

# Multicultural Narratives



# Multicultural Narratives:

*Traces and Perspectives*

Edited by

Mustafa Kirca and Hywel Dix

Cambridge  
Scholars  
Publishing



Multicultural Narratives: Traces and Perspectives

Edited by Mustafa Kirca and Hywel Dix

This book first published 2018

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Copyright © 2018 by Mustafa Kirca, Hywel Dix and contributors

Cover image © Rosemary Edwards

All rights for this book reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the copyright owner.

ISBN (10): 1-5275-0894-3

ISBN (13): 978-1-5275-0894-1

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction .....	1
Traces of Multiculturalism Mustafa Kirca and Hywel Dix	
Chapter One.....	9
Sir Henry Blount's Voyage into the Multicultural Levant Ipek Uygur	
Chapter Two.....	23
Two British Ladies in the Turkish <i>Harem</i> : Annie Jane Harvey and Lady Annie Brassey Elisabetta Marino	
Chapter Three.....	41
There by Not Being There: Adaptation, Intertextuality and the Multicultural Trace Hywel Dix	
Chapter Four.....	66
Memory Paths of Conveying Multi-Voiced Cross-Cultural Trauma Ingrida Egle Žindžiuvienė	
Chapter Five.....	85
Salman Rushdie's 'Union-by-Hybridization' and the Issue of Multiculturalism Mustafa Kirca	
Chapter Six.....	105
Scheherazade and the 1970s Sexual Revolution: Martin Amis's <i>The Pregnant Widow</i> Ayşe Naz Bulamur	

Chapter Seven.....	124
City and Cultural Identity in Kureishi's London and Pamuk's Istanbul: A Comparative Reading of <i>Something to Tell You</i> and <i>A Strangeness in My Mind</i> Mehmet Ali Çelikel	
Chapter Eight.....	135
Cross-Cultural Bridges and Transformation in Leila Aboulela's <i>The Translator</i> A. Nejat Töngür	
Chapter Nine.....	149
Language Nomads: Literature of Migration and (Altermodern) Poetics Adelheid Rundholz	
Chapter Ten .....	165
Multiculturalism, Hybridity and Creolization Mohamed Saki	
Conclusion.....	183
Multicultural Narratives and Different Kinds of 'Truth' Hywel Dix	
Contributors.....	189
Index.....	192

# INTRODUCTION

## TRACES OF MULTICULTURALISM

### MUSTAFA KIRCA AND HYWEL DIX

Global shifts in the movement of people have provided critical spaces for the deconstruction of traditional binary frameworks of ethnicity, race, nation and identity encapsulated in essentialist metanarratives as the impact of globalization in recent decades has caused great changes in the texture of cultural practices. Cultural encounters and shocks have increased, and the need for international collaboration is now more urgent than ever because of the global challenges we are all facing today. As a response to the inclusion of diverse cultures in one *homogeneous* group, the term ‘multiculturalism’ has been widely quoted to explain and study transnational networks and cultural changes on a global scale. With its varying implications and applications, multiculturalism is still a contested term in the humanities which includes those who fall outside the mainstream of categories such as gender, sexual orientation, religion, race, geographic origin, ethnicity and language. Bringing together ten unique studies which blur the limits of conventional discourses, and employing an interdisciplinary approach to address research problems with methods and insights borrowed from multiple disciplines, *Multicultural Narratives: Traces and Perspectives* features theoretical and analytical writings on multiculturalism and its traces in literatures that aim to subvert the essentialist binary frameworks of ethnicity, race, nation and identity in a variety of texts. These include Ruta Sepetys’s *Salt to the Sea* (2016), Martin Amis’s *The Pregnant Widow* (2010), Kazuo Ishiguro’s *The Remains of the Day* (1989), Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children* (1981) and *Shame* (1983), Hanif Kureishi’s *Something to Tell You* (2008), J. G. Ballard’s *High-Rise* (1975), Leila Aboulela’s *The Translator* (1999), Yoko Tawada’s *Das Fremde aus der Dose* (1992), Emine Sevgi Özdamar’s *Life is a Caravanserai* (1992), Orhan Pamuk’s *A Strangeness in My Mind* (2014), Annie Jane Harvey’s *Turkish Harems and Circassian Homes* (1871), Lady Annie Brassey’s *Sunshine and Storm in the East; or, Cruises*

to *Cyprus and Constantinople* (1880), and Sir Henry Blount's *A Voyage into the Levant* (1638).

Multiculturalism involves diversity and peaceful coexistence as it aims at egalitarianism. However, early modern English perceptions of multiculturalism involved struggle for empowerment. In essence, its goal was not primarily to accept and appreciate differences in terms of faith, ethnicity and culture but to fit the Other into a hierarchy that would bring economic benefits to the English. The volume's opening chapter by Ipek Uygur, 'Sir Henry Blount's Voyage into the Multicultural Levant,' discusses how seventeenth-century English traveller Sir Henry Blount's account of his eleven-month journey, *A Voyage into the Levant*, implicitly alludes to a feeling of 'imperial envy' and thus serves as a great source of inspiration for England regarding its political and mercantile policies of the time. The chapter analyses how Blount consolidates the early modern English perception of multiculturalism through his first-hand accounts of the Turks, who not only conspicuously appear as the ethnic, racial, and cultural Other of the English but also cause a sense of admiration and envy for their well-functioning institutions, as well as their multi-racial, multi-ethnic and multi-religious population.

In the next chapter titled 'Two British Ladies in the Turkish *Harem*: Annie Jane Harvey and Lady Annie Brassey,' Elisabetta Marino argues that starting from the 1820s, an increasing number of travel accounts penned by women writers began to be published, thus signifying a double violation of the domestic sphere, whose invisible boundaries were physically trespassed by dynamic ladies, eager to invade the male-dominated publishing world in order to acquire profits, notoriety, and both a personal and a literary voice. By focusing primarily on the portrayal of Ottoman women and the *harem*, Marino manages to explore in her chapter the complex, decidedly ambiguous way in which two British travel writers recorded their experience in Ottoman Turkey. While Harvey strived to please her broad and multifaceted readership by concocting an inconsistent and discordant narrative that could appeal to both men and women, to enthusiastic admirers of Oriental grandeur as well as to lovers of gruesome gothic stories, Lady Annie Brassey, a firm opponent of female suffrage in Britain, exhibited an unconvincing support for the cause of Turkish women's emancipation that cleverly disguised her wholehearted commitment to the British imperial mission. Given the subordinate position they occupied in society in the nineteenth century, women travel authors were acknowledged as the most appropriate and insightful interpreters of the weak and feminized *Orient*. Furthermore, their sex allowed them to penetrate the mysteries of *harems* and *hammams*, secluded spaces

forbidden to men which tickled the imagination of a large number of readers, the so-called *armchair* travellers. In the light of this position, Marino claims that the high demand for this kind of literature and the prospect of easy gains prompted women travellers to specialize in a sub-genre of travel writing, namely *harem* literature which, nonetheless, often frustrated the expectations of male readers.

