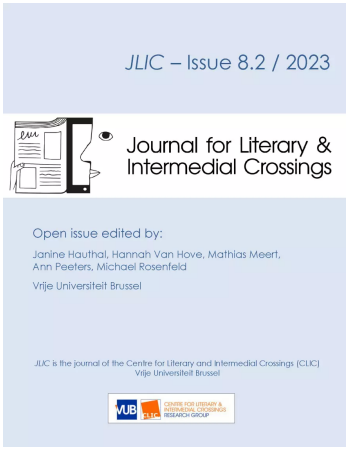

Journal for Literary and Intermedial Crossings

ISSN: 2506-8709

Journal homepage: https://clic.research.vub.be/journal

Submit your article to JLIC

Navigating an Imperialist Tradition: Elias Canetti's and George Orwell's Formulations of French Marrakech

Ezzahra Benlahoussine - Mohammed V University Rabat

Issue: 8.2

Published: 15 December 2023

Published online: 28 June 2024

To link this article: https://clic.research.vub.be/volume-8-issue-2-2023

To cite this article: Benlahoussine, Ezzahra. "Navigating an Imperialist Tradition: Elias Canetti's and George Orwell's Formulations of French Marrakech." *Journal for Literary and Intermedial Crossings*, vol. 8, no. 2, 2023, pp. 8-32.

Navigating an Imperialist Tradition: Elias Canetti's and George Orwell's Formulations of French Marrakech

Ezzahra Benlahoussine
University of Mohammed V University Rabat

Elias Canetti and George Orwell both attempted to write the city of Marrakech at a very crucial period during the French protectorate. Each of the two writers was beguiled by Marrakech; in part, because of the perceived exoticism of Morocco as well as its degree of cultural difference from the West. Orwell, a political novelist and literary essayist, arrived in Morocco during the colonial period, on the eve of World War II. In 1939, he sojourned in Marrakech where he wrote his journalistic essay, "Marrakech" (1939), which gives a piercing portrayal of the wretchedness of the imperial agenda and its implications on the poverty-ridden city.

Similarly, in 1950, Canetti travelled to Marrakech while it was still under French colonial rule. In *The Voices of Marrakesh: A record of a Visit* (1968), Canetti provides an autobiographical statement about his encounters with a foreign milieu in Marrakech. Canetti's own liminality and absence of any cultural affiliation shaped his whole travelogue and placed him in the ambiguous position of the outsider par excellence. However, as a cosmopolitan Jew, Canetti spoke French which allowed him to broaden the scope of his exchanges with the people of Morocco. Canetti was a private intellectual who refrained from making any political or social statements and adopted poetics that resist easy categorization. For Canetti, Marrakech functions as a space in which he embarks on a journey of questioning the self and its pre-established values while attempting to find a way around the relics of the colonial order and establish an authentic encounter with the inhabitants. Like Orwell's text, Canetti's account allows for a comprehension of the nature of the encounters between colonial Marrakech and its Western expatriates.

This article explores Canetti's and Orwell's negotiation of Orientalist and anti-Orientalist discourses in relation to Marrakech. In order to assess the extent to which both Canetti and Orwell were able to transcend ideological and cultural barriers while writing about the city, I will consider the following aspects: the genre of the narrative and its format, each writer's ideology and conception of art, and the historical background of the texts. Some of the pressing questions that this article will attempt to answer are: to what extent do Orwell's and Canetti's accounts impose or expose the French imperialist agenda in Morocco? Does their poeticization of Oriental poverty undermine their anti-colonialist claims? And, to what extent does Orwell's text, in particular, support his Marxist project of "exposing the evils of imperialism"?

Keywords: Otherness, Marrakech, literary representation of space, Orientalist tradition, George Orwell, Elias Canetti

"What I have most wanted to do… is to make political writing into an art."
— George Orwell, "Why I Write?"
"CAN AN ENEMY teach you freedom?" — Elias Canetti, *The Human Province*

Introduction

As a formerly colonized country, Morocco fascinated several Western writers who, beguiled by the exoticism they perceived there, painted the picture of Marrakech as a place of poverty, filled with "beasts of burden", "beggars" and "sore-eyed children" (Orwell "Marrakech" 308, 310, 314). George Orwell and Elias Canetti are among the authors who attempted to portray Marrakech at a very crucial period during the French protectorate, producing a discourse on colonial Marrakech that does not sit comfortably within the paradigms of colonialist writings on the city. That is, despite being accused of adopting an Orientalist attitude towards the subjects of their writings, a nuanced reading of their works undermines such claims. To understand their formulations of colonial Marrakech, we need to understand not just the form and ideological meaning of their narratives, but also, most essentially, the degree to which their writings consolidate, refer to, react to, and translate the nature of the French imperial enterprise in Marrakech. Orwell, a political novelist and literary essayist, arrived in Marrakech during the colonial period (1912-1956), on the eve of World War II. In 1938, Orwell (1903-1950) suffered a flare-up of his chronic tuberculosis, a reoccurrence of his childhood disease, after his return from the Spanish Civil War and was advised by his doctors to seek rest in the mild climate of French Morocco, Marrakech. In 1938, he sojourned in Marrakech where he wrote his journalistic essay "Marrakech" (1939), which gives a piercing portrayal of the wretchedness of the imperial agenda and its implications on the poverty-ridden city of Marrakech. Similarly, in 1954, the Bulgarian-born writer and philosopher Elias Canetti (1905-1994) travelled to Marrakech while it was still under French colonial rule, embarking on a journey of searching for his Jewish origins. In *Voices of Marrakesh: A Record of a Visit* (1969), Canetti provides an autobiographical narrative about his encounters with a foreign landscape in Marrakech. Like Orwell's text, Canetti's account allows for a comprehension of cross-cultural encounters between colonial Marrakech and its Western expatriates. Aware that their exploration of the city situates them at the end of a lengthy line of explorers of the country, their accounts, in their entirety, are couched within a larger narrative that informs their touristic and orientalising desires. This article attempts to examine Canetti's and Orwell's negotiation of the Orientalist and anti-Orientalist discourses in their works on the city of Marrakech. Some of the pressing questions that this study will attempt to answer are: to what extent do Orwell's and Canetti's accounts impose or expose the French imperialist agenda in Morocco? Does their poeticization of Oriental poverty undermine their anti-colonialist claims? And to what extent does Orwell's text in particular support his Marxist project of "exposing the evils of imperialism" (Orwell 253)?

While both Canetti's *Voices of Marrakech* and Orwell's essay "Marrakech" offer a critical perspective on Marrakech which captures the city during the period of French colonial rule, it would be inaccurate to describe their works as strictly Orientalist if we subscribe to Edward Said's definition of Orientalism.[1] Both authors make use of some Orientalist tropes but only to provide a critique of colonialism and the exploitation that has shaped the city's past. In her article "Orwell's Marrakech and the Protectorate's Tourists Guide", Fouzia Rhissassi undertakes a study of tourist guides during the protectorate, claiming that Orwell had presented himself as a tourist upon his arrival in Marrakech. Rhissassi believes that Orwell's reflections are illuminating as a reference to "a discursive formation, that of the tourist guide" (Rhissassi 159). Rhissassi relies on Michel Foucault's concept of "discursive formation" which implies a return to and a repetition of previous discursive formations. Foucault writes that "to say that one discursive formation is substituted for another is not to say that a whole world of absolutely new objects, enunciations, concepts, and theoretical choices emerges… it is to say that a general transformation of relations has occurred, but it does not necessarily alter all the elements…" (Foucault qtd. in Rhissassi 160). Rhissassi points out that tourist guides should not be considered a transformational practice of Orientalism but rather constitute a discursive repetition. She argues that tourists, including Orwell, were attracted to Marrakech by its natural beauty and its mild temperatures, in addition to the presence of French doctors in Marrakech. She suggests that Orwell chose the city because there were French doctors in town and she backs up her argument by referring to the list of French doctors in the tourist guides of the kingdom at the time. In fact, Rhissassi's article seems to focus on offering a study of the protectorates' tourist guides like *Marrakech et l'Atlas* (1937), *Guide Michelin* (1926) and many others, at the expense of a critical reading of Orwell's discourse on the "red city" of Marrakech. Such guides focus on making Morocco and Moroccans "available", rendering the country accessible to the tourists' "gaze", while highlighting the differences between the French and the Moroccans. That is, these tourist guides work to reinforce stereotypical images of the Moroccans as Oriental Others who need to be civilized. Hence, they work as a discursive mode through which the empire exerted and maintained its power on the protectorate in Morocco. Writers like Edith Wharton wrote travelogues that had overarching discursive and political implications. For example, in her book, *In Morocco* (1919), Wharton praised the height of civilization the country attained under General Lyautey's rule. Rhissassi advances the argument that the urgency of tourist guides during the protectorate rests on the premises that it was used to gain legitimacy to French intervention in the country, and that writers, like Orwell, blindly endorse some of the fallacies advanced in these guides. Such an

