

Abstract

This dissertation compares Lady Mary Wortley Montagu's *Turkish Embassy Letters* with the novels of Elif Shafak. In a comparison structured by Sontag's 'ethics of seeing', I demonstrate the pervasive nature of an Orientalist gaze that spans 300 years. The Orientalist gaze changes, but it continues to mediate literary presentations of Islam, and Muslim women in particular. It has proven difficult for critics to offer objective analysis of writing in this tradition, because literary criticism is so often complicit in Orientalising. While I find a nuance in Montagu that has been disregarded by critics who seek recourse in the same letters from the Turkish hammams, Shafak's work, to the contrary, is exposed as two-dimensional and unafraid of the reproduction of Orientalist archetypes. As a result, sacred barriers are disrupted, Islam is appropriated and fetishized, and representation of Muslim women becomes a form of capitalisation upon the heightened, sensationalised, climate after 9/11.

(150 words)

'Is nothing sacred?':

Lady Mary Wortley Montagu's *Turkish Embassy Letters* and the Novels of Elif Shafak¹

[W]avering all the time between this and that, belonging neither to one side nor the other...

The Qur'an, 4:143²

In a 2020 article on depictions of Afghan women, Sahar Ghumkhor uses Susan Sontag's critique of photography to explain the politics of capturing photographs of 'liberated' Muslim women from warzones and lifestyles that are seen, paternalistically, as oppressive and misogynist.³ She points to the example of Sharbat Gula, an eight-year-old Afghan girl with green eyes who was photographed by an American. The image was later published without her family's consent.⁴ Ghumkhor cites Sontag's view that 'to photograph people is to violate them, by seeing them as they never see themselves, by having knowledge of them that they can never have; it turns people into objects that can be symbolically possessed'.⁵ The photographic violation Sontag describes resonates with contemporary Muslim women being captured for and by the western media; they find themselves presented and re-presented in a way they have never seen themselves. This is central to questions of Muslim representation in literature and media. Contemporary scholarship, from western feminist

¹Title taken from Nabeelah Jaffer, 'Is Nothing Sacred?', *Aeon*, 9 June 2014 <<https://aeon.co/essays/the-line-between-creativity-and-stealing-from-another-culture>> [accessed 21 February 2020].

²The Qur'an, trans. by M.A.S. Abdel Haleem (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), *Surah Nisa*, The Women, 4:143, p. 64.

³Sahar Ghumkhor, 'Skateboarding wont 'save' Afghan Girls', *Al Jazeera*, 9 March 2020 <<https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/skateboarding-won-save-afghan-girls-200308121710895.html>> [accessed 13 March 2020].

⁴Ribhu, 'You'll Never See the Iconic Photo of the "Afghan Girl" the Same Way Again', *The Wire*, 12 March 2019 <<https://thewire.in/media/afghan-girl-steve-mccurry-national-geographic>> [accessed 13 March 2020].

⁵Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (London: Penguin, 2002), p. 14.

circles—and often by Muslim women scholars too—in celebrating and romanticising images like that of Sharbat’s as representative of liberation, misunderstands the moral, sacred and political consequences for those depicted, thereby neglecting the very ‘ethics of seeing’ Sontag discusses.⁶ It neglects that the very mode of representation is confining because such images of liberation are often produced by unveiling, thereby disrupting sacred and segregated barriers in favour of western ideas of cultural progress. It is predicated on the idea that a western gaze, for a western audience, saves and liberates them. In a consideration of the ‘ethics of seeing’ in Lady Mary Wortley Montagu’s *Turkish Embassy Letters* (1716-1718) and the contemporary novels of Elif Shafak, I find that Montagu often, although not always, is more nuanced in relation to how she depicts Muslim women, whereas Shafak, in spite of her progressive reputation is complicit in marketing aspects of the Muslim woman stereotype.⁷ Depictions of women from the harem and sensationalised images of Muslims, in ways ‘they don’t see themselves’ is an imposition of an authoritative way of seeing, by a pervasive orientalist gaze that disrupts sacredness and segregated spaces. The ostensible paradox of Muslim women finding more nuanced representation in the work of an eighteenth-century travel writer than in that of a contemporary female writer who belongs culturally, to the demographic she describes, speaks to the profound difficulties of untangling the Orientalising western gaze.

During Montagu’s stay in the Ottoman Empire between 1716 and 1718 when her husband was British ambassador to Constantinople, she described scenes from the Ottoman harem. The harem was the women’s quarters, with both the imperial harem in Topkapi as well as the domestic harem practising segregation by gender. The harem frustrated and haunted the western imaginary, as male travellers before Montagu, including Rycault,

⁶ Sontag, p. 3.

⁷ Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, *The Turkish Embassy Letters*, ed. by Malcom Jack (London: Virago press, 1994), all future references from this edition.

Galland, Dumont, and Whithers, were forbidden access due to the strict segregation maintained by Ottoman Sultans. What had been absent from the gaze and narratives of male travellers is inscribed by women. Montagu's description of Ottoman women's spaces extends her single, permitted glance to the gaze of the frustrated travellers and those fantasising about the harem at home. Beyond this, Montagu's writing is also a response to the stories of the 'vulgar Turk' (75) created and perpetuated by European writers. Montagu collapses some of these binaries, given her own 'admiration for Ottoman behaviours and goods', as Bevilacqua and Pfeifer write of 'Turquerie'.⁸ Yet, even in her admiration, her writing is predicated on the Orientalist exotic allure and mystery of the haremluk. Like Shafak, she fetishizes aspects of Islam for its aestheticism and thus, Muslim women; as Meyda Yegenoglu asserts: 'the inquiry into the Orient implies a need to investigate its women'⁹.

Elif Shafak is a contemporary novelist and journalist who is ethnically Turkish. Though she now lives in west London and holds academic positions in universities, her childhood was spent in a Kemalist Turkey, which wiped away religious, ethnic and language remains of the Ottomans in an attempt to enter Europe and the West ideologically, rather than imperially, as their Ottoman ancestors did. Her fiction mediates between the legacy of the Ottoman Empire that troubles the Turkish state's identity in relation to their secular European direction. Shafak's situation is, however, complicated. Her fiction is imbued with Ottoman nostalgia and her journalistic work and public appearances emphasise cultural authority in this discourse too, as she reminds interviewers: '[she] comes from a place that

⁸Alexander Bevilacqua and Helen Pfeifer, 'Turquerie: Culture in Motion, 1650– 1750', *Past & Present*, (2013), 75-118 <<https://doi.org/10.1093/pastj/gtt019>> (p. 111).

