morocco). Unlike the emotionally lecherous and sensuous periphery, the dominant culture of the metropolitan center is hailed as the central locus of rational reason and cerebral intelligence. Depicted as such, Morocco is relegated to a delicately precarious situation in ways that problematize its internal political status and weaken its geo-diplomatic position in the eye of its powerful international rivals. Accordingly, this feminizing metaphor unveils how the installation of the European imperial settlement is naturalized through the emasculation of the feminized Moroccan space.

As a perceptual scope of cultural representation, the 'feminizing metaphor' denotes the colonial architectural configuration of space. Morocco is emasculated as a virgin land. It is given the aural semblance of a fertile territory waiting for the imperial agricultural machinery to inseminate it with the fertilizing sperms of enlightening cultural civilization, industrial power and economic prosperity. In this context, to legitimize the urgent exigency of annexing Morocco, the latter, in the colonial grand-narrative, is inscribed with weakening discourses of fragile femininity, political dependency and frail geo-political insecurity. As I mentioned earlier, the de-masculinization of the Moroccan landscape as a feminized virgin land finds its objective correlative in the death of the Moroccan Sultan Mulai El-Hassan. The decease of Mulai El-Hassan is symbolically equated with the absence of the patriarchal male soldiery and the frustrating breakdown of anti-colonial resistance. Hence, the death of the ruling Sultan indicates not just the evaporation of patriotic nationalism which constitutes the cultural identity of the Moroccan society. Additionally, the Sultan's death implies a tacit invitation that solicits the protective patronage of the foreign colonial powers to place Morocco under the imperial protectorate system.

In the Orientalist imagination, the territorial invasion of the Moroccan landscape is symbolically interlocked with the feminization of its geography. In conjunction with what is priorly articulated, Shohat (1991) posits that "the geology and the topography of the land are also explicitly sexualized to resemble the anatomy of a woman" (p. 47). By drawing an allegorical interplay between erotic sexualization and geographical penetration, the phallocentric masculinity of the imperial gaze is legitimized to ravish the fruitful yields of the invaded Moroccan land/deflowered lady. In harmonious correlation with this insight, Grace's (2004) theoretical insights play in tune with the preceding critical views as she highlights that 'the process of Orientalization of the Orient is one that intermingles with its feminization' (p.40). In this context, Grace (2004) explicitly states:

> The imperialist imagination had to simultaneously superimpose its own meaning onto what was regarded an otherwise inert and vacant land (…) For the imperialist project to be successful, it had to assume that the world was uninscribed, blank for the required text to be written on it. Similarly, the veiled woman as representative of the 'nation' was a blank face, a *non-entity*, which had to be unveiled and given a new colonized and Christianized identity (p.137).

Departing from Grace's (2004) illuminating insights, the Moroccan female body is no longer an autonomous entity nor a socially independent psycho-anatomical structure with freestanding agency and gender mobility. It is rather metaphorically affiliated with a feminized space or a conquerable geographical milieu. In this case, the land, which is also a symbolic metonymy of the female body, is textually mapped and eroticized through the imperial gaze of patriarchal authority and colonial desire (McClintock,1995). The female body here, then, is not only a sexually raped anatomical structure but also alludes to an incurably wounded spatial site despoiled and rampaged by foreign imperial plunder. Thereupon, the sexual ravishment of the abused female body intersects here not just with colonial acts of geographical discovery and cultural exploration. More precisely, the territorial incursion of the Moroccan land overlaps with transgressive Orientalist practices of eroticism that transcend the forbidden realm

of the harem by striving to uncover its concealed recesses. In this vein, attempts of colonial conquest presuppose unveiling the puzzling sexual mysteries that constitute the socio-cultural experiences of the Moroccan female subjectivity and its overall womanhood. This explains the strategic ways whereby the colonial ideology associates the spatial permeability of the Moroccan land with the sexual penetrability of its women to ensure the feasibility of constructing colonial administration in Morocco.

