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The Image of Moroccan Women in Josef Von Sternberg's *Morocco* (1930)

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Abstract
This paper is an attempt to deconstruct an early Hollywood movie on Morocco. A great deal of literature was produced during the first half of the twentieth century in the field of cultural representation, and many stories were fashioned in/on Morocco by the powerful industry of Hollywood. Most of the American movies on Morocco were not unrelated to women and the portrayal of native female characters in American cinema was not exempted from the politics and dynamics of Orientalism; The veil, the hookah, and belly dancers were essential ingredients that prompted a Western obsession with the Oriental *harem*.These elements were also sites on which Hollywood movie makers fantasized to entertain a particular western audience disturbed by war. Josef Von Sternberg's *Morocco* (1930) has ever since been one of the most pertinent cases whereby Moroccan women were negatively imag(in)ed. From veiled objects of desire through sexual beings in service of western protagonists, the movie excelled in depicting native characters as naïve, 'docile' and available. Yet, much of what was conceived of was not necessarily 'true' or 'correct'; this research, hence, aims at reconstructing the whole narrative through a postcolonial reading of the film. The purpose of the article is to show where the camera, in terms of the western eye/I crumbles, and thus, demonstrate that the native female characters are not as accessible and available as portrayed through visual productions.
Keywords: Native female characters --- Moroccan women --- Hollywood --- representation --- camera --- scene --- close-up --- shot

1. Introduction

This paper is concerned with the analysis of the representation of Moroccan women in early Hollywood cinema. I argue that certain native female characters appear to be inconspicuous and seldom considered in American films produced at the first half of the 20th century; so is the case with their examination in assorted works of film literature. Less attention has been directed to the native laywoman in front of the camera. Indeed, here lies my niche and my modest contribution to the world of knowledge turns up; I shall examine in detail how different figuring Moroccan women are tackled and portrayed within the whole scope of an early film of Hollywood production in/on Morocco. By investigating the different roles assigned to the Moroccan female characters in Josef Von Sternberg's *Morocco* (1930), this paper shall trace the nature and culture of Hollywood's representations of Moroccan women in contrast to the Western female characters.

The choice of this topic derives its relevance and significance from the fact that Morocco was not only a fertile site whereby several American movies were operated, but inevitably also, a little story of Hollywood's Orient, which is, in Khalid Bekkaoui's succinct terms, "an invention, a creation, a representation, and a misrepresentation"[1]. The topic's pertinence lies also in the representational genre itself grounded on the fact that cinema, following Brian Edwards's assertion, is one of the most prominent constituents of American Orientalism. By the same token, the choice of this particular movie is rationalized by, first, its availability, and second, it is one of the most conspicuous Hollywood productions that feature the first half of the 20th century in Morocco; it is through cinematic politics and strategies of representation and circulation that America managed to 'understand', 'contain' and 'redefine' the world[2].

The value of the visual image is also crucially attached to the understanding of history and its dimensions. Cinema, accordingly, is part of a 'visual document' which has been less touched in Moroccan film criticism. In one of his articles[3], the Moroccan film critic Ahmed Sijilmassi stresses the necessity of an intimate familiarity with the history of both global and local cinema and, hence, the need for the development of cinematic literacy. This is, he argues, a requirement for the historian whose aim is to employ this visual art as a document for the sake of historical research. Despite this urging need, by giving a simple example that we hardly

1Khalid Bekkaoui, Signs of Spectacular Resistance: The Spanish Moor and British Orientalism (Casablanca: Imprimerie Najah El Jadida, 1998), p. 16.

2Brian Edwards, "Following Casablanca, Recasting the Postcolonial City," in Moving Worlds, A Journal of Transcultural Writings, vol. 5, Number I, 2005, p. 9.

3Ahmed Sijilmassi, "MolahadhathawlaA-ssinemakaMassdar min MassadirAttarikh (Halat al-Maghreb)" (Notes on Cinema as one of Historical Sources_ the Case of Morocco) in Attarikh wa A-ssinema, proceedings of acolloquium held in Ben M'ssik University, Casablanca from 16thto 24thFeb., (1990), pp. 93, 94.

know exactly the number of documentary and feature films related, for instance, to colonial Morocco, he contends that there is no thoroughgoing history of cinema in Morocco.

On the other hand, Hamid Tbatou[1] has outlined various impediments that affected literary and critical productions on cinema in Morocco; he feels deep contrite about scarce efforts made on the part of the responsible authorities and administrations to sustain and flourish cinema in this North African country. More remarkable is the fact that the interest in the culture of cinema in Morocco has only recently been at work and that the emergence of what is called 'Moroccan film criticism' is an outcome of only a limited number of concerned intellectuals. The problem of writing about cinema in Morocco has been related to the concept of history; Tbatou recalls that the grief of cinema intellectuals has always been history. MulayDrissJaidi, in his turn, has evoked this parameter in his *Le Cinema Colonial* not as an end, but as a reading strategy through which he managed to interpret different cinematic layers such as the structure, the laws, the audience, and short films and colonial cinema. History for him is regarded as a credible documenting tool. This tendency is clearly manifested in his edited *Prints in the Gray Memory-Bassamat fi AddakiraArramadia*[2].

Thumbing through cinematic writings in Morocco, namely those related to film criticism, most literary productions have been generally about the history of colonial and Moroccan cinema. Few critics have tackled issues of representation, in which case the French colonial movies were their primary sources of analysis. For instance, the Moroccan film critic MoumenSmihi points to some images held by the colonizer through visual art forms, he argues that "the first cinematic images [of Moroccans] are those perpetuated by colonialism", he flagrantly confesses that those "are 'really' the images of Moroccans and one cannot deny the 'reality' of the image"[3] (My translation). The critic seems to confirm the 'truthfulness of these axiomatic images' while it is obvious that the photographer is the colonizer himself and thus we cannot believe in the 'truthfulness' of an image for the image itself is constructed. Dissimilarly, LarbiWahi insists first on the value of the visual document as a solid source, he states:

> The historical document must be well assimilated by Moroccan researchers, who confine it only to what is written or in oral rites; the visual document,be it a movie or an image, is most often overlooked[4] (My translation)

