

Morocco through the Non-Homogenous German Eye/Ear: A Study of Elias Canetti's *The Voices of Marrakesh* (1978)

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Abstract: Imagining Morocco is endemic to foreign writings. The latter have been subject to critical analysis across disciplines. However, in reviewing different studies undertaken about Morocco in the writings of foreigners, it becomes conspicuous that much scholarly interest has been invested in French and British writings about Morocco. Hence, literary productions by other foreign writers have often received scant attention. German literary discourse about Morocco is a good case in point. The current article studies *The Voices of Marrakesh* (1978) in which Elias Canetti, a German writer, recounts his experiences and exotic encounters during a three-week trip to Marrakesh, Morocco. Interestingly, Canetti's text is not entirely enmeshed and imprisoned in, at least prima facie, long-standing, and homogenous Orientalist conceptions of far-flung spaces. Rather, images of exoticism and desire for Morocco are also persisted by inference or innuendo. Informed by theoretical approaches to questions of cultural encounters, this article explores the representations of Moroccan people and space through Canetti's eye/ear. In so doing, it brings to the limelight different ways in which images of Morocco vacillate between Western Orientalism and astounding desire for Morocco, spotlighting therefore Canetti's ambivalent attitudes vis-à-vis Morocco as a different cultural space.

Keywords: Elias Canetti, *The Voices of Marrakesh*, Orientalism, Exoticism, Otherness, Ambivalence.

Introduction

“Traveling, one accepts everything; indignation stays at home. One looks, one listens, one is roused with enthusiasm by the most dreadful things because they are new. Good travellers are heartless.”¹

This article zeroes in on Canetti's *The Voices of Marrakesh* which is -to say the least – a narrative parasite, in that it unsettles the Saidian frameworks of Western writings on the East. In *Orientalism*,² Edward Said purports that the East is a “European invention,” a Western subject of knowledge and object of power. For instance, he stresses the unity, singularity, and homogeneity of the European reportage about and inscription of its Other. This is exactly one of the problems of Said's *Orientalism*. In “Orientalism and Its Problems,” Dennis Porter posits that Orientalist narratives remain ambivalent as they contain within their contours different and even

1. Elias Canetti, *The Voices of Marrakesh* (London: Penguin, 2016), 18.

2. It is true that Edward Said wrote many books, after *Orientalism*, in which he revisited some arguments related to the Western discourse on the Orient. Highlighting *Orientalism* in our discussion emanates from the fact that it is one of the founding works of postcolonial theory that has gendered still-running discussions and has received more criticism germane to West-East relations and interactions. Focusing on the limitations of *Orientalism* is in no way meant to do injustice to the rest of Said's work.

paradoxical formations which are conducive to these texts' "undecidability," hence their "irreducibility" to one view/truth. In Porter's words, since Said "does not reflect on the significance of hegemony as process, he ignores in both Western scholarly and creative writing all manifestations of counter-hegemonic thought."³ What this quote eloquently demonstrates is the fact that Orientalist narratives may hold within their folds subversive potentialities coupled with anti-orientalist and counter-hegemonic discourses. This way, such narratives feed continuously on heterogeneity, diversity, and plurality. This premise is "ignored" by Said whose reading "contributes to the perpetuation of that Orientalist thought he set out to demystify in the first place."⁴

In her book, *Critical Terrains: French and British Orientalisms*, Lisa Lowe unpacks how Western formations of the Orient rest upon non-linear, discontinuous, heterogenous, and fluctuating positions, perspectives, and portrayals. For Lowe, classificatory forms of seeing the Orient should be rethought, in that "the binary opposition of Occident and Orient is thus a misleading perception which serves to suppress the specific heterogeneities, inconsistencies and slippages."⁵ The fact of the matter is that Orientalist productions about the East generate another "order of things" within themselves, allowing for counter-hegemonic voices to emerge. This resistance from within, so to speak, is lacking in Said's *Orientalism*. In his critique of the latter, Ahmed Aijaz, in "Orientalism and After: Ambivalence and Metropolitan Location in the Work of Edward Said," underlines that "[i]t appears that [Said] is transfixed by the power of the very voice [he] debunks."⁶ This question is of sufficient complexity because it showcases how *Orientalism* inscribes "Western canonicity" within a homogeneous and "passive" discourse. The case is that Western narratives disturb, consciously or unconsciously, monolithic, sometimes unfathomable, discourses about the East. Rather, they are prone to plurality, heterogeneity, and ambivalence. Elias Canetti's narrative is no exception in this respect. Focusing on *The Voices of Marrakesh*, the aim of this article is thus to peruse Canetti's ambivalent (re)positions vis-à-vis Morocco/Moroccans. It studies the ways in which images of Morocco fluctuate between Western Orientalism and astonishing desire for the different Morocco.

Orientalism and Moroccan Otherness

The Voices of Marrakesh: A Record of a Visit is a translation of Canetti's lived experience in Morocco. It narrativizes, in fourteen short-story-like chapters,

3. Dennis Porter, "Orientalism and its problem," in *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory*, edited by Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman. (London: Routledge, 2013), 152.

4. Ali Behdad, *Belated Travelers* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1994), 152. In a similar vein, he states that "Said's inadequate attention to the complexities of power relations between the Orientalist and the Oriental makes him reaffirm in a sense an essentialist epistemology that derives its authority from the dichotomies that it puts forth" (11).

5. Lisa Lowe, *Critical Terrains: French and British Orientalisms* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1991), 7.

