

On Representation, Cultural Appropriation and the Ethics of Artistic Collaborations in the Postcolonial Context of Morocco

O reprezentaci, kulturní apropiaci a etice umělecké spolupráce v kontextu postkoloniálního Maroka

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ABSTRAKT:

O reprezentaci, kulturní apropiaci a etice umělecké spolupráce v kontextu postkoloniálního Maroka představuje etnografický textový výstup, jehož cílem je kriticky prozkoumat roli západních kulturních aktérů a institucionalizovaných struktur, v nichž jsou zakomponovány odborné znalosti o nezápadní umělecké produkci. Studie nahlíží na „nedávnou“ dynamiku v oblasti produkce marockého vizuálního umění (mezi lety 2017 a 2020), ale neříká se současným uspořádáním jako daností. Autorka tvrdí, že je to „minulost“, která významně spoluvytváří „přítomnost“ a ohlíží se zpět do původního historického kontextu, mocenských komponentů a hegemonických koloniálních struktur.

KLÍČOVÁ SLOVA:

post-kolonialismus, kulturní apropiace, kulturní hegemonie, reprezentace, dekolonizace, komodifikace, současné umění, umění a antropologie, diskurz, Orientalismus, etika výzkumu, Maroko, Tighmert

KEYWORDS:

post-colonialism, cultural appropriation, cultural hegemony, representation, decolonisation, commodification, contemporary art, art and anthropology, discourse, Orientalism, research ethics, Morocco, Tighmert

Endless art orientated articles¹ refer to the city of Marrakesh as to the latest North Africa's visual art hub. The interest of Western art professionals towards non-Western art production is, in the past two decades, significantly increasing and Marrakesh became one of the sought-after. Within just two years – since 2017, two new cultural venues were opened, namely MACAAL (Museum of Contemporary African Art) and MYSL Marrakesh (Musée Yves Saint Laurent). Additionally, an annual art fair dealing with contemporary African Art 1.54 had been launched in February 2018. The seemingly prosperous dynamics led many Moroccan artists, as well as the foreign ones, to establish their livelihood here and take part in the new and relatively

ABSTRACT:

On Representation, Cultural Appropriation and The Ethics of Artistic Collaborations in The Postcolonial Context of Morocco presents an ethnographical textual output which aims to critically examine the role of Western and Westernised cultural actors and institutionalised structures in which expertise on non-Western art production is embedded. It follows the 'recent' dynamics in the field of Moroccan visual art production in situ as witnessed between the years 2017 and 2020, but doesn't follow the present arrangements as an objective, rather, it looks back into the historical context of original power components and hegemonic colonial structures. The author argues that it is 'the past' that significantly co-creates 'the present' as if on the old remnants the whole new foundation is being built.

small intimate field of cultural production. What one can witness is a lively, vibrant and appealing city full of challenging projects and investment possibilities, but to whom is flourishing cultural life visible and perhaps beneficial? Who is affected by the hasty development of infrastructure and artistic theoretical concepts, apart from the art world itself?²

'98 percent of Moroccans have never been to a museum, and only 0.3 percent of the national budget is for culture,' states the director of Museum of Contemporary African Art in Marrakesh Othman Lazraq in the article from August 3rd, 2019³. The relationship between small Moroccan, and even tinier (yet considered for the global art scene significant) Marrakesh art scene,

¹ The reader can indeed google 'Marrakesh' and witness herself/himself the character of the discourse that I aim to outline.

² The following lines are derived from a doctoral ethnographical field research held between the years 2017 and 2020 in the city of Marrakesh and in the South region of Morocco – in an oasis Tighmert.

³ Jaggi, M. (2019, August). Casablanca's Gift to Marrakech and the Birth of Morocco's Modern Art Movement. Retrieved 10.8.2019 from <https://www.nybooks.com/daily/2019/08/03/casablancas-gift-to-marrakech-and-the-birth-of-moroccos-modern-art-movement/>

and the majority of *absent* local audience is characterised by indifference from both sides. What perhaps Mr Lazraq omitted is that this lack of interest is not conditioned by a rejection of something that majority of Moroccans simply do not want to participate in, rather it is defined as an inability to access due to fear, feeling of inappropriateness and by the inferiority complex towards Western or Westernised privileged elitist environment which art scene here appears to be. Whereas from the opposite side, from those who are in charge of defining what art is and what art is not, we observe condescending attitudes such as – Moroccans are in terms of contemporary art, if not ignorant, then culturally incompetent, and such situation reacquires ‘an effort in education and cultural mediation.’⁴ None of the major cultural actors in Marrakesh, however, until today presented a set of solid pedagogical methods that would, in any way, mediate art production or systematically ‘educate’ the local audience⁵. Exhibition director of MACAAL Janine Gaëlle Dieudji in an interview from December 3rd 2019 blatantly stated that: ‘for us, as a Museum, it is important to connect primarily to the Moroccans.’ Nevertheless, when I have asked Ms Dieudji in which manner she approaches, in Bourdieu’s term – the uninformed local spectators, she offered ambiguous answers accompanied by evasive utters such as: ‘We make sure that each of the exhibition is comprehensible to everyone, even to Moroccans’. The more I had rejected vagueness and insisted on concrete examples of the methods, the less straightforward her responses were – a typical misleading accounts of art professionals in Marrakesh⁶. In a dialogue with researcher Nadine Fattaleh⁷, we both found very little evidence of the museum’s real agency towards the public sharply contrasting to the official proclaimed engagement as a central goal. ‘The museum’ Fattaleh notes, ‘becomes just a display or guide to sound art investment’ and institution at large continues to make false promises about the audience they seemingly serve (Fattaleh 2019: 16–17). Ms Dieudji finally, feeling slightly uncomfortable, admitted: ‘we have no methods.’

The presented ethnographical study approaches the contemporary visual art scene



Alexandra Anzid Kollárová and artist Hanne Van Dyck stitching together old fabrics in one of the houses in the oasis Tighmert. © Hanne Van Dyck.

in Morocco as a system of representational strategies, which are fabricated by Euro-American cultural institutions and their knowledge, based on binary logic and assumptions of the moral and cultural superiority of the West. As philosopher Seyla Benhabib puts it: the false, but widely acknowledged and practised generalisations about the Western uniformity of development process are visible on the concrete examples of human actions and interactions (Benhabib 2002: 24–25). The research I have conducted follows such examples manifested mainly on the production conditions and relationships between concrete cultural actors in Morocco. As mentioned above, Marrakesh became an important centre of contemporary non-Western post-colonial art production, gaining importance primarily due to the attention of the Western network of art professionals. These agents are not only influencing the circulation and representation of Moroccan art and artists in the international context but as well they fundamentally shape the art scene within the locality itself. This is done through various scholarly statements, economic instruments and information monopolisation. In practice, the new institutional structure is implemented in the form of galleries, museums of contemporary art and various artistic projects that are being initiated. While at the same time, within these institutions and within those interventions, certain

knowledge is introduced, i.e., a way of ‘correct’ understanding of what art is and what it represents. Such paternalizing attitudes in the art world of today, often less obvious and subtle, can be comprehended as a form of cultural dominance, using Achille Mbembe’s term – a hegemony (Ferguson 2006: 145–162).

Following the postcolonial critical approach of Homi Bhabha who emphasised that colonialism isn’t locked in the past but has real current consequences, I look into Moroccan cultural environment where the persisting forms of dominance are present and are closely linked to the ‘legacy’ of colonial representational schemes (see Abu-Lughod 1989; Rabinow 1995). By ‘legacy’ I refer to the Orientalist discourse that in the past formed the visual image of the so-called Orient and which now legitimises the representational strategies of Western or Westernised curators and cultural institutions towards Moroccans in general, Moroccan art and its producers in particular. We can state that the success of today’s Middle Eastern art scene is due to the enormous attention of gallerists, curators and artists seeking ways to satisfy the West’s centuries-long unaltered desires for the ‘exotic,’ ‘sensual’ and ‘oriental’ (Shabou, Mikdadi 2009: 9–10). In the case of Morocco, contemporary visual art has become an important tool for restoring and reproducing Orientalist discourse⁸. The first scholar to link the representational strategies of contemporary art production from the MENA region and the discourse of Orientalism was art theorist Nada Shabout more than a decade ago (Shabout 2009: 14–15). She used the term *Neo-Orientalism* in the context of critiquing the exhibition *Without Boundary: 17 ways of seeing* (MoMA) in New York in 2006, as an indication of a discourse that has never been dismantled but was transformed according to the rhetorics of globalisation (Shabout 2009: 14).