The notion of the *Harem* is also an outstanding feminizing trope which testifies to the preponderant presence of the sexualizing imperial gaze in Walter Harris's travel account. "Her great friend and companion in the 'harem' were another Turkish lady, the mother of the reigning Sultan Mulai Youssef" (Harris,1921, p.15). In Orientalist travelogue fiction, the harem is constructed as a private domestic sphere or a secluded polygynous quarter of hypersexual promiscuity and inexorable lust (Kabbani, 1986; Melman, 1989). In this framework, the harem comes to represent the carnal voluptuary and licentious cravings of male sensual lovemaking, concubinage tradition and captivity practices of female slavery. As Grace (2004) reiterates, "the word Harem for the western mind connotes a sexualized space, where a plethora of semi-naked women wait for the pleasure of the Sultan or the Pasha" (p. 40). The harem here echoes fascinating scenes of unlimited sexual indulgence and depraved perversities. It is in this context that the Algerian postcolonial critic, Malek Alloula (1986), defines the harem as "a universe of generalized perversion and of the absolute limitlessness of pleasure" (p.115). Furthermore, Abu-Lughod (1989) emphasizes the widespread ubiquity of the harem in Western travel literature and anthropological works. She posits that the sexual mysteries of the Oriental harem and the cultural ambiguities of Arab-Muslim societies turned into significantly researched zones of Western anthropological exploration and literary representation (Abu-Lughod, 1989).

According to varied historical accounts and ethnographic records (Flaubert et al., 2006; Melman,1989), the term harem is a politicized term, whose connotative significations, insinuate patriarchal power structures. This gendered political dimension is concisely expressed in recurring images of despotic patriarchy and phallocentric tyranny inflicted by Oriental rulers who subject the captured odalisques to sexual exploitation in their princely palaces known as the seraglio (Alloula,1986, p.115). Hence, in the Western monolithic conceptions of gender and Orientalist fantasy, Arab-Muslim women in general are often reduced to played-by sexual toys or fetishized objects exploited in the hands of their male lecherous patriarchs (Grace,2004).

In his magnum opus, *Orientalism*, Edward Said (1978) elucidates how the Orient is imagined in Western literary imagination as a licentious space of unrestrained sexual pleasure. "The orient was a place where one could look for sexual experiences unobtainable in Europe" (Said, 1978, p.190). Similarly, the same argument is reiterated by Melman (1989) who ascertains the fact that the Orient in the European literary productions "has always been associated with sensuality" (p.301).

In the Orientalist eroticism and its illusionary flights of fancy, the Orient embodies a redemptive sanctuary or a sexually liberating space of voluptuous self-gratification. Stereotyped as such, Morocco in this context conjures the erotic image of a brothel where European travelers and visitors can release their libidinous compulsions which are rigidly suppressed and repressed in Europe. Since its primary beginnings, the geo-political expansion of the colonial project was spurred neither by Christian missionary expeditions of redemptive salvation nor propelled by commercial aspirations of conquering extra-territorial marketplaces (Hyam,1993). The European colonial penetration of the non-Western colonies was not only economically mobilized by the extraction of 'surplus capital', but it was rather predisposed by the elicitation of sensual pleasure and the subjective projection of 'surplus sexual' desire (Hyam, 1993, p. 301).

The feminizing emasculation of the Moroccan geography is a markedly phenomenal trope and a recurring discursive motif amply found in Margaret Rome's *Bride of the Rif* (1972). Rome's Orientalist narrative structure is complicit in the colonial ideology of geographical construction and its exoticizing tendencies of white cultural hegemony. The narrative tarnishes the cultural image of the Moroccan Rif region as primitively conservative community governed by parochial tribalism and hegemonic patriarchy. This pejorative vilification is reasserted through foregrounding a relational contradistinction between the Riffian male-dominated framework and the emancipatory lifestyle of the western liberal outlook.

> The Rif are primitive in their passions, but every woman taken by them as a wife is counted fortunate in acquiring a faithful and devoted mate. (…) Demonstrating a perfect obedience? Prostrating herself submissively before her husband in such a way as to have no will of her own? If that is Rif Justice then you can keep it, senor. I prefer the more emancipated outlook of Western civilization (Rome, 1972, pp. 138-139).