6. Ahmad Aijaz, "Orientalism and after: ambivalence and cosmopolitan location in the work of Edward Said," *Economic and Political Weekly*: (1992), 102.

his picturesque experiences and exotic encounters during a three-week trip to Marrakesh, Morocco, where he sojourned in 1954, that is, when the French colonial enterprise was at its peak and was struggling against native and subaltern resistance. Canetti's travelogue is thus inscribed within the framework of Western writings about the Other. These writings are, to different degrees, informed by discrepancy and ambivalence. Put otherwise, the West's discourse about its Other is pregnant with inexorable features of heterogeneity and plurality. As stated earlier, this article traces the ways in which these features are incarnated in Canetti's text. Hence, the current section pivots around how Canetti, as a displaced and riven Self, develops codes and parameters of Western Orientalism in his construction of Moroccan Otherness through categorical-classificatory ways of seeing Moroccans. No wonder, throughout the travelogue, careful readers will find many an instance of Canetti's leanings towards Othering Moroccan people and space. Right from the outset of the narrative, manifestations of Orientalism and Moroccan Otherness are brought to the fore. The subsequent extract pictures a scene in which Canetti meets one of Marrakesh's beggars. In fact, on different occasions does the traveller delve into his encounters with beggars. Strikingly, he finds these encounters enjoyable, especially that he invests interest in seducing different beggars by providing them with money and food. Talking about a beggar- an old man, - Canetti writes:

“He [the beggar] gave the impression that he was always alone and did not wish it otherwise. I resolutely watched him chewing, intending to wait and see what happened when he had finished. It took a very long time; I had never seen a man chew so heartily and so exhaustively. [...] I experienced something akin to awe at his enjoyment, which struck me as being more conspicuous than anything I had ever seen in association with a human mouth. [...] I went up to him rather shyly and laid a coin on his palm. The fingers remained stretched; he really could not close them. Slowly he raised the hand towards his face. He pressed the coin to his protruding lips and took it into his mouth.”⁷

It is true, as it shall be made clear later, that Canetti tries to develop feelings of empathy with the marginalized of Marrakesh, say beggars, women, etc. Yet, the passage above entails Canetti's desire to distance the Moroccan Other. This is clearly reflected in the binarism made at work; I/him. The “I” has power (both symbolic and material) in that the traveller is a Western rich man who can control the “him;” the needy and poor native beggar. The latter is also subject to the power of narration which renders him utterly submissive to Canetti's gaze and mastery. This “commanding view,” in Spurr's words, is best manifest- in the above passage- in the use of such verbs as “watch” and “see.” These verbs reveal indeed how Canetti occupies the position of a “seeing-man,”⁸ to use Mary Louise Pratt's expression. As an object of the Western gaze, the beggar Other is framed within a disparaging

7. Canetti, *The Voices of Marrakesh*, 22.

8. See Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London and New York: Routledge, 2008).

context, and he is proffered no discursive space in Canetti's narrative. To borrow Foucault's idea, the beggar Other is conceived of as a "semiotic pawn on a chess board under the control of the white signmaker. [The latter] ... can move these pawns only within certain prescribed areas."⁹ As a signmaker, Canetti makes the Moroccan subaltern "voiceless." He cannot speak, and he is a mere gazed upon Other. The images provided above are conditioned by and contingent upon debasement and dehumanization¹⁰ as rhetorical strategies deployed by the speaking subject, Canetti, with a view to set himself against the Moroccan Other as his discordant image. In this vein, the passage above narrates with emphasis the issue of Eastern/Oriental poverty in a way that is ideologically loaded. On this particular question, Rana Kabbani avers that "Morocco for Canetti provides endless images of poverty, disease, sorcery, superstition, and sexuality. It is almost as if his eye were searching out the instances of differentness that he could present an audience with, in order to evoke shock, disgust, laughter or pity."¹¹ Through this representation and narrative productions, Canetti appropriates the Other and fits him into the frame of savage and backward Otherness in order to "invigorate" in his Western readers a feeling of disgust and contempt towards the "different" Moroccan. Given the theatricality¹² – to use Kabbani's words – of these scenes and their influence on the audience, Canetti does not hesitate to indicate them in his narrative so as to make this audience live the "experience." It is telling how he dedicates several passages to Moroccan poverty, superstition, and prostitution. Because his narrative is agential in constructing images of the Other and in determining his categorical belonging, Canetti finds Marrakesh a crucial space that functions to cater for the Western audience's desires. Consciously or unconsciously, Canetti's text, to borrow Malek Alloula's metaphor, "produces stereotypes in the manner of great seabirds producing guano. It is the fertilizer of the colonial vision."¹³ Therefore, what Canetti writes is not mere description, but it is an attempt to figuratively possess the Moroccan Other and introduce him to the West in a way that stresses his difference, hence his incompatibility with the Western Self.

9. Drawing upon what Edward Said terms the "standard commodities" in the representation of the Other, Terry Goldie, in his article "The Representation of the Indigene," dwells on the commodities which are frequently deployed in writings about the Other. These include sex, violence, orality, mysticism, and prehistory. The aim behind their use lies in inferiorizing the Other and placing him, as a "pawn," in a position which is incompatible with the Western Self, the "signmaker." Terry Goldie, "The Representation of the Indigene," in *The Post-colonial Studies Reader* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), 232-236.

10. Dehumanization is a frequently used discursive strategy in Western discourse. As the passage at stake unpacks, Canetti provides portrayals of the native Other in ways that showcase his affinities with animals in terms of reactions, food consumption, etc. This discourse sets out to place the Other outside the West as the locus of modernity and civilization.