In 'There by Not Being There: Adaptation, Intertextuality and the Multicultural Trace,' Hywel Dix combines postcolonial theory, the concept of intertextuality and recent research into the theory and practice of literary film adaptation in order to identify and recover traces of multiculturalism from within canonical texts that do not necessarily appear to carry such traces at first glance. Dix begins his study by invoking theories of adaptation and intertextuality to address the 2007 BBC television adaptation of Charles Dickens's *Oliver Twist*; and Ben Wheatley's 2015 film of J. G. Ballard's novel *High-Rise*. Each of these adaptations in different ways, he argues, provoked significant controversy at the time of their release. The adaptation of *High-Rise* is interpreted alongside the novel on which it was based to argue for a specific kind of multicultural trace: Ballard's novel is tantamount to an imaginative rewrite of Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. Where Conrad associated the degeneration of civilization with the supposed racial 'other' of colonial Africa, Ballard portrays that same degeneration in the heart of the European metropolis itself. To Dix, this means that by avoiding multicultural characterization Wheatley's film adaptation associates cultural degeneration with a set of privileged white Europeans, rather than the Africans whom Conrad had demonized, and so the film serves as a counter-example of the multicultural trace. After a discussion of the notion of hyperfidelity in regards to the colour conscious casting of the 2007 television adaptation of *Oliver Twist*, Dix concludes with a discussion of Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day*. He argues that for the Japanese-born Ishiguro to write an internationally successful novel that makes no mention towards multicultural inclusivity would seem like a striking omission. However, as Dix discusses in the chapter, unlike the portrayal of the character Stevens by Anthony Hopkins in the film adaptation of the novel, Ishiguro's protagonist Stevens can be interpreted as a colonial 'other' in the imperial world of 1930s Britain that Ishiguro portrays.

Ingrida Egle Žindžiuvienė's study, 'Memory Paths of Conveying Multi-Voiced Cross-Cultural Trauma,' focuses on the dimensions and the role of time and space in collective memory. Drawing on trauma theory and providing examples from contemporary American author Ruta Sepetys's recent novel *Salt to the Sea*, this chapter studies multiple ways

how collective traumas become deep-seated in collective memories and examines them from the aspect of multi-voiced cross-cultural collective trauma. Ruta Sepetys is an American-born English-speaking author, daughter of a Lithuanian refugee, who escaped from Stalin's Russia, and her *Salt to the Sea* tells a tragic story of cross-cultural trauma that happened in Eastern Europe during World War II. Žindžiuvienė claims that the four-layered focalization employed by the novelist creates a multi-voiced traumatic narrative; therefore, the fictional story, based on true historical facts, demonstrates the strategies of collective memory. Hence, the close relationship between individual memory and group or collective memory is emphasized when the chapter shows collective memory may have a strong influence on the capacity of individual or personal memory, and likewise, individual memory influences the generality of collective memory. Discussing in detail the different types of collective memory from the aspects of time and space/place and the author's role in constructing collective memory, Žindžiuvienė's study depicts through analysis of Sepetys's novel that descriptions of the geographical place(s) of traumatic experience and the memory of them may express a larger cultural context, built on the clash of different social values that influence the recollection of the event and the reconfiguration of the self and even the statehood. Therefore, the two aspects, time and place, are shown to be useful when collective traumas and the memory of it are considered. The chapter shows that they become core issues in Sepetys's novel.

Multiculturalism puts emphasis on diversity and cohesiveness by recognizing that prior ways of understanding assimilation or absorption of differences in a melting pot have not only distorted but also in many ways served to destroy *individuality*. In 'Salman Rushdie's "Union-by-Hybridization" and the Issue of Multiculturalism,' Mustafa Kirca asserts that Rushdie defies 'multiculturalism' as it is still another means of assimilation. Instead of 'multiculturalism,' Rushdie offers 'union-by-hybridization' in his novels to celebrate 'hybridity' and to challenge cultural essentialism. It is argued in this chapter that the multiplicity of cultures can best be reflected through 'the chutnification of history' in Rushdie's works of historiographic metafiction, and that historical reality is reflected in *Midnight's Children* and *Shame* as the process of discerning meaning, not as absolute and objective but as constructed. The alternative that Rushdie offers in place of the traditional mode of historiography is an *individual* mode of history writing that interprets past events from below and elevates individual experience as opposed to the conventional historiography which attempts to totalize individual experience. The chapter uses the traces of 'union-by-hybridization' and 'the chutnification

of history' in Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* and *Shame* to show how the author fights against cultural essentialism through his postcolonial narrative strategies which he uses to destabilize any essentialist myths such as unified cultural and national identity or nationalism based on the concept of the 'nation-state'. Kirca claims that by privileging a postmodern concept of history and a dialogic narrative in both novels, Rushdie defies nationalistic identity politics based on binary oppositions through his politics of textual decolonization which invalidates homogenous discourses by encouraging dialogic counter-narratives.

The following chapter, 'Scheherazade and the 1970s Sexual Revolution: Martin Amis's *The Pregnant Widow*,' brings Scheherazade and the medieval Islamic setting of *The Arabian Nights* to the fore through Martin Amis's novel, which travels back and forth in time, merging past, present, and future in its non-linear narrative, to account for the failure of the sexual revolution and to portray feminism as an unfinished project in twenty-first-century Britain. Ayşe Naz Bulamur maintains that it is through Scheherazade that Amis's novel portrays British women's problematic position between the ideals of feminine virtue and the manifestos on female sexual desire. The Oriental princess Scheherazade, who tells stories every night to save her life and to be happily married with the Sultan, insists in Amis's novel that she does not want love but sex. The sexual manifestos that preach extra-marital sex inspire sexual freedom among Amis's twenty-year-old British characters. Bulamur's study demonstrates that different centuries blend and clash in the novel and shows how traditional female roles have not much changed since the medieval Islamic world of Scheherazade.

