Arabic Cultural Heritage in Nineteenth-Century Spain in Vasily Botkin's *Letters about Spain*: Exoticism as an Aesthetic of Diversity

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ABSTRACT
In the present paper I argue that an interpretation of Spanish culture and national character presented in Vasily Botkin's *Letters about Spain* offers an alternative to the Orientalist picture of Spain in writings of his West European contemporaries. Botkin's interpretation comes close to the notion of Exoticism as Diversity developed 80 years later by a French cultural theorist, Victor Segalen. Traveling through an unknown space always involves an encounter with the Other who is translated into the cultural idioms of the home country. Botkin sets out on his Spanish journey in search of the romanticized "ideal of Spain" but this preconceived ideal is altered by the discovery of Andalusia, where the presence of the Moorish culture was the strongest and which became for him the quintessence of Spain. In his search for the African origin of Spanish culture Botkin travels to Africa, finding the contemporary culture of the Arabs, living in exile in Tangier, lacking the splendor of the glorious Moorish past. After Tangier Botkin returns to southern Spain ending his journey in Granada, the "lost Paradise" of the Moors, where he regains his connection with the Arabic Exotic Other. And Botkin intends to keep this Paradise forever, translating it into his home space. Botkin inscribes himself in this exotic space and conceives himself as Segalen's diverse Other, who is simultaneously the one and the other with this space.

Keywords: Vasily Botkin, Victor Segalen, exoticism, Moorish culture, Granada.

By the middle of the 19th century, after the end of the Napoleonic Wars, Russia's interest in Spain had reached its highest point. The 1800s--1830s also saw a wide range of Russian translations from Spanish, such as those of the thinker and writer and one of the main participants in the future Slavophiles-Westernizers debates, [1] Ivan Kireevsky, who translated the dramas of Calderon de la Barca; and Konstantin Mossalsky's new translation of *Don Quixote* in 1838.[2] Since that time the characters of Don Quixote and Don Juan became an inextricable part of Russian literature and culture with many Russian writers using them in their own works: for example, Pushkin's use of Don Juan in his "little tragedy" "The Stone Guest" (1830) or Ivan Turgenev's discussion of two sides of the Russian character in his seminal essay "Hamlet and Don Quixote" (1860). The founder of the national Russian school of music Mikhail Glinka lived for three years in Spain, creating his "Spanish Overtures" – *The Jota Aragonesa* and *A Summer Night in* Madrid – which contributed to the formation of Russian symphonic music.[3]

[1] Triggered by Petr Chaadaev's *First Philosophical Letter*, in the middle of the nineteenth century Russian intellectual society divided into two ideological camps — Westernizers and Slavovophiles. Botkin was a prominent Westernizer and as such opposed the Slavophiles' inclusion of Christian faith in their philosophy.

[2] By 1838 there were two translations of *Don Quixote* into Russian. The first translation by an unknown translator came out in 1769, and in 1804-1806 Vasily Zhukovsky published his free prose translation.

[3] Mikhail Glinka came to Spain in 1845 and spent three years there. He wanted his "Spanish Overtures" to be performed in Madrid but could not secure the cooperation of the Madrid symphony orchestra. They were performed for the first time in Warsaw in 1848.

In 1845 the Russian man of letters Vasily Botkin[4] made a long journey through Spain[5] and wrote voluminous letters about his experiences there. Initially they were published in Vissarion Belinsky's literary journal *Sovremennik* (The Contemporary) as well as in *Sovremennik*'s rival *Otechestvennye zapiski* (Notes of the Fatherland).[6] They became a sensation from the beginning. In 1857 the letters were published as a book entitled *Letters about Spain* and became the most influential text on nineteenth-century Spain in Russian culture. In fact, as one modern Russian scholar says, the "*Letters* laid the foundation for systematic Spanish studies" in Russia (Alekseev, 1985: 147). Almost thirty years after the publication of Botkin's book, V. Lesevich wrote in his *Etiudy i ocherki* (Sketches and Studies): "After Botkin's *Letters about Spain* there was not a single work, partially or wholly dedicated to Spain, with the exception of the chapter about Spain in a famous book by Buckle (1894), that attracted the attention of Russian readers to the same degree" (Lesevich, 1886: 108-110).[7]

Botkin was familiar with other writings about Spain, particularly with Washington Irving's The Tales of Alhambra to which he makes references in his *Letters* and with writings of French travelers, who were considered to be the authorities in the nineteenth-century travel literature — Rene Chateaubriand, Alexander Dumas, and especially Théophile Gautier. All of them traveled to Spain and wrote about Moorish Spain[8] which held a special attraction for French travelers since they saw it as the gateway to Africa – the exotic Orient, which was opened to them after Napoleon's campaign Egypt in 1798-1801. Their writings about their trips to Palestine, Algiers, Egypt, Morocco, and Spain became some of the main examples

[4] Vasily Botkin was a son of a tea merchant. He was born either in 1819 or 1811 and received an excellent education in one of the best private schools of the time – the Kryazhev Boarding School — where he learned French, German and English. Later on his own he learned Italian and Spanish. In 1835 Botkin received permission from his father to travel abroad and visited Germany, France and Italy, which he would later visit several more times, literally walking through the entire country on foot. After his return, Botkin joined the camp of Westernizers . From 1836 he started publishing his travel essays in various literary journals and later actively participated in Belinsky's democratic magazine *The Contemporary* (Sovremennik), where his *Letters about Spain* appeared in 1847. Later in his life Botkin shifted toward more conservative positions. He also became close to Leo Tolstoy and Afanasy Fet. Botkin dedicated all his life to art and after his death made several bequests for supporting Moscow University and art museums.

