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Bailey Booras  
*University of New England*

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# **Sex, Drugs, and Exotic Fantasy:**

Tangier and Orientalism through Paul Bowles and Mohamed Choukri

Bailey Booras

PSC 491: Integrative Essay

Undergraduate Senior Thesis

Department of Political Science

University of New England

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## Introduction

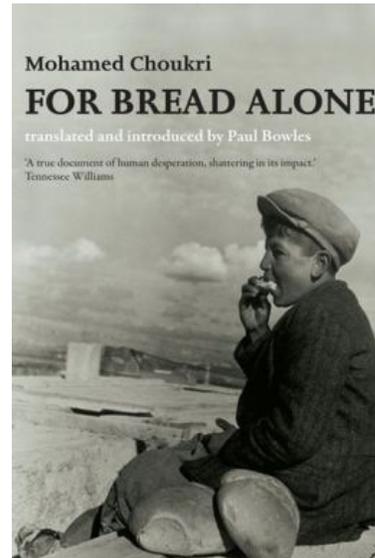
Western travelers, artists, writers, musicians, entrepreneurs and other curious minds have long flocked to the city of Tangier, located on the northern tip of Morocco. Situated on the edge of Europe, Africa, and the Mediterranean Sea, Tangier is a transnational city in terms of its culture, history, and influences. Located in a Muslim country, Tangier captured attention across the globe for being an artist's haven in the 1940s-1960s. Authors Paul Bowles and Mohamed Choukri were inspired to write about life in this complex borderland city. These authors, one, an insider, writing from the experience of living in poverty, the other providing unique insider and outsider perspectives on the city as an American expatriate who lived there for 50 years, illustrate whether or not elements of Edward Said's Orientalism, a term which he uses to describe the negative assumptions applied to the East by the West, are present in Tangier.

In my research, I analyze Tangier's romanticized image on the world stage, examine Orientalist representations, and determine the effects they have. Focusing on the two authors' representations of sex, drugs, and exotic fantasy in the city, I intend to portray Tangier's image as one divided by class, Orientalism, and other factors. This paper has three main arguments. First, Orientalist representations characterize Paul Bowles' work, despite his lengthy residency in Tangier, while Choukri's lower class story contradicts both Bowles' images and those perpetuated by the Moroccan elite, of Moroccan nationalism. Second, the portrayals of Paul Bowles and others, including the film *Casablanca* (1942), contribute to American Orientalism and the reproduction of a colonialist image of Morocco. Third, and finally, I argue that Orientalism dominates Tangier and the Muslim World in general as it is viewed by the American public.

This essay focuses primarily on representations of Orientalism in two 20th century literary works, one by American author, composer and poet, Paul Bowles (1910-1999), the other by the Moroccan author, Mohamed Choukri (1935-2003), both influential writers who respectively describe life in Tangier as they experienced it. *The Sheltering Sky*, the first novel that Bowles wrote, was published in 1949 and adapted into a popular film in 1990. Choukri's autobiographical account, *For Bread Alone*, was first published in 1973, having been translated into English by Paul Bowles. It is the first of an autobiographical trilogy and was an international success, translated into more than 30 languages.



Bowles' first novel, *The Sheltering Sky* (1949) was adapted into a popular film in 1990.



Mohamed Choukri's *For Bread Alone* was translated into over 30 languages.

This essay applies postcolonial method and Edward Said's critique of Orientalism in order to investigate whether Bowles and Choukri were influenced by Orientalist representations or not. In determining what the authors' views of the city of Tangier reflect (and thereby viewing the society from its own dynamics rather than colonial and nationalist elements applied to it) I contend that, in the postcolonial period, although some perspectives have changed

slightly, the same underlying, Orientalist attitude towards Muslim societies persists in America today. Using postcolonial method and the works of Paul Bowles and Mohamed Choukri, this essay addresses the following questions:

1. *When and why did Tangier emerge as an international city, appealing to Europeans and Americans, and develop as a fantasy land for artists and musicians?*
2. *To what extent can Edward Said's seminal critique of Orientalism be applied to examining the images of Morocco and the city of Tangier through the works of Paul Bowles and Mohamed Choukri? Do the two books reproduce Orientalist images, or not?*

I believe these questions to be worthy of investigation, in part, because of the broad social and political implications of ignorance in this matter. State interests, international relations, and public opinion all play roles in the creation and maintenance of cultural biases and other stigmas that exist today. By recognizing the sources of these assumptions and the interests of those who formed them, one is then empowered to decide for oneself the true nature of a society. In answering these questions, I seek to understand whether Orientalist images persist or not in Tangier, and to distinguish between the images of Tangier (American imagination) and the reality.

In this essay, I argue that Tangier, as it is presented in *The Sheltering Sky* and *For Bread Alone*, illustrates its own diverse nature, although it is often portrayed through the Orientalist lens as an exotic fantasy land and is then an example of mainstream America's understanding of the Muslim world. Bowles, despite his living in Tangier for 50 years, represents American Orientalism and the exotic fantasy in his novel, while Choukri provides an insider account from the lowest social class, telling an honest and shocking story which rivals Bowles' own socially

established perspective. The implications made by Bowles and Choukri in these two works thus form my position.

I support my three main arguments by explaining how Tangier became a transnational city and a haven/exotic fantasyland as a result of the International Zone, which separated the city from the rest of Morocco in the year 1912, effectively establishing it as distinct from the rest of the country, which was still under Spanish (in the far North) and French protectorate status. Additionally, I compare the differing images of Tangier as they are presented by Bowles, an outsider view of the city, and Choukri, a poor, homeless immigrant whose point of view paints a very different picture of the social and national scene in Tangier. Then, in investigating these varied images, some of which are Oriental and some not, I conclude that we must either challenge the Orientalist views or miss the human, diverse, and complex *other* Morocco, which is not accounted for in these limited representations. I illustrate my claims through the focal points of sex, drugs, and exotic fantasy in Tangier as they are perceived by the West and how the authors present them.

