

From Winston Churchill's Easel to the Stock-Image Archive: Moroccan Fauna as Destination Image Formation



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Abstract: This article investigates how a limited repertoire of animal imagery has shaped the Western visual representation of Morocco across different media for more than eighty years. It argues that donkeys, camels, and goats function as recurring visual codes that construct Morocco as timeless, exotic, and culturally distinct, thereby influencing its international destination image. The study examines paintings by Winston Churchill, *The Sheltering Sky* (1990), the guidebooks *National Geographic Traveler Morocco* (2011) and *Insight Guides Explore Marrakesh* (2019), as well as images from digital platforms, considered as an intermedial corpus. It draws on Gillian Rose's critical visual methodology, postcolonial ecocriticism, theories of exoticism, and intermediality.

The same animal figures recur across painting, film, travel guides, and digital media, constructing an image of Morocco presented as timeless, picturesque, and exotic. This iconography shapes tourist expectations while marginalizing species emblematic of Morocco's biodiversity, such as the Barbary macaque and the bald ibis.

The article proposes incorporating ethical principles into destination branding and promoting wildlife tourism based on conservation rather than the spectacle of animals.

The study shows that it is also animal-related signifiers - and not just narratives or landscapes - that are transmitted from one medium to another, establishing a novel link between postcolonial ecocriticism, intermediality, and tourism management.

Keywords: destination image; exoticism; postcolonial ecocriticism; visual methodology; wildlife tourism; intermediality; Morocco; Winston Churchill; ecotourism management.

JEL Classification: Z32; Z33; L82; Q57; M31; Z11.

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Introduction

What does it mean when a travel guide measures the width of a city's streets in "donkey widths"? Alternatively, when a political leader commissions a painting of a donkey and a camel while proclaiming his admiration for Morocco? What does it reveal that a search for "donkeys Marrakech" on a commercial photography platform returns 222 images available for licensing? In addition, what effect do these modes of representation have on the tourist

image of a country whose tourism sector contributes significantly to its gross domestic product and employment? (Aderkaoui 2026).

The Western visual archive of Morocco is densely populated with animals whose documentary function is often difficult to justify, but whose semiotic function is unequivocal. They serve to designate the place as an elsewhere: a foreign space in a precise and seductive way. Camels stand out against the desert dunes or occupy the foreground of rural souks. Donkeys crowd the narrow alleyways, carrying people and goods; sheep disrupt traffic; mules climb mountain paths; and storks nest atop palace ruins. These animals convey a set of meanings that is both limited and remarkably consistent. They signal a place perceived as strange, picturesque, pre-modern, and therefore worthy of being photographed. In this sense, the animals perform a role similar to that which Edward Said identified in the recurring figures of the veiled woman, the bazaar merchant, and other stock images of the Orient (Said 1978). They function as signs of authenticity, visual shorthand for “the real Morocco.” Their significance lies less in what they do within any single text than in what they do within the tourism economy: they are, in the vocabulary of destination-image research, organic image agents - media-borne representations that form visitor expectations long before any marketing organization intervenes (Beeton 2016; Valeri 2024). For example, one only needs to open the *National Geographic Traveler: Morocco* at “the Rif Mountains” chapter, to see the photographic apparatus perform its work before a single itinerary is consulted. A caption beneath a harvest scene assures the reader that “farming is still a very traditional activity in the Rif Mountains” (French 2011). Still. The adverb does the othering. A few pages earlier, an alley in Ouezzane is captioned as “just wide enough for a loaded donkey” (French 2011); the town’s spatial fabric is conveyed to the reader in donkey-widths, the way one might describe a doorway in shoulder-widths. Charming? Certainly. The charm depends on the assumption that the reader’s own streets are measured otherwise; in car-widths, say. The caption flatters the reader’s modernity while offering the town’s premodernity as spectacle. Eleven words. Considerable work.

The *National Geographic Traveler* describes itself as the fantasy it serves. Morocco’s visitors, the guide’s opening pages explain, are “drawn here by the handful of exotic tableaux for which the country is famed - the chaotic bustle of the medina, the great sweeps of Lawrence of Arabia-esque sand dunes” (French 2011). Exotic tableaux are indeed the guide’s own and describe the guide’s own photographic practice with an accuracy its editors perhaps did not intend. Noteworthy, the same guide concedes the historical mechanism this article traces. In its capsule history of Moroccan cinema, it records that “foreign directors concentrated on showcasing the country’s exoticism” while ‘Moroccan filmmakers focused more on contemporary social issues’ (French 2011). The admission is remarkable. The guidebook diagnoses, in a sidebar, the very representational economy in which its own captions participate. Moreover, the question is would Morocco still feel sufficiently exotic to justify the journey? If donkeys, goats, and camels were not showcased in this way. The journey of Port and Kit in *The Sheltering Sky*, the journey of Winston Churchill to Marrakech, or the journey of the reader who closes the guidebook and opens a booking platform. The question is not merely academic. Film-induced tourism research consistently finds that audiences retain visually memorable locations more reliably than narrative content, and that such retained images convert into travel intention (Beeton 2016; Valeri 2024). If the animal sign is what audiences retain, then the animal sign is what Morocco’s destination image is made of.

This study makes a threefold contribution. First, it offers an in-depth case study within the framework of postcolonial ecocriticism, demonstrating how animals participate in mechanisms of other in tourism media. Second, it contributes to studies of adaptation and intermediality by demonstrating that what is transferred from one medium to another is not limited to plot, characters, or aesthetic style, but also includes specific animal signifiers whose semiotic function is preserved in the receiving medium. Third - and this is its contribution to the field of tourism management - it translates this intermedial analysis into operational recommendations. It thus proposes approaches that enable Moroccan destination *marketing* organizations to identify, rethink, and ethically promote the animal imagery that a century of foreign media representations has associated with Morocco.

1. Literature Review

1.1 Exoticism and the Spectacle of the Other

Exoticism is “an inherently relational term that presupposes an awareness of Otherness” (Kapferer and Theodossopoulos 2016). The word’s Greek root, *exo*, means “outside” and marks its operation. The exotic is what arrives from elsewhere; it carries with it “a pervasive dualism between the Self and the Other, in which ethnocentric values provide the measure for evaluating difference” (Kapferer and Theodossopoulos 2016). Exoticism is, therefore, a relational structure that requires a self in order for the Other to be perceived. In this account, the animal shown in the frame is not an animal merely observed but an animal positioned to confirm the viewer’s outsideness

and the place's elsewhere. For destination image research, this relational structure matters because the tourist's anticipated "elsewhere" is precisely what the destination sells; exoticism, in short, is a marketing asset with a colonial genealogy. In his work published in 2002, Victor Segalen would likely not have fully identified with the positions of Kapferer and Theodossopoulos. While he defines "the Other" as a source of both fear and fascination, he challenges prevailing conceptions of exoticism and redefines it not as a product of colonialism, mass tourism, or mere geographical displacement, but as an "aesthetic of diversity" (Segalan 2002). Similarly, Deborah Root examines how Western artistic and commercial practices are appropriate and commodify so-called 'native' experiences, reducing them to cultural products intended for consumption. She also questions the assumptions underlying tourism, consumer practices, and cultural hierarchies through which notions of authenticity and value are constructed (Root 1996; see also Huggan 2001).

