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Space as an ‘Imaginative Geography’ in Paul Bowles’ *Let It Come Down*

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Abstract: Within the framework of orientalist discourse, this paper examines the politics of spatial construction of Morocco in Paul Bowles’ *Let It Come Down*. It uncovers how such construction, as a marker of difference, is designed to exoticize and primitivize the Moroccan ‘Other’. Bowles’ travel account is worthy of study by virtue of circulating orientalist stereotypes about Morocco. This paper adopts the postcolonial theory. After the analysis of the opted account, it was found that Bowles contributed to the construction of the Moroccan landscape as an ‘imaginative geography’. Morocco is represented as a ‘strange’, ‘mysterious’, and ‘esoteric’ space; it’s representationally constructed in the mode Edward Said referred to as ‘Orientalism’. The imaginative geography of Morocco as ‘exotic,’ ‘dangerous,’ and ‘dirty’ are only tools used by the writer to legitimize the colonial occupation. Bowles’ *Let It Come Down* remains an order of discourse which aims to ‘orientalize’ Morocco.

Keywords: Imperial Travel Writing, Representation, Space, Otherness, and Postcolonial Criticism.

Introduction

Orientalism has played a crucial role in analysing imperial writings. For instance, in *Orientalism (1978)*, Edward Said argued that imperial writers, travel writers in particular,

have the tendency to misrepresent the oriental ‘Other’ in negative terms. This misrepresentation, which aims to maintain binary oppositions between the West and the Orient, is not based on scientific grounds, but rather on a rhetorical tactic. Likewise, in *The Witness and the Other World (1988)*, Mary Campbell investigated a notable set of travel narratives which go back to the Middle Ages. Given the analysis of the studied corpus, Campbell perceived medieval travellers (i.e., traders, discoverers, and pilgrims) as agents of the European imperial project. In the same vein, Mary Louise Pratt’s *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation (1992)* was able to examine European travellers who made a visit of the African continent before the empire-building era. For Pratt, the travellers into question had played a crucial role in paving the way for the Europeans to conquer and colonize the Eastern world.

Given a general study of Orientalist discourse in Western writings, this paper examines the politics of spatial representations of Morocco in Paul Bowles’ *Let It Come Down*. It unveils how Bowles, as an American travel writer, contributed to the construction of the Moroccan landscape as a an ‘imaginative geography’. The work on this topic is based on the fact that travel writing is a literary genre which serves as a creative expression of a people’s culture. With this in mind, this paper brings out some aspects of how Morocco is spatially constructed by Americans in imperial travel writing. It shows that most of the images the West has about the East, Morocco in particular, are totally ‘imaginative’. Challenging the perpetuation of colonial discourse through travel literature remains the ultimate aim of this study.

This paper adopts the postcolonial theory to analyse the novel under discussion. The chosen theory is basically justified by its main purpose to explore the issues of representation, space, and orientalism in postcolonial literatures. Consequently, throughout the analysis of Western representations of Morocco in Bowles’ travel account, issues of space will be discussed, using some major postcolonial critics (such as Edward Said, Michel Foucault, Gayatri Spivak, Ella Shohat etc.) as relevant guides. The choice of the postcolonial theory is also based on the fact that it is closely relevant to the study of imperial writings, including travel writing, which is the major concern of the study.

This paper is divided into three main sections. The first section deals with the previous studies on how Morocco is culturally constructed as far as spatial issues are concerned. The second section contextualizes and theorizes the whole study in the framework of cultural and postcolonial studies. The third section analyses issues of space as they are developed within the postcolonial theory in *Let It Come Down* by Paul Bowles. The emphasis is to be placed on the politics of representing Morocco as an exoticized, barbarous, and Westernized space. On

the whole, this paper remains an attempt to investigate the way Morocco is represented in American travel writing in terms of space, aiming to display that most of the images the West has on the Orient, Morocco in particular, are man-made constructs.

Literature Review

The most recent works available on, or related to, the Western cultural representation of Morocco in terms of space, as far as I know, are: Simour's "The White Lady Travels: Narrating Fez and Spacing Colonial Authority in Edith Wharton's *In Morocco*" (2009), Agliz's "The Exotic as Repulsive: Edith Wharton in Morocco" (2014) and "Morocco as an Exotic and Oriental space in European and American Writings" (2015), Doron's "Orientalist Reveries: The Imaginary Creative Constructions of the Moroccan Space and Place by the Figures of the Non-Muslim Male Traveller and Female Tourist– from Travel Literature to Photography and Contemporary Fashion Imagery" (2019), Saissi's "The Symptoms of Orientalism in Pre-Contemporary Western Travel Writings on Morocco" (2021) and "The Mysteriousness of The Cultural Space in Peter Mayne's *A Year in Marrakesh*" (2022), and Ghal's "A Quest for Third Space in Paul Bowles's "By the Water" (1946), "The Scorpion" (1948) and "Tea on the Mountain" (1950)" (2022).