I focus on these three areas to expand my argument on the presence of Orientalism and its narrow-mindedness in regards to Tangier. The very representations of sex, drugs, and exotic fantasies in Tangier are stereotypes that continue today, but they must be contextualized on a global scale: the same problems afflict the US, which is plagued with illicit drugs, illegal prostitution, and the ongoing falsehood (fantasy) called the “American Dream,” which affixes an entire society to a single catchphrase. As this is the case, it is necessary to change the lens through which we view both American and Moroccan/Muslim societies. Analyzing these two authors allows us to examine both Orientalist and non-Orientalist representations by collecting

evidence to distinguish between what is Orientalist and what is not as well as answering why and how this is the case.

To examine these questions and prove my thesis, I shall first explain my methodological approach. Second, I will examine the historical context of 19th and 20th century Morocco and that of Tangier as an International Zone (1912-1956) in order to understand how it acquired the reputation as an exotic fantasyland. I thus make a distinction between Americans' perceptions of Moroccans and Muslims as shaped by Orientalism and Tangier as a complex and diverse Muslim society, capable of modernity and change. I then apply postcolonial method to Tangier through the topics of sex, drugs, and the element of fantasy/magic as they are presented by Paul Bowles and Mohamed Choukri. In my conclusion, I address the broader implications of my thesis and where to go from here.

Tangier is a single case study I have chosen, in large part, because it is perhaps the most Orientalized. In terms of international politics, the International Zone created a vivid and popular image of a destination for sex, drugs, and exotic fantasy, as well as a haven for homosexuals. Part of Tangier was effectively severed from the rest of Morocco and made into a Western playground. For this reason, Tangier does not resemble many other cities of Morocco or North Africa.

### **Methodology: Power, Language, and Knowledge**

Power relations are at the core of the questions that I seek to answer in this essay. I will apply postcolonial theory by adopting Edward Said's methodology and synthesizing Bowles' and Choukri's works by analyzing their discourses and representations. The work of the late Edward Said, a Palestinian-American scholar on the Middle East, guides my application of

critical methodology. His first classical study, *Orientalism*, was published in 1978. Orientalism, as he describes, is a narrow-minded cultural assumption perceived of the East by the West which affixes Muslims and the Middle East to a negative Western lens. It is a reaction confined to colonial knowledge of Eastern societies, including Arab and Muslim societies. Orientalism not only invents an “Orient” (and creates assumptions about the people who live there), but it necessarily creates a “West,” as well. In creating the Orient, the West, argues Said, has attempted to define itself as the opposite of Orientalist portrayals<sup>1</sup>. His critique of Orientalism as an ideology provides the basis for my method of critical examination of this topic. His investigation into how colonial knowledge has influenced the study and understanding of Islam contributed to international relations in both policy and practice. One integral part of Said’s seminal work is the notion that the “East” and “West” (or, the “Orient” and the “Occident,” as he calls them) were both created to defend a particular ideology. The facts of Oriental culture, upon which many people rely, therefore, are based entirely in fiction. To consider a culture or country in terms of Orientalist categories is both fanciful and demeaning, and the boundaries created by Orientalism confine Muslims and Eastern cultures to stereotypes which perpetuate Western ideologies of the East. Through Said, I put Tangier at the center of an examination of Orientalism and its effects. My theoretical question is thus to determine whether or not the stories of Bowles and Choukri reproduce Orientalist images.

My thesis is the product of my method, which elucidates the idea that the Orientalist view of Muslim societies forms essentialist entities (the “East” and the “West”) which are ahistoric and static constructions of a colonial and Orientalist era, an age wherein knowledge was influenced by colonial enterprise. Said’s thesis illustrates a created fantasy of the *other* and the concurrent mythologizing of the West as modern and an ideal of progress. Existing without

giving due consideration to class, race, gender, or colonialism, these fabrications leave each group effectively trapped within the confines of its own cultural representations. Neither culture is monolithic, though. Rather, they are both diverse and dynamic, resulting from some of the aforementioned variables. At the cost of the East, the West portrays itself as rational, egalitarian, and modern -- the latter description being highly questioned by author and postcolonial scholar Mahmood Mamdani, who argues against the labels “modern” and “pre-” or “anti-modern” in his book, *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim*, published in 2004.

Mamdani updates Said, writing in a larger, post-9/11 context about the War on Terror in *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim*. His theoretical model is also postcolonial, which states that when colonial powers leave a country, their presence does not completely disappear. Postcolonialism argues that colonialism does not simply end with the independence of the former colony, but its legacy still structurally has an impact on both societies via ideologies, institutions, and cultural elements, such as dress, music, and cuisine, which remain integrated in the society. The colonizing country, Mamdani asserts, is affected along with the colonized one as a consequence of their shared history. Mamdani rejects the categorization of cultures as “modern” versus “anti-modern,” and this will also guide me in determining the ways in which Tangier represents itself in the books as opposed to the descriptions which are assigned to it. Mamdani also asserts that modernism is not exclusively Western. Using Mamdani’s methodology, I examine in what ways the colonial impact did not end with Moroccan independence.

Ali Ahmida, much like Mahmood Mamdani, brings postcolonialism to international relations. His analysis is modern and specific to North Africa: it critiques colonial and Euro-centric knowledge and also considers the role of agency. Yet, Ahmida is also critical of nationalist perspectives for being too broad and too quick to rely on assumptions and categories

which reproduce colonial categories in reverse. I aim to convey the same message through my own findings in order to critique the narrow U.S. view of Muslims in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, its origins, and the insider/outsider dynamic.

In his book, *Forgotten Voices*, Ali Ahmida describes literature as a tool crucial to the study of society and political life in the Middle East<sup>2</sup>. In a postcolonial society, Ahmida explains, writers themselves are resources through which societal concerns are conveyed. As this is the case, Ahmida argues, their works are taken seriously in the context of social and political commentary. Bearing this in mind, one can see Choukri's *For Bread Alone* as a commentary on socioeconomic disparities and regionalism in Morocco under colonialism. Likewise, Bowles' work illuminates the outsider perspective; that is, the experience of an American expatriate living in then colonial Morocco.

Said's theoretical classical formulation explains the production of the image many Americans have of Muslims and Muslim societies. The literature I use to help prove this argument affirms the relevance of this topic to travelers, historians, anthropologists, and political scientists alike.