11. Rana Kabbani, *Europe's Myths of Orient: Devise and Rule* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1986), 128.

12. In this respect, Rana Kabbani reflects on how Western discourse is laden with some sort of "theatricality" in portraying the Other. Thus, narratives please and impress the Western readers/observers but also make them construct further images about the Eastern Other as violent, poor, despotic, and savage.

13. Malek Alloula, *The Colonial Harem* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986), 4.

The “theatricality” of Moroccan poverty and wretchedness is a recurrent trope in Canetti’s narrative. As indicated before, Canetti dwells extensively on encounters with beggars. In foregrounding this trope, he refers to the idea that “begging” is not peculiar to one age category. Rather, it concerns everybody. Earlier, we demonstrated how Canetti enjoys watching with both pity and pleasure an old beggar chewing food (and money!). The passage below further elucidates the traveller’s desire to Other and bring Moroccans- beggar children- under his surveillance:

“The beggar children’s favourite pitch was near the “Kutubiya” restaurant. [...] If they happened to miss me I was miserable and sought them out myself without letting them see I was doing so. I liked their lively gestures, the tiny fingers they pointed into their mouths when with pitiful expressions they whined ‘Manger! manger!’, the unspeakably sad faces they pulled as if they really were on the verge of collapse from weakness and starvation. [...] There were quite a lot of children; I tried to be fair, but of course I had my favourites among them, ones whose faces were so beautiful and so vivacious I would never have tired of looking at them. They followed me right to the restaurant door, feeling safe under my protection.”¹⁴

Many conclusions can be drawn from the quotation above. As a deterritorialized observer, Canetti strives hard to communicate the image that in Marrakesh, wherever one goes, they find beggars. One of the most telltale signs of his intention is manifest in his frequent vicious insinuations that everybody in Marrakesh is a beggar. The use of the quantifier “a lot of” in the statement “there were quite a lot of children” is indicative, and it is probably intended to “normalize” the phenomenon of begging in Marrakesh. In this vein, beggar children, as the focus of the passage at stake, are delineated as subjects that warrant intervention to wean them out of the “weakness” and “starvation” they go through. The despicable way in which they are portrayed can be read as an attempt on Canetti’s part to represent himself as their “savior.” Statements like “If they happened to miss me I was miserable and sought them out myself” and “feeling safe under my protection” remain particularly significant because they imply that the presence of the Westerner in Morocco is essential in saving the natives. In his text, Canetti is entrusted with the mission of protecting the native savages. Discrimination and stereotyping, we want to propose, harbor behind the façade of “help.” That is to say, seducing beggars through “help” is meant to create exotic scenes and moments for pleasure, that is, watching the wretched of Marrakesh as a “site” of fantasy. The drama of the Moroccan Other thrills Canetti as an outside “seeing-man.” Also, protecting the natives sets out to save the idea and value of humanity from savagery, backwardness, and primitiveness. This discourse draws on inferiorising the Other “as a means of classifying mankind [...] the European man at the top and primitive at the bottom.”¹⁵ This exclusion from the

14. Canetti, *The Voices of Marrakesh*, 85-86.

15. Brian V. Street, *The Savage in Literature: Representations of ‘Primitive’ Society in English Fiction 1858-1920* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1975), 9.

community of “Western Selves,” as it were, serves the purpose of emphasizing the Other’s difference. It is in this regard that Canetti’s discourse on difference can be situated under the umbrella of the French; for such a discourse endorses, unwittingly or willfully, the presence of the colonizer in Morocco by demarcating between the Occident “which is rational, developed, humane, superior, and the Orient, which is aberrant, underdeveloped, inferior.”¹⁶

Processes of Othering Moroccans prevail in *The Voices of Marrakesh*. Images of German, and more generally Western, Orientalism run through Canetti’s narrative. The latter deploys an arsenal of tropes that foreground the Other as different. Needless to say, imperial and colonial discourses are fraught with such rhetorical features that set out to inscribe the Other in a different context and position.¹⁷ In this regard, violence, portrayed as a distinctive trait of the Oriental, is highlighted in Canetti’s travelogue. In fact, it is one of the major leitmotifs in Canetti’s discourse.¹⁸ As stated earlier, on many occasions does Canetti allude to beggars in his text. Commenting on their violence- hence the violence of Moroccans, Canetti presents the following scene:

“I had an inexplicable feeling that he [beggar] wanted to slay me with his bulk; it was uncanny. [...] The big man on crutches tried to follow us, but when he saw that we were faster he gave up and came to a standstill. I could hear his angry cursing for some time, and the voices of the others who had fallen behind joined with his in a chorus of ill will. Relieved to have escaped them, I was at the same time ashamed of having roused their expectations in vain. The one-legged old man’s onslaught had been foiled not by the stones, with which he and his crutches were familiar, but by the quickness of my guide. [...] Wanting to find out something about our wretched enemy, I questioned the guide.”¹⁹

What this passage suggests is the relationship between the Orientals and violence. It is clear how Canetti victimizes himself as he is subject to violent

16. Edward Said, *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient* (New York: Routledge, 1978), 300.

17. In his book *The Rhetoric of Empire: Colonial Discourse in Journalism, Travel Writings and Imperial Administration*, David Spurr outlines different discursive strategies often deployed in Western-centered writings. These include, to mention but a few, “surveillance: under Western eyes,” “negation: areas of darkness,” “aestheticization: savage beauties,” “debasement: filth and defilement,” “eroticization: the harems of the West,” etc. These strategies feed on a classificatory system that ascribes the Other derogatory and downgrading qualities.