⁹Meyda Yegenoglu, *Colonial Fantasies: Towards a Feminist Reading of Orientalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 73.

has lost its cosmopolitanism'.¹⁰ Her position as a partial insider is employed as a mode of mediation between her idea of Turkey and mainstream western artistic depictions of a fetishised 'east', just as Montagu's physical presence in the harem becomes one of cultural, gendered exchange. Shafak draws on the newsworthiness of Islam in the post 9/11 era as European laws against veiling, and narratives demonising Muslim communities due to scandalous jihadi brides and Islamist terror, debate whether Muslims can co-exist in the west. Shafak frames this discourse in Turkey, and the west in the language of a neo-imperialist western secularism that excludes the complexities of the Muslim faith. Her novels rely on a reductive, decontextualized perspective of Islam, favouring a secular, marketable aesthetic.

Montagu's writing about Muslim women is shaped by her witnessing of the Ottoman racial and religious hybridity that disrupts the premise of an essentialised Eastern 'other'. Similarly, the Muslim women in Shafak's fiction are veiled Muslim women in the west and in Istanbul. This locating of Muslim women as demarcations between competing geographies and ideologies of 'East' and 'West', or the merging of it, lends to the creation of a sensationalised image of Islam. In these circumstances, the segregated harem and veiling are such physical demarcations of a visible Islam that they denote an intolerable difference. Locating Islam and Muslims as Montagu and Shafak do is rooted in the idea of the Orient and subsequent Orientalist gaze derived from Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978).¹¹ The Orient is 'almost a European invention', in that it is a 'place', denoting distance but also a romantic, exotic flair.¹² The Orient is a 'cultural contestant'; Europe's 'deepest and most

¹⁰Laura Kintsler, 'Turkish author Elif Shafak's cautionary tale for the West', *Politico*, 14 August 2017, <<https://www.politico.eu/article/turkish-author-elif-shafaks-cautionary-tale-for-the-west/>> [accessed 18 December 2019].

¹¹Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin, 2003).

¹²Said, p. 1.

recurring image of the other'.¹³ The imagined and cultural location of the Orient, and how it is figured and seen, is of interest in this study. Though Said's analysis begins with works in eighteenth-century Europe, the point at which European imaginings of the Ottomans began to change into interest from fear, following the Ottoman defeat at Vienna in 1683, he does not go into deep analysis of the Ottoman presence. Nonetheless, his work speaks to the European narrative of the Ottomans. As Said outlines, Islam had always been located in the East, equated to and synonymous in western scholarship with barbarism. The Ottoman conquest of Constantinople marked their entry into Europe in 1453 and the subsequent 'end of Rome', the great western, Christian empire. Montagu's audience's awareness of Islam and Ottoman culture was rooted in this Ottoman threat and presence in Europe. As both Montagu and Shafak's writing, separated by 300 years demonstrates, Istanbul is a crucial location to consider Islam because of the city's position straddling both continental Europe and western Asia.

Said's work must be expanded to consider the gendered Orientalist gaze, whereby his pleasing femininity of the Orient is embodied in discourse about women's bodies. As Orientalism is a 'mode of discourse', the Orientalist gaze is a 'mode' of seeing and capturing by the presumed authority of the Orientalist lens in the west. This gaze operates under the presumption of entitled access to segregated religious spaces, leaving 'nothing sacred.'¹⁴ The male gaze is, part of and party to the Orientalist gaze, but the Orientalist gaze refers specifically to the way those women who are not white, 'classified as "Oriental"', are seen.¹⁵ It is the 'geopolitical awareness into aesthetic' modes of seeing that distinguishes this

¹³Said, p. 1.

¹⁴Said, p. 2.

¹⁵Reina Lewis, 'The Harem: Gendering Orientalism', in *Orientalism and Literature* ed. by Geoffrey P. Nash (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), pp. 166-84 (p. 168).

gaze.¹⁶ Comparing Montagu and Shafak's works demonstrate the transhistorical pervasiveness of the Orientalist gaze. As Reina Lewis observes, rooted in 'the pivot of the Western Orientalist fantasy' : 'the harem and the veil [which] set the terms for [Muslim women's] interventions into Western discourse, providing their unique selling point of exoticized difference,' and continue to do so as the Orientalist gaze Montagu inscribes in her letters is a mode Shafak is not only complicit in, but extends.¹⁷

Though the *Turkish Embassy Letters* were sent while Montagu was occupying segregated womens' spaces within the Ottoman Empire, her writing communicates existence and travel beyond it too. Montagu was the first to 'inscribe' writing as a woman as 'a form of critical difference' as Katrina O'Loughlin writes, however, her writing remains responsive to the popular eighteenth-century travel writing genre dominated by men.¹⁸ Montagu 'augment[s]' previous writing about the harem by men who had falsely claimed glances.¹⁹ Her gender counterproductively sees her propagate the Orientalist gaze. As Billie Melman writes 'men and women had experienced the orient literarily before visiting the geographical middle east; they brought with them to that region images, propagated by a long literary tradition'.²⁰ Montagu's gendered access becomes access to, and a way of seeing, the women of the harem, by those outside. This is illustrated in Ingres's painting 'Le Bain Turc' which was inspired by Montagu's writing from the hammams (segregated Turkish baths).²¹ Her writing was an early formation of the Orientalist gaze facilitating gazing and

¹⁶Said, p. 12.

¹⁷Lewis, p. 168.

¹⁸Katrina O'Loughlin, *Women Writing, and Travel in the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), pp. 13.

¹⁹Lewis, p. 168.

²⁰Billie Melman, *Women's Orient: English Women and the Middle East, 1718–1918: sexuality, religion and work, 2nd ed* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1995), p. 63.

²¹Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres, 'The Turkish Bath', 1862, oil on canvas, <<https://www.louvre.fr/en/oeuvre-notices/turkish-bath>> [accessed 1 November 2019] ; Bernadette Andrea, *Women and Islam in Early Modern English Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 122.

paintings. In the hammam she 'wish[ed] secretly that Mr Gervase could have been there invisible' because seeing Ottoman women 'would have very much improved [Gervase's] art' (59). Invoking the gaze of portrait painter Charles Jervas, and French painter, Ingres, is an invitation and disrupts the segregation of the harem. This is indicative of her gaze and position: she cannot resist Orientalist exchange. It also disrupts the exclusivity of her gendered access.