[1] In his seminal work *Orientalism* (1978), Edward Said suggests that "anyone who teaches, writes about, or researches the Orient - and this applies whether the person is an anthropologist, sociologist, historian, or philologist - either in its specific or its general aspects, is an Orientalist, and what he or she does is Orientalism." Said goes on to define Orientalism as "a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between 'the Orient' and (most of the time) 'the Occident'" (1).

argument, while partly true in that the protectorate's sponsored travel guides spread colonial fallacies about the colonized as backward Others who need to be civilized, can be easily subverted by a nuanced reading of Orwell's text. In the same vein, Phyllis Lassner corroborates Rhissassi's judgement arguing in her article "Double Trouble: George Orwell, Martha Gellhorn and the War to End Global Imperialism" that Orwell dramatizes a global struggle in a way that renders him a collaborator with the French imperial agenda (72). She notes that, while reading the essay "Marrakech", "we veer from the position of innocent bystander to complicity with colonial blindness, to confrontation with the realities of the colonized" (75). Clearly, as an ex-British officer in Burma knowing first-hand the workings of empire, Orwell takes great risk in his essay, setting himself up for the recurring criticism that his rage against oppression is a merely self-serving performance. However, in this article I read his essay "Marrakech" alongside his other critical writings where he explicitly exhibits his anti-empire agenda. Such a perspective, as we are going to see, stems from his experience in Burma where he witnessed the oppressive treatment of the colonized and the corrupt wielding of power by despotic empires, stimulating Orwell's anti-empire antagonism and feeling that "he got to escape not merely imperialism but from every form of man's dominion over man" (Orwell 2001, 138).

Canetti is no different from Orwell when it comes to the dilemma of writing and representing Otherness aggravated by his multivalent sense of identity. Joussef Ishaghpour (1990) refers to Canetti as an intellectual "not representative of any country, of any school, of any movement, nor any single genre of writing" (Ishaghpour qtd. in Brighenti 74). Canetti is nonetheless accused of partaking in the discourse of empire, of perpetuating the historically persistent representation of the colonized as backward and decadent others who need to be civilized. Stuart Ferguson, for example, suggests that Canetti's visit of Marrakech had erotic and ethnocultural motivations which figure throughout different episodes of his text, *Voices of Marrakech*. Extensively quoting Canetti's text, Ferguson suggests that Canetti's narrative is overwhelmed by Orientalist details, interpreting his exploration of the city, his search for his Sephardic origins, as "a transgression of gender-culture-specific architectural boundary" (570). While my reading acknowledges some of the Orientalist poetics that Canetti, consciously or unconsciously, adopts, it attempts to steer away from categorising him as a purely Orientalist writer according to Said's definition. My reading of Canetti's account strives to highlight the narrative's counter-critique to Orientalist writings on the city. This reversal mode, the text's subversion of orientalist *clichés*, is something deliberately overlooked by Ferguson. In fact, Canetti's lack of national or cultural identification as a descendant of Sephardic Jews erodes the kind of rigid distinctions between the self and the other that are fundamental to the discourse of Orientalism. As we are going to see in the body of this article, Canetti feels like he reached the goal of his journey when he arrived at the heart of Jewish quarters in the medina of Marrakech where he is both foreign and native at the same time. For him, it is this state of being outsider/ insider at the same time that complicates any Orientalist accusation.

"Brown Skins" as "Beasts of Burden" in Orwell's "Marrakech"

In 1938, Orwell arrived in Marrakech where he spent his convalescence with his wife, Eileen, at their rented villa. The villa was "entirely isolated except for a few Arabs who live in the outbuildings to tend the orange grove that surrounds it" (Meyers 57). Eileen records that their villa had a large sitting room, two bedrooms, a bathroom and a kitchen where Orwell spent his time resting, observing and writing his novel, *Coming Up for Air* (1939). While in Marrakech, "the couple tried to create a North African version of their life in Wallington, planting a small garden and acquiring some goats and chickens" (Sheldon 301). During his stay in Marrakech, Orwell frequently exchanged letters with his friends back home in England where he records some of the "frightful" conditions that he witnessed in colonial Marrakech (Davison 279). In fact, reading Orwell's personal letters and critical essays allows for a deeper comprehension of his nuanced journalistic essay "Marrakech" (1939), which gives a piercing portrayal of life in Marrakech between World Wars I and II. In one letter that he wrote to Jack Common, a British socialist and essayist, on 28 September 1938, immediately after arriving in Marrakech, Orwell told Common that he religiously chronicles his experiences, keeping a Marrakech diary: "I am as usual taking careful notes of everything I see, but am not certain what use I shall be able to make of them afterwards" (Davison 278). He then moved on to tell him about his interest in the natives' lives: "I shall also be interested to see a little of how the Arab peasants live. Here in the town conditions are pretty frightful, wages generally work out at about ld or 2d an hour and it's the first place I've seen where beggars do literally beg for bread and eat it greedily when given it" (279). Marrakech's spell on Orwell is evident as he demonstrates an interest in the abject lives of the "wretched" natives (Orwell, "Marrakech" 316). Constantly distressed by the sights of the severe poverty around them in Marrakech, Eileen corroborated his view, telling a friend in one of her own letters: "Marrakech crawls with disease of every kind, the ringworm group, the tuberculosis group, the dysentery group" (Davidson 328). To further immerse themselves in the country, the couple tried to learn the local vernacular (*Darija*) in order to communicate with the locals around them, even though they rarely maintained any contact with them. In a letter, this time writing to Francis Westrope, the proprietor of a bookshop who sends them books to Marrakech, Orwell writes about the confusion occasioned by the multilingualism he faces in Morocco:

> I'm sorry to say Eileen and I have learned practically no Arabic, except the few words one can't help learning, because all the Arabs speak a kind of pidgin French… They also, of course, in these parts, speak a kind of dialect with Berber and even Spanish words mixed up in it. A lot of the people round here are Chleuh, a race the French only conquered quite recently, and there is also a certain amount of negro blood. (347)

Orwell repeatedly acknowledges his frustrations with his incapability to come into contact with the natives in Marrakech. In his letter to his friend, Common, Orwell confesses that the "trip is something quite new to me, because for the first time I am in the position of a tourist. The result is that it is quite impossible, at any rate at present, to make any contact with the Arabs" (277). Orwell's declaration that he is just "a tourist" entailing a degree of detachment could be read as an attempt to remain detached and unaffected by the gruesome sights of injustice he witnessed in the city of Marrakech. In fact, Orwell, who himself was disgusted by the spectacle of tourists in the city, was not interested in exploring Marrakech as a tourist, recognizing how "the people anywhere near a big town are utterly 'debauched by the tourist racket' […] which turn them into a race of beggars and curio-sellers" (322). As a political writer, Orwell approached Marrakech less as a tourist and more as an anti-imperialist and anti-totalitarian political activist interested in the plight of the working class living miserably in a decadent colonial milieu. In the same vein, Orwell's biographer, Jeffrey Meyers, writes in his book *Orwell: Life and Art* (2010) that Orwell was not interested in the "picturesque or touristic aspects of Morocco, but in the social and economic conditions, the agricultural methods and urban poverty" (57).

In 1946, Orwell, aware of the criticism levied against him, wrote in his renowned essay, "Why I Write" (1946), that "every line of serious work that I have written since 1936 has been written, directly or indirectly, *against* totalitarianism and *for* democratic socialism, as I understand it" (Orwell 532). It is, indeed, in this spirit that Orwell wrote his essay "Marrakech". On 24 November 1938, Orwell wrote a letter to his friend John Sceats where he relates the horrendous workings of French colonialism in Morocco:

> One can get a sort of idea of the prevailing hunger by the fact that in the whole country there are practically no wild animals, everything edible being eaten by human beings. I don't know how it would compare with the poorer parts of India, but *Burma would seem like a paradise compared to it* [my emphasis], so far as standard of living goes. The French are evidently squeezing the country pretty ruthlessly. They absorb most of the fertile land as well as the minerals, and the taxes seem fairly heavy considering the poverty of the people. (Davidson 302)

Overshadowed by the ghastly conditions of the locals he encounters in Marrakech and the gloomy thought of an impending European war, Orwell evaluates British and French colonialism remarking that Burma, compared to Morocco, was "like a paradise".