[5] According to the dates in the book published in 1858, Botkin started his journey in May and finished it in October of 1845. However, the Soviet-period scholar Zvigilsky states that in Tolstoy's Museum in Moscow B. F. Egorov discovered a letter that states: "I left Bayonne at 8:30 in the morning, at 12 the stagecoach crossed the border, and we had our breakfast in the border town of Irun" (Botkin, 1967: 287). The letter was dated August 11, 1845. Quoted in Botkin, 1967: 287.

[6] *Otechestvennye zapiski* was a sociological-political monthly published in Petersburg by A. A. Kraevsky from 1839 to 1867). In the 1840s, the journal's orientation was toward the ideas of the Westernizers and Belinsky contributed to the magazine until 1846. In 1846 he dissolved his collaboration with Kraevsky and left for *Sovremennik*.

[7] V. Lesevich *Etiudy i ocherki* (Sketches and Studies), St Petersburg, 1886, p. 108-110. Lesevich refers here to a chapter in Henry Thomas Buckle's monumental work *History of Civilization in England* (1821-1861), which was extremely popular throughout Europe in the second half of the nineteenth century.

[8] In 1806 Chateaubriand made a lengthy trip to the Orient, visiting Constantinople, Jerusalem, Egypt, Carthage, and finally Spain. He published his impressions in a book *Itinéraire du Paris a Jerusalem* (1811). Alexander Dumas, *père* made several journeys to different parts of the world, including Spain in 1834 and in 1846, the account of which came out in 1847 as *Impressions de Voyage. De Paris a Cadiz*. Theophile Gauthier made his trip in 1840 and published his letters about it in various Paris journals from September 1840 to January 1843. They were collected and published as a book in 1843 under the title *Tra los Montes*.

of what Edward Said would later call Orientalism, that is, the depiction of the Middle East, North Africa, India, and South East Asia as an image of what the Western civilization was not.[9]

The nineteenth century saw an explosion of travel, but the nature of travel drastically changed. While from the sixteenth to eighteenth century, travel was undertaken for the sake of discovery of unknown lands, in the nineteenth century travel became a form of tourism, that is, a search for the discovered. This meant that when Europeans travelled to the Orient, they wanted to find things they expected to find there and to compare them to the pre-conceived image of those things *vis-à-vis* things at home, proving "Western superiority and Oriental inferiority" (Said, 1978: 42). In nineteenth-century travel literature, Orientalism was closely connected with the notion of exoticism. Exoticism can be defined as the charm of the unfamiliar. The term goes back to the seventeenth century and was connected with the discovery and exploration of the New World. But in the nineteenth century, it began to be associated with travels to the Orient – Asia, North Africa, and the Middle East — territories that in the nineteenth century started to be progressively colonized and thus, as Edward Said puts it, demonstrate "a truly scientific appropriation of one culture by another, apparently a stronger one" (Said, 1978: 42). Several modern scholars of the exotic point out that it has to be of foreign origin. In travel writing the exotic is removed from its context, within which it is not exotic, but a part of the "domestic," and inserted into the context of the home space. As Peter Mason writes in his *Infelicities. Representation of the Exotic*, "The exotic is never at home: its very exoticism is derived from the fact that it has been detached from one context and inserted into another, to which it is to some degree refractory" (Mason, 1998: 148). Tsvetan Todorov insists that exoticism offers an encounter "in which otherness is systematically preferred to likeness" (Todorov, 1993: 264), meaning that the main point of the Orientalist approach was to create an idealized picture of the East that would stress the differences between the civilized West and the savage Orient. As the French scholar further says, if "we come to define exoticism in the abstract," then "what is at issue here is a valorization of the other than an act of self-criticism, less the description of a reality than the formulation of an ideal" (Todorov, 1993: 264). The French and British accounts of travels to the Orient create and almost fantastical world that reflects all the *a priori* conceived notions of the East and separate it from West European culture.

In the case of the French travelers' "discovery" of Spain, it is done from what later would be classified as a typical Orientalist position – "Africa begins right after the Pyrenees,"[10] implying that France, which, in their views, represented the pinnacle of Western civilization,

[9] Comparing the depiction of the Orient in the literature of different cultures, Said writes that "the French and the British… have had a long tradition of what I shall be calling Orientalism, a way of coming to terms with the Orient that is based on the Orient's special place in European Western Experience. The Orient is not only adjacent to Europe; it is also the place of Europe's greatest and richest and oldest colonies, the source of its civilizations and languages, its cultural contestant, and one of its deepest and most recurring images of the Other. In addition, the Orient has helped to define Europe (or the West) as its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience. Yet none of this Orient is merely imaginative. The Orient is an integral part of European material civilization and culture" (Said, 1978: 1-2).

[10] Alexandre Dumas *père* is usually credited with coining the phrase, but modern scholars argue that it is highly unlikely since it was used in Domingos António de Sousa Coutinho's *La guerre de la Péninsule sous son véritable point de vue* (1816). At that time Dumas was only 14.

is far more superior in comparison to the exotic and barbaric Spain (where the presence of the Arabic culture was still felt very strongly). As Tsvetan Todorov writes regarding Chateaubriand's travel to the Orient, for Chateaubriand civilization "begins where the influence of Islam leaves off" (Todorov, 1993: 300) which means that Spain, with its strong presence of Islamic culture, lies outside the borders of European civilization. It also must be added here that the concept of the exotic is conceived "before the discovery" as an ideal of a space or culture that is radically different from that of the traveler. In our context, the Arabic elements in Spanish culture are perceived as exotic, but they used to be "at home" in the Moorish Caliphate.

