

On the Supremacy and Privilege of 'White-Skinned' Subjects in Imperial Travel Writing

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Abstract

This paper offers an understanding of how Morocco, as a former French colony, is racially represented in Tom Gamble's travel account *Amazir: A Novel of Morocco* (2010). It shows how the author into question, through racializing Morocco, has taken part in the shaping of colonialist discourse and the construction of 'Otherness' as a whole. The selected corpus deserves to be studied because it offers some theoretical perspectives that can be utilized as a guide to scrutinize other similar postcolonial travel narratives. After a postcolonial reading of Gamble's narrative, it was inferred that Morocco is described as an 'other space' wherein the promises and limitations of the Western society are displaced, though not in a way this space is hermeneutically marked. The way Morocco has been delineated puts the West in the position of "creator". This position of "creator" results in the necessity of dominating the different 'Other' and their 'exotic' space. The binarism of the 'Self' versus the 'Other' articulates the 'racist' discourse of imperial travel writing. It is not only a matter of mapping the ground for the so-called 'civilizing mission' but also a tool to enlarge the gap between the West and the Rest in cross-cultural encounters.

1. INTRODUCTION

The writing of history is an 'order' of discourse that is usually subject to a 'system' of inclusion and exclusion. It is thanks to this meticulously textual investigation of history as an order of discourse and a system of representations that a notable set of postcolonial theorists and critics have been struggling to dissect the politics of orientalist discourse embedded in imperial literature, including travel writing. The emergence of postcolonial theory gave birth to the rise of multiple influential studies that have managed to unveil the 'complicity' of the discourse of travel writing in empire-building. These studies include Mary Campbell's *The Witness and the Other World* (1988), Marry Louise Pratt's *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (1992), Rana Kabbani's *Imperial Fictions: Europe's Myth of Orient* (1994), David Spurr's *The Rhetoric of Empire: Colonial Discourse in Journalism, Travel Writing, and Imperial Administration* (1996), and Ali Behdad's *Orientalism in the Age of Colonial Dissolution* (1994). Given a general study of orientalist discourse in Western travel literature, this paper investigates the trope of racial construction of Morocco in Tom Gamble's travel account *Amazir: A Novel of Morocco* (2010). It discloses how such hegemonic construction is designed to disseminate stereotypical images and misconceptions about Morocco, thereby maintaining the power relations between the 'Self' (the West) and the 'Other' (the East).

Recently, much focus has been put on the racial representation of Morocco in Western travel literature either during the colonial era or after the independence (e.g., Benaissi, 2023; Saissi, 2022; Oumoussa, 2021; Aammari, 2020; Bouamer, 2019; and Doron, 2019). However, there has been, as far as I know, no critical interest in the racial portrayal of the colonized Morocco in *contemporary* travel writing. As a result, this paper is an attempt to fill this research gap. It argues that even though travel literature is regarded as a subgenre within the 'literary canon' and an aspect of 'lowbrow' art, it is full of racial stereotypes about the different cultural 'Other'. Racial misrepresentations of the 'Other' in such a type of literature are no more than a pretext to legitimize Western domination and subjugation. This paper can be considered as a 'literature of resistance' against the hegemony of British imperial travel writing about the Orient. This paper adopts a postcolonial approach. The selection of such an approach is based on two main reasons. It is concerned with the themes of representation, race, and Otherness within the colonial context, which is the subject matter of this study. In addition, a postcolonial approach operates as a space where 'subalternity' is problematized; it is accustomed to assigning the voice to the voiceless. In this respect, a group of postcolonial theorists (e.g., Michael Foucault, Homi Bhabha, and Edward Said, just to mention a few) will be implemented as a significant guide throughout this study.

This paper falls into two main parts. The first part contextualizes the entire study within the postcolonial and cultural framework. The second part examines cultural (mis)representations of Morocco in Gamble's *Amazir: A Novel of Morocco* from a postcolonial perspective. The intersectionality of the discourse of race and space, as it is developed within postcolonial theory, will be given focus in the suggested novel. Stress is to be on how 'oriental subjects' are racially represented in the colonial discourse, and the politics of representing Morocco as an exoticized, barbarous, and Westernized space. It is worth stressing that Morocco is geographically conceived of as 'blank' and 'unpeopled' so as to map the ground to appropriate it. On the whole, this paper is an attempt to unveil that most of the images the West has about the Orient, Morocco in particular, are no more than a man-made construct.

