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FROM DESIRE TO DISCONTENT: ISABELLE EBERHARDT
BETWEEN CULTURES

KIRSTY BENNETT
MPHIL

UNIVERSITY OF SUSSEX
SEPTEMBER 2013

STATEMENT

I hereby declare that this thesis has not been and will not be, submitted in whole or in part to another university for the award of any other degree.

Signature.....

UNIVERSITY OF SUSSEX

KIRSTY BENNETT

MPHIL COLONIAL AND POST COLONIAL CULTURES

FROM DESIRE TO DISCONTENT: ISABELLE EBERHARDT
BETWEEN CULTURESSUMMARY

This thesis examines the Islamic and literary aspects of Isabelle Eberhardt's identity construction and her mediation of the two. In situating Eberhardt within the Orientalisms of the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, the thesis examines the writer's trajectory within a particular nineteenth-century desire for the Orient as well as her desire for knowledge.

Eberhardt's desire for status as a female writer within the wider Orientalist universe is paradoxically based on her male Islamic alter-ego as Mahmoud Saâdi and her desire to become the Other. I argue that this mediated opposition produces a figure that ultimately becomes a locus of contestation between Algeria and France. The assassination attempt (and her subsequent expulsion from Algeria) heralds a series of letters from Eberhardt to various colon newspapers. The public self-fashioning of her Islamic identity and consolidation of her literary identity, plus the simultaneous negotiation of the political situation in Algeria, become the focus of this thesis and constitute what I argue becomes her discourse of discontent.

My argument draws on archival material and it is contextualised within a historicisation of colonial Algeria and the Ottoman Empire, and the location of Islam within colonial society. This thesis reveals how Eberhardt was subject to multiple reconstructions contemporaneously by colon society and by the French metropole. It argues that, beyond her own self-fashioning of identity, her capacity for ideological reconstruction continues.

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The genesis of this thesis began over twenty years ago when I came across Kobak's biography of Eberhardt following a trip to North Africa. That work of scholarship has yet to be surpassed and I owe a debt of gratitude to Kobak's biography first and foremost. I still own that very same copy: it has played an integral part in my overall engagement with this project.

Two trips to the Centre des Archives d'Outre Mer (CAOM) in Aix en Provence, where the Isabelle Eberhardt files are held, ensued at tail ends of the project. I would like to thank Dr. Shen Bayon de Noyer for his invaluable assistance in the archive on both of those trips and the Bayon de Noyer family for their generous hospitality and hosting of my first visit. I am grateful for funding from the University of Sussex for my second visit.

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A note on translation and transliteration

This thesis follows the word and transliteration guidelines of the *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*. I adhere to the spelling of the author for translated or transliterated words in quotation - Kobak's spelling of Arab names follows Eberhardt's writings and contemporary French documents.

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INTRODUCTION

Group Theory

Certainly

it is the "cultural level
of a Noah's Ark"
(The Animals go in two by two.)
But

we do inhabit a rainy climate.
And alas

you can't get a sex change
on the N.H.S.

Only verbal instruments (Elizabeth Eberhardt
referred to throughout her diary as "he")
or linguistic situation (comprising clothes,
attitudes, behaviour) can perform the delicate
operation, of altering the terms of an erotic
equation.

We

were fitting key
works to our lives

e.g.

Tension, awareness, extremity
(liberte, egalite, fraternite)

She

hesitated for a while
then put down her cards;

Michael amo

Hamid amas

Me amat

"Of course I know what it means.
I did A level Latin."

Catch phrase

love all
game and set.

There are no

just(es)
mots. ¹

¹ Veronica Forrest-Thomson, *Collected Poems*, ed. Anthony Barnett, Exeter: Shearsman, in association with Alladyce, Barnett, Publishers, 2008, p. 87. With thanks to Dr. Gareth Farmer for his recollection of this poem. Farmer's doctoral thesis was on Veronica Forrest-Thomson.

Like Lady Macbeth in Alan Sinfield's reading, Isabelle Eberhardt is 'compounded of contradictory stereotypes' and she confounds Orientalist positioning.² There is a plurality of Eberhardts, constructed textually, auto-biographically and biographically, affirming her 'affinity to cultural camouflage'. 'Eberhardt's larger than life biography and diaries have exerted an extraordinary hold on the Occidental feminist imagination';³ and yet her writing (her stories, fragments, novels and correspondence) remains in her shadow. The above, rather prescient poem written by Veronica Forrest-Thomson in 1969/70 before a new wave of feminists took Eberhardt in their firm grasp, deliberately uses the wrong forename to re-emphasise the idea of identity changes and shifts and uniquely makes reference to Eberhardt taking on a masculine identity in her diaries and in the poet's use of the latin conjugation: amo amas amat. It is an apt place to begin my thesis on the constructions of Eberhardt and from which to illustrate how I will take a different path from the work that has gone before which focused on cross-dressing and gender ambiguities. I will contribute to another construction of Eberhardt for the 21st century: a construction that focuses on her literary and Islamic identity, her desire for the Orient, and her resulting discourse of discontent as she mediates between cultures.

Eberhardt's brief writing career spanned only nine years before her untimely death at the age of twenty seven in 1904. In those nine years she published under three names: Isabelle Eberhardt, Nicolas Podolinsky and Mahmoud Saâdi. Eberhardt's first publication was in 1895 when she was eighteen years old, under the Russian male pseudonym of Nicolas Podolinsky. During the next five years she published thirteen further articles under the pseudonym of Podolinsky; mainly translations of Russian poems in the French literary magazines, *Nouvelle Revue*

² To paraphrase Emily Apter quoting Alan Sinfield in her chapter, 'Acting Out Orientalism: Stereotype, Performativity, The Isabelle Eberhardt Effect', in *Continental Drift, From National Characters to Virtual Subjects*, University of Chicago Press, 1999, p. 146-147.

Alan Sinfield quote in full: 'The fainting/feinting incident gives us the "impossible" point at which the two contradictory features of the stereotype coincide as equally plausible. However, since they cannot co-exist, but only collide, they allow an audience to see, if we will, that Lady Macbeth is compounded of contradictory stereotypes – a character who is not a character.' Alan Sinfield, *Faultlines*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992, p. 78.

