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"Licentious Barbarians": Representations of North African Muslims in Britain

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Abstract: This study traces the various historical contexts under which representations of North African Muslims were created from the sixteenth century until the nineteenth century in Britain. It shows that the image of Muslims that is being propagated in the media today as sexually licentious, oppressive towards women and barbaric were created from the earliest encounters between Westerners and Muslims from North Africa in the sixteenth century and became gradually consolidated in both fictional and factual writings throughout a few centuries up until the nineteenth century. While historical contexts experienced change as a result of the advent and decline of the Ottoman Empire as well as the emergence of Western Imperialism in the nineteenth century, images of Muslims remained largely the same.

Key words: barbarians, Britain, Muslims, North Africa, harem

Although many readers today tend to dismiss the socio-political impact that North Africa had on Britain because the region was colonised by France, and because of the limited contact Europeans have had with North Africans in the recent years, the region is particularly important in shaping the representations of Muslims in today's Western media. This is because North Africa is the Muslim region that is closest in proximity to Europe and, as a result of this

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closeness, it is not only the first to have frequent encounters with Britain, but also the earliest one to be portrayed in Western discourses of the Orient and its people. The impact of these early encounters has been long and sustaining, even to the extent of shaping much of the way Muslims worldwide are being depicted in today's media. A study of the history of North African Muslims' representations in Western narratives throughout the ages will help us understand the hostilities and anxieties that underlie the East-West relationship today.

Indeed, Britain has had a long and sustained engagement with Algeria and North Africa that began as far back as the seventeenth century. As Linda Colley points out, "Throughout the seventeenth century and in the early 1700's, England's (and subsequently Britain's) most widely known and controversial contacts with Islamic cultures were with so-called Barbary powers, Morocco, Algiers, Tripoli, and Tunisia, the last three all regencies or military provinces of the Ottoman Empire."[1] Unlike the model of domination which characterises Britain as a colonising power in the nineteenth century, the Ottoman Empire was seen as a threatening and superior power to England. During the Age of Discovery or the Age of Exploration, a time period that spanned from the early fifteenth century continuing into the early seventeenth century, the fear, awe and envy which the English felt towards the unconquerable Ottoman Empire had caused them to impose sexual stereotypes on Muslims. Since such images prevailed through the nineteenth century and even managed to pervade into the twentieth century and beyond, an overview of the socio-historical relations between England and North Africa prior to 1830 helps us understand Britain's relationship with North Africa in the later period, as analysed in this paper.

Britain and North Africa prior to 1830

According to Edward Said, there has been a long-standing and seductive belief that the use of derogatory images of the Muslim "other" acts as a catalyst for Britain's imperialism of North Africa,[2] which began in 1830. As Lofti Ben Rejeb argues, "Europe systematically carved out an image, a composite portrait of North Africa's 'character' which, though not a primary cause of colonization, eventually became a major justification for it."[3] Similarly, Emily C. Bartels, Barbara Fuchs, Jean Howard and Jack

D'Amico have all alluded to Britain as an emerging colonial power, making unquestioning assumptions about Britain's imperial intent during the early seventeenth century when it was lagging behind its European counterparts in practically everything, from trade and expeditions to military might.[4]

On the other side of the divide are works which argue that the depiction of negative stereotypes of Muslims must be interpreted in relation to a contextual framework where the Ottoman Empire is seen as a threatening superior power to Britain.[5] These works are more credible because they take into account the historical specificities of the period that, unlike in the nineteenth-century, witnessed the Ottoman Empire as an unchallenged imperial power in the world. Linda Colley finds it difficult to accept the role of stereotyping as a catalyst for colonisation, arguing that stereotypes of the "other" are not the sole cause of aggression. However, these images, along with other factors, could be used to facilitate and justify the use of imperial force on those who are seen as inferior.[6]

Within the context of the Ottoman Empire as an imperial superpower, the attitude of most early modern English men and women towards the Muslims was one of fear, anxiety, envy and awe.[7] As Nabil Matar argues, historical documents suggest that from the sixteenth century to the eighteenth century, the relationship between Westerners, Turks and Moors was neither completely amicable, as when they attacked and raided each other at sea, nor was it definitively hostile, as when they continued to trade with one another. Thousands of Turks and Moors visited and traded in English and Welsh ports, hundreds came as captives and a few as ambassadors and emissaries. The English too traded with them in Mediterranean harbours, joined Muslim armies, sought their fortunes in privateering, piracy, and pillaging, or entered as slaves into Muslim households. As Matar suggests, "to numerous Britons, the Turks and Moors were men and women they had known, not in fantasy or fiction, but with whom they worked and lived, sometimes hating them yet sometimes accepting and admiring them."[8]

At a time when the English were busy colonising and dispossessing the Native Americans, they were extremely anxious with the Muslim armies' formidable success at conquering many places in Europe. Their still greater fear was that Europe would be

Islamised for while "the conquest of the Americas was enlarging Christendom in the West, the thrust of the Ottomans was diminishing it in the East."[9] While very few Muslims converted to Christianity, as Matar and Kenneth Parker argue, many Christians became Muslims in order to make a fortune in North Africa or to escape enslavement.[10]