2. Colonial Discourse and Writing the 'Other'

There is no doubt that Michael Foucault is one of the most influential theorists associated with the concept of 'discourse'. Discourse, as introduced by Foucault, is a 'system' of statements through which the world is interpreted. (Hall, 2007) It is a system exploited by socially dominant groups to construct the field of truth by dictating certain knowledge, values, and disciplines to dominated groups. A discourse, Foucault asserts, is a united body of thought and writing; it shares the subject matter, methodology (i.e., way of speaking about the subject matter/object), and a group of common concepts and ideas. Interestingly, discourse is about the implementation of knowledge and ideas and their impact on people. It helps individuals generate what they think about a suggested topic. It also determines what can be said, thought, or even done. Foucault argues that the processes of meaning-making (discourse) are closely associated with power relations; there is a systematically interwoven relation between discourse and power, insofar as they constitute a virtual compound: 'discourse/power'. None of each can operate without the other. Thus, discourse is a crucial marker of human relations as well as human knowledge. The dialectic of 'Knowledge/power' can only exist in association with discourse. According to Hall (2007), discourse is viewed as: "A particular way of representing "the West" and "the Rest" and the relations between them. A discourse is a group

of statements which provide a language for talking- i.e., a way of representing- a particular kind of knowledge about a topic.” (p.56) He goes further to argue: “When statements about a topic are made within a particular discourse, the discourse makes it possible to construct the topic in a certain way. It also limits the other ways in which the topic can be constructed. (p.56) Considering Hall’s argument, discourse is sometimes utilized interchangeably with similar concepts such as ‘representation’, ‘textualization’, ‘language’, and ‘signification’. (Barker, 2004) Discourse, when it is used as a system of representation, is basically understood as a style of thought featuring the ontological and epistemological differences between the West and the East. Discourse, in this sense, is a pattern by which a certain subject/ topic is dealt with, thought about, or represented. Discourse creates meaningful knowledge about the subject, which in turn has a real impact on social practices.

In *Orientalism*, with Foucault’s notion of discourse in mind, Said (1978) argues that it is difficult, if not impossible, to understand the complexities of Orientalism unless it is viewed as an order of discourse about the Orient:

My contention is that without examining *Orientalism as a discourse* one cannot possibly understand the enormously systematic discipline by which European culture was able to manage—and even produce—the Orient politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically, and imaginatively during the post-Enlightenment era. (p.3)

In Said’s viewpoint, orientalists, Western writers and academics, have paved the way for the West to dominate the Orient through an ongoing system of misrepresentation. It is for this reason that Said interrogates and challenges Orientalist works in his book *Orientalism*. Orientalism, Said (1978) stresses, is an academic discipline and an ideological discourse whose main purpose is to sustain Western power. Western scholars, as agents of Orientalism, have been harshly criticized by Said due to the circulation of stereotypical images and misconceptions about the Orient. The mode of representing the oriental ‘Other’, Said contends, is based on the system of binary oppositions. Such distinctiveness has unsurprisingly created, essentialized, and caricatured the Orient. It should be noted that the negative images attributed to the Orient (as being inferior, despotic, uncivilised, etc.) have never corresponded to empirical reality. In *Orientalism*, Said speaks of colonialism and Western powers over the oriental ‘Other’ not as a project of direct physical occupation, but rather as a complex process of controlling the representational mode of non-Western peoples through producing a range of forms of knowledge about the Orient. These forms of knowledge, for Said, serve many purposes. Initially, they deprive non-Western peoples of self-representation. They also distort the images and forms of knowledge about them, thereby legitimating the ongoing physical-military colonization of oriental territories. Finally, they essentially contribute to the generation of a new object of study (the Orient).