And later, he refers broadly to "the images of Morocco and Moroccans in colonial filmography,"Wahi contends that feature films, generated by European film industry, overlooked the social 'reality' of Morocco and Moroccans during the colonial era. He indicates that Morocco in colonial film was a "mere framework of a 'fantastic' and 'exotic' décor designed to satiate the European curiosity towards the 'unknown' and the 'unfamiliar'. Wahi pinpoints to various depictions of Moroccans in colonial movies explaining that men and women are most often attributed negative and denigrating pictures as opposed to the glorifying image associated with the Western man. He relied on movies such as André Liabel's *DansL'ombre du harem*(1928) (released in U.S.A as *In the Shadow of the Harem*), Jacque Séverak's*L'àme du Bled* (1929), and Marcel L'Herbier's*Les Hommes Nouveaux* (1936), all of which are, indeed, of a French production. Hollywood cinema, nonetheless, has not been profoundly detected in previous critical works. Even the analysis of the previously stated sample of movies was not conducted through pertinent frameworks based on politics of representation and dynamics of film theory; there has been a superficial description of different images, which might have been also only mere translated extracts from Western writings. I can argue that an Orientalist framework alone does, by no means, suffice to develop a counter-vision to the whole range of misconceptions and misrepresentations manufactured by the Western cinematic apparatus, namely that of the colonizer; a postcolonial approach, as a methodological framework, is pertinently viable in this respect. In terms of history, it would be worth to contextualize the status of North Africa and Morocco and how Hollywood was entangled into this part of the world.

2. Historical Background

The link between American cinema and Morocco was established during the 18th and 19th centuries when North Africa became a central concern of both Europe and America. At this time many westerners travelled to the region as part of the colonialist enterprise. Like the Middle East and Asia, North Africa became fertile ground for western fantasies. Western travel writers drew on generic conventions centered on wonder and

1Hamid Tbatou explains what DrissJaidi evokes in his Le Cinema Colonial. See Hamid Tbatou, "Rihanat al-Kitab A-ssinemai bi al-Maghreb" (Stakes of Cinematic Writings in Morocco) in FikrwaNaqd ', No. 91, (October 2007), pp. 113-116.

2Ibid.

3Ibid, 84.

4LarbiWahi, "al-Isti'amarwa A-ssinema: Haalat al- Maghrib" (Colonialism and Cinema: The Case of Morocco) in History and Cinema, proceedings of a colloquium held in Ben M'ssik University, Casablanca from 16th to 24th Feb., (1990), p. 100.

the fantastic to fashion stories about the 'other side' of the world in which the West was positioned as morally and culturally superior to the East. Because "[visual arts] were hardly immune to the blandishments of Orientalism"[1] Linda Nochlin (1998), the shift from textual to visual narratives did little to dismantle the imperialistic politics of Orientalist representation. One of the most influential visual arts, which took the East in general and Morocco in particular as its subject matter, was cinema, and especially Hollywood cinema.

The aim of Hollywood's colonialist films was to insert a Western presence into lands occupied by people seen as ethnic others. The presence of the French legion in North Africa, and particularly in Morocco, played a major role in shaping Hollywood's interest in the region. Other political realities also came into play. America's interest and involvement in North Africa, particularly in Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco, was rationalized by the imperative of militaristic intervention during World War II. In the process, Morocco was subjected to a distinctively American characterization. As the U.S. troops landed there General George S. Patten wrote, "Casablanca was a city which combines Hollywood and the Bible"[2]. In Patton's eyes Casablanca presented itself as a perfect site for Orientalist fantasies that could entertain the American audience during war time. Existing critical works on Hollywood movies that deal with Morocco have usually emphasized the way in which Western subjects are made to appear superior while Moroccans are subjected to demeaning stereotypes.

Gender was also a pertinent issue in Hollywood's Orient and women have usually been germane objects to the kinetics of representation. The depiction of oriental females, of whomMoroccan women are a mere example, was featured with assorted negative images; eroticization and sexualization were frequently executable processes through which the 'Other' was most often exerted.Yet, much of the literary criticism proliferated has considerably tackled the Arabs and Orientals in general, including, only superficially, women in particular; John Maier confirms that " The Orientalism of the film, not unrelated to its treatment of women, has received less attention"[3] Similarly, in the case of Hollywood films on Morocco; the focus of film critical and reflective literature targeted, at a large measure, either Western female characters like the notorious Von Sternberg's sexualized character Marlene Dietrich as Amy Jolly in *Morocco* (1930), or native Moroccan women who are characterized by American figures such as Dorothy Lamour playing the role of princess Shalmar in *Road toMorocco* (1942), for instance.

On the other hand, this colonial reality of the French legion in North Africa, and particularly in Morocco, played a major role in Hollywood's interest in the region. That is, a competition over the proliferation of numerous visual productions was launched between the colonizing France and America as the biggest film industry in the name of Hollywood. It was a matter of fact that cinema was the best medium through which a great deal of audiences would be reached. The empires expressed an enormous shift from fictional works to visual products. David Henry Slavin states: "Beset by U.S. competition, the French film industry found a haven in Lyautey's Morocco to produce films that could recapture audiences bedazzled by Hollywood"[4]. Slavin makes it clear that Hollywood dominated the world as far as movies were concerned; hence, the official and direct colonization of Morocco by the French and the U.S. troops landing in the country were to be symptomatic of this race through cinematic representation. Ironically enough, the 'Other' cultures and peoples were the capitalized sites of such competition. In fact, it was merely an indirect way to colonialism, Slavin reassures that

> In Morocco in the early 1920s, film directors and French protectorate officials produced successful films that expressed a policy of indirect colonial rule through realistic settings, spectacular battle scenes, and paternalistic attitudes toward colonial people[5]

No matter how the techniques were, the aim of colonial films was to inculcate a Western presence in the lands of 'Other' peoples, and 'discipline 'colonial people' in search for a consented and 'legitimatized' unanimousness on colonialism. Different cinematic features were, accordingly, employed to construct a 'realistic' aspect of what was taking place in the land of Morocco. It was obvious that the fear was posed by the power of Hollywood and the French "colonial narrative films had to compete with Hollywood productions on the international film market"[6]. Indeed, the two empires indulged in a dispute over who would have the priority to launch first visual outlines of Morocco. Yet, most American movies were actually complicit with the French foreign legion.

