

The Western Framing of the Female Captive: A Hermeneutic Study of Captivity in Morocco

Abdelaaziz El Bakkali and Tayeb Ghourdou

ABSTRACT

The study of the Western consumption of the female captive remains central to the circulation of cultural and social constructions in the mainstream visual and literary texts. Due to the massive upsurge of such constructs, the hermeneutic study of the existing images about captivity in the East has stipulated new perspectives into the production of these substantial messages that determine genuine challenges to the preexisting canonical view of cultural representations. As many scholars have advanced critics about the female images in many narratives, Western cinema has shown significant portraits of the female which draws an orientalist design of a discursive discourse, introducing extreme exoticness of both pleasures and destruction. With the promise to deconstruct the captive portraits of the female identity, this paper discusses the circulation of such images, explaining why they exist, offering some solutions, as well as offering an analysis of their possible impact on the public. Given the damaging misperceptions that exist as a result of their circulation and consumption, this paper fills a much-needed research gap by asking the following research questions. How does the circulation of these images reproduce issues of femininity and captivity? How do visuals reinvent the literary tradition to depict the female captive in the orientalist discourse? By answering these questions, the paper attempts to examine the issue of representation by adopting a cultural studies approach, relying specifically on qualitative content analysis to reveal alternative possibilities of some of the Western perceptions. The rationale behind this approach lies in the fact that cultural studies bash to study all aspects of cultures without canonizing some artifacts at the expense of others.

Keywords: Captivity, female, framing, Western.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Following literary narratives, many Western visual representations introduce the female in the East through a vessel of a rhetoric language, mostly projected as a captive deviant. She has been imbued with erotic and exotic nuances through social and political crises. Many scholars, such as Doris Gray, Fatima Mernissi, Alison Blunt, have advanced critics about the female images in many narratives. In Western cinema, likewise, portraits of the female draw an orientalist design of a discursive discourse, introducing extreme exoticness of both pleasures and destruction. As a captive female, she is being allegedly imprisoned physically and mentally as the subject of male oppression within ideological interests that are hidden under the disguise of her embodiment. To define various portraits of her cultural identity, the circulation of such images stalks the silver screen.

Similarly, Western visuals have long framed the Moroccan female through different images that turn her into an erotic, harem girl, a servant, and a sexual aberrant. She is projected as a vessel of the Western gaze. Her cinematic poses in erotic scenes and Oriental décors tend to frame her within the maze of the Western hero. She is meant to appear in the labyrinth of the male as accomplishing an Oriental design that tends to instill cinematic eroticism. Her voiceless, passive, and submissive situation is reflected as her inability to free herself from male restrictions.

II. FRAMING THE FEMALE THROUGH CAPTIVITY

A. *Projecting the Western Female as Captive in the Moroccan Land*

The filming of female captivity in Morocco has derived a considerable legacy from old accounts and experiences of captivity that occurred in Morocco and North Africa, between the 16th and 19th centuries. Captivity in Morocco was inscribed by many narratives of travelogues and ethnographic studies of Westerners in the region. Such narratives have largely dealt with earlier 16th and 17th centuries' encounters

between Muslim Moroccans and Europeans as well as Americans. In the beginning, the religious issue was the driving force behind captivity, which turned into a religious war of conversions. Nabil Matar (1993) contends that the captivity of Westerners in the region resulted in religious conversions. He argues that the “conditions of slaves were brutal and in 1625, wives of captured seamen stated that their husbands were so wretched in Muslim captivity that they were about to ‘convert’ from their Christian religion” (p. 486). He further argues that Western sailors were reported as being enslaved and turned into Muslims: “In the seventeenth century, conversion to Islam was a reality that many Englishmen had been forced to accept.” Morocco, El Bakkali (2021) asserts, was a major space for Muslim captivity and often looked at as the locus of entrapment of people seeking adventure in the East. Accordingly, the country was reported to live out the early captivity of James Riley whose accounts about the experiences seemed to be inspiring for later literary and visual narratives. Thus, Paul Baepler (2004) argues that the most popular Barbary captivity narrative in the United States was James Riley’s best-selling account of his capture by North African “wandering Arabs.” James Riley’s accounts fell within the Western travelogues that reported Morocco from an Orientalist perspective, as a particular space of Barbary captivity.