Traveling through an unknown space always involves an encounter with the Other, the relationship with whom can take all kinds of forms – from Freudian to existentialist ones. Usually in the process of translating the foreign space into one's home language, with the traveler constantly comparing himself and the Other. In the context of Russia and Spain, the question of the Other is complicated by propinquity to and coexistence with the exotic Other within their own cultures. In both cases, this Other appears in the form of the "Orient." For Russia it was Asia represented by the Tartars, and their 300-year yoke from the thirteenth to the fifteenth century, and for Spain it was Africa as represented by the Moorish conquest and the consequent rule from the eighth to the thirteenth century. Being "border countries," Russia and Spain have been very receptive to the influences coming from outside, yet at the same time have jealously protected their individuality.[11]

This Other whom the travelers encounter in a foreign country represents a collective national character inscribed into the physical and cultural landscapes of the country a traveler visits. This encounter leads to an attempt to translate the Other into the cultural idioms of the home country. Paraphrasing Edward Said's statement in his *Orientalism*, "everyone who writes about [a foreign country] must locate himself vis-à-vis [this country]; translated into his text, this location includes the kind of narrative voice he adopts, the type of structure he builds, the kinds of images, themes, motifs that circulate in his text…" (Said, 1978: 20). When Botkin sets out for the "discovery" of Spain, he knows he is going to the Orient, but he travels there with a completely different understanding of the exotic than his French counterparts. I will risk saying that Botkin's view of exoticism is surprisingly close to that of a French cultural theorist Victor Segalen, who, in the 1920s, proposed to consider exoticism through the concept of diversity. Thus Segalen's approach reverses the Orientalist view of exoticism: "I agree to call 'Diverse' everything that until now was called foreign, strange, unexpected, surprising, mysterious, amorous, superhuman, heroic, and even divine, everything that is *Other*;" Segalen lists all the attributes that are traditionally assigned to define the Orient, and then he continues, "that is to say, in each of these words, emphasize the dominance of the *essential* Diversity that each of those terms harbors within it" (Segalen, 66). The most radical aspect of Segalen's concept of Exoticism as diversity is his recognition and acceptance of the "otherness" of the Exotic, on the part of the "I," which establishes the independence of the Other from the "I" (Segalen, 2002: 19). Thus for Segalen "Exoticism… [is] nothing other

[11] It is interesting to note the rejection of these exotic others within their respective cultures. Western travelers used these others to deem both Russia and Spain as barbaric Asian/African countries. After the liberation from these Oriental Others, both countries tried their best to reject the presence of these Others in their cultures. We see these are tendencies even today.

than the notion of difference, the perception of Diversity, the knowledge that something is other than one's self; and Exoticism's power is nothing other than the ability to conceive otherwise" (Segalen, 2002: 19). In no way does Botkin try to establish the superiority of his "Russian *I*," or for that matter, the "European" Other, over his Spanish counterpart. From the very beginning he establishes the independence of the Spanish exotic Other from him, the European traveler, refusing to judge the unknown by the preconceived measures of Western civilization. He writes:

> For the citizens of Europe there is something in the character and life of the East that escapes their clear understanding. We can much better understand and feel the life of an Ancient Greek or Roman in us than the life of an Arab. Why do Europeans so badly get along with the peoples of the East? It seems to me that, despite the great number of the various histories of the Oriental peoples and travels [to the East], we know very little about the East, that is, about its character and manners – in a word, about its inner life. Travelers write about the East with a pre-conceived thought about the superiority of everything European and look at the Oriental life from the European point of view as if at a curiosity… (Botkin, 1967: 179-180)

It is interesting how the nineteenth century Russian writer could correctly identify the fundamental difficulty of the European acceptance of the Orient. He points out that since ancient Greece and Rome were the foundation of European civilization, the latter has no difficulties with accepting them, although they are millennia removed from them. But dealing with the Orient, which comes across as something completely different and thus not adhering to the values that are considered to be the pinnacle of human development, it is perceived as inferior to the West.

Undoubtedly, Botkin sets out on his journey with a preconceived ideal of Spain which was developed in Russian literature as discussed at the beginning of this essay. And it is easy to understand why Spain appeared to be an exotic country for Russian travelers because, to some extent, it represented an inverted mirror image of Russia. We must remember that both Russia and Spain were seen as "border countries" since they occupied a marginal, peripheral position on the outskirts of Europe, in direct proximity to the "Orient." The southern Spanish rocky desert landscape corresponds to Russian snow-covered plains, the Spanish heat – to the Russian cold, etc. But for the Russians, Spain was much more than just an exotic tourist destination. The interest in Spain was fueled in the aftermath of the Napoleonic wars when the Russian radicals found another similarity--both countries defeated Napoleon not so much by the might of the regular army, but through the efforts of the common people.[12] Botkin's difference from other European travelers of his time consisted in the fact that he perceives the Spanish Other through the prism of the country's own Other – the Moor, or in other words the presence of Arabic cultural heritage, which, to a large extent, determined for him the composition of the Spanish national character, conceived in Victor Segalen's terms as the Exotic (and thus Diverse) Other. I would add that for Botkin, this Other possessed, what we can call, double Exoticism: his Spanish exotic Other, determined by the Romantic perception

[12] It must be pointed out, however, that although the radicals, like the Romantics, the participants of the Decembrist Uprising (1825), had the picture of Spain as a freedom-loving country, the government's position was very different, and official diplomatic relationships witnessed their ups and downs. For example, during the Napoleonic war in 1812, Russia and Spain signed an agreement of mutual cooperation "in the war against the common enemy, the Emperor of France."