Given the review of literature, it was noticed that there has been recently an increasing interest in the Western portrayal of how Morocco is spatially constructed in imperial travel writing. However, much research is still needed to fully understand the complexities of imperial travel writing as an order of discourse about the Orient. Needless to say, an examination of other little-explored areas of imperial travel writing especially at the space level, as this study aims to, allows us to avoid any unsatisfactory generalizations about the Western discourse as a whole. This paper is then an attempt to fill this research gap. It aims to question how Paul Bowles, as an American travel writer, maintains power relations among the West and the East through orientalising the Moroccan 'landscape'.

Constructing the 'Colonial Space' in Orientalist Discourse

1. On Criticism of Western Representations of the Oriental 'Other'

'Othering' is strictly defined as a system of social representation, mostly full of stereotypical images and thoughts. In critical theory, the term 'otherness', or 'alterity', refers to the correlation between the 'Self' and the 'Other'; how the Self is identified through the different 'Other'. The mode of representing 'otherness' in orientalist discourse is sometimes questioned and harshly criticised because most of the representations of the 'Self' in relation

to the ‘Other’ are subjectively constructed. According to Hallam and Street (2000: 6-7), the ideological work of representation is usually manifested through the process of maintaining binary oppositions between the West and the Orient, which in turn pave the way for the subject matter of inclusion and exclusion in narrating the ‘Self’ and constructing the ‘Other’. It is through this system of inclusion and exclusion that power relations (civilization/barbarity, knowledge/ignorance, modernity/primitiveness, etc.) between the West and the Orient are emphasised. In general terms, the Eastern societies, or the so-called the different ‘Other’, are commonly represented as dark, uncivilized, barbaric, savage, and evil. Therefore, representations of the ‘Other’ can be seen as ideologies because they can never be truly real and objective. Due to the fact that the construction of the different ‘Other’ is very essential to the construction of the ‘Self’, this paper is meant to explore what kind of relations are assumed when the ‘Other’ is separated from the ‘Self’. It concerns with how ‘otherness’ is ideologically articulated in imperial writings, including travel literature, via certain narrative techniques. Stated differently, with the intent to orientalise the different ‘Other’, imperial travel writers tend to move from the processes of negation, exploitation, and exclusion, to the processes of acceptance and erotic desire.

The orientalist representation of the cultural ‘Other’ is one of the most controversial issues raised within postcolonial criticism, especially by Edward Said, Gayatri Spivak, and Ella Shohat. In his book *Orientalism*, for instance, Said (1978: 21) argues that the way the oriental ‘Other’ is represented in Western literature is unrealistic. Cultural representations of the Orient, for Said, are man-made constructs; they are no longer true and objective. Given the fact that most constructed images and conceptions about the oriental ‘Other’ are subjective and imaginative, their content, according to postcolonial critics, must be problematized. Following Said’s reasoning, orientalist discourse is a historical construct utilized by Western scholars as a tool to sustain power relations amongst the Orient and the West, and more specifically to diffuse stereotypical images and misconceptions about the oriental ‘Other’. This latter has then never been “a free subject of thought”; it is a man-made construction. Said (1985), in this respect, quotes: “The relatively common denominator between these three aspects of Orientalism is the line separating Occident from Orient, and this, I argued, is less a fact of human production, which I have called imaginative geography.” (p.90)

Similarly, Gayatri Spivak (1990: 108) suggests that representation is a system which should be put under scrutiny due to its political purposes. For Spivak, the discourse of representation is political by virtue of serving and speaking for the needs and interests of somebody or something. It is an apparatus which acts firmly to achieve two main aspects: “speaking for”

the ‘Self’, and “portraying” the different ‘Other’. The examination of orientalist discourse is, thus, determined by a full understanding of how the ‘Self’ is narrated, and how the different ‘Other’ is in turn spoken about and constructed in a literary work. Spivak also problematizes the issue of speaking on behalf of the ‘Other’ by arguing that: “It is not a solution, the idea of the disenfranchised speaking for themselves, or the radical critics speaking for them; this question of representation, self-representation, representing others, is a problem.” (Ibid: 63) In Spivak’s viewpoint, representation, as a system, should be criticised owing to its persistent construction of the different ‘Other’ as an “object of knowledge”; it is always there to be explored by the ‘Self’.