The history of captivity in Morocco is narrated through various stories that have reflected individual American captives who came to Morocco to discover Eastern pleasures. In these narratives, most of the captivity experiences are reported to happen as a result of “barbarous” acts of Moroccan captors who would escort the American ships to the Moroccan harbors. The Moroccans were reported to enslave the crews of the ships just upon their entering port. Baepler believes that most of the American ships were escorted in the Moroccan harbor and their people were captured: “Barbary rovers claimed two colonial American ships and escorted them into the Moroccan harbor at Sale, where the crews were enslaved.” Most Moroccan corsairs were reported to escort the prisoners in Sale, which was looked at as a space of captivity and a location of war between the cross and the crescent. Baepler asserts that the earliest surviving North American Barbary captivity narratives “are those by Abraham Browne and Joshua Gee. Browne was taken prisoner by Moroccan corsairs in 1655 and was held approximately three months, about the same duration as Mary Rowlandson. This ancient struggle between cross and crescent, with its penchant for human prizes, had already crossed the Atlantic by 1625 when Moroccan rovers carried the two colonial vessels into Sallee.” He argues that most of the Western captives in Morocco were struck by the “savagery” of the Moroccan acts; while the number of captives grew bigger: “In the mid-1620s...there were approximately 1,500 captives in Morocco alone.” Narratives about captivity, Baepler continues, portray “pernicious” attitudes of Moroccan captors when dealing with the American captives: “The Barbary captivity descriptions of the African masters are often predictable stereotypes of violent men or monsters who inflict countless cruelties on the captives.” Positive descriptions of Muslim masters could hardly appear in the captives’ accounts. Meanwhile, the portraits of their sympathetic and humane attitudes escaped the Western narratives.

The captivity encounters between the Moroccan captors and the American captives continued over decades. The American ships sailing to Morocco were reported to remain at the disposal of the “barbarity” of Moroccans who were described as terrorists. As the American desire to expand into other countries of the region grew bigger, new captivities appeared to the surface. Accordingly, David Igler (2013) contends that Western missionaries and travelers were seen as victims of “savage barbarity.” In this regard, Sunaina Maira (2008) argues that most of their accounts reported Morocco and Moroccan captors as backward Orientals whose portrayals fell within the Orientalist framework: “American Orientalization of Muslims and Arabs has a long history that can be traced to the foundational Holy Land myths of the Christian settlers and the U.S. Navy’s war with the Barbary States (early ‘terrorists’ in the Mediterranean) in the 1780s.” Maira suggests that earlier Orientalist accounts focused on the first involvement of America in Morocco through exotic and mystic portraits about Barbary: “During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the United States ventured into trade with the Middle East during what Mark Twain described as the ‘Gilded Age,’ and American missionaries, tourists, and merchants contributed to racist as well as romanticized notions of the ‘Orient’ that was imagined as ‘exotic’ as well as ‘backward.’” Orientalist images were brought to the front to describe the barbarity of the region and its people. These imageries penetrated the media by inheriting old Barbary stories in Morocco. “Given this history of growing U.S. involvement in the Middle East,” Maira writes, “it is not surprising that an Orientalist imaginary of the region as fundamentally antimodern and antidemocratic persists and permeates mainstream media in remarkably unobtrusive ways.” American involvement in the Middle East has paved the way for the encounters between Easterners, Moroccans in particular, and Americans. To the Western conception, this has often helped to instill a stereotypical image of the captivity of travelers to Morocco.