Stuart Hall explores this idea further in his analysis of the "spectacle of the Other." According to him, representation operates through binary oppositions that are at once powerful - laden with emotion and anxiety - and deeply reductive, since they reduce the complexity of differences between individuals to a simple, stark binary opposition (Hall 1997). From Stuart Hall's perspective, stereotypes reduce, essentialize, naturalize, and freeze difference in place, while erecting a symbolic boundary between the normal and the deviant, between insiders and outsiders, between "Us" and "Them" (Hall 1997). The images of wildlife that populate Western visual archives of Morocco are precisely part of this binary reduction. The goat is portrayed there as an exotic and picturesque spectacle, rather than as a domestic animal integral to Morocco's pastoral economies. Similarly, the donkey becomes a symbol of otherness presented as a charming backwardness, while the camel is reduced to an emblematic prop in tourist photography. Exoticism is not a fixed content but rather a moving of the world around; a continual redeployment of difference prepared for consumption by the metropolitan reader (Célestin 1995). The theoretical framework proposed by Célestin thus permits us to interpret the recurring animal compositions in the corpus not as innovations, but as legacies: signs whose form remains remarkably stable across the centuries, even as the medium changes. Daniela Berghahn extends this line of thought to the field of contemporary visual culture. According to her, exoticism in transnational cinema operates through what she calls the "spectacle of cultural difference" (Berghahn 2024). The exotic thus constitutes a mode of representation that stages foreign spaces as objects of visual pleasure intended for the metropolitan gaze or the potential tourist - a distinction that Paul Bowles specifically seeks to establish between the traveler and the tourist (Bowles, 1949). Berghahn further emphasizes that cinematic exoticism adopts the tourist's point of view: the camera shows what the tourist wants to see, thereby giving rise to what Sue Beeton refers to as "film-induced tourism" (Beeton, 2016). This convergence between the tourist gaze and the cinematic gaze is precisely the mechanism through which media representations are transformed into images of a destination. It is also this mechanism that we will highlight throughout this article.

1.2 Media-Induced Tourism

The film-induced tourism literature establishes that screen exposure shapes destination awareness, image, and visitation intention (Beeton 2016), and recent case-study work confirms that visually memorable locations frequently outweigh narrative elements in what audiences retain and act upon (Valeri 2024). Morocco is a paradigmatic case (Taibi, Hanbali, and Iflahen 2024). The country's film servicing economy, administered through the Centre Cinématographique Marocain (CCM) hosts dozens of foreign productions annually; in 2017 alone, foreign companies shot twenty-seven feature films, nine television series, and fifty-six documentaries in the country, investing close to 500 million MAD (Higbee, Bahmad, and Martin 2020). Each production is simultaneously an export of images, that is to say, an unpaid and unmanaged advertisement whose content the destination does not control. When those images repeat the same faunal inventory. The destination image hardens around camels, donkeys, mules, goats, and tourist expectation arrives at the border already formed and photographed.

1.3 Postcolonial Ecocriticism and the Animal Other

Postcolonial ecocriticism examines "the relationships between humans, animals, and the environment in postcolonial literary texts" (Huggan and Tiffin 2010). Its key contribution to the present argument is that the colonial and tourist gaze do not merely look at human Others and represent them; they construct a continuous spectrum across which animals and human Others are positioned and symmetrized together, sometimes even blending together (see Figure 8). The Western definition of humanity, Huggan and Tiffin write, drawing on Val Plumwood, 'depended - and still depends - on the presence of the "not-human": the uncivilized, the animal and animalistic' (Huggan and Tiffin 2010). Consequently, exoticizing an animal in a Moroccan context is not a separate act from the exoticization of Moroccans; both are part of the same system of representation. The mule on a mountain trail and the anonymous villager leading it are part of the same scenographic framework: neither appears as a subject

endowed with a narrative inner life or a distinct socioeconomic and environmental reality, but rather as mere visual markers of the place. From the perspective of wildlife tourism management, this logic has very concrete consequences. Representations that reduce animals to mere props help legitimize tourism practices that treat them in the same way: paid photo opportunities with animals, animals restrained or exploited for photo ops and artificially staged encounters. These practices have documented effects on animal welfare as well as on biodiversity conservation.

In *A History of Tourism in Africa* (2021), Todd Cleveland provides the historical grounding for comprehending how African fauna came to function as an exotic spectacle to be consumed and photographed. He contends that “Africa’s dramatic wildlife and distinctive cultures, constitutive elements of this perceived exoticness,” have for centuries stimulated people’s imagination worldwide (Cleveland 2021). The African safari established a representational template in which animals are staged for an arriving Western gaze; a staged, prepared authenticity to be enjoyed, as MacCannell would have stated it (MacCannell 1973; see also Rafik and Ouchoud 2025). The Moroccan fauna inventory is a domesticated version of the same template. Cleveland also documents the Moroccan chapter of this history: Edith Wharton’s *in Morocco* (1920), written to support the French protectorate, promoted the country as “a land of the Middle Ages ... an Arabian Night fantasy world,” a characterization “that would prove highly durable” (Cleveland 2021). In other words, the Orientalist fantasy has, from the very beginning, served as a strategy for attracting visitors. This article seeks to assess the extent to which this strategy continues to rely on animal imagery today.

1.4 How Signs Travel Across Media

Film is “an art form between media” (Bruhn and Gjelsvik, 2018), a space of “in-betweenness,” to use Judit Pieldner’s (2020) term. It is an art form that continually absorbs the conventions of the media that preceded it in order to rework them. Based on this conception, Jørgen Bruhn, Anne Gjelsvik, and Judit Pieldner develop a methodological vocabulary for studying how forms of representation circulate between painting, photography, the novel, cinema, and digital media (Bruhn and Gjelsvik 2018; Pieldner 2020). Within the framework of this study, this approach allows for a shift from an analysis centered on a single medium to an analysis of representational units that circulate from one medium to another while retaining their semiotic function. In other words, the aim is to examine how animal signifiers migrate across different media while preserving their semiotic role and, from the perspective of tourism studies, how this circulation gradually contributes to the formation of the destination’s organic image - an image with which tourism marketing strategies must subsequently contend, whether they seek to reinforce or transform it.

1.5 Tourism Texts and the Multimodal Construction of Place

Sabrina Francesconi conceives of tourism text as a multimodal device whose function is to construct a tourist destination on the visual, verbal, and textual levels for an audience that has not yet embarked on its journey - a tourist or a traveler, a fundamental distinction in Paul Bowles’s famous reflection (1949). The primary mission of tourism promotion is thus to represent the place through both images and text (Francesconi 2014). This representational framework is not, however, neutral: it is structured by broader cultural hierarchies that determine what becomes visible, meaningful, and desirable in the eyes of the visitor. In *The Tourist Gaze 3.0*, John Urry and Jonas Larsen show that perception, like language, is mediated by social and cultural contexts that produce different ways of seeing. The tourist gaze is thus shaped by culturally acquired values, knowledge, expectations, and aspirations (Urry and Larsen 2011). As John Berger (1972) has shown, individuals perceive not only the objects themselves but also the relationship they have with these objects. Within this multimodal framework, the animal sign is one element among many. Alongside urban landscapes, images of cuisine, architectural details, and costumes, its specific function is to stage the place’s difference and strangeness. A quest for exoticism, precisely.