On the stages of London's theatre, in the various historical accounts of encounters with the Muslims and in religious tracts, there is evidence of the viewed hostility of Christians towards Muslims. Representations of Turks as cruel, tyrannical, deceiving and deviant and the Moors as sexually promiscuous, emotionally uncontrollable, vengeful and furiously superstitious began to emerge in literary and theological contexts. Matar alleges that while these perceptions of Muslims did not appear in actual accounts of encounters with them, they could be found in plays such as Peele's *The Battle of Alcazar*, Deeker's *Lust's Dominion*, Shakespeare's *Othello*, Beamont and Fletcher's *The Knight of Malta* or Rowley's *All Lost by Lust*.[11] Elliot Tokson argues that these writers "widened the distance" between the Europeans and the Africans, both in North Africa and in the sub-Sahara, transforming "contact into conflict, engagement into stereotyping."[12]

The Barbary, Barbarians and North African Muslims

As a result of increasing Western hostility towards Muslims, English writers began to apply the term "barbarians" to the Muslims of the Ottoman Empire and North Africa. Matar attributes the use of this term to the English who wanted to denigrate the Muslims, as they had denigrated those they had colonised, even while acknowledging that the former had an advanced military and historical civilisation. He also implies that the English may have harboured the hope of dominating the Moors because they were viewed as "barbaric."[13]

Colley and Vitkus suggest the possibility that the Moors' enslavement of English captives may also have contributed to the use of the term.[14] For, by the beginning of the seventeenth century, as the English were engaged in the trading of African slaves, their own people were being captured and enslaved by Turkish privateers operating in the Mediterranean and the Northern Atlantic. Thus, Vitkus argues, the fear of being conquered, captured and converted

amongst the English was the internal drive that drove them to demonise the Muslims.[15] Yet, as Kenneth Parker argues, the term "Barbary" pirates is unstable since many of these pirates were actually Christian renegades, some of them from England. To ignore this fact "is but a short step to the construction of the conventional binaries such as those of Christian versus Muslims, or of overarching unities such as that of Barbary."[16] Such crossing-over and blurring of racial lines as those suggested by Parker demonstrates yet again the instability of stereotypes and racial markers, which in turn undermines the hegemonic stance of Orientalist discourse.

The greatest fear amongst the European Christians, nonetheless, was not so much crossing-over of racial lines, but further conversions amongst Christians in Britain. According to the writings of Samuel Chew and Matar, the English were extremely anxious about the Muslims and their power to convert.[17] This fear is manifest in the abundance of anti-Islamic writings and the prevalence of traditional stereotypes concerning Muslims, especially those that tried to establish Islam as a religion that encourages sexual licentiousness and the sexual practice of sodomy as originating from North Africa.

Islam, Sexual Licentiousness and the Origins of Sodomy

One image of Islam that continued from the Medieval Age right through the seventeenth century is that it is a religion that encourages sexual licentiousness, thriving on sensuality and sexuality to attract its followers. This long-standing tradition framed the Muslim's prophet, Muḥammad (SAW), as a fraudster and a violent and lustful man. Edward Aston claims that Islam's "incredible allurement" has been Muḥammad's "giving to his people free liberty and power to pursue their lustes and all other pleasures, for by other meanes, this pestilent religion hath crept into innumerable Nations."[18] Early modern writers, such as Leo Africanus, also claim that Islam's main attraction for Christian renegades and its main reason for maintaining its followers was the greater sexual freedom it afforded to its followers.[19] According to Vitkus, Christian writers saw evidence of Islam's encouragement of sexual licentiousness not only in the sensual pleasures it promises to adherents in the next life, but also in the sexual freedom allowed by Islamic law. Islamic regulations concerning concubinage, marriage and divorce became objects of ridicule and misunderstanding.[20]

Muslims are also accused of practising sodomy in these sixteenth- and seventeenth-century texts.[21] In fact the supposed practice of sodomy became one of the significant dividing lines between Christians and the Muslims.[22] Sodomy signified barbarity on the side of the Muslims and, according to many Christian preachers, brought doom to both the former and the renegades.[23] Colley argues that the prevalence of sodomy in various texts, especially before 1750, acted as a metaphor for the fear and insecurity which Western Europeans continued to feel when confronting the mighty and, to them, aggressive power of the Ottoman Empire. Rather than making the Islamic world appear feminised, "the burden of these expressed anxieties, was that the captive, from captive British and European males, were the potential victims. It was *they* who might be penetrated and invaded."[24] While accusations of sodomy would gradually fade following the decline of the Ottoman Empire, it would resurface again after 1830, when North Africa was under France's direct colonial rule.

