IMAGES OF EASTERN WOMEN IN THE TRAVEL HISTORIES AND LITERARY TEXTS OF EARLY MODERN ENGLAND

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Abstract:

The article adopts a historicist approach in its focus on the representations of Eastern women in Early Modern English Literature. It explores specific historical documents and literary texts of sixteenth and seventeenth centuries published in England, for the light that they shed on the manners and mores of oriental societies, particularly those of Muslim nations like that of the Turks, Persians and Central Asian royal households. The unique perspective taken by the cited British playwrights, travelers, diplomatic and trade missions, sheds some light on the underlying motives of the early anthropological and sociological studies of the Eastern nations at that early stage of Anglo-oriental negotiations in the context of the role played by women who were consorts of Kings and Sultans. In doing so this article raises questions about present day feminist assumptions of western critics writing in the post-colonial era who have not taken sufficient notice of this pre-colonial period when the imperial powers lay in the Eastern part of the world, and the British were not a significant imperial presence in the East.

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Introduction

Many plays and prose works of early modern English literature about the East have attracted the attention of social critics and historians alike in their attempts to trace the beginnings of Europe's sense of its own identity as defined by its opposition to the 'Other', represented by the East and its institutions. Edward Said has proposed that Eastern lore, or what is considered to be orientalism by Western writers, is based on the works of a 'very large group of writers among whom are poets, novelists, philosophers, political theorists, economists, and imperial administrators, who have accepted the basic distinction between the East and West as the starting point for elaborate theories, epics, novels, social description and political accounts concerning the Orient, its people, its customs, 'mind', destiny.'[1] Similarly, feminists like Geraldine Heng, writing about the earlier medieval age, have also attempted the 'contextual formulations of "race", "nations" and "empire" within the medieval period - conceptual constructs that are central to ethnic, Third World, and post-colonial studies today', particularly of the 'traumatic phenomenon of September 11, 2001, as the materialization of the medieval political past in our time'.[2] Yet, while much has been written about the East represented in the antagonistic crusading literature of the medieval era and in the literary works, of the later eighteenth century, of European colonialism, a corresponding study of orientalism in the early modern English literature deserves to be explored to some extent, even though most of the critical interpretations have been of the dramatic writings of Marlowe, Shakespeare and his contemporaries who represented Eastern characters in their plays such as those of Moors, Turks and Persians. It is significant that in the sixteenth century 'the dominant paradigms of human difference were cultural: dress, weapons, social organization, manners, custom, and religion were the key indicators in classifying otherness. This changed in the seventeenth century as increased trade and exploration resulted in greater contact with more sophisticated foreign cultures and definitions of alterity were refigured accordingly'.[3] It appears that race was defined by 'color' only later in this era, and that in the earlier writings on Turks and Persians, ideas of difference were based on ideological issues.

It is this era which is the focus of this article exploring many plays written by popular playwrights based on the histories of the contemporary ruling dynasties of the East, such as those of the Ottoman of Turkey, Safavi of Persia and Saadi of North Africa, along with those of the other Asian royal houses. The Turkish chronicle plays of Tamburlaine[4]

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[1] Edward Said, 'The Discourse of the Orient' in Literature in the Modern World: Critical Essays and Documents, ed. By Dennis Walder (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 329-340 (p.330)

[2] Geraldine Heng, 'Pleasure, resistance, and a feminist aesthetics of reading' in The Cambridge Companion to Feminist Literary Theory, edited by Ellen Rooney (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 53-72 (p.57).

[3] Michael Neill, " 'Mulattoes,' 'Blacks' and 'Indian Moores': Othello and Early Modern Constructions of Human Difference," Shakespeare Quarterly 49 (1998): 361-374 (336-7)

[4] Christopher Marlowe, Tamburlaine The Great, ed. by J.S. Cunningham, The Revels Plays (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1981). Cunningham assumes the latest date of the play as 1588 on the basis of a remark by Robert Greene regarding the emergence of a new extravagant theatrical style associated with the 'Atheist Tamburlaine' (p.3).

(1588), Soliman and Perseda[5](1589-92), Selimus[6](1594), The Turk[7] (1607), Mustapha[8] (1608), The Courageous Turk[9] and The Raging Turk[10] (1618) and are only some of the epic plays that described sensational episodes of Eastern histories and imperial conflicts between the competing and rival powers of the East. What is of interest is that the representations of Sultans and Shahs were depicted in an age when the greatest Empires were within the East and the idea of Western colonialism or any European Empire in that part of the world was not even a possibility, given the fact that the European merchants were travelling to the Eastern courts as supplicants, suing for the grant of permission to trade in the Eastern markets.

It was an age that witnessed the establishment of the Turkey Company in 1579, The Barbary or Levant Company and the famous East India Company by 1600. Richard Hakluyt's famous accounts[11] of the European travelers to the East were in circulation at the time and later compiled by Samuel Purchas. These and other travel anthologies corroborate the determined effort of the English government and the intellectuals to gain information about the societies and cultures of the East that had hitherto been considered in an adversarial light, since the crusades. But, the emergent capitalism of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries required a change of attitudes and mentalities by the English if their trading missions in the East were to prosper. Hakluyt's apology for trade with the 'misbelievers' indicates some of the themes which can be discerned in the plays written at the time. His view took into consideration the stirring events that had taken place in the last decades of Elizabethan rule, which had alarmed the concerned public about English involvement with Eastern monarchs. Later, Purchas also verified this high level of English involvement in the 'voluntarie' English adventures in the Civil uncivil broiles of …. Sunne-scorched Barbarie, of Turkish and Persian fights by sea, the Mongols by Land'.[12]

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[5] Thomas Kyd, The Tragedye of Solyman and Perseda , ed. by John J. Murray from the Original Texts with Introduction and Notes, (New York and London: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1991).

[6]The First Part of the Tragical Reign of Selimus , sometime Emperour of the Turkes, and grandfather to him that now raigneth. Wherin is showne how hee most unnaturally raised warres against his own father *Baiazet*, and preuailing therein, in the end caused him to be poysoned: Also with the murthering of his two brethren, *Corcut*, and *Acomat*. As it was playd by the queenesMaiesties Players, (London: printed by Thomas Creed, 1594), ed. by W.Bang, The Malone Society Reprints 1908 (London: Charles Whittingham& Co. Press, 1909).

[7]John Mason, The Turke, ed. by Joseph Q. Adams, Jr. in MaterialienzurKunde des alterenEnglischen Dramas (London and Leipzig: David Nutt, 1913).

[8]Mvstaphain Poems and Drama of FulkeGreville, ed. by Geoffrey Bullough, 2vols (London: Oliver and Boyd, 1939) II.

[9]A Critical Old-Spelling Edition of Thomas Goffe's The Courageous Turk ,ed. by Susan Gushee O'Malley (New York and London: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1979).

[10] Thomas Goffe, The Raging Turke, or, Baiazet The Second. A Tragedie written by Thomas Goffe (1631), The Malone Society Reprints, ed. by Peter Davidson (Oxford: Printed by Vivian Ridler at the University Press, 1968, repr. 1974).

[11] Richard Hakluyt, The Principal Nauigations, voyages and discoveries of the English Nation, (London: Imprinted by George Bishop and Ralph Newberie, Deputies to Christopher Barker, 1589), *STC* 12625. For a modern edition, see Richard Hakluyt, The Principal Navigations Voyages Traffiques and Discoveries of the English Nation, 12 vols (Glasgow: James MacLehose and Sons, 1903).

[12]Samuel Purchas, HakluytusPosthumus or Purchas His Pilgrimes, 20 vols (Glasgow: James MacLehose and Sons, 1905), VI, pp.53-54.

However, the English mercantile establishment sought to find out more about the Eastern seraglios and harems which were a region forbidden to the European travelers. Thus, much of the dramatic images of Eastern women had to be constructed from the histories of the Europeans chroniclers of the East who had their own political and strategic agendas. A discussion of sources of information available to dramatists in the Elizabethan and Jacobean ages who depicted women from the East is still largely an unexplored field of study. For this purpose, this article serves to focus on the actual knowledge available in early modern Europe about the innermost sanctums in the residences of Eastern monarchs where the imperial consorts and women of the royal dynasty lived, segregated from any social contact with strangers and men who were not closely related to them. Despite their inaccessibility to the public, these imperial quarters also formed the heart of the Eastern governments where the Sultans made decisions that affected the course of their Empires and national policies.

