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Ambivalent Vision in Annemarie Schwarzenbach's *all the roads are open*: A Critical Reading

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ABSTRACT

Travel writing, once a marginalized genre, gained critical recognition following Edward Said's *Orientalism*. This genre flourished during the interwar period, with literary figures like Annemarie Schwarzenbach contributing significantly to its development. Despite its literary value, Schwarzenbach's travelogue has been largely neglected by scholars. Responding to Said's call for an exploration of Swiss Orientalism, this study critically examines Schwarzenbach's work using a refined version of Said's framework. The analysis reveals that Schwarzenbach's vision of the Orient is marked by ambivalence, rooted in a conflict between her Orientalist perspective and her genuine engagement with the cultures she encounters. This ambivalence manifests in her critique of Orientalist stereotypes—such as the supposed depravity of indigenous peoples and their allegedly unsanitary culinary practices—while simultaneously romanticizing the "travellees" as noble savages and linking their cuisine to the sensual allure of the Orient. Additionally, her expressed solidarity with oppressed nomads is counterbalanced by her use of Orientalist notions of nomadism. Finally, the study shows how she intertwines her adventurous vision of the East with a suspension of hermeneutical interpretation.

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1. Introduction

Once spurned as "a second-rate literary form" (Kowaleski, 1992, 2), travel writing became the object of critical scrutiny after the publication of Said's groundbreaking *Orientalism* (Kuehn, 2019:176). For Said, travel books, namely those written in the nineteenth century, are not impartial narratives that innocently mirror the exotic Others, but the handmaidens of Western empires that subtly or crudely legitimate their will to power and perpetuate its unethical binaric perspective (1979: 167-199). By definition, travel writing points to the factual narratives in the first person (Youngs, 2013: 3) in which the traveler (as the identity/same) mainly from affluent Western nations makes a journey to the underprivileged non-Western loci, often in most cases. In asymmetrical power relations, the traveler encounters his/her travellees (as the difference/others) to chart his/her observations and impressions to be consumed by his/her readership. However, this definition does not gainsay the fact that some non-Western travelers, particularly postcolonial subjects, have voyaged to the Western zones and rendered their European travellees as the objects of their critical gazes (Thompson, 2011: 164). Pessimistically, travel books can result in perpetuating misrepresentations and the reiteration of the myth of travelers' cultural and racial ascendency. Optimistically, they can lead to a humanistic and ethical understanding of indigenous peoples and cultures.

Travel writing in the nineteenth century proliferates bookstores and become the darlings of the publishing world. However, according to Fussell, the genre experiences its golden days during the interwar period in which writers such as Robert Byron, Bruce Chatwin, D. H. Lawrence, and Evelyn Waugh, to name some, craft their critically acclaimed travel books (1982: vii). One of these interwar travel writers is Annemarie Schwarzenbach, who has not received enough critical attention from scholars of travel studies despite its literary orientation. In his *Orientalism*, Edward Said recommends examining Swiss Orientalism (1979: 24). Accordingly, to fill this scholarly gap, this article seeks to read Schwarzenbach's *All the Roads Are Open* in the light of Orientalism, albeit a revised and refined version of Said's model to highlight its ambivalent vision in her travelogue. It argues that the traveling subject represents her travel experience in the Orient ambivalently.

1.2. Travel Writer's Biography, Travels, and Travelogue

Even though Foucault is suspicious about the agency of authors and reduces them to the "organizing device [that] … groups texts" (Leitch, 2018: 1389) and even though the followers of New Criticism repudiate biographical reading of literary texts, this study believes familiarity with the biography of travel writers plays a major role in understanding their travel books.

Travel writer, novelist, photojournalist, cult figure, and morphine addict, Annemarie Schwarzenbach (1908-1942) with her unconventional life, androgynous look, romantic leaning, and autobiographical fiction was born into an affluent and industrialist family in Zurich. She spends her

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childhood in the idyllic surroundings of Bocken, a village close to Lake Zurich, which later emerges as the site of nostalgic yearning in her works. She is the second of four children. Renee, her dominant and passionate mother, raises her as a boy to satisfy her unfulfilled childhood desire (Cole 2011: viii). Later her gender-defying upbringing complemented by her androgynous appearance plays a significant part in her attraction towards women with all its concomitant depressions and frustrations. When she grows up, her family expects her to conform to the rigid laws of their family and preserve the honor of their family by eschewing bad acquaintances (Miermont 2015: Ch. 3), but her failure renders her into the black sheep of the family. Her tension with her family begins as her parents turn into Nazi sympathizers. For her father, Hitler's movement is pure, noble, and constructive; hence, he wishes her to contribute towards it (Ch. 5). Not surprisingly, they become critical of her anti-fascist activities and try to deter her from being involved. Nevertheless, she defies them and embarks on assisting German exiles seeking to leave occupied Austria (Eilitta 2010: 102) and providing financial support for Klaus Mann's magazine: *Die Sammlung* ('The Collection') designed to publish anti-fascist views of dissident German and European writers (Dieterle, 1998: 223). Despite all her friction with her parents, she is emotionally and financially dependent on them.

At the age of 23 in 1931, she received her PhD in history from Zurich University. Then she goes to Berlin, where she works as a freelance writer, and builds a friendship with Thomas Mann's children: Erika and Klaus. Her new leftist friends, Cole maintains, spark her artistic ambitions, emancipate her from her possessive mother, usher her into the world of unorthodox sexuality, and introduce her to morphine (2011:ix). Despite her attempts to give it up, she cannot extricate herself from its pains and anxieties till her death. In 1933, she published her novel: *Lyric Novella,* accounting the story of an anonymous character (her alter ego) that "struggles with his love for the aloof singer: Sibylle" (Jones 2011: IX) and mirrors "the decadence and desperation of her sojourn" in Berlin (Cole, 2011: ix).

