Staging the Fragility of Eastern Identity in English Drama: A literary Study with Linguistic Insights

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Abstract

The study examines a selection of Oriental plays performed on the English stage during the Restoration and 18th century, focusing on the portrayal of Eastern identity. In these plays, it is a recurring theme that the Eastern characters, including males and females from different social classes, are prepared to deny their culture, and ultimately their own identities, particularly when faced with challenges. Culture is a major constituent of one's identity and presumed to be the shield that protects an individual from external influences that might shake one's self-esteem or a feeling of pride in one's ancestors and heritage. Encountering or interacting with people mainly from the Western culture becomes the real test of Eastern people's pride and their feeling of belonging to their Eastern culture. These plays make a point of highlighting the fragility of the Eastern identity by presenting Eastern characters who have no qualms about denouncing their culture, and even show willingness to embrace the Western culture. The relationship between the West and the East has long since been characterized by conflict and strife. In the minds of many Westerners over the centuries, the Islamic faith has not represented a religion of conviction that invites people to an alternative path to God and fulfills the spiritual needs of its followers. Rather, historical and literary works of the past, along with modern media, have succeeded in creating a misleading perception of Islam as a religion of violence, coercion, and invasion that inevitably leads to a clash of cultures and animosity. This article examines a number of works of drama that, although penned during the period of the Restoration and the 18th century, were based on the earlier published accounts of sailors and European travelers to the East. As written accounts, the negative image drawn by these, often exaggerated and sometimes fabricated, portrayals of Muslim practices and beliefs was confined to a limited audience. However, the tales spun by the dramatic works were performed on stage in front of vast numbers of people, thus helping to make commonplace the misconceptions about Muslims and the doctrine that determines every sphere of their daily lives. As the vast majority of ordinary citizens in the West were very unlikely to interact with Muslims, let alone travel to the East to form their own conclusions, their opinions were easily molded.

Keywords: restoration drama, 18th century drama, Western culture, Eastern culture, identity, fragility

1. Introduction

In modern times, the term "the East" is used to refer to the Asian continent as a whole, including China, Japan, Indonesia, etc. However, the plays under discussion in this article, and the accounts of the European travelers on which they were based, use "the East" in its old, more limited connotation to refer to the Middle East and Turkey. Similarly, one could employ the term "the Orient" as it is used by Edward Said in his book *Orientalism*, to exclusively denote the Arab world and Turkey. Indeed, the terms the East and the Orient are synonymous in this study, carrying the same meaning and referring to the same geographical region. By way of simplification, the author will adhere to the terms "East" and "Eastern" to facilitate the use of their opposites, "West" and "Western".

1.1 The Problem

Beyond the series of religious wars fought mainly for control of Jerusalem and collectively known as the Crusades (1095 - 1291), the interest of the Europeans in the East dates back to the Renaissance, primarily in the mid-15th century, when the European merchants were seeking new routes to the rich spice and silk markets of India and China after the decline of the Empire of the Mongols in the 14th century. However, the hostility that marked the relationship between the Ottoman Turks and European monarchs hindered early genuine cultural interaction between the inhabitants of the two hemispheres. Especially during the peak of the Ottoman Empire's power, the heads of the European countries, which rarely enjoyed widespread internal stability, perceived it as a significant military, political, and religious threat. For this reason, they held an "intense fear of being dominated, destroyed, conquered or spiritually corrupted" by it (Vossler p.13). That fear needed to be countered, and a plausible way of doing so was to create a literary image that diminished the power of the mighty Turks. Having slim prospects of visiting the East, or of meeting any Easterners who might rectify any misconceptions, the Western audiences who flocked to watch the Oriental plays in London and Paris had no other knowledge with which to compare the Eastern characters being presented to them. For the vast majority of Europeans, the Eastern culture remained veiled almost until the collapse of the Ottoman Empire in the aftermath of World War I.

Initially, the meager, and oftentimes inaccurate, knowledge the Europeans had gleaned about the Eastern culture in the former centuries was conveyed primarily through the merchants and the travelers who had visited the East and documented their experiences. Subsequently, these diaries and narratives were adapted in the forms of Oriental tales and tragedies. Angelina Del Balzo (2015) articulates this notion when she says "Most Britons encountered Eastern regions first through their fictional representations" (p. 503). Among the early travelers to the East who, either intentionally or unintentionally, contributed to the misrepresentation of Eastern culture were the German Leonhard Rauwolf (his book Aigentiche Beschrebung der Raß inn die Morgenländer, published in 1582), the Venetian physician Prosper Alpinus (his book De Plantis Aegypti liber, published in 1592), and the two well-known English travelers George Sandys (his voluminous book *A relation of a Journey begun An Dom,* published in 1610) and Robert Withers (his book *A description of the Grand Signour's Seraglio,* published in 1653). John Covel (*Early Voyages and Travels in the Levant*, 1670), Jean Dumont (*A New Voyage to the Levant*, 1696), and Aaron Hill (*A Full and Just Account of the Present State of the Ottoman Empir*e, 1709) were from the second generation of travelers who went to the extreme in distorting the image of the Eastern culture in their accounts. In contrast, Lady Mary Montagu, who accompanied her husband in his embassy to the Ottoman Empire, portrayed a positive picture of the East and simultaneously refuted many of the earlier travelers' falsehoods about the Eastern culture. Lisa Lowe (1991) maintains that the *Turkish Embassy Letters (1717-1718)* "explicitly challenge the received representations of Turkish society furnished by the seventeenth-century travel writers" (31). It was sometimes the case that inaccuracies resulted from the authors' shallow knowledge and misunderstanding of the Islamic culture. Misconceptions could be formed due to language barriers or the limitations put by the Turkish officials on their movements and the places they could access. Other times, the inaccuracy was intentional, either to offer a more exciting spectacle to their audiences, or to purposely distort the image of the East in the minds of the European people, usually motivated by political or religious sentiments. Regardless of reason or motivation, the result was a corpus of dramatic works that can safely be described as "not quite ignorant, not quite informed" (Said p.55).

1.2 Importance of the Problem and Relevant Scholarship

Starting from the Renaissance and continuing into the Restoration and the 18th century, authors who were interested in the East leaned heavily on the travelers' accounts. Playwrights found a particularly rich inspiration for their works. The image of the East, as depicted on the English stage, varied considerably from one playwright to another, depending on their interests and attitude toward the East, or the sources that captured their interest at the time of writing the play. This wide disparity and the sometimes contradictory images of the East show that, at this phase, there was not yet a systematic or hegemonic process of portraying the Orient. This study adopts a position that is analogous but not identical with that expressed by Said in his book *Orientalism*, that "Orientalism was ultimately a political vision" (p. 43). Although Orientalism certainly came to be used for political ends, it is arguable whether that was the original intention. Supporting the idea of the absence of any sort of agenda at this phase, Geoffrey Marshall (1975) states that, in the Restoration, "The playwrights had no ideological guild" (p. 71). Angelina Del Balzo (2015) takes a middle position when she says, "The eighteenth century marks a time when the British Empire was in its early stages" (p. 505). Orientalism, of course, ultimately assumed a "political vision" in the nineteenth century when Britain started to exercise its colonial domination over Asia, in general, and the Middle East, in particular. As more Easterners came under British control, Orientalism offered a framework for justifying that control. If British citizens could be convinced that Easterners, and particularly Muslims, were backward, there could be no objection to taking their lands and asserting domination over them. It could even be argued it was for their betterment and an opportunity for them to learn a more civilized culture.