³ See Apter's full chapter on Eberhardt in *Continental Drift, From National Characters to Virtual Subjects*, pp. 131-149.

Moderne and *L'Athénée*.⁴ Under the male pseudonym of Mahmoud Saâdi, Eberhardt published only one piece, 'Fantasia', in the August/September 1901 edition of *L'Athénée*. Although she represented herself in her personal life as the Tunisian taleb, Mahmoud Saâdi (in Algeria *and* in France), in the last four years of her life Eberhardt published under her birth name of Eberhardt. This was more than likely a career move on Eberhardt's part, consciously mediating herself to a particular audience: the French reading public. She was extremely aware of her public persona and the furtherance of her career as a writer. According to letters preserved in the archives and notes in her diaries, Eberhardt corresponded with the editors of various journals, asking their advice on publication. Eberhardt was given advice and recommended to key figures in the French and Algerian literary circle such as Eugene Brieux, a playwright and editor who assisted Isabelle with her journalism;⁵ J. Bonneval; James Sanua; and Victor Barrucand, who eventually became her literary executor and who published her diaries and other works posthumously. From 1900 Eberhardt also published journalism and despatches; 'protest' letters to French/Algerian newspapers; an unfinished novel published in instalments, alongside short stories and fragments, and all under the name of Isabelle Eberhardt. This thesis examines only a small section of Eberhardt's oeuvre with a conscious focus on archival material and as yet uncited scholarly articles. In this respect I aim to avoid a reproduction of the same narrow range of published sources found in the Eberhardt scholarship. My research here covers the period from 1895 to April 1903, omitting the last year of Eberhardt's life. An analysis of the last year of Eberhardt's life and work (and her relationship with General Lyautey and Morocco) deserves considerable and lengthy attention and it is the basis for my future research.

I employ as an initial framework for the thesis Ali Behdad's expanded theory on the 'Desire for the Orient' taken from his specific chapter on Nerval where Behdad co-opts Nerval's own words *le désir de l'Orient*.⁶ In brief, Behdad states that:

⁴ J. Bonneval, editor of *L'Athenée*, published in Jan, Feb and May of 1897, Eberhardt's translations into prose of poems by Russian poet Simeon Nadson who had died at the age of 25 and who was, along with Richepin, her favourite poet at the time. Annette Kobak, *Isabelle*, p.43

⁵ See for example Eberhardt's diary entry of Tuesday 6 August 1901: 'had a letter from Brieux: I realise that in the literary domain, I have a vast amount of work to do. Am determined *to do it, because I must*. How strange: as I was writing the above, I felt a slight improvement in my outlook, no doubt because I think I might be able to do that short story for :*L'Illustration*.' Isabelle Eberhardt, *The Nomad, The Diaries of Isabelle Eberhardt*, trans. Nina de Voogd, intro. Annette Kobak, Chichester: Summersdale, 2002.

⁶ Ali Behdad, *Belated Travellers, Orientalism in the Age of Colonial Dissolution*, Cork: Cork University Press, 1994, p. 21.

The desire for the Orient, functioning in mediated opposition to the Orientalist's desire for knowledge and mastery, produces the effects of splitting and slippage and prompts a latent practice of decentering both in the case of the speaking subject and in his or her discourse. The belated Orientalism of travellers such as Nerval, Flaubert, Loti, and Eberhardt vacillates between an insatiable search for a counter experience in the Orient and the melancholic discovery of its impossibility; they are, as a result, discursively diffracted and ideologically split.⁷

This thesis draws on Behdad's theory as a basis for examining the trajectory of Eberhardt but differs in one respect: I argue for an overriding resulting discourse of discontent as a result of the mediated opposition between the desire for the Orient and the Orientalist's desire for knowledge.

In chapter one I examine how Ali Behdad's concept of the Orientalist's drive for knowledge is evidenced in Eberhardt's published stories, dictations, and correspondence, and to what extent this mediates in opposition with her desire for the Orient, that is, her receptivity to Islam and Arabic culture in the Maghreb. I demonstrate how Eberhardt is in fact initially bound up within the parameters of Said's Orientalism and the ideological apparatus that underpins and justifies imperialism, in this instance, French colonial concerns in Algeria. Here, I argue for a significant departure from Said's analysis. I discuss how the Orientalist drive for knowledge is for Eberhardt a learning process she engages with in order to stake a claim to the knowledge value of herself as a writer with some Orientalist authority, in the pre-Saidian sense of the word. I am referring here to the tradition of the scholarly Orientalist, well-versed in the study of the ancient world (classics) and Oriental languages. In situating Eberhardt on a spectrum *between* the traditional Orientalist and the writer with knowledge of the classics, Eberhardt, with her knowledge of the classic world, and the Arabic language, aims to establish her credentials as a writer, comparable to the drive for knowledge inherent in Oriental scholarship, in order to gain credibility, legitimacy and support. The significance of this lies in her desire for status as a female writer in the male-dominated domain of Orientalism. I use Eberhardt's short story 'A Sojourn in Tunis' to explore her attempt at becoming an Orientalist writer.

Chapter two begins by illustrating how Eberhardt's achievement of her literary/Orientalist status as a *woman* is consolidated, paradoxically, by the manifestation of her *male* persona as Mahmoud Saâdi. I then go on to explore in

⁷ Behdad, *Belated Travellers*, p. 15.

depth the process of that identity construction. Although I am attending to particular biographical aspects of Eberhardt, it has a textual, and specifically an epistolary, focus zoning in on archival correspondence plus an auxillary discussion of relevant images in the opening section. In my textual analysis I highlight a letter from James Sanua/ Shaykh Abu Naddara responding to Eberhardt's request to obtain a Turkish/Ottoman passport fraudulently. This request is placed in the context of Pan-Islamic politics and the Ottoman Empire at that time. I then proceed to argue that the consolidation of her personal identity as Mahmoud Saâdi, alongside her literary identity, is largely mimetic of the Oriental identity construction of her 'intellectual mentor', Abu Naddara, an Egyptian playwright who lived in exile in Paris.