When Hitler's party comes to power, she makes a journey to the East to flee from the horror of Nazism. Her Near and Middle Eastern itinerary includes Turkey, Syria, Beirut, Jerusalem, Iraq, and Persia. In these regions, not only does she engage herself in archaeological sites but also she keeps her travel diary, recording her reflections and observations.

In 1939, she went through detoxification in a drug rehabilitation center in Yverdon, Switzerland. Soon after her release, she goes to her rented villa house in Sils, a village in the Engadin, a high mountain valley in the eastern Swiss Alps, where she hosts Ella Maillart, the seasoned travel writer and where the idea of their joint travel to Afghanistan with her Ford hatches (Maillart 2013: 1). Interestingly, her mother encourages their voyage despite her daughter's physical and psychological fragility. Schwarzenbach hopes that their journey will deliver her from sinking into addiction, depression, and psychological disintegration, while Maillart anticipates undertaking an ethnographical

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study in Kafiristan/Nuristan (a landlocked and mountainous region in Eastern Afghanistan). They both through this journey seek to achieve self-knowledge by encountering authentic alterity (Perret 2011:128) as well as to flee from their sense of emptiness (Crispin 2013: XI)

In June 1939 from Geneva, they depart to their Eastern destination with Schwarzenbach's new Ford. From Zurich, they travel to Italy. Then they move to Yugoslavia, Sofia, and Istanbul. After that, they drive through Armenia and finally reach Persia. Then they depart to Afghanistan. Before reaching their destination, Schwarzenbach hangs a string of blue beads in an 'Oriental' fashion on her car radiator to ward off evil eyes (Maillart 2013: 98). When they approach the border between Persia and Afghanistan, the sight of their desired and promised destination makes them cheer and congratulate each other. Herat is the first city that they visit in Afghanistan. Then they head to Bala Murghab and Sheberghan. Their next destinations are Mazar-e Sharif, Puli-Khumri, and Bamiyan. Later, they go through Band-e Amir and Begram. In Kabul, Schwarzenbach suffers from Bronchitis and relapses into her old ways. There, she decides to join Joseph Hackin, the English archaeologist, in Ghazni to regain her health, albeit without Maillart. During her stay with the Hackins, she falls in love with Ria, the wife of Joseph Hackin. Unable to reciprocate her excessive love, Ria begs her to leave Afghanistan as soon as possible (Miermont 2015: Ch. 12). Consequently, on December 21, she sets off for Switzerland. In India, she visits Maillart appealing to her to stay with her. Maillart believes that her exposure to the volatile and hostile atmosphere of Europe will ruin her radiant self, but Schwarzenbach declines her suggestion and expresses her desire to fight against Nazism (Maillart 2013, 203).

Schwarzenbach's romantic journey in Persia and Afghanistan with Maillart results in her literary travel diary: *All the Roads Are Open* in which she writes about historical monuments, holy shrines, the plight of nomads, and the encroachment of modernity. She also touches on the sublimity of the Hindu Kush and the loneliness of deserts and oases. Hospitality, recreation, food, fruits, women, bazaars, architecture, the production of glazed pottery, education, teahouses, hospitals, and urban and rural life in Afghanistan do not escape her notice. Moreover, she records the Russians' colonial design plan for Afghan Turkistan, the haughtiness of the British, and the presence of Westerners in Kabul. In her travelogue, her impressionism is more conspicuous than her journalism, and she follows the brevity of style, thereby giving it a haunting quality.

In March 1942, after spending some time in Lisbon and visiting her husband in Morocco, she came back to Sils to enjoy the company of her friends. While cycling with them, she decides to pedal her bicycle without holding its handlebars, leading to her unexpected fall and severe brain injuries. Then, after a month, death brings an end to her beleaguered young life on November 15, 1942.

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2. Review of Literature

Critical scholarship on Schwarzenbach's *All the Roads Are Open* is limited; one can attribute it to the belated interest in travel writing studies as well as in Annemarie Schwarzenbach's travel books. Sofie Decock in her Der Engel des Demawend als Richter zwischen Paradies und Ende der Welt: Orientalismus in Annemarie Schwarzenbach's Roman *Das glückliche Tal* highlights her Orientalist attitude in her *The Happy Valley*. In this article, Decock argues that despite being a queer writer, Schwarzenbach succumbs to the discourse of Orientalism and fortifies the dichotomy between the East and the West. Hence, her representation of Damavand in Persia fluctuates between the Edenic garden of bliss and the maze of disorientation and fatality (2007: 156-158). In the same vein, Perret, in his L'Eemervellement, L'ustre et la Chansn du Voyage highlights her Orientalist outlook since Schwarzenbach judges Afghan women's Chador/veil based on European norms (2003:235). Unlike Decock and Perret, Maley (2013) in his Afghanistan as a Cultural Crossroads casts a sociological glance on her *All the Roads Are Open* and observes that she fleetingly captures the individuality of her travellees and their group identification; nevertheless, Schwarzenbach, he notes, keeps distance from them (220). Maley thinks that her travelogue conforms to the conventions of discourse molded by the Swiss public life (227). In other words, he implies that her representation is Eurocentric. Echoing Malay, Borella (2006) states that traveling by car does not permit Schwarzenbach to reintegrate with the supposedly premodern host culture. In her *Humanitarian Ideals Between the Wars,* Borella (2015) examines her travel texts in the light of human rights. She believes that the travel narratives of Schwarzenbach contributed to "the political and legal human rights discourses that emerged in the wake of their journey and in years that followed" (120). Lastly, in her article: *Die Flucht aus der kleintrauigen Alltagswelt in Annemarie Schwarzenbach Tod in Persien*, Pogonowska explores the different types of spaces in her travel book. She observes that Lar Valley illustrates Foucault's heterotopia notion since it is a simultaneously isolated and porous place. Subsequently, she dwells on two contrasting spaces in Persia and decodes their symbolic significance. The locked spaces in her travelogue symbolize her isolation and depression, whereas the unlimited and vast regions embody her emptiness and the loss of identity orientation.