The confrontations between the Moroccan captors and people from the United States continued through Orientalist narratives that reported the so-called primitivism of Moroccan tribesmen and their barbarous attitudes. “What emerges from these narratives,” Paul Baepler (2003) describes, “is a highly variegated and fluid mosaic of the captivity experience and the culture divisions it describes.” During the early 20th century, such confrontations reached the peak of hostility between the United States and Morocco through the captivity of Ian Pedicaris. The act of this captivity, Baepler asserts, was reported as reflecting the Barbary piracy which had faded into historical myths causing, thus, a national crisis. In 1904, Baepler writes, Ian Pedicaris, an aging American millionaire living in Tangier was abducted from his home along

with his British stepson by Moulay Ahmed Raissuli, the rebel Riffian chieftain, who wanted to embarrass the Moroccan Sultan. This story about such captivity reiterated the earlier story of Robinson Crusoe who experienced the adventurous captivity in Salé. Baeppler contends that Crusoe's encounter with Moroccans led him to captivity and then to prison. Such experiences in Morocco introduce the veracity of a special age of confrontations between Morocco and Americans, through which Morocco occupied more space in the margins of Western narratives.

B. Reshaping Morocco as a Land of Western/ Eastern Confrontations

The filming of Moroccan captivity centers on the major confrontations between the Moroccan captor and the American captive through images of primitivism, savagery and barbarity. The captivity, sometimes, fell as a way to show the love relationship between the male captor and the female captive. In this regard, and dealing with the different attributes of the Arab in the Eastern film genre, John Eisele (2002) asserts that seduction, affection and love relation between the Eastern male captor and the Western male/female captive exist in visuals, "whether this is overtly expressed in the film or used as a metaphor for real life relationships (i.e., marital love)." Eisele contends that this attribute is most clearly seen in the earliest subtypes such as the Arabian Nights and the Sheikh subgenres, where it refers to the actual seduction of the heroine/love interest by the hero, or vice versa, often following a forced encounter such as abduction. Sometimes, the story of the captivity might turn uneasy for the male/female captive. In the foreign legion film, Eisele describes, "the hero takes on (or is forced to take on) a new identity; he gradually comes to believe in the foreign legion 'cause' to the point that he is willing to give up his life for it, thus expiating [for] his original guilt or crime." Moroccans are portrayed as natives whose hostage-taking makes Americans unsafe. *The Tents of Allah*, Jack Shaheen (2003) asserts, features a battleship in Tangier where the marines are sent into the desert to rescue the niece of the American consul. To this, the woman is held hostage by some Moroccans who kidnapped her because she incurred their anger by committing "a breach of etiquette on a feast day of the natives." Through this hostage plot, the American filmmaker shows the sufferings of the American captives, by the act of savage captivity, and the American magic rescue that closes the film scenes.

In *The Wind and the Lion*, the hostage encounter between Americans and Moroccans in the American film, for example, is depicted by showing the Moroccan "Barbarous" leader Ahmed Raissuli kidnapping an American woman in luring images of rape-rescue fantasies. The picturing of Raissuli, Sophia Shafi Rose (2014) contends, represents the "Muslim Monsters of Africa" in American cinema. She asserts that the film is one of many examples of the kidnapping-rape-rescue genres that have dominated many films featuring what is cinematically depicted as "Muslim villains," from the sheik subgenre to terrorist films like *True Lies*, where such films mostly dehumanize Arabs. As Raissuli's portraits fit the Orientalist design of picturing the Sheikh as savage and barbarous, the process of kidnapping shows the American woman as a victim of Arab hostage. After Raissuli and his men Kidnap Mrs. Eden Pedicaris and her two children, American officials report the event as an act of barbarous criminality, showing, thus, the issue as a discursive process to reiterate stories of religious and cultural encounters.