Even though one might have a feeling that the Moroccan art scene has happened almost overnight, the precipitous and rapid growth is conducted because the current conditions are enabling it. The facility of implementations of Western curatorial projects, knowledge production and cultural institutions is a result

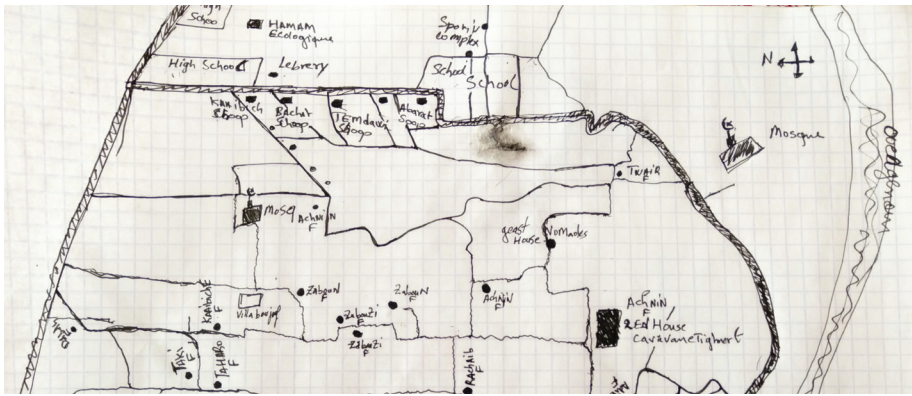
4 Information is based on semi-structured interviews (with museum directors, curators and gallerists in situ). In the course of my ethnographic research, which I had set off in fall of 2017, I have in-depth interviewed in total 40 actors in the contemporary field of visual art production in the city of Marrakesh, some of them repetitively.

5 The imperative call of post-colonial theorist Achille Mbembe: ‘Africa needs to write itself’ (Boulbina, S.L. (2016). Thinking in Lightning and thunder: An Interview with Achille Mbembe. *Critical Philosophy of Race* 4(2), 145–62) seems to be, in the case of Morocco, a far-off dream as the hegemony in a culture still persists (see Wagner and Minca 2016; Fattaleh 2019; Madhi 2019; Ferguson 2006). In postcolonial social settings, it is questionable how, and whether at all education in so called contemporary art appreciation and museum-going (widely associated with neoliberal economies hidden under blockbuster exhibitions understood as cultural development and modernisation attempts) can be executed. I.e., isn’t building a culture capital through a certain often undefined type of education, in fact, omitting or even suppressing original diverse aesthetic expressions? This question – by the art world highly unpopular and rarely tackled, however, once articulated opens a range of ethical aspects, such as imposing one’s dominant culture over the other hidden behind perplexed emancipation processes. Numerous postcolonial theorists are calling for rather than reshaping, recognising other forms as equally valuable’ and as postcolonial theorist Homi Bhabha emphasises: ‘We should listen to the subaltern voice – the voice of the oppressed peoples falling outside histories of colonialism’ (Huddart, D. (2009). Homi K. Bhabha, 4).

6 This statement is based on a discourse analysis I had conducted for the purpose of my filed research.

7 Young Palestinian American scholar Nadine Fattaleh recently published a short critical article tackling false promises of cultural professionals in Marrakesh, among others she directed her focus on MACAAL. Fattaleh on power positions of art professionals states that: ‘The elite disposition is a familiar performance endemic to the neoliberal class that wants to work alongside the state and NGOs to fashion the people in its own image.’ (see Fattaleh, N. (2019) (in press). *Contemporary African Art On its Own Terms. Collecting Architectural Territories*.)

8 Neo-Orientalist discourse is, concerning Moroccan art, undoubtedly an objective; the so-called art professionals (curators) are carrying out simplified categorisations as a result of the existing ethnocentric viewpoint of Euro-American cultural institutions. Maintaining an idea of the so-called Orient is a strategy where contemporary art is instrumentalized in order to fulfil intentions of cultural actors in power. Diverse ethnic and religious groups, narratives and histories are reduced into a single story or a myth recognised by thirsty art collectors and buyers, curators and gallerists and, indeed, by tourists. This situation is effectively maintaining the image of the West as a moral guarantor of the local art scene and the image of Moroccans as underdeveloped and uneducated masses.



A plan of the oasis drawn by Ahmed Dabah. © Hanne Van Dyck.

of a long history of a European presence in Morocco and the failed attempts and calls for decolonizing movements at the turn of 1960s and 1970s suffocated by years of political repressions known as ‘Years of Lead’ (Pieprzak 2010: 94–95). Visible cultural life is executed in the shadow of the city’s grandiose plan to sustain the growth in tourism, facilitated by powerful lobbies of real-estate developers. While the ‘progressive’ institutions in Marrakesh are being lunched, they are simultaneously being saturated by a specific (colonial) ‘idea of Morocco’ (Minca, Wagner 2016: 1–2). This persisting ‘idea’ had been manifested for decades through highlighting the contrast between the ‘Orient’ – *irrational, decadent and archaic* and the Western rationality which is associated with progress and modernity (see Morton 2002). Western artists, art professionals and foreign foundations are perceived as representatives of modernist ideologies and as development agents to the ‘*premodern and undemocratic country where cultural life is still aimed to be set.*’⁹ Postcolonial cultural production originates in an environment which is described by the West as culturally immature and where, in the case of Morocco, Moroccans themselves are perceived as culturally unqualified. This ongoing proclaimed justification creates the conditions for ‘civilisation missions’ in the form of Western driven cultural projects.

Novel Orientalist discourse, or perhaps the traces of the old one, is established to that extent, that in some cases, it determines both consciously and unconsciously the repertoire of what is to be produced within the local artworks. Representation of Morocco and its culture is undoubtedly firmly rooted in the colonial imaginary¹⁰ and contemporary art circuit in Marrakesh cannot stand isolated from this politics of representation, as much as it wouldn’t exist without it. Some of the most significant Marrakesh venues could possibly close overnight as they would remain empty

once without pleasing the gaze of primarily Western visitors. In fact, in some cases, cultural institutions deliberately built or reshaped specific places into a tourist sites, to gain support (both financial and moral), and help to broaden the small audience for the contemporary arts (Smith 2009: 22–23). Most of the spectators of contemporary Moroccan art in Morocco aren’t Moroccans and most of the contemporary art galleries and museums in Marrakesh are aware of such fact. This resulted in a practice that continues to vacillate between pragmatic satisfaction of tourist expectations (sustaining the idea of ‘better some than none visitors’) on one side, and the negotiated accountability towards the local communities, on the other. The exact scheme is followed by Moroccan artists who developed a certain state of schizophrenia where: inability to connect to own surroundings turned into a pragmatical pleasing of Western public. However, in the aftermath often substituted by acts of resilience forced by a desire to define artistic production under their own terms. This encompasses primarily the usage of self-developed vocabulary and a rejection of Western forms of epistemological frameworks.

In my output, I look at the contemporary Moroccan art scene as, in fact, not being entirely contemporary, but rather as being constructed on the foundation of previous discourse, powerful enough to saturate discursive formations in which both contemporary local and foreign cultural actors operate. The metanarrative of ‘The West and the Rest’ haven’t been abolished (see Hall 1992) and the new discourse doesn’t aim to correct the old errors. This is particularly evident as most of the art professionals are, in an assertive manner, implementing the categorisations and definitions of the ex-coloniser. The ‘Other’ has to be fundamentally transformed into ‘civilised’ and ‘global’ according to the ideas of the West if he or she aims to succeed in the contemporary art world (Shabout 2009:

21). Cultural actors of contemporary visual art in Marrakesh scene internalised, in general, understanding of artistic production through the Western evaluative system where ‘fine art’ is on the peak of the development ladder. The colonial history is to them: ‘*not quite right, but at least in some aspects (such as in the field of culture) it was beneficial for the under-developed Global South.*’¹¹

SELF-POSITIONING

After spending the first couple of months in the field I have decided to abandon the original intention which was to follow recognised Moroccan artists and their production, although voices of many were fundamentally important to my writing. Their work, enormously rich in content, kept on reminding me of J. W. Mitchell’s ‘state of visual illiteracy’ in which contemporary societies exist. I never intended to diminish (and by now I hope I haven’t) their significance as an important medium bearing various codes expressing the social conditions of the region from which they derive. However, I did not internally resonate with an approach that would look at works of art as an objective, simply because the power imbalance in which they exist, are embedded and circulate appeared as way too intrusive. Neither I felt comfortable with ‘giving voice’ to the nameless artists or local communities who are, as I have mentioned above, in a position of ‘inequality of rights to participate in cultural life’ – a phrase that I am borrowing from an art critic, curator and activist Lucy R. Lippard. I felt I would be in a similar position as many of those, who are entering this land (the land of the fetishised ‘Other’) through projects and research curriculums. As many of those intending to talk upon someone and even take something out, however, without tackling, at all, the ethical overlaps that Western research in ex-colonised societies can present (see Tuwihai-Smith 1999; Schneider, Wright 2014). Contemporary art is still today inevitably tied to imperialism, notes Nada Shabout and continues: ‘*It is a superior Western historical construct that enforces a binary ‘self’ and ‘other’ and must be re-examined within the paradigms of imperialism and colonisation*’ (Shabout 2009: 17). Following lines are designed, therefore, as a form of critical ethnographical writing that aims to stand outside the paradigm of hegemonic cultural positioning. It is looking into the field of the visual cultural production within limited time – from fall 2017 till spring 2020. For the purpose of this paperer I have decided to, in the very conclusion, emphasise one specific experience

9 A literal statement of a French gallerist Nathalie Locatelli running 127 Gallery located in Marrakesh (14. 3. 2018).

10 Interview with Emma Chubb (2014, September). Retrieved 13. 12. 2019 from <http://www.appartement22.com/spip.php?article382>

11 Quotation derived from a panel debate between Moroccan photographer Younes Fizazi and the moderator Juan Palao Gómez taking place in the art space LE18 in Marrakesh (6. 10. 2018).