of Spain is suddenly added or moved to the second power by the presence of the African Moor. The diverse nature of the Spanish national character for Botkin was associated with the notion of freedom that was lost in Nicholas I's Russia. And, I would argue, this freedom was associated with the presence of the exotic Arab in the Spanish national character.[13]

Travel literature is a description of a writer's physical movement through a geographical space (which, in the majority of cases, is foreign, unknown, and as such "exotic" to the traveler). Each space is distinguished from other spaces by borders that allow the traveler to identify the space as a specific cultural entity. "Since the space of the nation is seen as the arch-subject that endows the inhabitants with their individuality," one of the modern theorists of travel literature writes, "its identity must be secured by a clear and continuous demarcation line from the adjacent spaces of other nations" (Islam, 1996: 63). It must be pointed out, however, that these borders are not necessarily strictly physical ones (something like a border checkpoint or the contour of a shoreline). They are rather ideological borders that define certain cultural characteristics of both the geographical space and its inhabitants. In addition to the space through which a traveler makes his journey, the process of travel narrative inevitably includes a second space – his home space to which he makes frequent direct and/or indirect references. As two modern travel literature scholars, James Duncan and Derek Gregory, write in the introduction to a book of essays *Writes of Passage: Reading Travel Writing*, travel literature involves the "re-imagining the world through its re-presentation, describing spiraling circles between home and away, here and there, and reworking the connective between 'travel' and 'writing'" (Duncan and Gregory, 1999: 1).[14] Travel literature can be seen as a process of transposing the home space onto the traveled one and vice versa, like what Botkin is doing when he describes the Andalusian landscape:

> For me, the inhabitant of the Northern plains, Southern mountains possess some inexplicable charm; eyes that from infancy have become accustomed to penetrate freely into the dim distance but restricted by the dark and dead line of the horizon, wander with some insatiable tenderness along these summits onto which each hour of day spreads its own tones of color. On the plains, nature is seen only in the foreground, by your feet, so to speak; further there is nothing but the sky and empty space, which involuntarily predisposes you to pensiveness… In the mountains you must say goodbye to this misty limitlessness: eyes meet everywhere not a monotonous gray distance, but the bright iridescence of greenery or cliffs that the sun and the air impart with delicate radiant colors (Botkin, 1967: 142-143).

[13] It is more difficult to comment on the *Letters* as Todorov's idea of self-criticism. According to Botkin's contemporaries, his *Letters* were heavily censored and the originals — lost. But the *Letters* definitely offered a very original ideological image of Spain, which was based on the premise that Arabic culture was the foundation of modern Spain. Botkin finds an external expression of the sense of freedom in the Spanish people – the movement of their bodies and clothes. He speaks about the "graceful freedom in [common workers'] movements" in Seville. He remarks on the freedom of conversation even among the common people. But a special place in Botkin's discourse on freedom belongs to Spanish women, who for him, are totally different from women of other nations, including Russia. He marvels at the freedom of their conversation, the sense of their bodies, and the freedom of their movements.

[14] Partially quoting and partially paraphrasing Duncan and Gregory, we can say that in "re-presenting other cultures and other natures,… travel writers 'translate'" the visited place into the language of the home space, producing a new space in the process, which, according to modern translation theorist Lawrence Venutti, contains both remainders and additions (Duncan and Gregory, 1999: 5).

As we can see, Botkin approaches Spanish space not from the stationary position of the classical perspective, but by moving (at least with his eyes) through it. Instead of establishing boundaries that help him understand the foreign space, he breaks them off and transposes the mountainous Andalusian landscape onto his native plains. As a result, Russian space turns out to be based on an opposition of openness ("dim distance") and enclosure ("deadening line of the horizon"). This space is empty, and a person inscribed into it is doomed to inactivity. The only thing that he can do freely in this space is to contemplate the relationships between things in the foreground (that can be interpreted as our physical, everyday existence) and enclosed infinity, which serves as their background. By contrast, Spanish space is multifaceted and multicolored. It engages a traveler to active interaction, demanding of him/her to make decisions (in other words, to express his free will). According to Segalen, Exoticism calls for an "'expansive' way of thinking that has imposed itself on [us], to let the mind live and expand… All this relates to Diversity" (Segalen, 2002: 28). Encountering the Andalusian landscape, Botkin transgresses the prescribed perceptual borders and enters the free space of the Exotic Other.

The encounter with the exotic Other can take place only through the process of crossing the borders that delineate it. By crossing borders, the traveler opens the space into which he enters, and through this opening, a complex interaction between the traveled and home spaces begins. Botkin moved through the entire space of Spain, or more precisely, through a number of smaller spaces that comprise the total space of the country. His entire trip can be seen as an inverted Russian *matryoshka* doll or the spiral movement discussed by Duncan and Gregory, through which each space organically enters the next space, thus enriching it and making it larger and deeper. In terms of Botkin's travel, we can indicate the following borders he has to deal with: first, the above-mentioned border with France, which can be labeled as the "European border," that is, the one that separates "civilized" Europe from the "barbaric" Spain (barbaric because it has been affected by the Moorish conquest). The second can be called the Moorish border that lies between northern and southern Spain, between Castile and Andalusia, between Catholic and Moorish Spain. The third border is the one between Spain and Africa, that is, between the historical splendor of Arabic culture that had forever affected Spanish culture and resulted in the magnificent artistic achievements of Seville, Cordoba, and Granada; and in imparting the Spanish national character with its unique "African," for want of a better word, aspect, and the then present-day Arabic culture of northern Africa, where the descendants of Spanish Moors lived in exile dominated by European (primarily British and French) colonialists. Instead of imposing the boundaries of his home space on the space in which he is traveling, or creating new boundaries to make sense of the frightening "undiscovered" space, Botkin constantly crosses them. Undoubtedly, he sets out on his Spanish journey in search of the "ideal of Spain," that romanticized, pre-discovered image of Spain with which he came to that country, but this preconceived ideal is altered by the discovery of Andalusia, which becomes for him the quintessence of Spain.