1Linda Nochlin quoted in John Bale, "Capturing 'The African' Body, Visual Images and 'Imaginative sports', Journal of Sport History, vol. 25, Number 2, (Summer 1998), p. 235.

2General George S. Patton, Jr, quoted in Brian Edwards, "Following Casablanca, Recasting the Postcolonial City," in Moving Worlds, A Journal of Transcultural Writings, vol. 5, Number I, (2005), p. 11.

3John Maier, Desert Songs: Western Images of Morocco and Moroccan Images of the West (Albany: State University Press, 1996), p. 4.

4Henry David Slavin, Colonial Cinema and Imperial France, 1919-1939: White Blind Spots, MaleFantasies, Settler Myths (U.S. The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), p. 74.

5Slavin, 74.

6Slavin, 74.

3. 'Haremizing' Morocco

3.1 The Western Obsession with the 'Harem'

One of the most frequent notions that gave rise to western misconceptions about the Orient was that of the 'harem'. Morocco was not exempted from Hollywood's visual chronicles, and the western presence into the Moroccan 'harem' was a very germane theme in Hollywood's early film in/on Morocco. The entanglement of western subjects in the institution of the harem was remarkably part of Arabian nights' fantasies, and westerners showed a compulsive concern with the oriental woman. "The harem denoted the collection of women who were at free disposal of the male owner. The women of the harem were not wives, but their position was not comparable to that of a prostitute's."[1] The Oriental woman, accordingly, is a mere property which is, at any time, available and accessible to the male owner, and Harem women are attributed a status of 'in-betweenness'; the harem woman is neither an honorable wife nor an abasing prostitute. From the perspective of sociologist Fatima Mernissi, the harem refers to a space "surrounded by high walls and, with the exception of the little square chunk of sky that you could see from the courtyard below, nature exists"[2]. Mernissi's specific definition of 'harem' is applicable in terms of her meticulous description of certain spatial elements that construct an enclosed institution. In fact, the question that I shall pose here, to pave the way to my context, is: what is that which is forbidden? Since there is a particular part of the Oriental house reserved for women alone, isn't it that mixture, or rather co-presence, of women and strange men that is believed to be forbidden, or at least, avoided? Leslie P. Peirce defines 'Harem' as

> by definition a sanctuary or a sacred precinct. By implication, it is a space to which general access is forbidden or controlled and in which the presence of certain individuals or certain modes of behaviour are forbidden[3].

Relating it to the concept of gender and space and provided that those 'certain individuals'are most often referred to as males, Peirce clearly elaborates on the implications of the notion of *Harem,* which is,hence, gender-specific and embodies feelings of respect, sanctity and sacredness. A deep discrepancy holds, however, between the harem as defined here and the western both reception and perception of this concept. From a Eurocentric perspective, the *Harem*, Ella Shohat argues, is understood as simply a male- dominated space, a sign of 'oriental despotism'[4]. The western understanding of the Harem gives vent to westerners to become fascinatingly haunted by its fantasies and complexities, and this world is rendered 'fantastic' and 'wonderful' in western eyes because it is most often evocative of issues of sex and sexuality. It is viewed as a 'site of Muslim promiscuity'[5] to use Peirce's terms. This claim must be based on perspectival difference with regard to the notion of polygyny in the Harem. To elaborate, Napoleon once stated:

> Everything is arranged among the Orientals so that they can guard their wives well and be sure of them. Our whole life in the west, on the contrary, is such that we cannot guard them, and we are obliged to rely on them. We have to depend on the women's sense of honor and to have blind confidence in them[6].

The construct of 'guarding' embeds sanctity and, to my mind, suspicion as well. The Oriental woman in western eyes must be, even inside the walls, surveyed and watched over by their husbands. Unlike the East, the way gender roles are operated in the west is what prompts westerners to imagine the harem as a space for sexual adventures and a site for illegal courting encounters. Reina Lewis claims that, for western men, "the harem woman trapped in a polygamous sexual prison was a titillating but pitiful emblem of the aberrant sexuality and despotic that characterized all that is wrong with the non-Christian Orient"[7]. Prisons and polygamy tinged with sexuality become the institutions on which westerners fantasize. All these images, accordingly, satiate the thirst of, particularly, the western audience for an entertainment that would be accomplished not only in reference to assorted 'pre-fantasies' compiled illusively about the Orient, but also by physically experiencing the harem. Ella Shohat and Robert Stam argue 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

1LooklexEncyclopedia, retrieved from http://lexicorient.com/e.o/harem.htm.

2Fatima Mernissi, Dreams of Trespass: Tales of a Harem Girlhood, (U.S.A: Perseuse Books, 1995), 57.

3LesliePeirce, The Imperial Harem: Women and Sovereignty in the Ottoman Empire, (Oxford University Press, Inc., 1993), 5.

4Shohat&Stam, Unthinking Eurocentrism: multiculturalism and the media, (New York: Routledge, 1994), 163.

5Peirce, 7.

6 JoanDelplato, Multiple Wives, Multiple Pleasures: Representing the Harem, 1800-1875, (London: AssociatedUniversityPress, 2002), 34.

7Reina Lewis, Rethinking Orientalism: Women, Travel and the Ottoman Empire, (London: I.B Tauris& Co Ltd., 2004), 14.

otherized elsewhere[1]

The harem, therefore, was a necessary ingredient that turned the Orient into a visual tableau with miscellaneous sultry images. The western obsession with this sacred home is an inspiration of the traditional tales borrowed from the *Arabian Nights*. Alloula argues, in this regard, that "the figures of the Harem are not infinite,whereas the quest for the Harem is: it belongs to obsession"[2]. In the course of this Western lavish quest for the harem, other related concepts such as veiling and unveiling foreground; these concepts will be highlighted through the analysis of several scenes.