Chapter three examines Eberhardt's public mediation and further self-fashioning of her Islamic and literary identity in French colonial Algeria, through letters to the press, following the assassination attempt on her life and subsequent expulsion from Algeria. In addition, this analysis is layered with comparisons to Eberhardt's private discourse from unpublished archival correspondence in a related time period. I also cite the latest research on the assassination attempt. Soazic Lahuec's article utilises the previously inaccessible criminal file (opened in 2001) and provides evidence to contradict the general stance of biographers and critics. Lahuec, as yet, remains uncited but her evidence supports my emphasis on the political, rather than religious, motivation for the assassination attempt. Throughout this chapter there are several inter-locking concerns: those of career, French colonial politics and religious belonging. The political consequences of Eberhardt's self-fashioning of an Islamic identity (as an initiate of the Qadiriyya) in the environment of the Sufi brotherhoods in Algeria is further discussed. This, alongside an analysis of the manipulation by the colonial administration of those brotherhoods, and of the assassination attempt on Eberhardt's life, provides some historical context to the assassinations of explorers in the latter half of the nineteenth century.

Chapter four continues with an assessment of Eberhardt's public mediation of identity and her discourse of discontent following incessant press campaigns related to her identity and purpose in Algeria (now returned as a French citizen following her marriage). The chapter highlights an overlooked episode where Eberhardt is described as 'La Kahéna', or the Kahina, the war-like queen of the Berbers, by French journalists following the visit of the French President to Algiers. I examine Eberhardt's public response to the French newspaper *La Petite Gironde* and the

justification of her literary and Islamic identity, revealing Eberhardt's continuing career strategy as a writer. I also expose briefly some unpublished archival material on the incessant press campaign in 1903 that concerns 'Barrucand-Mahmoud-Saâdi-Eberhardt' (as *L' Union Républicaine* terms Eberhardt, along with her colleague and posthumous editor) in order to provide a background to Eberhardt's corresponding discourse of discontent.

CHAPTER ONE

Orientalism, Eberhardt, and the Orientalist Drive for Knowledge

Isabelle Eberhardt was born in Geneva on 17 February 1877, and registered as the illegitimate daughter of Nathalie de Moerder, née Eberhardt. She was educated by her legal guardian and stepfather, Alexander Trophimowsky, an ex-Orthodox Russian priest, turned anarchist, with an interest in Islam. Trophimowsky was the tutor to Mme de Moerder's children (Nicolas, Nathalie, and Vladimir) in Russia before Eberhardt was born. Trophimowsky became her mother's lover and in 1871 they left Russia (Mme de Moerder pleading illness) leaving behind Mme de Moerder's husband General Nicolas de Moerder. They travelled in Europe with her children for some years. Eberhardt's brother Augustin was born an ambiguous nine months after they had left Russia and they finally settled in Geneva. In all probability, Trophimowsky was Eberhardt's father. In her adolescence Eberhardt evinced a strong interest in, and desire to visit, North Africa. She entered into correspondence (under various male and female pseudonyms from 1895 onwards) with individuals based in North Africa. My research concentrates on her correspondence with Ali Abdul Wahab, a Tunisian civil servant, and James Sanua/Shaykh Abu Naddara, an Egyptian playwright living in exile in Paris. Both provided her with practical information about life in the Maghreb and the Islamic religion, at her request. In 1897 Eberhardt visited Bône in Algeria for the first time with her mother. Eberhardt also visited Tunisia but settled in Algeria in 1899. Her mother died in 1897 in Bône and Trophimowsky died in 1899. Eberhardt was left penniless due to lengthy disputations arising in Russia concerning the family estate and this spurred her on to create an income from her writing. Eberhardt resided in numerous cities and villages across Algeria: Algiers, Bône, El Oued, Batna, Ténès and Aïn Séfra. In 1900 she moved to El Oued where she met, and became the lover of, an Algerian sergeant in the spahis, Slimane Ehnni, whose regiment was based there. In the same year Eberhardt was initiated into the Qadiriyya Sufi brotherhood; Slimane was already a member. Eberhardt's presence in El Oued and her relationship with a 'native' (albeit, naturalised French) was a source of concern to French colonial officials. Furthermore, the army had made a strong alliance with the Tijaniyya, the rival brotherhood to the Qadiriyya. The Qadiriyya brotherhood, and thus Eberhardt, was considered untrustworthy by the colonial and military authorities and treated with suspicion.

The Governor General of Algeria condoned the military's decision to dismiss Slimane from the El Oued barracks and transfer him to Batna in order to remove the provocative presence of Eberhardt in the desert region. In 1901 they finally had the excuse to expel her from Algeria following the assassination attempt on her life but her marriage to Slimane, later in 1901, endowed her with French citizenship and the freedom to return to Algeria. Slimane, following in the footsteps of his father (who was a spahi, interpreter and then police commissioner), became an interpreter and was posted to Ténès in 1902. Eberhardt followed Slimane to Ténès where she subsequently became the victim of an incessant press campaign, alongside her colleague Victor Barrucand, editor of the Algiers-based, bilingual newspaper, the *Akhbar*. In 1903 Eberhardt met and became friends with General Lyautey who had just been posted to Algeria with the intention of expanding French colonial territory from Algeria in to Morocco. Barrucand and Lyautey corresponded and decided to send Eberhardt to report on the warring tribal situation on the Algerian/Moroccan border. Eberhardt willingly accepted her remit. Alongside producing despatches as a war reporter she in fact used her official status as a passport to the region in order to fulfil her Sufi path. Eberhardt visited the zawiya in Kenadsa with the intention of staying there many months. Eberhardt drowned in a flash flood in the southern region of Algeria on 21 October 1904 following admittance to the military hospital at Aïn Séfra. She discharged herself and took residence in the village away from the military presence. Lyautey was responsible for rescuing her papers and manuscripts from the ruins of the flood and sent them to Barrucand who published them posthumously. Lyautey ensured a Muslim burial for Eberhardt in the nearby cemetery of Sidi-bou-Djemâa. Lyautey recounts that she was buried according to the rites of the local population and with a profound respect.

