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

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Abstract

In this body of research and original photographic work to which it responds, I examine the position and connotation of Morocco as a site for artistic inspiration in travel literature, photography and fashion photography in the context of three main themes relating to its imaginary constructions: Orientalism; the western male traveller in contradistinction to the female tourist; and the figure of the cultured *flâneur*. These themes became associated with European industrialization and imperialism towards the end of the nineteenth century, and the research draws links between this particular period of culture and its values, and our present day, romantic fascination with Morocco, and the revival of such themes and their popular reincarnation in contemporary fashion editorials. The article investigates the role that photography has played in the development of twenty-first century Orientalism and its manifestation in visual fashion storytelling, and the interplay between artist-subject-location: how does the western traveller/photographer view both himself and others in the process of picturing the Maghreb and what are the kinds of relationships and tensions that develop between the traveller/photographer and the North African sites that he observes? The research focuses on the long association between travel and sexual adventure and explores the literary and visual narratives involving the figures of the contemporary traveller and tourist in the North African space and place, and how adventurer and location feed off one another. By examining the appropriation of such figures and motifs from art and literature

into contemporary photography of travel and fashion photography, the article aims to consider the visual representation and specific propositions of locations such as Tangier, Marrakesh, Assilah and the Moroccan Sahara as chaotic, dangerous and alien, and understand the complex, post-Orientalist rendition of the North African space and visual culture within the context of fashion photography. More specifically this article poses the following questions: why does our western culture want or need to revisit condescending Orientalist fantasies and an imperialist mode of representation? And in what way are the tropes of Orientalist representation tied to the fantasies, desires and anxieties that the fashion industry and its consumer engage with? The article takes Morocco's strong ties with western cultural figures as its starting point, and in times of intense political and social unrest in the Arab world – the continuing fascination with and promotion of this Muslim country as a sensual tourist destination by fashion editorial and ad campaign shoots. The article considers two photography monographs by western male travellers/photographers shooting photographic bodies of work in a foreign Islamic country: *Paul Bowles' How Could I Send a Picture into the Desert* (Bowles and Bischoff 1994) and Harry Gruyaert's *Morocco* (1990), in addition to several case studies from the literature (Peter Mayne, Elias Canetti); photography (Irving Penn, Daido Moriyama); and contemporary fashion editorial work (William Klein, Jack Pierson, Azim Haidaryan, Inez Van Lamsweerde/Vinoodh Matadin, Mario Testino, Hans Feurer, Steven Meisel and Daniel Riera). It aims to establish links between the visual representation of travel and the context of gender, fashion, identity and sexuality and the psychological dimension of tourism.

Keywords

fashion photography

flânerie

Morocco

Orientalism

spectatorship

tourism

1. Introduction

Since the birth of photography, photographers have been documenting the social landscapes of cities and places, establishing links between photography and travel. In the context of travel, photography is an active agent in the creation of the desire for mobility, experience and engagement. It provides a record of destinations, their populations and cultures – generating visual spectacles that in turn inspire and entice the audience who consume them to travel and experience those places that they see contained in clearly defined frames. During the course of the twentieth century, travel photography has become increasingly dependent on documentary or pictorial modes, and more generally regarded as '[…] beautiful images of exotic locations, reproduced in an expensive, "coffee table" format' (Thompson 2011: 13). By contrast, postcolonial travel literature such as the one written by American writer, composer and traveller-explorer Paul Bowles for example, came into its own by engaging audiences with stories about modern explorations of the psyche and the transformation of individuals through travel. Bowles settled in Tangier in 1947 and lived there till his death in 1999, immersing himself in Moroccan culture, which in turn shaped his writing. During the 1950s and the early 1960s a handful of Beat Generation writers and artists followed him to the North African cities of Marrakech and Tangier, venturing out of the United States in

search of new experiences and alternative lifestyles. Those artists, whose works had a transformative effect on cultural and photographic discourse in America, cemented a link between travel, literature, image making and sexual expression and exploration.

Bowles's fiction portrays travel as a transgressive activity animated by sexual desire, unfolding against the rich and complex backdrop of Arab–Islamic culture, and culminating in a spiritual journey where personal boundaries are violated and traditional cultural discourse is subverted. His narratives primarily focus on male traveller-protagonists in a state of psychological distress as a result of deteriorating consequences, and are set against the backdrop of an unfamiliar, foreign universe, far from Eisenhower's America and the significant cultural hubs of the era. The extreme and chaotic psychological situation of Bowles's protagonists appears enhanced and amplified by their exotic, non-western surroundings. For Robert Gorham Davis this account of the westerner's bewilderment with the sites and culture of the Islamic world is a reflection of Bowles's own view of Moroccan culture as being fundamentally primitive and his portrayal of North Africa, Islamic culture and the Arab people as essentially Orientalist. Davis criticizes Bowles for painting a picture of North Africa that resembles the myth of wild Africa and links his focus on the exotic with that of classic Orientalist tradition, specifically referring to Flaubert's accounts of Oriental hedonistic debauchery (1993, cited in Coury 1997: 135). In 1994 further evidence of Bowles's perspective on his adopted land surfaced in the form of a book titled *Paul Bowles Photographs: How Could I Send a Picture into the Desert?* (Bowles and Bischoff 1994). The publication brought together a collection of snapshot-type, black and white photographs taken by Bowles, depicting elements of the North African backdrop for many of his stories, in addition to providing the viewer with an intimate glimpse of his contemporaries, companions and Arab male lovers. The sequencing of these family album-type records of personal encounters with amateur anthropological studies suggests that Bowles's personal

photographic vision emulates that of a researcher/ethnographer, aiming at bringing the viewer '[…] closer to other cultural worlds while they exist; in "making the strange familiar" and opposing the deadness of the familiar with the enlivening challenge of cultural difference"' (Osborne 2000: 193). The *Desert* that appears in the title dominates Bowles's vision (the same desert that he considered to be the chief protagonist of *The Sheltering Sky* [2004]) as the occasionally out-of-focus images present us with a bleached-out, hallucinatory display of North Africa as a hostile, strange and almost alien-looking planet. Presented mainly through scenes of chaos, Bowles's visual depiction of the local inhabitants of these North African landscapes is embodied by the figure of the shadowy, ritualistic and enigmatic Arab – an Orientalist-inspired characterization that also appears in the narratives of Peter Mayne (*A Year in Marrakesh*, 1953) and Elias Canetti (*The Voices of Marrakesh*, 1978).