For centuries, the ideas that North Africa was a site that encourages sensual and sexual experiences unobtainable or outlawed in Europe, such as male homosexual practices, had been circulating in Europe. Long-established European beliefs hold that sodomy largely originated from the shores of North Africa. For Europe's demarcation of North African Muslim's "otherness," in as far back as the seventeenth century, includes the assumption in Europe that not only was the religion of Islam highly sexualised, but that sodomy was also prevalent in both North Africa and the Middle East. Though cultural historians like Rudi C. Bleys and Robert Aldrich have today traced the culture of male homosexual desire as originating and flourishing from the time of ancient Greece, sodomy was generally designated as foreign to European culture.[25] As Bleys argues, "Such association of sexual 'sin' and 'otherness' became a pervasive element in Western thought centuries before it was given pseudo-scientific status by racialist theory."[26]

While the practise of delegating "vice" to the culturally and racially "other" Muslims might have found support in the private practises from some people in the Middle East and North Africa, it conveniently ignores the opposition of the Islamic religious law against homosexual desires as understood in Europe. Without

sufficient regard to the laws and customs of these Muslim countries, Europe's delegation of vice to otherness had only resulted, as John Boswell suggests, in an increased hostility towards Muslims.[27] Sodomy would again be used to demarcate between Westerners and the supposedly sexually-depraved North African Muslims in the years following 1830 as North Africa fell under France's occupation.

As the study of colonial discourse during the French occupation of Algeria of 1830 has revealed, new political circumstances and colonial policies tended to rely on reiterating descriptions of racial stereotypes, particularly those that concern immoral and licentious Arabs or Muslims. Accounts from military officers involved in the French occupation of Algeria in 1830 were especially significant in the ascription of vice, in particular those connected to divergent sexuality, to the enemy Arab population. The Marquis de Boissy, for example, blames the Arabs for the purportedly widespread practice of *moueres arabes* among the French regiments during the occupation of 1830.[28] Because of the shortage of European women and the presence of Arab and black prostitutes, the French soldiers were thought to have been forced to have sexual relations with prostitutes, including males ones, or among themselves even at the risk of demoralisation. To some observers, the apparent increase in same-sex sexual contacts within the army or between soldiers and indigenous men were treated as circumstantial, being brought upon by the shortage of women and exposure to prostitutes. As one observer argues,

> The uprooted easily becomes a sodomite … [but] real homosexuality is very rare…. Many are sodomites by necessity, but real homosexuals are few in number. The shortage of women or the presence of Arab and black prostitutes, who are dirty, stink and carry diseases, pushes the uprooted to prefer sex with ephebes. Their behaviour is incidental and will be dropped when they return to the North.[29]

Besides the supposedly circumstance-induced same-sex sexual practices, climatic change is another explanation given for the purported prevalence of this practice amongst Europeans, particularly soldiers of the French Foreign Legion. From the various theories on the influence of environment on a person's sexuality, Richard Burton's environmental hypothesis provides the most significant

explanation for ascribing homosexual practices to certain countries in a single region in the world. His synopsis holds that they are practised across the globe, but the territory which is most associated with them is the Sotadic Zone. Describing the Zone, Burton says,

> Within the Sotadic Zone the vice [pederasty] is popular and endemic, held at worst to be mere peccadillo, whilst the races of the North and South of the limits … practice it only sporadically amid the opprobrium of their fellows who, as a rule, are physically incapable of performing the operation and look upon it with liveliest disgust.[30]

This "Sotadic Zone," named after the Alexandrian poet Sotades (third century B.C.) whose verses were said to convey obscene messages when read backward, included the area between 30° and 43° northern latitude of the Mediterranean, such as the coastal regions of North Africa, from Morocco to Egypt and parts of France, the Iberian Peninsula, Italy and Greece.[31]

But even Burton's "Sotadic Zone" was not wholly independent of scientific justification for racism. Though Burton alleged that his model was based on geographical and climatic differences, not racial ones, its ethnography of pederasty is plagued with inconsistency and contradictions. Studied critically, it exposes, as earlier works did, the intention not only to locate pederasty as alien to European civilisation, but also as one instance of Muslims' naturally "perverse" sexuality. For, as Bleys points out,

> If homosexuality was not defined racially, then how must we understand his portrayal of the Turkish people as 'a race of born pederasts?'[31] How to reconcile a theory of climatological conditioning with vaguely diffusionist descriptions of the import of homosexuality in Lower Egypt by the Iranians, in Northern Africa by the Romans, of the cult of androgyny in Syria and Palestine by the Egyptians?[32]

Burton's translations of Arabic literary texts also contributed to the debate on the homosexual inclination of Muslim people. His 1886 translation of *The Perfumed Garden* was inspired by his intention to include passages on homosexuality, expurgated from an earlier French translation. The manuscript was, however, burnt by his wife, Isabel, after his death. His work which remains the most influential reference for Burton's inclusion of homosexuality, nonetheless, is

his translation of *Alf-Layla Wa-Layla*, *The Arabian Nights*. It is from this book that Sotadic Zone is mentioned in one of its various annotations, namely in the "Terminal Essay," the conclusion to the tenth volume.[33] Burton's interest in matters connected to same-sex desire and other forms of sexualities may have met with disapproval by the British public, but some, like the best-seller novelist Ouida, were supportive of his interest in the connection between sexuality and the Middle East and North Africa. The association that Burton makes between colonial life in the Middle East and North Africa and, "eccentricities" or adventures and experiments of a sexual nature, are indelibly linked to earlier notions of what was perceived to be Islam's more relaxed attitude towards sex and sexuality. Through the making of such connections herself, Burton's admirer Ouida also produced a work, *Under Two Flags* (1867), that became a precursor to late nineteenth-century literature of North Africa as a convenient site to send Britain's undesirables who included not only poor people but also more significantly those who sought sexual adventures.