– a cultural event held in the south of Morocco. The artists residency known as Caravane Tighmert presented for my filed work a fundamental impulse to focus with a greater detail on ethical implications of artistic collaborations *in situ*. These frequent encounters are happening between Western artists and various local communities where often, even unconsciously, transgressions against ethics are taking place.

Western cultural actors in power, constructed a prestigious and celebrated world of the contemporary art scene – described as one of the most important on the African continent, yet without crediting (in most cases) those, with whom they collaborate – the natives. For whom then, the spectacle is intended and under who's terms? The art scene in Morocco consists of two utterly unlike worlds: that is the contemporary art scene itself and the silent (silenced) Moroccan majority which is, in fact, neither creator of their representations, nor a spectator; Moroccans have become through practices of the cultural actors a subalterns, an aesthetic objects of observation in order to encourage increasing tourist and artistic consumption (see Rabinow 1989). *'The New Creatives Putting Marrakech On The Map'*¹² – a head-title from the summer's edition of British Vogue (2019) I perceive here as an accurate metaphor in which Marrakesh is by the art world repetitively marked on a map as if subjected to the powerful conquerors. *'The Middle East is seen as a vast new source of goodies for the markets limitless voracity'* notes professor of art history Salwa Mikdadi (Mikdadi 2009: 8). Thus, we can ask what are the intentions of these creatives, through which strategies they construct representations and ascribe meanings to these representations. Secondly, it is fundamentally necessary to tackle the real consequences of their symbolical cartography practises in the Moroccan postcolonial context. Answering these questions requires, on an intimate scale, looking in a detail into actions of certain individuals, and understanding their personal interests: in the past years I was following their various statements, their decision making power, representational strategies and their quotidian practises towards the 'Other' who they aim to 'educate' but also incorporate or exclude. Within this text I will present an overview of a project carried out with a Belgian visual artist Hanne Van Dyck initially designed as an intimate brainstorming between the power poison of an ethnographer and an artist on topics such as: how to culturally appropriate, if possible, and how such can be done in a 'right way'.

MOROCCO: A LAND YET TO BE 'DISCOVERED'

Following S. Hall and his premiss that discourses are never closed systems, but they always draw from the dominant previous narrations while altering and translating new ones (Hall 1996: 201–202), and as Homi Bhabha insists: *'It is impossible to separate past from the present. They are not disconnected: the former is not a mere predecessor of the latter'* (Bhabha 1986: 23) – Orientalism here doesn't belong to the history. Within the context of Morocco, it exists as an alive coherent rational body of speech, writings and attitudes or a frequently used archive which serves as a principal source among various cultural actors. It provides a language how to talk about, in other words how to represent a particular kind of knowledge, how to construct a topic in a certain way and limit other ways in which the topic can be fabricated (Hall 1996: 201–202). The present is mirroring the past and continuous power positions of certain actors are conditioned by a particular discourse which had been ordered by a colonial force. As postcolonial critics put it: *'This is particularly evident if we consider the experience of colonialism not as a concluded chapter in global history, but as an intrinsic and indelible part of the contemporary world'* (De Angelis, Ianniciello, Orabona et al. 2016: 2). The Orient – real and imagined land of the exotic 'Other' as produced throughout the Western academic disciplines in 18th, 19th and 20th century and as a mode to perpetuate European dominance, had been critically overviewed in a rich corpora of papers and accepted as a fact. Some might argue that discussions on *Orientalism* have reached its peak, yet at the end of the day, does it matter to have a list of scholars and existing academic debates on strategies of the 'otherness' when those in charge (read cultural actors) do not take the accountability to deconstruct monotonous representations? In fact, the facade had never been torn down, the opposite is happening: it is being carefully restored and contemporary world of visual art became 'space of possible' where the discourse of Orientalism, perhaps its new forms in old power structures, is being exercised. Inspired by the words of American writer, art critic, activist and curator Lucy R. Lippard, the circuit of artistic production and cultural actors within have a social mandate to risk, interpret and educate, yet unequal powers make unequal risks and aesthetic daring must be balanced with responsibility (accountability) to the communities with whom the creators are creating (Lippard 2014: 26). The foreigner stepping into

the field of the 'Other' in order 'to discover' and 'to represent' became an inspirational pattern that repetitively occurred throughout the 20th century and that continuously exists. Today's cycled advertence to the past famous artistic figures in vast textual and visual narratives has a purpose and that is to legitimise agency of every new artist stepping into the country and producing art, while 'discovering', 'being inspired' and 'enamoured' with the local context, as so much as Eugène Delacroix, Jacques Majorelle, Paul Bowles and Yves Saint Laurent before him or her. It is, after all an established practice, a precedent enhancing Western position in the right to develop the model of comparison, to classify and to possess criteria of evaluations (Tuhiwai-Smith 1999: 42).

Discovery – a word that is present in almost every publication and article when talking about non-Moroccans stepping into Morocco (as much as to other non-Western lands) seems to appear as neutral but it is, in fact, conditioned by the possessed power of those who are 'discovering'. Such rhetorics are implying connotations as if the significance of the contested (even culturally) land was only established within the Western superiority apparatus, i. e., a space becomes worth attention/adorable only through dominant (colonial/ex-colonial) *authority* that manifests in its statements and practices. Morocco to this day remains a land to be discovered, as the aforementioned article in British Vogue from the 10th of June 2019 states: *'After Yves Saint Laurent: The New Creatives Putting Marrakech On The Map.'*¹³ The title is accompanied by two images: by a photography of Yves Saint Laurent in traditional Moroccan *jellaba* gazing into a garden with a cigar and drink in his hands. On the second image, we can see Laurence Leenaert – Belgian designer living in Marrakesh and producing designed rugs and ceramics with local artisans under the successful lifestyle brand LRNCE!¹⁴. The text follows by a list of eight individuals, mainly designers and artists who are, according to the writer, keeping the Marrakesh cultural scene alive. The message that this article implies is: Moroccans themselves aren't paying any attention to creativity and art, it is only within these individuals who voyaged to Marrakesh and again discovered its neglected potential, through them the culture can be *recognised and perhaps rescued, rehabilitated, empowered or emancipated*. Such discourse stretches throughout the whole contemporary art scene of Marrakesh, from artists and art professionals to cultural institutions.

12 Jennings, H. (2019, July). The New Creatives Putting Marrakech On The Map Retrieved. Retrieved 20. 11. 2019 from <https://www.vogue.co.uk/article/art-rugs-ceramics-in-marrakech>
13 Jennings, H. (2019, July). The New Creatives Putting Marrakech On The Map Retrieved. Retrieved 20. 11. 2019 from <https://www.vogue.co.uk/article/art-rugs-ceramics-in-marrakech>
14 About LRNCE. Retrieved 16. 2. 2020 from <https://lrnce.com/about/>

All of them are by their practise and statements referring to the previous famous names that were enchanted and seduced by the city – regularly described as an ‘essential Eden.’ Most of the travellers were and are inspired by (...) *‘zelliges, zouacs, jellabas and caftans: appearing as in relief – pink, blue, green and violet caftans blending with one another. One is surprised that these groups, which seem drawn or painted and evoke sketches by Delacroix, are in fact, spontaneous arrangements of everyday life’* (Benaïm 2019: 475) – writes Yves Saint Laurent his first impressions during his stay in Marrakesh.

In most of what we can read, a single reference to an actual Moroccan isn’t present – interactions with living and breathing human beings are, almost always, absent. Those narratives helped effectively to commercialise and produce a tourist version of timeless Marrakesh and turned its inhabitants into anonymous exotic subjects (see Nochlin 1989: 39–40). The only exception is the occasional link to craftsmen, or more broadly – ‘the native’ with whom the travelling artists and designers ‘collaborate’, yet again we can read about anonymous producers of a ‘traditional beauty’. Craftsmen or craftswoman are, by contemporary artists, perceived in most cases as bearers of an ‘archaic knowledge’ and a ‘source of inspiration,’ however never equal to their Western counterparts. Artists are commonly perceived as experts offering by their interventions a guidance to the locals in order to produce something beyond an ‘ordinary craft.’ Only then, within the collaboration of the two, the artisan is able to create something more than a worthless trinket which can be spotted on every corner of Marrakesh’s Medina. The question to be asked here is why the Moroccan craftsmen or craftswoman remain anonymous while the foreign artist possesses an actual name and appearance, as too his or hers final output has a branding narrative. The answer within which I argue is, that all contemporary artists and designers which are mentioned in the famous fashion and art magazines are first following the ‘language of a distinction.’ *Distinction* was, as we can read in the following lines, implemented by French colonial scholarship. Second, yet again these artists and designers are in powerful positions¹⁵, this inequality of power allows them to represent Morocco, both consciously and wittingly or not, in a similar manner as the artists of colonial

times did and thus continue to build up the archive of ‘new Orientalism.’