The value of the postcolonial method is that it allows one to see that, while colonialism in Morocco ended in 1956, a particular ideology persists today as a result of that very period. It is in this manner that I examine Tangier as one part of a larger Orientalist, colonial history and as a factor in Cold War politics. I look at the representations as well as social and global factors through both larger critical scholarship (Said) and critical postcolonial scholarship that is more specific to North Africa and Muslims (Mamdani, Ahmida), finally comparing Tangier to its Orientalist assumptions. I ask if, in their works, Bowles and Choukri portray the very claims made of Tangier and North Africa vis-à-vis the Orientalist lens. Does Choukri's tale of a native

nomad tell of the same problems as Bowles' narrative of American tourists traveling through the same region? These are the themes this essay will explore.

### **Historical Context: Morocco under Spanish and French Colonialism, 1912-1956**

The 1912 Treaty of Fez established Morocco as a Franco-Spanish protectorate. From that time until its independence, in 1956, Morocco was under the social, political, and economic authority of the Spanish in the North and the French government throughout the rest of the country. Yet, the political interests of Spain, France, and the UK/US were at odds as to what to do with Tangier, post-WWI<sup>3</sup>. In 1924, the new Statute of Tangier enumerated a compromise between the Western countries that established Morocco as subject to interference by several European governments. The U.S. did not recognize the protectorate for the next five years. The reasoning for this, Jamaa Baida explains, was that the war in Europe pushed the Allies to present a united front<sup>4</sup>. This new imperialism gave the West a stronghold in the Arab world, while Morocco, a mere nine miles from Spain, was treated as an enigma by the European continent. For the next few decades, Morocco existed as a Western outpost, manipulated to benefit the richer countries. It was during this time of loose governance, from 1924 until Moroccan independence, in 1956, that Tangier earned its reputation as a fantasy land. Drugs were easily acquired and loosely regulated, and the Beat generation of American writers and poets sought artistic refuge in the city.

Postwar Tangier was on the radar of the world's new hegemonic state, America. The value of Tangier's strategic location was no secret to foreign bodies, who had been putting pressure on Morocco since the French conquest of Algeria, in 1830<sup>5</sup>. Great Britain, Spain, and France had all vied for power in Morocco throughout the 19th century, sometimes resulting in

significant changes. In 1856, for example, Great Britain enforced an accord on the North African state which weakened Morocco's economy while giving the British huge advantages in the Moroccan market<sup>6</sup>. The outcome of this arrangement may not sound unlike that of NAFTA, the North American Free Trade Agreement, which was implemented in 1994 to the benefit of the U.S. and to the chagrin of Mexican farmers. Faced with trilateral European pressures, Morocco reached out to the U.S., in 1871, with a request for support in the face of the "dismemberment" of the Kingdom of Morocco by European powers<sup>7</sup>. The United States, enveloped in the era of post-Civil War Reconstruction, was disinclined to intervene. Furthermore, the Monroe Doctrine, which affirmed the U.S.' staying out of European countries' colonial affairs, was still, as Abdelhadi Tazi calls it, "a guiding principle of American foreign policy"<sup>8</sup>. He explains how it was American political superiority that led Morocco to accept protectorate status, knowing full well that the state was losing sovereignty and being politically exploited.

Morocco and France were in conflict from 1950-1956, and the official role of the U.S. during this time varied in apparent allegiance. When the American government did not condemn the 1952 riots in Casablanca, the French President announced to the United Nations that the inaction of the U.S. was favorable to the Communists and constituted a blow against French national pride and power<sup>9</sup>. Indeed, in 1950, the U.S. Congress adopted the Hickenlooper Amendment, which elucidated the unwillingness of the U.S. to provide support via the Marshall Plan to any country that was perceived to be in violation of a treaty with the U.S.<sup>10</sup>. Morocco was thus at the center of Franco-American tensions in the years following the end of World War II, although the American government was not actively supporting Morocco in many ways.

## **Tangier: The Making of a Transnational City**

Morocco has been and remains of particular relevance to the U.S. because it was the first country to recognize the statehood of the newly formed United States of America, in 1777. As a nation, Morocco cannot be boxed into one single category. It would be incomplete and limiting to simply label it as an “African state” and delve no farther into its character. This is because the broad notion of “African state” does not wholly capture all of the cultural influences that run deep through this country and color its history. Tangier, however, has become another Hong Kong or Tijuana through the impositions of foreign interests. It is the urban center of a complex Muslim, Arab, African and Mediterranean country, yet it was cut from the country as a result from colonial interests and international competition.

With Muslim societies increasingly featured at the forefront of American news headlines, but with the necessary component of contextualization often absent from these representations, the representations themselves are rendered biased, incomplete, and, most often, negative. Muslims are portrayed as the social “other” in American media; therefore, Tangier is one example of a world city within a Muslim country which has superseded the negative stereotypes assigned to it and, upon close examination, exhibits its own diverse character, much like any Western society.

The city of Tangier boasts a mixed culture, featuring lasting colonial elements as well as Orientalist representations. The discourses around Tangier have indicated its role as a haven for rock and roll artists and writers of the 1960's, as well as an economic and cultural center for Morocco largely because of its strategic location. Tangier also served as a refuge for homosexuals, which is ironic, considering its location in a Muslim country. In the U.S., the popular assumption is that a Muslim country is no safe haven for homosexuals. The Tangier

described by Bowles and Choukri, however, tolerates homosexuality as one element of its street life and culture. Choukri cites many instances of open homosexuality on the city streets, and it is well-known that both Bowles and his wife, Jane, had Moroccan lovers of the same sex as themselves. Such instances highlight the diversity of the society itself, which cannot be constrained to a few pithy phrases. “Anti-American” and “Anti-West” are not uncommon phrases in American media today; however, these labels are without substance, as they are entirely subjective and ill-defined. The creation and application of these negative categories serve to reduce a culture, nation, or people to a few terms and images. Given these Orientalist productions, we homogenize both the society to which we apply them as well as our own, limiting the people of a country to a large bloc assigned a single label, e.g. “American.” In this way, Orientalism effectively invents the construction of narrow categories for both the society being examined and the one doing the examining. It is subsequently reflective in that, as both Said and Mamdani call for, we must reexamine the images given to us in the process. It was in colonial Tangier, in 1947, that Paul Bowles wrote his first book, *The Sheltering Sky*, which was published in 1949.