3.2 Picturing Veiled Objects of Desire – Morocco (1930)

Reflecting on a number of images and scenes from the movie, I argue that the veil as religious and cultural signifier is deployed by filmmakers to construct different illusions and delusions about the Orient, in general, and Morocco in particular. In fact, flagrant stereotypes are proliferated through the use of figures of veiled women. HeidehMoghissi argues that

> The veil was the subject of fascination or rather fixation in Orientalist literature […] The veil represented both lascivious sensuality and despotic cruelty. Presentations of belly dancing in music halls and theatres, colonial exhibitions, newspaper advertisements, popular books, ethnographic photographs and the cinema were channels through which the stereotypes of veiling and the harem image were diffused.[3]

The cinematic representations of the Oriental woman are vociferous and stereotypical. Watching early Hollywood movies, the viewer encounters different features that render these productions not only entertaining and illusive, but also Orientalist in nature. Different characteristics such as the hookah, the turban, and the harem, for example, are part and parcel of early colonial and Orientalist movies. Likewise, the recurrent figure of veiled women is a frequent image that holds to the whole structure and content of early films. For a more detailed account on this issue, various contrasting images will be depicted, particularly those which deal with the unveiled, if not naked, women. Piercing into the fabric of the scenes from *Morocco* (1930), the notorious American cinematographer Joseph Von Sternberg proved to be one of the filmmakers who relied on the aspects of the veil and the body to shoot his movies in/on the Orient.

The movie opens with a local man ridiculously struggling to push his donkey away because the legion troops are heading towards him. As the camera moves backward, the natives appear to be stunningly confused to free the way for the coming legionnaires; afterwards, there is a sudden jump to a significant medium close-up wherein a smiling Moroccan woman, in a naked torso, establishes the background for soldiers passing by **[Fig 1],** the camera remains still for a considerably little moment on this scene. Only few seconds later, the legion's path is made laterally lined by a hefty number of veiled women in a cross-legged sitting posture **[Fig 2]**. Veiled women, all clad in white, constitute a welcoming décor for the legion procession moving past; they are looking at the soldiers from a bottom position, and through a narrow cleft of the veil on the level of the eyes.

Fig 1-*Morocco* (1930): The Native Woman in Unveiled Torso Close-up

Fig 2-*Morocco* (1930): Veiled Women Laterally Seated and Sidelined

The picture is so far aromatic of neither 'lascivious sensuality" nor "despotic cruelty", it suggests instead a state of mendicancy in the village. Both the posture and spatial linearity of the women are made to look as if they were begging paupers; it is an image seemingly indicative of solicitation mixed with confusion and fear of the intruding legionnaires. This disarrayed condition is further illustrated through the local people's movements; the closer the legionnaires get, the more confused the natives appear.

More images of veiled women occur but in different shots. While the camera adopts the position of the legionnaires heading forward, both men and women appear bewildered trying to clear the way, sending

1Shohat&Stam, 158

2MalekAlloula, The Colonial Harem,(Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 74.

3HaidehMoghissi ed., Women and Islam: Critical Concepts in Sociology, (Oxon: Routledge, 2005), 10.

mysterious looks through 'the orifice'[1] to use Alloula's terms. This sequence depicts local people as a herd being driven away **[Figures 3, 4]**. The inclusion of both veiled and unveiled women in these opening scenes reveals the film's intention to display features of the tribe's paradoxical and ambivalent culture. More prominently however, resort to recurrent images of veiled figures is also to disclose, as AmiraJarmakani argues, "the clear desire to 'unveil' women and to get an 'inside' perspective on their lives"[2]. The veil hides not only the body, but also a whole inscrutable culture behind, whose codes are to be deciphered by the Western man. Shohat argues, in this regard, that

> The recurrent figure of the veiled woman […] can be seen as a metaphor for the mystery of the Orient itself, which requires a process of unveiling for comprehension[3]

The desire for 'comprehension' and the need for 'unveiling' are thus driving motives for Von Sternberg to build up the sequences of *Morocco* through regular appearances of veiled women. This "process of unveiling" comes sooner in the movie once the legion troops come to a halt in the tribe. Legionnaire Tom Brown (Gary Cooper) raises his head to come across a couple of appealing veiled women in a rooftop corner **[Fig 5 & 6]**[4]. Depicted from a low angle, the two women were looking down at the legionnaires. Tom Brown gained their attention; one of the women removed her veil off her face in a slow motion, before she covered it back in a quick gesture this time, a hooking gesture in search of tantalizing Tom Brown, who was entirely indifferent to the officer's speech. He is interested more in the surroundings, and particularly in women. A more lecherous aspect of the legionnaire is made plain through his fidgeting looks around the setting. The camera moves, in Tom Brown's eyes, to depict different corners where women are located. The two veiled women on the rooftop are portrayed as two prisoners whose only outlet of freedom is offered by the rooftop. Their posture suggests also their depiction as prostitutes lurking for the legionnaires, who are seemingly the only people to whom they would remove the veil. On the one hand, this image is subversive to the colonial authority and to the official discourse based on the idea that "white men are saving brown women from brown men"[5],the two Moroccan women look unreachable though.

Fig 3

Fig 4

***Morocco* (1930): Native women looking Bewildered**

1Alloula, 14.

2AmiraJarmakani, Imagining Arab Womanhood: The Cultural Mythology of veils, harems, and Belly Dancers in the U.S.,(New York: PALGRAVE MACMILLAN, 2008), 149.

3Shohat, "Gender in Hollywood's Orient," pp. 40-42.

4Fig 7 & 8 are contrasting images displaying the face of one of the women veiled and then unveiled.

5 GayatriChakravortySpivak quoted in Robert Young, Hybridity in Theory, Culture, and Race, (London: Routledge, 1995), 152.