The continuing cinematic production of stories about Morocco still evokes the issue of captivity as one of the important facets that instill Orientalism in many American films. From Elizabeth Marsh to Jessica Lynch, El Bakkali (2022) argues, the American female captive has reported her accounts within an ongoing Orientalist framework which has often been busy portraying the Moroccan identity within negative lights through drawing images of the so-called Moroccan captor. The female captive often reported sexual threats, fears from the moor and scenes of torture. Recent cinematic releases take hold of borrowing such accounts responding, thus, to the flow of sound and image which sparkle such imageries, often within Orientalist vision, and present it to the public consumption.

Such visuals politicize the picturing of the American female in many scenes. If the American female is reported as a victim of a dangerous Oriental hostage, where the scene is set to introduce Orientals, together with their cultural and social settings, within Orientalist design, the Oriental female is depicted as a subject that has often been objectified. She is found within this layout, mainly silenced and relegated to minor positions. She is set to offer sex to the Western male. Through various frames, the female is normalized to fit different scenes of sexual perversions in the "strange" land.

III. INTRODUCING THE ICONOGRAPHY OF GENDERED MOROCCO IN WESTERN ACCOUNTS

A. Depicting the Moroccan Female as a Captive of Male Voyeurism

In *Morocco* (1930), the Moroccan female is seen in various images of Oriental captivity as a captive prostitute who appears to serve the sexual desire of the Western legionnaires. She is portrayed muted around many archaic buildings, appearing silent and seduces the passing soldiers and officers. Her designed wearing and, sometimes, her provocative dressings are meant to seduce the males, mainly as companions of soldiers in the desert, riding goats, camels, and donkeys.

At the opening of the film, Moroccan females stand in a row watching and seducing officers and soldiers passing by. With legionnaire Tom, other images of Moroccan females who appear seducing and being seduced crop up with the idea to show a sexualized image of the Moroccan female as an erotic Oriental. Obsessed by the gaze of females, Tom Brown seems unable to follow his officers' orders. "I am talking to you. You heard what I said." The officer shouts before Tom who is seen gesturing to a Moroccan woman. The female, here, is easily seduced and presents a picture of how the Moroccan female seems to be among Westerners, while some other females are seen in the streets and on the ship with veils having no chance to speak.

At the cabaret, Tom is seen with a Moroccan female who is ill-dressed and psychologically confused. She deficiently appears jealous just as Amy shows admiration for Tom. Dressed poorly, the local female asks Tom to throw away the flower given to him by Amy. He refuses and it is understood that she is meant to look undesired. Pictured as a disposable body, the Moroccan female is presented as the enslaved person in the local community. If compared to Amy, the Western lady, the Moroccan woman is found ugly, and her presence is confined to sexually pleasing Tom and his male compatriots.

At the marketplace where soldiers prepare to go to the front line, Moroccan females are seen as prostitutes who satisfy the soldiers' sexual lust. Almost every soldier is accompanied by one or two Moroccan females mostly taking them in arms and kissing each other in public. Tom, the main character, is seen with three Moroccan females, getting the last pleasures of sex before heading to the front line. Deep in the Oriental desert, the scene introduces the Western legionnaire as acting his colonial gesture in preserving and exploiting the land by means of the presence, and the abundance of Oriental sexual pleasures. That is, in the Orient, gender compliments spatiality in the sense that both elements serve the Westerner.

To Amy, these Moroccan females "must be mad" because they pretend to keep the peace for legionnaires, but "often they find them dead", and, hence, their role turns complimentary by associating them with sex and prostitution. Be it in the cabaret or the desert, when the camera swiftly moves on either side, a close shot of a handful of Moroccan females is screened allowing the viewer to see prostitution at large. If a different shot should appear on the screen, an odalisque sexually sticks out posing and singing to flirt with a reckless Westerner. Her half-naked body covers up erotic images and harem scenes and through them, the Westerner is meant to experience the Oriental romance in exile.