Based on what has been said, Said (1978) developed the term of ‘colonial discourse’ to uncover the system within which a set of practices termed ‘colonial’ comes into existence: “I have found it useful here to employ Michael Foucault’s notion of a discourse, as described by him in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* and *Discipline and Punish* to identify Orientalism.” (p.3) Said is the first postcolonial figure to coin the so-called ‘colonial’ discourse theory, whose

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subject matter is unravelling the complexities of colonial discourse. The significance of his landmark work, *Orientalism*, lies in its attempt to cast light on the modes in which colonial discourse functions as a tool of power. Homi Bhabha is another primordial theorist connected with colonial discourse. Bhabha has been able to examine a range of disabling contradictions embedded in colonial relationships (e.g., hybridity, ambivalence, and mimicry) and challenge the inherent vulnerability of colonial discourse. On the basis of Foucault's understanding of discourse, Said (1978) speaks of Orientalism as a colonial discourse that:

is produced and existed in an uneven exchange with various kinds of power, shaped to a degree by the exchange with power political (as with a colonial or imperial establishment), power intellectual (as with reigning science like comparative linguistics or anatomy, or any of the modern political sciences), power cultural (as with orthodoxies and canons of taste, texts, values), power moral (as with ideas about 'we' do and what 'they' cannot do or understand as 'we' do). (p.3)

Based on the above quote, colonial discourse is an apparatus of Western power which creates knowledge about oriental cultures being under colonial control. Notably, colonial discourse has tended to justify Western domination over the colonized through having control over what is known and the manner it is known. Therefore, bringing to the fore the correlation between power and knowledge is of great vitality to understand the theory of colonial discourse, as suggested by Foucault (1976): "it is in discourse that power and knowledge are joined together." (p.100) Foucault's reasoning is similar to Bhabha's definition of colonial discourse as an imagined space where knowledge is produced about the 'Other' and power is exercised by the 'Self'. In imperial writing, as Bhabha theorizes, the colonized 'Other' is racially degenerated by the colonizer to legitimize his conquest and rule. (Ashcroft et al., 1998) In this regard, Bhabha introduces colonial discourse as:

An apparatus of power...an apparatus that turns on the recognition and disavowal of racial/cultural/historical differences. Its predominant strategic function is the creation of a space for a "subject people" through the production of knowledge in terms of which surveillance is exercised and a complex form of pleasure/unpleasure is incited. It (i.e., colonial discourse) seeks authorisation for its strategies by the production of knowledge by colonisers and colonised which are stereotypical but antithetically evaluated. (Huddart, 2006, pp. 38-39)

Taking into account Said and Bhabha's logic, colonial discourse is a system which delineates colonies, colonial peoples, colonizing powers, and the relationships between them. It is an apparatus of knowledge and beliefs about the world where acts of colonization occur. Even though colonial discourse is produced in the colonizer's social and cultural surrounding, it becomes a discourse within which the colonized subjects perceive themselves. It is noteworthy that rules of inclusion and exclusion in colonial discourse function, on the one hand, as an indicator of the superiority of the colonizer's social and cultural system (i.e., history, language, art, political structures, social conventions...), and, on the other hand, as a

manifestation of the inferiority of the colonized subjects who are always ready to be ‘raised up’ through colonial contact.

Colonial discourse is based on racial differences which started with European imperialism. It is on the basis of these racial differences that colonial discourse comes to construct the colonized, albeit the diversification of their social structures and cultural histories, as ‘primitive’, ‘barbaric’, and ‘inferior’, and the colonizer as ‘civilized’, ‘developed’, and ‘superior’. Moreover, colonial discourse has the tendency of excluding statements which serve the interests of the colonizing power (such as the exploitation of other peoples’ natural resources) to sustain colonial ties. This is the complexity of colonial discourse that most colonizing subjects are not conscious of. The power of colonial discourse lies in its capability to construct the colonizing subject as much as the colonized. In short, colonial discourse, although it can be approached from different perspectives, is a space where power knowledge about the colonized ‘Other’ is generated to legitimize a hegemonic and colonialist point of view.