It is not surprising that the further south Botkin goes, the more pronounced the presence of Arabic culture becomes. On visiting Madrid, he just discusses the history of the war with the Arabs. But when he enters Andalusia, he for the first time comes face to face with the culture of the Moors:

> The Moorish element not just left deep traces in Andalusia, it coalesced here with everything, you can feel it in the tunes of the fandango, as well as in the customs and habits of the local people. Clothes, houses, streets, faces – everything bears the Moorish mark on them… In these smart, tight-fitting clothes, the Andalusians preserve all freedom, all spontaneous grace of movement (Botkin, 1967: 55).

I will venture to say that for Botkin, this freedom is inextricably connected with the Moorish heritage that distinguishes, or in Segalen's terms makes the Spanish "diverse." And for Botkin, the presence of the Moorish, Arabic Other (which he associated with Africa) in Spanish space was its most fascinating and attractive feature.

The first true acquaintance with Arabic culture takes place in Cordoba where the Arabic element becomes predominant in Botkin's spatial descriptions. "Cordoba is a completely Moorish city…Nothing recalls the European way of life and customs here," (Botkin, 1967: 47) he writes. "The Moorish color lies over everything, and this color is so strong that even now the towns and small villages of Andalusia have the character of the Orient" (Botkin, 1967: 47).

Botkin sees Cordoba as the pinnacle of Arabic cultural achievements in Spain: "Cordoba… was the capital of the most brilliant epoch of the Moorish reign in Spain. On this splendid land, full of reminiscences of the classical past, there one of the best flowers of Mohammedan life was cultivated" (Botkin, 1967: 49). The encounter with this city also allows Botkin to contemplate the place of Arabic heritage in the Spanish national character which was formed in the hostile interaction between Catholic Spain and Arabic Andalusia:

> The constant struggle against the Christian landowners brought forward in Spanish Arabs a certain special noble character, in the valor of which they greatly surpassed their Christian opponents. If it were not for the fact that audacity, raw power, and craftiness had always taken the upper hand over honesty, learnedness, and industriousness in history, then, of course, the Arabs would have remained the rulers of Spain to this day! Alas, history does not know any other right except power and ruse (Botkin, 1967: 49).

Botkin associates the Spaniards with physical prowess and the Arabs with education, culture and intellectualism. That is why, looking at the splendor of Arabic art and architecture in Cordoba, he mourns the loss of Arabic culture in Spain:

> I don't know anything more fantastic in the history of mankind as this sudden appearance, this wondrous brilliance, and the consequent disappearance of the Moorish nation!.. And all the treasures of the Arabs' knowledge perished together with their sovereignty. This brilliant, poetic people disappeared from the face of the earth without leaving any trace except for a few monuments and literary fragments. The wild, frenzied fanaticism of the Spanish clergy wanted to destroy even the very memory of this people, fomenting both political and religious hatred against them." (Botkin, 1967: 49-50).

Botkin sees the disappearance of Arabic culture in Spain as the victory of fanatical intolerance for the exotic Other, which was implemented by the Spanish Inquisition in place of the relatively peaceful co-existence between different cultures in Al-Andalus, the Arab Caliphate of 711-1492. In her book *The Ornament of the World*, Maria Rosa Menocal[15]

[15] See especially chapters "The Places of Memory," "The Mosque and the Palm Tree," "Mother Tongues," and

discusses the historically documented policy of tolerance and relative religious freedom that the ruling Umayyad caliphs, and especially Abd-Al-Rahman III, implemented toward Christians and Jews in Andalusia. It would seem that one hundred and sixty years earlier the Russian foreign traveler shares this view with the twenty-first century scholar:

> Reading the history of the Arabs, and especially the history of their conquest and expulsion from Spain, it is impossible not to see without deep sorrow how the intelligent, tolerant people, industrious to the highest degree, the multifaceted education of whom has already started to change the strict and dry dogma of Islam, were defeated and expelled by the barbarous, fanatical Spaniards; how the rich, cultivated, densely populated land was sacrificed to the Inquisition and has become a desert (Botkin, 1967: 50).

It is interesting to note how Botkin reverses the traditional European perception of the relationship between the Occident and Orient in Spain. For him the Arabs (the Moors) represent sophistication, culture, and intelligence, while the Spaniards, albeit the fanatical Catholics (as the members of the Inquisition) are labeled as barbaric.[16] The reason for this transposition can be found in the notion of tolerance: while the Moors are called the most tolerant people, the Spaniards are presented as their opposite. According to Segalen, tolerance is the necessary pre-condition for the acceptance of diversity: you accept the difference of the Other – the fact that s/he is not (like) you.

The greatest representation of Arabic culture in Cordoba for Botkin was the famous Mosque, the most ancient structure Arabs left in Spain, and the Russian traveler writes a long description of this architectural wonder, starting with a discussion of the typical – for Arabic culture – neglect of the exterior and transference of the luxurious decorations solely to the interior of the building:

> You suddenly enter a forest of marble columns, you don't know where to look first in their countless rows that disappear in the twilight distance; rare small windows barely let the light seep through so that the semidarkness, which reigns here, still further increases the singularity of the impression (Botkin, 1967: 52).

For those who visited the Mosque, it is not surprising that Botkin was so taken by the main element of Moorish architecture — the horseshoe arches — so predominantly represented in the Mosque.