To invoke a painter's invisible presence and therefore, absence, while she is present also suggests her sight is facilitated with them in mind. These invocations are found in her letters from the harem. Relaying her time in Fatima's home, Montagu concludes that she 'had been some time in Mohamed's paradise' (91). The reference to a man's paradise, whether of the Islamic prophet, Mohammed or an Englishman who would have thought the harem as an Islamic paradise suggests a mediated presence and gaze. Her writing is formed partly by her imagining seeing through the gaze and pleasures of a man. This is further perpetuated by how the letters from the hammams have formed much of the focus of contemporary scholarship. The scholarly focus on the content of these letters, rather than questions of position, access, and privacy, demonstrate the complicity of the academy in propagating myths about Muslim womanhood. This is the active and continual literary consumption of Muslim women's bodies. While Sontag considers 'the ethics of seeing' in relation to photographs of people suffering, this can be applied critically to the gaze employed and facilitated by Montagu's *Letters* from the hammam. A capturing of these bodies by the western imaginary occurs because Montagu's readers (primarily her sister Lady Mar and other named recipients, but also the others Montagu intended the letters be circulated to) were not morally permitted to Montagu's sights in the hammam.

Montagu extends her single glance and forces a reciprocal seeing upon Ottoman women. Towards the end of the first letter from the hammam, Montagu writes of being

‘forced [...] to show’ the women her ‘stays’ (59) which ‘they believed [she] was so locked up in’ (60). Montagu’s gaze here operates within western modes of comparison and her discourse ‘lock[s] [them] up’ to the very gaze and structures that locked her up ‘in that [eighteenth-century] machine.’ Mary Jo Kietzman locates this moment as Montagu being ‘an object of inquiry’ indicating a shared vulnerability²². Mohja Kahf has argued similarly, that Montagu and the women she writes about ‘become permeable substances, partaking of each other not as hard polished fantasms but as mutually vulnerable, porous bodies’ in their shared unveiling.²³ Both scholars neglect Montagu’s dominant position as writer of both her own unveiling and theirs, but also how these women become ‘permeable substances’ in her mode of writing. This sense of permeability resonates with a critique of Turquerie that ‘it relied fundamentally upon a European sense of the translatability of Ottoman culture, and of the desirability of its translation’.²⁴ This is rooted in the authority western writers assume when they represent the Orient. The language of ‘locking’ operates in Montagu’s gaze to free, by depicting, the sight of the harem to a narrative and gaze, that has long fantasised such unveiling as a starting point. Sontag writes:

[T]o take a photograph is to participate in another person’s mortality, vulnerability, mutability. Precisely by slicing out this moment and freezing it, all photographs testify to time’s relentless melt.²⁵

Montagu violates the vulnerability of the Muslim women she witnesses by attaching permeance to it, for writing it is ‘freezing’ the moment she was privy to. Montagu’s desire to reverse the narratives of her ‘brethren voyage-writers [who] lament on the miserable

²²Mary Jo Kietzman, ‘Montagu’s Turkish Embassy Letters and Cultural Dislocation’, *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900*, (1998), 537-551, <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/451062>> [accessed 28 November 2019] (p. 539).

²³Mohja Kahf and American Council of Learned Societies, *Western Representations of the Muslim Woman from Termagant to Odalisque* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1999), p.123.

²⁴Bevilacqua and Pfeifer, p. 113.

²⁵Sontag, p. 15.

confinement of the Turkish ladies' undermines her own view that they 'are, perhaps, freer than any ladies in the universe' (134), as it is by Montagu's gaze and mode of depicting them that they are confined. Montagu's 'forced' unveiling to them that reveals the restrictive machinery confining her and eighteenth-century English women, necessitates the unveiling of the women of the haremlik, to reciprocally confine them within a gaze. More important than vulnerability is that the unveiled harem and depictions of Ottoman women's bodies are produced by Montagu's demand of forced reciprocity. This is rooted in the western imaginary's presumed entitlement to seeing segregated spaces and veiled bodies. As Frantz Fanon writes of French colonialists in Algeria seeking to unveil Algerian women:

This woman who sees without being seen frustrates the colonizer. There is no reciprocity. She does not yield herself, does not give herself, does not offer herself.²⁶

Montagu 'give[s]' and freezes the glance of the harem, offering reciprocity on the women's behalf. Her discursive act should be read for the implications of her gaze it alerts us to: as a mass unveiling of sacred segregated women's spaces.

Melman has also praised this unveiling, for it 'normalised and humanised the harem' because Montagu resisted the 'trappings of the eighteenth-century oriental tale'.²⁷ Melman neglects that both Montagu's work and her scholarship are predicated on and thereby, operate within the Orientalist gaze. Melman's language is unsettling in the context of the harem too; it had its own barriers to the women within, while descriptions, like Montagu's, broke barriers they could not. Jeanne Dubino, in a book about pedagogical practises and

²⁶Franz Fanon, 'Algeria Unveiled', in *A Dying Colonialism* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1965), pp. 35-64 (p. 48).

²⁷Melman p. 62, p. 97.

Orientalism, celebrates the letters as an ‘example of eighteenth-century feminism’; a ‘celebration of women’s spaces’²⁸. Bernadette Andrea writes of this moment too, arguing ‘rather than displacing the source of patriarchal despotism onto an Orientalized other, [Montagu] locates it squarely in England’.²⁹ This scholarship celebrates the content of Montagu’s letters without interrogating the gaze that produces it, thereby operating under the assumption that the western gaze is entitled to seeing the spaces Montagu has depicted. This neglects the implication that it operates at the expense of confining the women of the harem to the Orientalist discourse and imaginary in England, from the segregated space of the harem. It is indicative of the fundamental internalisation of an Oriental gaze within the western academy that inform the way people deemed other and Oriental are seen. Melman and Dubino’s analyses remain constrained by and actively contributing to the ‘trappings of the eighteenth-century oriental tale.’ They demonstrate the failures of western feminist discourse attempting to ‘humanise’, like the contemporary narrative about liberating, Muslim women. The exclusionary nature of this feminism positions the Oriental woman as a static mode of comparison, burdened with normalising and humanising the harem, when it is the issue of the western imaginary that begins on that imagined premise.

This gaze that seeks to satisfy the western imaginary disrupts the segregation that grants Montagu access to the harem. Meyda Yegnoglu argues that as Montagu functions ‘as a supplement for the masculine Orientalist texts’ that could only imagine the harem, she is metaphorically ‘attach[ing] a phallus to herself’ to do so.³⁰ The metaphoric phallus Yegnoglu writes of is Montagu’s gaze: her way of seeing was informed by the thought of men, as her invoking Gervase, Apelles, and Mohammeden paradise indicate. Montagu calls

²⁸Jeanne Dubino, ‘Teaching the Quintessential Turkish Tale: Montagu’s Turkish Embassy Letters’, in *Interrogating Orientalism: Contextual approaches and Pedagogical Practices* ed. by Diane Long Hoeveler and Jeffrey Cass, (Columbus OH: Ohio state university press, 2006), pp. 139-159 (p. 143).

²⁹Andrea, p. 10.