Ella Shohat is another postcolonial critic who theorizes the issue of representation. Like Said and Spivak, Shohat (1995) calls for the questioning of textual representations about the Orient: “Each filmic or academic utterance must be analysed not only in terms of who represents but also in terms of who is being represented for what purpose, at which historical moment, for which location, using which strategies, and in what tone of address.” (p. 173) For Shohat, it is very significant to question orientalist discourse as it has the tendency of misrepresenting the subaltern ‘Other’. There are two main issues when questioning ‘subalternity’ in imperial writings. Subaltern or marginalized people do not have control over their representations, and they are most of the time represented as voiceless or silent subjects. Shohat stresses the fact that dominant subjects are not obsessed with being adequately represented. It is on this basis that some negative images of the dominant people are usually considered to be part and parcel of human beings’ natural diversity. Shohat adds that the system of representations in the realm of popular culture has influenced, to a great extent, other areas, particularly politics and economy:

The denial of aesthetic representation to the subaltern has historically formed a corollary to the literal denial of economic, legal, and political representation. The struggle to ‘speak for oneself’ cannot be separated from a history of being spoken for, from the struggle to speak and be heard. (Ibid.)

The system of textual representations about the Orient has affected the way the different ‘Other’ is shaped in the Western mind. It is for this reason that these representations, as some postcolonial critics argue, shouldn’t be taken for granted; they must be instead challenged as far as their political content is concerned. It is because of these representations that the circulation of many stereotypical images and ideas about the Orient has played out. Textual representations are no longer an ‘innocent’ order of discourse; their ideological work must be

unveiled due to their devastating impacts on the subalterns' identities. Interestingly, textual representations, as a system of inclusion and exclusion, have resulted from what is usually referred to by postcolonial critics as "the burden of representation".

Michael Foucault also introduces his critical approach to the system of representation via negotiating three main notions: discourse as a problematic concept, a dialectical interplay between power and knowledge, and the matter of the subject. Considering Foucault's discursive approach to representation, there is a complete shift from 'language' to 'discourse'. Discourse, not language, is typically understood as a significant system of representation. Discourse is defined by Foucault (2007) as:

A group of statements which provide a language for talking- i.e., a way of representing- a particular kind of knowledge about a topic. When statements about a topic are made within a particular discourse, the discourse makes it possible to construct the topic in a certain way. It also limits the other ways in which the topic can be constructed. (p. 56)

From a Foucauldian perspective, discourse is a problematic concept in the sense that it is not only about a linguistic system, but also about the practices resulted from this linguistic system. (Barker, 2003: 18) There is always a systematically interwoven relation between what is said or articulated (i.e., language), and what is done (i.e., practice). The subject matter is always shaped and dictated by discourse. Importantly, discourse identifies and generates the components of our knowledge. It also limits our way of talking and reasoning. What is more, discourse tends to affect the way our thoughts are put into practice and utilized to have control over other people. Discourse, Foucault still argues, is never composed of static or fixed interpretations; the same discourse can be interpreted differently according to different institutional settings in the society. It is, therefore, impossible to decipher the meaning of an object beyond its context of utilization. Having said this, for Foucault, given the fact that we can only be knowledgeable of meaningful objects, it is discourse, not the objects in themselves, which generates knowledge. For instance, 'madness', 'sexuality', 'and 'punishment' are subject matters which have meanings merely within discourses they are exposed to. Hence the significance of 'contextualization' referred to by Foucault in his discursive approach to the system of representation.

All in all, it is very primordial to emphasise the fact that textual representations embedded in the orientalist discourse are only strategic techniques implemented by imperial authors to

sustain all forms of binary oppositions amongst the Orient and the West, and more importantly to perpetuate colonial and neo-colonial projects. Orientalism is a never-ending process. This paper is then an attempt to dislodge predominant modes of representation as well as hegemonic ideologies incorporated in Western travel writing about Morocco.