Fig 5

Fig 6

***Morocco* (1930): Veiled women looking the legionnaire over from a rooftop corner**

Tom Brown's only access is made through gazes- the colonial gaze. Spivak's assertion of the white man's mission to save 'brown women from brown men' is one of the most fundamental patterns of official colonial discourse; however, the legionnaire is proved to be powerless to reach them, neither for rescue nor for pleasure. By the same token, Fanon argues that "This woman who sees without being seen frustrates the colonizer. There is no reciprocity. She does not yield herself, does not give herself, does not offer herself"[1]. The Moroccan veiled figures accordingly stand far away from a mutual interaction with the legionnaires, who remain bewildered. No matter how she exchanges looks, the action to offer herself continues to be absent. On the other hand, Moghissi reminds us of the Western man's limited access, stating that

> [a] constant theme of Orientalist literature is that of the European voyager/voyeur who catches sight from a rooftop or a peephole, of an unveiled and unsuspecting Oriental beauty[2]

Most important also is how the camera is found to be insurgent in turning against the idea enhanced by the film; these women are not available at all, they remain untouched and that is one scene where the colonial discourse fails and the "edifice of authority" crumbles down. According to the Orientalist logic, the harem is a secret to which sneaking looks of the Western man are authorized through rooftops or peepholes. Here, the two native women assume this role and snatch, seemingly accosting, gazes at the legionnaire. In addition to the space of the rooftop, the previously illustrated figures depict veiled women in the street as a public space.

In the course of action, other scenes of veiled women vacillate through other spaces. One of them occurs when Amy Jolly (Marlene Dietrich) is shown onboard to Morocco. A substantial shot of a veiled woman takes place on the ship. She is placed, in a medium close-up, in front of Monsieur *La Bessière* (AdolpheMenjou)- the wealthy French man- beside three other Arab men **[Fig 7]**. She is wearing a face muffler –*Anniquaab*-and only her eyes, snatching looks at thecamera's lens, seem to be in motion; otherwise the camera shows the characters in a static posture, with a voice-over of the ship's horns. The scene is broken through a jump cut to focus on Amy Jolly who appears bit by bit to occupy the whole screen in a close-up shot waiting for Monsieur *La Bessière* to collect her scattered case from the ground **[Fig 8]**. The veiled Moroccan woman is now relegated to the background to become scarcely visible again. She appears once more, but only through a long shot whereby the viewer can hardly pay attention to her presence. However, both her static posture and her silence are invocative of distance traced between her and the Western man. Relegating her to a back-staged position does not necessarily fulfill the cinematic negating intent. Instead, the Western man finds no way to get through the veiled lady. When this resistance persists, the camera subversively shifts to the Western female, who is more accessible and available. Hence, the veiled Moroccan female manages to keep away with the Western people's interest and subjugates the misconception that she can avail any time in service of Western characters.

Another significant place where the perennial figure of the veiled woman shows up is in theatre *de La Crimac*, referred to as 'a rowdy Moroccan nightclub'[3] in Studler's terms.

The camera jumps from the ship to the cabaret, where Amy Jolly is supposed to entertain the audience through her bilingual songs. At the beginning, there is a panoramic view of the theatrical space composed of different layered levels. The gist of the scene is gained by rich families attending the concert and welcoming 'citizen of the world' Monsieur *La Bessière.* Only at the back again appear two veiled women sharing the table with a

1 (Fanon 1967b: 43-44) in Drucilla Cornell, "The Secret behind the Veil: A Reinterpretation of "Algeria Unveiled," in Phihsophia Africana, Vol. 4, No. 2, (August 2001), 29.

2Moghissi, 148.

3GaylynStudler, In the Realm of Pleasure, Von Sternberg, Dietrich and the Masochistic Aesthetic, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 64.

native man and a seemingly European lady; **[Fig 9]**. Regardless of their point in space vis-à-vis the camera, their seating area with paper fans is redolent of their higher class status. Yet, no focal underscoring is placed on the Moroccan woman as a site of interest and significance in the compacted theatre. They are invisibly part of the whole crowd waiting to enjoy the remarkably interactive scene that would later take place between Amy Jolly and Legionnaire Tom Brown.

The film handles the concept of veiling in various terms, and the wearing of the veil is not actually confined only to native women; even western characters are made to take advantage of this signifier for particular purposes dictated by the film narrative. One further illustrative scene defaming 'veiling' is that of the Western character Madam Caesar(Eve Southern), who is attracted by Tom Brown and suggests a persona of treachery in the movie. She gets veiled and clothed in an Oriental way to secretly meet the legionnaire **(Figure 10)**; by taking the 'representation' of an oriental woman, the veil becomes a signifier of disloyalty and treason. (Fig 10) shows Madam Ceasar in the middle of her botch; the filmmaker unconsciously brought about a situation where she represents now that western female character who proves to be treacherous and unfaithful unlike the veiled native women, who happen to show interest neither in the rich Monsieur la Béssière nor in legionnaire Tom Brown, and the Orientalist discourse, meant to asperse veiled women and disdain the whole issue of veiling, merely turns out to unconsciously dilapidate.

Broadly, the fact that these veiled figures place an enigma along the storyline is inferred through the nature, inside the narrative, of the Moroccan female character as still, silent, unnamed, and most often distanced from the close-ups. She simply appears and reappears, or rather shallow-focused on, in weird gazes. Nonetheless, the movie sequences contain other scenes where the Moroccan woman is more visibly portrayed in longer close-ups, heard voice and more lively action; these advantages, however, are offered to her at the expense of her subservient role as a prostitute.

Fig 7- *Morocco* (1930):
Veiled woman onboard

Fig 8- *Morocco* (1930):
Amy Jolly at the foreground of the shot

Fig 9- *Morocco* (1930):
Figures of veiled women ate the background used as a décor

Fig 10-*Morocco* (1930): Mme Caesar disguised in veil to meet Tom Brown

Fig 11- *Road to Morocco (1942)*: Recurrent Figures of Veiled Women- these figures appear enigmatic for the Western man

3.3 The Unattainable Native Woman

The story plot is explicitly linked to the use of contrasting shots throughout the movie. If the previous section is concerned with the reappearing figure of veiled women in various settings regardless of their dimensions and implications; this section, on the other hand, reveals a different perspective whereby native women witness a particular, albeit negative, habitual presence. The analysis through this part contains, in some manner, scenes with prevailing images and figures of unveiled native women. John Maier argues that

> Women depicted in Orientalist paintings were prostitutes, far from being socially acceptable. They were the only native women accessible to the Western artists, diplomats, soldiers, and scholars, who were, until quite recently, men[1]

I shall take this statement as a framework of analysis substituting 'Orientalist paintings' with 'Orientalist movies'. A great deal of literature related to Von Sternberg's filmography has placed the notorious Marlene Dietrich - Amy Jolly in *Morocco*- an emblem of this director's *femme fatale.* The eroticizing and sexualizing scenes tend to be hence an inevitable part of his narratives, and *Morocco* is not an exception. However, my concern here is not with the character Amy Jolly, I am indeed interested in detecting how the native woman is constructed as an icon of prostitution, in the service of the legion.