Orhan Pamuk, the Nobel Prize winning novelist from Turkey, and Hanif Kureishi, British postcolonial author, are two contemporary authors writing about the multicultural cities they live in and creating unique ways of describing the diverse cultural landscapes of those cities. Mehmet Ali Çelikel's chapter 'City and Cultural Identity in Kureishi's London and Pamuk's Istanbul: A Comparative Reading of *Something to Tell You* and *A Strangeness in My Mind*' aims to read Kureishi's and Pamuk's novels comparatively from the perspective of David Harvey's concepts of 'privatization and commodification' of public assets that result in what Harvey calls 'accumulation by dispossession' in the lives of the protagonists Jamal and Mevlut. Çelikel claims that both Pamuk and Kureishi use metropolises in their novels as cityscapes that shape not only the culture of the societies but also the identity of the individuals in those societies. Istanbul in *A Strangeness in My Mind* and London in *Something to Tell You* are cities that affect the protagonists' lives, culture and identity

through their demographical, ideological and cultural transformations in time. Multiculturalism in Kureishi's London is not only caused by the colonial past, but also by the objectification and commodification of culture. Çelikel analyses how *Something to Tell You* captures disappearing values in contemporary London and recounts the lives of his characters beginning from the sense of sexual freedom, experimenting drugs and violent struggle between working class and capital in the 1970s. The popular culture has created a generation of individuals who are obsessed with 'brands,' identified not with their ethnicity but with their 'bodies'. The chapter further argues that in Pamuk's *A Strangeness in My Mind*, Mevlut's Istanbul goes through certain changes that result in the evolution of not only the physical but also the social landscape. The evolution of the streets of Istanbul is not only a result of economic but also social change.

In 'Cross-Cultural Bridges and Transformation in Leila Aboulela's *The Translator*,' A. Nejat Töngür writes that in stark contrast to the literary representations of Muslim women by different authors writing in English as subservient, invisible, oppressed, submissive and/or silent, Leila Aboulela's novel *The Translator* unfolds the story of Sammar, a devout Muslim and an uncompromising woman who is depicted to be grappling with cross-cultural troubles stemming from religious, ethnic, cultural, familial and climatic issues and racism which started to rise in Britain in the aftermath of the First Gulf War. In the novel, Aboulela depicts Sammar as a female character who refuses to conform to clichés and stereotypes of Muslim women who are often depicted in literatures in English to be denying and rejecting their culture and roots in order to adapt to British culture and values. By contrast, Aboulela's protagonist Sammar finds peace and comfort in the collectivistic nature of Sudanese society which may be perceived as oppressive, rigid and suffocating by others because of cultural, social and religious restrictions. The chapter attempts to discuss Sammar's transformation during which she adopts a reconciliatory standpoint towards British and Sudanese societies and cultures, and also to explore how Aboulela defies prejudiced representations of Sudanese women as oppressed and victimized by misogyny and religious fundamentalism with her transformation into a truly devout, resigned, sensible and functional person. Aboulela's humanistic solution towards building cross-cultural bridges between British and Sudanese cultures by means of mental and spiritual transformation of individual characters throughout her novel is also contained within the scope of the study.

Adelheid Rundholz, in 'Language Nomads: Literature of Migration and (Altermodern) Poetics' argues in specific ways that the history of

literatures of migrants and their reception has unfolded and created a conflicted relationship between national and migrant literatures in which the national literature is perceived as the centre while migrant literature is located on the periphery. Significantly, what dominated the discourse about migrant literature was the concern with themes rather than with its vehicle, i.e., language. Analysing a variety of texts, Rundholz's chapter shows that migrant writers are uniquely positioned to capitalize on language's profoundly creative possibilities and to affect readers' self-understanding as 'native speakers'. She puts forward the idea that the multilingual dimension of the texts does not constitute the encounter between two given cultures (homeland and country of residence); instead, the texts exemplify what can be called the 'altermodern'. Applied to the texts under scrutiny in the chapter, Nicolas Bourriaud's term 'altermodern' denotes a particular relational aesthetics that emerges through the emphasis on the medium, i.e., language. In this sense, each of the very different texts in different languages all 'teach' or make visible that alterity is not far away, but that it exists where one might not expect it (at home, in one's native language). The chapter goes on to argue that in an age that many classify as 'postnational,' alternatives to the restrictive and exclusionary definitions of belonging emerge in and through the texts of migrant writers/ cultural nomads.

In the final chapter of the volume, 'Multiculturalism, Hybridity and Creolization,' Mohamed Saki aims to revisit the vexed issue of *multiculturalism* discussed in the foregoing chapters in the light of two other concepts that seek to account for the diversity of human cultures, collective and individual identities: Homi Bhabha's *hybridity* and Edouard Glissant's *creolization*. Saki's study tries to lay bare how each of these three terms—multiculturalism, hybridity and creolization—deals with fundamental issues that characterize not only postcolonial societies with 'ethnically' or 'racially' mixed populations but all societies because the information technologies have reshaped the world we live in a fluid, connected glocal configuration. Saki manages to bring to the fore the fundamental difference between multiculturalism, on the one hand, and hybridity and creolization, on the other, arguing that while the former assumes the existence of a pre-given, pure and authentic cultural 'core' that dates back to times immemorial and that is transformed and modified as time goes by, the latter two however reject the existence of such a pure origin. Both hybridity and creolization contest the totalizing and homogenizing effects of certain uses of multiculturalism and their tendency to fetishize differences and to essentialize communities and individuals. Unlike multiculturalism, hybridity and creolization are not

concerned with fixed and static states but with the processes integrate acculturation, transculturation and interculturalisation.

*Multiculturalism* is a newly emerging topic in literary studies, and as this collection of essays discusses, it is also a highly disputed one. The number of existing studies specifically analysing multicultural traces in literary texts is limited, so the present study is intended to focus on the application of multicultural theories and perspectives mainly in the field of literature and particularly in contemporary narratives. As Hywel Dix discusses in the conclusion of the book, it is possible to dissect clear transitions in the history of multiculturalism when it is seen as an evolutionary process rather than a concept fixated at a certain point or period in time. The ten chapters of the collection look for the traces of multiculturalism in different times and genres, and they approach theoretical issues concerning multiculturalism and transculturalism from different perspectives accordingly. For that matter, we hope this study will be of interest for scholars and researchers working in the field of literature and cultural studies as well as students studying in the same fields and the general reader.

## CHAPTER ONE

# SIR HENRY BLOUNT'S VOYAGE INTO THE MULTICULTURAL LEVANT

IPEK UYGUR

Multiculturalism involves diversity and peaceful coexistence as it aims at egalitarianism. However, the early modern English perception of other cultures involved struggles for empowerment. In essence, its goal was not primarily to accept and appreciate differences in terms of faith, ethnicity and culture but to fit the Other into a hierarchy that would bring economic benefits to the English. In other words, the early modern English economy necessitated both a global awareness and a sense of alliance with the multicultural Ottoman Other. Besides, it also required interdependence between the multicultural Levantine communities which generated enormous wealth while living almost exclusively under Ottoman rule. The seventeenth-century English traveller Sir Henry Blount's (1602-82) account of his eleven-month journey, *A Voyage into the Levant* (1636), implicitly alludes to a feeling of 'imperial envy' and thus serves as a great source of inspiration for England regarding its foreign policies and overseas mercantile interests in the Ottoman-dominated multicultural Levant. In this chapter I intend to argue how the English traveller Sir Henry Blount consolidated the early modern English perception of what was not yet then termed multiculturalism through his first-hand accounts of the Turks, which caused both a sense of admiration for and envy of their well-functioning institutions, and thus bred wonder and astonishment at the multi-ethnic, multi-cultural, multi-lingual and multi-religious population of the Ottoman Empire.