2. Spacing ‘the Orient’

The text is a world of an aesthetic and a discursive mystery par excellence. It is not solely a space where the standards of an artistic artefact are highly appreciated, but also a tool by which the ideological constituents of a textual enterprise are questioned. Interestingly, the text tends to introduce the reader of literature to the ‘imaginative geography’, wherein a ‘polyphony of voices’ interacts with one another to hopefully fulfil two main purposes: to assert a fixed hegemonic conception of the ‘Self’, and to negotiate the discursive construction of the ‘Other’. In the world of imperial literature, the ‘Self’ is typically described as the manipulator and proprietor of the literary means whereby the text is generated. The ‘Other’ is, conversely, introduced as the object of study in the text. Such interaction of a ‘polyphony of voices’ in a literary text, which aims at the narration of the ‘Self’ and the discursive formation of the ‘Other’, results in the controversy over the nature of discourses being produced in such an imaginative space or geography. The project of imperialism, as Said suggests in his landmark book *Orientalism* (1978), was totally interested in the configuration of the oriental geography or space, in the hope of providing a huge corpus of orientalist studies about the Orient. It is on this basis that it is of great importance to examine the white-black colonial and cultural encounters and their violent manifestations in the colonial contact-zone.

Reflecting on the issue of violence practiced, symbolically or practically, on the indigenous people by the colonizer, Huxley (1995) states: “Violence has ruled over the ordering of the colonial world, [and] has ceaselessly drummed the rhythm for the destruction of native social forms and broken up without reserve the systems of reference of the economy, the customs of dress and external life.” (p. 171) Ironically, for the colonizer to supersede already existing native cultural forms with new intruding colonial ones, the indigenous people are negated and double victimized; they are implicitly prepared to emulate or imitate colonial cultural forms and, at the same time, play subordinate roles in the project of stressing the colonial supremacy and powerfulness. The interactive interplay between the colonized and the colonizer is fully governed by the discourse of violence, which is a powerful weapon

exploited by the colonizer to subdue the colonized ‘Other’, and to reinforce the ascendancy of the ‘Self’. A position of power, strength, and success is never attributed to the natives; they are a mere object constructed to serve the colonizer’s needs and interests.

What is more, such a dialectical state, which governs the correlation between the colonized and the colonizer, is a significant marker of the power of orientalist discourse. The power of the imperial project can be justified by two different ways: its ability of generating an ‘imaginative’ space for both the indigenous and the colonizer, and also its implicit emphasis on the privilege or importance of the colonizer/ the ‘Self’ over the colonized/ the indigenous. Following this argument, the ‘imaginative space’ can be understood as a contact zone, where different cultures meet, clash, and fight with each other, as Mary Louise Pratt (1992) argues, “often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination – like colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out across the globe today.” (p. 4)

Given the fact that space is an indicator of difference, it is of great vitality to consider its contribution to how the ‘Self’ and the ‘Other’ are narrated and shaped in orientalist discourse. The spatial construction is a colonial project based on binary oppositions amongst the ‘Self’ and the ‘Other’. It has never been a static and immobile phenomenon; it is instead ever-changing, meaningful and expressive of social and cultural meanings. From a Foucauldian perspective, space and specialization are systematically interwoven; they are politically oriented and ideologically manipulated. Due to the fact that space is subject to the interference of different agents, people are identified by their cultural and geographical spaces. Following Foucault’s argument, there is an interplay between space and power. He (1993: 168) claims that “space is fundamental in any exercise of power”; to have control over a space, there should be a kind of power, especially the power of knowledge. It is owing to this dialectical interlink between knowledge and power, as proposed by Foucault, that the colonizer is capable of dominating and ruling the colonized space.

Equally, Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin (1995: 1) assume that “the most formidable ally of economic and political control had long been the business of ‘knowing’ other peoples.” Stated simply, to know the ‘Other’ is suggestive of knowing and studying its space, which can be geographical, cultural or social. More importantly, this suggested knowledge should be preceded with an idea, be it factual or fictitious, about the space inhabited by this different cultural ‘Other’. The process of knowing and vividly imagining the different ‘Other’ and consequently its cultural, social, and geographical space is claimed to be

an effective means by which the colonial hegemony is consistently maintained in orientalist discourse. In order to sustain the discourse of difference and the negation of sameness or resemblance among the West and the Orient, the Western mind is ideologically shaped by the fact that the oriental inhabited space is 'exotic'. Due to this exoticism of the oriental landscape, its natives are problematically described as irrational and barbaric 'Other'. By saying so, space is, by definition, an imperial toot whereby the inhabitants' identity is static. Said, thus, contends that the discourse of 'imaginative geography' is no more than an arbitrary construction that reinforces differences, and in turn represses resemblances between the 'Self' and the 'Other' in the Western memory. The dichotomies between the occidental world and the oriental one are, then, legitimated in imperial writings, involving travel literature, through the discourse of 'imaginative geography'.