For the West, it was a paradox that the women who ruled the royal households and exercised palpable influence over the realm as mothers, wives, daughters, sisters and aunts of the Sultans were not seen in public, unlike the European women of royalty. In Renaissance plays, aside from a few exceptions, critics concerned only with issues of color or race have not generally paid any particular attention to the characterizations of Turkish, Moorish or Persian women that would distinguish them from those of European women in terms of their particular social status and privileges.

It is particularly intriguing to discover the initial reaction of the early modern travelers from Britain who commented on the norms and behavior of these women. The differences between the roles of Eastern and Western women in their respective societies were so markedly different in those days that they could not be ignored, particularly when information about Eastern societies began to reach Europe. There can be no doubt that the novelty of ideas about Eastern women, derived from the few contemporary travel histories, available on the subject, had an impact on their literary representations, adding to their theatrical and didactic importance, specifically after the commencement of the Turkey trade in the 1580s.

Many early modern investigations into societies in the East made a particular attempt, for pragmatic reasons, to address the question of the extent of power and authority exercised by women in the Eastern world. No doubt, the European merchants and diplomats had a vested interest in the workings of the Sultans' Porte and Seraglio that could affect the East-West trade. For instance, according to Sujata Iyengar, it was due to this traffic that Elizabethan cosmetics gained popularity and were literally "treasure" containing valuable Eastern minerals such as ivory, vermillion or henna so that poets compared female beauty to treasure, in more than metaphoric terms.[13]

Thus, the different impressions of Eastern women were varied, depending on whether they were from historical texts or from oriental lore and travelers' tales. It is therefore, necessary to explore the typical features that were integral to their portrayal in both these historical as well as anthropological surveys that were influential in forming their

[13] SujataIyengar, Shades of Difference: Mythologies of Skin Colour in Early Modern England (Phildelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), p.111.

theatrical roles. It is also reasonable to assume that some concerted efforts were made to distinguish the manner and appearances of Eastern women, particularly due to the visual nature of the dramatic medium.

Studies of the East, like those of the historian, Richard Knolles, provided the background for the roles of Ottoman and Persian women, particularly, in Marlowe's and Kyd's earlier plays. The novelty associated with these exotic women enabled Renaissance playwrights to create an exciting and meaningful impact through the vivid realization of the East in terms of the feminine. This allows an insightful comparative appraisal of selected plays that belonged to both the Elizabethan and Jacobean ages which convey a development in the concepts of the actual women living in the East, rather than those found in the mythological or biblical sources. Plays belonging to the end of the sixteenth century have figures of Eastern women that are largely symbolic of their current societies. By way of contrast, the critical interpretation of the later Jacobean plays illustrates how the depictions of these women acquired topicality and individuality with the passage of time and the growing mass of travel literature available to the public in the early seventeenth century.

A review of this literature reveals the issues that preoccupied the minds of English writers who had both strategic and mercantile interests. Clearly, early modern Englishmen were interested in discovering the sphere of power and level of authority the oriental women enjoyed in their societies, their position in royal palaces and the part they played in matters of dynastic succession. On the other hand, moralists and preachers were interested in the ethical implications of the rights of women in the East, particularly in the Muslim world. Travel records of William Biddulph,[14] as well as George Sandys[15], provided this additional dimension to the discussions about Eastern women, which augmented their traditional images, as conveyed in classical and medieval works. For example, biblical accounts of the Queen of Sheba had already established the connection between the wealth of the Orient and the royal women of the East.[16] While characters like George Peele's Bethsabe and Shakespeare's Cleopatra had well established antecedents, the figures of Ottoman queens, Moorish, Persian and Indian princesses were introduced for the first time within the context of a contemporary East with fabulous riches and resources.

The social implications of the newly acquired Eastern merchandise alarmed English reformers who were outraged by the travel accounts of the 'Orient'. Preachers feared that the lure of the East would corrupt the nation as it appealed to the acquisitive instincts in Englishmen and made Englishwomen susceptible to the degenerate fashions and exotic wares. As early as 1583, sermons employed visions of Eastern women in all their imagined splendor, tainted by the sins of pride and lust. Phillip Stubbes, known for his

[14] William Biddulph, The travels of certaine Englishmen into Africa, Asia, and to the Black Sea, finished 1608, (London: Haveland for W. Aspley, 1609), *STC* 3051

[15] George Sandys, A Relation of a Journey begun An: Dom: 1610. Foure Books Containing a description of the Turkish Empire, of Egypt, of the Holy Land, of the Remote parts of Italy and Ilandsadioying, (London: W.Barrett, 1615), STC 2172

[16] RanaKabbani, Imperial Fictions: Europe's Myths of Orient (London: Pandora, Harper Collins Publishers, 1986, with a new preface 1994), p.17.

puritanical inveighing against the ills besetting his society, described the abuses 'of women'sapparel' by comparison with the habits of 'Oriental' women:

> *Acertenkinde of People in the Orientall parte of the World (as writers affirme), that are suche Philautor, lovers of themselves, and so prowde with all, that, having plentie of precious stones and Margarits amongst them, they cut and launce their skinnes and fleshe, setting therin these precious stones, to the end they maye glister and shine to the eye.*[17]

The narrator proceeds to condemn the women of his own nation who wish to emulate the women of the East and 'tread their pathes, and folowe their direfull wayes in this cursed kind of unhard of Pride'.[18] Luxury, together with a certain kind of sensual and domestic power, was depicted as an integral aspect of the lives of these women in their societies.

Against this background, the plays promote the early modern personae of women associated with Sultans and *Bassas* who were reinvented, not only to emphasize the identification of the riches of the East with its women but also to convey the moral and ideological state of the ruling dynasties, among whom the Ottoman were foremost. The concerns that emerge from the writings of the day provided the themes for the dramatic portrayals of such powerful roles as those of Zabina, Zenocrate, Donusa, Quisara and various other women depicted in the relevant plays.

These women were shown as leaders of their different nations with power and authority that seems remarkable in the light of the later colonial age when Eastern women were depicted as servile and abject victims of their society. It is for this reason that earlier references to the depravity of the Eastern woman in the Renaissance was used as stock material for reformers, after the establishment of East-West alliances when familial structures of the East were perceived as a threat by Christian Europeans, particularly misogynists like Swetnam. It was against him that an anonymous play was written in 1620 entitled: Swetnam the Woman-Hater.[19] There was some apprehension that with the increasing contacts between England and the East, the early modern English woman would be morally corrupted by the dubious model of the Eastern woman whose spiritual state was adversely contrasted with the Christian ideal of womanhood and feminine virtue.

Interestingly, there was a similar use of gender in the context of the changing order of England's own society. Garthine Walker notes that gender was a 'crucial component of that order and its conceptualization; women were an obvious symbol for both the definition of and the transgression of social, political and religious boundaries. Thus we find godly, virtuous women exemplifying good order, and evil temptresses and

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[17] Phillip Stubbes, The Anatomie of Abuses, ed. by Frederick J. Furnivall, The New Shakespeare Society (London: N. Trubner and Co, 1877-9), p.70.

[18] Phillip Stubbes, The Anatomie of Abuses, p.70.

[19] Simon Trussler, The Faber Pocket Guide To Elizabethan and Jacobean Drama, (London: Faber and Faber Inc., 2006), p.203. Joseph Swetnam's Arraignment of Lewd, Idle, Froward, and Unconstant Women(1615), is cited as just some of the misogynistic literature circulated at the time at the behest of King James I, alarmed at the 'insolence' of women who asserted their rights.

murderous women representing the disorderly world of vice in which Satan attempts to rule'.[20]

It is important to note here that skin color was not a significant or decisive factor in the dramatic representations of Turkish, Tartar, Persian, Arab or North African women at this stage of drama. Although some modern critics like Kim F. Hall[21] have chosen to concentrate on female characters who could be portrayed as women of color, other writers like Ania Loomba have argued that 'the outsider in the literature of the period is not always literally of a different color, after all, the slave population of Europe consisted of Tartar, Greek, Armenian, Russian, Bulgarian, Turkish, Circassian, Slavonic, Cretan, Arab, African (Mori), and occasionally Chinese (Cathay) slaves'.[22]

Indeed, it is the religious and cultural disparities that are fore grounded by the roles of women, particularly in the earlier Elizabethan plays, such as Tamburlaine and Alcazar. The criterion for discrimination between the women of different nationalities is based on the differences in their morality and that of the people they represent. Similarly, in travelers' accounts, Kim. F. Hall finds that women functioned as 'positive signs of culture' because the containment of 'the female becomes the code -along with dress and eating habits - for judging foreign cultures', particularly since 'cultures identified as "savage" are those whose habits are the farthest removed from the European'.[23]

It is suggested that women were used as signifiers of the level of civilization prevailing in their Eastern lands and peoples. The claims of these nations to greatness were questioned on grounds of the status of women in their midst. They were found wanting according to the moral standards of Renaissance England and its concept of the place of women in society. While the material superiority of the East could not be denied in the face of the Ottoman success, the immoral status of the Eastern woman was employed by polemicists to establish the moral superiority of the West.