Bowles's fiction positioned Arab-Islamic sites and culture as sources of mid-century literary inspiration, but as far as contemporary visual representation – beyond the graphic imagery from war-torn Arab-Islamic countries (due mainly to the popularity of camera-equipped smartphones, and global media's recognition of the role of photojournalism in mediating reality) both travel and documentary photography arguably remain under-developed genres when constructing photographic narratives from and about the Middle East and North Africa region. In art and editorial fashion photography, however, where creative practice, capitalism and fashion are inextricably intertwined, narratives of consumerism and aspirational lifestyles are occasionally played against the backdrop of primitive exoticism, mystery and sexual desire in foreign faraway places. Such photographs then ignite their audience's imagination, and transport them '[…] beyond their everyday existences and yet confirm their most central assumptions concerning the world in general and the non-European world in particular' (Osborne 2000: 19). Since the 1950s, subjective, fantasy-driven fashion images utilizing Arab–Islamic settings as their extraordinary location have been globally distributed through

fashion magazines, potentially achieving a significant international exposure and impact. These commercial images (corresponding to the consumption demand and expectations of a fashion audience) provide evidence of the continued western fascination with this important part of the world, and the recreation of a predominantly quasi-mystical aesthetic that we come to associate with it, sitting within an Orientalist aesthetic. The formation in the mid-1990s of low-cost European airlines such as easyJet and Ryanair, offering flight routes to places that were not considered the most obvious holiday destinations by European tourists before, also contributed to the interest in cities of the Middle East and North Africa – destinations that previously attracted only the traveller-adventurer types. In *Sex, Tourism and the Postcolonial Encounter: Landscapes of Longing in Egypt* Jessica Jacobs (2012) argues that when it comes to visiting the 'Orient' tourists are encouraged – and want – to experience it as a series of places that reference the colonial era. 'In contemporary tourism, the imageladen landscapes of Southwest Asia, the Eastern Mediterranean and North Africa are key selling points, particularly those that evoke historical–geographical imaginations of deserts, oases and ancient Islamic market focused cities' (Jacobs 2012: xii). Haldrup and Larsen elaborate further on the shared attributes between Orientalism and tourism: 'Both emphasize the production of difference as the key for explaining the preoccupation of the Western consuming Subject with the Other. Both depict Self and Other as mirror images reflecting distorted fragments of each other' (2010: 17−50).

Much has been said about the study and discourse of nineteenth-century European Orientalism as a dominating western style of thought that is associated with hegemony, hierarchy, colonialist power and racism since this intellectual argument was established by Edward Said's seminal book *Orientalism* ([1978] 2003). Said claimed that historically, European civilization has considered the East as an unknown and hostile Other, and have formed a fictional version of it, asserting that there is '[…] a mysterious "essence," invariably

religious, that defines the Arab world' (Kamiya 2006). Said considered the 'Orient' as '[…] less a place with defined political borders than the product of an "imaginative geography" that could just as well find expression in the photographic studios of the European capitals as the cities of the Middle East' (Behdad and Gartlan 2013: 7). This fictitious geography, Haldrup and Larsen add, is not a '[…] "cultural" thing, but basically a device that *produce space*' (Haldrup and Larsen 2010: 80, original emphasis). *Orientalism* quickly became the authoritative text on postcolonial theory and since the book's first publication a number of scholars were divided into Said's supporters and his detractors, with the latter claiming a notion of complexity in the western approach to the Orient that Said had failed to acknowledge (see Irwin 2006; Kennedy 2000). This article considers a definition of Islamic Orientalism '[…] as a network of aesthetic, cultural, economic, and political relationships that cross national and historical boundaries […]' (Behdad and Gartlan 2013: 4) by associating it with active, continuous and persisting interest and aesthetic preoccupation by today's fashion industry at the confluence of Orientalist myth and the region's geographic reality. Considering the fact that Orientalist representation is generally regarded as a condescending view of the Eastern world, with its abundant of myths, stereotypes, generalizations and misconceptions, it is curious that the fashion industry continues to return to the Eastern world in its search for escapist fantasy narratives and a '[…] longing for an exotic and alluring alternative — one that was free of politics — to the predictabilities of everyday life […]' (Sharafuddin 1996: vii). The article focuses on the manifestation of such longing as it is depicted in both visual and literary forms in the context of Morocco, and the capture and consumption of the country's urban and rural landscapes by contemporary art and fashion photography and their audiences. It considers Morocco as a physical place, but also a symbolic space that continues to occupy the Western creative imagination. This aesthetic space brings together photographers and fashion editors for a modern-day production of a

predominantly exotic vision of the region, a vision that in turn is also embraced and perpetuated by the country's official branding strategy itself.

For the purpose of this study my definition of space and place stems from that of the American scholar of space and place anthropology, Professor Setha M. Low, who defines space as '[…] permanently social, produced by bodies and groups of people, as well as historical and political forces' (2017: 32). Low cites Cresswell (2015) and Sen and Silverman (2014) in defining place as '[…] a space that is inhabited and appropriated through the attribution of personal and group meanings, feelings, sensory perceptions and understanding'. She outlines a conceptual and continuous connection between space and place that considers scale and the subsidence from abstraction (space) to reality (place).

2. Orientalism and Flâneurism abroad

The Islamic Orient has captivated the imagination of the Western world for as long as trade routes with the East were established. However, as a travel and tourism destination this geographical region became increasingly more popular since advances and developments in technology during the industrial revolution of the nineteenth century had made it possible for an increasing number of people to travel to faraway places and engage with the '[…] leisurely consumption of difference' (Haldrup and Larsen 2010: 17). Major nineteenth- and early twentieth-century European male travellers to the region[1] positioned themselves as authority figures on exotic Eastern life, often disguising themselves in local Muslim garb that offered them the opportunity to explore the most forbidden, off-limits places for Europeans and Christians – from holy sites to harems and boy-brothels. Their travel-adventure and exploration accounts were different from those of educational tourism at the time with its emphasis on maintaining and safeguarding a distinct national identity and culture, although both were considered forms of exercising power and engaging with and influencing foreign

cultures. Certain fashion worn abroad became the defining factor and differentiator between the western tourist and the traveller, and how the two figures may also be linked to gendered differences. While cultivated male travellers had the freedom to explore foreign land dressed in native clothing, the western, imperialist female tourists presented themselves as spectators and consumers expressing wealth and power through wearing clothes that were unmistakingly European. British Victorian sociologist Harriet Martineau observed in her book *Eastern Life, Present and Past* (1848) that the English abroad must maintain their imperial uniqueness by continuing to wear their European clothing and avoid the temptation of going native as mimicking and 'blending into' a lesser culture was considered a sign of weakness and could be seen as a renunciation of their own heritage.

A second marker of difference between tourist and traveller was social class, with traveller/explorer exemplifying the refined sophistication of upper-class and 'high' culture, and tourist a representation of the 'commonness' of mass culture. Also whereas the more passive tourist was supposedly dependent on the travel guide for narrating his/her experience abroad, the individualistic, free-roaming and curious traveller directly engaged with the authentic culture of the place that he was visiting. In her discussion of colonial travel cultures Inderpal Grewal writes in *Guidebook and Museum* that

> […] just as the tourist's 'sights' are signs of having 'been there' in a complex signification of class, gender, nationalism, and imperialism as it constituted leisure within industrial capitalism, the European traveller's 'observations' are markers of an upper-class or mercantile imperial mobility. (1996: 91−96)

Christopher Pinney explores this point in a more contemporary context by observing the two ways of looking at travelling and the making of images of travelling by tourist and traveller:

> Tourists may take a variety of different photographs, from those that attempt to show an untouched reality to those that picture themselves as part of an already tourist-colonized landscape. The typical postmodern anthropologist, by contrast, is likely to understand fieldwork images as revealing a self-conscious rapport between ethnographer and community, in which both parties' awareness of the nature of the transaction is apparent and its ethical basis rendered transparent.[2] (http://bidoun.org/articles/ethnographic-tales, 2013)