Blount's *A Voyage into the Levant* recreates the Ottoman world in perfect detail in contrast to the previous images of the Turk perceived variously as 'members of the body of Antichrist' (Foxe 389); the believers of a faith which was 'an erthely [earthly] or rather diuylsye [devilish] plantation' (Bibliander sig. C.6v); as heathens whom 'God has sent as a plague upon us [the Christians]' (Luther 22); or as 'a barbarous people,

borne to the destruction of Cities, Arts and Learning' (Barclay 280) as well as 'the present terror of the world' (Knolles 1). Accordingly, Blount's travelogue stands as a fascinating document not only due to its dismissal of firmly fixed and inflexible images of the Turks, but also due to its vitally important role in testifying to 'England's profound political, military and economic interests in the East' (Schulting 67).

Sir Henry Blount was a well-educated man of his time as well as a sceptical observer who was determined to contribute to knowledge about the Turkish way as driven by English 'imperial envy' for the great Ottoman Empire. He set out on an 11-month voyage after having agreed with a janissary at Venice 'to find mee Dyet, Horse, Coach, Passage, and all other usuall charges as far as Constantinople' and thus 'embarq'd on a Venetian Gally with a Caravan of Turkes, and Jewes [...] not having any Christian with them besides my Selfe' (Blount 9-10). Blount travelled by land from Spalatro to Constantinople; and from thence to Rhodes, Alexandria, Cairo and back to Venice by sea on the Admiral Galeon. Being not in favour of religious travel, Blount defends advancing knowledge on the Turk through a comparative and rationalist inquiry into the Islamic world. Since Blount openly asserts that he is desirous of informing himself of the Turkish nation by observing 'the Religion, Manners and the Policie of the Turkes' (2), he would never content himself with knowledge achieved second-hand through reading, but:

rather (through all the hazard and endurance of travell,) receive it from mine owne eyes not dazzled with any affection, prejudicacy, or mist of education, which preoccupate the minde, and delude it with partial ideas, as with a false glasse, representing the object in colours, and proportions untrue. (7-8)

Accordingly, defining himself as a 'passenger,' willing to submerge himself in the 'Turkish way,' Blount distinguishes himself from writers on the Ottoman Empire who never experienced the 'Turkish way,' and therefore he stresses the preciousness of an inquisitive traveller's travel knowledge which is only gained by active endeavour:

but a traveller takes with his eye, and eare, only such occurencies into observation, as his own apprehension affects, and thought that sympathy, can digest them into an experience more natural for himselfe, than he could have done the notes of another. (3)

Blount is aware that passengers of intellectual complexion should be both mentally and emotionally prepared before setting out on a journey of cross-cultural exploration which will involve 'observing of people, whose

institutions much differ from ours [the Europeans']' (2). Blount furthers his argument by instructing that preparing to travel to Ottoman lands requires 'putting off the old man' by putting aside 'their ingrained domestic pieties and provincial prejudgements,' and thus putting on a new self that is purged of prejudices, and 'all former habite of opinion' (4), since only by doing so will they prepare themselves—in mind and body—for the change of 'diet and lodging, and other manners of the Turkes' (ibid). As matters stand, Blount's unconventional and rationalist inquiry into a multicultural Islamic Empire testifies to his intention to explain away the great achievements of Ottoman imperial civilization by avoiding either traditional prejudice or the teachings of biblical humanists.

Basing his discussion about the customs and characteristics of the different peoples of the world on a geographically specific theory, Blount claims that 'the customes of men are much swayed by their natural dispositions, which are originally inspired and composed by the Climate, whose ayre and influence they receive' (2). Apparently, for Blount, 'national institutions are the historical result of geography, nature and climate [...] national and cultural differences appear to knowledge as matters of space' (MacLean 181). Introducing the Turks as living in geographically advantaged parts of the world, Blount holds them in high esteem:

Moreover, those parts being now possest by the Turkes, who are the only moderne people, great in action and whose empire hath so suddenly invaded the World, and fixt it selfe such firme foundations as no other ever did; I was of opinion, that he who would behold these times in their greatest glory, could not finde a better scene than Turkey. (2)

Apart from observing 'the Religion, Manners, and Policie of the Turkes' (ibid), Blount's other major reasons for travelling to Ottoman-controlled Levant, are as follows: learning about 'those other sects which live under the Turkes, as Greeks, Armenians, Freinks, and Zingannes' (ibid), examining the army and visiting Cairo. It does not take him long to find out that multiculturalism necessitates peaceful coexistence of distinct religious, racial and cultural communities, which were living in relatively peaceful coexistence under the Ottoman *millet* system, an example of pre-modern religious pluralism. The Ottoman Empire, 'was a classic example of the plural society' (Braude and Lewis 1), allowing diverse groups of people cultural, linguistic and religious autonomy at a time when Christian Europe was suffering from religious antagonism between Protestants and Catholics, and political fragmentation.

Heterogeneity was one of the most important attributes of both the population of the burgeoning Ottoman state, and of the Mediterranean.

The Mediterranean with its notoriously obscure borders was a meeting place for Muslims, Jews and Christians, for the whole Mediterranean, according to Fernand Braudel, consisted of movement in space (277), providing peaceful coexistence as well as shifts of power through commercial contention.

Since early modern cultural encounters appear to have been rooted in the display of performance on the Levantine stage, taking place during each moment of cross-cultural contact through ‘either speech acts, bodily practices, fixed or improvised rituals, or non-adherence to diplomatic protocol’ (Schulting 68), *A Voyage into the Levant* stands as a book of cultures at play. In addition to being a sophisticated traveller, Blount presents himself as a gifted actor performing, on the Eastern stage, the Western ‘passenger,’ a talented improviser who flexibly adapts to changing circumstances in order to ‘observe the Religion, Manners, and Policy of the Turkes’ (though ‘not perfectly,’ which would have been ‘a task for an inhabitant rather than a passenger’) (4). Throughout the text he also provides the best evidence-based information for his cross-dressing and for the multiple identities that he has to either put on or off whenever the situation requires. Therefore, Blount underlines the necessity of cross-dressing as a form of disguise, flexibility as a means of survival enabling any western traveller to spontaneously shift behaviour as the situation necessitates in a cross-cultural setting, and improvisation, which was known as a cross-cultural phenomenon and deployed as one of his important survival strategies.