In "Marrakech" (1939), Orwell opens his journalistic essay in a pessimistic tone, describing the revolting image of a funeral procession that passed him while he was having lunch at a restaurant in Jemaa el Fnaa. Orwell writes: "as the corpse went past the flies left the restaurant table in a cloud and rushed after it, but they came back a few minutes later…What really appeals to the flies is that the corpses here are never put into coffins, they are merely wrapped in a piece of rag and carried on the shoulders of four friends" (Orwell 306). This is the earliest instance of what could be read as one of Orwell's

normalizations of the "uncivilized life" of colonized people while attempting to critique the system, imperialism, that reinforces such "dehumanizing" practices. Furthermore, although Orwell is critiquing colonialism, he has fallen into the trap of normalization, evincing a lack of knowledge about the traditions of the natives. He writes: "When the friends get to the burying-ground they hack an oblong hole a foot or two deep, dump the body in it and fling over it a little of the dried-up, lumpy earth, which is like broken brick. No gravestone, no name, no identifying mark of any kind" (306). Orwell's attempt to critique colonialism in Marrakech is undermined by his evident lack of knowledge about the locals' Islamic burial traditions and the philosophy behind locals' burial practices such as refraining from using gravestones to demonstrate the equality of humans in death. Gordon Bowker suggests that "somehow the hurried funerals, the shallow burial ground, 'merely a huge waste of hummocky earth', symbolised for him [Orwell] the degradation to which imperialism condemned whole populations, in Morocco as much as in Burma" (Bowker). In a letter to Charles Doran on 26 November 1938, nearly three months into his stay in Marrakech, Orwell writes in his usual bleak tone about the country:

> It is a tiresome country in some ways, but it is interesting to get *a glimpse of French colonial methods and compare them with our own* [my emphasis]. I think as far as I can make out that the French are every bit as bad as ourselves, but somewhat better on the surface, partly owing to the fact that there is a large indigenous white population *here, part of it proletarian or near-proletarian. For that reason, it isn't quite possible to keep up the sort of white man's burden atmosphere that we do in India* [my emphasis], and there is less colour-prejudice. But economically it is just the usual swindle for which empires exist. The poverty of most of the Arab population is frightful. As far as one can work it out, the average family seems to live at the rate of about a shilling a day, and of course most of the people are either peasants or petty craftsmen who have to work extremely hard by antiquated methods. (Davison 307)

Orwell's reflections on French imperialism in Morocco and British imperialism in Burma using the phrase "our own methods" delivers an explicit self-implication of Orwell within the colonial machine as a former colonial British officer in Burma. Literary critic Terry Eagleton writes that after resigning from his service in Burma, Orwell described "imperialism as 'that evil despotism'; but he also admired empire-builders for their practicality, and thought that a clip around the ear might do the natives no harm at all" (Eagleton 5). Orwell compares "French colonial methods" to the British in India concluding that the French are "just as bad as ourselves (the British)" even though the French cannot "keep up the sort of white man's burden atmosphere that we do in India, and there is less colour-prejudice" (Davison 307). Orwell recognizes the impossibility of

applying the classic myth[2] of the white-man's burden atmosphere strengthened by a color-prejudice in Marrakech. Orwell, however, observed the economic disparities fundamental to the relationship between the colonizer and colonized people: "economically it is just the usual swindle for which empires exist. The poverty of most of the Arab population is frightful" (Davison 307). This statement is a clear condemnation of all nations and languages that breed imperialism, whether it is British or French.

In *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature and Art* (1988), James Clifford writes about the predicament of writers like Orwell and Conrad arguing that "the most acute observers of the colonial situation, Orwell and Conrad for example, have portrayed it as a power-laden, ambiguous world of discontinuous, clashing realities" (78-79). Indeed, Orwell's formulations of colonial Marrakech evince an ambivalent position. He is clearly critical of the abuses of power as he tries to voice the plights inflicted by French colonialism, yet at the same time, his formulations partake in the language of the empire. That is, it suffers from a colonialist fever spreading *clichés* about natives as 'uncivilized', 'beasts of burden', and Others who need to be civilized. Evidently, Orwell is aware of his internalized imperialist attitudes and how it blinds him toward the plights of the natives in Marrakech. There is a passage in "Marrakech" where he metaphorically speaks of his blindness in a subtle language:

> What is strange about these people is their *invisibility*. For several weeks, always at about the same time of day, the file of old women had hobbled past the house with their firewood, and *though they had registered themselves on my eyeballs I cannot truly say that I had seen them.* Firewood was passing-that was how I saw it. It was only that one day I happened to be walking behind them, and *the curious up-and-down motion of a load of wood drew my attention to the human being underneath it* [my emphasis]. Then for the first time I noticed the poor old earth-coloured bodies, bodies reduced to bones and leathery skin, bent double under the crushing weight. Yet I suppose I had not been five minutes on Moroccan soil before I noticed the overloading of the donkeys and was infuriated by it. There is no question that the donkeys are damnably treated. (314)

Many critics regard this passage as clear evidence of Orwell's colonialist attitude towards the natives. However, nuanced reading of the passage drives home the idea that colonialism does not only dehumanize the natives but also dehumanizes the colonizer. In this instance, the mistreatment of donkeys elicits the observer's sympathy and yet he fails to notice the misery of human beings arounds him. Orwell's failure to "notice" the old women under the bundles of firewood walking past his house every day implicates him in the culture of blindness caused by his imperialist education. In fact, Orwell's upbringing and his time serving as an officer in Burma were pivotal in shaping his perspective and

[2] The classic myth refers to the assumption that the White man is predisposed to dominate and civilize the colonized people. 'White Man's Burden' is a concept originated from a poem written by British poet Rudyard Kipling in 1899. It portrayed the imperialistic mindset and ideas that were prevalent during this period. The concept itself was used to justify colonialism and the exploitation of resources in non-European lands, perpetuating a sense of racial superiority.

contributed to his insensitivity towards the hardships of the local population in Marrakech. This illustrates how even well-intentioned individuals can become complicit in a system that perpetuates inequality and suffering due to the ingrained biases and cultural norms they have absorbed. In a reading of Orwell's *Burmese Days and Shooting an Elephant,* Valerie Meyers argues that Orwell's writing "accentuates this theme that in order to rule the Barbarians you have to become one" (58). To further emphasize his initial blindness to the natives' misery, Orwell writes: "Yet I suppose I had not been five minutes on Moroccan soil before I noticed the overloading of the donkeys and was infuriated by it" (314). This is one of the clearest statements where Orwell is consciously condemning his own normalization of the colonized people's misery, suggesting that colonialism does not only dehumanize the colonized, but it also results in a loss of empathy and compassion of the colonizers.