This tension between Muslim and European family values forms a subtext in the records related to Anglo-Turkish traffic, such as those collected and published by Purchas at the end of the Jacobean era, even though the information contained within was already in circulation since the days of Hakluyt.[24] They provide evidence of the fact that the Ottoman presence in Europe, Africa and Asia gave English travelers a vantage point to observe the domestic arrangements of Turkish households. English traders were keen to acquire information about Eastern cultures and customs that would facilitate their entry

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[20] Garthine Walker, '"Demons in female form" representations of women and gender in murder pamphlets of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries' in Writing and the English Renaissance ed. by William Zunder and Suzanne Trill (London and New York: Longman Group Limited, 1996), pp.123-139 (p.125).

[21] See Kim F. Hall, Things of Darkness: Economies of Race and Gender in Early Modern England (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1995).

[22] AniaLoomba, 'The Color of Patriarchy: Critical difference, cultural difference, and Renaissance drama', in Women , "Race", and Writing in the Early Modern Period , ed. by Margo Hendricks and Patricia Parker (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), p.29.

[23] Kim F. Hall, p.50.

[24] Samuel Purchas, HakluytusPosthumus or Purchas His Pligrimes, 4 vols (London: W. Stansby for H. Fetherstone, 1625), *STC* 20509. See volume II, as it is of particular importance in its references to oriental women in the discourses of John Leo Africanus (pp. 749-851). Also see HakluytusPosthumus or Purchas His Pilgrimes, 20 Vols (Glasgow: James Maclehose and Sons, 1905), VI, 1-54.

into markets controlled by the Ottomans. Due to the growing English familiarity with the Turkish Porte, ancient concepts about Eastern men and women had to be reconciled with the politics operating in the Ottoman harems.

Descriptions of women in reports of travelers to the East

Among the early reports of English traders and diplomats, Richard Hakluyt's editions of 1599 and 1600 are notable for their frequent references to the royal women in various regimes. In fact, Hakluyt published one of the earliest English records about the progress of Sultan Solyman and the women in his retinue in the first edition of his work in 1589. It is possible that Marlowe was inspired by this account when he described Tamburlaine's triumphant progress through the streets of *Babylon*.[25]

Hakluyt's narrative describes the women, who formed part of Sultan Solyman's royal entourage as he entered the city of Aleppo, on his way towards Persia, on the fourth of November, 1553. This event was witnessed by Anthonie Jenkinson and an excerpt indicates what was of particular interest to the Englishman in this spectacle. It provided a glimpse of oriental women, closely associated with one of the most powerful rulers of the time. The emphasis was also on the strength of the Turkish soldiers and the splendor of the Sultan's train:

> *Immediately after them came the Great Turke himselfe with great pompe, & magnificence, using his countenance and gesture [with] a wonderfull majesties, hauing onely on each side of his person one page clothed with cloth of golde;[....]*
>
> *After him followed six of goodly young Ladies mounted upon fine white hacknies clothed in cloth of silver, which were of the fashion of mens garments.*[26]

Jenkinson's account, with its details of the kinds of apparel worn by the Turks and likely to be sold in their markets, presents the 'goodly young Ladies' of the Turkish Porte as embodiments of the magnificence and prosperity of the Ottoman Empire. Presumably, the children described in the passage belonged to the royal family.

There is an even more revealing reference to the activities of Ottoman women in Hakluyt's edition of 1599. In the first part of the second volume, Hakluyt introduced the Sultana Safiye to the English reading public by publishing one of the letters she had sent to Queen Elizabeth in 1594. In the letter, Safiye assured the English Queen that she intended to safeguard English interests in Turkey:

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[25] Tamburlaine in The Complete Works of Christopher Marlowe, ed. by Fredson Bowers, 2nd edn, 2 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981, pp.76-77). All further references to the text are from this edition.

[26] Richard Hakluyt, The PrincipallNauigations, voiages and discoveries of the English Nation, made by Sea or ouer Land, to the remote and farthest distant Quarters of the earth at any time within the compasse of these 1500 yeeres: Deuided into three seuerall parts, according to the positions of the Regions whereunto they were directed, (London: Imprinted by George Bishop and Ralph Newberie, Deputies to Christopher Barker, 1589), *STC* 12625, pp.81-82.

> *After the arrival of your honorable presents from the court of your Maiesty...I think it therefore expedient, that according to our mutuall affection, in anything whatsoeuer may concerne the countreys which are subject to your Maiesty, I neuerfaile, hauing information giuen me in what soeuer occasion shall be ministred, to gratifie your Maiesty to my power in any reasonable and conuenient matter, that all your subjects business and affairs may haue a wished and happy end. For I will alwayes be a sollicitour to the most mighty Emperour for your Maiesties affaires that your Maiesty at all times may be fully satisfied.*[27]

This letter has some significance as Safiye was the central figure of the Ottoman harem. She was the favorite Queen of Sultan Murad III and mother of Sultan Mehemmed III. Her communication with Elizabeth was in accordance with the old Turkish custom according to which the ruler sent a female elder of the dynastic family, typically his mother, as emissary to intercede with other rulers. It is generally recognized that Safiye consistently used her considerable influence over the Sultans to promote England's trade with Turkey.[28] Indeed, English diplomatic overtures met with success they did at the Porte due to her active encouragement. European diplomats recognized the importance of gaining the support of the Sultana. A message sent by the English ambassador, Edward Barton, to Burghley from Constantinople on November 19, 1593 suggests the level of English reliance on Safiye to supply important information about Turkish policies regarding Europe. Barton writes of 'the feminine sex which bear all the sway now in the empire' and how he sent to the Empress 'to require her to feel and search the Grand Signor his mind'.[29]

As Safiye, and later her daughter-in-law, were Venetians of the Baffo family, they supported the cause of their native land and favored England as opposed to Spain. However, the European origins of the royal women did not detract from their position as representatives of the Ottoman family and consorts of the Sultan. To all intents and purposes, their status depended on their complete identification with the women of the Turkish Empire and its dominant religion, rather than on their racial origins.

Elizabeth and Safiye wrote directly to each other and appeared to be conscious of their special communication as royal women. They deliberately cultivated the contact in the interest of their respective countries. It appears that Elizabeth wished to continue the close ties with Safiye, even after the defeat of the British Armada. In 1593, she sent the Sultana a jewelled portrait of herself, and more presents were later exchanged between the two, attesting to their shared interests. In response, Safiye not only expressed her gratitude but reminded Elizabeth of her continued espousal of England's cause at the

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[27] Richard Hakluyt, The PrincipallNauigations, 3 vols (London, G. Bishop, R. Newberrie a. R. Barker, 1599), II, *STC* 12626a, 311-312 (p.312).

[28] Leslie P. Pierce, The Imperial Harem: Women and Sovereignty in the Ottoman Empire(New York, London: Oxford University Press, 1993), p.222.

[29] List and Analysis of State Papers, Foreign Series: Elizabeth I, July 1593-Dec 1594, (London: H.M.S.O, 1989), V, 505.

Porte.[30] In 1599, the Turkish Queen sent another letter to Elizabeth, further confirming her patronage of English mercantile ventures in the Ottoman dominions.[31]

This background of the liaison between the government of Elizabeth in England and the women at the heart of the Ottoman Empire provides invaluable insights that have a bearing on the interpretations of Eastern women on the Renaissance stage that is only now being realized. In this historical context of the liaison between the women at the helm of affairs in England and Turkey, the Elizabethan and Jacobean dramatists were not reticent about depicting the participation of royal women at both public and political levels in the East.