³⁰Yegnoglu, p. 92.

her glances ‘stolen glances’ acknowledging her ‘wickedness’ in wishing Gervase had been present (59). Here, Montagu recognises her permitted glance being informed by those impermissible glances. Her glances were then stolen in some way, because, borrowing Andrea’s use of Djébar’s phrasing, ‘we have no right to be’ in the hammam scene.³¹ Nor do we have a right to the ‘glances’ of segregated women’s space, as Gervase did not. To be complicit in these ‘glances’ is to ‘occupy the subject position’ and be complicit in satisfying the western imaginary.³² While Bohls has argued that Montagu’s interest in the hammam is her attempt to ‘de-eroticize and de-exoticize’ Ottoman women, ‘seeing is a preprogrammed activity’; Montagu could not see without the exoticized, Orientalist lens of Gervase and her predecessors, her femininity does not prevent this internalisation or her inherently responsive tone.³³ Montagu could not see or depict the harem without the images of Eastern women that she had inherited and subsequently, drawing on Yegnoğlu, without the ‘phallus’ that navigated her Orientalist gaze. Kahf’s study of Western representations of Muslim women comments on Montagu’s gaze, but it does not go far enough. Kahf argues that for Montagu ‘to be voyeuristic, the look has to be forbidden’.³⁴ Kahf neglects that Montagu’s look relayed in the epistolary form necessitates circulation and publication. Montagu’s gaze is an imported one, travelling with her from England, and guided by the look of those outside, whose glances were forbidden. Her individual glance, as well as her stay in harem, was not forbidden, but one’s reading of these letters is with full knowledge that they are read because they have been published, rendering her writing and our subsequent glance voyeuristic.

³¹Andrea quoting Assia Djébar, p. 123.

³²Andrea quoting Assia Djébar, p. 123.

³³Elizabeth A. Bohls, *Women Travel Writers and the language of Aesthetics 1716-1818* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 28; Melman p. 308.

³⁴Kahf, p. 123.

There is an undoubted element of fetishisation and illicit viewing in Montagu's hammam letters; however, she is not guilty of straightforward complicity in an orientalisng gaze. Montagu locates the classical world, its beauty and culture in Istanbul, even though 'the Orient, when it was not merely a place in which one traded, was culturally, intellectually, spiritually, *outside* Europe, and European civilisation' as Said writes.³⁵ Montagu writes Islam and Ottoman history in Europe through evoking Istanbul's classical existence in its Ottoman context.³⁶ In Istanbul, 'several little passages' of Pope's translation of Homer make more sense, in a way 'that [Montagu] did not before entirely comprehend the beauty of' (74-75). Montagu's gaze writes 'the Orient' *in* Europe, also through Ottoman women. In Fatima, an Ottoman woman of Polish descent, whiteness blurs the binary of Orient and occident, the binaries of East and West collapse as they intermingle geographically, ancestrally and spiritually in Fatima. Montagu's letters are of interest beyond the indulgent critical focus on the letters about the hammam, her critical perspective actually emerges, more so in the vast majority of her letters which are not about the hammams. They demonstrate Montagu's efforts to understand the cosmopolitan nature of Istanbul. It has been a weakness of earlier criticism of the *Turkish Embassy Letters* to foreground Montagu's representation of women in an unveiled space. As reference to the (substantial) remainder of the collection shows, her acceptance of the Muslim communities and expression she describes is sensitive and acute.

However, it remains to be discussed that the women of the haremluk that Montagu has such 'heartfelt praise' for, are white women.³⁷ Montagu's tolerance and acceptance of Ottoman women must be understood in the context of the whiteness that subdues and

³⁵Said, p. 71.

³⁶Said, p. 71.

³⁷Anita Desai, 'Introduction', in *The Turkish Embassy Letters*, ed. by Malcom Jack (London: Virago press, 1994), pp. vii-xxxviii (p. xxviii).

hybridises their Oriental otherness. Her interest in the 'Fair Fatima' (89) is predicated on fetishizing the image of western fantasies of Oriental women merging with Eurocentric beauty standards. Fatima functions dually, as a medium for Montagu negotiating between binaries and an aesthetic measure. As Bohls writes, 'Oriental women carry a disproportionate symbolic burden in this discourse. Doubly other and doubly exotic, they become a synecdoche for the Orient itself.'³⁸

Montagu depicts Fatima repeatedly, because the spectacle of mixed racial identity disrupts the premise of a homogenized Orient. She writes of Fatima's 'harmony of features'; her white skin a 'lovely bloom of complexion' coupled with 'large and black, with all the soft languishment of the blue' eyes. Despite the absence of the western beauty standard of blue eyes, her white skin harmonises the contrasting darkness of her black eyes more common in Asian and Arab women, such that they have '*all* the soft languishment of blue' eyes; indicating the sight her whiteness transcends.³⁹ Her beauty is such that it 'effaced' Fatima being 'educated in a country we call barbarous' (89). Montagu's calling upon the 'we' further affirms the circulation of narratives about the barbaric Orient in Europe, but they also suggest that Fatima poses a visual disruption to those images in circulation. Culturally contrasting features of her face are in harmony because the whiteness purifies, while her face and self 'efface[s]', or erases, the connotations of the 'vulgar Turk' and the Oriental woman. In a later letter written in Pera, Montagu recalls a Greek lady 'said to [Montagu] in Italian: 'This is no Turkish lady; she is certainly some Christian.' For Montagu and her contemporaries, 'Turk' meant Turkish, Ottoman and Muslim. Mixed racial identity denoted a mixed cultural and theological identity, visually merging what had always seemed to be at

³⁸Bohls, p. 28.

³⁹My emphasis.

odds.⁴⁰ This is part of Montagu's larger fetishizing of mixed identity throughout her letters, as she writes to Abbe Conti:

Pera, Jtophana and Galata are collections of strangers from all countries of the universe [...] so often intermarried that this forms several races of people the oddest imaginable. There's not one single family of natives that can value itself on being unmixed. You frequently see a person whose father was born Grecian, the mother an Italian, the grandfather a Frenchman, the grandmother an Armenian.'

(p.111 LXL)

Despite locating the collapse of binary racial and religious identities in the harmony of Istanbul, Fatima's body evokes being 'transported' her to 'the most polite throne of Europe [... for] our most celebrated English beauties would vanish near her'(89). The racial 'mixture' 'produces surprising effects'; 'produces creatures more extraordinary than you can imagine' (111). Montagu's repetition of 'mixture' and 'produces' together describing mixed-race people as 'creatures' indicates a fetishization of both Oriental and European, and crucially, how the Oriental becomes 'extraordinary' by its mixing with the European. The presumed superiority of whiteness means the mixing with whiteness works to 'to bring the Orient closer to Europe, thereafter to absorb it entirely and – centrally important – to cancel, or at least subdue and reduce, its strangeness and, in the case of Islam, its hostility'.⁴¹ Montagu's focus is both reducing hostility and fetishizing the beauty, in her praise for Fatima there is a sense that her different identities are being measured against one another. The words used are clinical: of the 'exact proportion of her body' the 'most exact features' (89). This language dehumanises the identity Montagu recognises. It is

⁴⁰Gerald Maclean, *Looking East, English writing and the Ottoman Empire before 1800* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. 1.

