



## **Narratives of Simplicity and Danger: Morocco as an Exotic Playground in Contemporary Travelogues**



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### **Abstract**

This essay examines how Tahir Shah's stories and impression of the Oriental environment he surrounds himself with help to romanticize Morocco. It centers on his depiction of the shantytown, the infamous Dar Calipha, and the attraction of Moroccan superstition that permeated his travelogues, namely *The Caliph's House* and *In Arabian Nights*. Shah compares Morocco's dangerous environment with the comfort and security in the Western world. By highlighting and romanticizing Morocco's lack of development, Shah pursues danger, mystery, and simplicity. These offer an antidote to the perceived stagnation and artificiality of Western modernity. This paper analyzes the ubiquitous Western tendency to disconnect from modernity to find authenticity. Shah's works reflect a common Western fascination with Morocco because it offers a retreat or a haven from the complexities of modern life and an opportunity to confront danger and unpredictability which is often perceived, by many travel writers that will be mentioned in this paper (including Alice Morrison, Jeffrey Tayler, and Paul Bowles), as thrilling and exciting. Because Morocco gives Westerners a thrill in their lives, one of a type they cannot find back home, it is commonly portrayed in travel writing as a land of timeless simplicity, supernatural wonder, and existential discovery.

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## 1 Introduction

Morocco often appears in modern travel writing as a nation of exoticism and danger—a destination for Westerners to experience a delightful contrast to the comforts of Western life. The British travel writer Tahir Shah has done much to establish and promote this image of Morocco. In his two best-selling books, *The Caliph's House* (2006) and *In Arabian Nights* (2008), he describes his life in an exploration of this supposed wonderland of magic and superstition. This notion of Morocco as a land of “authenticity” also appears in the works of Paul Bowles and Alice Morrison, both of whom wrote while living in Morocco for extended periods. Shah frequently makes comparisons between the difficult living conditions in Morocco and the luxuries found in the Western world. Travel writers tend to criticize the comforts of modern life, seeing them as suffocating and shallow. This research examines how these tales glorify and exoticize Morocco, creating an Orientalist impression of a country that is eternally mysterious and static. Travelogues’ depiction of the simplicity and danger of modern Morocco feeds into Western fantasies of escaping the so-called “trap” of modern comfort for something more “real.” But these portrayals also reduce Morocco to a mere postcolonial playground ideal for Western exploration while ignoring the real, complex, and modern semiotics that exist in the country. This paper critiques the forms and the content of these colonialist narratives (Elsrud, 2001; McWha et al., 2018; Akgün et al., 2015). It examines how Shah’s romanticized depictions, especially when compared to those of other travel writers, influence Western perceptions of Morocco. It also aims to understand how these narratives reinforce a binary between the modern West and the exotic, undeveloped Morocco.

## 2 Materials and Methods

### *Romanticizing the Shantytown: Tahir Shah’s Embrace of Casablanca’s Precariousness*

Tahir Shah exclusively visited the locations in Casablanca that aligned with the Oriental aesthetic he had become acquainted with, therefore avoiding the modern metropolis that represented the French side of Casablanca. Bowles had this to say about the modernity spreading in Casablanca: “It’s of no interest to describe a bus line, an apartment house, or a modern city. I would not mention Casablanca because that’s not Morocco; it’s a false Morocco, it’s French, so that does not mean anything to me” (Elghandor, 1994). Likewise, Shah avoided the modern, Europeanized Casablanca. Instead, he sought the city he fantasized about in the popular movie *Casablanca*, as illustrated in this passage: “In any case, I thought I knew all about it because I had seen *Casablanca* with Bogart and Bergman” (Shah, 2007). In fact, his sheer fascination with the city led him to write his book *Casablanca Blues* (2013) in which he refers to Morocco at the beginning of the book as a “realm touched by magic, whose landscape and whose people never cease to amaze” (Shah, 2013). Shah even took the drastic decision to live in a mansion in the middle of a shantytown in Casablanca, creating the perfect recipe for ceaseless events and danger, despite the conditions he had to endure:

“Since moving to Casablanca, I had secretly hoped that the shantytown that surrounded the oasis of Dar Khalifa would be bulldozed, and that upmarket villas would replace them. If there were villas, then there would be a new road, a supermarket, cafés, and shops. And if the shantytown vanished, so would the stagnant pools of water, the mosquitoes, the plagues of biting flies, the braying donkeys, the raw sewage, and the mountains of festering trash” (Shah, 2007).

It is rather logical for Shah to choose Casablanca as a place to call home. His utter awe at the mystery and experience of living in a city that gives him more questions than answers is what precisely attracts him. Shah stated on YouTube that Casablanca is “a wild concoction of strange. Everything about it is strange. It’s a place of magic. It’s the most wonderful and unexpected place to live” (*On Casablanca*, 2024). Shah hopes the shantytown will be transformed and advocates for it to be demolished and replaced with opulent villas, portraying it as an unwanted eyesore on the landscape that should be removed to make way for more affluent construction. In the aforementioned quote, the shantytown is perceived as a source of filth, sickness, and general unpleasantness that would be eliminated with its removal. However, he wants villas to be built since that will open the way for numerous ‘improvements’ to the area. However, the real question arises: why did Shah decide to live in the shantytown in the first place? Why did he dismiss the modern metropolis of Casablanca, as he called it, if its removal would allow the introduction of modern

conveniences and services generally associated with wealthier and/or Western neighborhoods? In actuality, Shah enjoys the risk and excitement of being in the midst of Oriental chaos. The thrill that comes from living in such an environment replenishes his Oriental reservoir, which is supposedly what most travel writers seek. The following quotes from *The Caliph's House* do a better job of answering these questions:

“The backstreet café in Casablanca was for me a place of mystery, a place with a soul, a place with danger. There was a sense that the safety nets had been cut away, that each citizen walked upon the high wire of this, the real world. I longed not merely to travel through it, but to live in such a city” (Shah, 2007).

“I wanted to escape to a house of serious dimensions, a fantasy inspired by the pages of *The Arabian Nights*” (ibid., p. 2).

“Part of it was being in Africa. The sky was vast, the landscape severe and unrelenting. There was a sense that anything was possible, that I was no longer held back by the telescoped outlook of Europe. The danger was a motivator, too. One of the reasons to break free from Britain had been to shed the cozy sense of security, the safety net that trapped us and held us back. In Morocco, the lack of safety was an energizing force, but at the same time it was a constant concern” (ibid., p. 297).

Shah displays fascination and allure with the rawness and uncertainty of Morocco. Everything about the Orient to him is imbued with mystery, vitality, and a certain perilous quality, and it is this sentiment of feeling vulnerable and exposed that liberated him from the constraints of a more controlled environment. His desire to truly “live in such a city”, rather than just pass through, indicates a longing to immerse himself in this unfamiliar, risky world—to experience the thrill and challenge of navigating the “high wire” of reality without the safety nets he grew to have. Shah expresses his imaginative desire to travel to a more exotic, fantastical world in the second passage above, which draws inspiration from the enthralling tales of *The Arabian Nights*. The yearning to find the exotic, experience, and investigate it continues to persist in contemporary travel writing. Shah chose to live in this mansion for it opened up a world of boundless possibilities evoked by the rich imagery and stories of the Middle Eastern literary tradition (Santos, 2006; Herrick, 2022; Zellmer et al., 2006; Smith, 2005; Moezzi et al., 2017; Laing & Frost, 2017). This unequivocally demonstrates that Shah had preconceived conceptions about the Orient that he attempted to confront. In Morocco, the lack of safety is described as an energizing force, indicating that the precariousness of his environment fuels a sense of excitement, adventure, and personal growth. However, Shah also recognizes the underlying “constant concern” that this lack of safety engenders, hinting at the complex balance between the allure of the unknown and the need for a certain degree of stability and security. These passages collectively convey Shah’s intense fascination with the rawness, mystery, and danger of Casablanca and Morocco, as well as his willingness to escape the perceived limitations of his previous life in Britain and immerse himself in a world of boundless possibilities, even at the cost of a certain degree of comfort and security. He recognizes the inconveniences of living in a shantytown as he regularly complains about the noise, the filth that surrounds his house, the barking of stray dogs, the people’s firm beliefs in jinns, and his workers’ constant begging for favors, money, and uncanny requests:

“Like everyone else who has ever moved to Morocco, we were destined to brush with the supernatural, whether it be through the shantytown, the workforce, or through our new friends” (Shah, 2009).

Through his preconceptions from his literary and film representations, Shah decided to live in a shantytown intentionally, notwithstanding its many drawbacks, to experience the “real” Morocco. All his works highlight the difficult balance between the thrill of the unknown and the pragmatic difficulties of such an existence. Shah’s story ultimately shows a deep-seated attraction for the Orient motivated by a need to get away from the alleged restrictions of Western life and submerge in a world of unbounded possibilities and raw authenticity, even at the price of comfort and security.

### 3 Results and Discussions

#### *Living with Jinns: Tahir Shah's Immersion in Moroccan Superstition*

Tahir Shah decided to live in a house filled with Jinns. As a result, he authored two novels, *A Year in Casablanca: The Caliph's House* and *In Arabian Nights*, where he documented his encounters with the people who lived in the house who fervently believed in Jinns and the supernatural. Shah embraced these supernatural ‘occurrences’ because

they were crucial for generating his stories. He made it clear in *The Caliph's House* that the existence of danger through traveling is thrilling and precisely what motivates travel writers today:

“These were fueled all the more when I ranted on about the need for uncertainty and for danger” (Shah, 2007).

Shah harbored no superstitious beliefs until Morocco became his new home. Upon his arrival at the Caliph's house, Shah's life took an unforeseen twist. The Moroccan workers employed by Shah, Osman, Hamza, and Mohammed, exhibited highly superstitious tendencies, with their beliefs on such matters serving as a major thematic element in the book. Occasionally, Shah complained about the danger and uncertainty around his new home. However, he knew though never admits that these components were essential to plunge into the ultimate Oriental experience from a Western perspective. Upon examining his narrative, Shah largely focused on Jinns and several rampant beliefs, including Aicha Qandicha, from start to finish. The story even concludes with the expulsion of Jinns, which suggests that the narrative hinges on this superstition. Shah must actively pursue this particular setting, as without it, he would not have an entertaining and exhilarating tale to share. The author yearns for this fantasy that does not exist in his home country. Like Paul Bowles and other travel writers, he desires distinct, strange, unparalleled, and incomprehensible. Shah capitalizes on the features that captivate Western readers, therefore perpetuating the pattern of portraying Morocco as an enigmatic location teeming with superstition and the paranormal, which contain facts and fiction. Although Morocco encompasses all of those elements, they constitute only a fraction of its entirety. However, Westerners who only read about Morocco lack awareness of these facts. By reading this narrative, readers will quickly conclude that superstition is the trademark of Morocco. The author incorporated the superstitions and Moroccans' preoccupations with “baraka” and “Jinns” in the novel to create an authentic Oriental experience for his readers.

“When we moved to Morocco, I was not overly superstitious, but as time went on, I found myself wondering if someone had put some kind of curse on us. It was the easiest way of explaining the run of bad luck. You can't live in North Africa without being affected by the ingrained belief in superstition. It's everywhere. The more you think about it, the more it seeps into your bones. I was used to hard luck, but there was usually a gap between the waves of misfortune. In Casablanca, bad luck came in three dimensions” (ibid., p. 92).