Despite their contributions, the above-mentioned scholars do not point to the ambivalence within Schwarzenbach's travel book. To fill this scholarly gap, the current article strives to highlight and study her ambivalent vision in her travelogue.

3. Theoretical Framework

Buchanan defines ambivalence as "the coexistence of contradictory feelings and impulses towards the same object" (2010: 15). For Bhabha, it arises from the conflictual positions that a colonial subject occupies (Smethurst, 2011:168). Linking it to exotic journeys, Euben holds that ambivalence accompanies intercultural encounters (2006:33). In a similar vein, Mills (1991) observes that travel

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narratives do not merely replicate and reaffirm colonial vision; instead, they reveal the "symptoms of contradictions inherent in the power relations" (p.191). Likewise, Blunt remarks that the "traveling subject is fundamentally ambivalent" (1994:31). Hence, travelers can be both the sympathizers of the alterity and the voice of their home culture. The value of ambivalence, according to Blunt, lies in undermining the pyramidal structure of 'self' and 'other' (37). She believes that disregarding it within the travel texts will only perpetuate otherness and legitimize hegemonic structures (24). She blames Edward Said for neglecting its discussion in his *Orientalism*. But Edward Said, in passing, acknowledges its presence in Richard Burton's travel book and considers it the source of interest (1979:195), yet he does not elaborate on it. Ali Behdad fills this gap in his *Belated Travelers* by identifying and analyzing ambivalent moments in belated travelers like Norval's and Isabella Eberhardt's travelogue. He argues that "Orientalist consciousness in the age of colonial dissolution *ambivalently* interpellates its subjects [including travel writers] in a decentered system of *opposition* and *domination*" (emphasis added, 1999:14). In other words, ambivalence is inherent in the field of Orientalism. Lisa Lowe notes that ambivalence in colonial discourse [by extension Orientalism] stems from the discrepancy between inherited cultural baggage and the actualities of the visited cultures and peoples:

> The process of ambivalence is central to the colonialist [Orientalist rhetoric] which vacillates between a reference to what seems to be accepted knowledge [received official Orientalism] and a contradictory space [realities of Oriental locus] that challenges this [frame of] reference and makes it necessary to both fix and repeat it (199: 86).

Focusing on ambivalence in women's travel writing, McEwan states that it "characterizes the travelogues of [British] white women in West Africa" in the 19th century (2000:19). Still, Korte extends its presence to contemporary [female] travel writing (2016:176). She observes that their ambivalence arises from their fluctuation between "a confident record of their achievements and apparent anxiousness not to come across the masculine" (Korte: 2000: 118) and Schwarzenbach is no exception.

4. Discussion

Critiquing Supposed Depravity while Constructing Noble Savages

Annemarie Schwarzenbach in her travel to Afghanistan evinces this ambivalent response by simultaneously critiquing the supposed licenciousness of encountered Eastern people and constructing them as Noble Savages. When she and Ella Maillart cross the Khyber Pass and enter into the Indian border guarded by the British officials, the English officials sarcastically question them again and again about how they have managed to reach the border, where they have slept, and whether they have not experienced any bad incidents by local men (2011: 90). Here, these questions betray their Orientalist attitude towards the Afghans. Inspired by Edward Said, Thompson observes that

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'Orientals' are "routinely depicted as sensual and cruel" (2011:134). For instance, one can detect this type of Orientalist picture in Paul Bowles's *The Sheltering Sky* when a young caravan leader, chances on Kit Moresby, a female American traveler, alone in the desert,

> *He was all around her [, and thus] she could make no movement. She realized her helplessness and there was animal quality in firmness with which he held her and [it was] sensual [and] wholly irrational. She was alone in the vast and unrecognizable world [of the Orient] (1994:272).*

Shifting to the main subject, these officials presuppose that the Afghan Others are such wild and licentious people that will not hesitate over the sexual harassment of foreign women like Schwarzenbach and Ella Maillart if they stumble on them without any chaperone. Here, their reaction illustrates their Victorian mindset. In the Victorian era, young women were supposed to be chaperoned when they left homes to remain immune from delinquents' potential sexual offenses in the streets (Walkowitz, 1998: 1). According to Hodgson (2017), the chaperone system has been in full force until the first half of the twentieth century. Their mentality implies that the Afghans are not different from British sexual offenders, and their perspective is in line with Said's thesis: Orientals are usually associated with the delinquents of Western societies (1979: 207).