1.6 Moroccan Cinema and the Foreign Gaze

Kevin Dwyer and M. A. Tazi’s *Beyond Casablanca* documents how Morocco has long served as a setting for the production of otherness. “In many countries - Morocco is one of them - foreign films being shot locally often push aside the nation’s own filmmakers” (Dwyer 2004). Tazi contends:

Up to a certain point this was a very enriching experience for me. But it couldn’t continue unless you wanted to spend the rest of your life in that kind of mercenary activity. Also, it started to get monotonous: when people think ‘shooting in Morocco’ they think of the south, tents, camels, folklore - again, it’s that Orientalist vision. (Tazi qtd. in Dwyer 2004)

Higbee, Bahmad, and Martin, in *Moroccan Cinema Uncut*, extend this argument by observing that foreign films “offer little meaningful engagement with Moroccan culture, often using the country as an exotic backdrop for

Western-centred narratives and protagonists" (Higbee, Bahmad, and Martin 2020). The literature gap that this article addresses is now clear. Studies on exoticism analyze representations without examining their implications for tourism management. Conversely, research on media-induced tourism measures the effects of these representations on visitor flows without considering the centuries-old iconographic legacy that underlies them. Finally, neither of these two fields has yet applied a systematic visual methodology to representations of Moroccan wildlife. The objective of this study is precisely to bridge these three perspectives.

2. Method

2.1 Critical Visual Methodology: Rose's Four Sites and Three Modalities

The analysis is operationalized through Gillian Rose's critical visual methodology. 'By "critical",' Rose writes, "I mean an approach that thinks about the visual in terms of the cultural significance, social practices and power relations in which it is embedded; and this means thinking about the power relations that produce, are articulated through, and can be challenged by ways of seeing and imaging" (Rose 2023). The definition matters for tourism research more than is usually acknowledged. Destination images are precisely "ways of seeing and imaging" embedded in power relations - colonial, commercial, and curatorial - and a destination-image study that inventories image content without asking who produced the image, where it travels, and who consumes it is, in Rose's terms, uncritical.

Rose's framework holds that "there are four sites at which the meanings of an image are made: the site(s) of the production of an image, the site of the image itself, the site(s) of its circulation, and the site where it encounters its spectators or users' - its audiencing" (Rose 2023). The fourth and fifth editions added circulation to what had been a three-site framework precisely "to assess how different methods address the mobility of digital images across many kinds of social media and image-sharing platforms and devices" (Rose 2023) - an addition without which the stock-photography node of the present corpus could hardly be analyzed at all. At each site, Rose distinguishes three modalities: the technological (the apparatus that makes, carries, or displays the image), the compositional (the formal strategies of the image itself), and the social (the institutions, economies, and practices surrounding it) - and she notes "all three modalities are found at all four sites" (Rose 2023). For the circulation site in particular, Rose supplies the questions this study asks of every image: "What technologies are used to make an image move? Does that movement change the compositional qualities of an image? What social, economic or political processes are shaping that movement?" (Rose 2023).

Note worthily, Rose's framework is not a neutral grid onto which any content may be poured; it requires a theory of what the images are doing. Stuart Hall supplies that theory here. Rose herself anchors the interpretative stance of the entire methodology in Hall's dictum that "there is no single or 'correct' answer to the question, 'What does this image mean?'... work in this area is bound to be interpretative - a debate between, not who is 'right' and who is 'wrong', but between equally plausible, though sometimes competing and contesting, meanings and interpretations" (Hall, qtd. in Rose 2023). And Hall's account of culture as "not so much a set of things ... as a process, a set of practices' concerned with 'the production and exchange of meanings" (Hall, qtd. in Rose 2023) explains why a donkey can be a working animal in one practice of meaning-exchange and a sign of timeless Morocco in another. The present study, then, pairs the two: Rose supplies the sites and modalities - the where of meaning-making; Hall supplies the spectacle of the Other - the what that is made at each site. At the production site, we ask who authored the image and within which genre and economy. At the site of the image, we perform compositional interpretation: framing, scale, angle, color, and what Rose, following Pollock, calls "the spatial organization of looks" (Rose 2023) who looks at whom, and who is looked at. At the site of circulation, we track the image's movement across platforms, markets, and borders. And at the site of audience, we reconstruct the viewing position the image proposes - the implied spectator it seats - while acknowledging, with Rose and Hall alike, that actual audiences negotiate and contest.

2.2 Corpus and Its Faunal Categories and Analytical Protocol

This article reads four nodes of the Western visual archive of Morocco as a single intermedial corpus, along a trajectory that runs from engraving and painting, through the novel, to photography, to film, to circulating digital images. The corpus comprises: (1) Winston Churchill's Marrakech paintings, above all *A Town Gate at Marrakech with a Man on a Donkey* and *A Road at Marrakech, with a Man Leading a Camel* (Art UK, n.d.), read alongside *Tower of the Koutoubia Mosque* (1943); (2) Bernardo Bertolucci's *The Sheltering Sky* (1990), adapted from Paul Bowles's 1949 novel, with particular attention to its desert sequences and its recurring depictions of camels and goats; (3) two guidebooks - the *National Geographic Traveler Morocco* (French 2011), whose photographic apparatus and caption system are analyzed page by page, and *Insight Guides Explore Marrakesh* (Insight Guides

2019), whose history pages recirculate a nineteenth-century engraving of the city; and (4) the circulating images and photographs of marrakech-riad.co.uk, artuk.org, gettyimages.com, distant-horizons.com, onlineonly.christies.com, smithsonianmag.com, telegraph.co.uk, and theguardian.com - the editorial, commercial, and social-media afterlife through which the corpus's animal signs now move.

Each corpus is analyzed using the same set of recurring faunal categories to enable a systematic comparison: the camel in relation to the desert, the souk, and the beach; the goat in connection with rural landscapes and interactions with humans; the donkey and the mule in the spaces of the medina, the road, and mountain trails; the sheep in pastoral and agricultural contexts; and finally, the stork as a recurring emblematic figure in Morocco's built and natural landscapes. For each of these categories, the analysis addresses the same questions, organized according to the four sites defined by Gillian Rose. What is the animal doing within the image, and how is the composition organized (site of the image)? Who produced the image, for which institution, and in what media genre (site of production)? Through which media, platforms, and markets do the image circulate (site of circulation)? Finally, what viewing position does it offer the viewer, and what tourist expectations - as well as what wildlife tourism practices on the ground - does it help to legitimize (site of the audience)? By systematically applying this analytical framework to painting, literature, photography, film, and digital platforms, this article highlights both representational patterns and significant transformations in the visual construction of Morocco.