Manifestations of the Discourse of Supremacy in Tom Gamble’s *Amazir: A Novel of Morocco*

Before examining the politics of racial conceptions of Morocco in Tom Gamble’s travel narrative *Amazir: A Novel of Morocco*, it is of crucial importance to give an overview of it. Broadly speaking, the novel is a story of two men, an American and an Englishman, who first encounter in Gibraltar in 1938. The Englishman, Harry Summerfield, is on his way for Spain to fight in the Civil War but is talked out of it by the American, Jim Wilding, and travels with him to Morocco instead, where they part company. At this point, an enigmatic Moroccan named Abrach enters Summerfield’s life, engaging him to write love letters to a French schoolgirl called: Jeanne. The young woman, Jeanne, is the pivot around whom the entire narrative turns; she is the focus of the attention of Summerfield, Wilding and Abrach.

In Gamble’s *Amazir: A Novel of Morocco*, cultural difference between the ‘Self’ and the ‘Other’ is reinforced by the discourse of race and space. The novel is a “colonizing knowledge” which outlines an array of stereotypical oppositions: while the ‘Self’ is viewed as masculine, rational, democratic, humanistic, creative, dynamic, and progressive, the ‘Other’ is seen as feminine, irrational, despotic, oppressive, backward, passive, and stagnant. To illustrate, in the following extract, it is noticeable that the American person (Summerfield) is implicitly introduced as superior to the Moroccan person (Abrach) to celebrate Western domination and subjugation: “Abrach pondered this and released a sigh. ‘I suppose it is how your world works, *Sidi* Summerfield. Here it is different – the people who wish to become wealthy try to become wealthy because it is their personal destiny and, I ‘am sure, they have good reason to.’” (Emphasis is mine) (Gamble, 2010, p.17) Abrach is presented here as a slave and Summerfield as a master. The excessive use of the word ‘Sidi’ by Abrach to address the Westerner (Summerfield) is not innocent. It pictures the power which governed the relationship between the master and the slave in the past. Another instance of the superiority of the West can be deduced when the French Colonel Le Guédec claims that the French have “the best advanced arms” in the world, showing the military power of France in comparison to Germany military strength:

“They were onto the subject of analysing German military strength. *We have the best arms in the world*, Colonel Le Guédec was saying, in an attempt to soothe Mme. Bassouin’s worries. *Don’t worry--- Jean won’t be called up. Too old! No---it’ll rather be our young Henri here--- oh, dear, did I say something wrong?*” (Gamble, 2010, p.144)

The Western mentality is often criticized due to its internalization of the myth of Western superiority and Eastern inferiority. This essential distinctiveness between the hegemonic West and the subjugated East results in the colouring of “scientific truth” which urges the colonizer to go to the furthest territories to ‘civilize’ and ‘enlighten’ the natives. In the novel, Summerfield says to Badr, an uneducated Moroccan person, that he needs some English lessons:

“Bader pondered momentarily. ‘I do not know England. But is He not present there, too? I believe you even have a song—in *England’s pleasant pastures seen*,’ he said, with a pronunciation that made Summerfield wince. ‘Badr—you surprise me at each turn. Though you really do need some English lessons, if I may be so direct.’” (Gamble, 2010, p.70)

The so-called “civilizing mission” is a trope adopted by imperialists to legitimize a perceived necessity of going to the Eastern lands and undertaking the “white man’s burden” of civilizing subject races. It is of note that the imperial ‘civilizing project’ is fulfilled by hiding the colonial interests in statements about the inferiority of the colonized, the primitiveness of other races, and the barbarism of the colonized peoples. In the following conversation between Bassouin and Wilding, it becomes clear that the main aim of the colonial power is not to ‘civilize’ and ‘enlighten’ the indigenous but rather to exploit their natural resources:

“‘The princess without a crown,’ quoted Bassouin. ‘Four times as big as France and potentially the richest country in Africa.’ ‘I know certain French oil companies are drilling there, in the middle of the desert,’ added Wilding. ‘They have even begun to exploit the oil,’ added Bassouin. Wilding nodded. ‘There’s probably more than enough. Trouble is, there’s a lack of means and technology. You need help.’ ‘And the United States might propose it!’ said Fresquin, blurting out what everybody had been thinking.” (Gamble, 2010, p.146)