Not being a professional art critic, Botkin focuses not on aesthetic aspects of the Mosque, but on the question of how the architectural artifact represents the cultural historical nature of the Arabic people**.** He is trying to connect the architecture to the spirit of the Moorish national character, which he opposes to its Western counterpart as the restless spirit of Eastern nomads (hence the horseshoe shape). Botkin's vision of Moorish culture goes against a traditional vision of the exotic Orient as the languishing sultry feminine (and thus weak) Arab, lounging on cushions in his tent. The most interesting twist in Botkin's discussion comes at the end of the quoted passage where he points out the connection between Arabic culture and that

"The Abbot and the Quran."

[16] In the mid-nineteenth century Botkin appears as a typical product of the Enlightenment and a liberal. It is not surprising that that he saw the Christian Church (both Catholic and Russian Orthodox) as the instrument of oppression.

of ancient Greece and Rome. From Botkin's description of the aisles in the Mosque, we can see that he maintains that the culture of ancient Greece and Rome became the foundation of Moorish culture, which imparted the former with movement and fantasy. Knowingly or unknowingly, Botkin sensed the "multi-cultural" nature of the Mosques for the construction of which the Arab architects used "pillars taken from ancient and Visigothic monuments" (Sordo, 1963: 41). Also, according to modern art critics, the floral motifs were borrowed from Persia and the mosaics — from Byzantium (Sordo, 1963: p. 45). Thus, based on this cultural diversity, a unique unity of Moorish Caliphate art was achieved, which demonstrates "the noble Romano—Cordoban tradition and the very character of the [Spanish] people," as the Spanish writer Ricardo Molina puts it (Sordo, 1963: p. 45).

From Cordoba, Botkin travels to Seville where he finds the exotic romantic Spain that he initially came to discover before the actual discovery: "If there is left a city in Spain that reflects the entire former Romantic Spain with its guitar, duennas, low balconies, and night rendezvous by windows, then undoubtedly it is Seville" (Botkin, 1967: 67). But Botkin very quickly abandons this preconceived notion of a romantic Spain. The persuasive presence of Arabic culture in Seville like "the Moorish palace that, despite all the remodeling the Spanish kings did in it, still preserves its Arabic face" (Botkin, 67) makes Botkin see the true nature of Spain as a combination of Spanish and Moorish cultures:

> I have already spoken about Cordoba: that city even now entirely preserves its Eastern character; to the contrary, in Seville the Spanish element merged with the Moorish one and from that merging something extraordinarily attractive, original, and poetic, in one word, - Seville - emerged (Botkin, 1967: 67).

Thus, Seville, instead of a "pre-discovered" ideal, becomes the measure of the new concept of Spain – a hybrid of Europe and the Orient (Africa).

In search of the origin of this unique phenomenon, Botkin sets out for Africa. He arrives in Cadis, but experiences great disappointment. Although he calls Cadis, a small port city on the Atlantic ocean, just past Gibraltar, the "most amiable city in Europe" (Botkin, 96), he thinks that there "European civilization so deeply penetrated the minds and customs of its citizens… [that the city] in the least possible way can give any notion about the rest of feudal-Moorish Spain" (Botkin, 1967: 94). At the same time, Cadis, in the "brilliance of its sky and the amazing transparency of the air that is blinding and imparts to nature and all the surroundings with such a delightful and festive appearance," unquestionably demonstrated for Botkin the city's "kinship with Africa" (Botkin, 1967: 101). So it is not surprising that he continues his search for the origin of the Spanish character by venturing into Africa, although he ends up there almost by accident. Botkin wanted to go to Gibraltar and then to Malaga by ship, but because of a storm, the ship was detoured to Tangier where the Russian traveler encountered contemporary Arabs. He was the first Russian to visit Morocco and to write about it, although he spent only a few days there.[17]

It must be pointed out that at the time of Botkin's travel, Tangier was dominated by a Western (mostly British, especially Scottish, and to a lesser extend French) military presence.

[17] Technically the first Russian who visited Tangier was the captain of the Russian frigate "Saint Paul" Nikolai Skuratov, who landed in Tangier in 1778 and made a notation about the city in his ship's log. However, prior to Botkin, no one wrote anything about Tangier in the Russian press.

The encounter with present-day Arab culture fills Botkin with a bitter sense of disappointment. To some extent, he shares the sentiments of Rene Chateaubriand, who, comparing the "noble savage" of the American continent to the Arab of the Northern Africa, writes:

> In a word, everything in the American points to the savage who has not yet attained the state of civilization; with the Arab everything points to the civilized man who has fallen back into the savage state (Todorov, 1993: 300).

At the same time, Botkin realizes this contrast between the glorious, albeit romantically colored, past and the sordid present imposed on Arabs by Western colonial powers:

> A strange bitter feeling came over me when I was wandering through Tangier, looking at these half-naked people with sad and savage faces and majestic movements, bundled in their white burnooses, at this deadness of houses and streets, at this sultry mysteriousness of life. So here it is, this Asia! Never leaving Europe before, I anticipated, by looking at this one piece of Africa, what all those cities of Turkey, Egypt, Persia, and Arabia must be. Looking at this proud stature, at these beautiful faces, it was hard to believe that you were in a country of merciless tyranny. I happened to come across faces that touched me to the bottom of my soul with their sadly gentle expression. There was so much resigned sadness in these eyes, so much contentment and depth in this long, pensive look of Asia, that you asked yourself in bewilderment why must these peoples drag out such a wretched existence? (Botkin, 1967: 128)