My approach, in this paper, is to question the contemporary ‘discoveries’ as a constructed narrative present in most of the visual and textual coverages on Marrakesh in the international press which have, according to Fatalell: *‘the power to pronounce a hierarchy of cultural geographies, to advertise new destinations, and to utter into existence new concentrations of power’* (Fallateh 2019: 8). The colonial cartographers ‘putting Marrakesh on the map’ have been replaced by a number of cultural art professionals through implemented institutional art structure with global interconnections. Narratives of discovery, today bearing the prefix – re, have occurred in other spheres than visual arts. Writers on Morocco’s urbanism are, in fact, operating within similar discursive formations: *‘traditional urban fabrics were rediscovered after years of post-independent neglect’* (Kurzac-Souali 2017: 79). If the values (of monuments, cities, art works) were recently rediscovered, when then they have been discovered? Asks scholar Khalid Madhi in his critical study on *Marrakesh: Urban Restructuring Power and Capitalism in the Tourist City: contested terrains of Marrakesh*, 2019. For answer, he looks into the analysis of UNESCO where we can read: *‘Marrakesh Medina have enjoyed protection as a part of Morocco’s heritage since 1922’* (UNESCO 2008). I. e., following these logics, Medinas were first ‘discovered’ by French colonial apparatus, whereas with the withdrawal of the French Protectorate (1922–1956) cultural structures, the protection of cultural heritage has, of course, ceased (Medhi 2019: 42–43). Moroccan patrimony is no longer a local or even national concern as it involves international actors such as UNESCO – for example, the classification of *Jemaa el-Fna* as ‘Masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity.’¹⁶ As C. Minca and L. Wagner puts it – the shared discourse dictates that: *‘the present day inhabitant (‘natives’) aren’t for economic, political and even ‘cultural’ reasons – to guarantee the proper preservation and valorisation of their ancestors’* (Minca, Wagner 2016: 25).

THE FAILED CULTURAL DECOLONISATION

Simply it has become a norm that Moroccans are rarely making claims over their own culture, that includes as much as the notions

of the heritage, as it is the case of Moroccan contemporary art. From what had been aforementioned about the constructed representation of Morocco inherited by French artistic trio Eugène Delacroix, Jacques Majorelle and Yves Saint Laurent as if from father to son, one might ask if there were, in fact, any attempts to break free from recycling the colonial fiction in the post-independent period. Although the process of ‘cultural decolonisation’ has never achieved its goals, it is necessary to address *why*. Cultural decolonisation in Moroccan context is to be defined as: *‘a process by which Moroccan writers and artists would break with stagnant French models and Arabic canons in order to forge new artistic forms and literary languages in dialogue with the rest of the decolonizing world.’*¹⁷ At the beginning of 1960s, a group inspired by writings of a ‘prophet of postcolonial disillusionment movements’ Frantz Fanon was formed. Their concerns were expressed in bi-annual poetry and culture review *Souffles*, first published in 1966, however, subsequently banned in 1972. It’s leading figure – writer Abdellatif Laâbi (1942) was imprisoned, tortured and sentenced for ‘crimes of opinion’ in the years 1972–1980. Later in 1985, he was forced into an exile in France (Miller 2013: 198–199).

*‘Western science has held the monopoly on all research until now. Our history, our sociology, our culture, and our art have been studied and interpreted in the function of an externally motivated curiosity and rigour that fundamentally do not correspond to our perspective, our needs, or even our strict realities.’*¹⁸

The cultural decolonisation as a long-lasting and complex process, nevertheless, cannot stand isolated from the political context (Oelofsen 2015: 131–132) and as Laâbi noted: *‘Political and cultural struggles go hand in hand.’*¹⁹ Laâbi himself was part of organisation *Ila al-Amam* (‘To the Forefront’) founded by communist, mining engineer and university professor and later political militant Abraham Serfaty (1926–2010). Composed of intellectuals, the so called young ‘avant-garde’ was directly opposing King Hassan II (1961–1999). Violent repression of *Souffles* and the entire Moroccan intellectual groups is considered as the beginning of the period known as ‘Years of Lead’ (roughly dated 1975–1990). Famous King’s speech on the national television suffocated once and for all possible attempts of

15 I had, during my interviews, repetitively heard comments on the sexual life of Yves Saint Laurent during his stay in Morocco. First, a great indicator of his power position is, according to some informants, the publicly admitted homosexual orientation – YSL and Pierre Bergé were openly appearing as partners, despite the fact that both male and female same-sex sexual activity is, in Morocco, illegal. This fact is seen by some critical voices as the highest act of state’s hypocrisy, nevertheless, there has never been a public note stating anything negative about both figures. Second, most of my interviewees linked the figure of Yves Saint Laurent to controversies about sexual abuse of minor Moroccan boys which was, according to them, a practice about which no-one is doubtful.

16 Proclamation of the Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity (2001–2005). Retrieved 28. 1. 2020 from <https://ich.unesco.org/en/proclamation-of-masterpieces-00103>

17 Harrison, O., Villa-Ignacio, T. (2015, December). DECOLONIZING CULTURE – What a leftist Moroccan journal from the 60s can teach us about today’s cultural crises. Stratford University Press blog Retrieved 10. 10. 2019 from <https://stanfordpress.typepad.com/blog/2015/12/decolonizing-culture.html>

18 Laâbi, A. Read the little Moroccan. (1966). Translated from the French by Lucy R. McNair In *Souffles-Anfas: A Critical Anthology from the Moroccan Journal of Culture and Politics* Retrieved 10. 3. 2020 from <https://www.sup.org/books/ex-tra/?id=25641&f=Souffles%202.html>

19 Harrison, O., Villa-Ignacio, T. (2015, December). DECOLONIZING CULTURE – What a leftist Moroccan journal from the 60s can teach us about today’s cultural crises. Stratford University Press blog Retrieved 10. 10. 2019 from <https://stanfordpress.typepad.com/blog/2015/12/decolonizing-culture.html>

the popular appeal to reclaim cultural sovereignty: 'Allow me to tell you, there is no greater danger to the state than the so called intellectual; it would be better for you to be illiterate' (Miller 2013: 169). Failed cultural decolonisation is, however, caused by another aspect and that is the Franco-Moroccan relation, which surprisingly started to improve soon after the Moroccan Kingdom gained independence – within the period 1962–1965 (Miller 2013: 165). For mainly political and economical reasons many elements of the previous colonial system were kept in place, the physical presence of French cultural expertise, so as the language itself, resulted into a long-lasting uncritical official discourse towards France (Peiprzak 2010: 18). Attitudes, statements, images and narrations, in other words – the discourse implemented by the colonial powers remained, therefore specific language and selected images continued to serve economical, political and personal interests. Nonetheless, it is important to state, that discourses are powerful in a specific way, as Foucault notes. They do not operate as a set of imposed rules for thoughts and behaviour, neither they are repressive. Their power manifests in their productiveness, they do not put a spell on a preexisting human agent instead human subjects are produced through a discourse – sense of ourselves so as various objects, landscapes, scenes, relations, places (Foucault 1979: 95). Thus, to translate some of the arguments in the previous lines, it might be said that a certain notion of what is Morocco today is produced and inscribed through colonial tropes that are being nourished by previous discursive textual and visual formations. The latter lies in the intentions and comprehensions that the above-mentioned artists constructed and shared in their visual and textual representations under a specific colonial outlook. This was transmitted and incorporated by above-mentioned Yves Saint Laurent and others, mainly newly coming designers and artists which are under a powerful dictate of Western conceptualisation of Morocco. Perhaps this is a price Morocco had to pay for an alliance with the West, notably with France established in the first years of the 1960s to sustain economical and political stability in the post-colonial period. Nevertheless, we have to bear in mind that the colonial project doesn't end once the troops depart (Bhabha 1994; Rabinow 1989), the psychological effects of colonialism on the subjects continuously exist. Numerous postcolonial studies state that cultural sovereignty cannot be claimed back until the intellectual landscape of the country,

ultimately, decolonise the mind of the formerly (ex)colonised (Oelofsen 2015: 131–132).

THE NATIVE AS A 'NOBLE SAVAGE'

Moroccan craftsmen or craftswomen as members of various local communities are in a position of a 'noble savages' who bear the ancient and ancestral techniques and knowledge of artistic production. They are considered as simple and unsophisticated, living in a state close to Nature, possessing virtues of forgotten tribes unfettered by social divisions, laws and economical constraints of global economic systems (Hall 1992: 205–208). I use the archetypical character of the *Bon Sauvage* here, simply because it does, in the most accurate sense, describe in which way designers and artists refer to the natives in interviews I had conducted. Examination of designers' Instagram accounts²⁰ and frequent articles on Marrakesh in prominent magazines led me to a conclusion that these textual narratives, in most cases, follow the already established discursive formations. Websites' curriculums thus represent the new digital archive with the content of the old representational patterns. What this groups of statements have in common is, besides an evident promotion of exoticism, patronising relationship towards the craftsmen and craftswomen and other native groups. It is not an exception that some of the artisans are following artists and designers into their new studios, working on looms installed in the shops while being observed by random visitors. This practise enhances the curiosity in casual tourist passengers; the weavers newly situated behind the looms is something that would be under usual circumstances difficult to witness. The production is traditionally located primarily in old *funduqs* of Medina, for a stranger difficult to distinguish, therefore always hidden to the non-locals and pedestrians in narrow streets of the old city. In recent years artisans are being dislocated from their everyday context, in return, they are offered a 'fair salary', which is, compared to the Western conditions a ridiculous wage for most of the foreign employers. Artisans are objectified and treated through the prism of their economic potential. This, however, doesn't mean artist and designers aren't establishing close relationships with 'their' craftsmen, yet such personal affiliation has nothing to do with official and visible constructed representations.