To admittedly conclude, based on what has been said, space construction is a heated debate within postcolonial criticism; it is exposed to different interpretations in orientalist discourse. It has been understood by some postcolonial critics as constructed imaginary oppositions amongst the 'Self' and the 'Other'. Some other postcolonial critics, on the contrary, have introduced 'space' representation as a blurred concept, wherein binary oppositions cease to function, and are instead superseded with transcultural and hybrid notions of human social, cultural and/or geographical inter-relationships.

The Orientalist Representation of the Moroccan 'Landscape' in Bowles' *Let It Come Down*

1. Orientalizing Tangier

Space and place are socially produced entities. This is to say that space is not an emptiness or potentiality filled with objects, nor is it simply a context for events and actions occurring in time, nor is it, as in Kantian philosophy, a mental filter through which external reality becomes intelligible. (Walonen, 2011: 1)

This sub-section introduces Tangier as a 'colonial' space whereby all the incidents are dramatized in Bowles' *Let It Come Down*. Tangier is typically described as a colonial setting, insofar as it becomes a protagonist in the novel. Bowles' portrayal of the city of Tangier is, conversely, associated with the hegemonic ideology encompassed in the Western cultural system. Albeit the novel's ambivalent discourse of representing the city of Tangier, it is

replete with many ideological structures and discursive tropes, which makes Bowles' *Let It Come Down* an imperial account par excellence. Tangier is represented as an oriental 'space', which is ironically and appropriately exploited by the Western main characters. It is in this respect that this paper tries to uncover the ideology embedded in Bowles' imaginative depiction of the 'International Zone' as a genuine setting to sustain the exotic picture of the bygone colonized Morocco.

From the onset of the novel, the city of Tangier is constructed in a way that suggests a big differentiation between the oriental space and its Western counterpart. This spatial dichotomy between the Orient and the West can be justified by the main character's Nelson Dyar's trip from New York to Tangier. From Dyar's perspective, this symbolic travel from the Western world to the Eastern one is considered as an outlet for his daily-life monotony, anxiety, and extreme existential emptiness, brought about by the American social context. As a result, Dyar was obliged to stop exercising definitively his "cage" or job as a clerk in a bank in the United States, and moving to the city of Tangier, hopefully to search for an alternative mode of existence, and remedy for his psychological problems in the oriental exotic world. Surprisingly, for Dyar, Tangier is no more than another cage; it is space full of complicated and corrupt human relations.

Given the fact that Tangier is no longer a pre-colonial innocent city, particularly after being changed into an 'International Zone', the city has been metaphorically introduced by Bowles as space full of prostitution. Tangier is constructed as an object of appropriation and the West's greedy imperial desire. Interestingly, the so-called 'International Zone' is exploited by the author as a colony of limitless emancipation for any Western subject. This representational mode of the city of Tangier paves implicitly the way for the Western invasion and exploitation of Morocco, either by imperial states or individual subjects. At the individual level, the legitimacy of the Western occupation and manipulation of Morocco is highly manifested through Western characters' frequent visits of the city of Tangier and their indulgence in such immoral activities as drug-taking, espionage, illicit transactions, and homosexuality. As stated by Bowles (1952):

"There were voices in the hall. Daisy entered with a neat dark man who looked as though he had stomach ulcers. "Luis!" cried Wilcox, jumping up. Dyar was presented, and the four sat down, Daisy next to Dyar. "This can't last long," he thought, "It's nearly ten." His stomach felt completely

concave. They had another round of drinks. Wilcox and the Marqués began to discuss the transactions of local banker who had got himself into difficulties and had left suddenly for Lisbon, not to return.” (p.23)

Bowles’ *Let It Come Down* also deals with the world of moral decadence and socio-political corruption, wherein some characters get contaminated. The following excerpt echoes the first time the protagonist Dayr steps into the International Zone, as an immoral and corrupt space, talking to Daisy de Valverde, who in turn attempts to convince him about the future appreciation of the setting, no matter how its foolish style of life is:

“[...] how do you like our little International Zone?” [asked Daisy] “Well, I haven’t seen anything of it yet...” “Of course. You just came today, didn’t you? My dear, you’ve got so much ahead of you! So much ahead of you! You can’t know. But you’ll love it, that I promise you. It’s a madhouse, of course. A complete, utter madhouse. I only hope to God it remains one.” “You like it a lot?” he was beginning to feel the drinks. “Adore it”, she said, leaning toward him. “Absolutely worship the place.” (Bowles: 23-24)