In this chapter I shall examine how Ali Behdad's concept of the Orientalist's drive for knowledge is evidenced in Eberhardt's published stories, dictations, and correspondence, and to what extent this mediates in opposition with her desire for the Orient, that is, her receptivity to Islam (her empathetic perspective) and the Maghreb. I shall discuss how the Orientalist drive for knowledge is, for Eberhardt, a learning process with which she engages in order to stake a claim to the knowledge-value of herself as a writer with some Orientalist authority in the pre-Saidian, traditional sense of the word. This is what Sadik Jalal Al-Azm terms 'Cultural-Academic Orientalism':

a tradition of disciplined learning whose main function is scientifically to research and catalogue the Orient in an apparently objective manner.⁸

Cultural Academic Orientalism is a term that I utilise to delineate my particular focus on Eberhardt in the opening section of this chapter. However, this is not to suggest a dismissal of the ideological implications of Cultural-Academic Orientalism as widely represented by Said, nor to present a critique of Said, delving into the complex critiques of Said's Orientalism from critics such as Al-Azm. I solely wish to isolate al Azm's concept of 'Cultural- Academic Orientalism' in situating Eberhardt on a spectrum *between* the traditional Orientalist and the writer with knowledge of the classics.

Eberhardt aims to establish her credentials as a writer with her knowledge of the classical world. This is comparable to the egotistic drive for knowledge inherent in Oriental congresses and enabled her to gain credibility, legitimacy and support 'by claiming ancient roots and classical origins.'⁹ The significance of this lies in her desire for status as a female writer in the male-dominated domain of Cultural-Academic Orientalism. I shall use the example of Eberhardt's short story 'A Sojourn in Tunis' to explore her attempt at becoming an Orientalist writer.

Furthermore, I shall demonstrate how Eberhardt is in fact initially bound up within the parameters of Said's Orientalism and the ideological apparatus inherent in Cultural-Academic Orientalism. This is what al Azm terms 'Institutional Orientalism', the ideological superstructure that underpins and justifies, in this instance, French colonial concerns in Algeria. But significantly, Eberhardt's position as she documents and catalogues copiously, in an Orientalist, Eurocentric manner; codifying and observing is not so clear-cut. Eberhardt, in a series of documents, not only lists all the tribes in Algeria, but also provides a breakdown of the branches of the Aryan and Semitic races, along with detailed geographical information of North Africa, particularly Tunisia and Algeria. However, what complicates Eberhardt's positioning within the parameters of Orientalism, is the content of the instruction and education that Eberhardt gives to her Algerian husband Slimane, in the manner of a moralising dictation. This dictation consists of important dates in the history of Islam and the Prophet alongside a lesson in the 'forming of peoples' in ancient history. In

⁸ Sadik Jalal Al-'Azm, 'Orientalism and Orientalism in Reverse', *Khamsin*, 8, 1981, pp. 5-26. Quoted in *Orientalism, A Reader*, ed. Alexander Lyon Macfie, New York: New York University Press, 2000, p. 218.

⁹ Ibid. p. 219.

addition, Eberhardt compiles lists of relevant occidental and oriental literature, and the dates of recent Orientalist congresses. To open the chapter I shall demonstrate how this codification and cataloguing of the Orient is apparent in Eberhardt's texts whilst simultaneously revealing her divided position and, as such, transcending the essentialistic categories of Occident and Orient. Furthermore, my emphasis on Eberhardt's relationship to the classical Orientalist field adds a hitherto overlooked dimension to the studies of her relationship with Orientalism and colonialism.

Cataloguing the Orient

Tribus	Canton	arrondissement
Abazig Charif	Djiffa	Blida
Abdelkader	Djiffa	Blida
Abel el Oued	Supérie	Orléansville
Ajffa	Djiffa	Blida
Ain Dessem	Ain Dessem	alger
Ain Hazon	Ain Dessem	alger
Aissa	Djiffa	Blida
Ait Mansour	Ain Dessem	alger
Aklil	Ors national	Bizi'ouza
Amoua	Djiffa	Blida
Araza	Boufarik	alger
Belloua	Bizi'ouza	Bizi'ouza
Ben Chaoua	Boufarik	Boufarik
Beni Aissa	Donira	alger
Beni Ahmed	Meliana	Blida

Fig. 1
Eberhardt's list of Algerian Tribes¹⁰

In the above figure Eberhardt is cataloguing the tribes of Algeria, listing the names of the tribes along with the regions they belong to. These are divided into the larger regions in the second column and the smaller regions or 'arrondissements' in the third column. It is an extensive list yet only covers tribes beginning with the letters 'A' and 'B'. Whether the list was completed to the end of the alphabet is not apparent in

¹⁰ 23 X 24, notes and dictations for Slimane Ehni, CAOM.

the archive. Eberhardt's detailed catalogue of 'the ladder of tribes' in Algeria is reminiscent of T. E. Lawrence's scholarship on the Levant and also of his Orientalist drive for knowledge.¹¹ Lawrence's receptivity to Arabic culture and Eberhardt's receptivity towards Islam, alongside Arabic culture, places them in a debate on the role of westerners in the Middle East, the validity of the writing they produced, their position on the spectrum of Orientalisms and the multiple 'purposes it [Orientalism] served for various parties.'¹²

Kennedy's critique of Said's *Orientalism* and his assessment of Richard Burton's uses of Orientalism in *The Thousand and One Nights* are pertinent to my positioning of Eberhardt in this chapter. As Kennedy argues, 'Orientalism often served as a source of inspiration for Europeans who sought to challenge or enrich their own society.'¹³ Furthermore, continuing the comparison with Burton, whom Kennedy states 'found that an Orientalist stance gave him the emotional and intellectual distance he needed to carry out his critique of British society', Eberhardt's own Orientalist stance provided her with the platform to critique (when it was convenient) the French colonial administration, as discussed in chapter two.¹⁴

Not only does Eberhardt catalogue the Orient for her own purposes, she also teaches her husband Slimane Ehhni to do so, 'enlightening' him with the same Eurocentric model. This could be a case of the superiority of the western subject over the 'other' but the content of Eberhardt's teaching complicates the situation. It is a catalogue of important dates in the history of Islam and a life of the Prophet which, by the sheer fact of her dictation, implies that it is important for him to learn. The fact that she is not teaching Slimane about Christianity or Western philosophy in order to maintain some sense of European superiority implies that this is no exercise in Occidental self-affirmation. Eberhardt is educating Slimane in Muslim history with a western pedagogical method, although arguably this gives her some sense of superiority. This pedagogical method of dictation (recited and copied down to learn grammar) is part of the French schooling system and is still in use.