Another question here to be asked is, where is the line between being 'just inspired' and practise which can be considered as a cultural appropriation? The discussion on

such dilemmas remains in the art world undressed and, in fact, isn't in the centre of any concern. The so-called creatives are producing pieces in the 'collaboration' with artisans whose skills are in other parts of the world vanishing. Artist or designer then, just as Yves Saint Laurent, are in the position of an 'emancipator' of Moroccan cultural heritage, whereby without him or her the world wouldn't learn about Moroccan culture, simply because it is believed (by the contemporary art professionals *in situ*) that Moroccans themselves are lacking enough interest. In the context of contemporary art practices anthropologists of art Arnd Schneider and Christopher Wright concludes that there are very limited if non-existing dialogues on the processes of artistic creation that would link artists, artefacts and their original producers and new works resulting from these collaborations. How to develop a process of a 'correct appropriation' doesn't only remain unanswered, but is even rarely asked. The general consensus of the critics stands: the best to be done here is to understand artists intentions *in situ* and what kind of relationship he or she establishes with the 'Other' (Schneider and Wright 2006: 40). Criticism of superficiality and aestheticism is directed to those artistic practises where the artists are dealing purely with form and to whom, the understanding of the local communities is secondary. Anthropologists of art today more than ever call for contextualisation of the non-Western aesthetic expressions, that directly implies to recognise ethnographical specific symbolic and religious content in these sources (Schneider and Wright 2006: 38–39) and above all, to set ethical criteria of these collaborations. Until the 17th-century artists and artisans were generally considered as identical creators and their works were equally described as 'technical'. This is particularly evident in the etymology of the Latin word *ars* and greek *tekhne*: they both bear the identical meaning with the connotation of skill or craftsmanship, work, expert techniques and technology (Mitchell 2005: 6; Ingold 2007: 127).

Art historians traditionally explain the division between the producers of 'the routine' and autonomous free creators by a capability of creative intelligence and imagination – those are the virtues possessed by the second-mentioned group and the lack of them among the first. This understanding of cultural material production is according to anthropologists of art misleading and, in fact, implies the superiority of some groups above the others. Anthropologist Tim Ingold for example notes, that

20 For the purpose of this analysis I have been looking into these websites: LRNCE: <https://lrnce.com/>; Instagram accounts of DIOR <https://www.instagram.com/dior/>; SIJE: https://www.instagram.com/she_archives/; Marie Bastide Studio: <https://www.instagram.com/mariebastidestudio/>; Louise Barthélemy: <https://www.instagram.com/louisbarthelemy/>; ARTC: <https://www.instagram.com/maisonartc/>; Marrakshi Life: <https://www.instagram.com/marrakshi.life/>; Riad Yima: <https://www.instagram.com/riadyima/>

it wasn't due to 'genius spirit' or a courage of some producers to break free from internalised aesthetic repertoire, but rather the subsequent growth of industrial capitalism which contaminated the labour division. The technology shifted from mind to machine, and as Ingold puts it: '...the systematic studies of the process of production were incorporated into the machinery production itself' (Ingold 2007: 127). Following Ingold, those who could escape the determinations of technological systems were artists producing art. The rest – the artisans since then could only replicate (Ingold 2007: 127).

The tradition of *distinction* is according to art historians quite different. The theoreticians are pointing out that the Western tradition lies in the Kantian opposition between the constraints of the material world and the human freedom. Role of art was and is therefore seen as overcoming our ordinary relations to the world (Phillips 1999: 6). According to this understanding, the highest forms of art are those which were and are breaking free from rules of the ordinary world: that is modern and contemporary art, and the lowest are naturally those which are being produced for their utilitarian reasons – products of craftsmanship. This idea was then, within the Western scholarship and colonial apparatus brought to lands which French and other European powers intended to colonise. Judgements made upon Moroccan artistic production derived from new applied capitalist models of production pressured by the French authorities. Moroccan crafts and other aesthetic production were no longer personal expressions of its producers but were now 'strip-made' products driven by the need to satisfy the emerging market, more and more orientated on foreign clientele lusting mainly for holiday cheap trinkets (Irbouh 2005: 227–228). Maurice Le Glay (1868–1936) famous colonial writer on Moroccan culture in his texts talks upon Islamic Arabic civilisation as being unproductive and without any artistic force. According to him it was, in fact, the Muslim Spain, not the *Maghreb* or *Mashriq* that fertilised Islamic civilisation, and once the Spanish crafts got into contact with Moroccans, he notes, they began to 'wane and subside in decay' (Le Glay 1922: 138). Scholar Hamid Irbouh has been analysing how the French used systematic means of modernisation of local arts and crafts to impose their control. Another significant aspect that primarily nineteenth-century historians of art adopted is the Hegelian understanding of progress: nations with the existence of artistic freedom and greater incidence of fine art are thus considered as more developed (Phillips 1999: 7). The idea of 'prog-

ress' is particularly evident in vast examples of patronising attitudes that took part among scholars dealing with non-Western material cultures, including anthropologists of art. Art historian Sally Markowitz notes that process of differencing is undoubtedly a question of power: 'it reflects our (Western) culture's elitist values: anything that is performed or materially produced by European white man is 'art', while everything else counts only as a craft or folklore' (Markowitz 1994: 55). According to her claims, the process of distinction, as a result of many different historical factors within the scientific discipline of art history, doesn't justify the real social implication it can have.

The constructed divisions between art and artefact have soon been accepted as a universally recognised model which determined the classification of both Western and non-Western production. It implies the understanding that certain groups to whom we refer as to craftsmen are only capable of providing us with objects that we eat from, we sit on and we wear, whereas upon artists' production we contemplate, i.e., it is not an accident that work of the marginalised groups is often labelled as of lower status, thus craft (Markowitz 1994: 67–68). According to Markowitz, marginalised aren't only the producers, but it also implies the idea that the 'fine art' can be adored only by those who are capable of doing so – the intellectuals. In the case of Morocco, cultural capital (the ability to contemplate) was and is traditionally linked to the French and the educated local elites, additionally to the expatriates and tourists. Whereas 'the rest' of the public, the average Moroccans are only competent to enjoy 'repetitive decor' of traditional craftsmen production unable to step beyond conservatism that is dictated by 'strict religious constraints.' The *distinction* presents here a tool of social exclusion existing and active as much it was in the past as it is today and would be discussed and demonstrated on concrete examples in the following lines. For the past century or so the material objects of the cultural 'Other' have been categorised into two ongoing valid groups: the works of art and ethnographic specimen or an artefact (Phillips, Steiner 1999: 3). Once traditional aesthetic expression in Morocco was understood through the Eurocentric perspective of French colonial scholars as a 'mere craft practise' (*l'artisanat*) Western canon of distinction has been accepted and incorporated in the educational system and reproduced throughout the colonial era and following years after the independence (see Irbouh 2005; Holden 2008; Girard 2010). However, despite

the tradition of devaluation, Moroccan craftsmanship continuous to exist and presents a rich source of artistic practises and knowledge transmissions related to these practices. Furthermore, various forms of craftsmanship in Morocco today lively intersect with the field of contemporary art. Such collaborations encompass both Moroccan artists who are dealing with artisans (in order to explore their practice by employment of new materials in conjunction with local symbols, often with a purpose of rehabilitating what was once devaluated) and foreign artists/designers entering Morocco for various pronounced reasons nourished by a discourse of 'discoveries' and emergent capitalist economy. Markowitz suggests that we must look at the 'background' of each of these practices, search for assumptions and values that determinate how we perceive art and craft in specific cultural context (Markowitz 1994: 66). I argue that such described approach based on ethics of collaborations, in fact, doesn't exist in Morocco and very few foreign artists²¹ acknowledge the wider cultural meanings of production which historically internalised categories that were once artificially and violently imposed.