The above excerpt is suggestive of the ambivalent discourse of Tangier. The first scenario emphasises the Western people’s pride, pleasure, and satisfaction of the setting, regardless of its ‘strange’ mode of life. Also, the spatial construction of the city uncovers how its landscape is appropriated and colonized by both imperial nations and individual subjects. The second scenario is firmly reinforced by Daisy’s utilization of the possessive pronoun ‘our’, especially when referring to the Interzone. The use of the discursive pronoun “our” is ironical on the part of Daisy in the sense that it gives the symbolic impression that Tangier is no longer part of the Moroccan geography and cultural identity. It ideologically introduces the geographical area of Tangier as an ‘empty’ space or uncharted romantic island, which is unquestionably exposed to the Western occupants’ fantastic pleasure and geo-political interests.

Along with the vivid portrayal of the colonized Tangier, the Moroccan indigenous people are described as subjects who are in need of the colonizer’s help. In most cases, the natives are portrayed as either marginalized or exploited characters by their Western counterparts. In *Let It Come Down*, the system of inclusion and exclusion, to quote Foucault, is strongly omnipresent. To illustrate, the indigenous people’s presence in the old Arab medina is very much limited, apart from a couple of Moroccans (Thami and Hadija); the natives are systematically secluded and marginalized by the author. Bowles’ ideological discourse of

exclusion is also articulated via natives' unwillingness to get in contact with foreigners because, as Bowles simply puts it, unpleasant things will occur:

“He’s still a Spaniard, he’s still a Nazarene, and it’s a bad thing to have him in the house.” “You’re right,” said Thami, deciding that acquiescence was the easiest way out of the conversation, because his only argument at that point would have been to tell them that Dyar was paying him for the privilege of staying in the house, and that was a detail he didn’t want them to know. The old man was mollified; then, “Why doesn’t he stay at the fonda, anyway? Tell me that,” he said suspiciously. “Ah! You see?” the old man cried in triumph. “He has a reason, and it’s a bad reason. And *only bad things can happen when Nazarenes and Moslems come together.*” (p. 284) [Emphasis is added]

The cultural distinction between the colonizer and the oriental dominated ‘Other’ is remarkably crystallized by Bowles through such an apartheid system in the same geographical area. For instance, although Thami and Hadija are accustomed to get in contact with Westerners, they are consistently portrayed as oriental others, and consequently exploitable subjects. Thami is exploited when he was asked by his close American friend, Dyar, to smuggle the stolen money into the Spanish Zone. He is finally seen killed by Dyar, due to the influence of drugs (kif and majoun). Likewise, Hadija was employed as a prostitute in Madame Papaconstante’s Bar Lucifer. Hadija is then an indigenous woman who symbolizes the ideologically prostituted Tangier.

Undoubtedly, the way Bowles has represented the city of Tangier as well as its indigenous people is political and orientalist. Regardless of the city’s state of being eccentric and decadent, it has been nostalgically conceived of as a good colonial era in the Moroccan history. Bowles’ orientalist vision of the city of Tangier and its native people makes *Let It Come Down* an imperial travel account par excellence.

2. The International Zone as a ‘Fictitious’ Text and a ‘Factual’ Event

“The novel to which I gave that title was first published early in 1952, at the very moment of the riots which presaged the end of the International Zone of Morocco. Thus, even at the time of publication the book already treated a bygone era, for Tangier was never the same after the 30th of March 1952. The city celebrated in these pages has long ago ceased to exist, and the events recounted in them would now be inconceivable. Like a photograph, the tale is a document relating to a specific place at a given point in time,

illuminated by the light of that particular moment.” (Bowles, 1952: Introduction)

Bowles’ metaphorical implementation of the words of ‘photograph’ and ‘document’ in the above excerpt is of great importance to examine how the Interzone is ideologically pictured in the novel. Considering Said’s theory of orientalism, it is very hard to assume that Bowles’ *Let It Come Down* is a realistic novel. According to Said (1978: 72-73), orientalism is “a form of radical realism” which in great detail depicts an “imaginative geography” to have control over the oriental different ‘Other’. Needless to say, despite the fact that the author’s representation of the Moroccan space is, to a large extent, realistic, it is still imaginary, and it follows the discourse of ‘imaginative geography’, which has been traditionally used as a tool to hegemonize and manipulate the Orient.