It is important to understand that ranking women of the Ottoman and Persian Empires were central to an understanding of the issues of politics and trade with the Eastern markets that brought hope to the commercial sector of England in those lean years. These markets became synonymous with the luxury of the Ottoman harems and seraglios where the women held sway. Mercantile and tactical imperatives were an inextricable aspect of the descriptions of Eastern women. There can be no doubt that European writers were drawn to this subject because of the potential influence of Eastern familial connections, particularly in the royal courts, on both European economies and cultures.

The prospects of profit, as well as the mysterious delights imagined in this 'new' East, were epitomized by the characters of Eastern women. Erotic connotations of purportedly 'decadent' harems reigned supreme in the fictional re-creations of women who became paradigms for the unattainable, albeit desirable, treasures of the Eastern lands. Indeed, images of these women symbolized the possibility of commercial expansion for English merchant adventurers in search of trade and glory. Thus, the concept of Eastern imperialism in all its manifestations came to be associated with women of the East, forming a leit-motif in the literature of the period.

However, it should be noted that writers' perspectives of the feminine world had their own peculiar limitations depending upon the sources of information about the East and their level of accuracy. It is useful for the modern scholar to be aware that, although travel literature contributed to a considerable body of information about the rulers and their imperial governments in the East, there were certain constraints posed by the system of 'the Veil' or 'Purdah' in conveying accurate accounts of the women in these mainly Muslim societies due to the separation of the male and female domains. While merchant adventurers and preachers took pains to record details of the newly accessible communities of the East, they relied to some extent on hearsay and rumour when describing the details of Eastern women and their customs.

The most obvious obstacle to communicating true reports was that, unlike their European counterparts, Muslim women of the East did not have direct contact with European men. When they did visit markets and public places, they were veiled. On his visit to Constantinople in 1610, George Sandys could not see the Turkish women as they went

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[30] See 'Three Letters From the Ottoman "Sultana'' Safiye to Queen Elizabeth I', e.d. by S.A. Skilliter in Documents From Islamic Chanceries, Oriental Studies, ed. by S.M. Stern and R. Walzer (Cambridge Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1965), pp.132-133.

[31] Documents from Islamic Chanceries, p.139.

outdoors with 'their faces so mabled in fine linen that no more is to be seene of them then their eyes'.[32] The risks involved in any encounter between Europeans males and women, particularly those belonging to Islamic rulers of the East, lent an element of the forbidden to them. It made them the subject of titillating conjecture and prurient curiosity for foreign travelers. As late as 1613, Thomas Coryat, like many previous European travelers to the East, confirmed that the 'Turkes will not suffer these three things to be medled with all by a Christian or Jew, viz. his Religion, his Women, his Slave'.[33]

But within the limitations imposed by these societies, there is no doubt that travelers did convey some information, however flawed, about the familial structures of the nations they visited. It is this material which conveys concepts of Eastern women that extend the scope of debate about their images in Renaissance literature in the context of Eastern Empires. It is also the subject of continuing research by critics interested in feminist issues.

William Biddulph introduced his famous narrative with a reference to the segregation of Turkish women. Like other European orientalists, he began with the dire warning to all Englishwomen to consider the restricted lives of the Turkish women and to be grateful for their own liberty:

> *Heere wiues may learne to loue their husbands, when they shal read in what slauery women liue in other contries, and in what awe and subjection to their husbands, and what libertie and freedome they themselues enjoy.*[34]

Despite this initial admonishment, Biddulph admitted that the royal women of the Turks enjoyed prerogatives that enabled them to escape the dangers inherent in governing an Empire as complex and powerful as that of the Ottomans:

> *The daughters and sisters of the great Turke are more free than all men and women. For when their brethren die, they liue...When they come to yeeres of marriage, their father (if he be liuing) or brother (if he be king) will giue into them, for their husbands, the greatest Bashawes or Viziers whom they shall affect, and say unto them, Daughter, or Sister I giue thee this man to be thy slaue and bedfellow.*[35]

It should be noted that this contradictory attitude of the writers towards Ottoman women obviously arose from the difficulty experienced by Englishmen in reconciling the considerable authority at the command of Muslim women, on the one hand, and their confinement in physical terms, on the other, which made them virtually invisible to the common public. At times, ambivalent feelings towards the Ottoman Empire also colored the views of the English writers whose sublimated animosity finds expression in the images of Turkish women.

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[32] George Sandys, A Relation of a Journey begun An: Dom: 1610 (London: W. Barrett, 1615), *STC*. 21726, p.69. See an abridged account in Purchas His Pilgrimes, 1905, VIII, 88-248.

[33] Purchas His Pilgrimes, 1905, X, 426.

[34] William Biddulph, The travels of certaine Englishmen into Africa, Asia and to the Black Sea, finished in 1608 (London: T.Haveland for W. Aspley, 1609), *STC*.3051, sig. A2r.

[35] Biduulph, The travels of certaine Englishmen, p.56.

This inherent paradox in the position and status of the role of Ottoman women is not fully appreciated in present day criticism of drama about the East. For example, aside from a brief mention, the significance of Zabina's actual origins have no bearing on the development of her role in Fermor's edition of Tamburlaine. In other respects, her book is invaluable for discovering the sources of the play and its characters.[36] It is customary to view characters of Eastern women as reflections of the private and domestic lives of alien kings and princes, comparable to those belonging to the Western tradition.

However, with a growing historicist awareness of issues of race and gender, it is necessary to consider that despite their apparent seclusion, the female relatives of Ottoman rulers could wield immense power by virtue of the respect and dignity accorded to them by the Sultans. As exemplified by Safiye and the earlier figure of the Ottoman Sultan Solyman's wife Roxolana, women played a crucial part in the dynastic affairs of their Empire that brought them into the centre of international politics.[37] Consequently, English travel writers and historians of the late sixteenth century acknowledged the power of Eastern women with trepidation and awe.

It is apparent from the case of Safiye that the rights and privileges of women in Turkish areas had the potential of endangering a common European sense of masculine identity. Moreover, the Christian aversion to polygamous institutions such as the Seraglio and the vast wealth at the disposal of Eastern households contributed to creating erroneous impressions of supposed promiscuity that became inextricably associated with Eastern women. The vicarious interest of European readers in these matters provided an incentive for most travelers to the East to dwell on the subject of these women even if they had no means of personally verifying their information. Consequently, the focus shifted to the women who belonged to the Turkish royalty as it was relatively easier for European visitors to learn about them because of their influence on public and administrative affairs. The superiority of Turkish women over others became a common theme.[38]

The lack of reliable information gave the European writers liberty to use their imagination to fill the lacunae. Sensational as well as fabricated assumptions about the daily routine of Eastern women were usually perpetuated and reiterated by the credulous foreign visitors. Clearly, oriental women generated a degree of misconceived speculation and fascination.

Sandys narrated in intimate detail the manners and habits governing the domestic lives of Turkish Sultans and their women. There are lengthy descriptions of the Turkish Seraglios in his famous account of a journey to Constantinople. He recounted in some detail the 'proud Palace of the Tyrant' where 'Luxurie' was the 'Steward, and the Treasure unexhaustable'.[39] He mentioned the Court within this Porte, 'not by Christians ordinarily to be entered, surrounded with the Royall Buildings'.[40] Despite the impossibility of visiting areas allocated to women exclusively, he imagined untold acts of libertinism. The

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[36] See Tamburlaine the Great in Two Parts, ed. by U.M.Ellis-Fermor (London: Methuen & Co, 1930), p.25.
[37] See George Sandys's account in Purchas His Pilgrimes, 1905, VIII, 88-248 (pp.158-159).
[38] See for details, Godfrey Goodwin, The Private World of Ottoman Women (London: Saqi Books, 1997), p.110.
[39] Sandys, A Relation of a Journey, p.32. See also Purchas His Pilgrimes, 1905, VIII, 113.
[40] Sandys, A Relation of a Journey, p.33. See also Purchas His Pilgrimes, 1905, VIII, 114.

most innocuous of bath houses used only by women, led him to state that 'unnaturall and filthie lust is said to bee committed daily in the remote closets of darkesomeBannias'.[41]

These ideas, albeit colored by prejudice against Muslims and flights of imagination without any factual evidence, were translated in dramatic reconstructions of Eastern women. In Marlowe's Tamburlaine the Ottoman Queen, Zabina, is one of the earliest roles depicting Ottoman women. She represents the Turkish women in Tamburlaine even though Renaissance historians knew of the European origins of the Ottoman Sultan Bajazeth's wife. Like many other Ottoman Empresses, she was from Balkan nobility which had maintained close ties with the Ottomans since their conquest of the Byzantine Empire in 1453.