In recent decades, literary critics have invested their energies into studying the history of the novel from different dimensions, regarding the drama that coexisted alongside the novel since its emergence in the 18th century as merely "a sideshow" (Markley p. 2). Consequently, "there is a great deal of scholarly work yet to be done on the ways in which the theater participates in the 'crises of governance,' that attended Britain's changing imperial and economic fortunes throughout the century" (Markley p. 5). Taking as its focus a small sample of the Oriental plays written in the Restoration and 18th century, this study is the first critical work to examine pre-colonial English drama and its representation of "identity fragility" as a common trait of Eastern characters. The study shows that these characters, rather than upholding and defending their own culture, agree with the Westerners in their view of it as barbaric and ruthless, as opposed to the refined and civil Western culture. Moreover, it shows that Restoration and 18th century playwrights portray the Oriental identity as a fragile set of beliefs and customs that can be easily slipped off when it clashes with the individual's desires or is put in juxtaposition with Western culture. As a consequence, Eastern characters are willing to abandon their Islamic identity and assume what is portrayed to be the superior Western one. This body of Oriental plays contends that this fragility is a factor through all social classes of Eastern society, from ordinary subjects all the way up to the sultans in seraglios. The European audiences could be forgiven for drawing the conclusion that Eastern culture, and in particular the religion of Islam, must indeed be abominable if even the privileged among them can so easily turn their backs on it.

2. Method

This study applied the analysis of the juxtaposition of Eastern culture and Western culture as represented in characters from the two hemispheres. In Oriental plays, Eastern culture with Islam as its foundational component is juxtaposed to Western culture, which is primarily based on Christianity. The two cultures are contrasted in terms of civility, the relationship between men and women, and acceptance of the other. Edward Said's perception of the portrayal of the Eastern culture is referred to but not adopted, simply because the study maintains that during the Restoration and 18th century, England has not yet emerged as a colonial power in the Muslim East per se. This view entails that these Oriental dramas be taken as personal experimentations based on the sources available to the playwrights, rather than as a totalitarian systematic hegemonic project sponsored by a certain political or religious institution.

3. Results

In the light of this approach, this study shows how the Eastern identity is fragile; it can easily be dismantled and abandoned by its adherents when it meets the slightest challenge in the form of Western culture. It is observed that, on the one hand, Eastern characters in these plays easily and bluntly renounce their cultural heritage as being barbaric and cruel and quickly show willingness to embrace the Western culture, which is portrayed as the embodiment of civility and tolerance.

In William Hodson's *Zoraida* (1780), Sultan Selim I is full of criticism for his own culture. Selim's Vizier conspires with Almaimon against his master. After being discovered, he senses that his death is inevitable and implores Sultan Selim to have him executed quickly: "Haste, and call / Your ministers of fate; to instant death / Let me be doom'd" (p. 43). Unexpectedly, Sultan Selim addresses him, saying "Think'st thou Selim / Delight in blood? Altho' his nod determines / The fate of millions, know his soul disdains / The wild barbarity of Eastern monarchs, / Whose thrones are crusted with their subjects' gore" (p. 43). Linguistically, the metaphor "thrones are crusted with their subjects' gore" employs visceral, corporeal imagery, while the stative construction "are crusted" presents bloodshed as a permanent condition rather than a deliberate act, thereby naturalizing violence as intrinsic to Eastern rule. In contrast, Selim's self-presentation through abstract lexical choices—such as the noun "soul" and the verb "disdains"—aligns him with Western ideals of rational morality, linguistically positioning him in opposition to the visceral brutality associated with Eastern rule. The violent language uttered here by the Sultan would suggest that the cruelty of the Eastern monarchs is innate.

Selim's response to the Vizier conjures up horrific images of droves of subjects being slaughtered in repeated events over periods of time. Referring to Eastern monarchs in the plural permits a generalization to be made, thus eliminating the individual identity and asserting the commonality of the action. All Muslim rulers are portrayed as thriving on blood and slaughter, and violence is a cultural issue. It is inevitable that they all suffer from fragility of identity because the very foundation of the culture, Islam, demands killing and tyranny, both of which undermine a stable, balanced existence. Sultan Selim is used as a mouthpiece to express the idea to the Western audience that Eastern rulers habitually and abhorrently slaughtered their subjects, and the Sultan states that the thrones of his ancestors were established and preserved by bloodshed. Consequently, following the propagated Western idea of the preferred relationship between a ruler and his subjects, Selim tells his Vizier that he would rather "be lov'd, not dreaded" (p. 43). Selim's pretense to civility and abhorrence of violence is motivated by his attraction to Zoraida, the female orphan at the Egyptian court, who is in love with Almaimon. Even though the Vizier's crime is treason and warrants capital punishment in both the East and the West, Selim chooses not to punish his Vizier, but to forgive him and give him a second chance to show his loyalty.

The fragility of identity is apparent in both male and female characters in the Oriental plays. In William Davenant's *The Siege of Rhodes* (1656), Roxolana, the Sultaness, is under no pressure to trivialize her religion, she tells Ianthe, the Sicilian war captive, that "Religion is but a public fashion here" (355), meaning that Islam was merely a veneer in the Empire of her husband, Sultan Solyman. From a linguistic perspective, the term "fashion" connotes a social practice that involves appearance, temporality, and even superficiality, which sharply contrasts with the connotation of the term "religion", conventionally associated with essence, sacredness and 'metaphysicality.' The particle "but" adds to Roxolana's belittling of her religion (Islam), for it functions not only as a restrictive but also as a dwarfing agent. Moreover, presenting Roxolana's notion about Islam in a metaphor rather than in a simile is meant to assert the equivalence between Islam and fashion.

Roxolana's jealousy and ire are provoked by the presence of Ianthe in the seraglio, and aggravated by Solyman's repeated praises of Ianthe's virtues and character. The Sultan clearly believes that Ianthe's goodness stems from her Christianity, saying, "O wondrous virtue of a Christian wife" (p. 270), and in another place: "Thou great example of a Christian wife" (p. 271). Roxolana's jealousy pushes her to go back on a promise not to harm Ianthe, and when the latter reminds her that a promise, according to Islamic teachings, must be adhered to, Roxolana distorts the teachings of her faith to meet the needs of the moment, arguing that Islam allows a person to break a promise to a non-Muslim, saying, "Those seals were counterfeit, and pass / For nothing, since my sealing was / But to a Christian when I seal'd to you" (p. 355).