18. For instance, in talking about his encounters with camels, Canetti underlines how all these encounters ended tragically. In this, he portrays how the locals in Marrakesh treat camels, and animals in general, in a cruel and ruthless manner. These portrayals are at the center of the first chapter in the travelogue which Canetti titles “Encounters with Camels.” Added to his fascination with camels which established place in the narrative, Canetti strives hard to communicate the image of Moroccans as violent people. Foregrounding this trope in the opening chapter is probably intended to evoke feelings of aversion and repugnance in Canetti’s Western audience vis-à-vis Moroccans. For further interesting details, see Rana Kabbani’s comprehensive analysis on this particular note about Moroccans’ being bestial towards animals in her book *Europe’s Myths of Orient: Devise and Rule* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1986).

19. Canetti, *The Voices of Marrakesh*, 48.

harassment by the natives. More importantly, he emphasizes how he is attacked by crowds of beggars. Foregrounding this “collectiveness” can be interpreted as a way of homogenizing “the community of Others” as violent and aggressive. Thus, violence, for Canetti, is tantamount to the Orientals. The latter embody, in Goldie’s words, “demonic violence.”²⁰ This finds expression, in the quotation above, in the “violent letters”/words- to speak in a Derridean manner- used by Canetti in his description of encounters with beggars. This ideology of Otherness and violence seeks to maintain that violence, savagery and madness are faces of the same state of being. Drawing on Hayden White,²¹ David Spurr pinpoints that this condition is informed by “the need for positive self-definition in times of sociocultural stress. When notions such as “civilization” and “reason” are called into question, their definition, as well as their identification with a particular group of people, is established by pointing to their supposed opposites, to what can be designated as “savagery” or “madness.” Canetti delineates the beggars of Marrakesh as savage and mad. Here, he fits them into a framework that stands as the contradictory image of Western civilization and reason. Putting such a discourse into circulation propagandizes for the West as the savior of the idea of civilization against the Oriental obscene which has historically been associated with Arabs and Muslims as entities prone to violence and danger.

The last trope that this section considers pivots around dishonesty and trickery as part of the Oriental behaviors and practices. That is to say, Moroccans are Othered as deceitful and fraudulent people. Canetti puts on view this trope in the context of prices assigned to commodities in markets/souks. The comparison below begs critical questioning:

“In countries where the price ethic prevails, where fixed prices are the rule, there is nothing to going shopping. [...] Any fool who can read figures can contrive not to get swindled. In the souks, however, the price that is named first is an unfathomable riddle. No one knows in advance what it will be, not even the merchant, because in any case there are many prices. Each one relates to a different situation, a different customer, a different time of day, a different day of the week. There are prices for single objects and prices for two or more together. There are prices for foreigners visiting the city for a day and prices for foreigners who have been here for three weeks.”²²

For Canetti, unlike in the Western market wherein ethics are considered, the Eastern souks are sites in which decadence of values is easily observed. In modern Western countries, everything is transparent to the extent that even a “fool” cannot be deceived. In Morocco, however, prices, Canetti suggests, are a riddle. For him, prices remain floating; they constantly change depending on the customer, the time

20. Terry Goldie, “The Representation of the Indigene,” in *The Post-colonial Studies Reader*, edited by Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin (London: Routledge, 1995), 235.

21. See Hayden V. White, *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978).

22. Canetti, *The Voices of Marrakesh*, 14-15.

of the day, the objects, the kind of visitors, etc. Outlining all these situations is a form of exaggeration that is designed to make Westerners, in particular, wary of being swindled by the locals. This discourse is informed by the desire to put forth the idea that local culture is on decline in terms of the values and the mores that govern it. Moral decadence makes Eastern societies less responsive to violence, injustice, harassment, despotism, dishonesty, etc. It is as if Canetti is calling for a reevaluation and transvaluation of ethical values in order to, as mentioned earlier, protect the Western idea and value of humanity. Because markets/souks stand as “micro-societies,” Canetti uses them to communicate either “social germs,” as the case in Marrakesh or “ethical values” as a distinctive trait of Western societies. This Western-centric discourse thrives on a panoply of ideologies that seek to build walls of difference between the Western Self and the Moroccan Other. In the main, Canetti’s narrative does feed upon European Orientalism in constructing the Otherness of Moroccans who are ascribed pejorative images, including Eastern poverty, bestiality, violence, dishonesty, and trickery. Yet, as the coming section will illustrate, Canetti’s travelogue rests on ambivalence as it develops feelings of exoticism towards and desire for Morocco.

Exoticism and Desire for Moroccan Otherness

Thus far, this article has argued that Canetti’s narrative is fraught with images of Morocco, distancing it from the West as the locus of modernity and civilizatory development. Images of backwardness, barbarity and prehistory run through this narrative, exposing what Fabian dubs “the denial of coevalness”²³ to the cultures and peoples of the East. However, textual evidence shows that this narrative engenders within it a discourse that is revelatory of Morocco as a site/vision of desire. In fact, Western writings are not entirely informed by a desire for knowledge, power, and domination. Within the same line, Ali Behdad opines that these writings “are therefore split, for they are inscribed within both the economies of colonial power and *the exoticist desire for a disappearing other*.”²⁴ In an attempt to escape from what one may label as the ravages of Western urban-industrial modernity, Canetti turns to Morocco as a space replete with scenes that cater for his exotic desires. The speaking subject in *The Voices of Marrakesh* develops a sense of both fascination and obsession with the Moroccan Other and his culture. The opening pages of the travelogue are very telling, in that they clearly delineate how Canetti’s autobiographical narrator immerses himself in the city in search of an exoticist adventure. Narrativising “encounters with camels,” Canetti’s narrator projects the camel market in the following way:

23. Johannes Fabian underlines that, in the Western construction of the rest of the world, “the denial of coevalness” implies the negation of co-presence with the Other who is always distant in time and space, following an either-or-ism equation incarnated in “our time, their time or no time.” Denial of coevalness confines non-western peoples and cultures in the state/stage of “pre-history,” denying them any contribution to the development of history. See Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983).