Given the instance of the Venetian women who were the consorts of the contemporary Sultans, Renaissance Englishmen were aware of the anomaly of the mixed genealogy of the Ottoman Kings. Turkish intermarriages with both Asian and European women had led to the birth of a racially integrated dynasty that was Turkish in origin alone. The knowledge of Ottoman genealogy and multicultural society was widely available to historians like Richard Knolles. It is assumed that the Historie of the Turkes was known to Marlowe in manuscript form, among other sources of information about the Ottoman Kings.[42] Jacobean dramatists like Thomas Goffe also used Knolles' work to provide the plot for their plays on the reigns of Murad, Selimus and Biazet in his The Courageous Turk and The Raging Turk. Knolles' chapter on 'Baiazet fourth King of the Turks', clearly describes his wife Despina as 'a ladie of incomparable beautie' who was offered to Baiazet by her brother, Stephen, the Despot of Servia:

> *...she was forthwith honourabley sent to Baiazet; and so to him with great solemnitie and triumph shortly after maried. Of all his wives, he held her deerest, and for her sake restored vnto her brother Stephen the citie and castle of SEMENDRE (otherwise called S. Andrevv) and COLUMBRIUM in SERVIA: She allured him to drink wine, forbidden the Turks by their law; and caused him to delight in sumptuous banquets, which his predecessours Othman,Orchanes, and Amurath neuervsed.*[43]

In this way, the royal Ottoman women, both of Asian and European descent, played a part with far reaching diplomatic implications which directly affected Turkey's socio-economic relations with other Eastern and European governments. Legitimate wives and rival consorts of diverse origins formed a nucleus of contending factions around themselves in their harems and could change the direction of their countries' foreign policies through their influence and proximity to the absolutist monarchs whose decisions were more potent than those of kings who acceded to the throne by hereditary right alone. The Ottomans governed by means of a chosen circle of servants of the Sultan and the elite Janezaries belonging to the Turkish nobility as well as that of the occupied states.

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41 Sandys, A Relation of a Journey, p. 69. See also Purchas His Pilgrimes, 1905, VIII, 150-151.

42 Christopher Marlowe: The Plays and their Sources, ed. by Vivien Thomas and William Tydeman (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), p.79.

43 Richard Knolles, TheGenerallHistorie of the Turkes (London: Adam Islip, 1603), *STC* 15051, p.207.

Alliances with and allegiances to the Ottoman Empire were consolidated by the marriages of this ruling elite with women belonging to either neighboring principalities or conquered states. This was intended to bring the newly acquired nations into the Ottoman fold. These women and their entourage usually converted to Islam, provoking anxieties in Europe of mass conversion of Christian communities into the Islamic fold. There were numerous converts of this kind from Europe who resided in Ottoman territories and had the opportunity to gain high places in the Sultan's service.

The fact that even bond-women, who were captured in wars and had to enter Turkish households, could achieve eminent positions within the Ottoman family continued to surprise Englishmen.[44]Sandys observed this egalitarian treatment of women from conquered territories who were made members of the Ottoman household, and like the rest of the servants of the Porte, were considered the Sultan's slaves. According to Sandys, they were 'taken in warres, or from their Christian Parents' and the one chosen to become the personal companion of the Sultan who bore 'him the first Sonne' was honoured with the Title of Sultana'.[45] It followed from this lack of racial discrimination in the status of women living in the same royal household that the Turks were perceived as using their 'Bond-women with lesse respect then their Wives, and make no difference between the Chidren begotten both of the one and the other: who live together without jealousie'.[46]

Due to the multiplicity of consorts and their progeny, issues of succession were rendered complex and precarious. The conflicts of interest were further compounded by the part played by the daughters, sisters and nieces of the Sultan. Those servants of the state who had proved their dedication to the Ottoman family were usually rewarded with marriages to the close female relatives of the Sultan. This practice led to the notions of the exaggerated powers of the Ottoman harem. Travel writers like Biddulph and Sandys perpetuated misconceived ideas of the tyrannical customs involved in the marriages of Turkish women. Biddulph exaggerated the rights given to Ottoman women to such an extent that he could even imagine the Sultan permitting them to kill their husbands, if they failed to be 'louing, dutifull, and obedient'.[47]Sandys reiterated this with seemingly unequivocal authority when he stated that the Grand Signior's 'Daughters, Sisters, and Aunts, they have Bassas given them for their Husbands: the Sultan saying thus, Here Sister, I give thee this man to thy slave, together with this dagger, that if he please thee not, thou maist kill him'.[48]

Predictably, misconceptions of the cruel and conniving Eastern, usually Turkish, woman gained ground. Sandys' account mentions Roxolana, who also figures in Greville's tragedy of Mustapha. Originally a Circassian bond-woman at Solyman's court, she was granted her freedom by the Sultan so she could marry him and become a legitimate wife with all the religious sanction necessary for the official status. Sandys' perceives a certain

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[44] Reina Lewis, Rethinking Orientalism: Women, Travel and the Ottoman Harem (London: B. Tauris, 2004), p.130. Lewis refers to the right of slaves and concubines to become free after seven years.

[45] Sandys, A Relation of a Journey, p. 74. Also see Purchas His Pilgrimes, 1905, VIII, 158.

[46] Sandys, A Relation of Journey, p. 70. See also Purchas His Pilgrimes, 1905, VIII, 151.

[47] Biddulph, The travels of certaine Englishmen, p.56.

[48] Sandys, A Relation of a Journey, p. 75. See also Purchas His Pilgrimes, 1905, VIII, 159

duplicity in her character. Casting doubts on her sincerity and the means she employed to achieve the respected status of Sultana, he alludes to the Sultan's misguided devotion to her:

> *He cannot make a free Woman his Concubine, nor have to doe with her whom he hath freed, unless hee doe marry her, it being well knowne to the wickedly witty Roxolana...Whereupon she put on a habite of a counterfeit sorrow, which possessest the doting Solyman with such a compassion, that he forth-with gave her freedom, that she might pursue her intention.*[49]

Sandys, in his prejudiced account, continues to attribute the same treacherous inclinations to the contemporary Sultan's wife:

> *This also hath married his Concubine, the mother of his younger Sonne, (she being dead by whom hee had the eldest) who with all the practicess of a politickeStepdame, endevours to settle the succession on her owne, adding, as it is thought, the power of Witch-craft to that of her beautie, she being passionately beloved of the Sultan .*[50]

Ironically, unlike modern critics of Eastern women, the early modern English writers condemned them for the privileges they enjoyed rather than their lack of them. Renaissance writers tended to demonize the Sultan's women, not for their marital status, irregular or otherwise, but because they were central to the functioning of the Ottoman family. Their role in the succession of the new Sultans and their position as the Sultans' favourites also made them formidable figures in the governance of the land. The ensuing palace intrigues and political manipulations by rival aspirants to the succession were evident in the turmoils which embroiled concerned parties and even became known through scandal and rumour to observers of the royal courts. While European writers and travellers could not exaggerate the complexity of the familial conflicts, they did construct mythologies to describe the hidden machinations of the harem, prohibited to all men outside the degrees of consanguinity.

Fears of female government were usually behind this European hostility to the Queens of the East, who were regarded as abusing their sexual power to gain ascendance at the Porte since women could not succeed to the throne by their own right. This was in marked contrast to Western monarchs who, despite being women, could claim the throne by right of primogeniture. Thus, the women of Eastern royalty appeared fundamentally different from Elizabeth I, the most powerful woman in England, who did not have to resort to marriage to maintain her authority. In fact, official iconography insisted on the image of the Virgin Queen in the Elizabethan era even though she played with the idea of marriage as a tool of diplomacy.[51]

However, Elizabeth's position precluded any possibility of marriage which could threaten her independence as the sole monarch of England. The solitary status of the English

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[49] Sandys, A Relation of a Journey, p.74. See also Purchas His Pilgrimes, 1905, VIII, 158-159

[50] Sandys, A Relation of a Journey, p. 74. See also Purchas His Pilgrimes, 1905, VIII, 159

[51] Perry Williams, The Later Tudors: England 1547-1603, The New Oxford History of England (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), pp.284-285.