The image of North Africa, as a region where forbidden sexual practices and sexualities can be obtained, in the literatures of the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century was solidified as a consequence of the chance meeting between Gide and Wilde in Algeria in 1895. Having met the older and more experienced Wilde, Gide was encouraged by his abandonment to sensuality, as Wilde is known to have declared to him, "I no longer want to worship anything but the sun. Have you noticed that the sun detests thoughts?"[34] He was soon reportedly seduced, first, by a young Arab boy called Ali on the outskirts of Sousse. Later, to indulge his senses even more, he went to the winter resort at Biskra in Algeria where he viewed sumptuously dressed Oulad Naïl girls, with their gold necklaces and high coiffures, performing at the foot of stairways which led up to hotel rooms. Where others, like the Swiss doctor he met in Algiers, viewed such scenes as examples of sexual debauchery, Gide declared: "…I am drawn by the lingering presence of the sun on bronzed skins."[35] It was an experience that was to suggest to Europeans, for the late nineteenth-century representation of Algeria, the erotic pull and liberating effect of North Africa, particularly for individuals with same-sex desire seeking to escape social and political restrictions at home.

Published in the early twentieth century and describing the author's experience in the Levant, T.E. Lawrence's *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom* (1935) makes another significant connection between sexual abandonment and the desert of the Islamic Orient. On the first few pages of his biography, Lawrence makes a direct reference to same-sex-desire practices brought on by life in the desert,

> [O]ur youths began indifferently to slake one another's few needs in their own clean bodies – a cold convenience that, by comparison, seemed sexless and even pure. Later, some began to justify this sterile process, and swore that friends quivering together in the yielding sand with intimate hot limbs in supreme embrace, found there hidden in the darkness a sensual co-efficient of the mental passion which was welding our souls and spirits in one flaming effort.[36]

The Oriental Women and the Institution of the Harem

If much was being said about the connection between male homosexuality, sexual debauchery and life in the deserts of North Africa, there also exists in traditional European constructions of the Islamic Orient the idea that Muslims generally mistreat their women, objectifying them as sex slaves. Significant to these narratives is the Middle Eastern and North African familial institution of the harem which is generally associated with the practices and cultures of the Muslim people who lived in these regions.

"Harem," originally a Turkish word, was adapted from the Arabic word *ḥarm*, meaning either "something prohibited," and later from its derivative *ḥaruma*, meaning "forbidden or unlawful." Other than retaining all these meanings, the word "harem" in Turkish has also come to denote private quarters within a house in which its residents are guaranteed privacy that should be honoured and respected by everyone, visitors and family members alike. Both traditional and popular European culture today, however, frequently construct it as a site of sexual licence, a forbidden territory, a segregated space barred to men and charged with erotic significance since it is a place where a number of women are thought to be imprisoned in order to serve the desires of a single and promiscuous dominant male.

A major and influential work in the imaginative construction of the harem within a largely male, eighteenth-century Orientalist

tradition of writing on the subject, Baron de Montesquieu's *Persian Letters*, published in 1721, relates the various correspondences between two harem masters, travellers in Europe, and the concubines encaged within the Oriental harems they own in Persia.[37] These correspondences, however, end abruptly when the harem women, led by Roxanne, or "Roxana," as she is known in the English translation of the work, the most beloved of Usbek's wives, stage a rebellion that ends with the total annihilation of his harem and her imminent suicide.[38] Roxanne's rebellion is an event that would later be often repeated by feminist writers, such as Wollstonecraft, to support the pernicious consequences of women's suppression.

Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) is partly inspired by Montesquieu's *Persian Letters* and the first in a line of British women's writing, to argue that the Oriental institution of the harem has a pernicious influence on the Western men's treatment of women.[39] Wollstonecraft made strong associations between the Orient, especially Turkey, and male despotism and tyranny. Significant to her narrative is her accusation that the degradation which European women were suffering was a result of the pernicious invasion and influence of Oriental institutions such as the harem, the forced marriages of young girls, and the selling of slave girls to the highest bidder, in Western culture. She illustrates, from a European woman's view, the tyranny of the Oriental system in the following passage,

> In a seraglio, I grant that all these arts are necessary, the epicure must have his palate tickled, or he will sink into apathy: but have women so little ambition as to be satisfied with such a condition? Can they supinely dream life away in the lap of pleasure, or that languor of weariness, rather than assert their claim to pursue reasonable pleasures and render themselves conspicuous by practicing the virtues which dignify mankind? Surely she has not an immortal soul who can loiter life away merely employed to adorn her person, that she may amuse the languid hours, and soften the care of a fellow creature who is willing to be enlivened by her smiles and tricks, when the serious business of life is over.[40]

What is clear from Wollstonecraft's text is the severity of her condemnation of the Oriental women, whom her description conveys as being barely "animated." Their supposedly semi-human state,

she implies, explains their general acceptance of the seraglio (or harem) as a legitimate institution. Her presumption that Oriental women are generally soulless, accords with the misleading denotations attached to the term "seraglio" in Britain around the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

The *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED) notes that as early as the seventeenth century, the Italian word seraglio, meaning "a place of confinement" and "the family unit of various animals" is used to misleadingly render the Turkish word *serai* meaning "lodging" or "palace." At around the same time, one could also find the Italian term "seraglio" being used interchangeably with the word "harem." This greatly explains why, in this early period in the history of Western representation of Islamic societies, the "harem" not only denoted "the private apartments of women" but also "a prison for soulless women."