In a lengthy conversation in which Roxolana seeks confirmation from Ianthe that the "rumour" that Western women are free to make visits and be visited by men is true, she wistfully states that "This would in Asia wonderful appear" (p. 343). Her bitter envy of Western women manifests itself: "These Christian turtles live too happily" (p. 343), and she expresses her wish that, one day, such freedom be granted to Eastern women as Western culture comes to exert greater influence in the Orient: "But time may introduce that fashion here" (p. 343). Roxolana further questions Ianthe about the relationship between husband and wife in Western culture, prompted by her own painful relationship with Sultan Solyman. She asks if Ianthe's husband Alphonso is "Civil by day, and loyal too at night" (p. 343). When Ianthe responds that he is so "By nature, not by skill", Roxolana applies the same rationale to Eastern men, in general, and to her husband, in particular, arriving at the conclusion that Eastern men must be inherently cruel by nature. Her fervent wish is that Western men "would to Asia fly" (p. 343) to tutor Eastern men on the correct treatment of women.

Aaron Hill's *Zara* opens with a conversation between two slaves to the Sultan. Selima, the Muslim woman, chides Zara, the French captive, for showing signs of adaptation to the life in the seraglio. She questions why Zara no longer cries and longs to return to her own country: "You meditate no more, those happy climes" (p.31). Zara is becoming accustomed to captivity, but Selima rails against it, expressing her own distress at being held in "A barr'd seraglio! __ sad, unsocial life! / Scorn'd, and a slave!" (p.31), rather than being at

liberty to live life as an equal to her husband. She gives a glowing account of what she believes to be the situation of a Western woman: "Free, without scandal; wife, without restraint; / Their virtue, due to nature, not to fear!" (p.31). Clearly, Selima is disenchanted with a culture that dooms women to confinement and consequently to despair. Selima aspires to live like women in Europe where people are civilized and women receive respect from their husbands, enjoying equality and freedom, and are mature enough to preserve their virtues without rigid protections. Hill announces the dissatisfaction of Eastern women, even those who live in luxury, to the Western audience in no uncertain terms, glorifying the life of Western women in comparison.

The study concludes that, by the unjust portrayal of the Eastern culture, these plays distorted Islam and Islamic culture in the eyes of English audiences, setting the precedent for numerous forms of media from that era to the present time. Moreover, they prepared the British people to approve of the country's colonial project in the Muslim World which was launched in the second half of the 19th century. The British mind was already primed to see the inhabitants of the East, and in particular the Muslims, as backward and in need of 'saving' from their cruel and violent religion. The advent of cinema, starting in the age of silent movies, brought exotic, villainous, and sensual Eastern characters to the attention of an even wider audience in the West. The trope of the Easterner as a dangerous but romantic abductor of Western women was firmly established in such early films as *The Sheik* (1921) and its sequel *The Son of the Sheik* (1926), both of which starred the Italian actor Rudolph Valentino.

4. Discussion

4.1 Subjects and Sultans

In *The Siege of Damascus* (1720), John Hughes attributes this fragility even to Khalid bin Al-Waleed, the leader of the Muslim armies, renowned in Islamic history as a staunch Muslim and a formidable warrior. Referred to as Caled in the play, he is one of the companions of Prophet Mohammed, and is introduced as the "Great captain of the armies of the faithful" (p. 31). In a dispute over how to conduct the war against the Romans in Syria, Abudah, a general serving under Caled, advocates for minimal bloodshed. Caled, on the other hand, supports his opposing argument with the notion that the Prophet Mohammed promoted widespread slaughter over peaceful conquest, telling Abudah, "His own example points us out the way" (p. 32). In one of his encounters with the Romans in Syria, Caled passionately raises the battle cry, "Slaughter, do thy work!" (p. 61), believing that the killing of the maximum number of Romans possible would gain favor with the Prophet Mohammed, and ultimately the God of Mohammed.

While Caled appears steadfast in his faith when urging his army to battle, he then displays his readiness to cast aside this seemingly strong devotion to Islam and the Prophet. When he sustains a mortal wound in combat with a Roman general named Phocyas, he is shocked because, as a fighter for the faith of Mohammed, he believes that God and Mohammed are on his side and will therefore protect him from defeat at the hands of the enemies of Islam. Facing death, he loses not only his enthusiasm for his faith, but also his belief in Mohammed as a prophet going as far as to blaspheme against Mohammed, saying "False Mahomet! Is this then my reward?" (p. 62). Islamic teachings assert that martyrs are not only guaranteed paradise, but can intercede for seventy of their family members. Caled's conviction in this belief is far from rock solid. Evidently, he is not willing to die for his faith which he adopted purely to satisfy his appetite for fame, glory, and bloodshed. The rapidity with which he turns from being a staunch defender of Islam to one who loudly denies the Prophet illustrates the fragility of his identity as an Easterner. Obviously, Islam does not temper Caled's heart, but only his sword, and once the latter fails him, his Islamic identity likewise collapses and fails. This play abuses literary license to the point of pure distortion of the truth. The life of Khalid bin Al-Waleed is extremely well documented, and it is known that, upon his death bed in Syria in 642, he lamented the fact that he had not died in battle, but rather "like a camel" in his bed.

Skin color is an additional burden on the self-esteem of Eastern characters in the Oriental plays. They often express the view that their shades of brown or black render them inferior to the Westerners with their fair complexions. In Aphra Behn's *Abdelazer* (1676), the title character, despite being of royal lineage and having the favor of Isabella, the Queen of Spain, feels inferior due to his skin color, seeing himself in the play as a "victim of public opprobrium" (Birchwood p. 3). In a telling encounter, Alonzo, Abdelazer's rival for the love of Leonora, the Queen's daughter, does not refer to the latter's skin color, but simply asks Abdelazer if the Queen was to be found with him. The latter answers defensively, saying, "The Queen with me! with me! a Moor! a Devil! A Slave of Barbary! for so Your gay young Courtiers christen me" (p. 5). Interestingly, he employs the disparaging epithets used by Westerners of the time to describe Muslims. Even though Abdelzaer professes to have converted to Christianity, he is aware that the Christians surrounding him at court still regard him as a Muslim and therefore a barbarian. Moreover, his conversion does nothing to alleviate his concerns that his color puts him at a disadvantage. He continues: "Although my Skin be black, within my Veins / Runs Blood as red, and Royal as the best" (p. 5). Abdelazer's misplaced retort betrays his feelings of inferiority based on his skin color and he finds himself pushed to compensate for that by reminding his rival that he is a prince and therefore equal to him in social status.