Fashion and clothing played a pivotal role in the way in which Orientalist aesthetics were codified and formalized. This was especially evident in the European portrayal of indigenousness, channelled through the depiction of stylish excess and highlighting gender differences. Orientalist painters such as Ludwig Deutsch and Rudolf Ernst for example focus on the representation of the sumptuously adorned masculinity of staid and thoughtful emirs, palace guards and merchants, whereas Jean-François Portaels or Jean-Léon Gérôme focus on highly sexualized representations of naked or scantily clad female bodies and the layering of thin and transparent fabrics enveloping the figures of the enigmatic harem's odalisques. This display of dress and accessories was instrumental in defining and articulating notions of Muslim masculinity and femininity and how Europeans perceived them. The richness of the garments and a general sense of over-accessorizing, in addition to eastern architectural motifs and decorative objects, made the classic Orientalist fashion element appear phantasmagorical,

highlighting an overall sense of fantasy in costume that ignited the imagination of upper-class European women seeking fun and the freedom to play, and was typical of the make-believe atmosphere of French eighteenth-century Turqueries. Turqueries were decorative elements and motifs that were rooted in Turkish art and culture, found in interior decoration, on objects such as clothing and rugs or on an embroidered or painted representation of such objects. The genre scenes depicted fantasy tableaus of Turkish life, involving a blurring of cultural roles that Inge Boer calls 'cultural cross-dressing' – '[…] upper-class women, dressing up *as if* they were Oriental' (Boer 2006: 145−46, original emphasis). To have oneself painted in oriental dress became a 'fashion craze', apparently ignited by the arrival of the stylish Yirmisekizzade Mehmed Said Pasha – the Ottoman ambassador to Paris in 1742. Napoleon's Egyptian campaign (1798–1801) supported the continued interest in the region and unleashed a wave of Egyptomania across Europe – becoming one of the major factors that drove more artists to travel to the region – as official ambassadors of western governments or on their own initiative to document cultures that were considered to be unspoiled. Their work portrayed the Orient as an exotic, seductive, primitive, dangerous and mysterious 'land of wonders', populated by stereotypical 'authentic and colourful natives' (Nochlin 1989: 33−60, in Boer 2004: 94), encouraging further occidental tourism and shaping a particular image of the Islamic East that was strongly motivated by colonial purposes. In these orientalist paintings (drawn mainly from memory once the artists were back in their European studios using props acquired on their travels) fabricated scenes of everyday life or historical themes collided with decadent harem fantasies and portrayal of hashish and opium dens. Linda Nochlin discusses the notion of 'presence' in Orientalist paintings, and the fact that the genre presented scenes of timelessness – of a picturesque, pre-industrial world, untouched by innovation, change and progress. Also absent was the artist/narrator's presence as the colonial or touristic West was not depicted in Orientalist paintings – never in sight anyway,

manifested only through the gaze, which maintained and preserved the artistic vision of the Orient as essentially exogenous. With the invention of photography, European audiences became exposed to visual representations of the Islamic East, which would fall under the documentary or constructed reality photographic genres. Imperialist travellers and tourists used cameras to record the Orient as an anthropological, archaeological or scientific place but also as a subjective fantasy space – a European invention and an imaginary construct that reinforced the assumptions of the West's cultural and historical superiority. Ali Behdad draws a link between the genre's enormous popularity – the consumption of the photographs as curios and exotic objects (which were sometimes published and accompanied by written travel narratives) and a '[…] network of aesthetic, economic, and political relations between Western Europe and the Middle East' (Behdad and Gartlan 2013: 14). This European network was built upon the existing affinities amongst individuals – Orientalist artists, scholars, publishers and travellers, and enabled the technical and logistic execution of a number of substantial Orientalist projects in the Islamic Orient and back in Europe. Behdad highlights the opposing qualities of the Orientalist photograph as both a preserver of history (nostalgic colonial document) and a souvenir that further incites progress (through tourism and consumption). He continues by discussing the notion and act of 'preservation' as one of the key contributions of the medium to the formation of the Orientalist iconographic language, and highlights the concerns articulated by late nineteenth-century Orientalist artists over the anticipated changes to the region instigated by European imperialism. One of the objectives of Orientalist photography was therefore to preserve the endangered landscapes and lifestyles of such a seemingly idyllic world, uncontaminated by western industrial influence. Behdad elaborates on Nochline's theme of presence and absence by drawing our attention to the almost non-existent presence of 'the Arabs' in the Orientalist photograph, which were '[…] utterly erased from the scene or appear occasionally as anonymous physical

blotches to provide a sense of scale' (Behdad and Gartlan 2013: 24). According to Behdad this violent act of visually erasing (at least partly) indigenous existence/representation permits the viewer to access the scenes and become an engaged and active participant in its narration.

There is an interesting deployment of presence and absence in Belgian photographer Harry Gruyaert's large body of work titled *Maroc* (Gruyaert and Matthieussent 2013), which was mostly conceived in colour between 1969 and 1990, demonstrating Gruyaert's ability to relay the projected narratives of particular places and territories by using everyday-like situations. Far from resorting to clichéd exoticism or being stereotypically documentaristic, sociological or ethnographical, Gruyaert's vision of Morocco engulfs the senses and transports the viewer into a densely unconventional set of overlapping scenes, manifesting the totality of the images and feelings of impending doom. Gruyaert's Moroccan pictures are imbued with a sense of mystery and doubt, enhanced by the unclear and complicated puzzle as to who or what is the subject of the photographs. With humans depicted reduced to faceless shadows, the viewer is left with such things as dense colours, textures, materials and the ferociously sensual Moroccan light. Gruyaert's depictions of this glorious light appear to suggest the division of Moroccan cities into savage (shadowed) and civilized (lighted) zones, with ghost-like figures looming out of or disappearing into the darkness. This visualization of the division of urban space into different areas that correspond to social structure especially resonates when taking into account Morocco's history and status as a French protectorate between 1912 and 1956 and the colonial zoning across the country implemented by the French. It infuses the images with social meaning and cultural references about Morocco's colonial past and the impenetrable barriers that sometimes exist between different cultures. More recently Gruyaert shot 'Flâneur Forever' – the theme of the French fashion house Hermes Spring/Summer 2015 advertising campaign (in Greek mythology Hermes is the

patron saint of travellers), starring British model George Barnett. Even though the location of the shoot is Florida, there are striking similarities between the images of the campaign and Gruyaert's Moroccan pictures in their composition and recurring motifs of light and shadows intersecting with fleeting human figures. The presence of palm trees is another recurring element in Gruyaert's frames – a signifier according to Peter Osborne of '[…] the less arduous escapism of the hotels and star villas of the Mediterranean, southern California or Waikiki − the dream of fame and wealth and of the rituals of extreme consumption' (2000: 107). Palm trees also suggest sensually hot, at times dangerous and exciting otherness and the possibility of stereotypical visual exoticism, although Gruyaert manages to eschew any particularly obvious parallels, presenting us with a modern-day kaleidoscopic urban fantasy – fully in tune with the original etymological meaning of the *Flâneur* term, although representing the avant-garde *flâneur* – '[…] a man of the world and […] a great traveller […]' (Gluck 2008: 103).