Though these images were pervasively popular in the eighteenth century, there were also writers who sought to challenge such representations. Lady Mary Wortley Montagu's letters are fascinating for their unique and favourable responses to the Turkish women's custom of veiling and the institution of harem. Her encounter with the Orient began in 1717 when she embarked on a journey to the Orient to accompany her husband who had been appointed both as an ambassador by George I to Sultan Ahmet III in Istanbul and a representative of the Levant Company to the Sublime Porte. She was well read in Galland's version of the *Arabian Nights Entertainment* (*Mille et Une Nuits*), which appeared in twelve volumes between 1707 and 1714. Although travellers before her had accepted the truth-value of descriptions of Orientals in *The Nights*, Montagu was critical of reading the work as an ethnographic and historical source. While accounts of the harem in the travel literature of her time tended to sensationalise the harem as a site of sexual debauchery, her writings desexualised it.

Her letters to relatives and friends reflect her belief that Western European morals are relative to culture.[41] Instead of viewing the veil as a metaphor for female subjection and enslavement, her narratives suggest that they grant agency to the colonised women, allowing them to move freely and without being detected by their husbands. In one of her letters to her sister dated April 1717, now

published in a collection of correspondence, *The Turkish Embassy Letters*, she writes,

> Tis very easy to see that they have more liberty than we have, no woman, of what rank so ever being permitted to go in the streets without two muslins, ...You may guess then how effectually this disguises them, that there is no distinguishing the great lady from her slave and 'tis impossible for the most jealous husband to know his wife when he meets her, and no man dare either to touch or follow a woman in the street.[42]

Though she asserts in the passage that a Turkish woman, being veiled, had more freedom than her European counterpart, Montagu's opinion was still largely reliant on a preconceived stereotype of the sexualised Middle-Eastern women since the veil, she believes, endowed the female wearer with what she perceives to be the wearer's desire for sexual freedom.

Montagu was clearly not alone in challenging European traditional notions of the harem which associate it with the idea of imprisonment. In her writings of her personal experiences in Turkey, Elisabeth Craven grants Muslim women agency by emphasising the control that these women had over their bodies. Recounting what she saw there, she says, "I think I never saw a country where women may enjoy so much liberty and free from all reproach as in Turkey."[43] A point which Craven deems important enough to mention was the custom of putting a pair of slippers outside the door separating the *haremlik* from the *seramlik* (the men's quarters and the public part of the house) to signify that the female inhabitant wanted privacy. Billie Melman points out that to a late eighteenth-century writer, this act showed that Oriental women had rights to privacy and, thus, control over their own bodies.[44] Yet the belief that Muslim women generally do not have any agency, being perpetually enslaved by men, generally prevailed through nineteenth-century accounts of the harem. The writings of Harriet Martineau and Florence Nightingale are good examples. Martineau, who had travelled to the Middle East, records in *Eastern Life* her utmost contempt for the institution. She informed her readers that

> I learned a very great deal about the working of the institution; and I believe I apprehend the thoughts and

> feelings of the persons concerned in it: and I declare that if we were to look for a hell upon earth, it is where polygamy exists: and that as polygamy runs riot in Egypt, Egypt is the lowest depth in this hell. I always before believed that every arrangement and prevalent practice had some one fair side, some one redeeming quality; and diligently, did I look for this fair side in polygamy but, there is none.[45]

Martineau's general condemnation of the institution of the harem and her disdaining references to polygamy are also reflected in Nightingale's account of her 1849 journey to Egypt. Like Martineau, she brought with her preconceived notions of the Oriental women's degraded position in the Orient. Commenting on the harem she had visited, Nightingale writes,

> I feel like the hypocrite in Dante's hell, with the laden-cap on-it. I began to be uncertain whether I was a Christian woman, and I have never been so thankful of being so as since that moment. That quarter of an hour seemed to reveal to one what it is to become a woman in these countries… God save them, for it is a hopeless life.[46]

Nonetheless, such condemnation of the harem institution was again not characteristic of harem literatures written by other writers of the same period. In fact, some fellow travellers were incensed by Martineau's remarks. One of them, Lucie Duff-Gordon, criticised Martineau for equating the harem with brothels.[47] Nonetheless, despite Duff-Gordon's criticism of her and Martineau's dislike of the harem because she associates it with polygamy, it is certainly discernable from the writings of many nineteenth-century women writers, including Martineau and Nightingale, that there is no mention, in their accounts, of any sexual activities between the sexes. In fact, the image that is generally conveyed through these writings with regards to the harem was that it is generally a domestic place. Writings such as Wollstonecraft's work suggest that it was the imprisoning and male-dominated aspects of the harem that women writers find repulsive, not the image of sexual debauchery sometimes associated with it.

