UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA

RETHINKING EXOTICISM IN SELECTED TRAVEL TEXTS ON PERSIA
BY VICTORIAN WOMEN WRITERS

FARAH GHADERI

FBMK 2013 51
RETHINKING EXOTICISM IN SELECTED TRAVEL TEXTS ON PERSIA
BY VICTORIAN WOMEN WRITERS

By
FARAH GHADERI

Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia, in Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

May 2013
DEDICATION

For Nader, Tara and Daniel—my travelling companions
Abstract of thesis presented to the senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

RETHINKING EXOTICISM IN SELECTED TRAVEL TEXTS ON PERSIA BY VICTORIAN WOMEN WRITERS

By

FARAH GHADERI

May 2013

Chairman: Associate Professor Wan Roselezam bt. Wan Yahya, PhD
Faculty: Modern Languages and Communication

Exoticism in Western travel writing of the colonial era, i.e. travellers’ representations of differences encountered in the contact zone as exotic, has been found by postcolonial critics to be profoundly informed by the asymmetrical power relations between representer/colonizer and represented/colonized. As a result, it is argued that exoticism in these travel texts was appropriative, since it tended to construct the dichotomy of self/other in such a way as to justify colonial interventions in other countries. Even though, recently, there has been much scholarly work theorizing and exploring exoticism, it has skirted around the vital variable of gender by generally focusing on male-authored texts.

This research seeks to rethink and re-examine exoticism by writing gender into its theorization and investigating the impact of the uncertain in-between position of Victorian women travellers in Persia as a colonial context for their responses to the Persians and their cultural practices, as well as their portrayals of self-other relations. It addresses the relatively unexplored area of Victorian women’s travel
writing on Persia and focuses on Lady Sheil’s *Glimpses of Life and Manners in Persia* (1856), Bird Bishop’s *Journeys in Persia and Kurdistan* (1891) and Gertrude Bell’s *Persian Pictures* (1894). I draw from recent scholarship on exoticism and the notions surrounding it, such as cultural translation, appropriation of difference, reflexivity, reciprocity, colonial exoticism, Segalenian exoticism, the “static” traveller and the “exote”, among others, in the textual analysis. The political and Orientalist discourses of the time as well as the degree of political affiliation these travellers had with Britain’s colonial interest in Persia and their religious leanings are deemed crucial factors in moulding their positionality towards the differences encountered in the context of travel. Thus, they are taken into account when scrutinizing the ethnographic representations of Persians in the selected travel texts.

I argue that the ambivalent in-between position of these women travellers in Persia, as an effect of Victorian gender ideology and the concomitant dual affiliations with the British self and Persian other, was positive and empowering for them in the sense that it brought about a flexible viewing positionality towards difference, allowing for a shift between the perspective of the exote and that of the static traveller. This opened up alternative perspectives, other than the conventional Orientalist ones, on the Persians and their culture, which, in turn, allowed for a more nuanced treatment of difference, adding more layering, texture and complexity to exoticism in their travel texts. My findings reveal that there is a plurality of exoticisms in the selected texts, which are too ambivalent, versatile and multi-layered to be reduced to Britain’s political control over Persia. Furthermore, they indicate that exoticism in the hands of these women travellers finds new
directions and significations. Indeed, exoticism in the selected travel texts involves reflexivity and reciprocity and becomes a malleable medium for a dialogue with the self, hence questioning its pejorative connotations in colonial travel texts.
Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk ijazah Doktor Falsafah

PERTIMBANGAN SEMULA UNSUR EKSORTISME DALAM TEKS-TEKS KEMBARA TERPILIH MENGENAI PARSI OLEH PENULIS-PENULIS WANITA ZAMAN VICTORIA

Oleh

FARAH GHADERI

Mei 2013

Pengerusi: Professor Madya Wan Roselezam bt. Wan Yahya, PhD
Fakulti: Bahasa Moden dan Komunikasi

Eksotisme dalam penulisan kembara Barat era kolonial, iaitu tindak balas para pengembara terhadap gambaran berbeza yang dialami di dalam zon hubungan sebagai eksotik, telah dianggap oleh pengkritik-pengkritik pascakolonial sebagai sesuatu yang dipengaruhi secara mendalam oleh ketidakseimbangan hubungan kuasa di antara seseorang yang menggambarkan/penjajah dan yang digambarkan/dijajah. Oleh itu, pengkritik-pengkritik ini menyatakan bahawa eksotisme dalam teks-teks kembara ini telah diadaptasikan kerana ia cenderung membina dikotomi kendiri/‘other’ yang bertujuan untuk mewajarkan campur tangan kuasa kolonial ke atas negara-negara lain. Walaupun karya-karya ilmiah terkini banyak ditumpukan kepada perbincangan dan penerokaan teori eksotisme, namun begitu kepentingan dari aspek jender telah diketepikan kerana pengkritik lebih gemar memberi fokus kepada teks-teks hasil karya penulis lelaki.