The first eye-catching scene in the movie occurs with a close-up of a Moroccan woman suggested earlier in **(Figure 1)**. She stands along with other women in the same posture smiling to and welcoming the legionnaires. In a closer zooming in on the facial expressions of the woman, joy and excitement are of significant reminiscence for the viewer; the native woman is depicted as if she were waiting impatiently for foreigners to dispel gloom and bring in that smile on her face. Indeed, as the legionnaire Tom Brown's hunting looks proceed, another substantial scene befalls; with a direct sound of the prayer call –The *aathan*-, the camera stands almost still to depict the movements of the tribe men getting ready for prayer while the prayer call is still droning on as voice-off. In the middle of this religious activity, there occurs a jump cut to legionnaire Brown indulging in his courtship affairs when his fidgeting eyes fall on a native woman, shot right opposite the praying men. Looking back at the legionnaire, the camera pictures her in a lurking and hooking posture responding positively to the legionnaires' gazes and gestures. The scene encompasses a reaction shot bringing to the foreground this interactive dialogue between the native woman and the lecherous Tom Brown carried out through body language **(Figure 12, 13)**.

The image of the Moroccan woman fixing a date with the legionnaire marks the nature of the role assigned to the female character and her disposability for the legionnaires' sexual needs at any time.

1Maier, 10.

Fig 12

Fig 13

***Morocco* (1930):**
The Native woman and legionnaire
Brown fixing a date through body language

The meeting point is *Theatre De La CRIMAC*, where the native woman is a subject after the Theatre's proprietor finishes his welcome speech, the camera, from a platform position, jumps directly to depict Tom Brown from a high angle; few seconds later the native woman turns up gasping for the air and excited to arrive on time. Here the camera moves to shoot in detail how the native woman is treated in absolute humiliation, disdain and slanderous smearing; Tom Brown's gesture and words express a blatant indifference to her **(Fig 14)**, his eyes as usual always remain in a state of restlessness.

(Fig 15) expresses adequately not only Brown's sexual allure to his western compatriot Amy Jolly, but also a despising scene demoting the native woman to a petty position. The humiliating act is more understandably manifested once Amy Jolly shows up at the stage, in a top hat, puffing her cigarette; the western man becomes even aggressive now, he tries to cool down the audience; in a flagrantly violent act, he grabs the miserable native woman by the neck and attempts to forcibly seat her back **(Fig 16)**. This is the most dominant scene at the heart of the camera indicative of the legionnaire's power to dumb down the native woman, who merely attempts to reveal some feelings of jealousy; feelings that prompt her to stand up and even revolt when her imaginary beloved -Brown- enthrallingly, got a flower from Jolly, the western woman singer. This scene indeed reveals a contrasting reflector between the western and the native woman; the native woman only fills the gap until the western woman creates exerting agency on her appearance. On the other hand, almost every legionnaire is accompanied with a native woman constituting romantic couples in the theatre. Native women are present, not as active agents, but as bleak prostitutes satisfying the western man's desire.

Fig 14
***Morocco* (1930):**
Brown's blatant indifference to the native woman

Fig 15

Fig 16

***Morocco* (1930):**
Brown's Infatuation by Amy Jolly made him act violently towards the native woman

Further elucidating scenes ofnative women imaged as prostitutes occur when the French legion officer decides to leave the town to *Mogador*. Through an unexpected close-up, the camera portrays Tom Brown first surrounded by three native women, who continue to enshroud him in kisses and hugs **(Fig 17)**. By the same token, the other legionnaires are displayed vigorously relishing the flirting moments of send-off. The camera takes a medium shot of these moments **(Fig 17)**, travelling to show every single soldier kissing his woman-prostitute. Stunning, however, is the way Arab men are also scattered among the legionnaires and their wenches, producing a normative image wherein the courtship practices seem part of the tribe's culture.

The native women here are represented to be not only in the romantic and sexual service of the legion, but also more attracted and enthralled by the legionnaires to a large extent that they endeavor to follow them to the direful desert. **Figure 18** is a good illustration in this respect, Moroccan female characters are made unable to break up with the legionnaires; they decide to join the troops and carry their stuff, they are "the real guard"[1] in *La Bessière's* ironical words. John Maier, on the other hand, examines Amy Jolly's decision to follow the Tom Brown to the desert as a relegating act in the sense that it "places her on the level of the poor Moroccan women who follow their men"[2]. A further interesting scene depicting the Moroccan woman as a prostitute occurs through a dissolve transitional technique; from a map indicating *Mogador* turns up a group of native women caught in a clear close-up singing with an accompanying oriental music as voice-off. The woman at the center of the focus, with almost bare legs and chest, holds a burning end of cigarette and chants an oriental song for native men and women **(Fig 19)**.

Succinctly, the previous sections display a conflictual image. As veiled figures, the native female characters are made absent, silenced and lacking agency. As a satisfying object of desire, however, their contingent presence predicates an aggregate of prostitutes gratifying the burdened legionnaires. On the other hand, the obscureness of the native female character is a viable theme in the orientalist film narrative.

Fig 17- *Morocco*(1930): Brown and other legionnaires indulging in kissing and hugging with the native women

1 Minute 58": 12, Monsieur La Bessière calls these accompanying women the 'real guard'

2 Maier, 6-7.

Fig 18 *Morocco* (1930): native women following the legionnaires to the desert

Fig 19- *Morocco* (1930): a native woman singing an oriental plaintive song

4. Native women obscured

> Less often considered in *Morocco* is the way Moroccan natives are shunted off when they are no longer useful to the story[1]
>
> John Maier (1996)

4.1 The Prima Donna Amy Jolly versus the Disrepute Native Woman

Both the nature and culture of the roles attributed to the native characters in the movie are not innocuous. The filmmaker excels in aspersing politics of defaming the native characters at the expense of the western ones. Through our analysis, the character of Amy Jolly is taken as a backdrop against which different images are constructed. It is suggested earlier that Marlene Dietrich (Amy Jolly in this movie), is a figure so firmly entrenched to the American director Joseph Von Sternberg. This fact makes it clear and plausible that the beloved character of Marlene Dietrich is allotted ample time and space in Von Sternberg's movies; the role of the Moroccan woman indeed ends usually at the moment Amy Jolly gains the floor.