⁴¹Said, p. 87.

informed by a fetishization of whiteness that proportionally works to subdue and 'efface' the otherness in the body of an exoticised Muslim woman.

Montagu's descriptions of Fatima are also a capturing of Muslim bodies to relay private glances from homes and segregated spaces to be sent and published in letters. Montagu compares her 'looking on' Fatima to bring more pleasure 'than the finest piece of sculpture' (90). Evoking a sculpture suggests a kind of visual 'freezing' akin to Sontag's discussion of photographs, like Montagu's previous invoking of painters. As visually pleasing this sight is, it is also disorienting, as she writes to her sister Lady Mar: 'I know not where to direct or what part of the world you are in' (113). Yet the disorienting multi-lingual is also a 'medley' as she describes the diverse languages in her household as 'a perpetual hearing of this medley of sounds, which produces a very extraordinary effect upon the people born here' (122). The mixture is pleasing visually and aurally but also threatening. She is 'in great danger of losing [her] English', and 'extremely mortified at the daily decay of [English] in [her] head' (122-3). This makes some sense of O'Loughlin writing that, in Montagu's *Letters*, 'Europe appears more heavily exoticized than the people and culture of the Ottoman Empire'.⁴² Montagu's acceptance of the ethnic-religious diversity is reliant on a fetishization of self. However, O'Loughlin, like many others writing about Montagu do not consider the European ethnic makeup of the Ottomans, nor of the positionality of Montagu beyond gender. The Orientals who disrupt binaries like Fatima and Achmed Bey indicate hybridity between Orient and Occident. They are fetishized because they provide sensational and aesthetically pleasing images. Achmed, a Muslim scholar, is admired by Montagu for their shared interests in classical texts, and in her letters recorded for 'deviating from some part of Mohammed's law' by drinking. The 'scandal' (63) that Achmed sought to avoid, is the image Montagu wishes to capture, hence she repeats

⁴²O'Loughlin, p. 41.

Achmed's drinking to both Pope and Abbe Conti. While, Achmed's 'Oriental learning' is spoken of because it represents an admired elitist culture, as she confesses, a 'sensual declaration that [she would] rather be a rich effendi with all his ignorance than sir Isaac Newton with all his knowledge' (142). Achmed's drinking is a scandalous image and his knowledge of Arabic and Persian depicts a kind of 'sensual' Oriental luxury that her upper-class status in English society gave her access to. This extraction of images that present the beauty and luxury of the Orient are sought in the same way the harem fulfils a romantic, exotic sight. Montagu's writings on Fatima are rooted in her being 'wholly taken up in gazing' (89). Montagu's attempts to capture and present images of a harem, Fatima's beauty, and scandalous scholars are all disruptions of privacy and gendered segregation that Montagu's gaze achieves, and extends, by writing.

While the ethics of seeing in Montagu's writing alerts us to her disrupting segregated and private spaces for this early commodification of Oriental bodies, the ethics of seeing in Shafak's fiction is related to her marketing images of Islam that remove their sacredness. Shafak's fiction displaces devotional roots of Muslim expression, from Sufi practises to the veil, to ornament her fiction with the aesthetic and newsworthy quality of Islam. Here the Orient, when it is not feared, othered, or oppressed, is employed for its image, evoking an aesthetic sensual quality. This is most telling in Shafak's engagement with Sufi Islam in *Forty Rules of Love* (2010).⁴⁵ It is based on the life of the thirteenth-century Islamic mystic and scholar Jalal ad-din Muhammad Rumi and his controversial friendship with Shams of Tabriz. However, as Nabeelah Jaffer writes in her aptly titled essay 'Is Nothing Sacred', 'symbols of other cultures [are appropriated] in order to signal exoticism, or sensuality', but 'what if, [this] cultural territory being trodden upon is really

⁴⁵Elif Shafak, *Forty Rules of Love* (London: Penguin Books, 2011), all future references from this edition. From here, *FR*.

holy ground?’⁴⁴ Shafak’s interest in Sufism is evocative of the Ottoman legacy given Ataturk’s (the founder of the secular Turkish state) erasure of the tradition by closing down all Dervish lodges in 1925. However, her presentation of Sufism is through a reductive Orientalist lens, erasing both Ottoman and Islamic contexts, for a commercial function.⁴⁵ In *FR* Aziz, a Scottish convert to Islam and mystic compared to Shams, meets Ella. Ella, a non-practising American Jew, falls in love with him. Though Ella insists she is ‘not a Sufi’, Aziz assures her that ‘[she] can be Rumi’ (326). Rumi is referred to as a figure detached from the religious rooting of Sufism, for Aziz insists she doesn’t ‘have to be [a Sufi]’ and overlooks her ‘aversion to religion’ (145) or belief ‘that fanatics of Islam were the worst’ (159). In Shafak’s attempt to ‘cut across countries, centuries and cultures’ (*FR*,14) Islamic history and tradition is cut across, to appeal to a secular Western tradition. This perpetuates the Orientalist myth that the ‘Islamic people [are not] humans nor [is] their history [...] history’.⁴⁶ As Omid Safi writes too, the popular Rumi invented and reinterpreted in America; is a ‘bypassing, erasing, and occupying [of] a spiritual landscape that has been lived and breathed and internalized by Muslims from Bosnia and Istanbul to Konya and Iran to Central and South Asia.’⁴⁷ Safi writes of this treatment of Sufism to be a type of ‘spiritual colonialism’, described as the ‘uncoupl[ing] of mystical poetry from its Islamic roots’, whereby poets like Rumi are presented as ‘mystical not because of Islam but in spite of it.’⁴⁸

⁴⁴Nabeelah Jaffer, 2014.

⁴⁵Joshua Allen, ‘The Quiet comeback of Istanbul’s hidden Sufi lodges’, *Atlasobscura*, 10 October 2016 <<https://www.atlasobscura.com/articles/the-quiet-comeback-of-istanbuls-hidden-sufi-lodges>> [accessed 15 February 2020].

⁴⁶Said, p. 87.

⁴⁷Rozina Ali, ‘The Erasure Of Islam From The Poetry Of Rumi’, *The New Yorker*, 5 January 2017, <<https://www.newyorker.com/books/page-turner/the-erasure-of-islam-from-the-poetry-of-rumi>> [accessed 27 November 2019].

⁴⁸Ali, 2017.