Like other imperial writers, Gamble (2010) perpetuates Orientalism in *Amazir: A Novel of Morocco* through presenting Moroccans as ‘uncivilized’ and ‘primitive’ people: “Nothing must stand in the way of the République--neither the Boches, neither the English and certainly not the poor, indigenous and uncivilised peoples of its colonies.” (p.214) Gamble’s travel account is a system of political statements about the colonized ‘Other’; it asserts the need for the natives to be ‘raised up’ via colonial contact. Adopting such a binary system of thought, the novel comes to represent Moroccan people, whatever their social structures and cultural history, as ‘primitive’ and the Western subjects as ‘civilized’. As a form of critical analysis implemented to deconstruct Western-centric thoughts, Orientalism has disclosed the way in which the oriental ‘Other’ has been conceived of by the West through the system of dichotomies.

In imperial writing, including travel literature, the discourse of difference between the 'Self' and the 'Other' is sometimes articulated by the representation of space. As cited by Said (1994): "If there is anything that radically distinguishes the imagination of anti-imperialism, it is the primacy of the geographical element." (p.225) The 'colonial' space is a Western construction which tends to label the oriental 'Other' as being different from those who descend from the West. Difference, as a discourse, is sometimes understood as a space where cultural systems and social relations are created independently and in relation to a notable set of social principles and codes. As a result, this difference cannot be dissociated from being 'uncivilized'. In this respect, the effect of social space plays a crucial role in identifying one's difference, which is constructed by people. It is on this basis that space and difference are closely interrelated; a human being (the subject) is considered to be the intermediate hand that functions between the two categories. In *Amazir: A Novel of Morocco*, Gamble tries to investigate this relationship between 'subject' and 'space'. This relationship is problematized by Western characters who attempt to give it a new definition from different positionalities. The author adopts the Western stereotypical mode of discovering and depicting other territories. This mode of stereotypically depicting territories has become, in the Western imagination, a 'scientific truth', which is basically reinforced by the pre-given images about the 'Other'. The 'colonial' space is constructed through two strategic techniques: "textualization" and "visualization". In other words, the text and the gaze are two processes which have contributed to the formation of what Edward Said refers to as an "imaginative geography". In the novel, the Moroccan setting is structured not only as a text to be read but also as an object to be gazed at by the insider and the outsider. Gamble, like other orientalists, has been able to produce knowledge and the so-called 'reality' of the Moroccan landscape. *Amazir: A Novel of Morocco* is thus a mode of thinking about and 'imagining' Morocco, as Said (1978) highlights in *Orientalism*:

This universal practice of designating in one's mind familiar space which is 'ours' and an unfamiliar space beyond 'ours' which is 'theirs' is a way of making geographical distinctions that *can* be entirely arbitrary. I use the word "arbitrary" here because imaginative geography of the "our land-barbarian land" variety does not require that the barbarians acknowledge the distinction. (p.54)

In Orientalism, the inherent inferiority of the 'Other', as a subject and a culture, is perpetuated on at least two levels: the dissemination of the constructed images about the oriental, and the ongoing separation and highlighted distinctiveness between the West and the East. The construction of the 'Other' in such a powerful image has helped strengthen Western identity and culture. The space of the 'Other' is represented as distant, exotic, and dangerous on the one hand, and yet knowable and thus 'conquerable' on the other. One of the striking aspects of *Amazir: A Novel of Morocco* is its richness of geographical details and its truly vast "imaginative geography", including all the known world and the 'discovered' lands of that time. The representation of the Moroccan space involves images of exoticism, strangeness, splendour, lazy atmosphere at a deeper level. To exemplify:

"Humm." Ludo looked amused. 'Look,' said Jeanne, trying to make amends. She walked over to the edge of the veranda and learnt upon the balustrade.