Queen was therefore in direct opposition to the marital connections of the women of oriental royal families. Their positions were dependent on royal husbands and sons. Consequently, Eastern women presented strikingly different and much more complex systems of inheritance and succession.

English curiosity about the domestic and political aspects of Eastern women and their lives

Preoccupations with the issue of women in power were predominant in Elizabethan and Jacobean societies. Upheavals in the Tudor hierarchy successively brought about the turbulent reign of Mary Tudor, followed by that of Elizabeth I. Indeed, Elizabeth had to reinforce her power by eliminating her rival, in the person of Mary Stuart, and by negating her own femininity as she 'could only secure her status as ruler by transcending the limitations of her sex, i.e. by repudiating it'.[52]

The concern that another female monarch would ascend the throne was all too real in the Jacobean era as well. The notorious Arabella Stuart presented a challenge to James' rule as she was next in line to the throne and some considered her to be better qualified by birth than him. It was for this reason that she was kept under house arrest for years out of fear of her marriage and plots against the throne. After his own mother's execution, James had earlier secured a declaration from Elizabeth that the lady Arabella would not be given in marriage without the 'Kings' consent. Arabella was deprived of ancestral estates and income. She had to dispute the accusations that she had converted to Catholicism or planned to marry without the king's consent. She was, however, surreptitiously engaged in a courtship that resulted in her clandestine marriage and elopement with her husband William Seymour in 1611.[53]

Despite these rather morally questionable behavior exhibited at European courts Negative portrayals of Eastern women designed to personify the evil inherent in the sex, both oriental and occidental, continued to be a feature of Renaissance writings. However, in the Jacobean era, few could surpass the vitriolic style of Joseph Swetnam in inveighing vehemently against women:

> *Eagles eat not men till they are dead, but women devoure them alive for a woman will pick thy pocket, and empty thy purse, laugh in thy face and cut thy throat: they are vngratefull, periured, full of fraud, flo[u]ting and deceit, vnconstant, waspish, toyish, light, sullen, proud, discurteous and cruell, and yet they were by God created, and by nature formed, and therefore by policy and wisedome to bee auoyded; for good things abused, are to be refused.*[54]

The confused logic of the diatribe is embellished by the author, in the tradition of most Renaissance writing, by the use of classical and biblical examples that illustrate the perfidy of women: 'That great Captain Holofernes, whose sight made many thousands to quake, yet he lost his life, and was slaine by a woman'.[55] Further, he adds that 'had not

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[52] AniaLoomba, Gender, race, Renaissance drama(Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1989), p.76.

[53] Karen Newman, Fashioning Femininity and English Renaissance Drama, Women in Culture and Society Series, ed. by Catherine R Stimpson (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1991), pp. 141-142.

[54] Joseph Swetnam, The Arraignment of Levvd, Idle, Froward and Unconstant Women: Or the vanitie of them, choose you whether with a commendation of wise, vertuous and honest women. Pleasant for married Men, profitable for Young Men, and hurtfull to none.(London: Printed by George Penshowe, 1615), *STC*.23534, p. 16.

[55] Joseph Swetnam, p.23.

Holofernesseene the beauty of Judith, and marked the finenesse of her foote, he had not lost his head by her'.[56] The story from The Apocrypha is, typically, subverted by Swetnam, with the intent of displaying Judith's treachery rather than her courageous device in defeating the powerful enemy of her tribe, as it says in the scriptures:

> *Then said Ozais unto her, O daughter, blessed art thou of the most high God above all women upon the earth; and blessed be the Lord God,which hath created the heavens and the earth, which hath directed thee to the cutting off of the head of the chief of our enemies. Judith 13.17*[57]

It is not surprising that, in such an atmosphere of misogynist opinion which turned biblical texts into anti-women tracts with the purpose of expressing the writers' personal attitudes against women, histories and dramas based on the East suffered from a similar bias. From the Elizabethan to the Jacobean age, certain views of women from the Orient remained constant, even though the sources of information became more diverse with the accumulation of orientalist writings. For example, when John Leo's, Booke of the Historie of Africa (1526), was translated into English by John Pory in 1600[58], it proved to be an invaluable source of information about North African societies under Turkish rule. In view of its importance, it was republished by Purchas in 1625.[59]

In contrast to present day Western writers, we find that Leo deplored the rights enjoyed by Egyptian women in Ottoman Law, in the eighth book. Leo deprecated the 'libertie of the women of Cairo' when he described the Turkish fashion of the women who had the freedom to move about the city for legitimate business and family concerns, albeit in the prescribed attire.

> *These women are so ambitious and proud, that all of them disdaineeyther to spinne or to play the Cookes: wherefrom there Husbands are constrayned to buy victuals ready drest at the Cookes shops: for very few, except such as have a great Family, use to prepare and dresse their victuals in their own houses.*[60]

For John Leo, the most disturbing aspect of women's status was the choice granted to women in matrimonial contracts, on the basis of which Egyptian women were also free to divorce their husbands:

> *It falleth out oftentimes that the Wife will complaine of her Husband unto the Judge, that he doth not his dutie nor contenteth her sufficiently in the night season wherupon (as it is permitted by the Mahumetan Law) the women are divorced and maryed unto other Husbands'*[61]

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[56] Joseph Swetnam, p.24.

[57] The Apocrypha according to the Authorised Version (Oxford: Oxford University Press, no date), p.63.

[58] Leo John, Africanus, A geograohicalhistorie of Africa, written in Arabicke and Italian, tr and [with additions] collected by J. Pory (London: Eliot's Court Press imp. G. Bishop, 1600), *STC*. 15481.

[59] See Samuel Purchas, HakluytusPosthumus or Purchas His Pilgrimes, 4 Vols (London: W.Stansby f. H. Fetherstone, 1625), II, *STC*. 20509, containing 'observations of Africa taken out of John Leo his nine Bookes, translated by Master John Pory and the most remarkable things hither trascribed' (pp. 749-851).

[60] Purchas His Pilgrimes, 1905, VI, 22.

[61] Purchas His Pilgrimes,1905, VI, 25-26.

Africanus wrote for a Christian European readership, while he was employed by Pope Leo X, and just like Othello in his vilification of the Turks, Africanus insinuates himself into the idiom of Euro-centrism and thereby positions himself as a legitimate and objective historian. Accounts like Leo's and those before him established the presumed sexual excesses of Eastern women in the minds of European readers, especially since the issue of divorce and remarriage was still contentious and synonymous with adultery in England at the time. However, Leo's method of misrepresentation was based on the establishment of women and dark-skinned Africans as a 'more other' to nullify the otherness of lighter-skinned Muslim man.[62] Consequently, such discourses were felt to be threatening to those who wished to maintain the status quo both in terms of Christian morality and in the traditional relationship between men and women. Women from the 'Orientall parte of the World' were condemned as voluptuaries on the basis of the perceived liberties granted to them in Ottoman Law that prevailed in all territories ruled by the Turks. In fact, the rights granted by Islam to women were, at the time, inconceivable for European women, such as the right to independently own property, inheritance, and enter marital contracts or end them.

Besides Egypt, the Barbary states of North Africa were also under the influence of the Ottomans, if not directly controlled by them. English familiarity with their society and culture is indicated by the lengthy History of Barbarie (1609), written by Ro. C and later republished by Purchas.[63] He mentions the martial tradition of the women who belonged to *Alarbies* and aggressively participated in the deadly feuds that intermittently broke out:

> *In so much that upon losse of any great Lord or Chiefe man of their Bloud, cruellbattailes have ensued, wherin ten thousand men have been slayne at one time, and it is their fashion, the fairest Virgin to ride upon a Camell with a flagge in her hand decked in all pompe to sollicite her Kindred to revenge, and goeth foremost in field, encourageing them to follow; upon which incitement much bloud is spilt, her kindred is loth to lose their Virgin, and not revenge their injuries: the other side striving to winne her and the field, holding that a continuing glory to the seventh Generation.*[64]

The concept of Moorish women acting as agents of justice and avenging the wrongs done to their male relatives is suggested in George Peele's The Battle of Alcazar.The Fair Maid of the West written by Thomas Heywood in a more domestic setting, also refers to the vengeful character of the Moorish Queen. Indeed, Moorish women were not seen to be constrained by the inhibitions of the Turkish women and the former played a more active part in the affairs of their society, both in war and peace.