Clad in the Turkish manner and riding with two other Turks an hour before their caravan, Blount suddenly encounters four timariots, members of the Ottoman cavalry. Unexpectedly, the situation grows precarious immediately after the soldiers find out that Blount is a Christian. Being not fully familiar with the surrounding environment or the language, norms and customs of the culture Blount visits, he chooses to stand still till they menace their weapons and get closer ‘with lookes very ugly’ (98). Taking off his Christian self and trying hard to reset the parameters of the encounter, Blount tries some of the commonest Muslim gestures and speech acts required in a situation like this:

I smiling met them, and taking him who seemed of most port, by the hand, layed it to my forehead, which with them is the greatest signe of love, and honour, then often calling him Sultanum, spoke English [...] yet gave I it such a sound, as to them who understood no further, might seem affectionate, humble, and hearty; which so appeased them, as they made me sit, and aete together. (ibid)

Blount's improvisation is so successful that he is even offered a share of their dinner. Choosing the right Turkish phrase to utter with a soft voice along with his submissive bodily acts, Blount not only attributes them a higher social status than they actually have, but he also appeases their hostility. As regards cross-dressing, Blount was not the first Englishman to stress the reward for appropriate behaviour as well as the shielding function of 'Turkish dress'. In other words, as Nabil Matar puts it, 'dressing like a "native" helped them in reducing the hostility to the "Frank" that was endemic in the Levant. Wearing a turban among the Muslims was a necessary expedient' ('Renaissance England and the Turban' 44). Whereas Matar suggests that early modern England considered the turban as a symbol of Islam, a turbaned Christian was always considered to have renounced his Christian identity in favour of Muslim culture and custom. Unsurprisingly, Blount's avoidance of direct reference to the turban might 'suggest an uneasiness about the implications of his cultural cross-dressing for an English readership' (Schulting 72).

However, in the East, the improvisation of English travellers and merchants was rarely deployed as a tool to seize power. In essence, it was vital to 'coming to terms with England's lack of economic, political and military influence' (77). When Murad Pasha, camping on the Shore of the Danube on the eve of a war against Poland, asked Blount:

If my Law did permit me to serve under them going against the Polacke who is a Christian; promising with his hand upon his breast, that if I would, I should be inrolled of his Companies, furnished with a good Horse, and of other necessaries be provided with the rest of his Household; I humbly thanked him, for his favour, and told him that to an Englishman it was lawfull to serve under any who were in League with our King, and that our King had not only a League with the Grand Signior, but continually held an Embassadour at his Court, esteeming him the greatest Monarch in the World: so that my Service there, especially if I behaved my selfe not unworthy of my Nation, would be exceedingly well received in England; and the Polacke, though in name a Christian, yet of a sect, which for Idolatry, and many other points, we much abhorred; wherefore the English had of late, helped the Muscovite against him, and would be forwarder under the Turkes, Whom we not only honored for their glorious actions in the world; but also loved, for the kinde Commerce of Trade which we find amongst them. (15)

In his response, Blount does not hesitate to accuse 'the Polacke, though in name a Christian,' of idolatry. More specifically, Blount draws an analogy between Islam and Protestantism so as to use it wisely as a strategy of muting religious difference just as Queen Elizabeth I who in

her first diplomatic letter to Sultan Murad III (1574-1595), written on 25 October, 1579, defined herself as 'the most invincible and most mighty defender of the Christian faith against all kinde of idolatries, of all that live among the Christians, and falselie professe the name of Christ' (Skilliter 69). Apparently, Blount reconfirms Elizabeth I's claim that both Islam and Protestantism reject the worship of idolatry by siding the English with the Muslim Turks against the Catholic 'Polacke'. In addition, reflecting upon Elizabeth I's commercial policy in the Levant, Blount does not miss the opportunity to put into words how much the English appreciate the 'kinde Commerce of Trade which we [they] find amongst them [the Ottoman Turks]'. Accordingly, Blount's reply not only alludes to the current necessity for fostering good relations with the Ottomans for both trade and power-political reasons, but it also challenges the anti-Islamic rhetoric of early Protestant reformers by aligning England with the Ottoman Turks against the Catholic nations of Europe.

Closely observing that 'the Turke takes a more pernicious way to extinguish Christianity than ever the Heathen Emperours did' (110), Blount draws his readers' attention to the Turke's preference of putting 'none to death for Religion. ... [Because] Hee rather suckes the purse than unprofitable blood, and by perpetuall poverty renders them low towards himself, heavie to one another' (ibid). Moreover, despite the fact that the *millet* system endowed the Greek Orthodox, the Armenian Orthodox and the Jews with the collective right to observe their faiths, as the term *millet* was used to describe 'the organized, recognized, religio-political communities enjoying certain rights of autonomy under their own chiefs' (Lewis 39), non-Muslims were neither treated equally in that they would pay the same domestic tax, nor held in equal esteem with the Turks. Eventually 'perceiving themselves poore, wretched, taxed, disgraced, deprived of their children, and subject to the insolence of every Raskell' (110), a substantial number of non-Muslims considered conversion to Islam, among whom 'particular Convertites,' if they were 'serious, voluntary, and persons of important condition,' were 'received with honour, and large reward' (111). In brief, conversion to Islam proved beneficial for non-Muslims.

However, Blount portrays the non-Muslims living under Ottoman rule dispassionately in order to eschew treating the relatively inferior status of the non-Muslims as a means of breeding hatred for the Muslim Turks, and creating enmity against the Turkish way. What Blount observed was the protection of different religious communities in exchange for paying taxes and expressing their loyalty to the Ottoman sultan. That is to say, although Islam was embedded in the minds of early modern humanists as a religion

of tolerance, that toleration was predicated on the assumption that the non-Muslim communities were granted a considerable degree of protection, as well as religious autonomy, in return for their agreement to accept an inferior status and to assume certain obligations, such as the required payment of a poll tax, the *jizya*. More importantly, despite the so-called inferior status of each non-Muslim community, Blount 'noted them so desperate malicious towards one another, as each loves the Turke better than they doe either of the other, and serve him for informers, and instruments against one another' (109). In essence, while religious references in political rhetoric of the period pictured antagonistic relations between Islam and Christianity, the Orthodox, Catholic and Jewish communities or *millets* always preferred to side with the Ottoman Empire not merely for security reasons. Being on the powerful and winning side, they were able to lead a life of considerable contentment, but more importantly, siding with a mighty empire also proved to be lucrative for the non-Muslim communities, as they were allowed to partake in the trade activities of the Ottoman Empire.