In *Road to Morocco*, various images dish up harem scenes to bring about the Moroccan female to the front. Found in the desert, two Americans, Turkey and Jeff constitute a Western eye to the Moroccan harem in Moulay Kassem's palace. To them, native women are seen seducing and charming men in many public places. Inside the palace, where they are held hostage, a number of beautiful women surround the prince. The grouping of women inside and outside the palace, flirting with men, shows the Moroccan harem as a reflection of Moroccan society. Everywhere, harem girls are portrayed serving and pleasing men through dancing and singing. Hence, most scenes take place inside the palace to allow more opportunities for the viewer to see the harem in action.

When Jeff and Turkey arrive at the marketplace inside the city, they are received by a woman who is meant to seduce them. They fall in after a long gaze at her. A while later, the two Americans get haunted by another Moroccan erotic lady who takes a seductive long look at them. After they exchange gazes, Turkey seems more attracted to her. "It's a strange country, too strange," he shouts. By the same hint, Turkey is seen near a group of veiled box bearers carrying a hidden lady whose hand takes Turkey's kisses and then leaves it. "Mother told me that there would be moments like this. I wonder how she knew," Turkey surprisingly wonders. Similarly, Jeff is seen alone in the street exchanging seductive looks with harem girls looking out through upper windows. These are scenes that introduce various Moroccan women who are meant to chase and seduce Westerners. The two Americans encounter many harem girls and women through which the filmmaker shows the Moroccan female from an Orientalist viewpoint.

In a harem scene, Turkey is seen surrounded by many beautiful women inside the palace, where Princess Shalmar appears singing; a harem scene that is mixed with Oriental music allows the viewer to see charming harem girls dancing and serving Turkey. As Shalmar gets a passionate kiss from Turkey, Jeff decides to stick around just as the two lovers agree to marry in a week. Thus, the harem girls are meant to please Jeff and Turkey through singing and dancing. The abundance of these images introduces a love fantasy in the Oriental palace in Morocco.

The main appearance of Moulay Kassem is pictured in a large corridor where the princess is surrounded by many harem girls forming a circle that shows another setting of Oriental harem. They are with provocative off-shoulder-blouse girls gazing at Moulay Kassem. They are pictured with transparent garments that allow their body parts to appear. Their bodies, here, are a sign to accommodate the culture of sexuality in harem scenes. In a lovely harem setting, Shalmar is found with Turkey getting into the story of love. The princess charms him by looking and thinking of him, while Turkey is busy looking at a book cover that reads: "How to make love." To this Oriental love, Turkey is seen surrounded by harem girls busy dressing his hair, cutting his nickels, cleaning his clothes, and petting his body. Meant to appear joyful with Oriental pleasure, Turkey is circled by harem girls who are there to meet his sexual desire and satisfaction.

Through the gathering of women in palaces in Morocco, the harem scenes tend to show the female body and its interaction with the Westerner's lust.

Deep in the desert, the prince is pictured in a large tent where there are a lot of natives gathering around a belly dancer who performs before them. The dancing here is implemented as a part of the female roles that translate the significance of the Moroccan harem. Inside the tent, joyful moments mixed with Oriental music that rhymes with the magic dancing of the Moroccan belly dancer who presents erotic bodily moves. Many of these scenes reflect the projection of the female by designing an Oriental décor of harem girls.

The projection of harem in this film is significant imagery of the abundance of female scenes in such releases. Such scenes are also present in many films to depict the captivity issue.

B. *Imagining Rape and Kidnap in Morocco*

The problem of kidnap is a frequent cinematic subplot in many Western films that deal with Morocco or any other Oriental region. It is a way to eroticize the region within images of female kidnap or captivity. The blonde Western female has always been used in the film as being gazed at by natives. Western females are portrayed first as being erotic and then lavishly kidnapped. Native tribesmen are dangerous threats to the Western female travelers in the country. In this regard, the Western female in Millius's *The Wind and the Lion* presents a picture of the eroticized female object by Raissuli and his tribesmen.