It would seem that Botkin slips here into the Orientalist vision of Africa, bundling it up with such culturally different entities as Egypt and Turkey, Arabia, and Persia. A possible explanation for this would be that, on his own admission, it was his first trip to the Orient, the composite image of which he received from the writings of French travelers who, in addition to Spain, travelled to the Middle East, Egypt, and Turkey. The speculation notwithstanding, I question if it is truly an Orientalist approach to Africa that Botkin offers here? His description of the Arabs in Tangier, on the one hand, portrays them as majestic, proud, and mysterious; on the other hand, they drag out a wretched existence among dead houses and dead streets. Botkin is absolutely clear about the reasons for this wretchedness, saying it is a result of merciless tyranny imposed on the Arabs by the European powers. In no way is Botkin a proto-post-colonial writer, but he greatly deviates from a traditional Orientalist position in regard to the Orient, offering a very refreshing view on the relationship between the exotic Arabic Other and its European counterpart. In his discussion of life in Tangier, Botkin addresses the issue of European imperialism as it applies to Africa, especially here in Morocco. He writes:

> European civilization proudly says: they [the African people] are incapable of understanding me, and, therefore, they are doomed to yield their place to my tribes or to drag out the life of animals and eventually perish. (Botkin, 1967: 128)

Botkin compares this to the extermination of the Native American population and quotes President Thomas Jefferson, who talked about the grave guilt of his people, the American settlers, before the Native American population. Botkin continues his attack on European imperialism saying:

> European civilization brags about its universal humanistic elements. But why does it make its way with such grave violence? Why do millions of peoples who live next to it not only not feel any attraction toward it, but agree to perish rather than accept it? (Botkin, 1967: 128).

Victor Segalen saw the European universal essentialism as entropy and as "the sum of all internal, non-differentiated forces, all static forces, all the lowly forces of energy" (Segalen, 48). Deliberating on the nature of relationships between Europe and the Orient, Botkin addresses the issue of entropy as well:

> In Europe they so often and so much write and speak on any occasion about mankind that this word has become somewhat of a commonplace… If we take into consideration this notion, as it is usually used, in its essential meaning, and if we take into consideration the fact that the life of the millions of peoples of Asia and Africa have developed in a completely contrary way to European aspirations, then we must realize that under the high-flown word "mankind" Europe essentially means, without realizing it itself, only those tribes who have accepted its civilization (Botkin, 1967: 128-129).

The *a priori* accepted universality of European values erases the individuality of the Exotic Others, thus justifying the European domination over what they called the Orient. Segalen contrasts this universal humanism with "Universal Exoticism," or, better yet, "essential Exoticism," which represents for him "the selected Notion, the feeling of Diversity, the special attitude of the subject for the object having embraced all thought" through which "the thinking being… finds himself face to face with himself. This is universal Exoticism, essential Exoticism" (Segalen, 2002: 70). In Tangier, encountering the Arabic Other, Botkin takes a good look at European civilization, a member of which he considers himself to be. According to Segalen, universal Exoticism liberates the "I" and the Other from each other. Segalen writes: "It may be that *freedom* is one of the characteristics of the *Exot*, that is, *being free* with regards to the object that is felt or described, at least at that final phase when the Exot has moved away from the object" (Segalen, 2002: 28). Botkin sees in Tangier that very universality of European values that rejects diversity in regard to the Other and results in the reign of entropy, that is, the loss of freedom. Botkin writes: "…the monotony of life here [in Tangier] is such that, I think, one can quickly stop believing in the possibility of a different existence, such as in the midst of a cold winter it is sometimes hard to believe that the summer will come" (Botkin,1967: 133). Here Botkin in an indirect way equates colonial oppression and Russian despotic power. Unlike his European counterparts in Tangier, Botkin is not trying to define himself through the Arabic Other, but accepts it, admitting the independence of the Exotic Other from him and himself from that Other.

When he comes to Tangier, Botkin "at every step feel[s] the affinity between Andalusia and Africa, the only difference is that here Andalusia is in its embryo, in a seed – other elements participated in its development" (Botkin, 1967: 133). Here he finds the origin of the Spanish exotic Other, but, while he accepts the historical Spanish Moorish culture, he has difficulties to do the same with contemporary Arabs in Africa: for him, as for Chateaubriand "[t]he charm of the past has trouble overcoming the hideousness of the present" (Todorov, 1993: 307). I believe that the main reason for this was his disagreement with the Arabs' passive acceptance of the superiority of Western civilization. Rationally, Botkin sees the direct connection between them and the historic Exotic Other, whom he encountered earlier in Andalusia, but emotionally he cannot accept the loss of the essential exoticism by this Other. He relates the conversation he had in Tangier with a Moor, who, answering Botkin's question about what he was praying so ardently for, says: "You have Paradise here, on earth, and there

in the heights, where our Paradise is, you will have no Paradise." Botkin comments that "it was a Moor who has seen Europe – he visited Gibraltar and felt the advantage of European civilization over the Mohammedan East. At the same time he was a sincere Mohammedan. The answer of the Moor showed how the Arab believers, those who had seen Europe, console themselves while they perceive the spiritual and civic predominance of the Europeans over them. They accept this predominance, but interpret it in such a way that their pride does not allow them to feel humiliated (Botkin, 1967: 120). The colonial tyranny and the passive acceptance of their fate by the Arabs deprive them of their essential Exoticism, resulting in the loss of freedom. However, Botkin maintains that, unlike their European counterparts, the Arabs in Tangier, where they live in exile from their Golden Age, from their Paradise, do not define themselves through comparison with the "superior" Western Other, but through their own historical other — the Andalusian Moor.