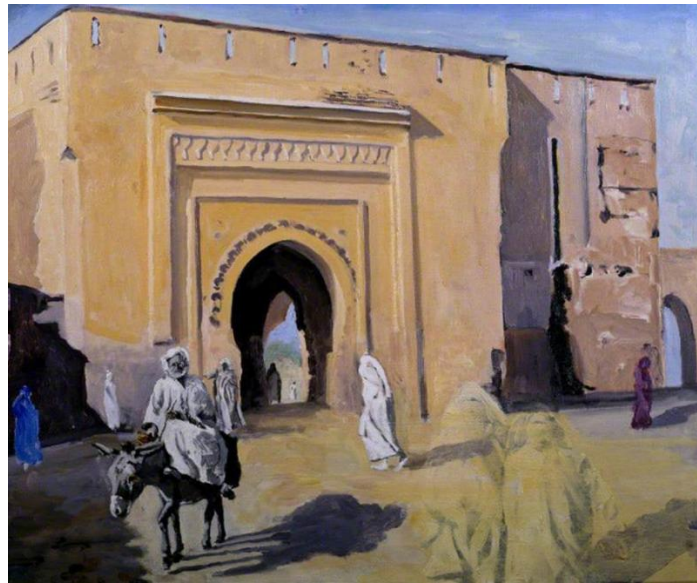
Ten figures anchor the analysis, one per corpus platform, so that the reproduction of visual material remains at the minimum indispensable to the scholarly argument. That is, one Churchill canvas (Figure 1); one photograph-and-caption unit from the *National Geographic Traveler* (Figure 2), with the guide's remaining fauna pages analyzed in the text without reproduction; one page from *Insight Guides Explore Marrakesh* reproducing an 1836 engraving of the city (Figure 3); one frame from *The Sheltering Sky* (Figure 4); and six documents of circulation, one per platform. The analysis included a press photograph from telegraph.co.uk, the Smithsonian donkey feature, the Distant Horizons tour page, the Christie's William Klein lot, the Guardian's Instagram travel gallery, and a screenshot of the gettyimages.com results page for 'donkeys Marrakech' (Figures 5–10). All reproduced images are fully attributed to their respective copyright holders, and their inclusion is intended solely for the purposes of criticism, review, and academic commentary, consistent with applicable copyright exceptions, including the United Kingdom's fair dealing provisions under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988 and the United States' fair use doctrine under Section 107 of the U.S. Copyright Act. Each image is discussed directly within the accompanying critical argument.

3. Research Results

3.1 Painting: Churchill in Marrakech and the Painted Origin the of Animal Sign

When Winston Churchill set up his easel in front of the ramparts of the old medina, his brushstrokes did much more than capture the North African light: they established a pictorial point of origin for the "animal sign" within the Western imperial imagination. In *A Town Gate at Marrakech with a Man on a Donkey* (Figure 1), ochre walls fill most of the frame; a keyhole arch opens onto shadow; white-robed figures drift across the middle distance; and in the left foreground, unmistakable, a turbaned man rides a small dark donkey toward the viewer. When we apply the compositional questions proposed by Gillian Rose, the visual economy of the painting becomes immediately apparent. The city gate appears to be the main subject of the work - Churchill defined himself first and foremost as a painter of light on architecture. Yet the viewer's gaze inevitably returns to the lower left corner, where the donkey and its rider form the only truly striking diagonal in the composition. The animal is small, dark against a light background, secondary in terms of composition but indispensable in terms of semiotics. If it were removed from the scene, the image could just as easily depict southern Spain or serve as a simple studio backdrop. It is the donkey that anchors the scene in a specific geographical space. It confirms to the viewer that they are in North Africa, amidst a population whose mode of transportation seems, according to the image's implicit codes, to belong to another era.

Figure 1. Winston Churchill, *A Town Gate at Marrakech with a Man on a Donkey*, oil on canvas. The mounted donkey rider forms the composition's only strong diagonal, lower-left foreground.



Source: © The Churchill Heritage Ltd; image via Art UK (artuk.org). Reproduced under fair dealing for criticism and review.

The companion painting, *A Road at Marrakech, with a Man Leading a Camel* (Art UK, n.d.), accomplishes the same effect with the second pack animal in the series. In both works, the animal is detached from its material reality and transformed into a powerful signifier: a semiotic anchor that codes the Maghreb as a timeless, premodern, and exoticized space. While Churchill sought above all the vibrant terracotta and cobalt blue hues of Morocco as a psychological refuge from the pressures of political life, his Impressionist eye nonetheless helped reinforce an already well-established visual narrative. By reducing the local horseman and his workhorse to a single pastoral motif set against the imposing ochre ramparts of Marrakesh, the painting romanticizes a living, dynamic reality, transforming it into a frozen image. From the perspective of “the site of production,” according to Gillian Rose’s methodology, the contextual elements are unequivocal: a British statesman painting in his spare time in a French protectorate, within a fully established Orientalist genre, whose conventions - architecture elevated to the status of a monument, light as the true subject of the painting, and human and animal figures reduced to the role of mere elements of animation (staffage) - had been established a century earlier by Delacroix.

The animal sign thus functions as an epistemic origin point, creating a persistent colonial taxonomy that frames the Global South not as a dynamic site of historical change, but as an aestheticized backdrop designed for the Western eye - and, in tourism terms, as a destination image awaiting its market. Noteworthy, the tourism industry has since folded the painter himself into the attraction: La Mamounia hotel maintains “Le Bar Churchill, named after La Mamounia’s most famous patron, Britain’s wartime prime minister, keen amateur painter and ardent Moroccophile Winston Churchill, who visited on several occasions during his retirement in order to capture the city on canvas” (Insight Guides 2019). The gaze has become a heritage product; the easel, an amenity.

3.2 The Novel: Bowles, the Tourist, and the Traveler

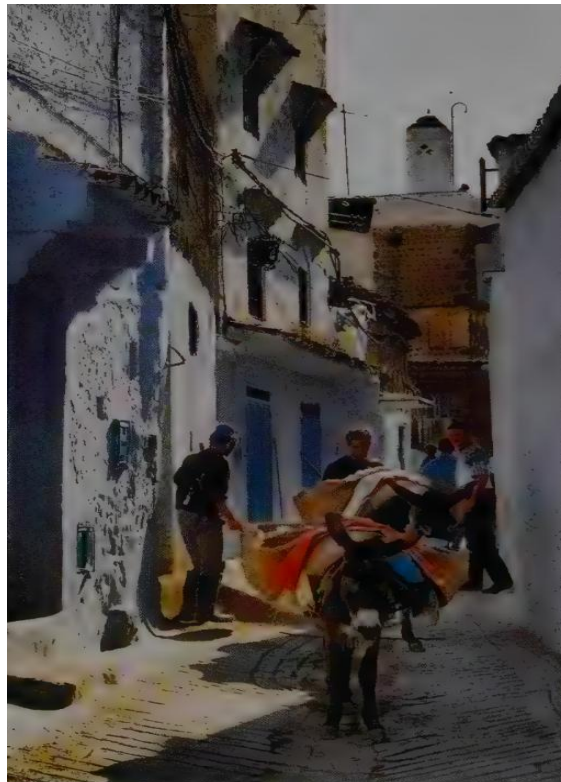
Between the painted donkey and the photographed donkey lies a novel. *With The Sheltering Sky* (1949), Paul Bowles did not so much enrich the visual archives with a new image as he proposed a genuine ideology of the gaze: the famous distinction between the “tourist,” who “accepts his own civilization without ever questioning it,” and the “traveler,” who confronts it with other cultures and rejects what he deems unsatisfactory (Bowles 1949). This distinction subtly flatters every reader by inviting them to identify with the second category, and the tourism industry has continually capitalized on this symbolic validation. As Sabrina Francesconi points out, tourism texts systematically address their readers as “travelers” rather than tourists,” precisely because this term is more appealing and more effective from a commercial standpoint (Francesconi 2014).

Port and Kit’s journey into the desert is presented as a quest for self-dissolution. Yet the visual culture that has appropriated their story - as the following sections will show - has transformed this existential quest into a mere backdrop. From this perspective, the novel occupies a pivotal position within the corpus: it bridges the gap between painting and photography by providing the narrative of an “authentic elsewhere” that photographic images would strive, over the next seven decades, to illustrate through.