The religious and cultural power of Islam stemmed neither from its offer of wealth in sexual desires, approval of polygamy nor from tolerance of other monotheistic faiths. Rather, as Nabil Matar argues, 'Islam projected an allure that promised a common Briton social and political power, and turned a poor European soldier into a well-paid *rais* (corsair captain) [sic]: it was the allure of an empire that changed an Englishman's hat into a turban' (*Islam in Britain* 15). Not surprisingly, thousands of European Christians renounced their inherent faith and embraced the Mohammedan faith so readily in the Renaissance and the seventeenth century, either because their low social conditions compelled them to behave so self-seeking, or because they desperately needed to identify themselves with a powerful empire to be able to lead a life devoid of factional struggles which intersected with religious disputes as well as political uncertainty.

Nevertheless, there were harsh attacks upon the honour of side-changers. The aim was to 'unman them and destroy their public legitimacy' (Hopper 146). The term 'renegade' derived from a Spanish form of 'renegade' was commonly used to 'refer to Christians who had "turned Turk"' (Vitkus 234), and preferred to live under Muslim authorities in the Ottoman Empire or the Ottoman-dominated Barbary coast of North Africa. Having the opportunity to converse with some *renegadoes* in Italian, Blount categorized them into two distinct groups by basing his judgement on reasons for abandoning their Christian faith:

generally I found them Atheists, who left our cause for the Turkish as the more thriving in the World, and fuller of preferment: these hate us not

otherwise than in shew, unlesse where they finde themselves abhorred for their Apostacy: [...] these are the voluntary Renegadoes; there are another sort, whom hard usage, and captivity brings in rather than any ambition, or disgust at home. These though necessitate to hold on, yet they beare a great goodwill to Christians, and likely a deep grudge to the Turkes. (112-113)

Distinguishing the ‘voluntary Renegadoes’ who were previously ‘Atheists’ from those who committed the sin of apostasy to avoid either life-long slavery or captivity, Blount was concerned about ‘seeing how many daily goe from us [the Christians] to them [the Muslims], and how few of theirs to us’ (ibid).

Throughout his text, Blount displays a surprising ability to penetrate the mindset of cultural others and to empathize with their point of view. He distinguishes a ‘naturall Turke’ from an Arab and Egyptian, as he contends that:

The Turkish disposition is generous, loving and honest; so farre from falsifying his promise, as if he doe but lay his hand on his breast, beard, or head, as they use, or chiefly break bread with me, if I had an hundred lives, I durst venture them upon his word, especially if he be a natural Turke, no More Arab, or Egyptian. (103-4)

Actually, Blount foregrounds ‘a naturall borne Turke’s difference from the Egyptians’ in character and attitude in his historical account of Sultan Selim’s conquest of Egypt (1517) in the earlier chapters of his travelogue. From his point of view the Egyptians, occupying a climatically hot and wet region, ‘were found damnably corrupt and dis-affectionate to the Turkish affairs’ (55). Therefore, as Blount puts it, ‘the Turke at this day, employes the Egyptians, rather that way [as farmers] than to armes’ (54), and that’s why ‘the Nation is made effeminate, and disarmed; which is the maxime he [the Sultan] holds upon that false and dangerous people’ (54).

Inspired by the Ottoman state’s policy on the ‘false and dangerous people,’ Blount does his best to penetrate into deeper levels of society only to find out perfectly functioning Ottoman institutions. The unchallenged authority of the sultans consolidated by the unconditional devotedness of a central administration is something that soon comes to Blount’s notice. While travelling through the Danube River valley, he becomes an eye witness to the Turkish army on the march. Blount praises the discipline of the Ottoman army: ‘yet I wondered to see such a multitude so clear of confusion, violence, want, sickness or any other disorder’ (13). He also confirms that the fame of the Turkish army is ‘excessive’ despite its moderate size. Soon Blount finds out why the Turkish armies are not so

numerous as in former times, and that among many answers, the wisest hit upon three points:

First that the enemies now [...] were not so Potent as heretofore; secondly, experience had taught them, multitudes over-vaste are neither capable of order, nor provision; wherefore to avoid confusion, and feminine, they bring no more into the Field then are necessary, the third was, before their Dominions were enlarged, they thought it better to employ them in new Conquests, then to leave them idle, necessitous, and dangerous at home. (69)

Maintaining the largest professional military capable of preserving strict discipline and order in sixteenth and seventeenth-century Europe, the Ottoman power was construed as practising relentless cruelty upon those of its subjects who did not dare to display slavish obedience. Blount, for instance, portrays the horrid executions such as 'Empalling, Gaunching, Flaying alive, cutting off by the Waste with a red hot iron, Ointing with honey in the Sunne, hanging by the foot, planting in burning Lime, and the like' (52). In brief, such extreme measures, as Daniel Vitkus puts it, 'were said to be the key to the Ottomans' success as conquerers and rulers' (47).

As regards Islamic principles and Muslim practice, Blount argues that there are 'four different sects of Mahometans, each interpreting [the Alchoran] according to the Genius of its Nation, the Tartars simply, the Mores, and Arabs superstitiously: the Persians ingeniously, the Turkes with most Liberty' (80). To Blount's surprise, the Ottoman rule appears to be enormously tolerant of other monotheistic religions and sects in an age when most European monarchs aspired to forced religious homogeneity. Holding the Turkish Muslims in high esteem in terms of the exercise of worship, Blount is also astonished to see the system of governance within the Ottoman-controlled territories enabled a considerable degree of religious tolerance including the right of free worship in public: 'especially the Turke [...] dis-affect their people in Religion toward the Enemy' (ibid). To put it in other words, the Ottoman Empire connecting three continents, Asia, Europe, and Africa, encompassing an array of cultures, languages, peoples, climates, and various social and political structures, were innately Muslim. Although their policies attached priority to Islamic tradition, they were never strictly orthodox. Besides, as Gerald MacLean puts it 'recent archival research is making it increasingly clear that their ambitions and methods of warfare and of rule were pragmatic rather than ideological, aimed at achieving and maintaining authority [...] rather than religious uniformity' (28-9). The Ottoman rule was enormously flexible as well as moderate in its capacity to respond to

other monotheistic religions in an age when embracing diversity was avoided at all costs.