We can deduce that this book would not exist had Shah visited an ordinary apartment in the modern side of Casablanca where nothing ‘exciting’, ‘supernatural’, or ‘eventful’ occurred. Essentially, the writer's captivation with the supernatural, despite the seeming irritation that he consistently conveyed in the narrative, was an inevitable outcome that contributed complexity, intrigue, and vitality to the story as a whole.

“Shah is looking for his house in Casablanca, and in so doing he is inviting the reader to do the same and look for difference on their own. This is clearly indicated when Shah mentions that, ‘Some people find their story right away’ whereas others ‘search their entire lives and never find it’” (Sbiri, 2020).

That is exactly what Debbie Lisle alludes to in her book *The Global Politics of Contemporary Travel Writing*:

‘A journey in France would not result in a “travel narrative”. It is not so much that such narratives do not exist, but they clearly lack the feeling of alterity in relation to the people (and the lands) described.’ (Lisle, 2006).

This justifies the reasons behind the visits and permanent residencies of people such as Paul Bowles, Alice Morrison, and Tahir Shah in Morocco. Tahir Shah's prominent subject in *The Caliph's House*, which he consistently complains about during his stay in Casablanca, is the rampant Moroccans' belief in Jinns and other superstitions. Shah, as he frequently stated, welcomes and enjoys the supernatural and exotic side of Morocco. His entourage's firm beliefs were deeply influential, and thus he found himself unable to be excluded. In the last pages of *The Caliph's House*, Shah makes the following conclusion:

“The learning curve had been severe. I concluded that a life not filled with severe learning curves was no life at all” (Shah, 2009).

Had it not been for the supernatural and the thrill of living in it, Shah would not have come to Morocco in the first place, or he would have limited his stay. However, the case today is that Shah lives in the same house and even has a

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YouTube channel where he shares his books, thoughts, and views about Morocco and the world around him. It is also worth mentioning that Shah gets tired of talk of jinns, as is the case in the following passage:

“I was sick of the talk of Jinns. To hell with cultural sensitivity. We were all violently ill, and as usual, the Jinns were being blamed” (ibid., p. 282).

For context, the word “Jinn” is mentioned 124 times in *The Caliph’s House*, which speaks to the value it carries for the author. He made superstition, specifically that of Jinns and the “baraka” (blessing), the focal point of the entire story, without which his books would never have been written. Ironically, he says he wishes he were back in Britain so he could be “industrially cleansed of superstition” (ibid., p. 283). Nevertheless, Shah chose to stay. His new home is where ‘difference’ is. His new identity is within his encounters with this ‘difference’. Thus, forming a new identity and a new home through watching the exotic ‘other’—including Jinns, Oriental stories, Baraka, and exorcists—and being in this otherworldly environment of the ‘other’ helps the travel writer live a life that is unretrievable back home.

“Shah as a traveler seeks to have a name of his own. His movement to Morocco is meant to negotiate a new space for accommodating a house of identity, and to gradually erode difference” (Sbiri, 2020)

Because of his experiences, Shah is convinced Morocco will never develop with this much superstition holding it back:

“There’s no way Morocco will progress,” I said accusingly, “until people lose the superstitious thought. It’s crippling them” (Shah, 2007).

It is interesting to see the contradiction in Shah’s thinking. On one hand, he complains about superstitions, which he adamantly addresses more than any other topic. It is also important to mention that Shah not only talks about Jinns but also alludes to other related topics, including witches, sehura (sorceresses), exorcism, etc. On the other hand, Shah seems to accept living amid trouble which he absorbs by becoming engrossed in the world of fantasy he has craved his entire life. Shah is forced to live with and accept the servants’ beliefs in the supernatural while simultaneously dismissing these beliefs at times as fallacies. The series of cultural encounters, as well as his Oriental fantasies and cravings he longed to witness firsthand, forced Shah to recognize these “fallacies” as manifestations of the locals’ unique way of life (Sbiri, 2020). Thus, “difference” is a natural aspect of human nature that Shah grows to embrace despite the difficulties he must endure. Shah understands the need to navigate cultural divides where many points of view cross. He welcomes this knowledge and the sharing of differences without forcing his stance to be the ultimate truth.