“Tangier”, “March 1952”, and “the end of the International Zone of Morocco” are the only aspects of realism in Bowles’ novel. Bowles focuses on “solidity of specification”, as James (1981: 1153) puts it, to narrate these real places and times. As a matter of fact, the writer has adopted this strategic technique of evocating the realistic geography and history of Morocco to give a sense of authenticity and objectivity to his narrative. Bowles has ideologically managed to generate an aura or feeling of *vraisemblance* in order to prepare the reader from the onset for the ‘factuality’ and credibility of the created story. It is also for this reason that Bowles reflects on the interlink between “a photograph” or “a document” and the reality of the Interzone to reinforce the sense of realism and reliability in the narration process.

What is more, the word ‘photograph’ is suggestive of capturing a proposed object or scene in the picture or image wherein it seems to exist in the reality. Similarly, Bowles’ allusion to ‘document’ or ‘documentary report’ assumes that the representational mode of the International Zone is authentic and closed to facts or evidence. Having said this, ‘photographs’, ‘documents’, or the narrative itself should be understood as cultural texts full of orientalist representational elements. They are thought to be discursive practices designed to imagine a given world under study rather than to represent it objectively. To put it simply, ‘photographs’, ‘documents’, or the novel are mere cultural products within discourses of power, and what they mostly represent is not reality, but “an epistemological field constructed as much linguistically as visually.” (Duncan and Ley, 1993: 5-7)

Interestingly enough, the discourse of ‘imaginative geography’ is somehow difficult to detect in the novel owing to the omnipresence of the viewer or observer who is able to decide “what should be documented”, and “what should be photographed or reported.” It is in this respect that Bowles’ *Let It Come Down* is seen as an order of representational discourse governed by

the system of inclusion and exclusion, as claimed by the postcolonial critic Foucault. Bowles, as the representer/interpreter of such cultural texts, has played a decisive discursive function in narrating cross-cultural encounters between the ‘Self’ and the ‘Other’. With the author’s introductory passage in mind, the choice and celebration of the ‘bygone’ period of the ‘International Zone’ instead of any other dimension of time and place can be justified by Bowles’ nostalgic willingness to sustain it via his literary work. By doing so, the novel articulates to what the extent Bowles is completely adherent and affiliated to the Western Orientalist tradition, by which the oriental ‘Other’ is usually, if not all the time, conceived of by the discourse of ‘imaginative geography’, which in turn identifies it as the West’s cultural dominated ‘Other’.

Accordingly, the author’s cultural misrepresentation of Tangier in the novel is subject to a fossilized mythological and orientalist image as celebrated in the colonial discourse. The Interzone is basically constructed as an ambivalent interstitial space. It is a ‘third space’, to use Homi Bhabha’s concept, in which not only all identities become hybridized, but also all essentialist binary oppositions between the West and the Orient get ideologically uncertain.

Bowles’ novel incorporates some illustrations of deep ambivalence that generally characterize the city of Tangier as a ‘third space’. These illustrations, however, importantly question and undermine the author’s ideological discourse from within. To exemplify, When Dyar moved from New York to Tangier in search for a change, he finally discovers that there is no change at all; his “cage” (i.e., monotonous job) in New York is superseded by another one in Tangier, as an oriental space. In this regard, Daisy tries to explain to Dyar that there is a difference between these two spaces. Bowles writes:

“We were talking about New York,” said Daisy. “Mr. and Mrs. Holland are from New York, and they say they feel quite as much at home here as they do there. I told them that was scarcely surprising, since Tangier is more New York than New York. Don’t you agree?” Dyar looked at Mrs. Holland, who met his gaze for a startled instant and began to inspect her shoes. Mr. Holland was staring at him with great seriousness, like a doctor about to arrive at a diagnosis, he thought. “I don’t think I see what you mean,” said Dyar. “Tangier like New York? How come?” “In spirit,” said Mr. Holland with impatience. “Not in appearance, naturally. Are you from New York? I thought Madame de Valverde said you were.” Dyar nodded. “Then you must see how alike the two places are...” (p. 126)

Based on the above quote, the essentialist difference between the occidental world (New York) and the oriental one (Tangier) is a man-made discursive construction; it is based on illusion, not facts or evidence. Such subversive and blurred difference between the West and the Orient is also manifested at the end of the narrative chiefly when Dyar, a Western character, kills his Moroccan close friend, Thami, and not vice versa. In the Western mind, the Eastern people are always savage, cruel, and insincere. On the contrary, the Westerners are never characterized by such negative attributes. Dyar's murder of his companion Thami is a good illustration of such a deep-seated orientalist stereotype in the Western memory. In the following passage, for example, Dyar accuses implicitly Thami, as an Arab man, of being dishonest and crafty:

“So what?” said Thami weakly, smiling. “How do I know so what? I know you said you will give me five thousand pesetas to take you here, and so I do it because I know Americans keep their word. And so you want to get here very much. How do I know why?” He smiled again, a smile he doubtless felt to be disarming, but which to Dyar's way of thinking was the very essence of Oriental deviousness and cunning. Dyar grunted, got up, thinking: “From now on I'm going to watch every move you make.” (Bowles: 262)

Considering the above extract, Bowles recognizes a difference between the oriental people (Thami) who are represented as untrustworthy, unfaithful, and crafty, and the Western subjects (Americans) who are thought to be honest, loyal, and intelligent. Besides, Dyar's mention of the word 'Oriental' outlines Bowles' orientalist ideology in the novel. However, Dyar's murder of Thami undermines so deeply the pre-determined assumptions of this ideology. Thus, the key idea that Bowles' *Let It Come Down*'s orientalist discourse is unwittingly deconstructed and questioned from within.

To sum up, the cultural portrayal of the Interzone (Tangier) is apparently articulated through the author's orientalist and hegemonic ideology, rooted in the Western culture about the oriental 'Other'. Tangier is constructed as a space of alterity and colonial appropriation, wherein cross-cultural encounters amongst the 'Self' and the different 'Other' are negotiated. It is also seen as a space of profound ambivalence, where the characters' identities become hybrid. Bowles has adopted two main techniques to narrate the discourse of 'imaginative geography' in *Let It Come Down*: the realistic mode of constructing the Moroccan 'colonized' space, and the monologic voice of the omnipresent narrator. The indigenous

people are, however, voiceless; they are totally marginalized and suppressed throughout the novel. Hence Bowles' *Let It Come Down* is an imperial piece of art par excellence.

Conclusion

This paper is considered to be an attempt to examine spatial representations of Morocco in Paul Bowles' *Let It Come Down*. It has initially aimed to challenge the extent to which American travel writing contributed to the shaping of Orientalist/ colonialist discourse as well as the construction of otherness as a whole. To achieve this aim, the scope of the study has been narrowly limited to the issue of space as it is developed within postcolonial studies.

After the analysis of Bowles' *Let It Come Down*, a notable set of conclusions has been drawn. It has been firstly inferred that this novel is replete with a number of stereotypical prejudices about Morocco. Additionally, the novel uncovers two main points in their cultural representation of Morocco: the relegation of the 'Other', and the idealization of the 'Self'. It is also worth noting that the exploitation of the system of binary oppositions and monologism in this novel exacerbates the negation of the natives in the process of representation. To put it simply, the cultural representation of Morocco in this novel is essentially based on spatial distinctiveness. This paper has demonstrated that the Moroccan landscape is a constructed space, a "man-made" geography. It is represented as being mysterious, violent and esoteric, that is to say in the representational mode that the postcolonial critic Edward Said famously called "Orientalism". This paper has come, thus, to conclude that the imaginative geography of the Orient as 'exotic,' 'dangerous,' and 'dirty' are only a pretext used by the colonizer in order to legitimize his colonial occupation.

Much importance has been assigned in this paper to the politics of space representation in the discourse of imperial travel literature, but other significant themes such as 'gender' and 'race' have been left for future research. Equally, imperial travel accounts can be examined in comparison to other popular literary works such as romances, detective stories, and captivity narratives. Given the fact that multiple travel narratives are adapted to screen, their literary investigation might be oriented to audiovisual. Religious and ethnic themes are among other areas of much vitality of exploration in imperial travel writing.

Having said that, the study into question has some limitations. Initially, it is very necessary, if not compulsory, to extend the corpus of the study to avoid any possible generalizations. Other American travel accounts could have been added to have a comprehensive and clearer idea about how the Moroccan "Other" is spatially represented by American travel authors. What is more, the fact that this study can be explored from a comparative perspective, as noted

earlier, brings about another problem. Not all research methods can lead us, as researchers, to objective results.

This paper is then expected, in the first place, to contribute to the better comprehension of other imperial travel narratives about the Orient. It is also expected to enlighten and improve the readers' mindset and vision across other cultural boundaries, and more interestingly to have a clearer and deeper understanding of the 'nature' of imperial writing, as an order of discourse. Last and not least, this paper is thought to be a contribution to the cross-cultural project that has been indubitably inaugurated by many people as well as an initiative step towards more professional projects.

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