The status of Islam at the emergence of the Ottomans and its institutionalization at the height of empire made it so that 'religion was adapted to the needs of the state, and contributed to the segmented integration of groups into the state' (Barkey 104). During the process of constructing the imperial realm, Ottomans never allowed for the possibilities of confusion between religion as institution and religion as a system of beliefs. For example, despite the explicit function of the institution of the mosque as a space of worship and spiritual quest, the mosque was essentially and inseparably a part of the state because it was dependent for its existence as a symbol on the state. Since the Ottoman state was able to ensure the dominant function of religion in the life of the empire, the mosque functioned within the state rather than outside in isolation. More importantly, the diversity of religions living within the imperial borders, the tolerance of the Ottoman leaders of the Other led to a peculiar construction of an early model of interfaith respect and dialogue. Despite their openness to other monotheistic religions, the early modern Ottoman Turks were not received with favour and confidence due to the negative entailments of the Muslim faith. As Daniel Vitkus puts it 'Islam itself was described by Christian writers as a religion based on sexual license, permitting polygamy and instant divorce' (47).

As regards Islam, some of the major points to which Blount draws his readers' attention are polygamy, prohibition of wine and predestination. He claims that polygamy contributes to the population growth of the Ottoman Empire, resulting in both a numerous and younger population: 'Alcoran ... permits poligamie, to make a numerous People, which is the foundation of all great Empires' (82). However, in addition to his discussion of polygamy, Blount refers to the practice of sodomy as perverting morality, which seems to be something approved of in polygamous marriages, especially among the powerful elite of the Ottoman Empire: 'beside these wives each Basha [pasha] hath as many, or likely more Catamites, which are their serious loves; for their wives are used (as the Turkes themselves told me) but to dresse their meat, to Launderesse, and for reputation' (14).

Moreover, as Nabil Matar contends, 'Britons asserted that among the Turks there was a niche carved by the ruler himself for "sodomy," and because the ruler was autocratic, not only could there be no criticism of his behaviour, but the ruler might just be setting the example for the rest of the elite to emulate him' (*Turks, Moors and Englishmen* 117). Early modern representations of the land of the Turks were subtly made in order to

distinguish European morals with regards to sexuality from that of the Ottoman Turks. That is why the Ottoman-dominated lands had penetrated in the West's imagination as sites of 'erotic crossing'. And in this respect, Blount holds that 'I have not noted them vicious, excepting their profest sodomy, which in the Levant is not held vice' (79). As Anna Suranyi states, 'almost all the early modern authors who wrote about Turkey declared that the sin of sodomy was endemic in the Turks' dominions' (160). So did Blount in his account of the Commander of the army, the Pasha of Bosnia, who had an entourage of 'Boyes likely of twelve, or fourteen yeares old, some of them not above nine, or ten, [...] clad in velvet and scarlet' (14).

Unlike many European travellers writing about the Muslim Turks and Muslim-dominated lands, Blount avoided not only generalizations about Islam but also using such terms as 'false prophet'; 'anti-Christian' or 'anti-Christ'. Speaking of the Turks' negative attitude towards wine, Blount claims that prohibition on wine is another important feature of Islamic culture which, along with the permission of polygamy, serves imperial interests and ends by hardening the soldier and preventing disorder, and facilitating public provision:

The cunning of that seconding humane inclination appears in the different successe of two politick acts of the Alcoran: the one permits *Polygamie*, to make a numerous People, which is the foundation of all great *Empires*, The other pretending a divell in every grape, prohibits *wine*: thereby hardens the Souldier, prevents disorder, and facilitates public provision. (82-83)

The last point Blount makes about the 'Turkish Religion' is the belief in predestination. Blount argues that the Turks are great believers in predestination, as they take for granted that everything about a Muslim's life including when and where he should die is believed to be written on his forehead at birth. Blount relates an instance which took place in Rhodes:

Where just as we entered the port, a French lacquey of our company died with a great plague sore. The Turks in the ship were so farre from feare, at his death, as they sate presently eating, and drinking by him, and within halfe an houre, after his removal, they slept on his Blanket, with his cloathes in stead of a Pillow; which when I advised them not to doe, they pointed upon their foreheads, telling me it was written at their birth when they should dye. (85-86)

Despite the fact that religion was the most important marker in revealing the binary opposition between Christians and Muslims, European

travellers with their first-hand reports of the Ottoman lands and the Ottoman Turks did not find common ground in their enthusiasm for the representation of an ethnic, religious and cultural Other, namely the Turk, since none of their representations of the Turkish Other came out as monolithic ideological constructs.

British desire for the ‘worldly goods’ of the East ineluctably drew their attention to the Islamic Ottoman Empire which lay in the path of their desire for empowerment through involvement in the profitable Eastern trade as well as the Levant trade. As Gerald MacLean suggests, in ‘sixteenth–and seventeenth-century Britain, thinking about Turks meant thinking about religious differences but it also meant thinking about empires in the East’ (44). As a consequence, the British had to redefine their own personal and national desires as well as identities in relation to a religious, ethnic and cultural Other without trying to identify them in accordance with locally familiar or traditional values.

In conclusion, Blount conceives of his voyage into the multicultural Levant as an attempt to reconstruct the British self while deconstructing the previously fixed images of the Ottoman Other. As he explains in the earlier chapters of his narration, preparing oneself for the journey into the Levant requires ‘an extended process of unlearning, [...] putting off the old man’ and discovering a freedom ‘from all former habit of opinion’ (4). Despite the fact that previously fixed images of the Muslims Turks are deemed to be prejudicial, reducing them into a barbarous race of people having faith in a false prophet and the doctrines of a false religion, in *A Journey into the Levant*, Blount denies the idea that in ‘the Turkish domination there were nothing but sottish sensuality as most Christians conceive’ (3). Above all, his praise for, as well as astonishment at, the multi-ethnic, multi-faith and multicultural Ottoman Empire and its well-functioning institutions stand as evidence of English culture’s striving for an imperial model to reflect upon.

### Works Cited

- Barclay, John. 1633. *The Mirrour of Mindes*. London: Printed by I. B. for Thomas Walkley.
- Barkey, Karen. 2008. *Empire of Difference: The Ottomans in Comparative Perspective*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Bibliander, Theodore. 1542. *A Godly consultation unto the Brethren and Companyons of the Christen Religyon by what meanes the cruell power of the Turkes, both may and ought for to be repelled of the Christen people*. Antwerp: Radulphe Bonifante.