In another passage, Orwell chronicles the inhumane conditions of the natives impoverished by French colonial rule: "When you walk through a town like this - two hundred thousand inhabitants, of whom at least twenty thousand own literally nothing except the rags they stand up in - when you see how the people live, and still more how easily they die, it is always difficult to believe that you are walking among human beings" (306). Aware of the French's myth of *la mission civilisatrice* ("the civilising mission") and the wretched circumstances it imposed on the natives, Orwell continues to emphasize the fact that "*all colonial empires are in reality founded upon that fact*" [my emphasis]. Interestingly, the earliest data on life expectancy in Morocco was taken in the 1950s and Morocco scored 45.67 years. In fact, the country experienced an agricultural crisis caused by drought starting from 1935 and as a result people were left starving to death. It is during this period that "human beings were emaciated to the final degree of misery," as investigated by Swearingen in his book *Moroccan Mirages: Agrarian Dreams and Deceptions 1912-1986* (1990). Orwell recounts that in colonial Marrakech, in the late 1930s, even an employee of a municipality cannot afford to buy his own bread. Orwell writes:

> I was feeding one of the gazelles in the public gardens…
>
> An Arab navvy working on the path nearby lowered his heavy hoe and sidled towards us. He looked from the gazelle to the bread and from the bread to the gazelle, with a sort of quiet amazement, as though he had never seen anything quite like this before. Finally, he said shyly in French:
>
> 'I could eat some of that bread.'
>
> I tore off a piece and he stowed it gratefully in some secret place under his rags. *This man is an employee of the Municipality* [my emphasis]. (308)

Orwell's choice to delay the information that "this man is an employee of the municipality" serves a purpose of emphasis. Here Orwell is emphasizing the fact that even

someone who works at an administration run by the French cannot afford to buy his own bread in a country like Morocco. Orwell's descriptions constantly evoke the horrid realities of the poverty and misery of the natives under French colonial rule, elucidating his project of "exposing the lies of imperialism" (Orwell "Why I Write" 534). On another occasion, someone noticed that Orwell was lighting a cigarette while passing the coppersmith's booths in the medina of Marrakech and instantly a crowd of people gathered around him clamoring for a cigarette. Orwell writes that "in about a minute I had used up the whole packet. None of these people, I suppose, works less than twelve hours a day, and every one of them looks on a cigarette as an impossible luxury (309)." For Orwell, during colonialism, one cannot perceive of the natives except as dehumanized creatures who are victimized by the white man and their destiny is to remain inferior and savage creatures.

In "Marrakech," Orwell also describes the extreme poverty of Jewish communities in colonial Marrakech. He visited the Mellah[3] and attempted to provide a historical background of their miserable existence in Marrakech:

> When you go through the Jewish quarters you gather some idea of what the medieval ghettoes were probably like... Under their Moorish rulers the Jews were only allowed to own land in certain restricted areas, and after centuries of this kind of treatment they have ceased to bother about overcrowding... (Orwell 308)

Describing the Mellah, Orwell writes about its small streets which are "less than six feet wide, the houses are completely windowless, and sore-eyed children cluster everywhere in unbelievable numbers, like clouds of flies. Down the center of the street there is generally running a little river of urine." Orwell is generally accused of anti-Semitism by many critics. In another instance in "Marrakech" Orwell writes "a good job Hitler isn't here. Perhaps he is on his way, however. You hear the usual dark rumours about the Jews, not only from the Arabs but from poorer Europeans" (310). One of Orwell's critics, Alexander Cockburn, accuses him of having written "mini-diatribes about blacks, homosexuals, and Jews and further claims as fact his crusty dislike of pansies, vegetarians, peaceniks, women" (Cockburn qtd. in William H. Pritchard 183-190). In an attempt to justify Orwell's position, Terry Eagleton writes, Orwell was "indeed unsociable, anti-feminist and homophobic, but only ambiguously anti-semitic" (Eagleton 3). In the same manner, Christopher Hitchens writes a trenchant vindication of Orwell claiming that he "hated

[3] The terms "mellah" refers to the Jewish quarters located inside Moroccan cities. In her book *The Mellah of Marrakesh: Jewish and Muslim Spaces in Morocco's Red* City (2019), Emily Gotterich states that the new Jewish quarter in Marrakesh was also called a "*mellah,*" a name that originally referred to the salt-marsh area to which the Jews of the northern Moroccan capital had been transferred. "Interestingly, the Roman ghetto had similarly inherited its name from its predecessor, the Venetian foundry (*getto* or *ghetto*) where a policy of Jewish confinement had been put into official practice in 1516. The two terms continued to follow parallel trajectories, moreover, with "ghetto" and "*mellah*" each eventually becoming a generic term for a Jewish quarter within their respective environments" (12).

inequality, exploitation, racism, and the bullying of small nations, and he was an early opponent of nuclear weapons and the hardly less menacing idea of nuclear blackmail or 'deterrence.' He saw how an external threat could be used to police or to intimidate dissent, even in a democracy" (140). Orwell might have dramatized the misery of the natives in Marrakech but only to expose their inhumane treatment and oppression under French imperial rule.

The invisibility of the colonized people is a question that Orwell has always been engaged with since his early days serving as a police officer in Burma. In his essay, "Why I Write", Orwell, rethinking his role as a writer, insists that he writes "because there is some lie that I want to expose, some fact to which I want to draw attention" (533). Eagleton, who considers Orwell a pioneer of Cultural Studies, comes to Orwell's defence once again and asserts that "Orwell was a magnificently courageous opponent of political oppression, a man of unswerving moral integrity and independence of spirit who risked his life fighting Fascism [...] he denounced an imperialism of which he had had unpleasant first-hand knowledge as a young policeman in Burma. In the meantime, he managed to pioneer what is now known as cultural studies" (4).

Orwell's discourse on colonial Marrakech, however, is certainly not consistent. His dilemma is that he can only conceive of the destitute natives in Marrakech as "beasts of burden", even as he is criticizing the empire for its methodical impoverishment of the natives. For Orwell, the natives were subjugated within the orbits of the West. However, while the essay can be read as an anti-imperialist polemic, its language does not offer a possibility of resistance. Stansky and Abrahams reflected on Orwell's dilemma writing that he sympathizes with "the oppressed, the underdog, the victim and resents the oppressor, the top dog, the victimizer; but how might one simultaneously resent and sympathize with the oppressed - and even the oppressor" (201). By acknowledging the superiority of the French colonizers in his essay[4] "Marrakech", eventually, the natives appear inferior and in need of a white man to civilize them. "People with brown skin are next door to invisible" (315), Orwell insists. For Orwell, the seething anxieties and plights of people with brown skins are simply overlooked by the white man:

> No one would think of running cheap trips to the Distressed Areas. But where the human beings have brown skins their poverty is simply not noticed. What does Morocco mean to a Frenchman? An orange-grove or a job in government service. Or to an Englishman? Camels, castles, palm-trees, Foreign Legionnaires, brass trays and bandits. One could probably live here for years without noticing that for nine-tenths of the people the reality of life is an endless, back-breaking struggle to wring a little food out of an eroded soil. (311-12)

[4] Orwell relates further information of the abject poverty and social conditions of life in "beastly dull" country of French Morocco under the French colonial rule which was "evidently squeezing the country pretty ruthlessly" in various letters that he exchanged with his friends during his stay in Marrakech in 1938. See Peter Davison (2013).

Christopher Hitchens notices the ambivalent nature of Orwell's oeuvre: "writings between 1936 and 1940, in particular, show an extraordinary volatility. He veered now towards straight anti-Nazism, now towards anarchism, then pacifism, varieties of gauchiste allegiance, and finally (with palpable relief) a decision to support the war effort" (144). Orwell himself recognizes the volatility of his convictions: "I worshipped Kipling at thirteen, loathed him at seventeen, enjoyed him at twenty, despised him at twenty-five and now again rather admire him" (Orwell qtd. in Keer 152). In a reading of Orwell's novel *Burmese Days*, Elleke Boehmer concludes that "despite the attempt at counter-narrative, however, Orwell does not ultimately diverge significantly from a colonialist semiotic. Traditional assumptions retain their hold" (154).

At the end of his essay "Marrakech", Orwell recounts watching a column of conscripted Senegalese soldiers in the French army march past him in their ill-fitting uniforms and was surprised how one soldier looked at him with reverence and "profound respect" because he was white, and Orwell thought "the wretched" boy is indoctrinated to think that way, to perceive every white man as his superior. Orwell writes: "This wretched boy, who is a French citizen and has therefore been dragged from the forest to scrub floors and catch syphilis in garrison towns, actually has feelings of reverence before a white skin. He has been taught that the white race are his masters, and he still believes it" (316).

Orwell's statement, "he has been taught that the white race are his masters, and he still believes it," is emblematic of postcolonial theorists' call for decolonizing the minds. Upon perceiving the soldiers' threat to the dichotomy upon which imperialism is built, Orwell, who also anticipated the end of colonialism and thought independence from colonial domination inevitable, wonders: "How much longer can we go on kidding these people? How long before they turn their guns in the other direction?" (316). In 1952, anticolonial thinker and philosopher, Franz Fanon, wrote his influential book *Black Skins, White Masks* where he wrote about the experience of colonialism and its psychological effects on the colonized people. Fanon argues that colonialism produced a "colonial mentality" in both colonizers and the colonized and that this mentality is characterized by a sense of inferiority complex of the colonized and a belief in the inherent superiority of the colonizers. Fanon hence calls for the liberation of "the black man from himself," entailing a need for decolonization to include not only economic and political liberation, but also a psychological (mental) liberation from the internalized effects of colonialism (Fanon 2).