The significance of making Tangier an International Zone was that it effectively did become a fantasy land in the minds of Western tourists. Postwar Tangier offered new business and vacation opportunities unique to the loose regulations in the International Zone. Travelers in Tangier in the 1940s and 1950s could find a mix of Western culture and the Eastern Orient about which they had heard. It was a destination for Westerners looking to relax after the tensions and hardships of the war.

## **Bowles' and Choukri's Tangier**

The particular resources used to analyze the case of Tangier have been chosen not only because of their content, but also because of their authors, who come from different backgrounds but share Tangier in common. Bowles was an American spending his life in Tangier, while Choukri's work highlights the role of socioeconomic class, exploring the marginalized sectors of society, receiving little attention in Bowles' work. From the two, one can garner a well-rounded understanding of Tangier's true qualities, Orientalist or otherwise. They both write about the presence of sex, drugs, and fantasy in the city, but either from his own perspective. Together they offer divergent images of Morocco, North Africa, and Tangier. Their individual accounts can be explained, in part, by both class and Orientalist factors.

Paul Bowles (1910-1999) and Mohamed Choukri (1935-2003) experienced Tangier differently. Bowles traveled there as an expatriate author, seeking a life that did not exist in 1940s America. Along with his wife, Jane, Bowles moved to Tangier and lived there for 50 years, until his death in 1999. He was an eccentric and talented writer who fascinated and inspired those who read his works, including some writers of the Beat generation of the 1950's. Mohamed Choukri, meanwhile, provides a lower-class perspective, giving a voice to the homeless, poor immigrants, and illiterate factions of society. His situation represents the marginalized groups, and his narrative is powerful, in part, because the alienation depicted is not fictional.

Choukri lives the life of an underdog, facing inequalities on a daily basis, and he recognizes his own inability to change the system, but also understands that his opportunity is to convey a message through his writing. The two men met in the 1960s, and it was Bowles who translated Choukri's first autobiographical account into English. *For Bread Alone* was published

in Arabic, in 1982, and, from 1983-2000, it was banned in Morocco. The book was wildly popular around the globe following its English publication, however, and it was translated into 30 more languages. In Morocco, the book was seen by Interior Minister Driss Basri as offensive precisely for its references to sex and drugs. Both *For Bread Alone* and *The Sheltering Sky* were made into film adaptations, Bowles' story, in 1990, and Choukri's, in 2005.

Bowles affected future influential artists and writers, including writer William Burroughs, a Beat who also moved to Tangier. American poet Allen Ginsberg wrote in his 1956 poem, "America," the following line: *Burroughs is in Tangiers I don't think he'll come back it's sinister.* Ginsberg knew that the life one could live in Tangier in the 1950s was a statement against the mainstream lifestyle in the U.S. Indeed, one aspect of Bowles' escape to Tangier was sexual, as he and his wife, Jane, both maintained homosexual lovers. Burroughs, like Bowles, was homosexual and he, too, took part in the prostitution that ran through Tangier. Author Ted Morgan wrote that "the misogyny of the social structure also appealed to Burroughs' innate distrust and fear of women. In Tangier, the ubiquitously veiled and shrouded woman loudly broadcast the subservient female role"<sup>11</sup>.

*The Sheltering Sky* is about three Americans traveling through North Africa, observing the locals but ultimately remaining within the removed realm of tourism, indulging in the benefits of the land without embracing its downsides. Choukri's memoir, *For Bread Alone*, was published in 1973, and it paints a much different picture. His book recounts his own life as a poor, homeless nomad whose family thought that Tangier might help solve their problems. An immigrant to the city, Choukri, a native Moroccan from the Rif, is more of an outsider than Bowles' characters are in that he is of the lowest class and, therefore, does not live in the same

Morocco that Bowles does. The fantasy land, as Choukri is well aware, is the product of both the Western countries and the Moroccan elite, of which Choukri was no part.

The books of Bowles and Choukri lend insights into understanding the city and its representations. Choukri's book is a memoir of his childhood, set in the 1940s and 1950s in Tangier and other North African cities where he grew up in dire poverty. This book was shocking to Arab culture as it disrupted social norms about family and life; for these reasons, it was banned in Morocco until the year 2000. One particularly offensive aspect, which Choukri himself has acknowledged, is the negative manner in which he depicted his father. In this way, Choukri provides a powerful narrative that defies the mainstream literature. Bowles' story is about three American travelers who, in exploring North Africa and Tangier, illustrate the intolerance and ignorance that Westerners show towards other cultures, as well as the damaging effects these can have.

Some of Bowles' personal feelings about Arab society challenge the representations put forth by Choukri. In a 1933 letter to the poet, Charles Henri Ford, Bowles said: "There is one drawback to Arabs, and that is their insupportable jealousy....But once I shall be away from them I shall immediately regret it, and am sure I shall return and spend all my life somewhere among them." Indeed, Bowles spent the last 50 years of his life in Tangier, eventually dying there. He saw the United States, and Western culture in general, as an entrapment.

The relationship between American counterculture and Tangier in the 1940s-1960s highlights the position of Tangier as an idealized image of opposition to mainstream life. Part of this is the similar European use of Tangier as an outlet for social influence; that is to say, Tangier was made into an experiment, used as a sample place for conducting free trade and taking part in

illicit activities. Mid-20th century Tangier was a playground for Americans and Europeans alike, but what effect did that have on the Moroccans?

Bowles and Choukri ultimately present multiple Tangiers through their representations. This is largely caused by the difference in their class experiences. It was the honesty of Choukri's depictions in *For Bread Alone* that his book was banned. It is nothing short of ironic that this book, widely circulated and celebrated around the world, portrays some of the most dire situations, yet the Orientalist images of Morocco and Tangier still persist in the West, confining Morocco to the biased way in which it is presented to the American public by the media.