¹¹ 'The ladder of tribes' is a phrase taken from T. E. Lawrence, *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, London: Vintage, 2008 [1935], p. 345. See also T. E. Lawrence, *Crusader Castles*, Oxford: Clarendon, 1988 [1936], a publication of his Oxford undergraduate thesis on Crusader Castles.

¹² See Dane Kennedy's take on Richard Burton and the uses of Orientalism: '“Captain Burton's Oriental Muck Heap”: The Book of the Thousand Nights and the Uses of Orientalism', *Journal of British Studies*, Vol. 39, No. 3 (Jul., 2000), pp. 317-339 at p. 318.

¹³ Ibid, p. 319.

¹⁴ Ibid, p. 321.

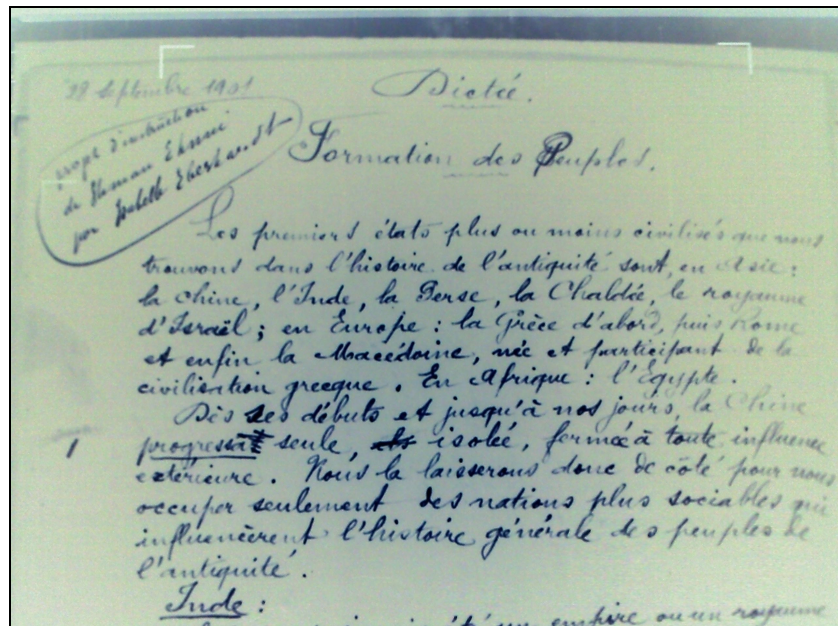


Fig. 2

Instruction of Slimane Ehnni by Isabelle Eberhardt¹⁵

Translation:

28 (or 22?) September 1901

[note in diagonal:] [...?] instruction of Slimane Ehnni by Isabelle Eberhardt

Dictation

Forming of the Peoples

The first more or less civilised states that we find in classical times are, in Asia: China, India, Persia, Chaldea, the kingdom of Israel; in Europe: Greece first, then Rome, and finally Macedonia, born of and deriving from the Greek civilisation. In Africa: Egypt.

From its start and until now, China progresses on its own, isolated, closed to all external influence. We will thus leave it aside to deal only with the more sociable nations that influenced the general history of the peoples of classical times.¹⁶

Furthermore, the content of Eberhardt's dictation to Slimane is worthy of comment with regard to my positioning of Eberhardt as an Orientalist who bases her credibility on a knowledge of antiquity. In a double inscription of 'knowledge', verbally and textually, Eberhardt instructs Slimane on the history of 'peoples' in ancient history and particularly those 'more social nations' that have influenced civilisation. It is interesting to note Eberhardt's authorial intrusion into the dictation - 'we will thus leave it aside' - establishing herself as the prime mediator of knowledge. She states: 'From its start and until now, China progresses on its own, isolated, closed to all

¹⁵ 23 X 24, notes and dictations for Slimane Ehnni, CAOM.

¹⁶ Translated by Gwenaëlle Lefeuvre.

external influence. *We will thus leave it aside* to deal only with the more sociable nations that influenced the general history of the peoples of classical times.’ [my italics]

However, in order to contextualise critically the nature of the categorisation of Eberhardt’s instruction to Slimane, that of the ‘forming of peoples’, it is necessary to go to the source of the critical discourse on Orientalism: Said’s theory on the classic eurocentric tendency to classify and codify:

At the heart of European culture during the many decades of imperial expansion lay what could be called an undeterred and unrelenting eurocentrism. This accumulated experiences, territories, peoples, histories, it studied them, it classified them, it verified them; but above all it subordinated them to the culture and indeed the very idea of a white Christian Europe. This cultural process has to be seen not as the origin and cause, then at least as the vital, informing and invigorating counterpoint to the economic and political machinery that we all concur stands at the heart of imperialism.

And it must also be noted that this eurocentric culture relentlessly codified and observed everything about the non-European or presumably peripheral world, in so thorough and detailed a manner as to leave no item untouched, no culture unstudied, no people and land unclaimed.’¹⁷

Eberhardt’s pedagogical method initially conforms to Said’s analysis in that her categorisation of the tribes and the formation of peoples is the epitome of eurocentrism which, according to Said, ‘accumulated experiences, territories, peoples, histories, it studied them, it classified them, it verified them’. However, Eberhardt’s instruction of Slimane departs crucially from the imperialist project that Said describes because her instruction is not based on a subordination to the idea of ‘white, Christian Europe.’ Where Eberhardt departs specifically is evident in the next document (fig. 3). As part of Eberhardt’s dictation to Slimane, she provides a history of the Prophet Mohammed and significant dates in the Islamic calendar and of various caliphates; the latter awareness from Eberhardt is an important focus in my next chapter: Eberhardt’s Islamic identity and her relationship to the caliphate of the Ottoman Empire.