In contrast to the British colonialists, the narrator adopts a refreshingly open-minded outlook towards the native people and debunks the reductionist myth about them through her snappy rejoinder, "With our Afghan friends, we felt safe as in Abraham's bosom [heaven]" (2011:90). Here she implicitly associates the British with biblical villains and herself their victim, but she affiliates the indigenous people with the prophet Abraham, known for his peacefulness, hospitality, and love of travelers from remote terrains (Deane, 1888:103). By doing so, she deflates their hauteur and questions their claim of refinement and civilization. Borella maintains that encountering Afghan people leads Schwarzenbach to reevaluate her Western perspective and formulate new ideas about the visited culture and people (2015:124). Further on, to accentuate their friendliness and peacefulness, she reminds her readership that they have driven through an allegedly unsafe zone: "Alone, without a houseboy and chauffeur, and without even a gentleman[and] without interpreter as well" (2011: 90). Moreover, she avers that Afghan, regardless of their tribal affiliations, will not permit a hair on their heads to be harmed (91). Similarly, Ella Maillart, in her travelogue: *The Cruel Way* corroborates Schwarzenbach's words: "I was convinced that when difficulties are encountered in Asia, women are more readily helped if they are seen to be without a man" (2013: 98). Likewise, Dervla Murphy, in her travel to Afghanistan, observes that "It is a curious experiment to be a woman traveling alone in Muslim countries, I [was] treated with the respect due to [being] a woman) (1985: 281). Indeed, the travel writer discredits the British officials' premises as mere fabrication via this rhetorical question: "This mysterious, the wildland is uncivilized and dangerous, at least in the British sense of the word?" (2011:90).

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By invalidating this uncharitable attitude, she indeed casts doubt on the credibility of the bulk of travel narratives about Afghanistan rife with worries over personal safety and murderous tribal people (Fowler, 2007: 75) because she assures her audience that

> *In [Afghanistan there is a] Tribal Territory, where passionately democratic Mohmand [Muslim], Shinwari and Waziri tribesmen are subject to no law but their own. And they guaranteed the safety of the Khyber Road-from sunrise to sunset [while] no shot to [is] fired there and all travel(s) [are made] in safety-in the view of the English authorities no lady may cross unaccompanied by a gentleman (Schwarzenbach, 2011: 90).*

In the above passage, for all her sympathy and championing the cause of her travelees, Schwarzenbach paradoxically puts on the garb of a cultural primitivist and romanticizes her travelees as noble savages, bespeaking her privileged position and surrender to the pressures exerted by the majoritarian codes of Orientalist ideology. According to Said, in the Orientalist worldview, "primitiveness [is] inhered in the Orient, was the Orient, an idea to which anyone is dealing with or writing about had to return as if touchstone outlasting time or experience" (1979: 231). Given Afghanistan, Fowler (2007) notes that Western travel narratives tend to build it as a "pre-industrial rural idyll" (p.66), assuming that its residents are close to nature, thus "unspoiled people"(Schwarzenbach, 2011: 51). By acting on this Orientalistic logic, Schwarzenbach assumes that the Afghans have retained their virtues and stayed away from evil influences of civilization for dwelling in a pre-modern and egalitarian society, operating according to un-written folk laws. In her eyes, these rules are more praiseworthy than English ones thanks to establishing peace and guaranteeing safe passage in the border region. Interestingly, her travel book's title: *All the Roads Are Open*, bears testimony to her traversed space's security and safety. She also praises these allegedly simple people for shunning unnecessary bureaucratic procedures dogging Western official systems: "Not once were we asked to show our passports or papers for our Ford [car] with Grisons license plate" (2011:90). Finally, if the British colonials are materialistic and bent on extorting money from them, the Afghans are free from this vice, "No one tallied [calculated] our foreign currency, or forced us to pay a fee for our radio which has long ceased working anyway" (ibid.). Her propensity to exoticize her travelees as noble primitives is not confined to the frontier people. She, for example, reiterates it when she encounters a hunter in the desert through a series of rhetorical questions, "What was present and future for him? Did he know what fortune and misfortune mean, and what our tortured hearts call hope?" (2011: 76).

By treating her travellees as noble savages, she locks them in the state of primitiveness and denies them coevalness, and this results in reducing the complexity of the visited culture as well as overlooking their "hardship and suffering"; therefore, it is "morally dubious and epistemologically problematic" (Thompson, 2011: 151). Nonetheless, in appraising her travelogue, one should consider

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she is not an imperial apologist/scribe since she is outside of the imperial game and comes from Switzerland: a neutral nation. Nonetheless, she constitutes them as the Others who live in primitive geography despite valorizing them.