Bowles wrote in his autobiography that it was the fleetingness of time that led to the allure of a nomadic life. The exhilaration of transience appealed more strongly to Bowles than any comfortable, sedentary existence<sup>12</sup>. Yet, he stayed, still as an outsider, in Tangier for the last half century of his life, hardly a "fleeting" visit, and far from nomadic.

### **Orientalist Tangier: An Oasis of Sex and Drugs**

Hashish, kif (cannabis mixed with tobacco), and alcohol are among the most recurring themes and often arise as points of contention between males and females (such as between Choukri's parents), or between authority figures and subordinates (such as with young Choukri and his boss). Choukri describes another regular occurrence, where, sitting in a cafe with several other illiterate men, he and the others would listen intently to the only literate man as he read the Arabic periodicals. As the man read, he would often quote the Qur'an. The men in the cafe, all smoking kif, listened intently to the most highly-educated scholar of their community. This is how political knowledge and current events were passed on to Choukri: by means of a reader or the radio, around which a group of men would gather at the cafe. His understanding of politics

was thus twofold, defined by the people around him from whom he absorbed information, and, yet, supplemented by his own life in the streets of the city. Choukri recalls how he would sometimes buy Egyptian magazines, “to look at the pictures of film stars wearing Oriental costumes”<sup>13</sup>. The ideas perpetrated by the film industry of the Middle East are just that to Choukri – costumes and falsehoods. The reality that Choukri sees is not one of ornate outfits and elaborate traditions, but rather one of day-to-day living and an ongoing struggle to embrace one’s cultural identity in a setting limited by colonialism. The Egyptian film industry, meanwhile, is responding to elite and Western interests. Choukri mentions the independence riots of 1952, giving attention to the fact that many Moroccans protested the constraints under which the West placed them, their country, and their sovereignty. Whereas Bowles discusses Tangier from the tourist perspective, Choukri illuminates the clear role that Spanish and French colonialism had in Morocco and society’s response to it.

Drugs, too, play a role for Bowles, as alcoholism is a recurring topic in a few of his works, including in his short stories “Merkala Beach” and “Call at Corazon,” both of which pivot on the relationship tensions caused by alcohol use/abuse. Bowles is not specific to any one culture when he describes these problems, describing afflicted individuals from both Eastern and Western cultures. He does not abide by the Orientalist concept that a Muslim society is a narrow one, but, instead illustrates the reality that its society is diverse and complicated, with as many complexities as any Western culture. While he is an outsider, and while he does show a tourist outsider view, Bowles is not blindly following Orientalism. He does not see the East as a monolithic fantasy land, although he is welcomed by Moroccan elites to do so. Much like the Egyptian film industry forms certain representations, the Moroccan elite do the same to encourage Western tourism and the use of the East as a sort of adult Disneyland, making efforts

to perpetuate these images in exchange for foreign direct investment. Bowles is less of an outsider, in this sense, than Choukri. It was Bowles, after all, who got Choukri his first book publication. Bowles understood that the Moroccan writer experienced a perspective that was simply not made available to Western visitors. He thus helped Choukri to give a voice to these underrepresented to Western audiences. It took the ethnic outsider to recognize the perpetuity of the myth, and Bowles' function in society thus became one of dispelling that myth. His own first book, *The Sheltering Sky*, however, was written during Bowles' first few years in Tangier, and for that reason it does not reflect the same attitude towards Arab diversity.

The idea of gender expectations is applicable to both cultures in Bowles' work, where the distinction between males and females is stark, among Moroccans and the Americans alike. In Bowles' 1949 novel, three Americans embark on a journey across North Africa in the 1930s, touring through towns of Morocco and Algeria until they are all separated, as one dies and the other two go off alone in different directions. They stay in North Africa for an unspecified, but long period of time, and the female character, Kit, finds herself trying to immerse into Arab life after she develops deep emotions for a local man. This series of events portrays the white woman as being kidnapped and then sinking into mental delusion, as she is expected to follow the same cultural and gender norms as do the man's Arab wives.

Choukri's situation (constant hunger and an abusive father) leads him to the city of Tetouan, where he frequents a brothel and finds work in a cafe. His life in Tetouan is regularly supplemented by kif (North African hashish) and majoun (hashish paste). Choukri's departure from Tangier for Tetouan is a sad goodbye, as he leaves behind his brother's grave. In the city, Choukri finds comforts in the lifestyle of prostitution and pimps, and through this lifestyle he comes to explore homosexuality; at one point, a young Choukri is solicited on a street corner to

engage in homosexual prostitution. All the while, gender norms for females are intertwined into the roles of homemaker and/or whore.

Acting as a counterpoint to the Western assumptions of the prevalence and influential nature of Islam in any Muslim country, Choukri addresses religion in relation to sex. In a situation where he is going to have sex with one woman, she stops him because she is menstruating and "...that's something you don't do with women," she tells him "It's a sin"<sup>14</sup>. Choukri describes another interesting moment in which a friend of his is turned away from the brothel because he wishes to sleep with a Muslim girl, but he does not speak Arabic, so he is assumed to be a Christian<sup>15</sup>. It is made clear that it is acceptable for the Muslim prostitutes to sleep only with Muslim men.

### **Exotic Orient/Fantasy**

While the Tangier enjoyed by Bowles' characters is a playground for expatriates, full of hustlers and pimps, it is important to note that, before they came to the city, Choukri's family saw Tangier as a potential source of income, food, and hope. The themes of exploration and experimentation arise in either book, for native and tourist alike. Said's point of the sensuality of the Orient collides with the character, Kit, in *The Sheltering Sky*. After her husband, Port, dies, Kit is drawn into a life of subservience. She dutifully follows two Arab men in their travels and acts as their sexual object, becoming attached to one of the men. She dons a male disguise and comes home with him, only to find that he has multiple wives and intends for her to be a sexual object. After her female identity is revealed, Kit is treated as another wife until she eventually runs away from the house and wanders back to Western society. The draw of the desert, combined with her husband's death, led Kit on a wild adventure through North Africa on

camelback, which, although fantastical, is, ultimately fiction. Its sharp contrast with Choukri's nonfiction account of the females with whom he interacts depicts a much darker sexual life – one in which prostitution happens out of sheer necessity.