> Not the slightest trace of their former civilization has been left among the Moors. But neither the deepest ignorance, nor terrible despotism could erase their wonderful noble appearance full of courage and dignity. I will never forget these majestic faces of the Moors sitting in their small shops in meditative repose. Framed by the black glistening beards, their beautiful white matte faces possessed in them something transparent, like marble through which the sun shines (Botkin, 1967: 133).

The historical Moorish culture, which Botkin encountered in Andalusia, becomes the light (which traditionally was associated with symbolic representation of spiritual values) buried in the contemporary Arabs.

After examining the origin of the "African" component of the Spanish national character, Botkin leaves Morocco and returns to southern Spain — first to Malaga and then to Granada, the final point of his journey – in search of the "buried sun" that he saw in the faces of the Arabs in Tangier. He wants to regain his connection with the Arabic Exotic Other and find "their Paradise" from which they were expelled so long ago.

It is no wonder that Botkin ends his Spanish journey in Granada, because the Arabs themselves perceived this city as their lost Paradise. He recalls Moorish legends about the city:

> No, not without reason did the Moors cry when they were driven out of Granada, not without reason one of the nearby mountains, from which, weeping, Boabdil for the last time looked at Granada, is still called the "Moor's sigh"—el suspiro del Moro. Not without reason the exiled Moors preserved a saying: when someone became lost in thought, people would say: "He is thinking of Granada" (Botkin, 1967: 193).

For Botkin, Granada appears different from Cordoba and Seville in that here the Moorish culture is not just a memory preserved in historical monuments, but permeates the very fabric of the life of its people.

> The Moorish element lives in Granada not only as an historical memory – you feel it in everything: here is an Arabic inscription, there are the Moorish outlines of a building or a Moorish name of a place. (Botkin, 1967: 174)

Not only the city, but the entire surroundings emerge as a special, almost mythical place in Botkin's writings.

> Here is the climate of Granada and this is one of its charms: fire and water, heat and coolness; and the hotter the heat, the quicker the snow melts in the North and the creeks and springs run more rapidly. This union of water and fire makes the climate of Granada singularly unique in the world… You rarely meet anyone in its overgrown garden paths — it is deserted silence, but everything around you is rustling and babbling as though the grove is alive and breathing… It doesn't look like any other garden in Europe: this is the pensiveness of the North merged with the moist, sparkling beauty of the South. I lied down on the cool moss of the first stone I came across and lay there for a long time listening to the babbling of the brook as if to some vague melodies that nevertheless were sweet to my soul. Oh, how well I understood the Moors' grief when they were driven out of Granada! (Botkin, 1967: 178)

The uniqueness of Granada's space is determined by the unity of water and fire, which, in all mythologies, signified female and male elements. Out of this union the life of nature is born in the form of a garden, which, according to Islamic studies scholars, "was for Islam the symbol of Paradise" (Edwards, 2009: 29). Even the Koran describes "the Moslem paradise as a luxuriant garden, which is very dark green in color and watered by delightful streams" (Sordo, 1963: 213). In comparison with the Western garden, which tends to overcome and order nature, like Versailles or the gardens at Peterhoff, "[t]he Arabic garden is quite different; there, it is not a matter of colonization, but of limitation; its aim is to seclude rather than to open out, to escape attention rather than to draw it. There are vistas, of course, but they are distant and seen from above" (Sordo, 1963: 213). Thus all of Granada is perceived as Paradise, with its core being the famous gardens of Generalife. Botkin rented a room in Alhambra and visited the Garden of Generalife quite often He describes his experience there in the following way:

> The snow-capped peaks of the Sierra-Nevada burn in the blue sky like a white-hot iron; pink rippling mist lies below over the city and the green thicket of the dale like a transparent veil… Everything – the sky and the earth – burns and melts in inexpressible radiance… A five-minute walk from me is the Moorish palace in Generalife with its thick, deserted garden where, after paying a watchman once, I got a permission to come any time I wanted. Every day I eat grapes there. What a pleasure to eat these clusters still covered with a matte, frost-like freshness of the morning straight from the tree! I greedily look into this dale, these mountains glistening with wonderful colors; Alhambra – I breath in the coolness of its gardens and fountains and think what I should do, so that all this could be imprinted forever in my soul, so that I could forever remember this Paradise, which, God only knows if I will have an occasion to see again… (Botkin, 1967: 191).

Thus, at the end of his journey, Botkin comes to what appears to him to be the core of the Spanish space constructed in Heideggerian terms "as the object of the knowing gaze of an indifferent subject" which is, according to the German philosopher, "symptomatic of the forgetting of Being," (Islam, 1996: 12) or in Sagelen's terms, he reaches the highest point in feeling the diversity of the Spanish Exotic Other:

> [T]he ability to feel Diversity entails… two phases of which one is reducible: one of the divergent elements is ourselves. In the other phase, we observe a difference of two parts of the

> object. This second phase must lead back to the first if one desires to turn it into the sensation of exoticism: then, the subject weds and merges with one of the component parts of the other part of the object (Segalen, 2002: 50).

Cleansed and transformed by the encounter and interaction with the Exotic Other, Botkin comes face to face with his true self innocently wandering in the regained Moorish Paradise (because the Generalife Garden is depicted as the Garden of Eden) and eating fruits not from the forbidden tree of knowledge of good and evil, but from those which Adam ate before the Fall. And Botkin intends to keep this Paradise forever, translating it into his home space. Botkin inscribes himself in this exotic space and conceives himself as Segalen's diverse Other, who is simultaneously the one and the other with this space, and, as Segalen says, "*he rejoices in this diversity*" (Segalen, 2002: 70).

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