#### *Disconnecting from Modernity: The Western Quest for Simplicity and Danger in Modern Morocco*

In his two books, Shah regularly makes comparisons between the West and Morocco, wherein he refers to the pros and cons of each and the major differences he experienced. For example, in the following passage, Shah depicts California as a place of luxury and convenience:

“‘In California, our lives are so comfortable,’ he said. ‘The drinking water’s clean, the supermarkets are massive and gasoline is cheap. It’s all easy and in a way it’s perfect. So much so that we get trapped and we forget.’” (Shah, 2009).

Shah advises, however, that this simplicity and “perfection” might be a trap, making people sluggish, which then leads them to dismiss the reality beyond their cozy bubbles. Like Shah, Bowles rejects living in a society of democracy and progress, which helps to explain his extended stay in Morocco. Peter Mayne, on the other hand, believes Westerners have been entangled in a world of “progress and prophylaxis” (Mayne, 2002). Alice Morrison criticizes the modern ways of life in the West, saying, “Modern life is busy and crowded and full of variety, all of which is great but it is also exhausting” (Morrison, 2019). Travel writers express this sentiment because they cannot find what they are looking for in modernity and progress, which both exist in their Western homes. This proves two things: Firstly, Westerners see Morocco as uncivilized and undeveloped, unlike the West, although at times they acknowledge Morocco as a developing country: “To me, it’s incredible that he could be born a slave in modern

Morocco” (Culture Vulture Rises, 2023, 7:52). Secondly, Westerners secretly or unconsciously love the fact that Morocco lags behind the West, or perhaps cannot catch up to the West. Otherwise, travel writers would not see the purpose of traveling far away from their safe, Western homes. It is this distinction from the West that permits travel writers to visualize themselves as explorers and go on a mission to investigate faraway lands. Morocco’s rich history, natural environment (desert, mountains, vast plains, etc.), and vibrant as well as exotic culture fall into the faraway land category, making it an exquisite destination for Western travel writers to experience and, in turn, transform that experience into travelogues for the Western reader. Shah simultaneously loves the lack of security and complains about it:

“We were living in a bubble, a bubble of security. It seems real, but it never is.” (Shah, 2009).

Interacting with a new culture, setting, and population gets travel writers out of the bubble of security. While they may complain about the danger or the lack of safety, having them provides fulfilling experiences. They believe that disconnecting with modernity and reconnecting with the simple, slow-paced, innocent life is the way to understand more about themselves, their identities, and their real purpose in life. According to the travelogues of Mayne, Shah, Bowles, Morrison, and many others, the sense of security and comfortable amenities that Westerners experience in their homes are overrated and inauthentic. It explains why Westerners enjoy connecting with nature, as Alice Morrison demonstrates in the following passage:

“The majority of people live in an urban environment where their access to nature is limited. The desert is the exact opposite of that. You can’t do anything very fast because the environment just won’t let you. There is nothing crowded or distracting about endless seas of sand. There is nothing ahead of you or behind you or around you except sand. There are no nuances in temperature, it is baking hot as soon as the sun is up and that intensity lasts till it goes down. Your sense of companionship is heightened by the feeling of being very small humans in a large world. And perhaps that is the real secret to the abiding allure of the desert: you feel life, you feel the universe. It is there.” (Morrison, 2019).

Paul Bowles, one of the very few writers who lived in Morocco for half a century, had a deep connection to the country, and his fiction served as the ultimate proof, for it portrayed the country through his eyes. In *Glory in Camel’s Eye*, Jeffrey Tayler acknowledges Bowles’s impact on him and how he perceived Morocco.