The majority of outside producers and Western public accepts the distinction as *truthful*, *innocent* and *neutral* and despite the post-colonial context, are following the still lingering definitions of art as an 'aesthetic conceptual knowledge' and craft as a 'technical knowledge' deriving from hierarchies of High Renaissance (Buczek 2011: 3). This ranking practice so typical for the contemporary field of art production in Morocco leads to subsequent neglect of local value systems and narratives, and continues to reproduce colonial schemes of classifications. Even though criteria of *distinction* are widely understood and applied as 'scientifically neutral' and within the Western art history discipline understood as a generally acceptable evaluating system, classification of objects produced by non-Westerners is an act of Western hegemony for one very specific reason – it was not Moroccans themselves who decided to categorise, whether at all or how, their own artistic expressions. Art historian Ruth B. Phillips and anthropologist of art Christopher B. Steiner are providing us with an example of how the discourse on art *distinction* was shaped by the cultural evolutionists. They argue that: 'while in the West the 'symbolic' was identified with fine art and the 'natural and imitative' with decorative art, the reverse became true for 'primitive art' (Phillips, Steiner 1999: 8). The appearance or the lack of art practises typical for the West (such as easel painting or

21 Among them for example Dutch artist Heidi Vogles, French artist Jérôme Giller or Belgium artist Hanne Van Dyck.



Maarouf. The dinner is served under the Khayma stitched collectively with the women of the oasis Tighmert.
© Hanne Van Dyck.

specific kind of sculpturing) among non-Western societies became an ultimate measure of 'human score' and always indicated the level of achieved civilisation degree among the 'natives'. During my research in Marrakesh I have been encountering, on various levels, a number of local and foreign artists working with artisans, these intersections were stretching from individual interests to grandiose implemented projects, founded companies, and organised events. Most of them adopted constructed representations framed by the discourse of French colonial scholarship and thus incorporated one general understanding of what culture and artistic production in Morocco stands for.

Ongoing evaluations of material objects of the cultural 'Other' based on distinction are today projections of individual pre-assumed understanding saturated by, as Phillips and Steiner puts it: *'Inscribed Western models of commodity production which has been one of the most important aspects of global extension of Western colonial power'* (Phillips, Steiner 1999: 4). The collaborations are enhanced by innovations in design and practice of marketing objects serving primarily to the economical needs which subsequently intensified the process of cultural appropriation. Artists and designers have the power of giving and taking cultural significance to local production. In the following lines, I look deeper into this particular practice. My concern here is the relationship between the artist (both local and foreign) and the so called native (for example craftsmen or craftswoman) *in situ*, more concretely the way power is exercised on the visible level and which representation is being constructed within these collaborations – how are the collaborations pronounced and how are the artisans credited. Acts of appropriating or copying stretches throughout the whole

history of art (Schneider, Wright 2006: 40), yet in the aftermath of the colonial expansion and the rise of critical voices calling for cultural decolonisation²², questions on *representation* and *ownership* became more urgent. The Western obsession with dislocating objects and displaying them in museums, seems at first, as a practice belonging to the past, nevertheless in the second decade of the 21st century the representation of the primarily material culture of non-Western societies is still remaining highly discussed topic. Targets of the critics are both – ethnographical museums as much as the way Western curatorial experts are displaying the so-called contemporary art from the Middle East and North Africa or solely Africa – executed under the fixed stereotypes enhancing the Orientalist gaze. Similar is, in fact, happening within these artist-artisan collaborations.

Moroccan traditional craft industries were 'reformed' by French administrators, and as Irbouh points out, it had considerably bettered the material conditions of artisans through an improved organisation, entrepreneurship and patronage (Irbouh 2005: 227). However, such evaluations on 'the improvement of labour conditions' can be two-edged. Comparable claims we hear today about the Moroccan artisans working for foreigners: *'At least the working conditions have improved.'* To put it otherwise, because the foreign designer or artist isn't directly exploiting the artisans he or she is in the legitimate position of cultural appropriation. French colonial policies categorised craft exclusively according to their own schemes: some production of *nejjarine* (carpenters), *fekharrine* (potters) and *haddadine* (metal workers) were considered as repetitive and degenerative, some were approved to be more valuable (Irbouh 2005: 55–56). Texts written on Moroccan handicraft usually follow the French colonial models of classifications, thus descriptive analysis are made according to the geographical locations, gender, racial and ethnic origins of manufacturing (see Prosper Ricard 1924; Jacques Berque 1939; Henry Terrasse 1924; George Hardy 1927; Roger Le Tourneau 1965; J. Hainaut 1925). Moroccan craft once labelled as 'decorative' by a vast number of French scholars supporting mutually their authoritative claims, the local artistic production remained fixed under these categorisations. Colonial 'experts' sustained classification of the craft by housing the 'right' prototypes in museums claiming that traditional designs have to be protected and revived. The *distinction* made throughout the colonisa-

tion period in Morocco irreversibly 'widened the gap between the traditional and the modern' (Irbouh 2005: 227). Moroccan craft was considered as 'lower indigenous art' and had been patronised by the French through the educational system of vocational schools all over the country and by a vast amount of scholar texts produced. Such attitudes resulted in a 'beautiful' but second-rate tradition attracting the attention of a cluster of Western designers and artists who are seeking recognition through the various levels of appropriating. In most of the cases, while promoting novel products as a result of collaborations, the craftsmen or craftswoman remain anonymous. The collaboration with producers of traditional handicrafts located in the guilds of Medinas disseminated around the whole country, as much as with the craftsmen and craftswoman in the rural areas of Morocco, is an increasingly sought-after practice and presents nowadays one of the possible practices in which Moroccan artists are reclaiming back the lacking cultural sovereignty. Such collaborations are, as well, highly popular among a vast number of 'travelling foreign artists' and designers describing their interest by an attempt to learn various techniques far forgotten, however, saturated by a dominant discourse of Morocco as an exotic land yet to 'discovered.' Furthermore, they justify their interventions by the need to emancipate the local communities often 'in stagnation' of creativity. Unfortunately, these practices lead to wittingly or unwittingly to cultural appropriations and various ethical transgressions. Curator and activist Lucy R. Lippard is one of the few scholars discussing the question of ethics of those stepping in the field of the 'Other.' She asks if several dislocated artists producing out of the boundaries of own culture framework isn't more a quest for loot than anything else. According to her, such artworks become a raw material absorbed in the artist's careers and in most of the cases it doesn't present anything form the original source. Further, she asks: under which terms can these objects be possibly a product of an empirical reflection of anyone's lived experience? (Lippard 2014: 24) Even though foreign artists might seem to do everything 'right', how can we distinguish between a noble rehabilitation of old visual forms and a coherent branding tool which made vast number of artists celebrated and respected exceptional creators of the Biennials and Art Fairs in and out of the country? In order to explore the intersections between contemporary

22 One of the recent symposiums on cultural decolonisation in contemporary art was held in June 21 and 22, 2017 titled 'De-colonizing Art Institutions' at Kunstmuseum Basel with the speakers Sabih Ahmed (Asia Art Archive), Jeebesh Bagchi (Raqs Media Collective), Binna Choi (Casco), Eyal Danon (Holon Digital Art Archive), Kadiatou Diallo (SPARCK), Same Sizakele Mdluli (Lecturer, Wits University), Rohit Jain (ISEK, Uni Zürich), Shwetal A. Patel (Kochi-Muziris Biennale), Dorothee Richter (Postgraduate Programme in Curating, ZHdK).

art practices and what is to be called as Moroccan craft I have during my research focused primarily on the social interactions and power relations between the artists, artisans and local communities with whom the art world engages. My interest lies in how artists chose their audiences, and what are the social effects, if any, on the local communities they intended to collaborate with.

BETWEEN LOVE AND HATE: CONTEMPORARY ART PRACTICES AND ANTHROPOLOGY

Anthropologists of art Arnd Schneider and Christopher Wright are in recent years opening a new discourse that would validate interdisciplinary approaches and overlaps between the disciplines of art and anthropology. I. e., how the art world can adopt ethnographical methods in a 'right way' and how anthropologists can in the aftermath of Writing culture critique (see Marcus 2014) open up to the new challenging methodologies of artistic experimentations. Even though intuitive and unorthodox practices are increasing, some critics such as Hal Foster (see Foster 1995) and Lucy R. Lippard highlights the alarming absence of ethics in these research practices which are, according to them, often seldom and self-fulfilling (see Lippard 2014). As I have stretched in previous lines the relationship between art and anthropology has been continuously problematic. Through traditional perspectives of anti-aestheticism, art and its overlaps towards research-based practices couldn't present for several decades, primarily for the academia, a constitutive knowledge that would contribute to an anthropological scientific know-how (Schneider, Wright 2014: 2). On the other hand, as anthropologists Grimshaw and Ravetz points out, the growing interest and whirl in activities cannot be left without a dialogue among anthropologists and the cultural actors (see Grimshaw, Ravetz 2015). Contemporary art forms and engagements of artists with the social worlds present for most of the anthropologists methodologically random actions, rather than a serious research output, therefore 'artists in the field' are often evaluated in a dismissive manner (Schneider, Wright 2014: 1–5). As so much this claim is relevant towards the subsequent postproduction and fabrication of 'the collected hard data' translated into an artistic output often under a certain tendentious curatorial discourses.

Despite a growing number of 'aware' art practitioners and cultural actors, we are still facing unethical approaches to the field (Inagaki 2015: 75). This squabble between the artists and the anthropologists is best described as a love affair marked by sharing common visions followed by a sudden farewell (see George E. Marcus; Amanda Ravetz; Christopher Wright; Arnd Schneider; Hal Foster; Lucy R. Lippard; Tatsuo Inagaki; Anna Grimshaw and Elspeth Owen). Speaking in general, the increasing number of contemporary artworks are fieldwork based, thus directly interacting with various social groups embedded in diverse contexts both 'home' and abroad (Marcus 2014: 7–8). Contemporary independent art spaces in Morocco are mostly research orientated as most of them are naturally, through art, reacting to the current phenomenas which are in a need of an examination such as: *'endemic poverty, disaffected youth, variable economy, political paralysis, runaway population increase, residual corruption etc'* (Miller 2013: 234). The shared idea is that the marginalised and vulnerable groups can be potentially approached through artistic experimentations.