When it becomes apparent that Leonara prefers Alonzo, the white European, over Abdelazer, the black Easterner, the latter's feeling of inferiority becomes overwhelming. Leonara asserts that the two are equal in valor, both being of noble lineage, yet she chooses Alonzo because "Nature has laid out in Beauty on his person" (p. 57). Thus, Abdelazer concludes that it is his dark skin that repels the young white woman he hopes to marry. Humiliated and bitter, he rants, "Curst be my birth, / And curst be Nature, that has dy'd my skin / With this ungrateful colour! Cou'd not the Gods / Have given me equal Beauty with Alonzo?" (p. 57). We must note the use of the plural "Gods", which is significant since Abdelazer's original religion, Islam, and his newly adopted Christianity only recognize one God. Playwrights of the era often had characters call on "the gods", falling back on their Greek and Latin education. This outburst shows his

inability to control his temper, which further puts him in a bad light. His perception of why he has lost out on the love of Leonora leads Abdelazer to renounce his ethnicity and identity as an Easterner, as well as pushing him to create destructive conflicts in the Spanish Court which eventually result in horrible crimes, making the play qualify for the label "full-blooded tragedy" (Birchwood p. 2).

Shakespeare's plays were performed regularly on the Restoration and 18th century stage, sometimes with slight changes to the plot to suit the taste of the Restoration audience. Like Abdelazer, the Prince of Morocco in Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* (1598) also displays feelings of inferiority due to his skin color. These feelings are betrayed in the Prince's opening gambit in wooing the young Italian, Portia, where he urges her to "Mislike me not for my complexion" (p. 260). His fear that she will judge him for his color rather than for his character reveals poor self-esteem, although he does get on to say that, in terms of valor and love, he would challenge the whitest of the Western men: "Bring me the fairest creature northward born . . . To prove whose blood is reddest, his or mine" (p. 260). However, he appears apologetic when he explains to Portia that his dark complexion is a result of the hot sun of the East, claiming this hue is much admired by the beautiful young women of the East. However, this confidence proves to be superficial when he states: "I would not change this hue, / Except to steal your thoughts, my gentle queen" (p. 260). Interestingly, rather than applauding him for this gesture, Portia says that she has no problem with his color: "Your self, renowned prince, then stood as fair / As any comer I have looked on yet / For my affection" (p. 260). Portia's response goes some way to reassuring the diffident Prince and he thanks her for the compliment, but his feeling of inferiority clearly lingers.

Despite the fact that the sultan was the highest authority in the Ottoman Empire and regarded as the protector of the Islamic faith, even the sultan in more than one Oriental play is given a fragile character. Whereas English drama usually drapes European kings with a majestic aura which distinguishes them from their subjects, that aura is not afforded to the sultans who are, rather, usually marked by two common traits: tyranny and lasciviousness. They are untrustworthy villains, governed by violence, lust, and avarice, leaving no balance between what John Killeen calls "the nature of the relation between royal essence and royal figure" (p. 217). Examples of such characters are to be found in Mary Pix's Sultan Ibrahim, in *Ibrahim, The Thirteenth Emperor of the Turks* (1696), and in the Sultan Osman in Aaron Hill's *Zara* (1736). In these cases, the fragility of identity does not exist due to misfortune, like Caled, nor due to skin color, like Abdelazer. The feeling of insecurity that afflicts these fictional sultans stems from unfulfilled sexual desire. Their positions of power should mean that they can have any woman, yet in the face of desirable Western women, they feel that their power is diminished. We see Pix's Ibrahim willing to renounce his culture only to please a Western captive, his sensuality overriding his status as sultan, resulting in the Mufti describing Sultan Ibrahim as a "licentious Tyrant" (p. 24) and "Lustful Sultan" (p. 26). In Hill's play, Sultan Osman seeks the acceptance of his Western captive Zara, and plainly expresses his disapproval of the practices of his ancestors: "The Sultans, my great ancestors, bequeath'd / Their Empire to me, but their taste they gave not; / Their laws, their lives, their loves, delight not me: I know, our prophet smiles on am'rous wishes / And opens a wide field, to vast desire" (35-36). Osman's repetition of the pronoun "their" highlights his efforts to distance himself from the traditional behaviors of his forebears. Moreover, he is not only prepared to refute his heritage, but also unfairly attributes excessive sensuality to the Prophet Mohammed. Paradoxically, Osman claims that he denounces the practices of previous sultans but it is his sexual desire for Zara that leads him to do so. Zara, the proud Christian who believes that "the cross she wears has the power to engender strong affective responses both in her and others" (Del Balzo p. 514), hears "with joy" that the Sultan's "passion" is "so unlike" those of his predecessors (p. 36). Encouraged by her approval, he continues on, saying "Passion, like mine, disdains my country's customs" (p. 36). Zara provides a stark contrast to this abominable culture, telling Selima how much more harmonious life is among Christian society: "I honour, from my soul, the Christian laws, which, soft'ning nature, by humanity, / Melt nations into brotherhood; -- no doubt, / Christians are happy; and it is just to love 'em" (p. 34). It is apparent that Zara's language in universalizing Christianity –"Melt nations into brotherhood"— is meant to introduce Christianity as a substitute to Islam. The adjectives "softening" and "humane" qualify Christianity for such a position, for it becomes spiritually fulfilling as well as emotionally. Killeen (1976) maintains that in one type of Restoration drama "an over-riding duty to the state brings about conflict of duty with sentiment" (p. 220). This is not true in the case of the Eastern sultans who, when faced with such a conflict, conveniently choose to side with sentiment.

Not satisfied with verbally deriding his culture, Osman takes steps to act in contradiction to it. Following Eastern tradition, Orasmin, Osman's officer, has asked Nerestan, a Christian captive, to wait outside the Sultan's private chamber, described as "This place, long sacred to the Sultan's privacies" (p. 37). Sultan Osman breaches deeply rooted custom, implemented by Easterners to protect their women from strange males, by ordering Orasmin to admit Nerestan to his private room where he converses with his beloved Zara; "Go—bring him with thee" (p. 37). He asserts that he "think[s] with horror on these dreadful maxims" (p. 37) and leans towards the Western viewpoint: that "Restraint was never made for those we love" (p. 51). In his usage of the evaluative terms "horror" and "dreadful", Osman casts Eastern culture in a bad light and bolsters the Western moral judgment of the practice of keeping women secluded. The phrase "Eastern maxims" can be taken to embody the entirety of traditional practices of the East which are perceived as undesirable by the West. The fact that the Sultan himself gives voice to this opinion, through which the fragility of his identity is illuminated, gives it greater impact in the minds of the audience. It should be noted that, in the Eastern culture, jealousy is not a totally negative passion; in some cases, it is even commended and the want of it is condemned. In particular, a husband's jealousy is most necessary as it fuels his desire to protect his wife from strangers. Jealousy, however, becomes another Eastern trait that Osman claims to "shun" to prove his devotion to Western culture, a culture that takes a dim view of jealousy and consistently warns against the evils arising from it.