The French poet Charles Baudelaire was the first to engage with the character of the Flâneur – the spontaneous European wanderer, an avid spectator and reporter of everyday life and modern urban space. This original, *popular Flâneur* considered Paris at the centre of modernity and therefore was a more local phenomenon, as opposed to his avant-garde incarnation, who became concerned with '[…] the outward show of life […]' and '[…] fashion and of love, […]' which were displayed in the '[…] capitals of the civilised world […]' (1859−60, cited in Gluck 2008: 103). For photography scholars the act of *flânerie* became synonymous with post-war street photography, most notably in the work of William Klein and Daido Moriyama, who were each exploring contemporary urban life in New York and Tokyo, respectively, and whose work became the subject of a joint exhibition at Tate Modern (2013). At the time of the Exhibition Moriyama's book titled *Marrakech* was published (2013), bringing together a body of work that Moriyama shot some 25 years earlier

when he travelled to Morocco. The elongated book opens to reveal two blocks stacked on top of each other, each containing Moriyama's diaristic photographs shot in his high-contrast black and white trademark style. The viewer is invited to put together, combine or pair the images according to his/her wish, building a custom narrative that culminates in a rework of the series that Moriyama had shot decades ago, actively reconstructing the publication's overall narrative. Moriyama (2013) cites the influence of Elias Cannetti's *The Voices of Marrakesh*, which is set in the city during the mid-1950s and describes it while it was still under the shadow of French colonialism. Canetti subtitles his novel a 'Record of a Visit' (Canetti 1982) – suggesting the short and immediate encounter of a tourist rather than the observational, long-term study of a traveller. His carefully crafted diaristic essays imply that his might not be an attempt to discover the essence of Marrakech, but '[…] rather to look at Marrakech from his perspective as a central European writer' (Campoy-Cubillo 2012: 102). Moriyama shoots *Marrakech* from his perspective as a central Japanese photographer, and since Marrakech becomes the core of both publications, Moriyama and Canetti approach it from the 'periphery' that Europe or Japan is to the Maghreb. The images in Moriyama's book operate together to form an ever-changing veritable kaleidoscope of Marrakech as seen by *stray dog Moriyama* (his alter ego) or Moriyama the avant-garde *flâneur*, laying out traces and indications to subjective emotions within implied and infinite narratives. In *Marrakech* Moriyama seems to apparently once again relinquish his personal artistic authority by not insisting on a particular interpretation, inviting his audience to participate with him in the act of *flânerie*, and constructing and recording their visit to Marrakech in a diaristic and democratic style.

Susan Sontag in *On Photography* established that photographers such as Moriyama, Klein or Cartier-Bresson act as an '[…] armed version […]' of the *flâneur*, drawing attention to the similarities between both characters ([1977] 2010: 55) and the act of photography. The

artistic representations of the act of *flânerie* or the *flâneur* as a representational character, however, are pretty much absent from contemporary photography, although in recent years the genre of fashion photography, and in particular men's fashion photography, embraced the figure of the avant-garde *flâneur* as a vehicle for channelling ideas about fashion and travel and the spectacle of cosmopolitan city life, this being particularly evident in the range of major international editorials and advertising campaigns shot in exotic locations, where Bowlesian-type settings lend themselves to narratives about a crisis in modern, urban masculinity. Although the Far East had become more prominent as a location for men's fashion photography (existing beyond the chosen location in advertising for local brands in Brett Lloyd's 2016 shoot for Louis Vuitton in Thailand for example, or Sean and Seng's latest magazine editorial work in various Asian locations), the North African area, specifically the region of the Maghreb, has turned out to be an increasingly important site and backdrop for adventurous expressions of western masculinity. Such stylized depictions of the European and American Flâneur in a conceptualized Arab space also represent the cultural clash between the Muslim and non-Muslim worlds, echoing the Orientalist fascination of male writers and artists who had been captivated by the Arab world and especially by the Arabic culture of the Maghreb and the Middle East, although transformed and reduced it into their own, orthographic projection. Such is the setting for Azim Haidrayan's *Road to Morocco* editorial in the March 2013 issue of *Port Magazine* – a menswear fashion story emanating with a chic, contemporary world-weary *schadenfreude*. Haidrayan's cinematic sequence of images is presenting us with a moderately young travelling type (French male supermodel Clement Chabernaud), passing through scrubby, shadowy spaces in and around an uninhabited, and unidentified drab Moroccan town and into the static perfection of the remote and barren Atlas Mountains. Chabernaud is personifying a cross between the figure of the Hitchcockian man-on-the-run and a typical Bowlesian protagonist/traveller caught in a

downward spiral, '[…] belonging no more to one place than to the next […]' and wandering slowly '[…] from one part of the earth to another' (Bowles 1949: 5). The stark urban scenes as representation of contemporary Morocco evoke Bowles's description of Tangier as '[…] counterfeit, a waiting room between connections, a transition from one way of being to another […]' (Walonen 2011: 40), confining it in another set of stereotyped distortions. A striking feature of this editorial is the dominant presence of night-time scenes that are so crucial to Bowles's storylines and imagining of the Maghreb as alienating and dehumanizing. In his travel-writing essay 'Journey through Morocco' Bowles remarked on the shape-shifting nature of nocturnal North African cityscapes:

> At night, from a car window, it looks not unlike one of our Western cities: long miles of street lights stretching in straight lines across the plain. Only by day you see that most of these lights illumine nothing more than empty reaches of palm garden and desert. (Bowles 1963)

The artificial night lighting or the pale light of dawn cast an almost hallucinatory, drug-induced air over the images of urban lifelessness in *Road to Morocco*. The sickly, greenish-blue projection of a feverish vision recalls the western association of Oriental ambience with consciousness-altering substances, and the nocturnal *flâneurism* scenes in Bowles's work (an activity that leads to hostile and disturbing conclusions), that seem to have stemmed from his interest in hypnotic states, and recreational use of mild hallucinogens. Jean-Marc Moura expands on the seductive allure and mystery of North African scenery and atmosphere: '[…] the exotic city generally takes on for the outsider the dimensions of a place devoid of intelligible sense, a utopian place of tradition and communitarian coexistence, or a place

invested with personal myth' (cited in Walonen 2011: 40). In a 1975 interview with Bowles by Daniel Halpern the author describes the (*Let it Come Down*) (2000) writing process as a conscious recollection of environments and urban places:

> […] we went past Tangier and I felt very nostalgic — I could see faint lights in the fog and I knew that was Tangier. I wanted very much to stop in and see it, but not being able to, since the boat went right on past, I created my own Tangier. (Dagel Caponi 1993: 88)

In other words, Bowles confesses here his author's subjectivity by writing Tangier perhaps as a mood rather than a location – 'Tangier' rather than Tangier. In a similar manner Haidrayan presents us with his own 'Morocco' – a desolate mental space for westerners who teeter on the edge of survival.