3.3 Photography: The National Geographic Traveler and the Captioned Animal

Guidebook photography differs from painting in one decisive respect: its images arrive captioned. The caption instructs. It tells the reader what the image shows and, more quietly, how to feel about what it shows - and, in the language of destination marketing, it converts an image into an itinerary item. The *National Geographic Traveler Morocco* (French 2011) supplies five photograph-and-caption units that, read through Rose's site of the image, disclose the guide's entire faunal grammar; one is reproduced here (Figure 2) and the remaining four are analyzed in the text. At the site of production, it bears remembering what institution stands behind them: National Geographic has functioned, for over a century, as perhaps the most influential single apparatus through which Western audiences have received images of the non-Western world, its house style - saturated color, traditional dress, technically brilliant wildlife - so codified that whatever appears inside its frame arrives, so to speak, pre-trusted (Lutz and Collins 1993).

Figure 2. National Geographic Traveler: Morocco — “An Ouezzane alley: just wide enough for a loaded donkey.” The animal as unit of measurement.



Source: French 2011; © National Geographic Society. Reproduced under fair dealing for criticism and review.

Figure 2 may be the guide's most quietly revealing item, and it has already served as this article's opening exhibit. A narrow-whitewashed alley in Ouezzane; a loaded donkey at its centre; figures pressed to the walls. The caption: “An Ouezzane alley: just wide enough for a loaded donkey” (French 2011). Consider what has happened grammatically. The donkey has become a unit of measurement. The charm depends on the assumption that the reader's own streets are measured otherwise, and the caption flatters the reader's modernity while offering the town's premodernity as spectacle. Moreover, the guide's remaining fauna pages extend the grammar. At a camel souk near Goulimine, robed men and camels interlock edge to edge in a crowded, warm-toned, almost frieze-like composition; the caption - “Bargaining at a camel souk near Goulimine” - adds a verb, and the surrounding text supplies a mythology: the fair is attended by Tuareg traders, “known as the ‘blue men of the desert’ because of their traditional blue djellabas,” and Goulimine itself is “sometimes called the ‘gateway to the Sahara’” (French 2011). Whether any reader could subsequently look at the photograph and see simply livestock exchange - prices, lineages, veterinary condition - seems doubtful. The frame arrives pre-narrated. Elsewhere, “a Berber villager and his mule ascend into the High Atlas Mountains”: the massif dominates, the rider and animal occupy a sliver of trail, and the composition descends directly from the Romantic mountain picture in which a small human figure gives the sublime its measure - Churchill's man-leading-a-camel transposed from oil to Kodachrome, seventy years on. The mule's contribution is temporal: a mounted figure on a mountain trail could belong to almost any century. In the Rif

chapter, a harvest scene is captioned “Farming is still a very traditional activity in the Rif Mountains” - still; the adverb does the othering - while the adjacent text formats the corpus’s one endangered animal as a lottery prize: “If you are lucky, you may see a troop of Barbary macaques” (French 2011). Luck. The macaque’s endangerment goes unmentioned on the spread; the animal enters the sighting economy alongside the boars and the eagles, fauna as encounter, encounter as reward. And on the Marrakech palaces spread, “a white stork nests on the early 17th-century ruins of El Badi Palace”: bird, nest, and ruin fused into one picturesque vertical totem, printed beside Clive Carpenter’s boxed reflection that “a trip to the Bahia Palace is a fascinating reminder of how far into the modern world the country’s old ways survived” (Carpenter, in French 2011). Morocco’s “old ways” have “survived” - persisted, like the stork’s nesting habits, like a species - “into the modern world,” which belongs, by grammatical implication, to the reader. Fabian (1983) gave this maneuver a name decades ago: the denial of coevalness. The guidebook page performs it with a bird, a ruin, and a tip. In a similar vein, another caption offers “Shopping at a souk in Marrakech’s timeless medina” (French 2011); timeless is the operative fantasy, and the fauna are its most efficient carriers.

3.4 The Guidebook’s Deep Archive: Insight Guides and the 1836 Engraving

While *National Geographic Traveler* illustrates how the zodiac sign is used in contemporary travel guide photography, *Insight Guides Explore Marrakesh* reveals an even rarer phenomenon, a guidebook that explicitly references the very origins of this iconographic tradition. In the section titled “History: Key Dates”, the book reproduces an “engraving of Marrakesh dating from 1836,” attributed to the *Mary Evans Picture Library* (Insight Guides, 2019) and presented here as Figure 3. An examination of its composition is revealing. The city occupies the middle ground, with its ramparts, palm groves, and minarets, while the Atlas Mountains rise in the background. In the foreground, on the path that guides the viewer’s gaze toward the city, a loaded pack animal and its handler appear. The year is 1836. More than a century before Winston Churchill set up his easel in Marrakech, the compositional model was already fully established: Marrakech presents itself as a panorama, the Atlas Mountains serve as a backdrop, and the pair formed by the animal and its driver occupies the foreground as the visual sign that immediately authenticates the landscape as that of Morocco.

Figure 3. Insight Guides Explore Marrakesh, “History: Key Date” page, reproducing “An 1836 engraving of Marrakech” (Mary Evans Picture Library). City and Atlas in the distance; a laden beast of burden and its driver on the foreground path.



Source: Insight Guides 2019; engraving © Mary Evans Picture Library. Reproduced under fair dealing for criticism and review.

The page, read through Rose’s four sites, is a small marvel of compression. At the site of production: a nineteenth-century European engraving made for European print audiences in the decades when the Maghreb was being converted into pictures. At the site of the image: the template this article has been tracing, already complete. At the site of circulation: the engraving survives into the present through a commercial picture library - Mary Evans

licenses historical imagery much as Getty licenses contemporary photographs - and is purchased back into a twenty-first-century guidebook to illustrate "History." And at the site of audiencing: today's visitor, planning a city break, absorbs an 1836 way of seeing as historical garnish, its conventions unmarked and therefore intact. The guidebook's epigraph on the same spread notes that "Marrakech's fortunes have depended upon the tastes of the ruling dynasties" (Insight Guides 2019); its own pages demonstrate that the city's image has depended, for nearly two centuries, upon the tastes of its pictures. Elsewhere the guide records, without apparent irony, that Souk Semmarine "used to be the souk of the blacksmiths who dealt specifically with horses and donkeys but is now a vivid corridor of consumerism" (Insight Guides 2019) - the working animal's infrastructure converted into retail—and directs diners to a rooftop terrace with "excellent views ... of the neighboring storks' nests" (Insight Guides 2019). The stork has become table dressing. The 1836 engraving, the Churchill bar, the storks'-nest terrace: the guidebook does not merely inherit the archive; it retails it.

3.5 Film: Bertolucci's *the Sheltering Sky* - the Camel as Vehicle, the Goat as Tableau

What does a camel carry when it carries a Western protagonist into the desert?

Bernardo Bertolucci's 1990 adaptation of Bowles's novel translates the archive into motion. Where Churchill's donkeys are ornamental, Bertolucci's camels are existential. The film stages an extended desert sequence in which Kit travels with a Tuareg caravan, and Figure 4a reproduces its characteristic image: white camels in strict profile crossing a flat, hazed desert, the horizon low, the light a golden monochrome that dissolves detail into silhouette. Kit rides among the indigo-veiled Tuareg, her pale jacket and bare ankles the only Western notes in the frame. The animal here is doing two things simultaneously. First, it performs the desert; a sand sea without a camel is merely a beach; with a camel, it becomes the Sahara, the Orient, Africa. Second, it performs the protagonist's Western alterity: the camel is the vehicle by which Kit can ride into otherness, her body carried in file with the caravan, processed through an animal apparatus that does not belong to her. The camel is, in semiotic terms, the threshold animal - and, in tourism terms, the prototype of the sunset camel trek that now anchors the excursion economy from Merzouga to Agafay. An adaptation of a novel that despises tourism became, in its visual afterlife, an engine of film-induced tourism (Beeton 2016); a staged authenticity, as MacCannell would have stated it (MacCannell 1973). One image, two economies.