Both Port, the fictional character of Bowles' story, who in many ways reflects Bowles himself, and the young Choukri are met by enticing offers of prostitution in the city. While Bowles enjoys these sexual comforts as a tourist, Choukri sees them as a part of life. Choukri's autobiography acts as a counter voice to the tourist perspective, as the hidden transcripts of Choukri's story are those of economic disparity and daily hardship. He exists in the streets, in the dark alleyways, observing society from the background. Walking alone in the streets of Tangier, Choukri sees drunks, thieves, whores, beggars, homosexual male prostitutes, and rape. He notes the role of the Spanish soldiers in starting riots, and the prevalence of guards in the city. Police brutality is perpetrated by the Spanish, and job opportunities are provided by the French. Describing the availability of work, a friend offers Choukri a position working for a French family in their home. This is happening in the 1940s, when Morocco was effectively a land of colonial control, under the influence of French political, social, and economic interests.

After Choukri's smuggling cohort is caught by the secret police, one man attributes their fate to Allah, bridging their Muslim faith with their underground activities<sup>16</sup>. This scene calls attention to one type of diversity among Muslim people, helping to elucidate and validate the complexity of a Muslim culture and society as a fusion of diversity. From ethnic mixing between Berbers and Bedouins to interracial marriage, Moroccan society is compounded by an assortment of peoples, who, while nearly all of them are Muslim, live lives very different from one another. Rather than representing all Muslims as interpreting their religion in the same way, Choukri shows one way in which the label "Muslim" is not specific to a single lifestyle.

Additionally, much of Choukri's perspective is derived from his class experience, which dictated his opportunities in 1940s Morocco. Of his time in Tangier, Choukri has said:

*When I arrived, there were two Tangier: the colonialist and international Tangier and the Arabic Tangier, made of misery and ignorance. At these times, to eat, I compared the garbage. The European ones preferably, because they were richer.*

In Bowles' story, Port, Kit, and Tunner all take for granted the privileges they are granted as upper-class visitors. Although they stay in the local hotels and even befriend some of the local people in the towns they visit, there is always a tangible element of separation between the tourists and the locals. The tourists are treated well; however, there is the repeating assumption that they are rich. Indeed, throughout the story, the Americans never mention a need for money. Bowles himself was able to live comfortably after he used an advance from his book to buy a ticket to Morocco, where he wrote *The Sheltering Sky*. Again, Choukri represents the underserved in society as he writes from a drifter's perspective.

It is important to note the underlying fact that, while Paul Bowles chose the nomadic lifestyle as an escape from the bustle of New York society, Mohamed Choukri had no other option. This is one of the more palpable instances of a class advantage. Considering this, it is interesting to compare their respective representations of homelessness in Tangier/North Africa. For Choukri, it is the reality of the few options he has in the face of colonial power and class limitations. Bowles, meanwhile, wrote a short story, "Allal," about a homeless boy who is the outcast of his village. In this story, the boy's homelessness separates him from the other boys in their social activities, and it is a focal point of the story. Homelessness, for Choukri, on the other hand, is one aspect woven into several parts of his book, sometimes distinguishing him from those around him, while, at other times, demonstrating his fitting in with his environment.

Bowles and Choukri offer quite alternate representations of Morocco, North Africa, and the city of Tangier. Choukri himself was illiterate until the age of twenty, yet he still remembers events from his childhood in great detail. *For Bread Alone* is a nonfiction piece that functions as social commentary on colonialism and the colonial situation in Morocco. Choukri's book illustrates a constant, underlying division between French influence and Moroccan life in the street. This sharp disunity is indicative of the tensions existing between the colonizer and the colonized. Whereas Bowles' book is seemingly peppered with brief, typically cordial interactions with the Moroccan natives, *For Bread Alone* is more direct in establishing the Westerners and the Moroccans as being at odds. Choukri's family was living in poverty in a rural area until they moved to Tangier, which offered the dream of bread: regular meals, and a reason to have hope. This is the "exotic" and "fantastical" aspect of Tangier for Choukri's family: its potential for a better life. This image crumbles when Choukri's family, after moving to the city, is still beset with hunger. Choukri is uncensored in his account, often describing events that most people not living in poverty would see as crude and shocking.

Bowles found the people and societies of North Africa liberating, author Michelle Green asserts, because of their "...belief that nothing—save the infinite—is real"<sup>17</sup>. Tangier, in Bowles' first years spent there, emulated this very quality: little about the city suggested permanence, and the effects of the International Zone were palpable. Western expatriates roamed the land, looking for easy ways to make fast money and live a more luxurious lifestyle that their incomes could not give them in Europe or the U.S. Postwar Tangier was a playground for corporations, entrepreneurs, and artistic individuals alike, each seeking benefits derived from the financial and political opportunities of the Free Zone. Free of high taxes and trade restrictions, Tangier was, for a few decades, the haven of businessmen in addition to free-spirited artists and writers.

### **Postcolonial Tangier: 1956-on**

The American government was able to help Morocco in the immediate postwar years, helping to fight famine all across the country, from the cities to the countryside. Earlier in the 20th century, Tangier had been made home to a port of free trade, referred to as the Tangier Exportation Free Zone or the International Zone. This further distinguished Tangier from the rest of Morocco, solidifying its role as an international city and borderland. By 1955, Tangier was still a protectorate of France, yet it seemed to transcend many political barriers for those free-spirited expatriates who sought a fantastical land for escape. Indeed, the ready availability of drugs in Tangier added to this pursuit.

The making of Tangier as an international city distinguished it from the rest of Morocco in that it was viewed as a separate entity by the West. The problem with this begins with simple geography: Tangier still remained within Morocco, even after the Free Zone was established, and so it remained part of the Moroccan people's concept of themselves and their country. The effect this had was that, for some Moroccans, it seemed as though the Westerners had made Tangier their own, thereby taking it away from the Moroccans. This resulted in feelings of disenfranchisement, or marginalization, from a portion of their own nation and society, in that part of their country had been given away.