Riffian women are represented here as victimized scapegoats and marginalized female categories suffering

from the enduring legacies of patriarchal oppression and lack of democratic gender equality. As opposed to the socially privileged Western women who represent the mobilized feminist consciousness of the metropolitan bourgeois culture, the traumatized Riffian women are viewed as downtrodden underdogs or minorized subaltern peasantry. Misrepresented as such, Riffian women are portrayed as being miserably anguished in the throes of patriarchal injustice and humiliating maltreatment. With their socio-political status problematized by Orientalist victimizing narratives, Moroccan women in general and rural Riffian females in particular are subordinately relegated to what Ahmed designates as "the category of Third World female subaltern" (cited In William Chrisman, p.93). In Rome's (1972) *Bride of the Rif*, what binds the ideologically scapegoated Riffian women together, to quote Mohanty (1988), is a homogenzing "sociological notion of the 'sameness' of their [patriarchal] oppression" (p.65). Similarly, Spivak (1985) critiques the white 'rescue fantasies' that legitimize the European colonial expeditions based on a feminist liberation movement endorsed under the banner of "white men saving brown women from brown men" (cited in Williams&Chrisman,2013, p.93). Mohanty's (1988) insightful contention dovetails in correlative accord with Spivak's deconstructive analysis of the colonizer/colonized hierarchical power dynamics and the Othering ideologies of cultural subordination and imperial domination that ensue from these unequal power imbalances.

Additionally, marriage in the Rif is denounced as an unfortunate herald of eternal imprisonment and fateful misfortune. It is portrayed as a suffocating jail that hijacks women's freestanding agency of gender mobility. Marriage is argued to undermine women's decision-making power and incarcerate them in the subterranean dungeon of submissive servitude, sexual exploitation and social alienation. In this context, wedlock seems to be equated with repressive bondage and female captivity. More significantly, wedlock is no longer deemed here an advantageous social institution of family building. Viewed this way, marriage is neither a mutually unifying bond of romantic tenderness and requited lovemaking nor a socially co-operative alliance of male-female complementary collaboration. Instead, matrimonial relations in the Rif are depicted as restrictive constraints and obstructive restraints that hamper women's creative potential and prevent their socio-economic aspirations and unlimited freedom.

In the Rif, married women, Rome (1972) suggests, are coerced to showcase signs of spousal obedience and subservient docility. They are expected to genuflect in obsequious obeisance, abide by their husbands' commands and acknowledge their male spouses' guardianship. Viewed from a Eurocentrically limited perspective, marriage is conceived of in Rome's Orientalist narrative as an exclusionary social structure that reproduces sexist practices of gender discrimination. Thus, wedlock, in the Riffian cultural tradition, Rome (1972) stresses, is linked to the perpetuation of masculinist mentalities of patriarchal domination and phallocentric superiority. Accordingly, the Western feminist doctrine is offered as an alternative avenue to accomplish social emancipation. Thus, Western feminist ideology is brought to the fore as a powerfully transformative force capable of liberating Riffian women from the oppressive shackles of socio-economic marginalization and hence rescue them from the minority status of peripheral subalternity to which they have been priorly doomed. By problematizing the Rif region as a breeding ground of gender injustice and despotic patriarchy, Rome endorses the widespread ubiquity of the colonial civilizing mission discourse. The latter, in its biblical missionary belief, claims a divine legitimacy vouchsafed exclusively to the white race to extend the Christian moral principles of civilizational enlightenment and redemptive salvation to other non-European blind spots.

Like the civilizing mission rhetoric that propagates the erroneous illusions of civilizational advancement and promises the rescue of the 'barbarous' *Other*-world from the darkness of bestial savagery and ignorance, the Western feminist liberation movement disseminates the utopian grand-narratives of social emancipation. Thus, similar to the civilizing mission ideology, the white feminist agenda claims the advent of liberal democracy, secular modernity, and the rise of multicultural globalization. Alongside the feminization of the Moroccan geography, lurking behind this gendered binary logic of literary representation is a set of erosive imperial stereotypes. These deracinating ideologies are concerned with the erasure of the Moroccan folkloric heritage and the entire obliteration of its indigenous identity and collective memory. The excessive concern with the feminine presence of Morocco in Rome's (1972) narrative indicates the rationalized absence of its masculine manpower. As a result, this literary imagination of Morocco as a vacantly feminized space implies the assumption that Morocco is a 'womanly queendom' emptied of its male elite. The exclusionary disregard of the Moroccan male military forces is itself a colonial terra nullius paradigm which avers the penetrable colonizability and the unpeopled vacancy of the emasculated Moroccan land.