Critiquing Culinary Prejudice while Viewing Cuisine Orientalistically

Food is another cultural arena through which Schwarzenbach reveals her ambivalent stance. As the site of identity, power relations, and negotiation (Briand 2008: 220), food has been an integral ingredient within travel texts. Travelers have appropriated this gustatory and cultural sign not only to forge solidarity with indigenous travellees but also to create cultural distance with them. Foods, foodstuffs, and food habits of non-Europeans have been the object of scrutiny since medieval times. Launay (2003) maintains that Western travellers' attitude towards their non-European foods in the middle Ages and Renaissance has been generally positive and broadminded (42), and "the description of foods do not reflect European superiority" (29). The sheer abundance and variety of foods in the Orient (especially China, India, and Southeast Asia) generate a sense of wonder in these travellers; thus, they depict their traversed terrains as the cornucopia of delectable foods (Phillip, 2014:81-89). However, Launey believes, that in the seventeenth century, when Western colonization gathers strength, and when exotic foods become increasingly commercialized (2003: 44), the travel writers' favorable, dispassionate, and reciprocal responses give way to judgemental and negative ones (29). British travellers' uncharitable attitude towards their encountered cuisine became more pronounced and naked in the Victorian period. Carl Thompson attributes this intolerant outlook to the new technology of tin cans and food preservation in Britain (2004, 98). Britain's medical advancements, military prowess, and imperial expansion can be added to this increased critique as well. Moreover, in this period, the descriptions of indigenous foods become entangled with the discourses of sexuality, hygiene, and medicine; hence, these travellers condemn Asian and African cultures, especially the Islamic Orient, for encouraging obesity and gluttony (by extension, lasciviousness) (Kostova, 2003, 25; Melman 1992: 123). Getting his critical cues from Edward Said and Julia Kristeva and focusing on two male (culinary) travel writers, Nyman opines that contemporary travel writing still operates within the colonial and Orientalist discourse since they highlight supposedly exotic culinary praxis of their travellees in non-Western spaces to otherize them (2003: 85). This explains why their culinary accounts are accompanied by disgust and abjection (93) and why indigenous cuisine is consumed as a rhetorical device to accentuate Western traveling subject's virility and mastery (101).

While crossing the Khyber Pass with their Ford motor car and reaching "India's sheltered settlement", English officials ask them how they find Afghan food (2011: 89). Similarly, a Swiss man enquires whether Afghan food is edible (97). Here the British officials and the old Swiss man imply that the indigenous cuisine is inedible, unclean, and unhealthy. According to Thompson, British travel writers subtly orientalize their encountered cuisine by linking them to diseases and moral change (2004: 99). Their condescending comment mirrors their inherited Victorian perspective since the

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Victorian travellers viewed native foods with disgust and horror and appropriated them to erect the cultural boundary between 'self' and 'indigenous others'. Schwarzenbach vehemently reproves these conservative British officers for cultivating the cult of exclusion through culinary signifier when she accentuates their cold lunch in their tiffin box and beers which connect them to their colonialist forefathers. Moreover, she indirectly attributes their exclusionary attitude to their bitter defeat by the Afghans:

Those [British officials] who never travelled without an elaborate cold lunch in their tiffin box, a dozen bottles of ice beers. The British are the most conservative on the earth, and they cannot forget that, a hundred years ago, Afghanistan mountain tribes inflicted several defeats upon the English troops (2011:89).

In sharp contrast to the male British representatives, Schwarzenbach approaches local cuisine as a cultural opportunity to cross the border between the identity/self and the difference/other. According to Korte, "A female traveller can gain an insight into realms of experience other than those open to men" (2000:120) because she is more "willing and able to cross-cultural [here culinary] boundaries than male travellers" (123). This explains why she likes to mingle with them and experience the resultant conviviality. The following extract illustrates her culinary desire:

It was at this very time that laughing and waving women met me in the village on the desert's edge. They took me to Hakim, who sat on the carpet, smoking a hookah. While I was offered bread and a bowl of unsweetened tea, young and old surrounded me, the children giggled at me, the pretty girls felt my clothes, the doctor asked me friendly, earnest questions and gave me a horse and a guide so that I would find my way home. The true warmth in the desert village and in the opulent garden of Shibargan-this virtue makes the Afghans dear to me (2011: 98-99).

In the above fragment, she pictures herself as the weary and disoriented soul on the edge of the desert detected and assisted by the local women who, in a sisterly manner, direct her to the local physician's dwelling, where she enjoys his hospitality. Partaking of the plain Afghan tea and bread facilitates warmheartedness and conviviality, filling this cross-cultural atmosphere with joy and laughter since Schwarzenbach becomes the object of curiosity, gaze, and fun for the local women, albeit in a non-coercive way. The incident inverts power relations between the traveller and her travellees since laughter is the expression of power and humor at once (Bennett & Royale, 2009: 104). This simple culinary encounter triggers a humanistic dialogue between Hakim and her and makes it dialogic. This respectful togetherness ends in a gentlemanly gesture by the host: orientating the disoriented and fragile individual, which kindles the traveller's sense of solidarity, gratitude, and love towards the visited Afghans.

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Despite her desire to drink her tea with Afghan "brothers in a chaykhana [teahouse] by the roadside or at the bazaar" (2011:92) and despite her goodwill and respect towards the indigenous people, the traveller in the same extract either consciously or consciously succumbs to the centripetal forces of Orientalism, by the subtle recycling of two Orientalist cliché images: hookah-"Symbolising boredom and self-abandonment" (Behdad, 2016: 85) and the 'opulent garden' in the middle of the desert. Her Orientalist imagery in connection with Afghan food and hospitality finds its clear expression in the following passage:

In the middle of the garden, the clay terrace was *lit* by petroleum *lamps* and spread with *carpets*. We were received by a friendly man with a shrewd [and] *pleasant gaze* as though he expected us. We took off our shoes, and servants brought *us cushions*, tea, and a basin to wash our hands. In no time, a *sumptuous pilaf* was served. The moon rose as we ate: the garden transformed into an image from a *fairy tale*. Though unfortunately able to exchange, [but only a few] words with our host, we spent the entire next day in Shibargan. Before parting, we ate with him one last *festive rice dish* (2011: 96-97 emphasis added).