The most frequent illustrative scenes whereby the Moroccan woman is put aside occur in the theatre accordingly. Prominent as it is, the stage is occupied by Amy Jolly looking the audience over; the Moroccan woman is a mere part of the general audience. The camera borrows the position of the stage floor –high angle- to provide us with a seemingly panoramic shot of Amy Jolly at the front while the audience is at the back. The ironical dimension of the image is that, as suggested earlier, the native woman is discredited; she only fills the tables taken by the legionnaires at the theatre; she by no means fits in the situation, and Tom Brown's native woman ultimately left out of her understanding of this fact. Her dream, when she first fixed the date, turns out to be a fiasco. She was urging Brown to drop the flower Amy Jolly had offered him, otherwise she would leave; Tom Brown's blatant reply was: "what's keeping you baby?"[2] This sarcastic reply is to explicitly inform her that she is no longer wanted around; indeed, the native woman is well aware that her presence is to be pretermitted once Amy Jolly appears, and so is the story with every native woman joining a legionnaire in the theatrical space. Amy Jolly takes the role of a diva and the native women, on the other hand, hardly swell in focus.

Another image that I find pertinent to my analysis in this respect is related to the send-off scene; when the legionnaires indulge in cuddles and kisses with the native women, who would later accompany them to the desert; Amy Jolly just arrives at the site. It is another contrasted image replete with signification worth scrutinizing **(Fig 20);** it is a medium shot of Amy Jolly, and two Moroccan women holding on legionnaire Tom Brown. John Maier states in this respect:

> Tom is surrounded by his admirers among the native women **[Fig 20]**. The Moroccan equivalent of Amy sings a plaintive song in the background – a song that the film does not bother to translate[3]

The gazes of the two native women as well as that of Brown look suspicious, mysterious, and reminiscent of a romantic race to take place soon over the legionnaire. Nevertheless, as my primary focus is on the native female character, the two women's looks suggest a state of inferiority and submission, a state expressive of fear of the appearance of the neatly dressed Amy Jolly. This fear is further elaborated when one of the two native women turned around to hold legionnaire Brown more firmly and sending sharp gazes of hatred and jealousy **(Fig 20)**. Dissimilarly, Amy Jolly is very calmly smiling back and her messages with Tom Brown are already transmitted through telepathic looks. Moreover, the two women are represented in this particular scene to bodily implore

1Maier, 6-7.

2This dialogue starts in the movie at minute 20''30

3Maier, 7.

protection from Tom Brown while the chanteuse Amy Jolly stands by herself with much self-confidence and self-reliance. The fact of soliciting protection and affection from the Western protagonist in front of the eyes of another Western female protagonist is suggestive of a role subservient and denigrating in nature and dramatically ridiculous in action. Hence, by looking closely at these contrasting images, we find that Amy Jolly is, most often, the prima donna of the scene while the native female characters dys-function as an exclusively disrepute decor. These images are reminiscent of Bruce Humberstone's*The Desert Song* (1953) in terms of Margot Birabeau (Kathryn Grayson) versus Azuri (Allyn Ann McLerie)[1].

Fig 20
***Morocco* (1930): native women holding legionnaire Brown and sending suspicious looks at Amy Jolly**

Fig 21- *Morocco* (1930)
Rhytmic and Vibrational hands of the hidden body of a native woman

Fig 22- *Morocco* (1930)
Tom Brown carving Amy Jolly's cript on the table

4.2 Agency Denied to the Native Woman

Eventually, a great deal of agency is denied to the native woman. Her presence is featured as mere vacant ornament accomplishing both the structure and content of the film narrative. Almost all the scenes about the native women are invocative of the beautification of the movie's make-up. The lateral placement of numerous veiled women, clad in white at the very beginning, and the two fixed figures in rooftops are definitely clear symptoms that stand for this negativity. As objects decorating the setting, veiled figures are organized to be acted on; indeed, what they ofttimes perform as tasks is moving, looking back, walking around and gazing; seldom can we spot a veiled woman expressing herself in words or action. They are represented not only silenced and negated, but the movie belies their presence so much so that they look like, except for movement, objects or even worse, statues, which are spatially designed to embellish filmic stages. Veiled women are figuring everywhere through the cinematic space; but nowhere as for active agency. These facts are best certified through a further narratively superfluous, but purposefully ornamental, shot; it is that which projects two discorporate hands in the middle of a vibrating dance for which a piece of oriental music constitutes the voice-off **(Fig 21)**. The scene of a native belly dancer's hands is used to dramatize the narrative of the film by

1In Humberstone'sThe Desert Song (1953), the western female Margot Birabeau (kathrynGrayson) dominates the film narrative, and the naivewomanAzuri (Allyn Anne McLerie) satsfies the spectators' lustthroughbelly dancing performances.

sexualizing and 'folklorizing' the native woman not only through dance, but also through the negation process of removing almost all the human figure.

The native women are "the real guards" as Monsieur *La Bessière* calls them. They move, they carry luggage, they walk into the desert, but they never utter a word. They occupy the space following the narrative's prescribed rules and assigned roles. In fact, once Jolly shows up, the native woman remains even unnoticed for the top priority plot of the narrative, which sets the western protagonists as the gist of the story while the native characters, particularly women, are rendered unheeded; even when they are given voice in the movie, as in the case of the prostitute in the theatre **(Figures14-15)**, they undergo aggressive acts of silencing and humiliating.
Interestingly enough, even when the native woman is shot to express herself, there raise other features symptomatic of negligence and discredit. A particular scene in this respect holds evidence when Legionnaire Tom Brown, entirely exhausted by war and alcohol, sits next to another native woman assuming the role of a pass-time woman; this is actually one of the rare scenes where the native female character becomes zoomed and voiced. She speaks; she asks questions "Who is this girl?"! "Do you love her very much?"[1] **(Fig 22)** However, Brown displays a painful indifference to her; he sates himself instead carving on the table the name of his 'one true love'[2] to use Maier's terms. Being subject of laughter and ridicule of movie characters and spectators, the native woman is used as an outlet for the legionnaire to escape the bitter reality out of Jolly's absence; it is no matter of wonder that the native woman is with Brown only as a body, as an object of sex, filling the space of the scene while his true love is, as is reflected in and proved by the table carving, inscribed in the uttermost space of his mind and heart.