In past years, independent spaces concerned by the socio-economical situation of the country are effectively building up or restoring archives and readdressing forgotten memories there, where official state structures are remaining uninterested²³. In the contemporary art world are experimentations and intuitive field practices perhaps nothing novel, but in the academical background, it is the anthropologist who finds artist's playful outputs to some extent disturbing. Even though anthropologists do not possess a monopoly on the fieldwork conduct, as Marcus's critique on Hal Foster's essay 'Artist as an Ethnographer' stands (Marcus 2014: 83–84), yet artist is perceived as someone who is daringly appropriating and making use of what is frequently considered as anthropological qualitative research tools (for further reading see Grimshaw and Ravetz, *The ethnographic turn — and after: a critical approach towards the realignment of art and anthropology*, 2015). Artists are recording, executing semi-structured interviews, observing and anthropologists (most of them) are disapprovingly watching over their actions. Beside existing prevailing sceptical discourse, the interest of anthropology towards art and its contemporary forms is increasing. Anthropology

had to eventually acknowledge that artists are sometimes working in the same territory (culture) and using similar tools (ethnography) (Grimshaw, Ravetz 2015: 424). As a direct result of the research-based artistic outputs different novel terms came into play: artists became *practitioners of making* (Ingold 2013) or *conceptual ethnographers* (Ssorin-Chaikov 2013).

James Clifford in his much-cited 'The predicament of Culture' defines ethnography which stands as it follows: *'a hybrid activity, variously appearing as writing, as collecting, as a modernist collage, as imperial power, as a subversive critique'* (Clifford 1988: 13). He refuses to distinguish between disciplinary science and avant-garde experimentation and calls for ethnography as a universal mode of inquiry (Clifford 1988: 12). Both him and Tim Ingold are stating that anthropology doesn't have an exclusive and privilege position for claiming interpretations and representations. Ingold understands art as a *verb* rather than a noun and contemporary artistic experimentations present for him an analogous way of engaging with the world and life itself (Ingold 2013: 7–8). The *power* aspect is perhaps the stumbling stone of most misunderstandings and failed dialogues.

The best known critical voice towards the research-based artistic practices is above mentioned Hal Foster – artists are, according to him, in a *sough* of the cultural and ethnic other. In his famous essay 'Artist as an Ethnographer' he notes: *few principles of the ethnographic participant-observer are observed, let alone critiqued, and only limited engagement of the community is effected. Almost naturally the project strays from collaboration to self-fashioning, from a decentering of the artist as cultural authority to a remaking of the other in the neo-primitivist guise* (Foster 1996: 196–197). Foster is claiming that the people with whom artists are engaging are objectified in the services of aesthetic contemplation, artists rarely step beyond their own artistic visions, rather, they scarfing human beings for their own purposes. Both disciplines are characterised by engaging in the site-specific setting on a relevant subject where afterwards visual and textual interpretations and representations are established. Both disciplines have the *power* to represent, but whereas anthropological discipline has undertaken self-reflexivity and attempt to dismantle once for all paternalistic categorisations as 'primitivism', for art ethical implications are

²³ As an example to be mentioned here is the case of Ahmed Bouanani (1938–2011) – a significant Moroccan writer and filmmaker who had been silenced in the 1970s and 1980s as he had belonged to the circle around the censored journal *Souffles*. Bouanani presented one of the rare voices calling for cultural decolonisation, which he himself executed by a numerous trips around the country. Bouanani documented dance costumes, rituals, crafts, folk tales and oral poetry aiming to purge Moroccan culture from still existing colonisation constraints and help to set off the modernisation process not without, but within the Moroccan roots, traditions and heritage of the local context (Interview with Omar Berrada and Soukaina Aboulaoula (2019) *Something we Africans got* 7, 170–171). It was through artistic and curatorial practices that Bouanani's legacy has been resurrected: curator Omar Berrada in the library Dar al-Mamun in Marrakesh invited Bouanani's close friends, family members, scholars and artists to talk about his work and help to restore his legacy. Process of uncovering Bouanani's legacy reached its peak during the last edition of Marrakesh Biennial in 2016 where Bouanani's major concerns were brought to light: the relationship between art and craft, writing and oral tradition, memory and the future, people and their narratives (Interview with Omar Berrada and Soukaina Aboulaoula (2019) *Something we Africans got* 7, 170–171). Artists Yto Berrada, Mohssin Harraki and Sara Ouahdoud were invited to engage with Bouanani's personal archive and articulate some of these questions in the current context through their own outputs. These happenings featured intersection between artistic practice and the role of a researcher and were, according to some curators, successful.



Chicken seffa prepared by the women for the gathering maarouf.
© Hanne Van Dyck.

seldom the core of any concern. Foster notes that the artist's commitment to reflexive and participatory research is often only rhetorical, in fact, a mask to reassure own artistic authority (Foster 1996: 197). Interdisciplinary border crossings are, despite all the concern, happening, and are enriching the mutual dialogue which is in globalised intermingled social reality almost a necessity. The main concerns of anthropology are more comprehensive – stretching from denouncing artificial construction of representations and its politics to criticising commissioned art pieces for Biennale circuits which are often leading to reduction of productive differences and increasing internalisation and homogenisation of cultural production in general. The art worlds had been way too long in a position of a strong unquestionable authority rarely approaching communities of the ex-colonised populations with accountability, and as Olu Oguibe and Okwui Enwezor puts it: *'habitual neo-colonial rhetorics towards non-Western artists are ongoing reality'* (Oguibe, Enwezor 1999: 17–19). A concrete example of above mentioned artistic engagement *in situ* is being discussed in following lines through a description of a collaboration with Belgian visual artist Hanne Van Dyck with whom I had a chance to collaborate and thus obtain a greater understanding of the so called position of the 'artist as an ethnographer.'

THE KHAYMA PROJECT

I have met Belgian visual artist Hanne Van Dyck in 2018 in Marrakesh during my doctoral field research. Eventually we became housemates and close friends which allowed me to follow more closely her artistic approach as I knew she often questioned, unlike to others, her presence as a foreigner in the country with a colonial past. In contrast with other foreign artists and curators she often spoke about her concerns openly and beyond constraints of

aestheticism typical for the Eurocentric art world. In spring 2019 we have decided to apply, based upon our numerous discussions, for an artist residency titled Caravane Tighmert,²⁴ – a cultural festival annually held in the Southern region of Morocco and organised by architect from Ceuta Carlos Perez Marin in a collaboration with Ahmed Dabah and others from the local community of the oasis Tighmert. Our proposal was designed as a dialog between myself in a position of an ethnographer on one side, and Van Dyck as an artist adopting ethnographical research methods on the other. Suggesting this might open up an interesting debate on the possibilities and limitations of ethnographical methods in the terrain used by artist. There has been, indeed, on this topic written a lot (see Schneider, Wright 2014), yet quite less practised. We have met Marin, for the first time, as well as other Caravane participants, in the independent cultural centre *LE18* in the heart of Marrakesh's Medina. As we had witnessed presentations of the previous applicants on their experiences in the oasis, our critical remarks simply piled up, but there wasn't a much space left for deeper discussions. We had a lot of questions concerning predominantly themes as follows: various aspects of cultural appropriation, translation of an art piece fabricated in the field into the language of the art world, manifestations of power, self-positioning and self-reflexivity etc. Thus, we have decided to undertake this very experience in the Southern region of the country hoping to get some answers. Our residency took place in an oasis titled Tighmert located 17 kilometres from the main region' centre Guelmim. The initiative is described as noble in its intention, according to Marin's words: *helping 'human and culture development of the oasis' and where artists can 'find a proper atmosphere for their creations, far from the area of influence of Moroccan cultural nerve centres (Rabat, Casablanca and Marrakesh)'*.²⁵

The last day of March we left for one whole week with another nine participants (among them anthropologists, dancers, visual and conceptual artists, film makers and photographers both foreign and Moroccan) to the small oasis where local families immediately embraced us with their hospitality. Marin with other helpers namely Abderrahman Sayad and Gazan Kaabich, guided us through the confusing alleys of the oasis where the local inhabitants orient themselves by remembering the ingenious *qanat* system by heart (lit. channels, traditional system of irrigation used in the entire oasis as much as in the whole North African region).