A nuanced reading of Orwell's anti-colonial tendencies in his journalistic essay "Marrakech" unravels his unmistakable solidarity with the underdog, the victims of the tyranny of colonialism, as well as his philosophy as a lifelong foe of colonialism. As someone who despised being a cog in the machinery of despotism during his service as an officer in Burma, Orwell strived to unlearn his superiority and purge himself of his deep-seated class / race prejudice that underpins his English culture. "Marrakech" might be considered one of the earliest works where he demonstrated his anti-empire agenda.

Hitchens proclaims that "One way of describing him, as well as of valuing him, would be to say that 'he was a man at war'. There was a continual battle between his convictions, which were acquired through experience, and his emotions and temperament, which were those of his background and of his dificult personality" (132). In the same vein, in his book Orwell and Empire (2022), Douglass Kerr warns us against condemning Orwell's tone or rhetoric without taking "the historical context" into account since being anti-imperialist in his time was not a "straightforward" or easy position to take (7).

Elias Canetti's Insider/ Outsider Perspective on Colonial Marrakech

In March 1954, Elias Canetti was invited by his close friend, Aymer Maxwell, Gavin Maxwell's brother, to accompany him and his film crew on a trip to colonial Marrakech where they shot their feature film *Another Sky* (1955).[5] This trip took place during a crucial period in Moroccan history, marked by national struggle for independence and the disintegration of French colonial power. Canetti's visit, however, constitutes a symbolic act of revisiting his Sephardic Jewish origins in Marrakech. It's important to note that Canetti himself had a multicultural upbringing: he was born in Bulgaria in 1905, was forced to flee persecution in Nazi-occupied Austria and spent several years living in exile in Switzerland and England. Many critics agree that his experience of displacement, coupled with his Jewish heritage, shaped Canetti into a cosmopolitan citizen of the world, having a unique perspective on the world and human relationships. In 1981, he received the Noble Prize in Literature for "writing marked by a broad outlook, a wealth of ideas and artistic power". [6] After his trip to Marrakech, Canetti documented his experiences and observation during his visit to the Red City in his book, *The Voices of Marrakesh: A Record of a Visit*, which was originally published in German as *Die Stimmen von Marrakesh: Aufzeichnungen nach einer Reise* (1967).

As a cosmopolitan Jewish writer, Canetti spoke French which was helpful for him in enlarging the scope of his exchanges with the natives in Marrakech, both Muslims and Jews. Canetti was a private intellectual who refrained from making any political or social statements and adopted a poetics that resists easy categorization. Yet his work can hardly be said to stand apart from social issues. Like George Orwell's "Marrakech", Canetti's account is contaminated by the discourse of empire. That is, even though it allows for a comprehension of the intercultural encounters he witnesses, it is seemingly quite thoroughly caught up in the ambivalent position of exposing and/or imposing the

[5] In our article "Framing Colonial Marrakech in Alfred Hitchcock's *The Man Who Knew Too Much* (1956) and Gavin Lambert's *Another Sky* (1955)" (2023), Bahmad and I argued that both Hitchcock and Lambert offer the earliest representations of Marrakech on Western Screens, establishing the relationship between colonialism and filmic representations of the period. (See Benlahoussine, E. & Bahmad, J 54-69).

[6] The Nobel Prize in Literature 1981. NobelPrize.org. Nobel Prize Outreach AB 2023. Tue. 14 Mar 2023. https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/1981/summary/

discourse of French empire in Marrakech. Canetti, like Orwell, writes at length about the marketplace (the *Souks*), animals (camels), beggars (children), and Marrakech minorities (women and the Jewish community) while formulating his discourse on colonial Marrakech.

Canetti begins his travelogue with a section entitled "Encounters with Camels" (9), in which he chronicles his first encounters with the camels: "I came into contact with camels on three occasions, and each occasion ended tragically. 'I must show you the camel market,' said my friend soon after my arrival in Marrakech" (9). By choosing to start his travelogue with an evocation of camels as an animal that has always fascinated Western travelers, Canetti immediately creates an association between his work and earlier travelers' clichés about Marrakech. This reference to an Orientalist cliché which is fundamental to the discourse of Orientalism is a recurrent motif in the whole narrative. However, in this instance, Canetti's evocation of the camel market illustrates one of the essential features of colonial Marrakech by recalling its significant historical role in the trans-Saharan trade. In an endeavour to find the camel's market at Bab El-Khemis, Canetti and his unnamed male companion (probably Aymer Maxwell who accompanied him to Marrakech) come upon the following scene:

> We had gone to the market expecting to see hundreds of these gentle, curvaceous beasts. But in that huge square we had found only one, on three legs, captive, living its last hour, and as it fought for its life we had driven away. (11)

On a second occasion, Canetti and his friend were passing through a different part of the city when they saw a large caravan of camels being sold for slaughter. Canetti writes that most of the camels he saw "had lowered themselves to their knees; others were still standing... It was a picture of peace and twilight" (11). What strikes Canetti in this scene is that the camels he encounters had humane faces resembling those of English ladies: "We looked at them closely and I tell you they had faces. They all looked alike and yet they were so different. They put on a mind of elderly English ladies taking tea together, dignified and apparently bored but unable entirely to conceal the malice with which they observe everything around them" (11). The scene of the dignified camels urges Canetti to anthropomorphize them: "that one is my aunt, honestly,' said my English friend when I tactfully pointed out the resemblance to his countrywomen and soon spotted other acquaintances" (11). Canetti, though he lives in England, avoids associating with the English in the narrative, and confesses that he tells people from Marrakech he is from London "for the sake of simplicity" (13). This is one of the myriad instances in the text that foregrounds Canetti's lack of any strong attachment to any culture, embracing instead the position of a "wandering Jew" (41). Curious about the "camels' existence", Canetti strikes up a conversation with a camel drover from Goulmime who told him in a broken French that the camels are on their way to the slaughterhouse (15). Canetti and his English friend who "at home is an enthusiastic hunter" (12) were "shocked" by the news of a mass slaughter of the beautiful creatures. Placing emphasis on his English friend's

dismay at the news of the camel's slaughter, even though he is a keen "hunter back home", the text highlights Western traveler's hypocritical attitude towards the natives' traditions and practices, regarding them as decadent and barbaric.

On their final encounter with the camels, Canetti and his English companion hurried to the market hoping to "gain a less somber impression of camel existence" (14). However, in the market they came across another tortured beast who was "putting up some kind of resistance":

> A man was trying to force it to its knees, and because it would not obey he was backing up his efforts with blows of his stick. Of the two or three other people busying themselves at the animal's head one stood out particularly: a powerful, stocky man with a dark, cruel face. His stance was solid, his legs as if rooted in the ground. With brisk movements of his arms he was drawing a rope through a hole he had bored in the animal's septum. Nose and rope were red with blood. The camel flinched and shrieked, now and then uttering a great roar; finally it leaped to its feet again, having by now knelt down, and tried to tug itself free, while the man pulled the rope tighter and tighter. (15)

For Canetti, the man with a dark cruel face is a display of cruelty and the camel is portrayed as a victim to the inhumane treatment of the native man. The man is described in bestial terms: "powerful, stocky with a dark, cruel face. His stance was solid, his legs as if rooted in the ground", whereas the camels have a "humane face" (11). This reminds us of Orwell's rage at the overloading of donkeys while ignoring the plight of the human (woman) next to it. Rana Kabbani, comparing Canetti to Richard Burton, argues that, like Burton, Canetti's images of the native man as a despot subscribes to the tradition of Orientalism: "This is the traditional view of the Oriental as despot, as cruel being and violent captor. He is not perturbed by blood or by the suffering of animals" (Kabbani 124). In the second section, Canetti retreats, after an encounter with the camels, to "The *Souks*" (17-22), another invocation of a popular Orientalist cliché about the 'East', "the colourful *bazaars*" (17). This theme of an "exotic city" is an important theme in the whole narrative. In the *souk*, Canetti encounters a picturesque setting of exotic goods and merchandise exhibited at the heart of the city, within the urban fabric, whose structures tend to disorient the foreigner. Referring to Pierre Sansot's concept of "Geometric illusion" identified in his book, *Poetics of the City* (1971), Jean-Marc Moura argues that the Western travellers maintain several "functionalist illusions" (78) about the city. However, Moura remarks that the structure of the exotic city in Marrakech subverts these taxonomies: "The stranger, excluded from the unchanging social system, is somehow trapped. He takes the only route accessible to him, that of the consumer, leading to the identifiable street, the shopping street, the *souk*" (78). In "*The Souks*", Canetti rediscovers his journey uninfluenced by Orientalists' discourse providing a positive ethnographic account of his encounters there. Impressed by the organization of the merchandise in the Souks, Canetti writes:

> All the booths and stalls selling the same thing are close together - twenty or thirty or more of them. There is a *bazaar* for spices and another for leather goods. The ropemakers have their place and the basket weavers have theirs. Some of the carpet dealers have large, spacious vaults; you stride past them as past a separate city and are meaningly invited inside. The jewellers are grouped round a courtyard of their own, and in many of their narrow booths you can see men at work. You find every thing – but you always find it many times over. (18)

Unlike Orientalist writings' invocations of the imagery of the *souks* to perpetuate a colonialist discourse of landscapes of Otherness as decadent and savage spaces in need of civilization,[7] Canetti's own formulations launch a counter-critique on Western modernity. Referring to Marrakech's largest and most famous bazaar Souk Cherratine , he writes: "there is a great deal of pride in this exhibition. They are showing what they can produce, but they are also showing how much of it there is" (18). Unlike Orwell's pessimistic account of craftsmen - "All people who work with their hands are partly invisible, and the more important the work they do, the less visible they are" (388) -, Canetti, astonished by the "dignity they achieve, these things men have made" (19), celebrates the artisans that he encounters in the medina. Unlike Western capitalist societies, in the system of production in the medina, the craftsman identifies with the object he produces as he exhibits and sells it. Canetti further develops his critique of modernity by alluding to the proximity the consumer attains with the merchandise in the souks. Canetti observes that there are many booths "where you can stand and watch the things being manufactured. You are in on the process from the start, and seeing it makes you feel good" (19). He laments the absence of firsthand experiences with the merchandise in the Machine-controlled Western modernity. Canetti perceives it as a symptom of the desolation of Western modern life: "Because 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 rope maker busy at his work, and his stock of finished ropes hangs beside him" (19). This reversal mode is a characteristic of Canetti's narrative, *The Voices of Marrakech*, constantly subverting Orientalist clichés about Marrakech.

There are some instances, however, when the discourse of Orientalism slips into the narrative of Canetti, providing a language that submits to the orientalist clichés about the city instead of subverting it. Throughout *The Voices of Marrakech,* it is the penultimate

[7] Such Orientalist invocations of the *souks* are found in Wharton's travel book, *In Morocco (1919),* where she portrayed the *souks* in Marrakech as a terrifying location filled with "fierce tribesmen with inlaid arms in their belts and the fighters' tufts of wiry hair escaping from camel's hair turbans, mad negroes standing stark naked in niches of the walls and pouring down Soudanese incantations upon the fascinated crowd, consumptive Jews with pathos and cunning in their large eyes and smiling lips, lusty slave girls with earthen oil jars resting against swaying hips, almond-eyed boys leading fat merchants by the hand, and bar-legged Berber women… there emanated an atmosphere of mystery and menace more stifling than the smell of camels and spices and black bodies and smoking fry which hangs like a fog under the close roofing of the *souks*" (112,113).

section entitled "Sheherazade" that employs the most Orientalist tropes. Canetti makes use of Orientalist clichés of "Scheherazade", the famous storyteller in *The Thousand and One Nights,* to deconstruct this myth by revealing the hidden reality of the place in which it is set to represent, that is Marrakech. A careful reader notices that the title 'Sheherazade' is written in quotation marks to refer to the place in which the story takes place. The narrator tells us that "Sheherazade" is the name of an "all-night bar" (90) in the old medina owned by a French couple. By using the name 'Sheherazade', Canetti summons Western imagination of Oriental racial stereotypes of "sleeping beauties" and "locked up princesses" waiting for a "knight-errant" (Canetti 95) to save her. However, Canetti distorts such racial stereotypes by featuring 'Sheherazade' bar as a European milieu frequented by Europeans with crude racist and ethnocentric perspectives on Marrakech people. The misleading title 'Sheherazade' is therefore not that of the story being told, but the name of the milieu where it takes place. Canetti's deconstruction of Oriental myths is further illustrated in his depiction of the French bar, "Sheherazade", in contrast to that of Djema el Fna square as the narrator observes: "It is impossible to imagine a greater contrast" (90). "Sheherazade" is described as French, "Frequented by Europeans, Americans, English. It was used by Arabs too; but they either wore European dress or they drank, which was sufficient in itself to make them, at least in their own eyes, modern and European" (91). As all activity comes to a halt in the Djema el Fna square, the interior of the bar is just beginning to come alive. In staging class hierarchies in Marrakech society augmented by the presence of Europeans, Canetti compares the abject lives of "the people in rags who lay in the square had nothing or a couple of francs in their pockets," and the rich European customers of the bar who spend a fortune on their alcoholic drinks" (91). Canetti presents another contrast between "the Arab music" wailing noisily in the square and "the European dance music" in the 'Sheherazade' (91). From the outset, then, the bar is emblematic of European life, its customs, music, language and sexual norms, while the square represents Marrakech's impoverished natives, rhythms and traditions.

The proprietress of the bar 'Sheherazade', madame Mignon who is half-French and half-Chinese, appears as the true incarnation of the French colonial empire and its defects. Madame Mignon got her last name from her husband, Monsieur Mignon, a French man who served in the Foreign Legion. Placed in the context of French colonial history, Madame Mignon is the fruit of an inter-racial relationship between her French father and her Chinese mother during the French Concession in Shanghai: "My mother was a Chinese. My father was a Frenchman" (92). She is also accustomed to life in the colonies, "including a number of years in Douala" (91). However, her experience resulted in a deeply-seated ethnocentric and racist bias, propounding racial superiority of the French:

> She had something against every nation; never have I come across such naive, unswerving prejudices as that woman had. But she would not hear a word against the French and the Chinese, always adding proudly, "My mother was a Chinese. My father was a Frenchman."

> She was as pleased with herself as she took exception to those of her customers whose origins differed from her own. (92)

Canetti is disgusted by the prejudices and hostility of Madame Mignon's reductive mode of viewing the natives. Despite the derogatory nature of her judgments, Madame Mignon personifies deep contradictions: while being of French-Chinese heritage, she denies ethnic diversity; while claiming to be proud of her Chinese origins, she tried to erase its traces by undertaking plastic surgery to correct her almond eyes: "She had had her originally slit eyes operated on, and now there was little of their Chinese character left" (91). In the same vein, Ferguson suggests that the couple's "Frenchness can be regarded as 'medial' on the Oriental-Occidental scale, with the traditional Moroccans at one extreme and Canetti, the pseudo 'Anglo', at the other extreme" (580).

Furthemore, even though the book records a moment in history (the eve of the country's independence), the text refrains from giving any direct references to colonial Marrakech. One instance when the text seemed to give a historical commentary is when Canetti records the overlapping between colonial domination and sexual exploitations taking place in Marrakech. Canetti gives a background story to this story by informing the reader about the fact that Marrakech brothels[8] mostly belong to Pasha el Glaoui, a loyal ally to French colonizers, who facilitated French exploitation of native women. In fact, during the colonial period, Marrakesh is generally known to have "one of the most picturesque red-light districts in the world…Its Pashas used to pay their armies with their revenues from prostitution, which was taxed like any other trade. The French troops stationed in Marrakesh added to the boom" (Qtd. in The Mellah of Marrakesh 165). In 'Sheherazade', Monsieur Mignon is presented as a pimp who takes his clients to a French brothel called the "Riviera", which is also only a few minutes' walk from the bar. The narrator remarks that "Riviera" was "the word heard most often at the bar" (92), hinting at the explicit connection between Mignon's business at the "Sheherazade" and the brothel. In "the Calumny" section, Canetti recall one instance when Monsieur Mignon told him that the little beggar children strolling around the restaurant can be bought: "For fifty francs you can have any one of them. They'll all go round the corner with you just like that" (85). To wash away the sight of disbelief expressed by Canetti, the Frenchman goes to display his Orientalist prejudice taking pride in his sexual exploitation of local women: "We played a splendid trick once, I must tell you about that. There were three of us, me and two friends. One of us went to a fatma in her room' - this was how the French contemptuously referred to native women" (85). Canetti is appalled by French's custom of calling native women "fatma" which does not only objectify them, but it also denies them their individuality. Indeed, women suffer a double exploitation by the patriarchal structures of both colonial power and indigenous society as argued by postcolonial critic

[8] In her book *The Mellah of Marrakesh* (2019), Emily Benichou Gottreich contends that "prostitutions have long been associated with the city of Marrakesh and was indeed considered one of the southern capital's 'principal industries'" (81).