As is the case with other Easterners, Osman's embrace of the Western culture proves to be a superficial and fleeting one; being an Easterner, his jealousy is aroused as he observes the way Nerestan looks at Zara. However, he strongly protests when Orasmin advises

him against succumbing to jealousy. Remembering his implicit commitment to Zara to shun all Eastern manners, he becomes exasperated, replying angrily, "Jealousy, said'st thou? I disdain it; ….. Jealous! — I was not jealous." He adds "Distrust is poor, and the misplaced suspicion / Invites, and justifies, the falsehood fear'd" (p.39). Osman's rapid emotional escalation, displayed in his repetition of the word "jealous", coupled with the introduction of a string of negative abstract nouns (distrust, falsehood, fear) reveal his growing emotional instability. The inference is that Western moral codes are needed to stabilize, or perhaps ultimately replace, fragile Muslim identity. Osman knows that jealousy is viewed by Westerners as a sickness and, if he is to live up to Zara's expectations, he must show no signs of it. In English drama, jealousy has usually been portrayed as a sickness, and characters plagued with it usually feel ashamed of themselves and their doubts prove to be baseless. Shakespeare's *Othello* is an outstanding example of how unbridled jealousy causes the downfall of a well-respected man, pushing him to commit murder. In William Davenant's *The Siege of Rhodes* (1663), Alphonso chides himself for feeling jealous of Sultan Solyman when his wife Ianthe defends Solyman and describes him as a "generous and true" man (p. 284). Ianthe labels Alphonso as "sick" for harboring such an "unnatural evil" (p. 33) in his heart. Ashamed of himself for falling prey to such an abhorred passion, Alphonso laments his pathetic condition saying, "Oh, Jealousy (if Jealousy it be) / Would I had here [referring to his heart] an Asp instead of Thee!" (p. 284). Interestingly enough, Laura Brown states that "Proximity might make Alphonso's jealousy seem justified" (p. 5), which could be interpreted as meaning that Alphonso's presence in the East has made him vulnerable to contracting the destructive passion of jealousy because it so prevalent. The location also obliges him to interact with men who can't be trusted with women, thus, it could be argued that he should be forgiven. In contrast, Osman does not succeed in his attempts to either control or hide his jealousy. Eventually, he is overwhelmed by the emotion and reverts to his Eastern culture. Not only does he threaten to punish with death "the audacious slave" if he dares to enter again, but also to make his death a lesson to Zara "To teach the faithless fair, to feel my anger" (p. 59). The fire of his jealousy, as he indicates, would burn both Zara and Nerestan.

A number of plays promote the notion that the relationship between the Eastern monarchs and their subjects is based on mistrust and fear. In Charles Johnson's *The Sultaness* (1717), Osmyn, an officer in Sultan Amurat's army, reports to Acomat, the Grand Vizier, on the opinion held by the Janissaries of the Sultan, saying, "They fear him, Sir, and whom they fear, they hate" (p.2). Historically, the Janissaries in the Ottoman Empire were the special force devoted to protecting the Sultan and renowned for their loyalty to him. Johnson distorts this relationship and depicts the Sultan as a tyrant who is feared and hated by his guards. In Samuel Johnson's *Irene* (1749), Abdalla, one of Sultan Mohamet's officers, employs hyperbolic metaphor to impress upon the listener the awe in which his master is held: "At his dread name the distant mountains shake / Their cloudy summits, and the sons of fierceness . . . Distrust the' eternal fortresses of nature, / And wish their gloomy caverns more obscure" (p.24). Such wild exaggeration presents the power of the Ottoman Empire as being grounded in theatrical spectacle rather than moral legitimacy. The Greek captive at court, Aspasia, belittles this bombastic show of pride, telling Abdalla to "Forbear this lavish pomp of dreadful praise" (p.24).

The fear and mistrust between the two parties is painted as reciprocal. The Sultans also fear mutiny and betrayal on the part of their subjects. In Davenant's *The Siege of Rhodes* (1656), Sultan Solyman admits to his son Mustapha and his officer Pirrhus that he constantly seeks to occupy his Janissaries with warfare, not necessarily with the aim of spreading the faith or increasing his dominions, but rather to keep them busy so they do not think to turn their swords against him: "For I shall find my peace / Destroy'd at home, unless / I seek for them destructive War abroad" (p. 20).

The facile and stereotypical tableau of the overriding mutual distrust between the despotic Eastern monarch and his savage subjects is set in direct juxtaposition to the notion that Western monarchs and their subjects maintain a harmonious relationship. For instance, in Isaac Bickerstaff's *A Peep into the Seraglio* (1767), Roxalana, the English captive, paints an idyllic picture of English life for Sultan Solyman, saying that there "reigns ease, content, and liberty; every citizen is himself a king, where the king is himself a citizen" (p. 314). Her simplistic description contrasts the healthy and civic relationship maintained at the English court with the sinister environment of the Eastern court that is, according to her, marred with oppression and subjugation.

4.2 Barbarous East

Easterners in Restoration and 18th century drama are remarkably aware of their own barbarity, and candidly reveal that the attacks they launch on other nations are not, as is the assumption, to promote their faith, but for an innate obsession with power and domination and the love of destruction. Their ultimate goals are to plunder the wealth of other nations and satisfy their thirst for bloodshed. The West's fear that the Ottomans would someday overpower them and seize control of land and resources can be detected. In *The Siege of Rhodes* (1656), Roxolana, the wife of Solyman, criticizes her husband for his obsession with war and his intent to destroy other civilizations:

> . . . to meaner conquests go!
>
> To wars, where you may sack and over-run,
>
> Till your success has all the world undone
>
> Advance those trophies which you ought to hide (p. 348)

Roxolana explains that her husband's obsession with wars springs from his unquenchable appetite for fame and power achieved through destruction and slaughter. She feels that this insatiable appetite will drive him to keep destroying one city after another until he tears down human civilization. The fact that Roxolana, a Muslim woman in a privileged position, uses verbs of plunder— "sack", "over-run"— points to her belief that Islamic conquests are sought with a sly, underhand objective rather than as a result of spiritual motivation. It

implies that these military expeditions are carried out purely for the sake of plunder and killing, with no moral justification, and thus, they should induce a sense of shame in Muslims. Religion, therefore, provides rhetorical cover for the perceived reality that Muslims are fully aware that their religious claims are deceptive and conceal a quest for power. This undermines the image of a Muslim with a stable identity based on the foundations of earnest religious convictions. Like Osman, Roxolana functions as a member of the fifth column, undermining Islamic culture from within, or practicing what could be termed as internal Orientalism.

While the goal of the Ottoman sultans is fame and domination, spoils and bloodshed seem to be the goal of their soldiers. Daran, one of the Muslim officers in John Hughes's *The Siege of Damascus* (1720), protests against any sort of treaty with the Romans of Syria that would deliver Damascus to the Muslims without fighting. Belittling any conquest that comes through a treaty, he admonishes his superiors, Abudah and Caled, reminding them that they are not "merchants" to seek out a treaty, to poorly buy a victory with "conditions" (p. 10). He declares his support "for war and plunder" (p. 10). Daran here makes it clear that his priorities do not lie with spreading the faith of Islam, which is more attainable by peaceful methods, but rather with his thirst for blood and the desire to accumulate wealth. Later, when Abudah rebukes him for gathering jewels as spoils of war, he instantly breaks away from his faith and abuses the Prophet, whom he mockingly describes as a thief; "Was not the founder of our law a robber?" (p. 37). When Daran is deprived of his plundered wealth, his enthusiasm for fighting diminishes, showing the superficial nature of his faith which serves merely as camouflage to satisfy his barbaric tendencies.