Safi cites Coleman Barks, who has produced many editions of Rumi's poetry and is largely responsible for Rumi's status as 'the most popular poet in the US'.⁴⁹

Though Rumi wrote in Persian and Arabic, Barks is not familiar with either language. He is more interested in reinterpreting, seeking to 'release' Rumi's poetry 'from their cages' of Islam and devotion.⁵⁰ They are freed for their consumption in the American culture that Barks capitalises on by removing Qur'anic references and Islamic contexts, creating a palatable, hippie American Rumi. Though in the Islamic and Turkish tradition, Rumi's writings 'represent the historical dynamism within Islamic scholarship', the dynamism of his devotion does not fit the narrative of a commercial Rumi, nor the construction of a palatable Islam that embellishes the American Rumi or Shafak's work amongst a homogenised threatening Islam.⁵¹ Barks is an important source for Shafak's novel, and is cited in her sources.⁵² Her reliance on this secular, commercial, reinterpretation of Rumi sees her fall into the same mode of thought as Montagu in the *Turkish Embassy Letters*, but with greater consequence. Rather than extending the reach of Sufism to America, where Shafak's presentation falls apart is her relocating this spiritual landscape to America and then Amsterdam in a secular context, as traced by the movement of Ella and Aziz. Just as Barks and others have created a variety of commercial Sufism from fetishizing the aesthetic quality of the Oriental, Shafak's presentation of Sufism feeds into this culture and capitalises on it in the form of a popular novel, at the expense of displacing and losing the

⁴⁹'Rumi Best-Selling Poet in the US', *Financial Tribune*, 16 November 2015, <<https://financialtribune.com/articles/art-and-culture/30372/rumi-best-selling-poet-in-us>> [accessed 29th November 2019].

⁵⁰Ali, 2017.

⁵¹Ali, 2017.

⁵²FR, *sources*.

Islamic roots. As Furlanetto writes: '[*FR*] detaches itself the most from the Sufi way [...] a product of the American discourse on Sufism, rather than of the Muslim one.'⁵³

This displacement of the spiritual to an aesthetic, commercial pursuit can be understood by looking at the Gnawa festival in Essaouira. It is a music festival that attracts much tourist attention, derived from the mystical tradition in Morocco. Devotional phrases, like *la illaha illa anta* (meaning 'there is no God but Allah') are displaced from religious texts and repeated on stage for the audience to 'trance out' to.⁵⁴ The festival 'fus[es] mystic Islam with west African animist beliefs [...] developing a music made to commune with an invisible spirit world of moluks and djinn, the genies that swarm through Moroccan folklore' and Shafak's stories too.⁵⁵ The Gnawa festival is an important example of making a 'sacred and local practice such as trance [...] into a fetish'.⁵⁶ This fetishization of the sacred, by employing devotional words for hedonism is present in *FR* too:

[S]lowly, tenderly, and in ever-growing circles, he moved his palms up from her feet toward her ankles [...] towards her belly [...] he was praying. While his hands caressed every inch of her body [...] his lips prayed for her. It was the most spiritual thing she had ever experienced [...] the sexiest feeling she had ever experienced.

(303)

⁵³ Elena Furlanetto, *Towards Turkish American literature*, Peter Lang edn (Germany: Frankfurt am Main, 2017), p. 178.

⁵⁴ Deborah Kapchan, 'The Festive Sacred and the Fetish of Trance', *Gradhiva*, (2008), 52-67 <<https://doi.org/10.4000/gradhiva.1014>> (p. 53).

⁵⁵ Tim Culling, 'People Freak out and Fall down', *Guardian*, 21 August 2007 <<https://www.theguardian.com/music/2007/aug/21/worldmusic>> [accessed 15 December 2019]; Elif Shafak, 'The gathering place of the Djinni', *Power of Culture*, February 2005 <http://www.powerofculture.nl/en/current/2005/february/elif_shafak.html> [accessed 12 December 2019]; Djinni's appear in Elif Shafak, *The Bastard of Istanbul*, (London: Penguin Books, 2006).

⁵⁶ Kapchan, p. 54.

Even the language of prayer becomes sexually intimate, removed from its devotional origin. The spirituality of their connection is without God, but remains framed as a Sufi tale, as Shafak structures Aziz's narration of his life to Ella by the letters that make up the word Sufi. The devotional connection and exchange between Aziz and Ella that is to be reminiscent of Shams and Rumi's is reduced to an aesthetic, bodily realm. It is commodified and contained in an ornament too, symbolised by Aziz gifting Ella a 'necklace of turquoise and red coral beads with a silver whirling dervish' (303). Here, the 'sacred and local' Sufi practice is contained in a commercial, touristic souvenir. Furlanetto writes of this moment: 'Shafak's Sufism may be mostly decorative and ornamental but less spiritual'.⁵⁷ The whirling dervish is an important example of the commodification of the Sufi tradition: they travel from keychains in the bazaars of Istanbul and Turkey, to images in Shafak's writing, resembling the vendors of Istanbul selling their customs for tourist spectacle through whirling dervish shows too. Aziz, like Shafak and Barks are satisfied with a non-devotional, commodified, ornamental Sufiism. The western fetish and touristic allure for the 'local and sacred' practice is capitalised on by reducing such practice into sellable objects, retaining only the decorative purpose, neglecting that even the aestheticism is rooted in devotion. Shafak draws on the same theme as Barks, by 'free[ing] [Sufism] from the cages' of religion, to a commercial, secular commodity that, in its containment and popular form can 'travel in the global market'.⁵⁸ Yet, this is not freeing nor does it honour the tradition it is derived from. It is 'freeing' to that dominant secular narrative seeking to disrupt sacredness. Shafak concludes too that, 'stories move like whirling dervishes, drawing circles beyond circles.'⁵⁹ She draws on the popular Sufism and image of whirling dervishes to ornament her own

⁵⁷Furlanetto, *Turkish American Literature*, p. 181.

⁵⁸Kapchan, p. 54.

⁵⁹Elif Shafak, 'The Politics Of Fiction', TED global, transcript, (2010) <<http://www.elifsafak.us/en/roportajlar.asp?islem=roportaj&id=39> > [accessed 12 November 2019].

stories and facilitate their movement in the global market. And yet, that, whirling dervishes move for God is neglected.