24. Ali Behdad, *Belated Travelers*, 14, emphasis added.

“Some days later we were passing another part of the city wall. It was evening; the red glow on the wall was beginning to fade. I kept the wall in view for as long as I could; delighting in the way its colouring gradually changed. Then, in the shadow of the wall, I saw a large caravan of camels. Most of them had lowered themselves to their knees; others were still standing. Men with turbans on their heads went busily and yet quietly about among them. It was a picture of peace and twilight. The camel’s colouring blended with that of the wall. We got out of the car and walked among the animals ourselves.”²⁵

True, Canetti’s narrative was produced at a time when Morocco was still a French colony. However, in no way can one hasten to say that this text feeds purely on Orientalist leanings and Eurocentric proclivities. As readers, it is incumbent upon us to adopt – one may call it – a “plural” reading to this complex text in order not to occlude it within one framework, say Western desire for and/or will to power, which falls asunder the weight of Orientalism. The love-affair with one theory, say postcolonialism, which readers often develop when perusing texts written in the colonial context is not always *in situ* and must be reconsidered in order to shun any “hermeneutic injustice.” In fact, part of what Western writings on the Orient/Oriental Other conjures up is the need to go through an exotic experience in places that are far-flung from the site/sight of European sophisticated modernity and advanced mode of life. The passage above incarnates the narrator’s desire/will to “go native”²⁶ in search of romantic adventures in the land of the Moroccan Other. If the camel market stands as a quintessential socio-cultural Oriental site, then the narrator’s fantasies are in sync with it. By immersing himself in the market as the excerpt above unpacks, the writer attains his “dasein” – to speak in a Heideggerian way – or his being in a space that is immune from the “germs,” as it were, of “progress” and “change” brought about by industrialization and globalization. The camel market is not solely an antidote to the “prison-house” of Western capitalist market and its parameters, but it also proffers the Western traveller “peace and twilight.” The Moroccan market becomes a refuge for the narrator away from Western paranoia and discontent. It is of cardinal significance to state that the narrator’s visits to the camel markets and his encounters with the Other run through the opening pages of *The Voices of Marrakesh*. Devoting one entire chapter to “encounters with camels” is revelatory.

Canetti embarks on a journey in search of exoticism in Marrakesh beyond the borders of domesticity in an alien space with its aura. In doing so, he musters a keen interest in experiencing possibilities of – let us say – “re-birth” present in the East/absent in the West. In observing and participating in Oriental rituals and the habits

25. Canetti, *The Voices of Marrakesh*, 3.

26. The process of “going native” signifies the traveller’s inclination to “the participation in ‘native’ ceremonies, or the adoption and even enjoyment of local customs in terms of dress, food, recreation, and entertainment.” These “doings” are experienced by Canetti as a tourist/ traveller in the city of Marrakesh. See Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, Helen Tiffin, *Post-colonial Studies: The Key Concepts* (London and New York: Routledge, 2013), 115.

of the Moroccan market, so to speak, Canetti's narrator, through exoticization, blurs the lines of demarcations between the "familiar" and the "uncanny." One potential interpretation for this operation can be attained through Huggan's problematization of exoticism as "the systematic assimilation of cultural difference, ascribing familiar meanings and associations to unfamiliar things."²⁷ In trying to "find himself" in the land of the Other, the narrator pays visits to more exoticist sites, say "The Souks" to which the second chapter in *The Voices of Marrakesh* is dedicated. While in the "Souk," it is riveting how Canetti levels stern criticism at the Western modes of production and consumption which, for him, stand as absurd. This is how he develops a comparison between the Western and Eastern markets:

"Part of the desolation of our modern life is the fact that we get everything delivered to the door ready for consumption as if it came out of some horrid conjuring device. But here you can see the ropemaker busy at his work, and his stock of finished ropes hangs beside him. In tiny booths hordes of small boy, six or seven of them at a time, operate lathes while youths assemble the pieces the boys have turned them into little low tables."²⁸

Imbued with the narrator's "nervous voice," the above passage offers a stark critique of the patterns and mechanics of consumption that are proliferating in the Western metropolis. The machine has rendered the products devoid of any "authentic" value, and it has alienated the consumers. Capitalism – one might have thought – has contributed to European social degeneracy which is akin to the malaise of *fin de siècle*. This is a concernful reality for Canetti. In seeking de-familiarization away from Europe through border crossing of whatever type, the narrator draws the readers' attention to the fresh and unspoiled nature of the Oriental market. His depiction of the ways products are "fabricated" by people in the "souk" might be seen, in a sense, as a manifestation of an "exoticist desire for a disappearing other"²⁹ at a time when "aestheticization of reality"³⁰ prevails. The modern industrial ideology is but a "decoy;" it is not without impediments, and *The Voices of Marrakesh* provides soulful insights in this respect.