Saya ingin menekankan bahawa perihal berbelah bagi posisi ‘in-between’ di kalangan para pengembara wanita di Parsi ini adalah akibat daripada ideologi jender zaman Victoria serta hubungan dwi seiring dengan diri British dan ‘other’
Parsi, merupakan sesuatu yang positif dan memperkasakan kerana ianya telah menjana kedudukan pandangan yang fleksibel terhadap gambaran perbezaan, yang membolehkan berlakunya anjakan kedudukan di antara pengembara eksotik dan statik. Ini telah membuka suatu pandangan alternatif, selain daripada pandangan Orientalis lama terhadap orang-orang Parsi dan budaya mereka, yang sekaligus membenarkan suatu layanan yang berbeza dengan pernambahan lapisan, tekstur dan kerumitan unsur eksotisme dalam teks-teks kembara mereka. Hasil penemuan saya mendedahkan kehadiran eksotisme majmuk dalam teks-teks terpilih yang dianggap terlalu berbelah bagi dan berlapis serta tidak boleh hanya diperkecilkan semata-mata kepada isu penegasan politik Britian ke atas Parsi. Tambahannya, kajian saya menunjukkan bahawa eksotisme yang dipraktik oleh para pengembara wanita ini memberikan arah penemuan baru yang penting. Sesungguhnya, eksotisme dalam teks-teks perjalanan yang dipilih melibatkan refleksiviti dan kesalingan yang menjadikannya suatu medium yang mudah dibentuk untuk dialog kendiri; seterusnya mempertimbangkan semula maksud penindasan dalam teks-teks kembara kolonial.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I feel blessed because God has granted me the fortitude to be persistent in my studies. To Him, all my praises and love. This thesis would not have been possible without the support of many people and institutions. Words fail me in seeking to thank my supervisor, Associate Professor Dr Wan Roselezam Wan Yahya, for her detailed reading of the chapter drafts, invaluable guidance, endless words of encouragement and uncompromising support over the last four years. I am also deeply indebted to the members of my Supervisory Committee, Associate Professor Dr Carol E. Leon and Dr. Shivani Sivagurunathan, for their interest in my work and their insightful comments on the chapters.

I am very grateful to the University of Urmia for giving me the opportunity to further my studies. I also would like to thank the staff of the Faculty of Modern Languages and Communication, particularly Associate Professor Ain Nadzimah Abdullah, the Deputy Dean of Graduate Studies, for her time and support. I also wish to thank the dedicated staff of the Information Management of UPM Perpustakaan Sultan Abdul Samad for their invaluable assistance in providing me with the books and material needed for my research. I cannot sufficiently express my gratitude to Dr Chuah Guat Eng for her class on practical criticism, to Professor Sahar Abdel-Hakim for her valuable suggestions and to all the authors whose work provided me with a wealth of knowledge for my thesis.

I wish to pay heartfelt tribute to my parents, siblings and friends. I shall never forget their moral support, love, daily emails and weekly calls. My warmest thanks
go to my mother for all her daily prayers “at dawn” for me. I am exceptionally grateful to Kak Gharani for his continued support and constant encouragement. I owe a huge thank you to my friends, Nahid, Katie, Qiao Meng, and Akram, for the many discussions we had together and for making my UMP days so enjoyable. I should also like to thank my dear colleague, the late Dr Khezerloo, for his encouraging words, and Brendan for the much needed information about Lady Sheil’s life and the sharp comments on her travel journal.

My own family, my husband Nader and my children Tara and Daniel have been the source of inspiration and delight, they have kept me going through the years. Nader, a special thank you for the endless cups of tea you gave me while writing my thesis, for your unfailing support and unwavering faith in my work. To Tara and Daniel, I hope you will enjoy reading my work someday. I cannot thank you enough for accompanying me through all the stages of this journey, literally and metaphorically. To you, this thesis is dedicated.
I certify that a Thesis Examination Committee has met on 28 May 2013 to conduct the final examination of Farah Ghaderi, on her thesis entitled “Rethinking Exoticism in Selected Travel Texts on Persia by Victorian Women Writers”, in accordance with the Universities and University College Act 1971 and the Constitution of the Universiti Putra Malaysia [P.U. (A) 106] 15 March 1998. The Committee recommends that the student be awarded the Doctor of Philosophy.