In *Three Daughters of Eve* (2016), the cosmopolitan Istanbul Shafak envisions and depicts in response to nationalism, is reserved for the ‘fine modern Muslim women’ only (4).⁶⁰ Practising or veiled Muslim women are excluded. Muslim women in Shafak’s fiction and especially, their ‘most visible markers of differentness and inferiority’ as Leila Ahmed writes about ‘veiling – to Western eyes’, characterises them as impenetrable demarcations of otherness. This corresponds with sensationalised media coverage of the Muslim woman stereotype: Shafak ‘adopt[s] the existing frame’ of depicting Muslims to represent otherness too, which is essentially economically driven as it is image based, as Morey affirms: ‘the market for the Muslim has both aesthetic and economic dimensions’.⁶¹ Shafak characterises Selma by her ‘attending religious circles’ ‘chang[ing] visibly’ in her ‘cover[ing] her head fully’, to wearing only sandals, from the ‘suspicion that glue from pig bones might have been used’ (19). Selma’s devotion is measured in purely external terms and contrasts between her ‘too superstitious’ self and ‘too rational’ (56) secular husband Mensur. There is a ‘foolish’ (53) undertone in her fear of traces of pig in footwear being derived from Islam’s forbidding eating pork. Selma functions as a dramatic device, diving their home into ‘Dar al-Islam and Dar al-harb – the realm of submission and the realm of war’ (20). This oppositional framework in the terminology of war, to describe their domestic situation and contrast Selma’s with Mensur’s secularism implies the violent otherness of Selma’s practise through hyperbole.⁶² Selma is repeatedly presented as extreme from her clothing, to believing that ‘to balance out Allah’s wrath, [she would go] days, sometimes weeks, without

⁶⁰Elif Shafak, *Three daughters of Eve* (London: Penguin Books, 2017), all future references to this edition, after this *TD*.

⁶¹Peter Morey, *Islamophobia and The Novel* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018), p. 7.

⁶²‘Dar Al Harb’ in *The Oxford Dictionary of Islam*, *Oxford Islamic Studies*, 2003
<<http://www.oxfordislamicstudies.com/article/opr/t125/e490n>> [accessed 12 December 2019].

eating much' (69). There is something neurotic to her devotion, in her starvation and only 'praying and cleaning' (69). Selma and Mensur become emblematic of this ideological East and West that Shafak repeatedly alludes to and locates in Istanbul. Mensur, who idolises Atatürk symbolising the secularists within Turkey, is characterised by his belief that 'education will save us', and his subsequent desire for his daughter to 'be educated in the West [...] Oxford' (71). However, Shafak's attempt at presenting any middle ground between this falls apart in her consistent return to Selma's veiled body, which is employed as spectacle. Mensur is tolerant of religious symbols in Oxford for 'in Europe religion has a different nature' (105), yet Selma's 'outfit epitomised everything [Mensur] had always despised, loathed and confronted in the Middle East. The benightedness of the religious [...] they had been born into this culture and swallowed unquestioningly whatever they had been taught' (70). Not only does this reveal Mensur's secularism to be rooted in a western neo-imperial framework, it objectifies Selma. Her veiling is presented as a preliminary step to her fear of encountering pig bones in the glue binding her footwear. Selma's veil separates her from the thinking secularists and Aziz from *FR*, as her devotion must be attached to her having 'swallowed [religion] unquestioningly' she is incapable of the interiority he displays. Nor is she given the fictive agency that Aziz or Ella are characterised by despite her discomfort in her marriage. As Yaqin and Morey write critiquing literary representations of Muslims, 'the body of the Muslim...veiled, bearded or praying is made to carry connotations far beyond the intrinsic [devotional] significance of such externals and rituals'.⁶³ In the case of Selma her devotion is only seen through the lens of exteriority that is employed to carry the weight and image of stereotypes.

⁶³Peter Morey and Amina Yaqin, *Framing Muslims: Stereotyping and Representation after 9/11* (Cambridge, MA; London: Harvard University Press, 2011), p. 3.

This is a recurring trope in Shafak's fiction. Mona in *TD* is a student activist at Oxford, a self-proclaimed 'Muslim feminist' (127) who affirms her veiling is 'a personal decision, a testimony to faith' (136). However, her veiling functions to 'challenge stereotypes [...] to shake things up' (136), for 'if [Mona] with [her] headscarf, [doesn't] challenge stereotypes' who will? Veiled Mona is evoked as a 'shorthand for Muslim presence', as Tryer notes of the veil.⁶⁴ There is a depersonalisation and de-characterisation, because Mona's veiled body is employed only for the newsworthy spectacle it provides for western consumers desiring this spectacle of challenging stereotypes. Her being at Oxford in her headscarf connoting the physicality and visibility of her faith, does 'shake things up' in traditionally white institutions like Oxford. This performative use of the veil works to 'shake up' Shafak's fiction, adding tokenistic images of diversity and otherness. Shafak relies on image-based representations of Muslim women: she is there only in image, providing a sensationalised marker of 'authentic' Muslim identity, in what is predominantly a narrative and a world infatuated with the West, and written for the West.⁶⁵ There is a voyeurism to this too: Mona's headscarf exists only for the image it provides thereby displacing intimate 'personal' 'testimony to faith'. Shafak is drawn to sensationalised images of clash in her fiction and replicates in the character of Azur in *TD*, a professor of theology. Ironically, he is well known for two things: his paper on God, and for and having affairs with students. Azur 'cherry-pick[s] the students' (224) for his seminars, to ensure they 'escalate into a clash'. He desires to 'mess things up': 'imagin[es] an Islamophobe develop[ing] a crush on a Muslim woman' (267), resonating with the story of Ella and Aziz. Azur positions himself as the hybrid who 'find[s] [his] true self only in the faces of the other. The absolutists, they venerate purity, we hybridity' (267). While Montagu fetishizes

⁶⁴ David Tyrer, *Politics of Islamophobia: Race, Power and Fantasy* (London: Pluto Press, 2013), p. 41.

⁶⁵ Tyrer, p. 41.

the hybridity of mixed Orientals, whose otherness is aestheticized by their mixing with white blood, Azur's orchestrates and fetishizes clashes. He can speak about God profoundly and be excused for unethical teaching methods, while orchestrating Shirin, Mona and Peri sharing a house as an experiment, 'controlled by [his] far away brain' (314). What is unsettling here is the continued use of identity as props, after all, these images are 'an irresistible dramatic device' as Bevilacqua and Pfeifer write of Europeans employing the Ottoman plot in their plays.⁶⁶ It is telling that Shafak mentions in an interview, that Azur 'was quite a mystery to [her] when [she] first started writing', and that 'sometimes [she] like[s] to hide within [her] male characters.'⁶⁷ Shafak is confessing her exteriority when writing here, through Azur. Her 'far away brain' orchestrates in her fiction, a similar cultural experiment that fetishizes desirable images of clashing identity. This is precisely what problematizes Shafak's presentation of Muslims.