As in the *Road to Morocco*, menswear editorials and advertising campaigns shot in the Maghreb evoke a nostalgic image of the cool, distant and sophisticated worldly traveller-explorer-adventurer type, neatly dressed in a summer suit and a linen shirt such as the ones worn by John Malkovich, who plays the role of Port Moresby in Bernardo Bertolucci's 1990 film adaptation of Bowles's *The Sheltering Sky*. Whereas in women's fashion stories set in similar locations there is a strong emphasis on the make-believe realm of fashion with a clash of colours and patterns and an over-stylized approach that make the clothing seem like theatrical costume and the female characters look as if they were the subjects of Rococo Turqueries, rather than real women wearing designer clothing. A case in point is Mario Testino's *High Plains Drifter* fashion shoot (photographed in Morocco and styled by Lucinda

Chambers, in the May 2012 issue of *British Vogue*) vs American artist and photographer Jack Pierson's homage to Saint-Laurent in *The House of Saint Laurent* fashion editorial (in the spring summer 2012 issue of *GQ Style UK*). *High Plains Drifter* tells us to 'Layer the cultural richness of artisan-led chic – raffia, fringing, weave and embroideries – for the nomadic fashion spirit of now'. The editorial is starring Estonian supermodel Carmen Kass, probably cast in the role of Tin Hinan – the Tuareg nomad warrior-queen. The mishmash of cultural references in the title and tagline text (*High Plains Drifter* is Clint Eastwood's first American western; 'artisan-led chic' and 'nomadic fashion spirit' are meaningless fashion constructs) is as bold as the mix of prints, textures and colours within the garments and looks that Kass is wearing and the unconventional props – a golden Moroccan pouf, a nomad tent and to make up for the absence of indigenous characters – a clan of frenzied monkeys. One of the images is reminiscent of Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres's 1814 *La Grande Odalisque*, showing a reclining and ferocious-looking Kass leaning on the back of another reclining figure, dressed from head to toe in black and donning a large and dramatic-looking, black and heavy headwear reminiscent of a tagelmoust – a Tuareg headgear. This black, faceless local figure in the background is made into an object at the service of a white woman, recalling a number of secondary characters featuring in Orientalist harem scenes, most notably in Ingres's *Odalisque with Slave* (1839) and Edouard Manet's take-off – *Olympia* (1863). Both paintings, and this fashion image, feature a similar visual device – directing the viewer's attention to the white flesh of the heroine as it is contrasted against the dark-skinned figures behind her, almost blending into the background and highlighting the desirability of the white-skinned character over her dark-skinned inferior Other (Smith and Watson 2002: 89). The exaggerated celestial objects Photoshopped into some images add to the dramatic atmosphere dominating this and other womenswear editorials, as opposed to the more narrative-driven, cinematic style of menswear editorials.

The House of Saint Laurent featured model Patrick O'Donnell and the Spring Summer 2012 menswear collection of Italian designer Stefano Pilati for the French fashion house. The editorial features a single traveller, a suave young man depicted against a series of local backdrops as he chain-smokes his way through a night and day in Marrakech and, perhaps on the coast in Essaouira – two locations that were probably picked to reference the house's founding designer Yves Saint Laurent, who found inspiration for his designs in Morocco and designated Marrakesh as his second home after his first trip in 1966. In a similar manner to Pierson's non-commercial work the expressive postmodernist photographic mode and technique distorts the confines of fact and fiction, the real and the artifice. It is difficult to decode Pierson's protagonist – as in Pierson's art his portrayal of male models and actors in elaborately staged and fabricated, 'everyday' scenes establishes narratives that are constantly shifting from a documentary code to a fictional one. Pierson depicts O'Donnell as a solitary figure with rather ambiguous facial expressions, suggesting that he is an observer who is also being observed, and judging by the Saint-Laurent clothes that he is wearing throughout the story we can assume that he is extremely well off. Pierson provides some indication of local beings (albeit in the background and reduced to create the effect of shadows) and the westerner's encounter with the natives, fitting the description of the *flâneur* who, as Richard Sennett has noted, is the '[…] man of the boulevard who "dresses to be observed", whose very life depends on his arousing the interest of others in the street: the flâneur is a person of leisure who is not an aristocrat at ease' (2003, cited in Genosko 2005: 278). Much like Bowles himself and his protagonists Port Moresby and Nelson Dyar, O'Donnell's soft, refined, rich-boy character had been jerked from the heart of civilization and flung into the heart of the sun-drenched North African scene; his foreign outward appearance makes him look like a tourist who stands out in a crowd, a quality that, in a typical Bowlesian manner will eventually lead him to fall an easy prey into the eager hands of the sinister locals.

3. Fashioning tourism in Morocco

Acclaimed photographer Irving Penn's 1951 *Woman in Palace (Lisa Fonssagrives-Penn)* and William Klein's 1958 *Tatiana and Marie Rose with Camels, Picnic Morocco*, are perhaps two of the earliest examples of Vogue's non-western fashion shoots in the North African region, and are full of paradoxical combinations, toying with Martineau's Victorian moral codes. Penn and Klein were both exploring other cultures and countries when not working on fashion assignments, with Penn's contrived ethnographic studies of Peru, New Guinea and Morocco and Klein's explorations of urban space in his *Rome* (1959), *Moscow* (1964) and *Tokyo* (1964) album books – working within the larger tradition of the avant-garde *flâneur*. Focusing on womenswear the images from their Morocco projects indicate the general approach to Arab/Islamic culture/space found in western 1950s and 1960s fashion photography as the photographs appear to be not so much about Morocco or Marrakech but about being a fashion model/traveller/tourist in an exotic or a primitive location, while enforcing western expectations about the subservient Arab and the asymmetrical power relationship between visitors and the visited. *Tatiana and Marie Rose with Camels, Picnic Morocco* is the title of one of Klein's images that accompany *Gossipy Memo: On Morocco* and *Morocco Circuit* – an *American Vogue* feature that explores Morocco as a tourism destination. Klein's photography is presented alongside travel writing segments that describe Morocco as a '[…] land of Oriental splendor with a French overlay of chic […]' set within '[…] the many-walled mysteries of the Arabian' (Klein 1958). *Tatiana and Marie Rose with Camels, Picnic Morocco* is arguably one of the earliest examples of fashion and lifestyle photography as a staged and simulated reality, with Klein constructing a tableau that resembles the *Tea in the Sahara* frame story in *The Sheltering Sky*.[3] Klein's scene depicts the models, who are wearing one-piece swimsuits with their heads uncovered, surrounded by authentic local paraphernalia (including what looks like an Arabic version of Coca-Cola) and

relishing in the childhood activity of pretending. One, with her back towards us, is pretending to be reading an Arabic newspaper and the other to be playing a Moroccan shepherd's flute. They appear to perform these activities for travel-hungry audiences back home, with the image reminiscent of bygone colonial postcards – a case of a foreign culture invading and conquering/mastering the local one. In the background, three hunkered down camels and a curious-looking local mahout are observing this midday sunny scene, a picture-postcard-perfect scene that might have attracted the *Condé Nast* magazine readers interested in travel, and helped establishing Morocco as America's new adventure playground. The binary Orientalist composition of this image suggests a distinction between the Orient and the Occident and implies a hierarchy, which Edward Said discusses as a '[…] Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient' (1979, cited in McCarthy 2010: 69).