Robert Young in his book *Postcolonialism* (2001). They are doubly inferior, being women and being Orientals. Thus, women suffer another double colonization where not only their lands (countries) are exploited but also their bodies. Evidently, Canetti, the author of *Crowds and Power*, is disgusted when he is confronted with abuses of power in colonial Marrakech:

> The door was still open, the children still standing outside, expectant, patient. They sensed that they would not be driven away while his narrative lasted. I reminded myself that they could not understand him. He who had begun with such contempt for them had in a matter of minutes made himself contemptible. Whether what he was saying about them was a calumny or the truth, whatever the beggar children might do he was now far beneath them and I wished there really were a kind of punishment whereby he would have been dependent upon their intercession. (87)

Indeed, for Canetti, Marrakech functions as a space where he embarks on a journey of questioning the self and its pre-established values. During his explorations of the city, Canetti is constantly putting his touristic and Orientalising desires in question. He writes:

> Travelling, one accepts everything, indignation stays at home. One looks, one listens, one is roused to enthusiasm by the most dreadful things because they are new. *Good travellers are heartless*. (24)

Canneti seems to have had postcolonial critics in mind as he consciously sums up his whole project in "Travelling, one accepts everything." It could be read as an exculpatory dictum, writing off any Orientalist accusations. Like Orwell, Canetti also inherited negative associations between the "oriental" and "backwardness" from his family and education. In a reading of Canetti's autobiography, Irene Stocksieker Di Maio notes that the "negative concept of the Oriental was prevalent in his immediate and extended family. Young Canetti easily assimilated his family's mindset that opposed backward Oriental Roustchouk to modern, enlightened Europe" (Di Maio 178). Di Maio continues to suggest that it is in his final Danube voyage in 1924 that "the young university student began to question his inherited prejudices about the barbaric Balkans through his encounter with Dr. Menachemoff" (178), the physician who had contributed greatly to Canetti's intellectual development as well as his nuanced appreciation and understanding of his Sephardic tradition (178).

In Voices of Marrakech, Canetti reminds us that "good travellers are heartless,", and heartless here does not mean a lack of feelings but rather an open-mindedness towards lands of the elsewhere (24). In "The cries of the blind" section, resorting to another recurrent theme in Orientalist travelogues, Canetti purports that he did not read any of the earlier accounts on the country: "I had not read a thing about the country. Its customs were as unknown to me as its people" (23). And that even "the little that one picks up in the course of one's life about every country and every people fell away in the first few hours" (23), suggesting the untranslatability of certain traditional and cultural practices in

Marrakech. At the beginning of this section, Canetti defies and is ultimately defeated by his ignorance of all the languages he heard in Marrakech, mainly "Arabic and the Berber (Amazigh) languages". He is sitting in his office in London, contemplating a white page: "here I am trying to give an account to something, and as soon as I pause I realize that I have not yet said anything at all" (23). Here one wonders: Was the reality of colonial Marrakech beyond Canettian words? Canetti explains that:

> 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. (23)

Canetti's dilemma with language is astutely developed in his philosophical essay "The Writer's Profession" (1976). The essay answers similar questions like those elaborated on by Orwell in his essay "Why I Write", yet Canetti is more focused on the philosophical phenomenon of writing itself. Suspicious of the profession of a *Dichter* (German word for a writer or poet), Canetti argues that "in reality, no man today can be a writer, a *Dichter,* if he does not seriously doubt his right to be one. The man who does not see the state of the world we are living in has scarcely anything to say about it" (237). Quoting an anonymous author, Canetti writes: "This jotting bears the date August 23, 1939; that was a week before the outbreak of World War II. And it goes 'but everything is over. If I were really a writer, I would have to be able to prevent the war'" (237). This sentence, writes Canetti, "is an admission of complete failure" (238). Again, was Canetti admitting his failure to voice the reality of colonial Marrakech?

Echoing the heartless traveller's acceptance of everything in *The Voices of Marrakech*, in "The Writers' Profession", Canetti, this time addressing the *Dichter* (the writer), states that the *Dichter* profession is to "become anybody and everybody, even the smallest, the most naïve, the most powerless person" (342). Here Canetti is stressing the importance of metamorphosis in the process of encountering the elsewhere and its otherness. The writer, for Canetti, must be careful not to "abuse the power" conferred on him thanks to his words and power. This perspective on "the writers' profession" by Canetti informs his refrainment from learning the foreign language that he hears in Marrakech: "I wanted sounds to affect me as much as lay in their power, unmitigated by deficient and artificial knowledge on my part" (23). According to Canetti, this ability to put oneself in the shoes of the other is what defines a real writer: "*to become anybody and everybody* " (342). Canetti is thus embodying his own concept of metamorphosis. His philosophy may be interpreted as a counter-argument to Orientalist writings sustaining colonial power structures instead of a discourse that celebrates cross-cultural understanding.

Canetti's Search for his Jewish Origins

Canetti's travel to colonial Marrakech in 1954 presented him with an opportunity to search for his Jewish origins in Marrakech. Canetti opens his section "A Visit to the Mellah"

with a confession-like note that says: "On the third morning, as soon as I was alone, I found my way to the Mellah" (39). Though restless to finally discover the Jewish community in the Mellah, Canetti obviously wanted to have a first contact with the square on his own, unperturbed by the touristic desires of his English friends, and thus waited until the third morning when he was able to go the Mellah alone. Once inside the Jewish Square, the Mellah, Canetti found himself in an open bazaar filled with Jewish inhabitants: "Men squatted among their wares in little low booths; others, dressed European style… the majority had on their heads the black skullcap with which the Jews here mark themselves out, and a great many wore beards" (41). He was astonished by the distinctive diversity and heterogeneity of the people in the Mellah, both the inhabitants and those who frequent the shops in the square:

> There were faces that in other clothing I would have taken for Arab. There were luminous old Rembrandt Jews. There were Catholic priests of wily quietness and humility. There were Wandering Jews whose restlessness was written in every lineament. There were Frenchmen. There were Spaniards. There were ruddy-complexioned Russians. There was one you felt like hailing as the patriarch. Abraham; he was haughtily addressing Napoleon, and a hot-tempered know all who looked like Goebbels was trying to butt in. I thought of the transmigration of souls. (42)

Canetti's journey into Marrakech forces him to face the question of his identity which obsessed him all his life. In his essay "The Human Province,"[9] Canetti writes that "THE GREATEST intellectual temptation in my life, the only one I have to fight very hard against is: to be a total Jew" (51). Canetti, however, refuses to identify with only one culture in favour of identifying with different people. He concludes his statement wondering: "Can't I continue to belong to everyone, as before, and nevertheless be a Jew?" (26). This lack of attachment to a single culture informs his position as a traveller in the lands of the elsewhere. In *The Voices of Marrakech*, the narrator identifies with the inhabitants of the Mellah, believing that he shares with them, if not the same geographical origins, the same cultural heritage. He discovers in Marrakech the living traces of his distant Sephardic ancestors who were expelled from Spain in 1492 and lived in Morocco through the centuries, escaping the fate of the Jews of Europe. Searching for the heart of the Mellah, Canetti notices that the deeper he penetrated the Mellah, "the poorer everything became. The beautiful woollens and silks were behind me. No one looked wealthy and princely like Abraham" (43). Canetti refers to the *bazaar* he saw when he first entered the Mellah saying that it was "a kind of posh quarter; the actual life of the Mellah, the life of the simple people, went on here" (43). He then reaches the heart of the Mellah where

[9] In "The Human Province" (1944), Canetti writes that "in The Old Testament, wherever I open to, overwhelms me. I found something suitable to me at almost every point. I would like to be named Noah or Abraham, but my own name also fills me with pride. I try to tell myself, when I am about to sink into the story of Joseph or David, that they enchant me as a writer, and what writer have they not enchanted!" (26).