Figure 4. Bernardo Bertolucci, *The Sheltering Sky* (1990). (a) Kit rides with the Tuareg caravan: white camels in profile against a golden desert haze. (b) Interior of a desert settlement: a herd of black-and-white goats crowds the straw-covered foreground while their herders sit and stand behind and among them — one man's face wrapped, another's emerging between the animals, a third seated at right, arms around his knees, looking sideways at the camera.



Source: © Warner Bros. / Recorded Picture Company. Screenshots reproduced under fair dealing for criticism and review.

Yet the film's most revealing animal is not the camel at all. Consider the stable interior reproduced in Figure 4b. The scene belongs to the film's final movement, during Kit's passage through the desert settlements, and its composition rewards slow looking. Directional light enters from a doorway to the right and rakes across earthen walls the color of the landscape outside; the floor is straw. A herd of young goats - black-bodied, white-faced, tether ropes visible at their legs - occupies the entire foreground plane. The men are behind them. A figure on the left, face wrapped in a white turban to the eyes, is half-screened by a dark goat pressed against his chest. A younger face surfaces at the center between the animals' backs, at exactly their height. A third man stands in the shadowed doorway. And at the right, a herder in a pale turban and rough woollen djellaba sits with his arms wrapped around his knees, looking sideways at the camera - the frame's one direct human address.

What is this frame doing? Nearly everything this article has been arguing, all at once. Begin with the plane of the composition: the goats stand in front, the men behind. The hierarchy of visibility has been inverted - the

animals screen the humans, and the human faces that do appear emerge between and behind goat bodies, at goat height. Huggan and Tiffin's continuous spectrum, on which animals and human Others are positioned and symmetrized together, is here rendered not as metaphor but as blocking: the frame literally interleaves herder and herd until the two read as one warm-toned mass of bodies (Huggan and Tiffin 2010). The lighting completes the operation. The raking chiaroscuro, the straw, the stable setting, the kids at the center of the composition summon the iconography of European genre painting - even, unmistakably, of the nativity. That is to say, Bertolucci's camera does not merely film a Moroccan interior; it repaints one, closing the intermedial loop that began at Churchill's easel - or rather, as Figure 3 has shown, at the engraver's bench a century earlier. Compare Figure 4b with Figure 1: the same earthen palette, the same subordination of individual identity to picturesque arrangement, the same animal admitted into the composition as a warm body among warm bodies. The painted Orient returns as cinematography - and compare Figure 4b with the National Geographic camel souk described above, which performs the same binding of men and animals into a single ethnographic unit.

Noteworthy, the humans in this frame do look back. The seated herder's sidelong gaze meets the lens directly; the young man's eyes find it between the goats' backs. Rose's "spatial organisation of looks" (Rose 2023) is precisely the analytic that catches what happens next: the returned gaze changes little, because the tableau format has already converted looking into posing. The frame receives their gaze the way a painting receives a viewer's: as confirmation of the spectacle, not as interruption of it. And notice what the returned gaze cannot undo - the tethers at the goats' legs, the men's position behind their animals, the composition's insistence that herder and herd belong to one another and to the scene. Nothing in the image, from the straw to the turbans to the raking light, permits the viewer to assign it a century. The scene floats in the timeless ethnographic present that the travel archive requires Morocco to inhabit; Fabian (1983) named this operation the denial of coevalness, and Figure 4b performs it with a herd of goats.

3.6 Circulating Images: Press, Magazine, Operator, Auction, Instagram, and 222 Donkeys

The analysis now shifts to the "site of circulation," as defined by Gillian Rose, and the fourth corpus demonstrates precisely why this dimension plays a central role in her methodological framework. Six platforms are examined, each through a representative image, to demonstrate how the animal symbol circulates across all the channels through which "Morocco" is currently presented to potential visitors: the press, magazines, tour operators, auction houses, image galleries on social media, and commercial stock photo libraries.

In September 2023, a few days after the Al Haouz earthquake, *The Telegraph* published an opinion piece titled "Tourism can help Morocco back on its feet" (Duddridge 2023; Figure 5). This headline alone sums up the central issue of this article: a destination's image is a national economic asset, and in times of crisis, it can become a key driver of recovery. However, an examination of the visual economy of this media coverage reveals a deeper phenomenon. Even as the country is struck by a disaster - with entire villages having collapsed in the High Atlas, precisely the region where engravings and photographs of mules in tourist guidebooks have romanticized for nearly two centuries - the press once again draws on the familiar iconographic repertoire

Figure 5. The Telegraph, "Tourism can help Morocco back on its feet," 17 September 2023. Press photograph accompanying the post-earthquake feature; the recovery appeal is visualized through the established destination iconography.



Source: telegraph.co.uk, 2023. Reproduced under fair dealing for criticism and review.

Smithsonian Magazine's feature on Morocco's donkeys (Figure 6) narrates the animal as an "astonishing commingling of past and present," reading even mules trotting over a new highway as "claiming the image as Morocco" (Smithsonian Magazine 2009). The formulation deserves a pause. A mule on a modern highway could equally "claim the image" as evidence of a working economy adapting to infrastructure; the writer instead reads the animal as the past intruding photogenically upon the present. The magazine performs, in prose, exactly what Carpenter's "old ways survived" tip performs in the guidebook: Fabian's denial of coevalness, applied at highway speed.

Figure 6. Smithsonian Magazine, "Morocco's Extraordinary Donkeys" (2009). The load-bearing donkey narrated as an 'astonishing commingling of past and present.'



Source: smithsonianmag.com. Reproduced under fair dealing for criticism and review.

Distant Horizons' "Morocco: Beyond Marrakech and Fez" page (Figure 7) calls the donkey "the soul of Morocco" and frets that development might cost the country that soul, a modern well standing "conspicuously ugly" beside the timeless valley (Moore 2020). Here the commercial function of the animal sign is fully explicit: the operator is selling itineraries, the donkey is the certificate of authenticity, and modernity - the well that presumably delivers clean water to the valley's residents - is an aesthetic liability. The Marrakech Riad blog completes the instruction, closing its donkey feature by inviting the tourist to photograph the next donkey they pass (Marrakech Riad 2018). Pity, admiration, and the camera shutter, all trained on the same animal.

Figure 7. Distant Horizons, "Morocco: Beyond Marrakech and Fez." Tour-operator page in which the donkey is narrated as "the soul of Morocco."



Source: distant-horizons.com. Reproduced under fair dealing for criticism and review.