- Bisaha, Nancy. 2004. *Creating East and West: Renaissance Humanists and the Ottoman Turks*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Blount, Henry. 1638. *A Voyage into the Levant. A Briefe Relation of a Journey, Lately Performed by Master H. B. Gentleman, from England by the way of Venice, into Dal[matia], Sclavonia, Bosnah, Hungary, Macedonia, Thessaly, Thrace, Rhodes and Egypt, unto Gran Cairo*. London: Printed by I. L. for Andrew Crooke.
- Boerth, Robert. 1996. 'The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World on the Stage of Marlowe and Shakespeare.' *Journal of Theatre and Drama* 2: 35-58.
- Braude, Benjamin and Bernard Lewis. 1982. *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Empire: The Functioning of a Plural society*. New York: Holmes & Meier Publishers.
- Braudel, Fernand. 1995. *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean world in the age of Philip II*. Berkeley, California: University of California Press.
- Foxe, John. 1838. *The Acts and monuments of the Church; containing the history and sufferings of the martyrs*. A new ed., revised, corrected, and condensed by M.H. Seymour. London: Printed for Scott, Webster and Geary.
- Hopper, Andrew. 2012. *Turncoats and Renegadoes: Changing Sides During the English Civil War*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Knolles, Richard. 1603. *The General Historie of the Turkes*. London: A. Islip.
- Lewis, Bernard. 1991. *The Political Language of Islam*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Luther, Martin and Eugene F. Klug. 1996. *Sermons of Martin Luther: The House Postils, Volume: 1*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books.
- MacLean, Gerald M. 2007. *Looking East: English writing and the Ottoman Empire before 1800*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- . 2012. 'Performing at the Ottoman Porte in 1599: The Case of Henry Lello.' In *Early Modern Encounters with the Islamic East: Performing Cultures*. Eds. Sabine Schülting et al., 27-42. Farnham: Ashgate.
- Matar, Nabil. 1997. 'Renaissance England and the Turban.' In *Images of the Other: Europe and the Muslim World Before 1700*. Ed. David Blanks, 39-54. New York: Columbia University Press.
- . 1999. *Turks, Moors, and Englishmen in the Age of Discovery*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- . 2008. *Islam in Britain, 1558-1685*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Schülting, Sabine. 2012. 'Strategic Improvisation: Henry Blount in the Ottoman Empire.' In *Early Modern Encounters with the Islamic East: Performing Cultures*. Eds. Sabine Schülting et al, 67-84. Farnham: Ashgate.
- Suranyi, Anna. 2008. *The Genius of the English Nation: Travel Writing and National Identity in Early Modern England*. Danvers, MA: Rosemont Publishing.
- Vitkus, Daniel J. 2000. *Three Turk Plays from Early Modern England: Selimus, A Christian Turned Turk, and the Renegado*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- . 2008. *Turning Turk: English Theater and the Multicultural Mediterranean, 1570-1630*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

## CHAPTER TWO

### TWO BRITISH LADIES IN THE TURKISH *HAREM*:

ANNIE JANE HARVEY

AND LADY ANNIE BRASSEY

ELISABETTA MARINO

#### **Introduction: Lady Travellers to the Middle East**

Up until the first decades of the nineteenth century, travelling to the Middle and Far East was mainly regarded as an ‘exclusively androcentric experience’ (Melman, *Women’s Orients* 31), and the travelogue was a genre cultivated essentially by men. Conversely, starting from the 1820s, an increasing number of travel accounts penned by women writers began to be published,<sup>1</sup> thus signifying a double violation of the private domain of the household. Indeed, the invisible boundaries of the domestic sphere were physically and metaphorically trespassed by dynamic ladies, eager to invade the male-dominated publishing world in order to acquire profits, notoriety, and both a personal and a literary voice. Quite surprisingly, however, their provocative and transgressive stance passed almost unnoticed: conventionally identified as ‘the “Other within”’ (Melman, *Women’s Orients* 1), given the subordinate position they occupied in society, women travel authors were acknowledged as the most appropriate and insightful interpreters of the ‘Other without,’ the weak and feminized *Orient*.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, their sex allowed them to penetrate the mysteries of

---

<sup>1</sup> Melman quotes Richard Bevis’s *Bibliotheca Cisorientalia*, an inventory of all travel books about the Middle East released between 1500 and 1914. According to Bevis, between 1500 and 1821, only four accounts were written by women. Then, in a period of barely ninety years (1821-1911), women writers published 241 travelogues (31).

<sup>2</sup> As Claire Arnold has elucidated, following the Orientalist stereotype of the feeble, lustful, and sluggish Orient, ‘femininity became the means through which Eastern culture was demeaned and weakened, with the country and its male

harems and hammams, secluded spaces forbidden to men which tickled the imagination of a large number of readers, the so-called armchair travellers, avid consumers of lurid and enticing narratives resembling the *Arabian Nights*.<sup>3</sup> The high demand for this kind of literature and the prospect of easy gains prompted women travellers to specialize in a sub-genre of travel writing, namely *harem literature* which, nonetheless, often frustrated the expectations of male readers. In fact, far from featuring the seraglio as the privileged site of unrestrained eroticism and sexual licence (or, to quote Billie Melman, ‘the ultimate abode of lasciviousness and vice’ [Melman, ‘Desexualizing the Orient’ 301]), *harem literature* demythicized and domesticated the female apartments, by faithfully depicting the customs and manners of their inmates, without falling into the temptation of exoticizing and fetishizing them (Kamberidou 384).<sup>4</sup>

The encounter with the Oriental Other frequently offered women writers the opportunity to reflect on their own condition, considering the disturbingly similar state of segregation, commodification, and cultural starvation shared by odalisques, concubines, and the Victorian *angel in the house*. Consequently, in Reina Lewis’s words, the East was turned into ‘a foil through which to evaluate and discuss the status of women in the West’ (‘Harem Literature’ 48). Other times, however, British women travellers could not refrain from adopting an Orientalist gaze as well as relying on widespread misconceptions and stereotypes since, as Charlotte De Jong has argued (10), they were not just colonized by gender, but also colonizers by race. Hence, on occasion, their travelogues (more or less) unconsciously replicated the very tropes they aimed at challenging,

---

inhabitants portrayed as weak and feminine and its female inhabitants as sexually available’ (70).

<sup>3</sup> Théophile Gautier’s portrait of male and female travellers to Turkey (viewed as a ‘jealous country’) epitomizes a widespread perception. In his *Abécédaire du Salon de 1861*, in fact, he stated that ‘only women should go to Turkey,’ since men could only see white minarets, fountains, dogs, and local *hamals*. In his opinion, ‘for a woman, on the contrary, the odalisque opens itself, the harem has no more mysteries; those faces, doubtless charming, for which the bearded tourist searches in vain [...] she contemplates stripped of their veil, in all the brilliance of their beauty’ (Yegenoglu 75). As Leila Ahmed has observed, what was generally reported in Western men’s accounts of the harem was ‘prurient speculation’ (524).

<sup>4</sup> Melman has noticed that, especially in Victorian times, ‘the *haremluk* is divested of its sexual attributes and presented as “home”’ (Melman, ‘Desexualizing the Orient’ 313). In Julia Pardoe’s *The City of the Sultan; and Domestic Manners of the Turks, in 1836* (1837), for example, harems are thoroughly stripped of their allure; they are peaceful, domestic, at times monotonous spaces inhabited by women who enjoy their privacy and independence.