¹⁷ Edward Said, ‘Nationalism, Colonialism and Literature, Yeats and Decolonisation’, Belfast: Field Day Theatre Company, Pamphlet No. 15, 1998, p. 7.

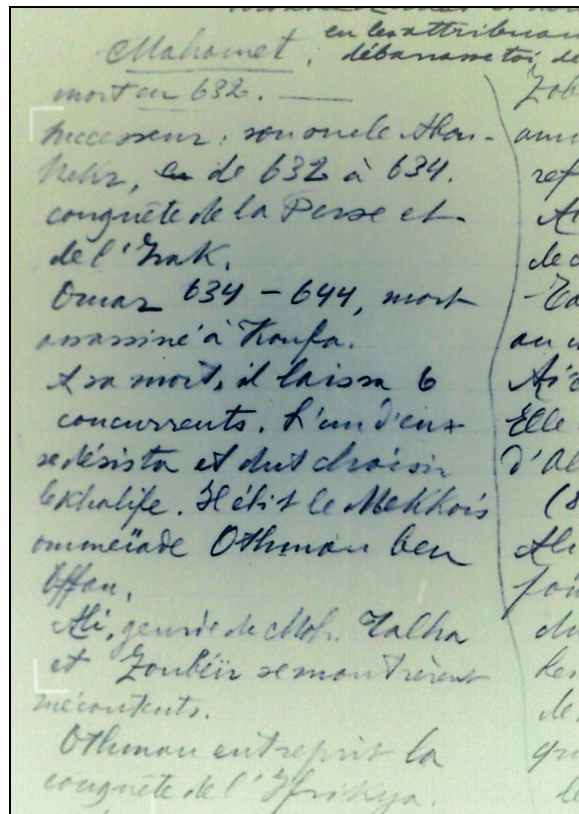


Fig. 3

Notes and dictations for Slimane Ehnai ¹⁸

Translation [laid out as above]:

Mahomet

died in 632.

successor: his uncle Abu Bekr, from 632 to 634.

conquest of Persia and Iraq.

Omar 634-644, died assassinated in Koufa.

At his death, he left 6 competitors. One withdrew and had to choose the

caliph. He elected the Mekkois Umayyad...umayyad Othman Ben Affan.

Ali, Moh. Talha's son-in-law and Zoubair were displeased.

Othman started the conquest of Ifrikya, sent Gen. El Hasith.

In 656, Othman was assassinated and Ali succeeds him.

The content of Eberhardt's dictation to Slimane provides detailed evidence for my reading of her positioning with regard not only to Islam but Orientalism and imperialism. Eberhardt is representative of yet another case-study in the micro-practices of Orientalism as demonstrated by Kennedy's theory on Burton. Although Eberhardt is not an explicit part of the imperialist project that colonised territories in the nineteenth century, for example in the 'scramble for Africa', she participates in

¹⁸ 23 X 24, notes and dictations for Slimane Ehnai, CAOM.

the structuring themes of this historical period that justified colonisation, despite the purpose in the content of her writing.

Therefore Eberhardt's desire to catalogue the Orient in this manner is not a neutral scholarly exercise; it arises from the medical and anthropological classifications of race in the nineteenth century which stemmed from the classification of the plant world and the mapping of the landscape.¹⁹ Therefore in this aspect we see Eberhardt fitting into Said's theory of Orientalism as a method of cataloguing the Orient that was inextricably linked to the imperialistic world view. Kabbani states:

The nineteenth century wanted to know the world it was in the process of conquering. The travellers travelled for their *patrie*, as it were; they were the seeing eye, and the recounting voice. They often had official backing from officialdom, since their travelogues ultimately served to forge the imperial representation of the world.²⁰

Although Eberhardt's has this nineteenth-century desire to travel and to 'know the world', her specific desire is for the Orient which functions to enrich her sense of Islamic identity, to confirm her Islamic identity, and she uses this ultimately to create her identity as a writer. Eberhardt is not the traveller of Kabbani's definition. Eberhardt has no links with officialdom and the information she classifies is no doubt part of her desire to take on a secular, anthropological register in her writing. In continuing with the concept of cataloguing the Orient it is of use to see how this extends into Eberhardt's literary work, beyond her own auto-didactic education and that of Slimane's, and into the realm of literary culture.

Printemps au Desert

Eberhardt wrote this impressionistic fragment (of approximately 800 words) 'Springtime in the Desert' in the summer of 1901 whilst destitute in Marseilles, France, following her expulsion from Algeria after the assassination attempt, which is explored in detail in chapter three. Eberhardt needed to earn money and this publication was a successful attempt towards that end. The whole

¹⁹ See Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*, for a thorough analysis of these paradigms of classification. *Imperial Eyes, Travel Writing and Transculturation*. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2008.

²⁰ Rana Kabbani, *Imperial Fictions: Europe's Myths of Orient*, London: Pandora, 1994 [1986], p. 6.

fragment/impression contained in 'Printemps au Desert' consists of descriptions of the chotts juxtaposed with lush oases, but with an emphasis on describing the chotts, as the unknown or non-European aspects of the landscape, as 'one of the strangest places on earth'. In particular she foregrounds, as the title of her work indicates, spring in the desert; and that which she is seeing is 'quite unknown in the souf', confirming here at least, Kabbani's notion of the traveller as 'the seeing eye, and the recounting voice.'²¹

There, for the first time in months, I was seeing earth and fine wild grass, things quite unknown in the souf.

Farther out, the road descends into the colourful, clayey lowlands which are crisscrossed by dark-brown salt-marshes, now dry; then the road winds round a few peaked knolls of aluminium blue.

From there we enter the region of the great *chotts* or salt plains, one of the strangest places on earth. First we follow a track, slightly gravely and solid, between treacherous expanses where a thin, apparently dry crust hides unfathomed pits of mud.