In the late nineteenth century, the popularity that *The Arabian Nights Entertainment* enjoyed owed its success to this tradition of presenting Muslims and Islam as licentious. Richard Burton's 1885

translation of this famous literary piece *The Book of the Thousand Nights and a Night*[48] came to be seen as the definitive representation of the Orient as a place of excessive sexuality.[49] Texts such as the popular Edward Lane's *An Account of the Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians* (1836) attribute the presumed libidinous nature of the Oriental women to the climate, the "want of proper instruction" and their husbands endorsing sexual licentiousness in their wives. As Lane argues,

> The women are permitted to listen, screened behind the windows of wooden latticed work, to immoral songs and tales sung or related in the streets by men whom they pay for this entertainment, and to view the voluptuous dances of the ghawazee, and of the effeminate khawals'.[50]

Lane also assures his readers that the "intrigues of women in 'The Thousand and One Nights' present faithful pictures of occurrences not infrequent in the modern metropolis of Egypt."[51]

Like Lane, Gustave Flaubert, the French novelist, was another European writer who helped popularise the image of the highly sexualised Oriental woman. The highlight of his visit to Egypt with his photographer-friend Maxine du Camp in 1848 and 1849 was a chance encounter with an Egyptian courtesan, Kuchuk Hanem, whose services as a dancer and prostitute he engaged. Said argues that Flaubert's description of Kuchuk Hanem produced a widely influential stereotype of the passive Oriental woman who cannot represent herself. Consequently, it is the white, European male, like Flaubert, who had to speak for her, describing to his readers how she was a "typical Oriental woman."[52] Though his personal travel documents and field notes were never published in his lifetime, Flaubert's pornographic descriptions of Kuchuk Hanem's "Bee Dance" served as a template for the dance of Salomé, providing a compelling image of an Oriental dance for Westerners. Accompanying the proliferation of scholarly texts and travel writings, such as those by Flaubert, and literary outputs was the flourishing industry of pictorial Orientalism, in which paintings, especially those of North-African women, such as *The Great Odalisque* (1814) by Ingres and the famed *Women of Algiers in their Room* (1834) by Delacroix, created and encouraged the iconography associated with Oriental women and the harem.

While the image of Islam as a religion that encourages sexual licentiousness and Muslims as barbarians persisted well into the nineteenth century, the threats posed by the "Barbary" pirates had largely diminished by the end of the eighteenth century. European powers took advantage of this situation and increased their attacks on the Muslims. In 1816, Lord Exmouth led an Anglo-Dutch flotilla in a successful attack against Algerian pirates. Although it did not completely destroy piracy in Algeria, it effectively ended the naval power of the *dey* of Algiers. Throughout this period, North Africa was subjected to colonial expansion by European powers from France and Britain, notably in Algeria with the French invasion of 1830.

Near the dawn of Western Imperialism on Africa, beginning with the French invasion of North Africa, representations of Arabs generally depicted them as a blood-thirsty, rioting mass driven by religious frenzy and fighting against colonising Westerners. In an Empire that sought to maintain its differences and power by force, both in the physical and ideological sense, racial tension is inevitable. It was impossible for such literatures on the races not to be influenced by events happening throughout the Empire. The Indian Mutiny in 1857, the continuous fighting between the British and the Maoris which began in 1860 and proceeded up until 1865, and, finally, Governor Eyre's suppression of the former slaves' rebellion in Jamaica in 1865, had all accumulated, both in factual and fictional works, to strengthen the way the British republic had regarded the native people under their rule as blood-thirsty rather than "noble" savages.[53]

Just as a host of literary accounts of imperial conflicts, such as the Indian Mutiny, were instrumental in transforming the way the British public perceived these various colonised groups, the battles which were fought in North Africa between Europeans and the native insurgents were thus influential in generating the impression the British have of North Africans. Although the Arabs were still being portrayed as sexually licentious, the stress on an individualised and glorified image of the Arabs earlier in the nineteenth century had relied on an emphasis on the individual brought about by the discourse on the Noble Savage. The negative connotations that were attached to the masses in the late nineteenth century, the general upheavals throughout the Empire and the aggressive actions that

were employed by colonial powers to arrests them during this period, all contributed to diminish this portraiture of the individualised Arab as a noble savage. In its place were negative images of undistinguishable masses of Arabs, a shift in representation that was significantly aided by events that chronicled General Gordon's 1885 defeat and death at Khartoum. For not only did Gordon's death trigger a series of events in Sudan, it also helped solidify Europe's image as a force of civilisation fighting barbaric Islam that has continued to be propagated in the world today where North Africa, along with the rest of the non-Western world still continue to be subjected to Western neo-imperialism, particularly in the media.