At onlineonly.christies.com, William Klein's Moroccan fashion photography circulates through the online auction market (Figure 8): Western models staged against camels, the exotic marker transposed from the easel to the fashion image and priced accordingly (Klein 1958). The auction platform is where the animal sign's asset character becomes literal - and the Churchill canvases travel the same channel. A press photograph from 2012 shows a Churchill Marrakech painting gilt-framed under gallery lighting while a visitor leans in to look; when one such canvas, famously owned by a Hollywood actress, sold at auction in 2021, the donkey's painted siblings made global headlines. Ask Rose's circulation questions of this trajectory. What technologies moved the image? Auction logistics, press photography, wire distribution, database ingestion. Did the movement change its compositional qualities? Benjamin would say the aura drained away in reproduction; one might counter that a second aura accreted - provenance, a statesman's hand, the hammer price. What social and economic processes shaped the movement? A market in which Churchill's Moroccan pictures command premiums precisely because Marrakech, and its picturesque inventory, retain their glamour for the buying class; the painted animal has become an asset class.

Figure 8. Christie's online sale, "William Klein (1928–2022)": Moroccan fashion photography in which Western models are staged against camels; the exotic marker priced for the auction market.



Source: onlineonly.christies.com. Reproduced under fair dealing for criticism and review.

In 2017, the Guardian published a travel gallery of one photographer's Instagram snapshots of Morocco - the blue houses of Chefchaouen, market scenes, the Rif valley (Austin 2017; Figure 9). The item matters methodologically more than any single image within it, because it documents Rose's circuit closing. Audience has become production: the tourist, trained by the archive this article has traced, photographs the Morocco the archive promised, posts it to Instagram, and legacy media then republishes the tourist's production as travel inspiration for the next cohort. The gallery format canonizes the tourist gaze itself; Urry and Larsen's hermeneutic circle - the photograph already half-taken before the camera leaves the bag - is here completed in public, at editorial scale (Urry and Larsen 2011). No DMO commissioned any of it. That is precisely the point.

Finally, it is worth examining the very economics of keywords. At the time of writing this study, a search for the phrase "donkeys Marrakech" on *Getty Images* returned 222 images available under license (Figure 10). The results page can be read as a document in its own right. The first row already presents the donkey in four distinct ways: standing still next to a pink wall with its cart; harnessed in front of a blue door, its load carefully balanced; photographed in profile against a solid pink background, in a setting reminiscent of a studio portrait; and finally, tiny at the far end of an alley framed by a horseshoe-shaped arch. The following rows repeat the same motifs: traffic in the medina, mountain trails, and the souk.

The diversity of the images is real; their underlying homogeneity is even more so. All of them isolate the animal as a visual event. None of them truly document the donkey's role in the economy: the loads they carry, their owners, municipal debates on the use of animals in the medina, or even the veterinary associations working to protect them.

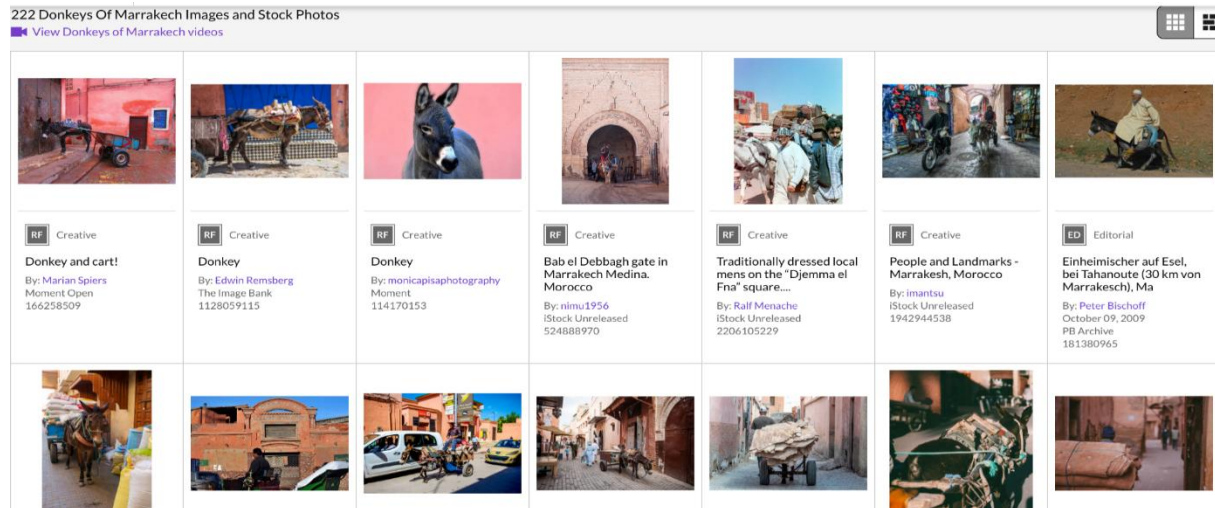
Figure 9. The Guardian, "Morocco: blue houses, Chefchaouen market, Rif valley - Instagram snapshots" (2017). A reader-photographer's Instagram travel imagery republished by legacy media: audiencing become production.



Source: theguardian.com, 2017. Reproduced under fair dealing for criticism and review.

The logic of keywords favors what is immediately identifiable, and this legibility rests precisely on what is already familiar to the eye. As Gillian Rose (2023) points out, technologies of circulation, themselves, influence the production of meaning in images.

Figure 10. Screenshot of gettyimages.com search results: "222 Donkeys Marrakech Images and Stock Photos." The animal sign as commercial inventory.



Source: gettyimages.com. Screenshot reproduced under fair dealing for criticism and review.

Across all these platforms the same structure recurs: each is a Western-authored framing of Morocco; in each, the emblem that carries "Morocco" is an animal rather than a person; the beast is consistently coded as timeless and authentic, set against a modernity it is imagined to resist; the animal is simultaneously an object of pity, of admiration, and – crucially – of photography; and all are, at bottom, selling something – tours, subscriptions, licenses, paintings, page views – so the exotic-authentic animal doubles as a marketing sign that certifies Morocco as elsewhere, premodern, and worth the journey. Art UK aggregates the Churchill canvases for a global audience (Art UK, n.d.); Mary Evans licenses the 1836 engraving back into the guidebooks; Getty licenses the donkeys forward into whatever needs a Morocco. Here, then, is the central result stated in tourism-management terms: the organic component of Morocco's destination image has been animal-borne for nearly two centuries, it was assembled entirely outside the country's control, and it is now algorithmically self-reproducing.

3.7 Which Animals Travel: a Counter-Inventory and Its Conservation Cost

A counter-inventory serves to highlight this representational logic even more clearly. The Barbary macaque - an endangered species of great ecological importance, at the heart of active conservation programs, and itself exploited as a photographic prop in Marrakech's Jemaa el-Fna Square - appears in *National Geographic Traveler* only as a chance encounter reserved for the attentive hiker. It is completely absent from Churchill's paintings, Bertolucci's images, and, just as significantly, from the first pages of commercial stock photo libraries. The same is true of the bald ibis, whose largest wild colonies are found in Souss-Massa National Park and whose partial recovery is, nevertheless, one of the major successes of conservation policies in North Africa. The animals that appear across all four corpora - the donkey, the camel, the mule, the goat, and the stork - share two common characteristics: their proximity to human activities and their immediate recognizability as visual symbols. Conversely, the species that remain absent from the shared iconographic repertoire possess the opposite characteristics: they are less integrated into everyday spaces and less immediately recognizable as emblems of the tourist imagination.