Members of the thesis Examination Committee were as follows:

**Shamala A/P Paramasivam, PhD**  
Associate Professor  
Faculty of Modern Languages and Communication  
Universiti Putra Malaysia  
(Chairman)

**Rosl B Talif, PhD**  
Associate Professor  
Faculty of Modern Languages and Communication  
Universiti Putra Malaysia  
(Internal Examiner)

**Ruzy Suliza Hashim, PhD**  
Professor  
Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities  
Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia  
(External Examiner)

**Robert J C Young, PhD**  
Professor  
Department of English  
New York University  
(External Examiner)

______________________________

**NORITAH OMAR, PhD**  
Associate Professor and Deputy Dean  
School of Graduate Studies  
Universiti Putra Malaysia

Date: 26 June 2013
This thesis was submitted to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia and has been accepted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. Members of the Supervisory Committee were as follows:

**Wan Roselezam bt. Wan Yahya, PhD**  
Associate Professor  
Faculty of Modern Languages and Communication  
Universiti Putra Malaysia  
(Chairperson)

**Carol Elizabeth Leon, PhD**  
Associate Professor  
Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences  
University of Malaya  
(Member)

**Shivani Sivagurunathan, PhD**  
Senior Lecturer  
Faculty of Modern Languages and Communication  
Universiti Putra Malaysia  
(Member)

---

**BUJANG BIN KIM HUAT, PhD**  
Professor and Dean  
School of Graduate Studies  
Universiti Putra Malaysia

Date:
DECLARATION

I declare that the thesis is my original work except for quotations and citations which have been duly acknowledged. I also declare that it has not been previously and is not concurrently submitted for any other degree at Universiti Putra Malaysia or any other institution.

FARAH GHADERI

Date: 28 May 2013
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DEDICATION</td>
<td>ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRAK</td>
<td>vi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGMENTS</td>
<td>ix</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPROVAL</td>
<td>xi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DECLARATION</td>
<td>xiii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CHAPTER</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.1 Background to the Study</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2 Statement of the Problem</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3 Scope and Limitations of the Study</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.4 Objectives of the Study</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.5 Significance of the Study</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.6 Conceptual Framework and Methodology</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.6.1 Defining Exoticism</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.6.2 In-betweeness: Split Positionality</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.6.3 Method of Analysis</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.7 Layout of the Chapters</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 LITERATURE REVIEW</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1 Introduction</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2 An Overview of Persia in the East-West Encounter</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3 Anglo-Persian Encounters in the Nineteenth Century</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3.1 Nineteenth-century British Travel to Persia</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3.2 Dominant Literary Texts of the Time</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.4 Women’s Travel Writing: Politics of Gender</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.5 Review of Past Studies: Selected Travel Texts</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.5.1 Glimpses of Life and Manners</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.5.2 Journeys in Persia and Kurdistan</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.5.3 Persian Pictures</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.6 Summary</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 LADY SHEIL’S GLIMPSES OF LIFE AND MANNERS</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1 Introduction</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2 Contextualising Travel: Lady Sheil as a British Memsahib</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3 Colonial Exoticism</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3.1 Great Game: Anglo-Russian Political Rivalry</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3.2 Anti-conquest Exoticism: Translating Cultural Difference</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3.3 Harem Depictions and Persian Women’s Lifestyle</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4 Segalenian Exoticism</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.5 Contradictory Rhetoric: Experience Versus Orientalist Statement</td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.6 Conclusion</td>
<td>127</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4 BIRD BISHOP’S JOURNEYS IN PERSIA AND KURDISTAN 131
4.1 Introduction 131
4.2 Contextualising Travel: Bird Bishop as a Globe-trotteress 132
4.3 Colonial Exoticism 137
  4.3.1 Great Game: Anglo-Russian Political Rivalry 137
  4.3.2 Anti-conquest Exoticism: Translating Cultural Difference 142
  4.3.3 Harem Depictions and Persian Women’s Lifestyle 149
4.4 Segalenian Exoticism 163
4.5 Assertive rhetoric: Religious and Political Entwinement 171
4.6 Conclusion 175

5 GERTRUDE BELL’S PERSIAN PICTURES 179
5.1 Introduction 179
5.2 Contextualising Travel: Gertrude Bell as a Leisure Guest 180
5.3 Segalenian Exoticism 187
5.4 Colonial Exoticism 196
  5.4.1 Great Game: Anglo-Russian Political Rivalry 197
  5.4.2 Anti-conquest Exoticism: Translating Cultural Difference 198
5.5 Undecided Rhetoric: Impenetrable Nature of Cultural Difference 204
5.6 Conclusion 208

6 CONCLUSION 211
6.1 Summary of Findings and Implications 211
6.2 Recommendations for Further Research 219

WORKS CITED 221
BIODATA OF STUDENT 231
LIST OF PUBLICATIONS 232