Colonialism formally ended in Morocco in 1956, but the effects of the postwar transformation of Tangier were too powerful to evaporate with the shift in governance. In Morocco, French is still an official language today, and Western styles of dress are just as common in urban areas as traditional Moroccan attire. Postcolonialism asserts that, after colonial rule has ended, elements of the colonizer's culture remain intact in the now-independent

country. For example, in Morocco, elements of French and Spanish culture, from language and dress to religion and cuisine, are still identifiable today. Likewise, as postcolonial methodology suggests, the presence of Morocco can be found in French culture, society, and politics. As is the case with many other countries, French and Morocco boast a unique post-colonial relationship resulting from their shared history and its impact.

### **Implications of this Study**

One problem with the way in which Muslim countries are portrayed exists in the American media and its effect on public schemas. In reducing Muslim culture to news blurbs, the media has perpetuated Orientalism and kept it alive in the 21st century. One tool for facing this ideological crisis is to change the understanding of culture. Scholar Mahmood Mamdani's concept of "Culture Talk" addresses the operationalization of culture, specifically in regards to its function as a politicized concept in the post- Cold War era. Mamdani distinguishes between two types of culture, one as the focus of scholarship and the other as a fabricated concept:

*Unlike the culture studied by anthropologists – face-to-face, intimate, local, and lived – the talk of culture is highly politicized and comes in large geo-packages. Culture Talk assumes that every culture has a tangible essence that defines it, and it then explains politics as a consequence of that essence. [...] It is no longer the market (capitalism), nor the state (democracy), but culture (modernity) that is said to be the dividing line between those in favor of a peaceful, civic existence and those inclined to terror.<sup>18</sup>*

Mamdani's focus is on the American public's understanding of Islam, especially post-9/11, but the concept of Culture Talk is applicable to a variety of situations. One example where Culture Talk meets Tangier today is the expectation that the wonderland as it was experienced by the Beats, rock and roll artists, and writers and poets in the 1950s is maintained. Tangier's status as an International Zone resulted in an influx of bohemian types, seeking something apart from the mainstream way of life. This was true, as was the considerable role of drugs in the loosely

regulated International Zone. That said, Tangier today, like any modern city, is subject to change and development. Recent infrastructural improvements have stretched across Morocco, and whether the city's well-known "character" still remains intact simply depends on how one looks at it. The souks remain plentiful in number, peppering narrow streets with their colorful products. At the same time, tour buses travel down the highways, bringing tourist groups straight to the entrance of the Medina, or old city.

In response to the question of defining a culture, author Andrew Molinsky offers one solution. Culture cannot be defined, he argues, simply or otherwise. He asserts that even lengthy written works on the topic are, at best, controversial in their claims. Instead of trying to define culture, Molinsky argues, instead, we should analyze the "cultural code," or norms. This practice is one tool for understanding a part of culture. There are four key factors, Molinsky asserts, to a cultural code. The amalgamation of country norms, regional norms, individual differences, and company or industry norms form the cultural code for doing business across cultures<sup>19</sup>. Likewise, culture in other situations can be described around a given situation, rather than as a static idea. Culture, Molinsky implies, is a driving force rather than a fixed notion. If we apply this style of thought to the case of American Orientalism and the Middle East, misguided stereotypes and assumptions would be replaced with valuable comprehension and cross-cultural camaraderie.

Tangier is illustrated by many elements, some of which parallel the current circumstances in the U.S. Extreme income disparities have weakened the Moroccan middle class considerably, and the resulting resentment between classes has come to reflect the last decade in both countries. Similarities, economic or otherwise, bridge these two countries in such a way as to

open the door for meaningful reconstruction of preexisting ideologies and notions either has of the other.

The power that Tangier had over Paul Bowles was not magic. The writer himself said that he was even more amazed by the city of Fez than he ever was by Tangier, for, upon reaching Fez, Bowles wrote, “I felt that at last I had left the world behind, and the resulting excitement was well-nigh unbearable”<sup>20</sup>. Yet, he chose to stay in Tangier, not Fez. That said, it is important to bear in mind that, throughout his adventures and life in North Africa, Bowles, like his main characters in *The Sheltering Sky*, always had the Western countries outside of Morocco available. When Bowles contracted typhoid, for example, the same disease that plagues the character Port and leads to his death in a small village in Algeria, Bowles went to France for treatment, an option not possible for the majority of Moroccans. Perhaps it was Bowles’ sustained connection with the developed world that led him to make other choices for the characters in his books. Of spending his life in North Africa, Bowles wrote that, “Each day lived through on this side of the Atlantic was one more day spent outside prison”<sup>21</sup>. It seems as though Bowles was aware of the temporality of his presence in Morocco, and of the fleetingness of life. Having come to Tangier from a much different society, Bowles, in *The Sheltering Sky*, shows an appreciation for the foreign culture, observing it carefully without ever fully engaging in it. Bowles’ writings and choices seem to convey that he enjoyed being a perpetual outsider in Morocco, yet, he wished to spend his life there, and he was adamant about his personal distaste for the lifestyle in the U.S.

The translation of Choukri’s book into several languages helps dispel the ideological stronghold which Orientalism enjoys. It is an influential work for Tangier, Morocco, North Africa, and any other marginalized societies, providing a critical counterpoint to the fantastical notions of some. If we wish to possess an accurate understanding of Tangier and other Muslim

societies, it is imperative that we recognize the inherent diversity and complexity. Listening to voices like that of Choukri highlights the less-discussed role of marginalized sectors of society and the place they nonetheless hold within it. Moroccan society is much more than its elite class, and Choukri presents this. He writes of the Morocco most people do not see instead of confining its description to the better-known ideas. Too many people have the narrow image of Morocco as simply a Western ally, popularized in American films, media, and fiction as the home of delicious food, exotic tourism, and the souks of Marrakech. That said, it becomes apparent that Bowles' idea of Morocco in *The Sheltering Sky* is less honest and less representative on its own. Indeed, the two books necessarily address one another's shortcomings. Bowles' idea of society is quite colorful, full of kif, stern and swindling Arabs, and the kidnapping and rape of an American woman. What his story lacks is exactly the grounding social element upon which Choukri's book is based. Choukri's account of living through the colonial period and what impact it had on him helps us understand the nationalist elements which have since been assigned, among other Orientalist categories, to the city of Tangier. Written in 1973, his work is a reflection of a society that once existed and continues today only as a static perception of the West.