In the above passage, the imagined geography that the traveller fashions is not dissimilar to the sensuous and epicurean world of *The Arabian Nights*, which she indicates via highly Orientalistically connotative words: the delightful garden, the rising moon, lamps, carpets, cushions, the sumptuous pilaf [food made with rice and meat], and the pleasant gaze of the desirous Afghan host and. According to Roland Barthes, "The connotative field of references -is par excellence, the domain through which ideology [here orientalism] invades the language system" (Hall, 2000,1061). Despite its telling similarity to *The Arabian Nights*, the narrator assumes that this exotic scene is a reminder of the fairy tale, which is far away from the chaos and irrationality of the war-torn Western world. Ella Maillart, Schwarzenbach's companion, similarly compares this experience to the "fairy tale" (2013, 147) and a "Persian miniature" (148). Indeed, Schwarzenbach like a linguistic magician transforms the reality of culinary contact into the dream world. Elsewhere, she confesses that she lacks "the sound and reassuring instinct for the solid facts of earthly experience [; as a result, she] cannot always tell memories from dreams" (23). Hence, she relegates the Orient to the zone of fancy and designates it as the imagined geography. In other words, her travelled domain becomes the playground of her imagination and desires. In sum, the traveller concurrently fuses her counter-Orientalist tendency with that of Orientalist vision.

Solidarity with Nomads while Adopting Nomadism

Another site of ambivalence in Schwarzenbach's travelogue is pertinent to her solidarity with the marginalized ethnic nomads living in the north of Persia on the one hand, and simultaneously her Orientalist elegy about the disappearance of the authentic mode of nomadic lifestyle on the other hand. Maillart's and Schwarzenbach's journey to the Northeast of Iran coincides with Reza Shah's

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modernization projection which involves the forced sendentarization of nomads. Indeed, the ruler is a mimic man who blindly and impatiently seeks to superimpose Western ways without paying attention to the cultural and economic ramifications of his supposedly grand plan. As a traveller with a journalistic background, she witnesses and charts its adverse consequences. She is both critical and suspicious about the benefits of this project because she observes how it wreaks havoc on the nomadic way of life. Klee notes that Schwarzenbach has "criticized the widespread belief in progress [since it] lacks consideration for traditional ways" (2021: 15), and the following passage illustrates her attitude:

The old men in the tower are prisoners and understand little of legal wordings. But they remember other days; they owned weapons then, and swift horses, the steppe thundered beneath unshod hooves, and all around, in the dust shimmering evening light, great freedom spread, as the sea of golden waves! How joyful their sons were growing up (2011, 30)

Schwarzenbach has been the nemesis of the oppressors and champion of the oppressed peoples, like the victims of the Nazi regime and mine workers in the US (Klee, 2021:15, 23). Similarly, in this journey, she implicitly mirrors her solidarity with these nomads by bringing into focus how Reza Shah's program ends in incarceration and severe curtailment of the nomads' freedom that once they enjoyed through riding their swift horses in the vast steppe. In sync with her observation, Soofizadeh (2015), the local historian, observes how Reza Shah's soldiers (as the emblems of Repressive State Apparatus, to use Althusser's words) have burnt the nomads' yurts to break their defying wills and force them into accepting his new scheme. This historian believes that Reza Shah's motive behind his plan has been economic and military; because he viewed the nomads as the new reservoirs of forced labour, tax, and conscription (108). Likewise, William Irons reports that the Shah's officials treated the nomads and abused their power "to enrich themselves at the expense of the local population"(1975, 76). With her sharp observation, the traveller documents the plight of nomads,

> *The man in uniform grows impatient. And writes, writes down like a scribe and Pharisee- the old men have long since fallen silent. There it stands confirmed: their sons, joy and pride of their old age, Ali Asker and Jakub and many more, members of nomadic tribes, have fled across the border to the Soviet Union, evading taxes, military service, new laws, refusing to settle down, invoking unwritten grazing rights; they are declared to have forfeited their herds and tents, they are declared guilty, and must pay a fine of so and so many tomans and tomans rials to the state, the state! (2011:30).*

In the above passage, Schwarzenbach bears witness to the wretchedness of the nomads under the new law, which motivates her to identify and be intimate with the disfranchised and oppressed people. Ashcroft maintains witnessing the hardships of encountered natives in the course of the journey generates identification with them (2009: 237). Akin to Ashcroft, Youngs believes that travel writing can be a means of sympathizing and understanding with the travellees (2019: 26). Nomads,

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whom the traveler meets, are caught within the power web of the autocratic ruler and his officials whom she associates with the foes of Jesus: Scribes and Pharisees: symbols of power-knowledge abuse in Christianity. What she observes here is not the will to modernization and improvement but the will to power and domination. This explains why Scharzenbach satirizes the agents of this plan by her verbal irony signalled by two exclamation marks in the following sentence, "Dutiful officials, educated, wearing uniforms, giving orders, requisitioning taxes in the name of authorities, *law, and order!* And *progress!*" (2011:30). Here her stance reminds William Blake's proverb: "Prisons are built with the stones of Law" since these officials imprisoned the old nomads in the name of the law: "But you ill-fitted fathers, shall be responsible and detained until dark-haired Jakub returns and repents" (2011:31). Indeed, from Schwarzenbach's perspective, progress is synonymous with exploitation (Klee, 2021: 15).