the alien elements of Marrakech are tempered by familiar ones of Sephardic Judaic traditions. Canetti writes:

> I came into a small square that struck me as being the heart of the Mellah. Men and women stood together around an oblong fountain. The women carried pitchers that they filled with water. The men were filling their leather water-containers. Their donkeys stood beside them, waiting to be watered. A few open-air cooks squatted in the middle of the square. Some were frying meat, others little doughnuts. They had their families with them, their wives and children; it was as if they had moved house out into the square and were living and cooking their meals here now. (43)

Indeed, this position of Canetti as an ex-insider complicates his writing position *vis-à-vis* Marrakech. Inside the Mellah, Canetti ceases to be an outsider and Marrakech ceases to be an "elsewhere" for him. Jean-Marc Moura advances the same argument that Canetti "arrives in the center of his city where nothing is exotic anymore; where he ceases to be a wandering Jew" (83). For Canetti, finding the heart of the Mellah is an epiphanic moment when he realizes that "he really reached the goal of his journey" (45), a return to origins in Marrakech. Canetti's arrival at the heart of the Mellah made him realize that he was "the square as I stood in it. I believe I am it always" (45) which instilled in him a desire for a more direct encounter with the interior spaces of the houses inside the square.

In a section entitled "The Dahan Family", Canetti fulfills his wish to go inside one of the houses in the Mellah. Canetti writes that "returning to the Mellah next day, I went as quickly as I could to the little square I called its 'heart'…my desire to set foot inside one of the houses had increased" (53). In the Mellah, Canetti gives free rein to his desires to explore private spaces, approach the inhabitants and satisfy his visual desire for unveiled women. Canetti's desire to penetrate the private spaces of the Jewish community was fulfilled upon being ushered into the interior of the house of a Sephardic family, the Dahan family, where he met a newly-wed couple, including the bride. Once inside the house, Canetti meets the main character of the section, Elie Dahan, who shares the same first name with Canetti. Significantly, it is in the Dahan family house that Canetti reveals his identity for the first time when Elie suddenly asked if he is an "Israélite" (58). Canetti answered with an enthusiastic "Yes," saying that "It was such a relief to be able to say 'yes' to something at last" (58). Canetti's ambiguous position as an outsider/ ex-Insider underscores his sense of identity while characterizing Moroccans. As I illustrated above, Canetti's Sephardic ancestry places him in slippery position *vis-à-vis* the subject of his book.

Conclusion

As a cosmopolitan writer, Canetti's text refuses to surrender to any dichotomous logics in favour of a discourse of metamorphosis, coexistence, plurality, and multiculturalism. This is accentuated in Canetti's theorization of the profession of the writer as a "guardian of

metamorphosis" who "ought to keep the access between people open" (242). More precisely, Canetti distinguishes between two meanings of *Dichter* as a keeper of metamorphosis, entailing a duty of memory: "Today, when the writings of nearly all early cultures have been deciphered, we know how rich that heritage really is in metamorphosis" (240). Making the writer both an actor and a collector of metamorphosis, for Canetti, it is this duty of preservation of human heritage that the writer should be engaged with. It is thus this process, the search for sites of metamorphosis to maintain an open "access between people", that animated Canetti's literary encounters with colonial Marrakech (242). In the same vein, Orwell's essay "Marrakech" strives to accomplish his project of "transforming the political into an art" (Orwell "Why I Write" 533) as highlighted in his denouncement of colonialism and the injustices he witnessed in Marrakech. This is also foregrounded in his adoption of a journalistic prose employed to make a direct political point. Canetti, on the other hand, employs a style that is often poetic and reflective, maintaining his focus on capturing the "voices" of the places and its people, as epitomized in his title *The Voices of Marrakech*. Indeed, even such a title promises a political commentary.

Nevertheless, while *The Voices of Marrakech* poeticizes Canetti's encounters with his Jewish origins, giving few instances of French abuses of power, it fails to give an elaborated account of the socio-political realities of colonial Marrakech. Indeed, Canetti's denouncement of colonialism is not as explicit as Orwell's, yet Canetti's formulations convey an explicit deconstruction and dismantling of Orientalist discourses on the colonized Others. Both Orwell's and Canetti's accounts of colonial Marrakech, as I contended at the beginning of this paper, do not sit comfortably within the discourse of Orientalism. Reading both accounts bring to mind the idea that decolonizing the minds is a project that should be undertaken by both ex-colonized countries as well as ex-colonial countries. Both authors were subject to an education that perpetuated Orientalist dichotomies of the self and the Other and found themselves in a precarious position where they had to decolonize their own minds and unlearn their "White prejudice" (Fanon 148).

Works Cited

Bowker, Gordon. *George Orwell*. London: Abacus, 2004.

Benlahoussine, Ezzahra & Jamal Bahmad. "Framing colonial Marrakech in Alfred Hitchcock's The Man Who Knew Too Much (1956) and Gavin Lambert's Another Sky (1955)." *Journal of Applied Language and Culture Studies*, 6 (1), 2023, pp. 54-69.

Brighenti, Andrea. "Elias Canetti and the Counter-image of Resistance." *Thesis Eleven*, 106 (1), 2010, pp. 73–87. https://doi.org/10.1177/0725513611407451

Canetti, Elias. *The Human Province*. New York, NY: Farrar Straus & Giroux, 1986.

---. "The Writer's Profession", *speech given in Munich in January 1976*. https://www.scribd.com/document/362099266/Elias-Canetti-the-Writers-Profession. Accessed 25 May 2022.

---. *The Voices of Marrakesh: A Record of a Visit*. London: Marion Boyars, 1969.

Davison, Peter. *George Orwell: A Life in Letters.* New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2013.

Eagleton, Terry. "Reach-Me-Down Romantic." *London Review of Books*, 2003, https://www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v25/n12/terry-eagleton/reach-me-down-romantic.

Edward, Said. *Orientalism.* London: Penguin, 1978.

Gottereich, Emily. *The Mellah of Marrakesh : Jewish and Muslim Space in Morocco's Red City.* Indiana University Press, 2019.

Ferguson, Stuart. "Elias Canetti And Multiculturalism." *Poetica,* vol. 29, no. 3/4, 1997, pp. 532–95. JSTOR, http://www.jstor.org/stable/43028148. Accessed 25 Feb. 2023.

Franz, Fanon. *Black Skin, White Masks.* New York: Grove Press, 1952.

Joussef, Ishaghpour. *Elias Canetti: Métamorphose et Identité.* Paris: La Difference, 1990.

Hitchens, Christopher. *Why Orwell Matters*. New York, NY: MJF Books, 2008.

---. "For George Orwell." *Grand Street*, vol. 3, no. 2, 1984, pp. 125-41. JSTOR, https://doi.org/10.2307/25006597. Accessed 28 May 2022.

Kabbani, Rana. *Europe's Myths of Orient: Devise and Rule*. London: Pandora, 1988.

Keer, Douglas. *Orwell and Empire*. Oxford University Press, 2022.

Meyers, Jeffrey. *Orwell: Life and Art.* University of Illinois Press, Chicago, 2010.

Moura, Jean-Marc. *La littérature des lointains: histoire de l'exotisme européen au XXI e siècle*. Paris: Honoré Champion, 1998.

Lassner, Phyllis. "Double Trouble: George Orwell, Martha Gellhorn and the Global War to End Global Imperialism." *Globalisation and its discontents edited by Stan Smith for the English Association*. D.S. Brewer, 2006.

Orwell, George. *The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters of George Orwell.* Vol. 2, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1984. `

---. *The Road to Wigan Pier.* London: Peguin Classics edn, 1937.

Swearingen, Will Davis. *Moroccan Mirages: Agrarian Dream and Deceptions, 1912-1986*. Princeton Legacy Library, 1987.

Sheldon, Michael. *The Authorized Biography of George Orwell.* New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1991.

Stansky, Peter, and William M. Abrahams. *Orwell, The Transformation.* New York: Knopf, 1980.

Thibaud, Jean-Paul. "The sonic composition of the city". *The Auditory Culture Reader*, edited by Michael Bull and Les Back. Berg, 2003, pp. 329-41.

Vox Motus. *Flight*. Theatre Production. Edinburgh International Festival, Church Hill Theatre Studio, 2017.