It was more or less up to us how we want to spend the week at the spot. Some artists, predominantly dancers, decided to lead workshops for children of the oasis, in the previous years some other artists such as Ramia Beladel initiated a collaboration with the local women. This was the case for Hanne Van Dyck as well, she became immediately interested in local female community and wanted to meet the women of the oasis which weren't, in the public space, visible at all. How to enter the private space dominated by the local women became a challenge and Van Dyck little by little developed an idea how an art work can serve to this purpose. To her the artistic concept became an instrument, far beyond self-centred understanding of an art-piece as a material object solely fabricated by genius art producer. *'I think we did a good job'* she honestly reflects on our work a year after in my Marrakesh living room where we decided to re-open discussion on our output. *'And you know why?'* She asked between the sips of green tea, *'because we did not care for art at all!'* 'Yes,' I nodded and replied *'art work became just a tool to us'...* Hanne added to my words: *'... a tool which helped us, still in a very superficial way, to understand within one week the life in the oasis through a female perspective.'* A conversation that we carried out a year after helped us to deconstruct what have had happened and perhaps what we had disagreed upon. In the beginning of the *Khayma* project I was in a position of a 'watching dog', trained in the ethics of research I despised almost ever 'traveling white' artist who was engaging with local communities. In horror I often asked: *'but what does it mean for the locals?'* I thought I would be, in a similar manner, disapprovingly watching over Van Dyck's actions, yet her approach surprised me, she was carrying out serious field work despite it was based mainly on her intuition and experimentation. It led me to a conclusion she would be perhaps indistinguishable from any other ethnographer.

Critical self-positing was central to us, we knew we are part of a broader power structure which helped us to access the communities in a way too smooth manner. Our goal wasn't to finish the project, therefore we were ambition free, hoping that we would at least be able to explain to the women what are we demanding. First of all we did not master the local dialect – the so called *hassania*, and my poor *darija* at that time was just enough for courtesy phrases. Accordingly we asked our novel companion Abderrahman to help us record a short voice message which would effectively explain our intention – entering into the households. Project *Khayma* came to being when we both

24 For more information about Caravane Tighmert visit an official website: <https://caravanetighmert.weebly.com/>

25 About Caravane Tighmert. Retrieved 29.6.2020 from <https://www.carlosperezmarin.com/caravane-tighmert-tighmert>

admired local colourful female clothing – *mlhaf*, a several meters long thin batik fabrics imported from Mauritania. It is typical for the Southern region that women of each household create a patchworks from old garments that are no longer in use. As Van Dyck observed: ‘They are usually made in a form of tents or shelters to protect from the sun, often installed in the backyard or shading the interior of the houses. During a wedding for example, two families join to create a *khayma*, a tent, in the courtyard, which is then used during the ceremony.’ Therefore we understood that for us, it can be as well, used as a perfect instrument to connect to the women of the oasis. We set off the project by knocking on doors and asking (using a recording) for a piece of old *mlhaf* that we would stitch together with the concrete woman. As we always connected the new piece to the one we had been already carrying with us, we get to meet a novel house female members, sometimes even the whole families, each time. Ahmed Dabah, one of the local organisers and a good friend of Carlos, drew a map for us, so we can better understand the terrain of the village and kinship structures. After a week of collecting and collectively stitching the large patchwork fabric, we organised a gathering which the local women called *maarouf* – a meeting where women come together to eat and celebrate various rites of passage such as engagement, marriage, circumcision but even divorce or last goodbye. In Tighmert women had a community building serving solely for these purposes, but it was also very common to organise such meeting at one of the houses. Soukaina Dabah and Rachida Dbbah were the two women who helped us to organise this very gathering and spread the news among other women of the oasis. Young woman Soukaina became what is to be defined as a *gate keeper* and connected us with other women, thus with her we were almost everywhere welcomed. Once we had the fabric big enough, in the end of the week we decided that we want to do something with it, however we were missing a specific frame. It was the women’s initiative to propose a *maarouf*. With an annual interval we might honestly state that we haven’t imposed on the participants any novel roles, we have had always presented our intention openly and respected all of their suggestions and constraints. We were, in fact, the ones who observed a tradition typical for this region and carefully adopted it. In order to avoid cultural appropriation we have left what we have stitched together entirely for the oasis’ usage.

The idea of installing a *khayma* in a gallery wasn’t an option to us, despite the fact that many known artist are doing so, namely Mohammed Arejdal or Souad El Maysour. Our work was radically contextualised since

the beginning and anything other would feel uncomfortable to us. We as well, never intended to ‘emancipate’ any of these women, which wasn’t the case among already mentioned artist Ramia Beladel. Her artistic output was clearly about teaching women an invention in design so they can, according to the artist, break free from the so called repetitive decor in weaving and embroidery, the one they typically use during their creative process in the oasis. To Beladel the existing native production was in stagnation, something that French colonial scholar Henri Terrasse named an ‘emptiness in variation’ (Irbouh 2005: 31). Whereas with her their minds were set free once they adopted new motives she presented to them. To us this was the major ethical transgression that was often happening and that we have had witnessed endlessly in Marrakesh contemporary art scene. The very gathering turned out into something very intimate where up to 25 women of various age came and ate with us, we managed to have a very personal conversations with women of our age on marriage, divorce, adultery and other topics which wouldn’t be uttered without a previous week of stitching side by side. Perhaps the Ingold’s definition of contemporary art (art as a *verb*) seems to be, in our case, as accurate summary. Our approach was based on communication in flux and simple daily negotiations. We obeyed their orders, often formulated without compromises, such as what is to be cooked for the gathering – we suggested cous-cous, they disagreed and decided it will be chicken *seffa* instead, and this was the case with most of our suggestions. Soukaina, her mother and sister carefully described what we need to purchase for the dish, which turned out to be a bit of a disaster once we brought back way smaller amount of meat than they have asked for (the purchase was left on me as vegan Van Dyck, naturally, wouldn’t participate in an incident where chicken slaughter is present). The situation was eventually saved by the oasis’ stock of frozen meat. The women have had decided where the *khayma* will be installed – in the back yard of Soukaina’s house which was approved by the feminine assembly to be the perfect spot for this kind of occasion, as no man can access anyhow our session. Also in the pictures that Van Dyck took, the women are absent, as they don’t like to be photographed but they let us voice record the dancing and music at the end of the evening. For us the art work here served as a medium, a symbol of a mutual exchange and, to us, a successful engagement with the community. Nothing more and nothing less. To be able to answer Lippard’s critical question: *but are you wanted here?* (Lippard 2014) We can profoundly state that we were.

Numerous scholars of the past, as so much as the contemporary artists deeply appreciate

the material culture of Morocco and the so-called ‘golden age’. They thus advocate the idea of a foreign cultural actor bringing back the glory of the ancient times, yet simultaneously never forgetting to emphasize that the decay is solely due to Moroccan *inability*, often based on essentialist ideas, of respecting their own heritage. The reasoning of the *incapacity* is, among ethnicity, the religion, further a grammatically poor character of Moroccan dialect *darija* and above all something defined as a sort of ‘Oriental attitude’ usually associated with laziness, narrowness, lacking interest etc. All above-mentioned factors according to the artists and designers didn’t allow the civilisation development and progress of Moroccan culture. Many of colonial administrators who were in charge, namely artist Tranchant de Lunel have described the monuments as ‘turning into ruins, neglected for more than six centuries’ (Jelidi, 2007: 300). Such claims again enhance the discourse of Moroccans purposely disregarding their own heritage while it justifies the presence and interventions of the French as patrons, educators and facilitators – an existing discourse which allows contemporary Western or Westernised artists and designers, researches and implemented cultural institutions to, in a similar manner, restore material culture under own terms for the natives who dwell in ignorance. The narratives of the Travellers serves here as a building blocks of contemporary discourse which continuously saturates the understanding of the country and its martial culture as an exotic land of ‘otherness,’ while it simultaneously lures the contemporary foreign cultural practitioners and subsequently justify their agency.

The act of *distinction* as presented by the colonial force that once for all, by modes of representations, divided the Moroccan material culture production into two unequal splits, two distant worlds of the ‘archaic indigenous production’ and ‘the modern world of contemporary art’. Both local and foreign artists are, for various reasons, successfully intersecting these two worlds, perhaps with an intention to bring them closer, to fix the fracture and to set a mutual dialogue. Nevertheless, they are, in fact, operating within an ongoing discourse of culture dominance where one group is always more: *openminded, progressive, sophisticated, playful* and *creative*, whereas the other half of the producers remain trapped in the timeless Medina guilds once sealed by colonial administrator and army general Hubert Lyautey, or in the remote rural lands yet ‘untouched by civilisation’ (such as oasis Tighmert). I argue, that it is, again, the outsider who is presenting ‘the correct’ way how to *restore, display, describe, classify, store* and *evaluate* the artistic expressions as it was during the official colonial era in Morocco. The archetype of ‘an outsider emancipating the misled natives’

is in Morocco present since the European expansionism and continues to be executed through a vast number of diverse art interventions. There are those for whom the accountability is on first place, and for whom the local creativity is not just a folklore or craft. Hence, the power of Western institutional structure and the flow of the foreign capital seems to be a barrier too thick to dismantle. Marrakesh

is already marked on the map of interest by the globalised art world. Such situation is a direct result, I argue, of cultural decolonisation that never happened and an ongoing discourse of carefully restored Orientalism which recognised, in the field of Moroccan visual art production, an effective instrument through which it can smoothly operate in order to produce particular human subjects.

One of the direct and visible consequences in Morocco is commodification of culture which, by the words of Comaroff and Comaroff: *'may also entrench old lines of inequality, conduce to new forms of exclusion, increase incentives for the concentration of power, and create as much poverty as wealth.'* (Comaroff, Comaroff 2009: 52).

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