When intertextually analysed and juxtaposed, one can discern how the ideological enactment of white cultural racism is a predominant Orientalist trope commonly

recurrent in both Harris's *Morocco That Was* (1921) and Rome's *Bride of the Rif* (1972). While Rome (1972) castigates the submissive prostration of the Riffian women to their patriarchal male elites, the Moroccan customary etiquette of bowing before the Sultan in his presence is likewise derogated in Harris's *Morocco That Was* (1921). As a signifying cultural practice, the symbolic gesture of bowing before the Sultan is repulsed and denigrated as an 'absurd' triviality that brings disgraceful dishonor associated with servile docility and humiliating slavery. In this context, Harris (1921) writes: An Englishman, and much less England, cannot be demeaned by any fantastic gymnastics. I preferred not to do it solely for the reason that it seemed to me absurd'' (p.31). When presented to the Moroccan Sultan, the delegated British envoy, Walter Harris, disparagingly despises the renowned behavioral pattern of bowing in allegiant fealty before the Sultan. Expressed with defying refusal, the British ambassador vehemently repudiates and rebukes the Moorish customary etiquette of bending the knee or prostrating in humility and loyal reverence before the Sultan. This explains why the cultural attitudes embedded in Harris's British travel account are subjectively biased and replete with prejudiced stereotypes and ethnocentric bigotry. This Eurocentric perspective is articulated in a seemingly racist tone that appears to reject cultural difference and normalizes the egotistic hubris, hegemonic supremacy, and racial superiority claimed by the white dominant culture.

Conclusion

This paper has explored the theme of gender and colonialism in British travel writing and literature. It casts the spotlight of critical inquiry on how Morocco is constructed as a *terra nullius* and feminized land in Walter Harris's *Morocco That Was* (1921) and Margaret Rome's *Bride of the Rif* (1972). Drawing on postcolonial theory and iconographic geography, this current study has reached a constellation of important conclusions. These insightful inferences contribute to the ongoing scholarly debates on the interplay of imperialism and gendered colonial encounters. By re-imaging Morocco as a feminized terra nullius in British literary imagery, the colonial gaze forges a metonymic intersection between the erotic unveiling of the sexualized female body and the geographical penetration of the annexed land. This narrative strategy constructs Morocco as a fertile virgin land available for the imperial interventionist policy and its abusive ravages of economic exploitation and political control.

While Spivak (1985) and Mohanty (1988) label the Western feminist-imperialist representations of Third World subaltern women as discursively colonizing ideologies of 'epistemic violence', Said (1994) re-defines European imperialism as an act of 'geographical violence' (p.255). In other words, colonialism works not just through the bloody necro-politics of ethnic extermination and collateral damage, but it also involves the production of knowledge through metaphors. Such disempowering metaphorical allegories function as ideological apparatuses which epitomize how cultural representation intermingles with imperial power dynamics in ways that justify the colonial proprietary discourse of land appropriation.

This conceptual understanding is further proved by Said (1983) who argues that any interpretive practice of textual analysis in literary theory should try shifting the examined text from the abstract fictional realm of intra-textual 'literariness' to the extra-textual 'worldliness' (circumstantial materiality). For Said (1994), any critical interpretation of the realities of imperial domination may remain incompletely superficial or conceptually limited unless the metropolitan text is explored in relation to its broader colonial context. This scholarly endeavor, Said argues, should be conducted in subtly nuanced ways in which the aesthetic poetics of a particular text dovetail neatly with the ideological politics supplied by its corresponding context. Seen from this anti-colonial perspective, colonial textuality is enmeshed within discursive structures of power, language and ideology. In the case of this study, the imperial logic operates through a feminizing metaphor. This explains how the eroticizing tropes of sexualized female bodies and feminized vacant lands are expressed in imperiously powerful tones that accord the hegemonic prerogative of administrative control to the foreign empires.

In brief, this article has elucidated how the remarkable experiences encountered by British writers during their exploratory voyages to Morocco provided them with a conceptual blueprint to deform the geo-cultural identity of the Moroccan society. The latter in Harris's *Morocco That Was* (1921) and Rome's *Bride of the Rif* (1972) is de-materialized and transformed from concretely existing realia to an abstract idea. This defamiliarizing metamorphosis, fulfilled through the transformative power of literary representation (writing), is embroidered in an aesthetically entertaining fashion which sparks the European intellectual curiosity and raises the erotic desire of the Orientalist fantasy. In this respect, British literary discourse on Morocco represents a mosaic confluence of imperial cultural politics in which the factual and the fictional are confusingly conflated. Therefore, British travel accounts and literary fiction are rich scholarly archives that warrant a deep textual investigation when it comes to exploring the intersectional complexities of colonialism and gender.

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