Caled, the commander of the army, shows little interest in war spoils. His obsession is with slaughter and his ultimate goal is to kill as many Romans as possible. Instead of honoring the agreement with the Romans of Damascus which was based on resigning the city peacefully, he resorts to fighting to conquer the city. Abudah reminds him that a Muslim's "vow is sacred" and, as a Muslim, he must honor his agreement with the Romans. Also, as a "companion of the prophet", he is bound to behave accordingly (p. 45&46). Caled brushes aside Abudah's words and violates the agreement, disregarding the commandments of Islam in his desire to satisfy his thirst for blood. It is evident that, for Caled, Islamic precepts can be bent to convenience. Upon breaking the eastern gate of Damascus, he calls to his soldiers, saying: "Kill, I say . . . More blood! Our prophet asks it" (p. 45). Like Daran, Caled interprets his religion in a manner that serves his own ostensibly barbaric nature. Abudah beseeches him to consider the Prophet as a role model for civic behavior, but he insists on seeing him as a perpetrator of slaughter.

The severity of the Eastern rulers and the mistrust between the rulers and their subjects is another contributing factor to the fragility of the Eastern identity in Restoration and 18th century drama. These plays lay forth the notion that the cruelty so often found in the Eastern sultans and their military officers is inherent in Muslims, springing, as conjectured by the playwrights, from the example of the Prophet Mohammed. In Voltaire's *Mahomet, The Prophet*, published and performed in France in 1741 and performed in London in 1744, the title character viewed others around him, including his followers, as "blind" and would not tolerate any form of dissent in his state. When Zopir, a non-Muslim chieftain, warns him that the other tribes may rise against him, he replies "The sword and the Koran in my blood-soaked hands would impose silence upon anyone else" (p. 22). Associating the sword with the "Koran" here drives home the Western perspective that those two things are inextricably linked and that the sword that is drawn against the subjects is supported by the teachings in the holy book of Muslims. The notion that the Prophet promotes cruelty through his teachings is also addressed in Eliza Haywood's *The Fair Captive* (1721). Isabella, the Western captive, tells Alphonso, her lover, that his "Case has been related to the Mufty, /And in their Prophet's Name, he votes thy Death" (p. 41). Alphonso does not direct his anger at Mustapha, the Grand Vizier, who refers his case to the Mufti, nor at the Mufti who issues the severe punishment, but at the Prophet of Islam. Alphonso sees Mohammed and his teachings as being responsible for forming the culture of brutality that he observes in Muslims, and thus says, "Curse on their Prophet, and his bloody Laws" (p. 41). This notion of ruling through force and fear is emphasized in William Davenant's *The Siege of Rhodes* (1656). Adopting a very severe and threatening tone, Sultan Solyman commands his Officer Pirrhus to "Range all the camp for an assault" and to tell the soldiers that "they tread in graves who make a halt" (p. 268). Solyman concludes: "hence from my anger fly! Which is too worthy for thee, being mine, / And must be quench'd by Rhodian blood, or thine" (p. 268). Solyman's lust for bloodshed is not reserved for his enemies, but also extends to his troops and officers. Top officers are threatened with losing their heads if the Sultan's orders are not executed properly, and death awaits any soldier who is not enthusiastic in performing his duty to fight.

In *The Siege of Constantinople* (1675), Henry Neville Payne reveals the Westerners' perception of the Turkish sultans' severity as a danger to humanity. The Sultan has ordered the execution of a great number of men he has deemed to be traitors. Criticizing this action, Theophilus, the Chamberlain of the Emperor of Constantinople, says "This Turkish way of rule threatens the world" (p. 87). Expressing his approval of the Sultan's decision, Synan, one the Sultan's Bassas, contradicts the Chamberlain, saying, "This is the way to govern: / Severity, not mercy, strengthens power" (p. 87). The linguistic dimension reveals a marked juxtaposition here of the nouns "severity", representing the inherent Muslim style of rule, and "mercy", the Western standard of government. Force is the prevailing factors of the Eastern ruler's character, while values only come into play when it is politically expedient.

A similar stand is taken by Daran, in John Hughes' *The Siege of Damascus* (1720), when he opposes signing a peace treaty with the Romans in Damascus, telling Abudah and Caled, his military superiors, that they "were sent to fight the Caliph's battles, / Till every iron neck bend to obedience" (p. 10). Etymologically, the term caliph means the one who assumes leadership of the Muslim state after the death of the Prophet. Daran is aware that fighting the battles of the Caliph means fighting the battles of the Prophet. In other words, by choosing to fight rather than strike a treaty, he abides by the teachings of the Prophet. Caled adopts the same stance, assuring that his faith requires that: "'t is our task . . . to fight; our law enjoins it. / Heaven, too, is promised to the valiant. / Oft has our prophet said, the happy

plains / Above, lie stretch'd beneath the blaze of swords" (p. 10). The use of the metaphor "beneath the blaze of swords" glamorizes and glorifies the savagery of war, while simultaneously enforcing the widely held view that Islam was spread exclusively through violent conquest. Consequently, we can see that when Eumenes, a Roman official of Damascus, describes Muslims as "hungry bloodhounds of the war" (p. 10), he is not being harsh or unjust. Rather, he is merely recounting their religious practices, as portrayed in these plays and propounded by the ideology of Orientalism.

The Oriental dramas that form the focus of this study make it apparent that a major contributor to the fragility of Eastern female identity is the trivialized status that women hold in the culture. Eastern men in these plays openly state that they do not consider women to be their partners or peers in life, but merely sexual beings created to please them. This demeaning view of women creates a rift between Eastern women and their culture and makes them yearn to assume the Western identity. In Hannah Cowley's *A Day in Turkey*, performed in 1791, Mustapha reveals in a conversation with the Western captive Alexina, that the Eastern culture strips women of all intellect when he says: "a woman's virtue with us, is to CHARM, and her religion should be love" (p. 12). Eastern women feel degraded by this diminished role assigned to them by their culture and they admire Western women as their role models and yearn to be emancipated like them.

This notion of Eastern women railing against their confinement and yearning for respect and the chance to live like their Western counterparts is displayed in Hannah Cowley's *A Day in Turkey*, performed in 1791. In the Bassa's harem, the Eastern women envy the French women for having kind husbands like A La Greque, the French captive. Unlike the Eastern men, A La Greque shows kindness to the harem women, treating them as ladies of the palace rather than concubines owned by the Bassa. Upon his departure, he recognizes their life of confinement and humiliation, directing a plea to God on their behalf, saying, "heav'n bless ye all, and send to each LIBERTY and a HUSBAND" (p. 70). One of the women comments, ruefully, after he leaves "How happy must Frenchwomen be to have such lovers for husbands" (p. 70).