Indeed, many sites in Marrakesh are coveted by the narrator who is in an everlasting search for romantic, exotic, and personal adventures. Another case

27. In this context, Graham Huggan alludes to many an authority who see exoticism as part and parcel of the imperial machine, particularly in the nineteenth century when imperialism was at its peak. For the purposes of the current argument, exoticism is regarded as the psychological and emotional desire to explore exciting "otherness" and unknown terrains, hence raise doubt about "ontological and epistemological differences" between the Self and the Other. Part of the aim is to question the critical capabilities of exoticism as put forth by postcolonialism. See Graham Huggan, *The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003).

28. Canetti, *The Voices of Marrakesh*, 13.

29. Ali Behdad, *Belated Travelers*, 14.

30. Fredric Jameson borrowed "aestheticization of reality" from Walter Benjamin to account for what happened to the postmodern culture, which is commodified through the culture industry, emerging from the "lapses" of Western industrial modernity. Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham and New York: Duke University Press, 1991), x.

in point resides in his joining of the performances played by storytellers. In fact, Western travellers, in general, have shown a vested interest in and preoccupation with Eastern storytelling. Canetti as a Western traveller is no exception. The excerpt quoted at length below is telling:

“The largest crowds are drawn by the storytellers. It is around them that people throng most densely and stay longest. Their performances are lengthy; an inner ring of listeners squat on the ground and it is sometime before they get up again [...]. Their words come from farther off and hang longer in the air than those of ordinary people. I understood nothing and yet whenever I came within hearing I was rooted to the spot by the same fascination. There were words that held no meaning for me. [...] To the man who spoke them they were precious and he was proud of them. He arranged them in a rhythm that always struck me as highly personal.”³¹

What is most intriguing about the above passage is that it testifies to the narrator’s obsession with alien and foreign spaces wherein his lure for the exotic can be fulfilled. Most important still, the storytellers’ performances are subject to the narrator’s eye and ear. The power of the ear in experiences of and desires for the exotic is probably the reason why the writer titled his work *The Voices of Marrakesh*. It is the voice that seduced the speaking subject to the Moroccan space and made him fall captive of all that is “unfamiliar.” This being so, he ascribes much importance to “hearing” wherever he sets foot. The plurality of senses paves the route for more meanings to emerge. In the words of Karayer, “the focus on the other senses [...] points towards a decentering of visuality with the promise of creating a balance in which the subject and its relation to its surroundings is foregrounded, in order to allow meaning to proliferate.”³² Most often, it is visuality that pervades travel narratives. In Canetti’s case, aurality also looms large. In fact, it is aurality that helps his narrator have access to “strange” worlds in Marrakesh. It is significant how the words uttered by storytellers have no meaning for him. This “crisis of meaning” is not disturbing. It, rather, gives the traveller the opportunity to explore the “primitive” life in the East which fascinates and strikes him quite hard. The narrator enjoys the sounds and the cries irrespective of what they signify or connote. He debunked learning the local languages just not to quell his exotic desires in unknown places. He writes:

“During the weeks I spent in Morocco I made no attempt to acquire either Arabic or any of the Berber languages. I wanted to lose none of the force of those foreign-sounding cries. I wanted sounds to affect me as much as lay in their power, unmitigated by deficient and artificial knowledge on my part. I

31. Canetti, *The Voices of Marrakesh*, 78.

32. Isabella Kraye, “Between the visual and the aural: Elias Canetti’s *The Voices of Marrakesh*,” in *Reading Objects in the Contact Zone*, edited by Eva-Maria Troelenberg, Kerstin Schankweiler, Anna Sophia Messner (Heidelberg: Heidelberg University Publishing, 2021), 200.

had not read a thing about the country. Its customs were unknown to me as its people.”³³

Canetti’s lack of interest in acquiring the native languages of Moroccans springs from his belief that such a process will stand as a hurdle to appreciating the purity and authenticity of the “sounds” and “cries.” Foreignness in this regard fuels his pleasures of exile. The encounter with difference is attained through the emotional power of native sounds, *inter alia*. As previously stated, the voice of storytellers is part of what makes the narrator excited regardless of any meanings it communicates. The time spent following their performances is expressive. It is of critical significance to state here that Canetti’s ignorance of local languages does not only trigger his exotic feelings and catch his eye/ear, but it also contributes to the making of his stories in the whole text. This power of ignorance – we can call it – is manifest in the writer’s linguistic handicap. In his book *The End of Modernism: Elias Canetti’s Auto-da-Fé*, William Collins Donahue pinpoints that “Canetti folds [his] linguistic handicap into the stories he tells; it becomes the self-conscious precondition of the experiences he relates and the pictures he paints.”³⁴ As the excerpt above cogently demonstrates, Canetti is hyper-aware of the choices he made in his voyage to Marrakesh. The issue of language is *de facto* a good incarnation of these choices.

That said, Canetti’s travel to the Moroccan land can be read as an attempt to experience difference beyond his European home and domesticity. To him, routes precede roots and location “is not a matter of finding a stable “home” but being aware of the difference that makes a difference in concrete situations, of recognizing the various inscriptions, “places,” or “histories.”³⁵ In this vein, Canetti finds pleasure in inhabiting different temporary homes – not perforce physical and material homes. Thus, the traveller’s exotic contacts cannot always be conceived of as an attempt to distance the Moroccan Other from the West. Instead, it is to make this distant Other knowable and visible, in such a way that blurs lines of demarcations between the Self and the Other. In this line of thought, Canetti’s identity is (re)defined, (re) imaged and actualized in a way that corroborates Laing’s statement that “identities require an Other: some other in and through a relationship with whom self-identity is actualized.”³⁶ In the main, Canetti’s visit to Marrakesh is for, among other things, actualizing his identity. His narrative can thus by no means be placed in a French colonial context.