In view of the unquestionably significant role splayed by these women in their nations' affairs, the conversion of oriental women to Christianity and subsequent reformation of their societies was considered to be a means of bringing about their spiritual salvation. This also provided a means for Europeans to gain access to their realms. The rewards for

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[62] Jonathan Burton, "A most wily bird: Leo Africanus, *Othello* and the trafficking in difference' in Post-Colonial Shakespeares ed. by AniaLoomba and Martin Orkin (London: Routledge, 1998), pp.43-63 (pp.60-61).

[63] Purchas His Pilgrimes, 1625, II, 851-874. See also Purchas His Pilgrimes, 1905, VI, 54-109.

[64] Purchas His Pilgrimes, 1625, II, 872. See also Purchas His Pilgrimes, 1905, VI, 106.

winning souls for Christianity were considered to be both spiritual and material. When Eastern women were, thus, converted by European men their transgression in renouncing their oriental societies was justified and rationalized as proof of their transformation by the nobler cause of religion.

This anti-Turkish and anti-Muslim stance became more obvious at the ascension of James I. The English government made a conscious effort to revise its policy towards the Ottomans, at least in political terms. James envisaged peace with Spain and promoted the idea of pan-European unity. To further the Anglo-Spanish alliance he went so far as to propose the marriage of his son, Charles I, to the Infanta of Spain. The lady rejected the plan and thereby aborted the proposed unity of Catholic and Protestant interests against the Ottomans, a project debated by Francis Bacon in his "An Advertisement Touching an Holy War" (1622).[65]

The radical change of attitude towards the Turks and Moors was due to the Jacobean policy of an aggressive union of British interests with those of Spain and Italy. The new approach reversed many of the treaties Elizabethan England had embarked upon in Barbary with the consent of the Ottoman establishment, during England's conflict with Spain. As Spain had exiled the Moors from the Iberian peninsula and continued to harbour its own designs against the African territories, the Moors felt justified in their war for restitution. The piratical activities of the English navy, which found safe havens in the North African coastal regions, had unofficial approval during the previous reign of Elizabeth I when there was little to distinguish corsair activity from legitimate naval enterprises.[66]

Commenting on Anglo-Ottoman official trade as the 'most positive achievement overseas' for England, Perry Williams refers to this Mediterranean trade as 'highly profitable, probably outdoing all overseas branches of English commerce'.[67] What is of relevance here is his reference to the 'depredations of the English pirates, who found the Mediterranean as fruitful in pickings as the Caribbean'.[68]

Ostensibly it was the Barbary states who were held responsible for this 'piracy', but the English, French and Dutch had tacit encouragement from their governments. The booty from such privateering activities in the Mediterranean was enjoyed by various English members of the Kings Council. Indeed, money acquired from the sale of booty even went to the Lord High Admiral. [69]

It was not surprising that James' efforts to suppress piracy were impeded by English sympathy with the privateers who attacked Spanish shipping. According to Sir Godfrey Fisher, the 'rival countries were clearly more interested in the profit to be extracted from

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[65] The Works of Francis Bacon, ed. by James Spedding and Douglas Denton Heath, VII Vols (London: Longman &Co., 1892), II.

[66] Sir Godfrey Fisher, Barbary Legend: War, Trade and Piracy in North Africa 1415-1830(Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957), p.141.

[67] Perry Williams,The Later Tudors: England 1547-1603, The New Oxford History of England (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), p531-532.

[68] Perry Williams, p. 532.

[69] Chew, The Crescent and the Rose, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1937), p.345.

embroiling each other with the "pirate states" than in uniting for their extirpation, and even within some of those countries themselves there was sharp division between commercial and political interests'.[70] Nevertheless, for some years, Jacobean official propaganda attempted to discredit any English involvement in piratical ventures, either in Barbary or elsewhere.[71]

In actual fact, Englishman like John Ward continued their buccaneering activities, even without the sanction of the government. He was a well known example of the many English 'renegades' who reacted to the change in the political climate by transferring his loyalties to the Moors. So dominant was the issue of piracy that in 1612, Robert Daborne wrote a play based on the fabricated life of this man.[72] The playwright tried to instill in his English audience the moral that God would certainly exact retribution for 'apostasy' even if there was no historical evidence in Ward's life to support this belief.

In 1620, some time before Philip Massinger's The Renegado, was written, an expedition was launched ostensibly to destroy the Barbary corsairs. James sent a fleet of ships under the command of Sir Robert Mansel against the 'Pirats of Argiers'.[73] However, when it reached the Mediterranean it captured no 'Pirats'.[74] The whole enterprise was ineffectual and failed either to prove the much publicized existence of the pirate infestation of the Barbary coast or to justify its own depredations against the maritime vessels in the Barbary region. One of the ships of the fleet brought a prize in the form of a small vessel, carrying 'diverse Moores and Jews, men, women and children, passengers bound from Tituon to Algier, all Turkes saving themselves in their Boat'.[75] The writer recounted his experience with 'two Moores who treated with him concerning the redemption of their people whom our ships had taken, offering for so many Moores, so many English whom they held in town as slaues, hauing bought them off the Turkes'.[76] This indicated that except for emancipating some English captives, the mission accomplished no tangible results. However, it did prove England's determination to maintain its presence in the Barbary region which had continued since Alcazar .

Outside the Islamic lands, the adventures of English merchants in India also attracted the attention of travel writers whose accounts were published in the volumes of Hakluyt and Purchas. These representations of Indian women deserve some note, though it was not until 1600 that the East India Company was established and regular journeys were made

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70 Fisher, p.180.

71 Fisher, pp.169-170.

72 Robert Daborne, A Christian Turn'dTurke or The TragicallLiues and Deaths of the two famous Pyrates, Ward and Dansiker, As it hath been publickly acted by Robert Daborn,Gentleman (London : William Barrenger, 1612). *STC* 6184. See Nabil Matar, Islam in Britain: 1558-1685(Cambridge: University Press, 1998), pp.54-58, for a discussion of the issue of conversion.Gentleman (London : William Barrenger, 1612). *STC* 6184. See Nabil Matar, Islam in Britain: 1558-1685(Cambridge: University Press, 1998), pp.54-58, for a discussion of the issue of conversion.

73 See Newes from Argiers or the proceedings of our royallfleete since their departure from England(London : G. Purslowe, 1621), *STC* 353. 5. See also Purchas, 1905, VI, pp.131-145. In the same volume, see also the relation of the ship ' Jacob' taken by the 'Pirates of Argiers' (pp.146-151) and the recovery of the English ship the 'Exchange' from the 'Turkish Pirats of Argier' (pp.151-171).

74 Newes from Argiers, sig. C4v. See also Purchas His Pilgrimes, 1905, VI, 138.

75 Newes from Argiers, sig. D2r. Purchas His Pilgrimes, 1905, VI, 140.

76 Newes from Argiers, sig. D2v

to ports like Goa. The beginning of the East Indian trade prompted writers to gather as much information as possible about that remote country.[77] Translations of other European travellers' records were published to introduce the English to this fertile land and the prosperity it offered for those who were willing to colonize it, such as the Portuguese and the Dutch.

So great was the number of European colonizing missions to India that rivalries arose between different European nationalities. Ralph Fitch, writing in 1583-91, described these conflicts and the treatment meted out to newly arrived Englishmen in European dominated areas of Goa:

> *Goa is the most principall Citie which the Portugals have in India, wherein the [Portuguese] Vice-royremaineth with his Court. It standeth in an Iland, which naybe five and twentie or thirtie miles about [...]. At our comming we were cast in Prison, and examined before the Justice and demanded for Letter, and were charged to bee spies, but they could prove nothing by us.*[78]

John Huighen Van Linschoten, a Dutch traveller in 1583, wrote about the manners and habits of many of the Indian women who had become Christians either through intermarriage with Europeans or as a result of the work of Jesuit missionaries. In this way many Christian communities were established in India.