The negatively constructed images of the Moroccan woman in the movie have displayed the crudity of the Orientalist tradition and the perfect culture of 'Othering'. Ranging from various veiled figures through prostitutes to objects staged to complement the overall structure of the movie, the native female character becomes Joseph Von Sternberg's backdrop to weave the romantic story of Amy Jolly and legionnaire Tom Brown. This 'fantastic' story hides from the spectators' view the military side of the plot connected with the French foreign legion. The proliferated figures of native women are ample neither to emulate nor to simply equal or match the dominant presence of one single Western character Amy Jolly. John Maier argues that

> The 1930 Paramount film *Morocco* has elicited much response, especially from feminists who are disturbed by the dehumanizing cinematic gaze on the body of Marlene Dietrich[3]

Indeed, the 'dehumanizing cinematic' gaze as well as action is rather on the body of the native women. If much feminist film criticism, as suggested earlier, has targeted the establishment of a counter-attack on dehumanizing movies, the defense has most often been in favor of the Western female character. Less attention has been directed to the appraisal of the Oriental female character though.

5. Conclusion

This paper has attempted to examine the image of Moroccan women in one of the most remarkable movies featuring the first half of the 20th century: *Morocco* (1930). I have tried to argue that the views constructed by early Hollywood films are not necessarily 'true' or 'correct', and they are not, by any means, associated with the social and cultural realities of what Moroccan women genuinely were. The discourse established and perpetuated through audio-visual representation of Moroccan females is certified to be orientalist and colonialist in style and content, but seems eventually to be subject to crumble. Regardless of being flagrantly (re)presented as supine and voiceless, native female characters turn out to be indeed pervasive throughout the film narrative placing nuisance to different 'conceited' Western figures; indeed, the camera proves to be insurgent across various scenes.

By providing a different interpretation to the various politics of representation employed by Hollywood cinematic apparatus, I have attempted to demonstrate the paradoxical dimension of these flagrant imaginary views. When native women undergo a negative depiction in the movie, there simultaneously occurs an intersecting sub-scene wherein the Western female character falls in the same discrediting image. There appears an entirely conflictual encounter between the native and the Western females in terms of the roles assigned. Hollywood's, unavoidably Orientalist, intent to superimpose the Western female character in the scenario of the film is, either explicitly or implicitly, countered by degeneration. In fact, across the narrative of this film, as well as in other similar movies such David Butler's *Road to Morocco* (1942) and Bruce Humberstone's*TheDesert Song* (1953), the Moroccan woman remains an enigmatic figure whose secrets cannot be deciphered. The visual representation of veiled women as objects of desire, for instance, operates against its grain. The Western protagonist proves unable to infiltrate between the interstices of the veil. By the same token, the depiction of the Moroccan woman as promiscuous figures in service of the legion's sexual romance and fantasies happens to be unconsciously equidistant with images of the Western female being an object of gaze and entertainment as well.

1This scene occurs at minute 1h 20'52.

2Maier, 7.

3Ibid.

Similarly, we have also noticed how the legion cannot sustain without being entangled within an active interplay with the natives. We have tried to show how the 'civilized' western man, standing-by exclusively for the purpose of 'militaristic and civilizational missions', becomes an easily 'docile body' in the hands of women. The power of the woman to leak into the legionnaire's life has been discovered and proved itself as unavoidable and non-detachable part of the story line. The gender issue is best anatomized in the movie through those native women, who had been meant to only fill in the narrative; hence, a Western anxiety continues to promptonce this conscious fear of the native female's powerfulprevalence in the film narrative is triggered. The way these native women are imaged by a giant cinematic apparatus such as Hollywood's does nothing but deepening the chasm between 'us' and 'them', between 'the West' and 'the East'.

Straightforward, this paper has tried to convey certain points based on the fact that:

- The social and cultural reality, as it was, of Moroccan women transcends the politics of colonialist and orientalist representation.
- The discourse of colonialism and, particularly that of, Orientalism is shaken up and falls in paradoxical tropes.
- There is a huge discrepancy between the Moroccan women as-they-are-portrayed and the Moroccan women as they are.[1]

On this basis, to confirm John Maier's statement, this paper is ultimately for the purpose of "promot[ing] a new way of thinking about the [discredited] Moroccan woman."[2] Because the postcolonial economic, political and cultural status of the world on the one hand, and the postmodern impact on the development of cinema as a technological and cultural form of visual art, on the other hand, have inflicted an upheaval on the life of every individual, the 'Other' has become, by all means, a fertile site of filmic representation and the industry of cinema must have constructed further different images of the Arabs in general and the Oriental woman in particular. This topic accordingly opens diverse horizons in the sense that a further in-detail research of the American cinema's current views of Moroccan women must be pertinently called forth.

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Hassane Oudadene has been teaching English Language in High School in Morocco for almost ten years. After graduation with a B.A in English Language and Literature – Linguistics Option- from Ibn Zohr University in Agadir, Mr Oudadene obtained a diploma in the Higher Institute for Teacher Training in Rabat in 2003. He is also holder of a Master Degree in Cultural Studies from Sidi Mohamed Ben Abdullah University in Fez, and a current candidate in Ph.D programme at the same University. In 2007, he participated in a six-week State Department-funded programme -Study of the United States Institutes- at UIC - University of Illinois at Chicago-. Oudadene is interested in issues of post-colonialism, cultural representation, Orientalist discourse, and teaching and learning issues as well. He published assorted articles online.

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