Arguing against any entire inscription of Canetti within the French colonial discourse, as his trip took place during the colonial presence of France in Morocco, this article outlines further manifestations of *The Voices of Marrakesh’s*

33. Canetti, *The Voices of Marrakesh*, 23.

34. Williams Collins Donahue, *The End of Modernism: Elias Canetti’s “Auto-da-Fé”* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 201.

35. James Clifford, *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century* (London: Harvard University Press, 1997), 190.

36. R.D Laing, *Self and Others* (London: Penguin Books, 1969), 82.

inconsistencies, slippages, and hence ambivalence. To illustrate, tacit and explicit allusions to the writer's sharp rebuke of the French intervention in Morocco as well as his rejection of war in general cannot go unnoticed. In this context, it is intriguing how Canetti proffers a fruitful space for Moroccan ex-veterans in Europe to disclose their memories and traumatic experiences about the war, hence speak and partake in his narrative making. Albeit with its significance as part of the Moroccan history and memory, the issue of Moroccan veterans in different wars, including the Second World War, has not received sufficient attention in literary as well as scholarly discourse.³⁷ Through allusive and oblique hints, Canetti strives to fill in this gap by paving the path for contestatory voices of the veterans to emerge in his travelogue. This way, he tries to do justice to this category of marginalised groups that are oftentimes denied any place in literary and artistic spaces. The excerpts below refer to occasions on which Canetti gives voice to the "voiceless" veterans:

"But he wanted to know where we were from, and we told him for the sake of simplicity that we were both 'from London'. He smiled and appeared to be slightly nettled. 'I was in France during the war,' he said. His age made it plain he was talking of the First World War. 'I was with Englishmen. I didn't get on with them/ he added quickly, dropping his voice a little. 'But war isn't war anymore. It's not the man that counts nowadays – it's the machine.' He said some more things about war that sounded very resigned. 'It isn't war anymore.'"³⁸

Upon another encounter with Canetti, the same veteran adds later in the same chapter the following:

"I spoke to you last Thursday - do you remember the camel with rabies? I was in Safi when the Americans landed. We fought a bit against the Americans, but not much, and then I was taken into the American army. There were a lot of Moroccans in the American army. I was in Corsica and in Italy with the Americans. I went all over the place. The Germans are good soldiers."³⁹

The powerful tells the (hi)story. Such is the case with the Other's (hi)story in Western discourse. The Moroccan veterans' narratives have often been either neglected or told/written from a Eurocentric colonial perspective. To some degree, Canetti does fair to this group by including their voices in his narrative. Irrespective of the crisis of/in conversation between Canetti and his Moroccan respondent, the two passages above underscore the Moroccan Goumiers' participation in the French and American armies. Ostensibly, the two armies took part in dramatic and

37. Among the very few studies conducted on the experience of Moroccan veterans' participation in the war, we can mention Moshe Gershovich (1997; 2000; 2012; 2016) and Driss Maghraoui (2004; 2015). See Moulay Lmustapha Mamaoui & Bychou Otman, "Stereotypical labelling of the Moroccan Goumiers in German colonial discourse," in *The Discourse of British and German Colonialism*, edited by Felicity Rash and Geraldine Horan, (London: Routledge, 2020): 199-211.

38. Canetti, *The Voices of Marrakesh*, 6.

39. Canetti, *The Voices of Marrakesh*, 9.

devastating wars, and the Goumiers did onerous tasks in these wars, particularly in the French colonial context. However, their arduous and strenuous efforts have not been acknowledged fully. Aware of historical conditions surrounding Morocco as a colony and of the predicament that Moroccan participants underwent in various wars, Canetti, as part of historical responsibility, re-emphasizes and participates in “literary justice” towards these victims of the war. “Literary justice,” writes Shapiro, “keeps issues open and available for continuous reflection rather than imposing definitive judgments.”⁴⁰ In this sense, this practice is a way of doing justice to the victims by narrativizing their stories and keeping them vibrant. Also worthy of consideration, these stories produce different histories that destabilize the colonial single and biased inscriptions of the Goumiers. In so doing, they disturb any attempts at limiting access to the memories and traumas of Moroccans who served in the war(s) across borders.

Striking in Canetti’s text is, as the first extract above testifies, his innuendoes to the changes that the war tactics have witnessed, particularly with the use of modern technologies. The statement “But war isn’t war anymore. It’s not the man that counts nowadays – it’s the machine” may be interpreted as a reference to the perilous use of technology in the modern age. If anything, war, as it is often initiated against the weak and the powerless, should be condemned. Here, the narrator stands as a voice with a cause, excavating historical experiences and incidents that brought about traumas to different victims. In fact, Canetti himself experienced dispersion in Europe because of war and its devastating repercussions. This being the case, his narrator is granted the position of a “knower” when it comes to history narration. Canetti’s text is not only a travelogue, but it is a historical account. The question of narrative and history thus takes on significance. In his essay “the structure of historical narrative,” Hayden V. White conceives of the narrative as “an account of something that is known or knowable, or that was known and has been forgotten and therefore can be called to mind by the appropriate means of discourse. It presupposes a “knower,” who tells or informs us of what he knows.”⁴¹ As stated above, because Canetti himself went through wars and experiences of displacement, his narrative makes “known” the trauma of Moroccan combatants. On this basis, he subverts and disrupts colonial narratives about the Other’s history. In the main, the postcolonial tone of Canetti’s narrative is not recondite. Rather, it cannot go unobserved.