Nevertheless, among other Asiatic women he discovered the same catalogue of vices that European travellers perceived in women from the Ottoman territories. The theme of the pride, luxury and lust of Asiatic women was a repetition of the views of other oriental travel accounts.[79]

However, Ralph Fitch noted that, unlike Muslim women, Indian 'Wives here doe burne with their Husbands when they die'.[80] These and other brutal customs are mentioned as novel and unique only to India. The European travellers' tales indicated a level of oppression experienced by Hindu women that excluded them from the power and authority associated with Ottoman women or the aggressive autonomy of the Moorish women. In contrast to these images of dangerous women from Muslim lands, Indian women were seen as requiring emancipation from the tyrannical customs of their traditional society.

There was also a marked attempt by writers to take a relatively sympathetic approach to those oriental women whose nations were considered to be autonomous and not directly ruled by the Ottoman Empire. Efforts were also made by writers hostile to the Anglo-Turkish alliance, to promote images of Tartar, Persian women, hinting at possibilities of their conversion to Christianity if the European mercantile ventures in these territories

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[77] See 'The Voyage of M. Ralph Fitch merchant of London' in Richard Hakluyt, The PrincipallNauigations, voiages and discoveries, 1599, II, Part I, 250-265. Also see this in Purchas His Pilgrimes, 1905, X, 165-204. In the same edition, Purchas also records: 'The Jesuit Obsrvations of India [1599]' (pp. 205-222), and 'HohnHuighen Van Linschoten's his voyage to Goa, and observations of the East Indies [1583]' (pp.222-318).

[78] Purchas His Pilgrimes, 1905, X, 171.

[79] Purchas His Pilgrimes,1905, X, 241.

[80] Purchas His Pilgrimes, 1905, X, 178.

succeeded.[81] It is, therefore, necessary to maintain a distinction in the portrayals of women belonging to the East rather than to conflate or subsume the characters of women from different ethnic backgrounds in early modern plays.

When Hakluyt published records of the Muscovy traffic he also printed medieval histories of Tartar nations which specifically mentioned their women.[82] Among these Tartar races, the CrimTartars received some attention as they were supposed to inherit the Ottoman throne in case the Turkish line failed.[83] It is reasonable to assume that these early works of anthropology, with images of nomadic Tartar women, contributed to the prevailing English concepts about the importance and authority of Eastern women in their societies. For example, Friar John De Plano Carpini's 'Apostolicall' journey to the Northeast parts of the world, in 1246, refers to the crucial role of the royal Tartar women who acted as regents in the absence of their husbands:

> *For it is a custome among the Tartars, that the Courts of Princes or of noble men are not dissolved, but alwayes some women are appointed to keepe and governe them, upon whom certaine gifts are bestowed, in like sort as they are given unto their Lords.* [84]

Given this information attesting to the duties entrusted to Asiatic women in the governance of their nations, characters such as Zenocrate and Zabina need to be reconsidered in any analysis of Tamburlaine and other plays of this genre. It is clear that they are informed by the climate of opinion that favoured the mercantile expansion of England in the East. Conflicting commercial and national interests are evident in the bias of the writers. This affected accounts of Persian women, particularly when juxtaposed against their Turkish counterparts. European writers such as Nicholas Nicholay tended to idealize Persians and assured his readers of the superiority of Persian women:

> *If amongst the women of the East partes, the Persians haue of all auncestrie obtained the laud and prayse to be the most gentle, and proper in their apparrell and cloathing, so are they likewise no less full made in porportion of their bodies and naturall beautie.*[85]

In Tamburlaine, Marlowe exploited the real issue of Turkish and Persian rivalry by assigning his heroine, Zenocrate, a Persian and Egyptian background, as opposed to the Turkish Queen Zabina. Yet, a study of the Renaissance historical material available to Marlowe, did not indicate these associations and most writers of the period merely alluded to the Tartar or Central Asian origins of Tamburlaine's chief consort. In Knolles' words she was the 'daughter and heire of the great Cham of Tartaria' and had no Egyptian, Arabian or Persian ties which appear to be Marlowe's own invention:

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[81] Purchas His Pilgrimes, 1905, X, 238.

[82] The Principal Nauigations, 1599, I, Part I, pp. 53-71. See also Richard Hakluyt, The Principal Navigations, Voyages, Traffiques and Discoveries of the English Nation, 12 vols (Glasgow: James MacLehose and Sons, 1903), I, 50-293 (p. 138, 151, 175, 243-247).

[83] George Sandys, A Relation of a Journey begun An. Dom: 1610 (London: W. Barrett, 1615), *STC* 2273, p.52. Also seePurchas His Pilgrimes, 1905, VIII, 131.

[84] The PrincipallNauigations, 1599, 1, Part I, 67. See Principal Navigations, 1903, I, 168.

[85] Nicholas Nicholay, TheNauigations into Turkie, tr. by Thomas Washington (London: Thomas Dawson, 1585), *STC* 18574, p. 119.

> *Now the Great Cham of Tartaria (his fathers brother) being growne old, and out of hope of any mo children, moued with fame of his nephew, after his victorie sent vnto him diuers presents, and withall offering him his onely daughter in marriage, and with her to proclaime him heir apparantvnto his empire; as in right hee was, being his brothers sonne, and the daughters not at all succeeding in those empires.*[86]

In marked contrast to the Ottoman Zabina, all the virtues of a good Christian wife are suggested in the portrayal of Zenocrate as she supports Tamburlaine in his progress across the Eastern world. The play employs the figures of the oriental women to allude to the idea of Perso-Christian alliance which, historically, took shape in political and strategic as well as religious terms.[87]

These ideas were promoted by the earliest English travellers to Persia, the notorious Sherley brothers whose exploits were enjoyed by the public in pamphlets and plays, were not working under the instructions of the English government. However, they enjoyed informal support from the Earl of Essex[88] and later, from James I. By 1607, they had received considerable publicity for their individual campaigns against the Ottomans, as commemorated in the pamphlet by Anthony Nixon: The Three English Brothers. As suggested in the title page, it was Nixon who popularized the idea of Robert Sherley's 'wars against the Turkes, with his marriage to the Emperour of Persia his Neece'.[89] It was claimed that she belonged to the Persian royal family. In fact she was Teresa Sanpsonia, of a noble Circassian family and a member of the Orthodox Church.[90] However, the story of the Sophy's niece was fabricated by contemporary writers and dramatists alike. The element of romance in The Travels of the Three English Brothers is also based on the niece's supposed conversion and subsequent marriage to Robert Sherley. In an idealized account of Robert's achievements, Nixon wrote of the impression the adventurer had made on the Sophy's 'niece':

In these warres against the Turkes, this younger brother purchased such honour and estimation, as the cousin Germaine to the king of Persia (beeing the widowe of a Duke in that countrey) entred into such liking of his worthiness, as she resolued (with Andromache) to rest her whole estate upon his prowesse...In what affection of hers, was likewise on his part answered with equall proportion so that after their priuate interchanging of faith and troth, their seuerall desires were made joyntly happy in the honourable ende of marriage.[91]

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[86] Richard Knolles, The GenerallHistorie of the Turkes, 1603, p.213.

[87] See Three Renaissance Travel Plays, ed. by Anthony Parr, The Revels Plays Companion Library (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), p.11.

[88] Sir Anthony Sherley and His Persian Adventure: Including some Contemporary Narratives relating thereto, ed. by Sir E. Denison Ross, The Broadway Travellers (London: George Routledge and Sons, 1933), p.13

[89] Anthony Nixon, The Three English Brothers, Sir Thomas Sherley his Travels, Sir Anthony Sherley his embassage to the christitan princes, Master Robert Sherley his wars against the Turkes (London: A. Islip, 1607), *STC.* 18592.

[90] Samuel C. Chew, The Crescent and the Rose: Islam and England during the Renaissance (New York: Oxford University Press,1937), p.299.

[91] Anthony Nixon,π k4r

There can be no doubt that the conflict of interest between traders who desired Ottoman markets and those who wished to revive the English plan of trading to Persia via the Russian routes, led to the complexity of approaches towards the Eastern Empires and their women in the literature of the period.

Some common features, such as licentiousness, wicked extravagance in wealth and riches, and treachery were considered to be common aspects of Asiatic women and the lands they represented. However, the Turkish women stood apart on the basis of their participation in the imperial designs of their male counterparts and their challenge to Christendom.