Why is that? Because endangered species do not perform exoticism efficiently. They require explanation, and explanation is friction. Knowledge, as Todorov reminds us through Berghahn, is incompatible with exoticism (Berghahn 2024). The macaque is interesting only if you know what a macaque is; the donkey in the alley is immediately legible to any viewer, anywhere, as a sign that Morocco is somewhere strange and somewhere worth photographing. The intermedial corpus selects for legibility. Ecological significance travels badly. Charm travels light. The conservation cost of this selection is direct: destination awareness is a precondition of ecotourism demand, and species that never enter the circulating image repertoire generate neither visitation revenue nor the public constituency that funds their protection. Morocco's flagship biodiversity assets are, in effect, locked out of the country's own destination image by a century of animal signs that were never chosen with conservation in mind.

4. Discussions

What does this analysis change? Two key contributions can be identified, in order of increasing significance, each with direct implications for tourism management.

First, regarding studies on exoticism and destination image. The corpus confirms the fundamental paradox that Daniela Berghahn borrows from Tzvetan Todorov: exoticism thrives on the surface of things, because in-depth knowledge tends to dispel it. This study, however, refines this observation by showing that the animal sign may be the most effective surface for producing this effect. A donkey in an alleyway immediately catches the eye without requiring dialogue, raises no particular controversy, needs no actors, and becomes outdated less quickly than costumes or linguistic codes. It also effortlessly crosses all the boundaries imposed by image-sharing platforms. While the stereotyping of people - as analyzed by Stuart Hall - is now facing growing ethical and commercial resistance, the stereotyping of animals continues almost unchallenged. In other words, otherness has been transferred to animals. Critics have paid little attention to this shift, as has the management of tourist destinations. Consequently, an assessment of Morocco's organic image that catalogs monuments and landscapes without considering animal iconography evaluates a heritage that is representative of Morocco's organic destination image that inventories monuments and landscapes, but not animal iconography is measuring the wrong asset register.

Second, for Morocco. Every foreign image-maker who reaches for the donkey reinforces a visual economy in which Moroccan cultural producers must work against their own country's image inventory - an inventory compiled elsewhere, for other audiences, over a century. Tazi's weariness is instructive here; the "mercenary activity" of servicing foreign shoots grew "monotonous" precisely because the foreign imagination kept ordering the same Morocco: "the south, tents, camels, folklore" (Tazi qtd. in Dwyer 2004). Even the *National Geographic Traveler* concedes the asymmetry: "foreign directors concentrated on showcasing the country's exoticism," while 'Moroccan filmmakers focused more on contemporary social issues' (French 2011). The observation of Higbee, Bahmad, and Martin that foreign productions offer "little meaningful engagement with Moroccan culture" (Higbee, Bahmad, and Martin 2020) describes a structural condition rather than a lapse of individual taste. The corollary is the subject of the conclusions: the condition is structural, but structures can be managed, and Morocco holds more leverage over its image supply chain than it currently exercises.

Conclusions and Further Research

A loaded pack animal crosses the foreground of an 1836 engraving (Figure 3). A man riding a donkey passes through a doorway in a painting by Churchill (Figure 1). An alley is described in terms of "donkey-widths," while a macaque appears only during a pleasant hike, and a stork perches atop the ruins of a palace next to a caption celebrating the survival of traditions (Figure 2). A man holds a goat in his arms in soft light, while a Western traveler

passes through his world (Figure 4). A newspaper uses picturesque imagery to call for the revival of tourism after an earthquake (Figure 5); a magazine interprets a mule on a road as the return of the past to the present (Figure 6); a tour operator presents the donkey as “the soul of the country” (Figure 7); models pose in front of camels in an auction house catalog (Figure 8); a tourist’s Instagram photo becomes inspiration for the next traveler (Figure 9); and two hundred twenty-two photographs of donkeys await licensing in a stock photo database under the keyword “Marrakech” (Figure 10). A single archive. Four collections. Nearly two centuries. At the center of each of these images, the animal tirelessly fulfills the same discreet function: to authenticate the “elsewhere,” to reassure the viewer of their own modernity, to evoke just enough wonder to keep knowledge at a distance, and, in doing so, to help construct the destination image on which Morocco’s inbound tourism now runs.

If we were to remove the donkey from this alley, would Morocco still seem exotic enough to justify the trip? The answer is, in all likelihood, no. This is precisely where the challenge lies, but it is also the point at which the question of management becomes an ethical one. Dean MacCannell, whose concept of “staged authenticity” has informed the discussion throughout this article, revisits this issue in a later work, asserting that tourism falls within the realm of ethics: every gaze cast by a tourist establishes an ethical relationship with what is being observed, whether or not it was intentionally conceived (MacCannell 2011). A destination whose organic image is based on animal symbols it did not choose itself may certainly decide to manage this iconography as a strategic asset. Nevertheless, it may also reflect on the effects this iconography has on the human beings and animals it represents. The two recommendations set forth below, addressed to the Moroccan National Tourist Office (ONMT), the Moroccan Cinematographic Center (CCM), and the national park management authorities, prioritize this second perspective by outlining the contours of a genuine ethics of the tourist gaze.

First, “co-temporality” should be adopted as the guiding principle of an ethics of the image. The results of this study all point to the same conclusion: for nearly two centuries, international representations of Morocco have deprived their subjects - both human and animal - of their contemporaneity. The shepherd is frozen in a timeless pastoral scene; the mule is presented as a relic of a bygone era; agriculture is described as “still” traditional; “ancient customs” are said to have “survived.” Specifically, the ONMT and the CCM could adopt an ethical charter for visual imagery, inspired by the codes of dignity that have profoundly transformed the portrayal of humanitarian work. This charter would provide a framework for national communication campaigns and would serve as a requirement for audiovisual productions to receive institutional support. Its evaluation criteria would not focus on the number of camels or donkeys appearing on screen, but rather on how they are portrayed. The person photographed or filmed should be identified or at least depicted as part of a living present; the working animal should appear in the context of its owner and their livelihood; captions should avoid a timeless tone, eschewing expressions such as “unchanged,” “the soul of...,” or any other phrasing that traps Morocco in a suspended state of time. It is important to clarify that this approach does not condemn either the beauty of the landscapes or their picturesque nature. What is at issue is not aesthetics, but the temporal exile imposed on the people depicted. An image adheres to this principle when it does not assume that a Moroccan must belong to another century in order to meet the viewer’s visual expectations. While Stuart Hall has shown that stereotypes freeze difference in place, a framework based on co-temporality is precisely the tool that can break this freeze by intervening at the very site of production, where this process originates.

The bald ibis colonies of Souss-Massa, along with interpretive guidance capable of providing precisely what exoticism cannot tolerate - knowledge. The guide identifies the shepherd, explains how the argan economy works, and describes the species’ conservation status. Todorov’s paradox, drawn upon throughout this article, is thus reversed: when knowledge replaces mere spectacle, exoticism fades and gives way to a more fruitful relationship - that of an encounter between contemporaries. It should be emphasized that this approach is in no way a matter of commercial naivety. An ethical encounter now constitutes a recognizable tourism offering, one that is reputable and increasingly valued by the market. However, it is important to clearly state the priority: the primary justification is not profitability. Certain realities should not be commodified, even when they sell: the exhausted animal turned into a photographic prop or the human being reduced to a mere folk costume. Tourists will, in any case, continue to photograph Morocco. The real question - one over which Moroccan stakeholders have the power to act - is whether their camera lens will capture mere scenery or a living reality.

Declarations

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Credit Authorship Contribution Statement:

Mohammed Ajrinija: Conceptualization, Investigation, Methodology, Formal analysis, Writing – original draft, Writing – review and editing.

Kamal El Fouadi: Supervision and Reviewing.

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