Images such as those found in the popular film, *Casablanca*, reproduce an Oriental Muslim city. We must, as citizens of a polarized and heavily politicized world, reject the representations as handed to us by the Western mass media and Moroccan elites, whose goal is to sell Morocco as a location for tourism and profit. The popular television show, *America's Next Top Model*, used Morocco as its destination location in 2011, and the Travel Channel featured a \$100,000 trip to Spain and Morocco as a grand prize in 2014. In selling the trip as an exotic getaway, the Travel Channel encouraged its watchers to buy into these fixed notions of

Moroccan society. We must understand that Morocco is more than an ahistorical, exotic land, and, in order to do this, we must recognize the interests of those who have perpetuated such stereotypes, ideologies, and rhetoric in the first place. We must be intolerant to such carefully crafted sensationalism, and identify its source.

Motivation can tell us much about the ideas that are spread. In a Foucauldian fashion, this paper has attempted to challenge its reader to engage in a critical thought process, determining from where our information comes. Much like how the creation of the East inherently builds a West, we must understand that the American perspective of Morocco necessitates a Moroccan view of America -- and we must study both perspectives. The case of Tangier should be taken as a warning. Only a critique of works that present the society from its own dynamics, rather than through colonial and nationalist elements that have been applied to it, can reveal the real Tangier that we need to discover and understand. Additionally, we must admit that knowledge is not neutral, and history and facts are often skewed to reflect the interests of the power holders in society. By staying unaware of the difference between representations and reality, one chooses to ignore the humanity and agency of the non-elite majority of Moroccans. We, as concerned people, must not allow such ignorance to persist in 21st century global affairs. At every level of society, we must attack broad notions as inaccurate and incomplete portrayals of people and societies. We must question and critique the information that we are pushed to accept as truthful.

European imperialism came and went, historically speaking, in a short period of time. Yet, its effects did not conclude with the dismantling of colonial status by means of a treaty. Countries such as those in the Middle East continue to face political issues which are direct consequences of colonialism. The geographical boundaries created under colonial rule were, and

continue to be, entirely artificial; that is, they did not come out of a culture, but, rather, they arose from political decisions imposed upon the areas, which, once parts of large entities, now exist as separate countries. The countless issues which have since ensued are the result of the creation of senseless political borders which have no cultural origins. In Egypt, for example, natives associated themselves with the region by means of the Nile Valley for thousands of years. Today, Egypt's borders go far beyond the Nile, although some 95% of Egypt's population is located along the river<sup>22</sup>.

The arbitrary drawing of lines onto a map, a distinctly European approach to land division, is perhaps the most concrete, and, yet, overlooked, postcolonial feature today. Western culture took root wherever it went, spreading new ideas about political boundaries in place of geographical ones. Many of these lines persist today, reminiscent of borders which, once, did not exist. Indeed, although cultural origins expand across these boundaries, many countries, like Morocco, which achieved its independence in 1956, are trapped within the confines of these borders. Cultural likeness aside, political borders separate entities which, in accordance with political sovereignty, are in competition with one another. The outsider perspective is now vital to the concept of a whole, much like how Bowles' point of view complements Choukri's. The two authors' stories are not diametrically opposed; rather, either one acts as the other's counterpart. Neither singular work conveys a whole view because the big picture is outside both of their realms of perception. Bowles lived in Tangier for 50 years and still remained an outsider: he could never be apart from his Westerner status. Choukri, after achieving literary success and international recognition, could never not be a product of the poorest class. Neither author could perceive and articulate the things that were beyond their own positions. From both stories, we collect a semblance of a more complete picture of Tangier. This proves, then, that it

is impossible to compress into succinct phrasing, as many political leaders attempt today, the catchphrase of a “Muslim” country, which carries notions not necessarily true of all its inhabitants.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1978), 1-2.

<sup>2</sup> Ali Ahmida, *Forgotten Voices: Power and Agency in Colonial and Postcolonial Libya* (New York: Taylor & Francis Group, 2005), 56.

<sup>3</sup> C.R. Pennell, *Morocco Since 1830: A History* (New York: New York University Press, 2000), 195.

<sup>4</sup> Jamaa Baida, ““The United States and the Franco-Moroccan Conflict (1950–1956),” in *The Atlantic Connection: 200 years of Moroccan-American Relations, 1786-1986*, ed. Jerome B. Bookin-Weiner and Mohamed El Mansour (Rabat: Edino, 1990), 183.

<sup>5</sup> Jerome B. Bookin-Weiner and Mohamed El Mansour, *The Atlantic Connection: 200 years of Moroccan-American Relations, 1786-1986* (Rabat: Edino, 1990), 71.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 72.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 73.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 75.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 186.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 190.

<sup>11</sup> Ted Morgan, *Literary Outlaw: The Life and Times of William S. Burroughs* (New York: Avon, 1988).

<sup>12</sup> Alan Hibbard, *Paul Bowles, Magic and Morocco* (San Francisco, Cadmus Editions, 2004), 17.

<sup>13</sup> Mohamed Choukri, *For Bread Alone* (Telegram, 1973), 203.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 153.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 208.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 164.

<sup>17</sup> Michelle Green, *The Dream at the End of the World: Paul Bowles and the Literary Renegades in Tangier* (New York: Harper Collins, 1991), 7.

<sup>18</sup> Mahmood Mamdani, *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: America, the Cold War, and the Roots of Terror* (New York: Random House, Inc., 2004), 18.

<sup>19</sup> Andy Molinsky, *Global Dexterity: How to Adapt Your Behavior Across Cultures without Losing Yourself in the Process* (Boston, MA: Harvard Business Review Press, 2013), 57.

<sup>20</sup> Paul Bowles, *Without Stopping: An Autobiography* (New Jersey: Ecco Press, 1985), 149.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 165.

<sup>22</sup> William W. Cooper and Piyu Yue, *Challenges of the Muslim World: Present, Future, and Past* (Amsterdam: Elsevier, 2008), 86.

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