To the right and left can be seen two seas of milky blue, stretching towards the horizon, seeming to blend with the pale sky. And beneath the motionless crystal of the salty waters there are countless archipelagos of clays and multicoloured rocks, in perpendicular and stratified ledges.²²

The ethnographic register evident in the above fragment, through description of the landscape, had been recommended by George Sand to writers such as Eugène Fromentin, who wrote on Algeria in the mid-nineteenth century, and whom Eberhardt regarded as one of her literary mentors. Fromentin is liberally quoted in her diaries along with Loti. Furthermore Sand urged Fromentin to include both scientific information about geology and fictional elements to heighten his books' appeal. Eberhardt, like Fromentin, exploits the Orient for her European readers who could not travel there, 'on the imperial, "accepted" political premise that the Arab world is utterly foreign and bizarre and is in need of interpretation by the European.'²³

There is evidence of the geological approach, advised by Sand, in the detailed description of the chotts (dry salt lakes) in the authoritative manner of an

²¹ Ibid.

²² Isabelle Eberhardt, *Prisoner of Dunes*, trans. Sharon Bangert, London: Peter Owen, 1995, p. 89.

²³ Valérie Orlando in the introduction to Eugène Fromentin, *Between Sea and Sahara, An Algerian Journal*, trans. Blake Robinson, intro. Valérie Orlando, Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1999, p. xxi. English translation of *Une Année dans le Sahel*, [1859].

ethnographer, albeit a literary ethnographer. The region of the great chotts is also a metaphor for Eberhardt's nostalgic crystallization of the past, the 'motionless crystal of the salty waters [...] countless archipelagos of clay and multicoloured rocks, in perpendicular and stratified ledges'. By nostalgically crystallizing the past, Eberhardt essentializes the landscape, leading her story to become representative of nineteenth-century Orientalist tropes and the 'institutional Orientalism' that Said decries.²⁴ Sidonie Smith comments in her book *Decolonising the Subject*, on how the reverence for loss can lead to the positioning of people or places in an irrecoverable past, identifying them with an inevitable loss, ennobling them and distilling Africa through specific axes of identification, in an exoticised and timeless place - a nostalgically crystallized past – even as the historical changes being wrought by the march of colonialism are acknowledged.²⁵ This nostalgic representation of the past, this timeless Orient, in its very essentialism works in opposition to Eberhardt's alternative 'desire for the Orient' manifested in her receptivity to Islam and Arabic culture. Such moments of ideological diffraction will now become more evident in my examination of Eberhardt's ultimate fluency in Arabic revealing instances of slippage in the Orientalist, egotistic drive for knowledge.

Eberhardt and Arabic

The publication of 'Printemps au Desert' in the summer of 1901 saw Eberhardt's career as a writer progressing successfully. However, importantly, she wished to be accepted as a writer with some authority on the Orient especially in her journalistic guise. There is evidence of Eberhardt being perceived in a position of authority in the Arab world in the letter below, written to Eberhardt from the French writers and brothers Marius and Ary Leblond, who won the Prix-Goncourt in 1909.²⁶ The brothers and Eberhardt were mutual friends with the French-Algerian writer Robert Randau who had written alerting them of Eberhardt's 'remarkable presence.'²⁷ Leblond states that he consults Eberhardt as 'an Arab soul' and desires a written

²⁴ To use al-Azm's term, Institutional Orientalism as opposed to Cultural-Academic Orientalism.

²⁵ Sidonie Smith, *Decolonising the Subject*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992, p. 430.

²⁶ Kobak, *Isabelle*, p. 246.

²⁷ Ibid, p. 198. Robert Randau was the pseudonym of Robert Arnaud. Randau was a French-Algerian novelist. In works such as *Les Colons* (1907) and *Les Algérienistes* (1911) he presented European colonists as a vigorous antidote to the decadence of metropolitan France. He was seen by many in colonial Algeria as the archetype of a literary school unique to North Africa.

piece from her in order to have the Arab view represented in his literary magazine.²⁸ Aside from the ethical and critical issues implied in this statement and the question of whether Eberhardt can in fact legitimately represent an Arab point of view, the fact that she is seen as empathetic to the Arab worldview by French editors and writers is significant in my placement of Eberhardt as a writer aspiring to an Orientalist authority feeding on her experience of colonial Algeria to further her career.

Dear fellow and friend,
 Could you get at Arnaud's this novel from Rosny ([..?]), read it and send it to us immediately, in a few lines, your opinion of these great novel writers to whom the Grand [..?] will dedicate an issue (investigation and writers' opinions). We would be happy that you adopt an Arab point of view: nomadism, prayer/quest [??] of space etc. Don't forget that we consult you as an Arab soul. Do not tell anyone why you borrow this book. And make haste to send us about 15 lines.
 Most cordially,
 Marius-Ary Leblond
 Director of the Grand [..?] ²⁹

It took Eberhardt a few hard-won years to attain this kind of literary status and positioning in the French/Arab world. An integral qualification of any Orientalist was fluency in the language of the area of study. Eberhardt's proficiency in standard and colloquial Arabic, ethnographic descriptions and journalistic work places her within the modern definitions of an Arabist. Although not travelling with a compass, not compiling maps, and not reporting back to the Société de Géographie in Paris, as other predominantly male, and French, Arabists and Orientalists were doing (and the very occasional female, such as Eberhardt's early contemporary Gertrude Bell was to do for the Royal Geographical Society in Britain), Eberhardt's writing still aspires to an ethnographic register as seen in the above analysis of 'Printemps au Desert'.³⁰ Eberhardt's style is necessarily gendered; there is the absence of a male scientific style to be found (as seen for example in an anthropological monograph with

²⁸ 23 X 26, letters from various friends, Marius-Ary Leblond to Eberhardt, CAOM. Marius-Ary Leblond was the pen name of two writers, historians, writers, art critics and journalists, George Athénas and Aimé Merlo.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ The Société de Géographie counts amongst its founding members the French, Orientalist scholar Chateaubriand and the German scholar Alexander Von Humboldt. Of the 217 founding members of the Société in 1821, 19 were 'foreigners' that resided in Paris, including Humboldt. Alfred Fierro, *La Société de Géographie 1821-1946*, Geneva/Paris: Centre de Recherches d'Histoire et de Philologie, 1983, pp. 20-21.

extended footnotes) perhaps because of the exclusion of women from the scientific professions in the nineteenth century. The Royal Geographical Society declared in mid-1893 that it was inexpedient 'to admit ladies' because 'their sex and training render them equally unfitted for exploration'³¹; and as a woman at this point in history, it was difficult to become an Orientalist scholar because women were denied entry to university and thus to classical and Oriental studies. Eberhardt is an Orientalist via auto-didactic methods.