4.3 Victorious West

Less than satisfied with her marital relationship with Sultan Solyman in Davenant's *The Siege of Rhodes*, Roxolana is fascinated with the perceived ideal relationship between the sexes in Western culture. Listening to Ianthe praise her husband and his civility sharpens the pain that Roxolana feels due to the neglect in her relationship with Solyman. Interestingly, Sultan Solyman is also ready to believe that Eastern culture is inferior, holding the belief that Western wives are more wholly devoted to their husbands. His interactions with Ianthe, the Sicilian lady who jeopardizes her own life to save her husband from captivity, convinces him that the virtue and refinement that he sees in her are naturally developed within Western culture. Lamenting his fortune with Roxolana and envying Alphonso for having such a devoted wife, he says: "O wondrous virtue of a Christian wife! / Advent'ring life's support, and then her life / To save her ruin'd Lord" (p. 270). Here, the Christian wife is linguistically imbued with wonder, virtue, and character. While Christian identity stands strong based on essence, Muslim identity is nothing more than superficial appearance. Christian belief is linked to heroic action, while Muslim belief is a flimsy fa ̧ade which is easily dropped. Mathew Birchwood alludes to the willingness of Solyman to convert to Christianity, inspired by the virtuous and loyal Christian wife exemplified in Ianthe, describing Solyman as "the besotted suitor" who "ultimately [is] transformed into a 'Christian Turk' by the dazzling beauty of his princess captive" (p. 2).

In Bickerstaff's *The Sultan, Or a Peep into the Seraglio* (1767), Roxalana, an English captive of the Sultan, refuses to abide by the rules of the seraglio. The Sultan admonishes her to observe these rules without showing resistance: "All in this place honour their superiors and obey in silence" (p. 314). The proud English woman embodies the Western notion that a person's spirit may be free although his flesh is not, replying sarcastically "In silence! - and obey! Is this a sample of your Turkish gallantry - You must be vastly loved indeed, if you address women in that strain" (p. 314). The Sultan issues a subtle warning that Roxalana would do well to obey: "Consider you are not now in your country" (314), indicating that the freedom enjoyed in the West does not exist in the East and that Roxalana is wrong to expect such freedom. Roxalana confirms this difference with an exaggeration, saying that in England "reigns ease, content, and liberty; every citizen is himself a king, where the king is himself a citizen" (314). Edward Said, in *Orientalism*, points to Bickerstaff's intention here, which is to show "orientalism as an exercise of cultural strength" (p. 40). When measured against the Western culture, the Eastern culture cannot withstand the challenge, and this is revealed in the Sultan's irresolute position. Upon sensing Solyman's lack of resolve, Roxalana pushes for some dramatic adjustments to the running of the seraglio. In order to become "an accomplish'd prince" and to be loved by his women, she proposes to the Sultan to let "the window-bars to be taken down" and to "let the doors of the Seraglio be thrown open" (p. 315). From the Eastern man's point of view, the purpose of the window-bars and the closed doors is to protect the women, not to imprison them; they are supposed to make women feel more safe and secure rather than feel confined and subjugated. However, for Roxalana, these security measures are representative of a prison, rather than a loving home environment. She argues that, in England, windows have no bars and women can freely leave the house for shopping, visiting, etc. She sees the imposition of such a closed lifestyle on women in the seraglio, while expecting them to show love and loyalty to the man of the house, as incomprehensible because it makes the Sultan appear, to his women, as a jailor rather than a lover. So long as they are made to live in these circumstances, his women will never love him sincerely. Women, she adds, should desire to stay in the home due to "inclination", not because they are held there by bars and closed doors. At this point, it would be natural for the Sultan to mount a defense of his culture. However, rather than making an attempt to explain the reasoning behind taking such measures in Eastern homes, his infatuation gets the better of him; the stage direction reads "while she is speaking, the Sultan admires her" (p. 31). Roxalana continues giving her "first lesson", as she calls it, to the Sultan, demanding that the women of the Seraglio be treated as ladies by his officers, not as slaves. She suggests that he should send them "a handsome smart young officer" to attend them in the morning, instead of Osmyn, who she refers to as an "ugly odious creature" (p. 315).

Instead of chiding her for this disrespect, the Sultan turns to Osmyn in astonishment, inquiring "Did you ever see so expressive a countenance?" (p. 315).

Observing that she has gained the Sultan's indulgence, Roxalana is emboldened to introduce a supposedly very sensitive issue to the Eastern man— the status of his relationship with woman. As she sees it, women "have certainly ten thousand times more sense" (p. 315) than men have, which would render men not eligible to be the dominant figure in the marital relationship. Moreover, it means that man is not qualified, as she explains, to give any sort of advice or guidance to his woman. It is Roxalana's opinion that "Men were born for no other purpose under heaven, but to amuse us" (p. 315), which is the very opposite of the view held by the Western culture of Eastern relationships, that women were created to please men, an idea that has dominated Western opinion for centuries. When Eastern men, in Western drama, admonish women they seem to perceive femininity as concomitant with inferiority. Thus, for them, women exist as purely sexual beings, possessing neither will, aptitudes, or intellectual abilities. For instance, Sultan Mahomet, in Samuel Johnson's *Irene*, published and performed in 1749, explains to the title character, a Western captive at his court, that women's natural inferiority to men means that their role in life is to delight men. In addition to assuming the inferiority of women, Sultan Mahomet places women on a par with animals when he says that God keep no records for women's actions because there is no life for them in the Hereafter. In contrast, man is "sov'reign" and has Paradise reserved for him, and therefore God, according to him, records every single action and thought of man throughout his lifetime:

> . . . For your inferior Natures
>
> Form'd to delight, and happy by delighting,
>
> Heav'n has reserv'd no future Paradise,
>
> But bids you rove the paths of Bliss, secure
>
> Of total Death and careless of Hereafter; (p. 36)

In Bickerstaff's *The Sultan, Or a Peep into the Seraglio* (1767), the Sultan makes no effort to present counterpoints like those Johnson's Sultan Mahomet brings up to his captive, nor does he show any kind of objection to what Roxalana says. On the contrary, he is impressed with her rationale and, while his officer Osmyn considers her speech to be unbearable "insolence", Solyman views it as "amusing" (p. 316). Thus, the Sultan is persuaded by Roxalana's argument and shows a willingness to do her bidding.