The earlier, *Woman in Moroccan Palace* (*Lisa Fonssagrives-Penn*), which was taken by Irving Penn in Marrakech, is a striking portrait of the photographer's wife, Lisa Fonssagrives – one of the most in-demand fashion models of her time. On the one hand the scene can be interpreted as a sign of female power. By dressing up in local garb Fonssagrives-Penn (or the character she was playing) is rejecting Martineau's call for the Victorian tourist's display of superior social identity through their dress, adopting a position of independence, which was previously the domain of the male traveller. But, on the other hand, the scene brings to mind the make-believe aspects of the Turqueries, suggesting that dressing up or putting on costumes like locals brings us one step closer to the picture-postcard vision of a place, and implies that other countries and other cultures are therefore easy to decode. The image also introduces another plot element of transgression and surrender found in *The Sheltering Sky* – the fantasy of the abducted European women held captive in an Oriental harem or palace. This particular scenario seems to have captured the imagination of other photographers in

1950s and 1960s fashion photography such as Georges Dambier (Suzy Parker photographed in the April 1953 issue of *Elle* magazine); Henry Clarke (Veruschka photographed in Egypt for the 1963 issue of *US Vogue*); and Helmut Newton (Ann Turkel photographed for the May 1967 issue of *UK Vogue*). The narrative and appearance of these images suggest a clear difference and conflict between Orient and Occident, with the *inversion* of desire that situates Europe as the Orient's space of fantasy. The photographic recreations of this archetypal Orientalist theme bring to mind some of Ingres's 'imaginary Orient' paintings, such as the 1862 erotic harem scene painting *Le Bain Turc* (*The Turkish Bath*), that are stylistically similar in form and composition. But rather than perpetuating Orientalist perspectives of western superiority and Oriental inferiority the fashion images present a viewpoint that is clearly different in how it is unexpectedly reversing the gaze, '[…] directed from the normalised perspective of the "natives" toward those who now appear as picturesque exotic creatures […]' and inverting the classic scene of Orientalist art and travel literature: '[…] the European traveller, erstwhile owner of the gaze and interpreter of the Orient, not only becomes the object of the natives' gaze, but his or her very ability to see, record, and narrate the East is radically questioned' (Hassan 2011: 176).

In more recent times, with the Middle East countries in turmoil and the Arabian Peninsula's conservative and reactionary political views on fashion, it is Morocco, having managed to avoid much of the Arab Spring violence, that has become North Africa's burgeoning upmarket destination and one of the leading destinations for the creative industries in search of exotic Arab 'authenticity' in the region. Since 2010 the country has developed and relaunched itself as Fashionable Morocco – a kingdom and an identity, 'The country that travels within you' as goes the slogan of Morocco's National Tourist Office (http://www.visitmorocco.com, 2014). As in the case of other exotic destinations, the country-as-photograph exists to sell a perfect, picture-postcard paradise '[…] which in turn

sells the country' (Osborne 2000: 86). In this context, taking into account the country's aspirations for growth and progress, it is interesting to note British geographer Doreen Massey's call for '[…] a progressive sense of place, one that is 'unfixed, contested and multiple … [and] open and porous' (Orley 1994: 5). Massey acknowledges '[…] a desire for fixity and security in a world of fast-paced living and change […]' and recognizes that '[…] a sense of place, of rooted-ness can provide stability […]' but argues that fixed identities of places is not a sign of progress, but a token of traditionalism that '[…] can encourage what she calls 'reactionary nationalisms, competitive localisms and introverted obsessions with "heritage"' (Orley 1994: 151). For Massey, therefore, '[…] to associate a "sense of place" with stasis, memory and nostalgia is neither creative nor productive. Any claims to internal histories or to timeless identities of place can therefore be seen as romanticised and narrow-minded […]' (Andrews and Roberts in Orley 2012: 38). The seemingly timeless Morocco as a fashionable tourist destination has also steadily become a destination of choice for film or fashion production companies in search of picturesque native life and culture. However, it seems that the creative industries are placing their fantasy-driven productions in Morocco not for the specific flavour of the country's sites, or its contemporary cultural scenes, but for the ability of the country's historically rich landscape to pose as somewhere else, to stand in for other locations real or imagined, and replicate the ultimate, stereotypical image of Arab-Islamic culture and denote 'Orientalness' (to paraphrase Barthes's 'Italianness' of the Panzani ad) – feeding into notions of exoticism and tourist fantasy. Marrakech became the film location of *Sex and the City 2* (King, 2010) – a stand-in for the more conservative Abu Dhabi, the capital of the United Arab Emirates, which the film's official synopsis labels: '[…] one of the most luxurious, exotic and vivid places on earth, where the party never ends and there's something mysterious around every corner'. The fact that the movie producers and scriptwriters decided on Abu Dhabi as the narrative's ultimate holiday destination '[…]

despite the country's appalling record on women's rights and human rights in general' speaks volumes about the continued lack of interest and understanding of the delicate tissue of history, culture and religion relations in the region (https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2010/may/18/sex-and-the-city-2-abu-dhabi). Perhaps an appetizer to the May 2010 release of *Sex and the City 2*, Inez van Lamsweerde and Vinoodh Matadin's editorial *Vogue-À-Porter*, in the February 2010 issue of *Vogue Paris*, continues the theme of western tourist 'invasion'. This editorial depicts a trio of sophisticated and stylish female tourists (models Dree Hemingway, Lara Stone and Freja Beha Erichsen) on their Moroccan holiday. We follow them, as they are being followed closely and manhandled by djellaba-wearing and fierce-looking local men; hang out on sunny Medina rooftops; shop in the picturesque souk; and finally trek through the foreboding Sahara Desert. Unlike Tatiana and Marie Rose's laid-back style and devil-may-care attitude, the styling of the wardrobe, hair, makeup and props in the rooftops and souk images of *Vogue-À-Porter* make the models-tourists appear to look almost inhuman and alien. With their 'glamour' poses adding yet another aspect of exaggeration, the models come to personify the stereotype of the fashionable western tourist in developing countries, or specifically in the Arab world, characterized by Heba Aziz as '[…] shameless hedonists corrupting local morals through empty promises of economic benefit' (2001, cited in Timothy and Olsen 2006: 190). This is tourism as performance (see Crouch et al. 2001; Edensor 1998; Urry 1991), where

> […] Western women tourists are portrayed as 'potent yet independent' (Gibson 2001 in Apostolopoulos et al.: 37), and presented to the predominantly female, fantasising audience (imagining themselves as potential tourists) as actors animating the scenes, imbuing the otherwise barren, male-dominated landscape with a heightened sense of forbidden sexuality.

The subjects in Hans Feurer's editorial *Impressions of Morocco*, published in the July 2014 issue of *Vogue China*, are not culturally sophisticated and stylish westerners but, instead, a duo of stylish female Asian tourists (starring Sung Hee Kim and Lina Zhang). This editorial provides the ultimate twist, in which the East (as the West's 'Other') observes the Orient (the West's other 'Other'). Through the prism of global mass tourism and the presence of Chinese tourists on the world stage, China's cultural existence is authenticated, clarified and legitimized. The models pose with determination as they march round the outer walls of an ancient Moroccan town, like troops dispatched to conquer a city or use powers over foreign territory. The photographs, perhaps a nod to China's imperial view of the world and the unprecedented growth of its economic investment in developing areas, act as mediator for the political and economic regions across which China extends itself. Feurer's images, alongside Lamsweerde and Matadin's, are photographs of world tourism that visualize it as a shared, collective experience – a falsely altruistic social event, and a form of national soft power. By contrast, Steven Meisel's editorial *Moroccan Holiday*, in the May 2009 issue of *Vogue Italia*, is on a smaller scale a revisit of the theme of the magical Orient and a return to the harem as a site of a constructed, western male sexualized fantasy. Meisel's models (Pablo Contreras and Sasha Pivovarova) are of Cuban and Russian origins, and were probably chosen because of their racial and ethnic identities. The models, who seem to be cast in the roles of complaisant boy and girl slaves, are displayed as owned objects and embody a mishmash of mannerist and passively feminine Ingresian poses within the confines of a shaded harem. On first viewing the visceral qualities of the editorial seem to suggest sex tourism – 'Oriental sex' as a commodity, enforcing the notion of 'the Orient' as the West's subordinate Other. '[…] the potential for exotic sexual experience with bodies of different shades and shapes or arrestingly different in their adornments […]' is a fundamental aspect of what Dennis Porter