For all her sympathy and solidarity with the otherised ethnic nomads and critiquing dehumanising policies of Repressive State Apparatus, her text is still characterised by the impulse of nomadism which is affiliated with Orientalist discourse which one encounters in the travel narratives of Richard Burton and T.E. Lawrence. According to Lindsay, "In the nineteenth and twentieth-century nomadism becomes the source of fascination for the travelers to the Middle East" (2019:172). For Schwarzenbach, the West is the fragmented and dystopian world defined by the butchery of the war, the rise of Nazims, the encagement of freedom, addiction, depression, and suicide temptations. This sense of discontent encourages her and Maillart to quest for pre-industrial, idyllic geography uncontaminated with European cultural malaise (Perret, 2011: 128). The traveller hopes to experience this authentic and unfragmented life through communing with nomads. Nevertheless, she uncannily observes the gradual disappearance of nomadism and its unique material culture [indicated by their handicrafts] due to fatal modernization, replacing the original nomadic life with disciplinary institutions such as schools, factories, hospitals, and barracks in her visited locus. This realization provokes her elegiac feelings: "Soon no more black tents will be seen on the Steppe, no colorful saddlebags, rugs, tent bands, no unshod horses. Instead, cotton field. Tabacco sheds, textile, mills, schools and hospitals, and barracks" (2011: 31). Hence, she articulates her melancholy and sorrow at this loss of nomadic life by following words: desolation, vulture, wretched, silence, and slow. They conjure up death and wasteland and the following extract attests to this:

To my left, on the horizon now extinct and leaden, I saw a few wretched goat-felt tents…From the West, white vultures with slow wing beats. That was all. The steppe sprawled in silence, and desolation … This beginning of Asia merged into dark vision (28).

Even though her desire to visit nomadic and pastoral does not find fulfilment here, her Orientalist assumption remains intact because the East for her is still the site of wish-fulfilment and

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regeneration, a land of escape from the complexity and anxiety of the enervating West, and a blank canvas on which she projects her fears, loneliness, and anxieties and this tethers her to Orientalism.

Interlinking Imaginary Vision with Hermeneutical Suspense

The last arena of ambivalence in Schwarzenbach's travelogue is related to her synchronous reaffirmation of the visionary Orient and the ideology of adventure, along with the suspense of hermeneutical practice. In her journey to Afghanistan Turkistan, Schwarzenbach's Orientalist dream illusion and disillusionment are concurrent with the counter-Orientalist narrative moment. Before undertaking her travel to her desired destination, for her, the shore of the Oxus River is the embodiment of a promised land, and she anticipates that it will be a replica of her desired wish. Hence, she cherishes the idea of finding healing to her mental distress and physical agony: "We thought that there was promised land, and we dreamt about it" (2003: 89). The content of her dream testifies to her expectation:

> *In my dream, I saw very young and light green leaves moved by wind, I saw fields and sweat-drenched horses that were drawing the plow, I saw friendly smoke rising, white clouds playing their games, and though mesmerized, they would be somewhere gurgling wells, the old farm, my home. (2003: 89).*

The above dream is the fulfilled wish of the romantic traveling subject, to use Freud's perspective. It matches well with her imagined Afghanistan: a serene, pastoral, and ordered world free from conflicts and contradictions. Her dreamscape is still immune from the evils of technology, and its timescape does not connotate anxiety, but peace, friendliness, hospitality, and contentment. Also, its motherly ambiance provides her with her desired sanctuary: "The old farm [is] my home [symbol of mother]" (90). Like light green leaves in her dream, she wishes to be borne by the currents of her imagination to this innocent region of the mind. But the brute reality and complexity of traveled terrain defy her vision and render it inaccessible since the "paths [leading to her desired zone] were lost at the horizon [which is] called the shore of the Oxus River and was forbidden to her" (ibid.). The new realization disorients her and evokes existential despair and futility:

Now, just now, the distress was so tremendous, and I did not know what to do. I was drenched in sweat, and I heard my heartbeat, nothing else in the far distance the faint, very whistling of the wind. But in that direction was the desert; the view did not reach until the Oxus, maybe just a picture of the dream. I was lying on the ground, pressed my face against the stones, and listened. An answer! Lord! Lord in heaven! I prayed and prayed; nothing happened. Nothing becomes like the sky (ibid), and [my prayer] was in vain (ibid).

Here the reality that she experiences is antithetical to her Orientalist dream world. Instead of the ordered garden and welcoming bower, she encounters the barren wilderness; instead of life-giving

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vernal winds, she hears the sad whistle of wandering desert winds, and in place of sweat-drenched horses of the farm, ironically, she is exhausted and soaked in sweat. The bitterness of reality is a parody of her notion of the promised land since it is out of reach and invisible. Moreover, it is an inferior and unsatisfying copy of her dream. Thereby, this experience destabilizes and jolts the traveler out of her vision, leading to her existential desperation. Like characters in Absurd Theatre, she feels abandoned by God who is "trouble deaf with [her] bootless cries", to borrow Shakespeare. For her, the existence is absurd and rife with nothingness and disappointment. Unlike Victorian supposedly heroic colonial travelers, in this passage, she is an antihero whose agency ironically finds expression in her passive bewailing and weeping.