Conclusion

Morocco and Moroccans have been the foci of an ever-increasing flow of foreign writings across disciplines. The current article is inscribed within the theoretical and critical framework of travel discourse. It has sought to offer nuanced readings to Elias Canetti’s *The Voices of Marrakesh*; a travelogue that records the author’s lived experience during his sojourn in Morocco. Complex as it is, Canetti’s text resists

40. Micheal J. Shapiro, *War Crimes, Atrocity, and Justice* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2014), 1.

41. Hayden V. White, “The structure of historical narrative,” *Clio*, volume 1(1972): 5-20.

unitary categorizations and identifications. By dint of its ambivalent discourse on the Other, this text is always free-floating. There are many “ideological splits,” to borrow Ali Behdad’s phrase, governing Canetti’s discourse. Whilst there is a plethora of images that are revelatory of aspects of Western Orientalism in Canetti’s travelogue, there are also manifestations of a fervent desire for picturesque experiences in Morocco which do not perforce imply any colonial or Eurocentric vision. Thus, to travel from West to East is not always informed by the “will to power.” Rather, hopes for other pursuits, say psychological, emotional, cultural aspirations, should be considered when studying travel texts to avoid any “hermeneutic injustice.” Suffice it to say, *The Voices of Marrakesh* remains open to many critical readings and epistemological fluctuations. There are indeed, in Canetti’s narrative, more topical questions that move beyond the mere encounters between Self and Other which deserve critical analysis.

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العنوان: المغرب من خلال العين/الأذن الألمانية غير المتجانستين:

دراسة لنص "أصوات مراکش" لكاتبه إلياس كانيتي (1978)

ملخص: يستوطن المغرب بجلاء عنصر الخيال والمتخيّل في الكتابات الأجنبية. وقد خضع هذا البلد للتحليل النقدي عبر مختلف التخصصات. ومع ذلك، عند مراجعة الدراسات المختلفة التي أجريت حول المغرب في كتابات الأجانب، يصبح من الواضح أن الكثير من الاهتمام الأكاديمي قد تم استثماره في الكتابات الفرنسية والبريطانية حول المغرب. ومن ثم، فإن الإنتاج الأدبية لكتاب أجانب آخرين لم تحظ في كثير من الأحيان إلا باهتمام ضئيل. ويعد الخطاب الأدبي الألماني حول المغرب مثالا جيدا على ذلك. وفي هذا الصدد، يتناول هذا المقال نص أصوات مراکش (1978) الذي يروي فيه إلياس كانيتي، الكاتب الألماني، تجاربه ولقاءاته الغربية خلال رحلة استغرقت ثلاثة أسابيع إلى حاضرة مراکش بالمغرب. ومن المثير للاهتمام أن نص كانيتي ليس متشابكاً ومسجوقاً بالكامل فيما يبدو، وعلى الأقل للوهلة الأولى، في مفاهيم استشراقية متجانسة وطويلة الأمد للمساحات البعيدة. وبدلاً من ذلك، فإن صور الغرابة والرغبة في المغرب لا تزال قائمة أيضاً عن طريق الاستدلال أو التلميح. مستنيراً بالمقاربات النظرية لمسائل اللقاءات الثقافية، يستكشف هذا المقال تمثيلات المغاربة والفضاء المغربي من خلال عين/أذن كانيتي. ومن خلال القيام بذلك، فإنه يسلط الضوء على الطرق المختلفة التي تتأرجح فيها صور المغرب بين الاستشراق الغربي والرغبة المذهلة في المغرب، وبالتالي تسليط الضوء على مواقف كانيتي المتناقضة تجاه المغرب باعتباره فضاء ثقافياً مختلفاً.

الكلمات المفتاحية: إلياس كانيتي، أصوات مراکش، الاستشراق، الغرابة، الآخر، التناقض.

Titre: Le Maroc à travers l'œil non homogène/l'oreille allemand(e): Une étude des Voix de Marrakech d'Elías Canetti (1978)

Résumé: Imaginer le Maroc est endémique dans les écrits étrangers. Ces derniers ont fait l'objet d'une analyse critique dans toutes les disciplines. Cependant, en examinant ces différentes études entreprises sur le Maroc, il est clairement visible que beaucoup d'intérêt scientifique a été investi dans les écrits français et britanniques. C'est pourquoi les productions littéraires d'autres écrivains étrangers ont souvent reçu peu d'attention. La littérature allemande sur le Maroc en est un bon exemple. Le présent article étudie *Les Voix de Marrakech* (1978) dans lequel Elías Canetti, un écrivain allemand, raconte ses expériences et ses rencontres exotiques au cours d'un voyage de trois semaines à Marrakech, au Maroc. Il est intéressant de noter que le texte de Canetti n'est pas entièrement empêtré et emprisonné, du moins à première vue, dans des conceptions orientalistes communes passées liées

aux espaces lointains. Au contraire, les images d'exotisme et de désir pour le Maroc sont maintenues par inférence ou insinuation. S'appuyant sur les approches théoriques concernant les questions liées aux rencontres culturelles, cet article explore les représentations du peuple et de l'espace marocains à travers l'œil et l'oreille de Canetti. Ce faisant, il met en lumière différentes façons dont les images du Maroc oscillent entre l'orientalisme occidental et le désir stupéfiant pour le Maroc, mettant ainsi en lumière les attitudes ambivalentes de Canetti vis-à-vis du Maroc en tant qu'espace culturel différent.

Mots-clés: Elias Canetti, Les voix de Marrakech, Orientalisme, Exotisme, Altérité, Ambivalence.