'Isn't it wonderful?' It's not Paris,' said Ludo, joining her and added, 'but it's charming. I suppose the exoticism is having an effect on me. It reminds me of a *Thousand and One Nights*.'" (Gamble, 2010, p.105)

Reflecting on the above-mentioned quote, the Moroccan space is constructed as 'strange' and 'exotic'. With intent to emphasize the exotic landscape of Morocco in the novel, Gamble demonstrates how this spatial exoticism and strangeness have a great impact on the psyche of the characters. Summerfield, for instance, gets upset and nervous at the beginning of the novel because he has difficulty in coping with the Moroccan atmosphere and space:

"At first, nervous and unsure, Summerfield began to adapt, adopting the behaviour of someone who didn't care, someone who felt quite natural in these alien surroundings. It was almost like turning it all about-face: it was the *local* environment that was different, not he. Perhaps it was the advice of the larger Moroccan man under the magnolias, perhaps (and he smiled at himself for this), his Britishness." (Gamble, 2010, p.13)

Gamble's "imaginative geography" of Morocco, as an instance of the complex interweaving of culture and power, reveals two things. It dictates the uncanny shaping power of how the different 'Other' is represented in the imagination of the writer, and it reflects the entrenched geographical dichotomy between the West and the East. Morocco, in this sense, is a constructed space, a 'man-made' geography. Morocco operates as an 'other space' for the West. It is a space which can be located but does not completely exist. Morocco is ideologically represented in different ways (e.g., being 'dark', 'savage', 'uncivilized', 'dangerous', 'dirty', and 'poor') to sustain Western dominance and deepen the remoteness of the 'Other'. Morocco cannot be reduced to one type of space. It is an 'other space' in which the promises and limitations of Western societies are displaced, though not in a way this space is hermeneutically marked. Therefore, it is not simply that the West functions as a subject and the East as an object, but also that the East haunts the West and dismantles Western identity. The way Morocco, as a subject and a culture, has been constructed puts the West in the position of "creator". This position of "creator" is closely connected to the necessity of containing the different 'Other' as well as their 'exotic' space.

In sum, Morocco, as represented in the novel under study, is a mirror or an 'Other' through which the colonizer (the 'Self') and his colonial interests have been reflected. Gamble's *Amazir: A Novel of Morocco* operates as a cultural discourse wherein Western domination and hegemony are exercised over other peoples. It reflects a subject-object relationship in which the 'West' (subject) is imposed on the 'East' (object). Gamble's narrative is accordingly a racist piece of writing par excellence.

3. CONCLUSION

Reading Tom Gamble's *Amazir: A Novel of Morocco* from a postcolonial perspective allows the reader to explore the way Morocco is racially represented by British imperial travel writers. This paper has questioned Gamble's 'complicity' in the shaping of orientalist/colonialist discourse and the construction of 'Otherness'. After the analysis of the proposed travel narrative, it has been found that it is replete with many racial and spatial stereotypes and prejudices about Morocco.

In terms of race, the representation of the ‘Self’ (the West) and the ‘Other’ (Morocco) is based on racial hierarchies. Morocco is a Western construction; it is represented by a binary system of oppositions. This binarism of the ‘Self’ versus the ‘Other’ echoes the stereotypical discourse of the post-colonial literature. While the colonizer (the British) is presented as civilized, highly advanced, sophisticated, educated, rich and clean, the natives (Moroccan men and women) are introduced as barbaric, uncivilized, illiterate, poor, and dirty. The insistence on these imaginative strategies of Othering or boundaries reinforces the current power structures by making sure that each part is contained by a definition. Interestingly, the representation of the ‘Other’ in such a way maps the ground for the ‘civilizing mission’. As for the issue of ‘space’, this paper has demonstrated that Morocco is a ‘man-made’ geography. The portrayal of the country in this manner is a pretext utilized by the author to legitimize the colonizer’s occupation of Morocco.

This paper is claimed to be an attempt to offer some theoretical perspectives that can be used as a guide to explore and grasp other similar postcolonial travel narratives. With intent to boost the reader’s insights cross-culturally, this paper can be viewed as a contribution to a better understanding of the mechanisms of contemporary British travel literature about Morocco. Last and not least, this paper is an initiative step towards challenging Western conceptions of ‘Otherness’ in cross-cultural encounters, thereby drawing the reader’s attention to the scholarly significance of cross-cultural projects. In this sense, this paper is a ‘literature of resistance’ against imperial travel writing whose ultimate goal is to disseminate cultural ideologies about the oriental ‘Other’.

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