calls the '[…] eroticism of travel […]' by male authors (Porter 2014: 81). The models' languid poses, and suggestive, hypersexual gestures (towards each other and the audience) and the photographer's excessive use of bare flesh, add an illicit pansexual undertone to the promise of the exotic, secret and forbidden *Holiday* in the title. However, the fact that Meisel (arguably the most postmodern of all contemporary fashion photographers) has made little attempt to disguise the Latin and European features of his scantily clad models suggests that we might be observing a series of scenes that were intentionally created to remind us of the traditional Orientalist representations of the harem and the odalisque. Meisel's ironic approach seems to suggest that his western audience's vision of Morocco is shaped by cultural perceptions and imaginary impressions forced upon our minds by visual culture rather than it being formed by first-hand accounts, or authentic travel experiences. Here the images bring to mind a balancing act between truth and illusion reminiscent of Orientalist thinking and the process of imagining harem scenes in nineteenth-century paintings, while propagating the eroticization of Oriental women. Being western men, Orientalist painters were strictly forbidden to enter the harem, but tried to imagine themselves into it and then created it in their paintings: given the secretive nature of the harem and a general shortage of authentic accounts, the artists had little option but to take a leap of the imagination when painting harem life. How big a leap they took was partly determined by the exotic expectations of the art buyers back home (Wiegand, http://www.theguardian.com, 2008). Meisel's collaging of the constructed fashion scenes with found amateur snapshots of Morocco, in the manner of a holiday slideshow, highlights and emphasizes the split between what is imagination and what is reality, between authentic and fabricated memories, confirming the 'reality' that subjective travel literature and photography is most likely to evoke. The clumsily art-directed sets of *Moroccan Holiday* are another element that suggests that what we are looking at are not real images of Morocco or holiday souvenir shots but a

subjective fabrication. Scattered around the models are hastily wrapped objects that will appear familiar to anyone who has ever visited an Arab souk and left with a paper-wrapped lamp or a rolled up carpet. Meisel tells us that this *Moroccan Holiday* must be all in our minds, and the more closely we inspect the photographs, the more attentive we become to the fact that they invoke the staging of an imaginative world and a playful make-believe activity at home – very much in the fashion of eighteenth-century Turqueries. The images are standing in for the experience of a 'Moroccan Holiday', a recreation and a visual entertainment rather than a true representation of an actual and truly lived event, and may well be the product of a daydreaming mind, a traveller's mind engaging in acts of Orientalist reveries. On the topic of traveller's reveries and referencing Flaubert's novel *Bouvard and Pecuchet* (1881), Osborne states that the act of reverie is an activity that potentially does not require great knowledge. Like Flaubert's middle-class fools who '[…] conjured up visions of lands all the more beautiful for being totally imprecise' (1976, cited in Osborne 2000: 26), Meisel's mish-mash of simulated Orientalist tableaus and banal paraphernalia proposes seductive but meaningless visual candy for an aspiring but ignorant fashion crowd.

4. The case of Assilah

In *Photography's Orientalism: New Essays on Colonial Representation* – a volume that brings together a rich, varied and comprehensive evaluation of the photographic stamp on Orientalist discourse, Behdad highlights the problematic nature of the Orientalist photograph that on the one hand is denounced for its implicit objectification of women and yet, on the other admired for its aesthetic qualities, citing photographic historian Joseph Geraci's observation: 'Is the correct paradigm for interpreting this kind of work one of politics and power, or one of imagination and inspiration?' (Behdad and Gartlan 2013: 28). Geraci's dilemma puts in question the criteria that we apply to our appreciation or evaluation of editorial fashion stories that utilize the Islamic East setting as a fundamental part of their

narrative. There is no denying that these photo stories present us with some striking examples of the photogenic nature of Islamic city sites and the fact that they provide an alternative backdrop to the western street and studio. But we cannot overlook the fashion industry's apparent ignorance in replicating existing stereotypes and clichés of the Orient, and, in the process, reducing the authentic experiences of the region, and its social; religious; political; and cultural identity into a system of signs denoting 'authenticity'. Perhaps the question that we should be asking is whether this fascination with, and depictions of foreign cultures in the form of fashion imagery is presenting us with a particular experience and knowledge, or a special brand of visually stunning eye candy. Is it a representation of a symbolic development in our culture – of a constant search for meaning and knowledge beyond our everyday experience? Or one that points to our inability to shake off the ambivalence inherent in our colonial past?

Luxury fashion is exoticized and deployed in fashion editorials and advertising campaigns, underpinning the audience's need for enchantment of the contemporary experience. It is an element through which glaring exoticism and otherness are channelled, and 'alien' and 'foreign' identities are formed. Fashion as a cultural industry is continuously changing; it is in its nature to have to constantly fluctuate to keep up with social and economic change and cultural trends. In its constant search for the 'new and uncharted' the industry (and its emphasis on fantasy and drama) has always been exploitative and, to a certain extent, imperialist:

> Fashion imagery may be drawn indiscriminately from many places and times, and the clothes themselves come from all over the world, usually sewn by very poorly paid women. The fashion fantasies level and dehistoricize these

> times and places, often contributing to the commodification of an exotic Third World at the same time that they obscure the real imperialism and exploitation that both the fantasies and realities of clothes enact. (Benstock and Ferriss 1994: 209)

The continuous staging and performance of Orientalism on the pages of fashion magazines, and the articulation and invocation of exoticism in travel narratives from the region, visually portraying Morocco as an ancient land, and a city such as Marrakesh as a veritable oasis where life has remained untouched by modernity, result in what Haldrup and Larsen call '[…] 'practical Orientalism', as opposed to a purely discursive and representational conception of Orientalism' (2010: 85). This is, of course in direct continuation of the Orientalist construct, and another fashion frivolity; however, this vision of Morocco as 'a kingdom of wonders' or 'the land where time stood still' is also perpetuated by the Moroccan Tourist Board that promotes travel to Marrakech for its '[…] sandstone buildings, dusty streets and towering minarets' (http://www.muchmorocco.com/locations/marrakech/). Also with urban spaces in contemporary western societies becoming increasingly more homogeneous, cities of the Maghreb and the Middle East, as modernized and sophisticated as they have become, still stand out as a symbol of 'otherness', just as they did centuries ago and as such are likely to excite attention and wow the fashion crowds in their hunt for truly 'authentic' experiences. This predicament is echoed in the words of Léonce Bénédite – founder of the Society of French Orientalist Painters:

> The Orientalist painters correspond, for their part, to this need for the unknown, this thirst for far-off things, this taste for exoticism that grips us in

> our Occident where there is nothing left to learn, at the dawn of a day where every part of our world – almost entirely explored, organized, administered – will soon be familiar to us as the crossroads of some great and unique city. (Benjamin 2003: 61)