Her disillusionment simultaneously brings about her discursive shift, that is, divergence from the Orientalist convention illustrated by halting her hermeneutical practice. If the Orientalist traveler is epistephillic and restless to interpret and enlighten his/her readership about the supposedly exotic others and their cultural traditions, she bares her discursive confusion and handicap: "[My] memory is extinguished and I do not know how to explain myself in the language" (90) and confesses her desire to cease narrative/knowledge production by "putting [her] pen away" (ibid) because, her visited destination have taught her silence: "The art of being silent, this we learned in Turkistan [of Afghanistan]" (ibid). If using "language affords remarkable power" (Fanon, 2008, 127), then here Schwarzenbach's lack of linguistic willpower amounts to the oreintalistic disempowerment and discontinuation from the epistemological and positivistic urge that renders the Orient the site of vested knowledge production and interpretation or 'girds of specification' in the words of Foucault. In other words, she invents her lines of flight, to borrow Deleuze and Guattari, and momentarily emancipates herself from the majoritarian codes of Orientalism. For Behdad, this type of linguistic hesitation and inability: "Words, words, silent fainting" (89) is an example of the parasite, in the sense of disturbing noise, within Orientalist order (1994: 127), which disturbs its communication, albeit fleetingly.

Even though she briefly undermines strong Orientalist inclination to inscribe, she at the same time inevitably operates within the field of Orientalism, and this is mirrored in her will to adventure: "The blue chain of Hindu Kush became a reality, we had to fight out our way. But this was on another day and another dawn" (2003:92). Here the traveler's non-oreintalistic, absurd world and linguistic disorientation evaporate, and she begins her day according to the norms of Orientalism. Accordingly, she subtly fashions herself as the adventurous heroine who has to conquer her putatively wild and undeveloped by driving her Ford car through the dangerous, mountainous, and winding roads of Hindu Kush. Parret (2003) observes that Schwarzenbach has viewed her voyage as an "incentive to embark on the adventure" (237). Behdad notes that adventure is a mediated phenomenon (2009, 82) and her embrace of adventure ideology affiliates him to the masculine colonial hero-adventurers. Korte notes that sometimes "women travelers take on "masculine virtues of strength, initiative, and decisiveness" (2000:118): qualities become crystalized in adventure. Nonetheless, it should be noted

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that she cannot sustain this adventurous role in her journey because her trip hinges on the assistance of local people, yet this does not question her Orientalist assumption and outlook. Thus, in her journey, the oreintalistic element coexists with the non-orientalist one leading to her ambivalent vision.

Conclusion

In her journey to Afghanistan, Schwarzenbach does not portray her travelees and their culture in a reductive and Manichean way but ambivalently; that is, she simultaneously challenges and upholds Orientalist conventions. This yin-and-yang mode in her representation reflects contradiction and indeterminacy within the discourse of Orientalism. Indeed, Schwarzenbach's travelogue validates Behdad's perspective: ambivalence is one of the common attributes of modern Orientalist representation (2016: 99). Her ambivalence arises from the conflict between her Orientalist vision and her engagement with her travellees and host culture. Schwarzenbach her ambivalent reveals it in four ways.

Firstly, as a liberal traveller, she questions British officers' Orientalist assumptions viewing Afghans as terrorizing and sensual Others. For her, their cultural myopia is only a constructed myth stemming from their Victorian mentality as well as from their humiliating defeat by Afghans in the nineteenth century. Instead of violence and promiscuity in the native people, she identifies the virtues absent in supposedly civilized people. Her un-Orientalist enlightenment results from her context-bound engagement with the local people in the frontier region. However, despite her goodwill and cosmopolitanism, she synchronously envisions them as noble savages who are morally superior to the British border guards and whose existence is uncontaminated by the evils of Western societies. By doing so, she yields to the hegemonic ideology of Orientalism that buttresses the West-East dichotomy.

Secondly, unlike the British officers who cultivate the cult of exclusion through culinary signifiers and assume the indigenous cuisine is unhealthy and unsanitary, Schwarzenbach ingests it without any complaint or condescension. Moreover, she exploits this culinary signifier as an opportunity to cross the boundary between 'identity' [that is herself] and 'difference' [that is]. This is why she accepts their gracious hospitality and enjoys its resultant conviviality and a humanistic dialogue with her generous host. Again, despite her alternative perspective towards their food, Schwarzenbach cannot extricate herself from the centripetal forces of Orientalism since she intermixes this sign with the epicurean and sensuous world of *The Arabian Nights* and the utopian world of the fairy tale.

Thirdly, in the course of her journey, she witnesses the plights of nomads whose nomadic way of life is fading away due to the sendentarisation program imposed by Reza Shah, the embodiment of the Repressive State Apparatus, to borrow Althusser. She sympathizes with these voiceless nomads

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and critiques their formidable foes. Nevertheless, her commiseration for and understanding of the victimized nomads is motivated by nomadism. Indeed, the travel writer quests for an alternative space for European inferno. She imagines that her wish will be attainable among nomadic people, but ironically what she finds is their repression; however, this does not dislodge her Orientalist aspiration: the Orient as the site of recuperation.

Finally, she illustrates her ambivalence by juxtaposing and interconnecting her Orientalist inclination with her non-Orientalist tendency. Schwarzenbach cherishes the idea of encountering a promised and utopian space near the Oxus River. Her desire bespeaks her Orientalist worldview that associates the Orient as the land of escape and revival. However, the inaccessibility of the river thwarts her dream, resulting in counter-orientalism and her sense of futility and absurdity. Consequently, she halts her hermeneutic inclination or epistephilia, that is, an Orientalistic urge for interpretation, explication, and judgment. Instead, she prefers silence. Yet, her non-Orientalist gesture is fleeting since it is accompanied by her wish to adventure, the emblem of colonialism.

Authors' Contributions

All authors contributed significantly to the research process.

Declaration

We declare that this manuscript is original and has not been submitted to any other journal for publication

Transparency Statements

The authors affirm that the data supporting the findings of this study are available within the article. Any additional data can be obtained from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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