“Bowles wrote mostly fiction of course, but having spent much of his life in Tangier and the Sahara, he knew Morocco as well as any outsider ever could; to those who have lived in Morocco, his fiction rings true” (Tayler, 2013).

It is important to point out that travel writing, however successful and accurate it is, always has a major role to play in shaping the future of the genre of travel writing. Tayler admits to experiencing “nagging” and “irrational fears” as he rests in Mhamid and prepares for the next leg of his journey. Because Bowles had left a lasting impression on Tayler with his wild stories about Morocco and its Sahara, Tayler was overwhelmed with a sense of apprehension about the unknown aspects of his expedition. He senses the potential dangers, possibly mirroring themes present in Bowles’s fictional narratives. Tayler’s desire to complete his journey unscathed, with his “tongue and other organs still attached,” shows his safety concern. Like Tahir Shah’s and Alice Morrison’s complete disregard for the lack of safety, Tayler accepts to partake in his adventure regardless of the obstacles. *Glory in a Camel’s Eye* chronicles Jeffrey Tayler’s perilous three-month trip across the Moroccan Sahara in the company of Arab nomads. He sets off on this road, knowing exactly the dangerous journey ahead. Despite this, Tayler is steadfast about traveling and dismisses all the dangers. Morrison went through a similar journey where she decided to be in the vicinity of as much nature as possible, including the Moroccan Sahara, as it is considered the ultimate wilderness romanticized and praised by the majority of travel writers. Walter M. Weiss ends his book, *Morocco: in The Labyrinth of Dreams and Bazaars*, with the following line: “Finally we are face to face with the Sahara, just as North Europeans romantically imagine it.” (Weiss, 2016). This suggests that the Moroccan Sahara is the ultimate treasure trove for travel writers who venture to Morocco—an ideal destination for any Oriental fanatic. Therefore, despite displaying concern and complaining about safety, travel writers are more than open to taking risks and putting themselves through hardships to document and replenish their travelogues. Like other writers mentioned in this paper, Walter M. Weiss’s portrayal of Morocco displays a combination of admiration, mostly for the romanticized and temporal appeal of Morocco, but

also a small hint of dismissiveness of and annoyance by particular stereotypes. His perspectives encompass a range of views, from the enchanting and exotic to the problematic and backward. More than once, Weiss invokes the idea of Morocco as a place where time has stood still, almost described as an exotic realm reminiscent of fairy tales from *One Thousand and One Nights*.

“Time seems to have stopped in this mountain in that until 1920 no Christian was allowed to enter” (ibid, p. 21).  
“We suddenly feel transported to the seventies” (ibid).

Written in the 21st century, Weiss carries on the discussion of Morocco having a fantastical description that European imaginations have been obsessed with for centuries. One of his objectives for this voyage, the most important of which is exploration, is to confirm his preconceived notions about Morocco. Travelers and tourists such as Weiss and Morrison find themselves retracing the paths of historical explorers while sustaining a Eurocentric identity in their interactions with different or foreign cultures. Weiss describes Morocco as a country “anchored in their faith and happy to let the flow of events carry them through life,” (ibid, p. 28) through which he shows that Morocco has a simplicity and contentment which is the complete counterpart of the Western way of life, often associated with progress, hard work, success, ambition, democracy, and civilization. Thus, Weiss’s perspective can be perceived as reductive because he carries a Eurocentric identity that prioritizes European culture and values. Furthermore, Weiss brings up negative aspects of Moroccan society. Whether or not it is done to denigrate the image of Morocco is hard to tell. Contemporary travel writers are not in the business of doing that anymore, or at the very least, they do not make it so obvious and direct. However, they do not shy away from criticism, which in Weiss’s book revolved around the persistence of poverty, the annoyance of overzealous guides, and the historical exploitation by colonial powers. His descriptions carry an implicit judgment. According to him, tourists who flock to Morocco are seen by the Moroccans as “helpless, manipulable, infinitely rich, shopping-crazy idiots” (ibid, p. 23). He also talks about how tourists are often hassled by annoying guides, referred to in the book as the “guides noirs”, or the “wrong guides”. The presence of these men, implied to be unemployed, offering their services as guides—a theme in travel writing that Bowles, Mayne, and Canetti addressed—cast a shadow over the tourist’s visit to Morocco. Readers will most likely read it and have the wrong impression about the welcome that Moroccans have prepared for them (Desforges, 2000; Dhoub, 2021; Indiani & Suda, 2018). The notion of the Arab pest is another stereotypical representation that takes shape in travel writing. Among them is the Guide who is said to have an irksome attitude towards foreigners. Guides pester, manipulate, and impose their demands and the Westerner can detect it which leads to homogenizing them with the entire population.