The first scene of the movie introduces Riffian men on their way to kidnap the American woman. Using waving guns and swords, Raissuli and his men are seen in a violent scene where Raissuli's followers crash into Pedicaris's villa killing many Westerners and their Moroccan servants. This bloody scene ends by kidnapping the American lady and her children, William and Jennifer. This introduces the issue of abduction in Morocco where the country's space is meant to appear hardy for Western females. The issue of kidnap shapes a major concern for American officials who are seen moving to the Pasha of Tangier to ask for Pedicaris' rescue. The US president is portrayed with his recurring dream: "America wants Pedicaris alive or Raissuli dead." While the Moroccan Pasha is introduced as unable to solve the problem of kidnap because he is "only a servant of the Sultan, the chosen one, the defender of the faithful," he admits that he "can make no such a decision." As the Sultan of Morocco in Fez discusses with the American diplomat, Mr. Gommez, "the return of the woman Pedicaris," the Sultan admits that Raissuli's Kidnapping Pedicaris is big trouble. He suggests that "it is difficult to be a Sultan." The issue of kidnap in the film seems to entice everybody. It shows a high degree of threat Moroccan tribesmen pose to American travelers to the country.

Raissuli explains to Pedicaris why he has kidnapped her. "It is my intention to embarrass Moulay Abdelaaziz, the Sultan of Morocco. The tribesmen will see that he is the bought dog of the European armies." By the same hint, Pedicaris's kidnap entices the American political intrigue by showing confusion in the presidency department. By doing so, Raissuli appears as the "true defender of God" who is strong enough to turn Pedicaris's kidnap into a national concern. The hostage of Pedicaris in the film shows the danger of female captivity in Morocco.

Likewise, in *Five Fingers*, the issue of captivity is present from the early shots of the first scenes in Morocco. The captivity of Westerners, here, is associated with Islam because people dressed in Islamic garments violently getting their Western captives. Two Moroccans are awake, while others are asleep, winking at each other allowing the viewer to see Moroccan Muslims Kidnapping Western tourists. Discovered in an undisclosed place, where a Moroccan Muslim is appearing softly through the transparent garment, the Westerners are held hostage in a horrible place that brings images of early Barbary captivity in Morocco to the fore. In the beginning, it is not understood why they are held hostage. Martijn asks, "Why did they take us?" Gavin wonders, "Maybe they thought we were Americans." Being Americans or Europeans, kidnappers in Morocco get their captives without letting them know about the reason behind such acts. In this film, the captors remain anonymous until Ahmed, the beard Muslim in white, appears taking a newspaper and loudly reads: "Two Europeans missing in Africa." Through this scene, the issue of kidnap crops up with a significant reference to terrorism. Associating captivity with Moroccans and Moroccan space tends to bring about another image of Eastern threat to the front and clue the Western audience with distorted images about the East in general, and Morocco in particular.

IV. CONCLUSION

The issue of captivity in both literary and visual texts appears as an important element to speak about the hostage of Westerners by Moroccan Muslim believers. This imagery tends to introduce Morocco as a place of significant Eastern/Western encounters. Therefore, the projection of the Moroccan female remains a cornerstone in the projection of the Moroccan identity in many Western films. The Moroccan female is seen at the disposal of the American to quench his lustful desire. This image would guarantee him an abundance of pleasures in the Orient. The Country, thus, is seen as a place of the extension of the American ego. It is, by an Orientalist act, turned out to be a place of fantasy whereby the American is depicted as superior and the local is seen as inferior. Through westernizing the country, the filmmaker intends to show

the degree of designing Morocco as a westernized space that suits the Orientalist agenda.

In contrast to this portrayal of the Oriental woman, the Western female is differently portrayed in Hollywood. She is pictured from the perspective of captivity and largely captured within the emotion of the rape/rescue fantasy genre. She is there, awaiting either the miracle rescue of the Western male hero or her own ability to trap the Oriental male captor and defeat him.

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