Mapping Marrakech in Wester Feature Films

In the 21st century world our everyday life is increasingly shaped by medial imaginations. These imaginations give us ideas of how the world that we live in looks like. As a visual discipline (DANIELS et al. 2011: xxvi), one focus of geographical research addresses the part of geographical imaginations. They are expressed in media like photographs, novels and movies. Therefore one can assume that "even the most straightforwardly factual descriptions and depictions of the world are not mimetic correspondences with material reality (…) but projections of human values, hopes and fears" (DANIELS et al. 2011: xxxi).[1] This paper follows this assumption by saying, that movies are always embedded in specific social- and production conditions as well as in political, economic and social contexts and are shaped by "local topographical tales, and larger national and global stories" (DANIELS et al. 2011: xxxi). It is for this reasons that cinematic worlds refer to units of a so-called everyday reality. In a dynamic process, they are then staged and visualized cinematically.

The Moroccan city of Marrakech can serve as a case study. Since 1919, Marrakech is used not only as a setting but also as a location in many international film-productions. Thereby it has been continuously redefined as *Cinematic Marrakech*. Its cinematic geography has been discussed in previous studies (ESCHER & ZIMMERMANN 2001, 2005). The authors emphasize that the cinematic construction of Marrakech as an oriental city refers to a defined set of characteristic scenes and locations. However, a closer look reveals that over time, *Cinematic Marrakech* is attributed with various significances. This vicissitude leads to the observation, that *Cinematic Marrakech* is not only one specific place but a combination of various places. The city serves as a projection surface for historical and current issues, motives and social processes. This paper turns the focus towards the different meanings and cinematic appreciations, which the city has experienced during the 20th and 21st century as cinematic narratives. Thereby it refers to the theoretical concept of a sense of place (Cresswell 2004/2009). We assume that movies are conveying individual, subjective references to places and thus generate various senses of place. Over time, those are transformed dynamically and have changed repeatedly. On a theoretical level, a sense of place attached with a cinematic city can also be described as a cinematic place and be interpreted as specific layer of meaning that shapes the cinematic city at a specific time ore in a specific movie type.

From this perspective, Marrakech can be regarded as a set of cinematic places. In those, European or Western perspectives towards Marrakech are reflected and lead to different images of the city. Feature films reflect dynamically the way of how people from western countries have occurred in the

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[1] KOECK & ROBERTS (2010) or ROBERTS & HALLAM (2014) show that movies, are intertwined with social environments.

respective temporal context in which a film was produced, or in which the cinematic narration takes place. Aspects like the urban structure of the cinematic city of Marrakech, its iconisation, the markings and inscriptions are subject to a temporal change. Each place, as constructed in feature films, is always contributing to an image of the city that has retroactive effects on the images of the "real" Marrakech.

The paper emphasizes four different cinematic places of Marrakech that will be discussed by means of selected movie samples. They succeed each other and create images, which partly work build on each other:

- **Marrakech, place for colonialists**: In Films which address the period of French colonization in morocco (*Le grand jeu*, *Les hommes nouveaux*) Marrakech is characterized as a place for colonialists or a city of legionaries. They reflect the colonial past of Marrakech and show the city as a place that is conquered and contested by French forces.

- **Marrakech, place of murder and ambush**: Late and post-colonial films of the 1960s and 1970s (*The man who knew too much*, *Our Man in Marrakech*, *Alle Menschen werden Brüder*) depict Marrakech as a city of murderers and murder. The focus of the narration is the murder of a central character. Certain parts of Marrakech are thereby connoted and drawn as places of murder and ambush.

- **Marrakech, place for hippies**: Later movies (*Two People, Hideous Kinky*) reflect the era when Hippies from America and Europe settled in Marrakech. They were looking for a shelter and freedom in the Moroccan city and used it as a free space. The city gave them the opportunity to celebrate a casual lifestyle, far away from the borders of their home country and its limitations.

- **Marrakech, place on the margin**: Since the 1990s the freedom that Marrakech poses for the (cinematic) Hippies has been further developed in movies (*La vengeance d'une blonde, Exit Marrakech*). In those, Marrakech becomes a 'place on the margin' - a place where western protagonists can experience and realize impossible adventures and fantasies.

The result of the outlined analysis can be summarized as a cinematic interpretation of Marrakech, showing that the city is a place that is permeated by European perspectives and ideas. Marrakech can thus be regarded as a Western or European place, set in the Western periphery that has been caught in the field of tension of European conquests since the beginning of its cinematic history. Despite all of their changes over time, those places have in common that they reproduce Marrakech in a European perspective as an unavailable place of "in between", respectively an "other space" (FOUCAULT 1987). The different places are occupied by various filmic characters, actions, significances and meanings which are spanned over different venues and locations. They are enfolded over a variety of elements including characters, equipment, perspectives, attitudes and sounds. Additionally, scenes and

locations are of a special interest, since they can be used for a mapping of the different places representing Marrakech can be reproduced. Based on an analysis of the filmic content, sequence diagrams, film stills and maps, the paper analyzes and visualizes the different places associated with *Cinematic Marrakech*.

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