“If the Arab was often a pest and pretty generally a nuisance, he nevertheless was indispensable” (American Orientalism: Taking Casablanca, 2013, p. 28)

Additionally, Weiss speaks of European fantasies about Morocco and the broader Orient. He mentions baths and harems—seemingly one of the West’s wildest fantasies about the Orient. European fantasies have long been captured by sensuous eroticism and uninhibited pleasure thanks to the mystery and unknowns that shroud the famed Oriental harems. Of course, this fascination is part of a broader Orientalist perspective that has been exacerbated over time due to its repetitive recurrences in travel writing books. The more travel writers talk about harems, the more life they feed their fascination.

“Repetition, then, is a way of keeping the foreigner contained and the traveler and the reader of travel writing stable. One of the most pervasive stereotypes of the East that emerged during this period was that of the highly sexualized, backward, and oppressed Muslim woman, a trope that persists to the current day” (Montagu & Jack, 2021).

## 4 Conclusion

To conclude, Shah’s choice to live in a shantytown regardless of its challenges reflects his obsession with the hazards and unpredictability of Morocco. He wanted a full sense of immersion infused with raw life and simplicity. Appreciating its simplicity and the great sense of being part of the great universe, Alice Morrison notes the dramatic difference the desert offers from urban life. On the other hand, Tayler participates in his journey across the Sahara to mirror the dangers exalted in Bowles’ fiction out of a desire to experience and record the exotic and dangerous.

Travelers looking for the excitement and authenticity of the Orient frequently dream of the Moroccan Sahara as the ultimate wilderness. These authors have a deep-seated curiosity in the exotic and the unknown, despite their reservations about safety; they thus deliberately face risks to develop and enhance their travelogues. Throughout his books, Shah romanticizes Morocco, emphasizing his life and the lives of those around him in the shantytown. He loved the feeling of living in a dangerous environment that was confined by supernatural beliefs. These contexts provide Western eyes with images of Morocco as an exotic and mystical land differing mightily from the modern, advanced West. Shah, like Paul Bowles and Alice Morrison, critiques the contrived nature of modern life through a comparison between Morocco (underdeveloped) to the safe, comfortable environment of Western society. This paper has shown that Western travel writers seeking to unplug modernity and adventure in danger promote Orientalist narratives that represent Morocco as a space of timeless simplicity and mystique. While Shah and others critique the Western lifestyle for its manufactured conveniences, they also admire Morocco's simplicity as a way to foster personal development and adventure. When Morocco is portrayed in this manner, travel writers propagate a narrative of Morocco as an adventurous playground for Westerners. This reduces Morocco to an exotic playground for Western adventurers, thus overlooking the lived realities of its people and stereotyping them. In the end, this appeal to danger and simplicity corresponds better with Western fantasies than it does any innate characteristics of Morocco itself. This speaks widely to a much broader—and often problematic—relationship between Western travel writers and their romanticized places on Earth.

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The author declared that he has no competing interests.

#### *Statement of authorship*

The author has a responsibility for the conception and design of the study. The author has approved the final article.

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