Bénédite's reflection highlights the inherent tensions between the familiar and unfamiliar, the everyday and the exotic, and therefore the metaphorical qualities of the 'Orient', which I believe play a strong role in the apparent renaissance of Orientalist aesthetics in contemporary fashion photography. As with late eighteenth-century and early nineteenth-century Orientalist imagery, the dissemination of new images depicting imaginary and magical Near Eastern and Maghrebian places is made possible due to a network of economic interdependence that altogether creates a complex system of power and domination. For example, the production and distribution of major films of a particular genre, or films set in a particular time period or a specific location, are usually linked to the revival of interest in such genres, periods or locations in fashion design, later becoming a source of inspiration for fashion photography, and, in turn, generating cinematic and fashion tourism, seeing a resurgence in popularity of such places as new tourist destinations, and the stimulation of consumer spending. One aspect worthy to consider is the rise of a new generation of outspoken Muslim celebrities/role models all with a huge number of Social Media followers,[4] which, alongside the West's continuous redefinition of its complex relationship with the Muslim world, might explain the curiosity with Islamic culture. The increase in visibility of ethnically diverse fashion models (rising star Moroccan model Nora Attal for example) and the current preference for dark features à la Kardashian Dynasty also contribute to the fashion industry's interest in the new, profitable market opportunities. This search for the 'next big thing' dominates the marketing strategies employed by the fashion and tourism

industries – businesses that sustain a close relationship. High-fashion luxury brands such as Chanel, Louis Vuitton and Balenciaga and lifestyle brands such as Supreme, Palace and Adidas thrive on their ability to reinvent their products, offering an increasing number of mass-produced objects described as 'collectors' editions', 'exclusive' or 'rare', to an ever-hungry market of fashion consumers. Morocco, especially Marrakech, has become the destination equivalent of such brands, offering tourists and fashionistas a 'time-travelling' experience, spiced with travel buzzwords such as 'exotic', 'mystical' and 'authentic'.

Offering a different take on the Mahgrebian as a fabricated urban fashion space, Spanish fashion photographer Daniel Riera's *Assilah (A Portfolio)* is a modern-day version of Klein's *Gossipy Memo: On Morocco* and *Morocco Circuit* – a picture-led feature in the Spring/Summer 2015 issue of *Hercules Magazine* (a men's fashion and travel journal) that explores the Moroccan coastal town of Assilah as a tourism destination. Up until the late 1970s Assilah was a decaying town on the north-west tip of Morocco, where high levels of poverty, unemployment and dilapidated infrastructures existed. But all that had changed in 1978 when Assilah's then parliamentary representative, Mohamed Benaissa, set up the Asilah Cultural Moussem – an annual cultural festival to support the rehabilitation of the town. Nowadays Assilah enjoys sustained growth as a result of sociocultural financing from the Gulf countries, and in addition to international cultural recognition it is at once a lively market and harbour town, a centre for cultural events and a summer resort. Created as a vehicle for promoting the Spring/Summer 2015 menswear collections, Riera's editorial introduces models Alessio Pozzi and Arran Sly in a classic fashion story mode – fashion photography as a selling tool against '[…] the shop-window spectacle of the exotic' (Osborne 2000: 19). The models seem to be positioned randomly across town, with Riera making little use of Assilah's 'sights of magic carpets' and 'fascinating allure' that the accompanying text promises (http://www.theissueten.com, 2015). Instead of giving centre stage to the fashion

element of the feature, Riera – the photographer-as-*flâneur* seems to have been 'looking for images' someplace else, directing his gaze more on the city, and interspersing the fashion images with William Eggleston-esque colour snapshots and documentary style moments. In the absence of tourist attractions or photogenic monuments, and in true democratic style, various untouristic elements across the town: flaking white walls; an abandoned vehicle; an orange-coated steel structure; crashing waves; fisherman boats; a slim tree trunk, a lone footballer – all receive similar photographic treatment, and exist as both elements of experience and sign forms (which possess meaning in relation to other signs). Through everyday observations Riera's portrayal of Assilah cultivates it as a whitewashed ghost town – very much in line with the town's previous incarnation. Consequently, the audiences learn about 'Assilah' by being exposed to images of Assilah, which in this case is not analogous to the 'real' Assilah – reinforcing expectations of it as the ubiquitous sleepy Moroccan coastal town. Edensor sees tourist places as stages, and tourists as performers, and in Riera's fashion story Assilah is a 'dead' tourist place, waiting for the annual cultural festival tourists to occupy it, and in their performance – bring it alive (Haldrup and Larsen 2010: 5). The inclusion of a few lines from Jake Bugg's 'Seen It All' lyrics amplifies another dimension of gritty realism and may make Assilah and its local culture appear coarser than they really are. Alistair O'Neill highlights this inherent conflict between fashion photography's tendency to glamorize and documentary photography's aim to provide an accurate representation of a situation: 'Documentary photographs convey imperfection that jars with the conventional polish and exactness of fashion photographs. The codified means through which documentary is expressed by fashion photography is usually far from its origins in social awareness' (O'Neill 2014: 53).

Helena Ribeiro (2009: 46) refers to the rehabilitation process of post-war Paris, reimagined by American fashion photographers on the pages of fashion magazines for the 'benefit' of

American consumers. Ribeiro suggests that the commercial photographer-as-*flâneur*'s subjective rendering of the geographical metropolis then supported the process of reinforcing the perception of it as an imagined metropolis in the minds of an international audience. One could argue that *Assilah (A Portfolio)* comes to stand for the opposite of this 'rehabilitation' process that Ribeiro describes, although Riera's portfolio probably represents a more accurate depiction of a contemporary Moroccan town just by the fact that it is not heavily determined by objective, Orientalist vision. It might seem to focus on ghost-like isolation but at least it does not promise us the 'magic of the Orient'. As the portfolio of images arises from what are essentially two very different kinds of visual perspectives (fashion and documentary), Riera's body of work and his foreigner's gaze upon Assilah also emphasize how, although the end-result often looks photographically different, photographic modes potentially shape or manipulate audiences' cultural perceptions of foreign places in several ways that are similar. Whether a case of the photographer-as-*flâneur*'s objective documentation or fashion photography's fantasy-driven depiction of tourism and ethnographic *flâneury*, the possibility of generating more rounded accounts of foreign places, cultures and different social worlds through photographic representation is still problematic and endlessly challenging.

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Notes

[1] Such as William Gifford Palgrave, Sir Richard Francis Burton, Edward William Lane, Charles Montagu Doughty, Alois Musil, François-René de Chateaubriand and Gustave Flaubert.

[2] Reflecting on his lifestyle choice and his status as an American expatriate in a Muslim country Bowles's authorial voice speaks through his character Port when making a crucial distinction between tourist and traveller:

> He did not think of himself as a tourist; he was a traveller. [...] Whereas the tourist generally hurries back home at the end of a few weeks or months, the traveller, belonging no more to one place than to the next, moves slowly, over periods of years, from one part of the earth to another. (Bowles 1949: 5−6)

[3] A story within a story about three North African girls who dream about having tea in the Sahara. In the story the girls manage to make the trip into the desert and have their tea, only to meet their deaths too.

[4] Such as models Gigi, Bella and Anwar Hadid; singer Zayn Malik; Oscar-winning star Mahershala Ali; Moroccan actor Said Taghmaoui; and Moroccan kick boxer Badr Hari.