Not content with admonishing the Sultan on the treatment of women, Roxalana makes a display of practicing what she preaches about the dignity and freedom of women. When the Sultan sends Osmyn to invite her to join him in a drink of sherbet, an invitation which is delivered in the politest of terms: "I come from the sublime Sultan, to kiss the dust beneath your feet, and to desire you will come and drink sherbet with him", she replies defiantly, saying, "Go tell your master I have no dust on my feet, and I don't like sherbet" (p. 316). Furthermore, when she comes to the Sultan's chamber without an escort of the Sultan's guards, Osmyn is outraged at her unprecedented behavior. However, the Sultan not only intervenes to defend her, but also apologizes to her: "she's not acquainted with the customs of the Seraglio; so let it pass. Roxalana, I beg your pardon— I am afraid he has disturb'd you now" (p. 317). This great shift in the Sultan's character and his outlook on the status of women becomes conspicuous and can only be seen as the fruit of Roxalana's first lesson on how to behave with women to appear as a civilized person, from a Western point of view.

Under Roxalana's influence, Solyman proposes to change the rules of the seraglio to suit her, in the expectation of her meeting him halfway: "if I endeavour to render the Seraglio agreeable to you—if I study to make you happy, might you not in your turn try to deserve my favour?" (p. 318). Roxalana is aware of and pleased with the change taking place in the mind of her "pupil," as she calls Solyman, and claims full credit for it. Eventually, the victory is achieved; Solyman now respects her will and does not try to impose his desires on her. He offers her to smoke and she bluntly refuses, with him feeling offended; he invites her to dine with him and respects her choice when she declines his invitation. Moreover, she invites him to sup with her in her chamber and he accepts. Later, she celebrates her victory in a monologue: "now I have got the reins in my own hands, there shall soon be a reformation in this place" (p. 320). The change begins from Roxalana's own chamber, as she insists on conducting dinner with the Sultan according to Western norms. Roxalana asks the mutes to "Take away all this trumpery" (320), the Turkish setting, to be replaced by "tables, chairs, knives and forks, and dishes and plates" (320) because eating with fingers makes human beings look like baboons. Most strikingly, Roxalana asks for "wine" to be brought with the food. As is known, drinking alcohol in all its forms is prohibited in Islam and consuming it exposes the consumer to severe punishment. Aware of the seriousness of such a violation, Osmyn avoids touching the bottle with his own hand. Seeing his disgust, Roxalana decides that he should be the first to drink. Osmyn, who identifies as "a true believer, a rigid Mussulman" is obliged to drink wine, ordered by Solyman to obey the English woman. Solyman then follows him by drinking from the bottle, fulfilling the desire of Roxalana, saying to her, "I must do as you bid me" (p. 320). Urging him to take the initiative and begin the change in his own character, the Sultan ultimately surrenders to his Western captive, declaring his defeat: "my scruples are at an end— my prejudices, like clouds before the rising sun, vanish before the light of your superior reason" (p. 326). The wording here makes clear the inferiority of the Eastern culture compared to the Western culture, with the former being compared to clouds while the latter is likened to the rising sun. Under Roxalana's direction, Sultan Solyman's seraglio is transformed from an embodiment of the Eastern culture into an English court. Ivan Kalmar views the opposition between the West and the East in the mind of the Western Christians as being "related to the imagined relationship between the sacred and the profane" (p. 29), with the West viewed as a host of the Christian leaders and institutions whereas the East is the dominion of despotism and barbarity.

Restoration and eighteenth century Oriental plays evidently share a common issue and objective — to convince the audience of the superiority of the Western culture over the Eastern one. To many scholars, Davenant's *The Siege of Rhodes* (1656) is a "representation of the Turk as an early modern emblem of Oriental despotism" (Park p. 49). In the Oriental plays, the East is portrayed as "irrational" and "depraved" whereas the West is "virtuous" and "mature" (Said p. 40). However, some voices like the English writer and Church of England clergyman Lancelot Addison (1632 – 1703) tried to make a defense, asserting that "what is commonly call'd Barbarous, is but a different Mode of Civility" (qtd. in Birchwood p. 6). The identity of a nation is usually molded over the course of time when a certain ideology is cherished and thus turns into a deeply rooted component of the culture; the Eastern identity, on Restoration and 18th century stage, seems to be composed of a fragile ideology that easily breaks down and becomes no longer functional as an identifying marker. In essence, it fails to make Easterners look civilized, and is therefore no source of pride, in contrast to their Western counterparts. As it appears in the Oriental drama, the fragility of the Orient springs from the Easterners' low esteem of their culture, and ultimately of themselves. They do not see their religion, which forms the very foundation of their culture, as being built on solid ground. It is not regarded as a faith that creates civilized nations or promotes peace and compassion. By their own admission, their claims of benevolence and mercy are superficial and meant only to deceive other nations. Amongst themselves and in moments of truth they show their natural leaning to violence and bloodshed. On the other hand, the Western identity, which hinges on Christianity, is portrayed as a solid structure which not only fortifies Westerners in their encounters with the Easterners, even when they are the less powerful, but also renders them as one body. For instance, Aaron Hill's major character Zara is a French Catholic who has been raised in an Eastern environment (Sultan Osman's court) from an early age, but ultimately her "Christianity" not only preserves her identity as a Westerner, but also "domesticates her" in England even though she and Osman, as Del Balzo maintains, "may be equally foreign to English audiences" (p. 510). Even though Zara's original identity has been clouded by the life she has lived within the confines of the seraglio, the bond with her original identity is easily restored when the opportunity presents itself. For Del Balzo (2015), however, this revival of the Western identity is not "innate" but "performative" (p. 518).

5. Conclusion

This study investigated the representations of Muslims in a number of Restoration and 18th century Oriental dramas and showed that these dramas construct Muslim identity as weak, fluid, and subject to change when exposed to external pressures. Across these texts, Muslims of all types (devout warriors, rulers, and ordinary people) are shown to be willing, not only to renounce Islam and the Prophet of Islam at the first challenge, but also to adopt Western identity with its cultural manifestations. This generalization that encompasses the social and political hierarchies of the Muslim community presents, on the one hand, a Muslim identity which is fundamentally fragile, rather than the solid, stable foundation for a well-rounded life. On the other hand, the audience is presented with the Western culture, clearly portrayed as the superior one.

Although the misrepresentation of the Eastern civilization and the simultaneous glorification of the Western civilization in Restoration and 18th century drama was not primarily motivated by a political agenda, it served the purpose of preparing the minds of the English for the 19th century British colonial enterprise in the East which started with the occupation of Egypt in 1882 and reached its peak after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire in the 1920s. Centuries of literary works and dramatic productions had been presented to the British public by that point in history. There had been plenty of opportunity to mold opinion regarding the people of the Middle East who now fell under the post-war mandates of Britain and France. Having absorbed the caricatures of Eastern culture from stage productions, citizens of Britain felt few qualms about 'civilizing' the barbarous Muslims. The message was that these were people sorely in need of the taming influences of the West. The mandates were even installed on the basis that they were a temporary measure until the indigenous people learned how to govern themselves. The public was already convinced of the idea that the West held superiority over the East and, therefore, all means were justified to conquer, subdue, and 'civilize' the peoples of the East.

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