As Peri 'unwittingly play[s] her part' in Azur's mental laboratory, Mona and Selma, 'unwittingly playing [their] part' in Shafak's fiction. Veiled bodies function performatively. There is an irony here and stylistic failure on Shafak's part too. In Mona's adoption of feminism, she cannot articulate or depict herself out of that very restrictive, western feminist frame that Shafak represents her through. Nor can she exist with the same spiritual capacity that characters like Azur and Aziz have either. Shafak draws on how Muslim women's visibility in the post 9/11 context is politically charged because of the oppressive, violent meanings that have been imposed upon it. However, her fiction does not challenge it nor allow Mona to exist as a fully dimensional character. Instead Shafak's narratives correspond to right-wing tabloid media coverage. Mona's existence is to represent the

⁶⁶Bevilacqua and Pfeifer, p. 108.

⁶⁷John Williams, 'Tell Us Five Things About Your Book: Elif Shafak on Mixing Faith and Doubt', *The New York Times*, 17 December 2017 < <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/12/17/books/elif-shafak-three-daughters-of-eve-interview.html> > [accessed 12 December 2019].

apologetic Muslim voice, to respond to the ‘crazies out there doing really sick stuff in the name of [her] religion’ (312).⁶⁸ Mona is burdened with the connotations of what the veil has come to signify in the west. Shirin who is Iranian reads Mona’s headscarf, a ‘small piece of cloth [that] sent us into exile’ (310). The Iranian revolution is evoked here but there is no narrative intervention – her headscarf has added weight, also symbolising the oppressive Iranian state that forces veiling. While Furlanetto argues this is the embodiment of Shafak’s ‘constant effort to create an image of Islam that talks back to post 9/11 Islamophobic discourses’ her writing can also perpetuate that same discourse.⁶⁹ This ‘placement of world incidents (9/11) and debates between her characters about the burning questions of Islam...force[s] [Mona] to employ a voice that explains and apologises to the West for the problems of West Asia’ as Sameen Borker observes.⁷⁰ This role-playing for western ears perpetuates the idea of the Muslim problem, which Said has mentioned and Peter Morey discusses.⁷¹ Said writes: ‘they [are] seen through, analyzed, not as citizens, or even people but as problems to be solved’⁷². They are ‘seen through’ in the anthropological sense of analysing them, unveiling them of their devotion do so, but also ‘seen through’ the projected, forcibly imposed, secular western narrative that constructs its own accepted image of Muslim identity. One that is primarily concerned with ‘the Orient as a locale requiring western attention, reconstruction and even redemption’.⁷³ Furthermore, as Peri, the novels developed and predominant voice confirms, Mona is a ‘younger version of

⁶⁸See Arwa Mahdi, ‘The 712-page Google Doc that proves Muslims do Condemn Terrorism’, *Guardian*, 26 March 2017 < <https://www.theguardian.com/world/shortcuts/2017/mar/26/muslims-condemn-terrorism-stats> > [accessed 20 January 2020] ; Asim Qureshi, ‘Fight the power: how CAGE resists from within a “suspect community”’, *Palgrave Column*, 1 September 2017 <<https://www.nature.com/articles/palcomms201790> > [accessed 16 April 2020].

⁶⁹Furlanetto, *Turkish American Literature*, p. 146.

⁷⁰Sameen Borker, ‘Elif Shafak’s new book gives Muslim the novel they deserve (but it needs a second draft)’, *Scroll.in*, 11 March 2017 <<https://scroll.in/article/831498/eli-shafaks-new-book-gives-muslim-women-the-novel-they-deserve-but-it-needs-a-second-draft>> [accessed 15 December 2019].

⁷¹Morey discusses this in both *Islamophobia and The Novel* and *Framing Muslims*.

⁷²Said, p. 207.

⁷³Said, p. 206.

[Selma]' (136), despite her contrasting Selma's mainly domestic, insular presentation. The veil is employed as a 'metonym of Muslim culture' as understood by dominant western narratives today; a 'condensation' and bridging between both Orientalist and Islamophobic discourse' also employed to essentialise veiled women altogether.⁷⁴ Mona's Oxford education and feminism does not seem to 'save' her as Mensur implies, her visibly Muslim body makes her fated to the same 'foolishness' of Selma. Like the displacement of Sufiism for the images it provides, the headscarf is employed only to denote extremeness or to contrast her activism; to clothe Mona and Selma in political response and stereotypes. The veil and thereby, the Muslim women in Shafak's fiction are unwillingly employed as political, rhetorical ornaments to fuel and satisfy the desire for condemnation and apologies from Muslims. Shafak misplaces the spiritual from its sacredness as Mona is simultaneously veiled in response and unveiled because without her devotion, how can it be a veiling that is sacred, separate from performance?

The Orientalist gaze depicting the harem and Muslim expression written by Montagu and extended by Shafak, pervades segregated boundaries, thereby leaving nothing sacred. These works are produced to report and reveal capitalising upon the transhistorical Orientalist gaze into Muslim lives, that has intensified after 9/11. They seek to *present* performative, marketable identity in the guise of representing.⁷⁵ The gaze that produces these works must be deconstructed before images of unveiling are celebrated, as Sontag's 'ethics of seeing' makes clear. I have considered that this literature may not be the place to seek representation as a Muslim woman, but in turn have found that this study remains constrained

⁷⁴Mahmut Mutman, 'From Orientalism to Islamophobia', in *Orientalism and Literature*, ed. by Geoffrey P. Nash (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), pp. 255-268 (p. 262).

⁷⁵Sara Upstone alludes to a similar idea of 're-presentation' drawing on Jacques Derrida in 'Representation and Realism: Monica Ali's *Brick Lane*', in *Culture, Diaspora, and Modernity in Muslim Writing*, ed. by Rehana Ahmed, Peter Morey and Amina Yaqin (New York: Routledge, 2012) pp. 164-183 (p.172-3).

because there is an already an established epistemological framework in western scholarship that is complicit in Orientalising: terms like Orient, East, and West, remain in use. How can representations outside of the stereotyped, exoticised frame emerge anywhere when the critical discourse is complicit in Orientalising?⁷⁶ So, I end by affirming Morey's comments: 'what we need is a critical Muslim studies to match developments such as critical race studies'.⁷⁷ Critical gender studies operates within a secular feminist framework that often misses religious complexity, by celebrating Montagu's unveiling as liberation or Shafak's appropriation of Islam as diversity. This occurs because the discourse operates without considering religion as a critical perspective. It is our position as readers and critics that should be scrutinised: to reflect the problem back upon a critical tradition of misrepresenting women speaks to an Orientalised arrogance that believes in the falsely dichotomised positions of 'oppressed or liberated', 'veiled or unveiled'.

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⁷⁶ My use of the term frame in this context draws upon Amina Yaqin and Peter Morey's use in both *Framing Muslims* and *Islamophobia and the Novel*.

⁷⁷ Morey, *Islamophobia and the Novel*, p. 11.

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