Conclusion

Whilst the geography for Western discourse on Islam has since moved on from North Africa to other parts of the globe, namely the Middle East and South-East Asia, images of Muslims as sexually licentious and semi-barbaric that were created during the North Africans' early encounters with Europeans continue to endure. The proliferation of contemporary fictional writings and non-fictional semi-autobiographic accounts on the Middle East, for example, seems to be riding on the popularity of Islam's image as a backward religion. To demystify the reason behind this, as this paper has argued, is to point at the perceived threat emanating from Islam's presence in Western countries in today's world.

Indeed, there could be reasons to believe that the ever increasing numbers of Westerners converting to Islam, the high numbers of Muslims migrating to Europe and, consequently, Islam's meteoric rise as a contesting socio-political power in Western countries are today's sources of European's discontent with the religion and the continued demarcation of Muslims as the "other." Nonetheless, it is hoped that by discussing the politics behind the West's biased representation of Islam from the sixteenth century until the nineteenth century in Britain, as this paper has attempted to do, the contemporary worlds of East and West will not only arrive at a more objective view of Islam and Muslims but also come to terms with the causes for the anxieties behind the Western representations of Muslims.

Notes

1. Linda Colley, *Captives: Britain, Empire and the New World, 1600-1850* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2002), 43.

2. Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon, 1978).

3. Lotfi Ben Rejeb, "Barbary's 'Character' in European Letters, 1514-1830: An Ideological Prelude to Colonization," in *Dialectical Anthropology*, 6 (1982), 345-355.

4. See Emily C. Bartels, *Spectacle of Strangeness: Imperialism, Alienation and Marlowe* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993), 59. Bartels later published a revision of her earlier use of postcolonial methodology in "Othello and Africa: Postcolonialism Reconsidered," in *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd ser., 54, no. 1 (January 1997): 45-64; Barbara Fuchs, *Mimesis and Empire: The New World, Islam and European Identities* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2001), 118; Jean E. Howard, "An English Lass amid the Moors: Gender, Race, Sexuality, and National Identity in Heywood's 'The Fair Maid of the West'" in *Women, "Race," & Writing in the Early Modern Period*, eds. Margo Hendriks and Patricia Parker (London; New York: Routledge, 1994), 101-117; Jack D'Amico, *The Moor in English Renaissance Drama* (Tampa, Fl.: University of South Florida Press, 1991), 61-2; .

5. See Gerald MacLean, "Ottomanism before Orientalism? Bishop King Praises Henry Blount, Passenger in the Levant" in *Travel Knowledge: European Discoveries in the Early Modern Period*, eds. Ivo Kamps and Jyotsna G. Singh (New York: Palgrave, 2001); Colley, *Captives: Britain, Empire and the New World, 1600-1850;* Nabil Matar, *Turks, Moors, and Englishmen in the Age of Discovery* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999).

6. Colley, *Captives: Britain, Empire and the New World, 1600-1850,* 102.

7. For a discussion see Colley, *Captives: Britain, Empire and the New World, 1600-1850;* Matar, *Turks, Moors, and Englishmen in the Age of Discovery*; and MacLean, "Ottomanism before Orientalism? Bishop King Praises Henry Blount, Passenger in the Levant."

8. Matar, *Turks, Moors, and Englishmen in the Age of Discovery,* 6.

9. Ibid., 9. See also Colley, *Captives: Britain, Empire and the New World, 1600-1850,* 103.

10. See Nabil Matar, *Islam in Britain, 1558-1685* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998); Kenneth Parker, "Reading 'Barbary' in Early Modern England, 1550-1685," in *Seventeenth Century*, 19 (2004): 87-115.

11. Matar, *Turks, Moors, and Englishmen in the Age of Discovery,* 13. For a detailed discussion on how the Muslims were portrayed in Renaissance drama,

refer to Jack D'Amico, *The Moor in English Renaissance Drama* (Tampa, Fl.: University of South Florida Press, 1991); Daniel Vitkus, *Turning Turk: English Theatre and the Multicultural Mediterranean, 1570-1630* (New York; Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003); Jean E. Howard, "An English Lass Amid the Moors: Gender, Race, Sexuality and National Identity in *Heywood's 'The Fair Maid of the West',"* eds. Margo Hendricks and Patricia Parker, *Women, "Race," and Writing in the Early Modern Period* (London; New York: Routledge, 1994).

12. Elliot Tokson, *The Popular Image of the Black Man in English Drama, 1550-1688* (Boston, Mass.: G.K. Hall and Co, 1982), 138; See also Matar, *Turks, Moors, and Englishmen in the Age of Discovery,* 14.

13. Matar, *Turks, Moors, and Englishmen in the Age of Discovery*, 15.

14. Colley, *Captives: Britain, Empire and the New World, 1600-1850,* 103.

15. Daniel J. Vitkus, "Turning Turk in 'Othello': The Conversion and Damnation of the Moor," *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 48, no. 2 (Summer 1997): 146-7.

16. Kenneth Parker, "Reading 'Barbary' in Early Modern England, 1550-1685," in *Seventeenth Century,* 19 (2004): 93.

17. See Chew, *The Crescent and the Rose: Islam and England during the Renaissance* (New York: Octagon Books, 1974), 100-149; Nabil Matar, "'Turning Turk': Conversion to Islam in English Renaissance Thought," *Durham University Journal*, 86 (1994): 33-41.

18. Edward Aston, *The Manners, Lawes and Customs of all Nations* (London: G. Eld, 1611), 137.

19. Leo Africanus, *A Geographical Historie of Africa, Written in Arabic and Italian*, trans., John Pory (London: G. Bishop, 1600).

20. See Norman Daniel, *Islam and the West: The Making of an Image* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1958), 135-40.

21. For a detailed treatment of the subject, refer to Nabil Matar's chapter "Sodomy and Conquest" in *Turks, Moors, and Englishmen in the Age of Discovery*.

22. Matar, *Turks, Moors, and Englishmen in the Age of Discovery*, 113; See also Colley, *Captives: Britain, Empire and the New World, 1600-1850,* 129.

23. Matar, *Turks, Moors, and Englishmen in the Age of Discovery*, 114.

24. Colley, *Captives: Britain, Empire and the New World, 1600-1850,* 129-30, (The italics are Colley's).

25. Rudi C. Bleys, *The Geography of Perversion* (London: Cassell, 1996); Robert Aldrich, *The Seduction of the Mediterranean* (London: Routledge, 1993).

26. Bleys, *The Geography of Perversion*, 19.

27. John Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance and Homosexuality* (Chicago; University of Chicago Press, 1980), 279.

28. Bleys, *The Geography of Perversion*, 112.

29. Cited from Bleys, *The Geography of Perversion*,149.

30. Richard Burton, *The Sotadic Zone* (Boston: Longwood Press, 1977), 18.

31. Ibid., 62.

32. Bleys, *The Geography of Perversion*, 218.

33. See R. Burton trans. and ed., *A Plain and Literal Translation of the Arabian Nights' Entertainment, Now Entitled the Book of the Thousand and One Nights and a Night.* With Introduction, Explanatory Notes on the Manners and Customs of Moslem Men and a Terminal Essay upon the History of the Nights, 10 vols (Benares: Kama Shastra Society, 1885-88). The citation used in this paper, however, is taken from Burton, *The Sotadic Zone*.

34. Cited in Ian Littlewood, *Sultry Climates: Travel and Sex since the Grand Tour* (London: John Murray, 2001), 195. [Translated by Littlewood from André Gide, 'Oscar Wilde,' in *Oeuvres Complètes,* vol III (Paris, 1933)].

35. Littlewood, *Sultry Climates: Travel and Sex since the Grand Tour*, 195 [Translated by Littlewood from Gide, Si le gran ne meur (Paris: 1955)].

36. T.E. Lawrence, *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1935), 27.

37. Charles de Secondat, baron de Montesquieu, *Lettres Persanes* (1721) trans. J.R. Loy, *The Persian Letters* (New York: Meridian Books, 1961).

38. The first translation of *Persian Letters* in English appeared in 1722.

39. Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1982).

40. Ibid., 112-3.

41. Billie Melman, *Women's Orients: English Women and the Middle East, 1718-1918: Sexuality, Religion and Work* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992), 79-83.

42. Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, *The Turkish Embassy Letters*, ed. Malcolm Jack (London: William Pickering, 1993), 71. This collection is based on an

authoritative text established by Robert Halsband, *The Complete Letters of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu* (Oxford: Claredon Press, 1965).

43. Elisabeth Craven, Margravene of Anspach, *A Journey through the Crimea to Constantinople/in a Series of Letters Written in the Year MDCCLXXXVI* (London: Printed for G.G.J. and J. Robinson, 1789), 205.

44. Melman, *Women's Orients: English Women and the Middle East, 1718-1918: Sexuality, Religion and Work,* 87.

45. Harriet Martineau, *Eastern Life: Past and Present* (London: Edward Moxon, 1848), 293.

46. Florence Nightingale, *Letters from Egypt* (London: A. & G.A. Spottiswoode, 1854), 26.

47. Lucie Duff-Gordon, *Letters from Egypt with a Memoir by her Daughter Jannet Ross* (London: R. Brimley Johnson, 1865), 112.

48. Jack Zipes, *When Dreams Came True: Classical Fairy Tales and Their Tradition* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 51.

49. Referring to his propensity to represent the East, particularly its women, as lascivious, Rana Kabbani argues, "[W]hat the narrator felt himself unable to say about the European woman, he unabashedly said about eastern ones. They were there for his articulation of sex." Burton, thus, according to her, confirms "the myth of the erotic East." See Rana Kabbani, *Imperial Fictions: Europe's Myths of Orient* (London: Pandora, 1986), 10-11.

50. Edward Lane, *An Account of the Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians* (London: Dent, 1908), 305. (Originally published in 1836.)

51. Ibid., 304.

52. Said, *Orientalism*, 6.

53. Events surrounding the uprising in 1857 are known to Indians as the "First War of Independence" and the "War of Independence of 1857" but to the British as the "Indian Mutiny," the "Sepoy Mutiny," the "Sepoy Rebellion," the "Great Mutiny" and the "Revolt of 1857."