Women were only now gaining an entry level in the male-dominated world of classical Orientalism. The University of Toronto's digitised online archive contains the transactions of the Ninth International Congress of Orientalists in 1892. The transactions from that congress state that 'ladies' were invited for the first time to give papers:

The "Ladies" was proposed by Professor Ernst Leumann, who said that this was the first occasion on which ladies had taken part in our work by contributing papers and discussing scientific subjects with us. By doing so they had earned a right to associate themselves with this Congress, a right that we hope will not be denied to them in the future.³²

In a letter to shaykh Abu Naddara in 1896 Eberhardt desires to be aligned more intimately to other women in the Orientalist world, perhaps symbolising this new era of 'ladies' that the Orientalist Congress in 1892 heralds. Eberhardt writes to Abu Naddara to ask for the address of Alihe Hanoum:³³

...it would be so nice to have an educated and intelligent correspondent among my Oriental sisters. I think you won't find this bad, now that you know that the young man who signs N. Podolinsky is only a very young (and poor) Russian, true, but very respectful of Islam and who will give herself to Oriental studies.'³⁴

³¹ George N. Curzon, Viceroy of India and future president of the Royal Geographical Society, 'Ladies and the Royal Geographical Society', *The Times*, 31st May, 1893, quoted in *Imperial Desire: Diffident Sexualities and Colonial Literature*, eds. Philip Holden and Richard J. Huppel, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003, p. 106.

³² http://www.archive.org/stream/1893proceedings01inteuoft/1893proceedings01inteuoft_djvu.txt

³³ Alihe Hanoum is the daughter of Djewdad Pacha, Ottoman law scholar; one of Abu Naddara's former students in Cairo; and the subject of an article by Mrs L. d'Ariel, her former co-worker at the *Revue Moderne*, which attempted to dissipate any 'tacky exoticism'. G. Roger, *L'Europe*, July 1956, p. 24.

³⁴ G. Roger, *L'Europe*, p. 24.

With a clearly stated aspiration from Eberhardt towards her literary status within the field of Orientalism, her level of fluency in Arabic is worthy of further examination in that it arguably places her in a position of greater receptivity to the Arabic-speaking world and supports my positioning of her as an aspiring Orientalist writer. There are numerous accounts of Eberhardt's fluency, not just in Arabic but in other languages, based on reported testimony in the Eberhardt biographies and by Eberhardt's own confession but there is a lack of textual evidence to support this. My analysis provides evidence beyond the anecdotal. In just one example, Jean Rodes, the French writer, whom Eberhardt had met in Beni-Ouif in November 1903,³⁵ provides a representative anecdote, related by Kobak:

Rodes and Isabelle visited Figuig together, accompanied by a small escort of *mokhrzenis* and an interpreter. Rodes remarked that 'Isabelle was in these circumstances completely astonishing in her profound knowledge of colloquial and Arabic customs, and she used endlessly and fluently to reciprocate their long rituals of salutations and pious exclamations.'³⁶ He said that the most refined and scholarly Muslims took an evident pleasure in the ritual perfection of her language, and used to make a point of trying to get her to speak as much as possible.³⁷

It is perhaps a contradiction of Eberhardt's oft-quoted fluency that they travelled with an interpreter. Robert Randau relates that sometime after first meeting Eberhardt he asked her how she had learned Arabic and she said, 'I just opened my mouth and spoke it.'³⁸ It is generally quoted by critics that Eberhardt received a grounding in Arabic from her tutor and stepfather Trophimowsky.³⁹ Further evidence from an undated letter to Ali Abdul Wahab⁴⁰ points to the fact that Eberhardt continued her Arabic education in Tunisia and Algeria by taking classes: 'I think that when I arrive (in Tunis) I will manage, like I did in Bône, to attend for some time the classes of some Arab [Arabic]. But in any case, at that point, I will have made huge progress, I want it, and it will be so, or I will kill myself at work.'⁴¹ Maxime Rodinson, who translated the letters that Eberhardt first wrote to the shaykh Abu

³⁵ 23 X 26, letters from various friends, CAOM. At the same time Eberhardt also met the French Orientalist painter Maxime Noiré, who founded the Society of Algerian Artists and Orientalists.

³⁶ Robert Randau, *Isabelle Eberhardt, notes et souvenirs*, Charlot, Algiers, 1945, p. 33, quoted in Kobak, *Isabelle*, p. 211.

³⁷ Kobak, *Isabelle*, p. 211.

³⁸ Randau, *Isabelle Eberhardt*, p. 33, quoted in Kobak, p. 56.

³⁹ See for example, Kobak, *Isabelle*, p. 56 and Rana Kabbani, *Imperial Fictions*, introduction.

⁴⁰ The letter is undated but it is filed under 1898/99 in the archive. See below

⁴¹ 23 X 31, correspondence Ali Abdul Wahab, CAOM.

Naddara two years earlier in 1896, when she was nineteen, confirms Eberhardt's auto-didactic confession. Rodinson states that Eberhardt's Arabic, in her first letters to Abu Naddara in 1896, was at a beginner level, contained incoherent sentences in classical Arabic and was full of low level expressions:

They are more exercises in the Arabic language[...] Isabelle Eberhardt was then only a beginner, paying attention to the external/superficial charm of her calligraphy, and possessed a very elementary knowledge. A very industrious beginner, actually: her clumsiest missives (clumsily from the angle of expression) generally look very pleasant, framed with polychromic illuminations/decorations and show a pretty decorative effect like the old-fashioned Oriental way or the arabesque.⁴²

Rodinson states that it was obvious that she studied hard and that she worked alone (this she stated herself) and furthermore in the space of one year, by the end of 1896, her Arabic had progressed significantly.⁴³

Rodinson's translations in the G. Roger article provide an unheralded insight into this incubatory period in Eberhardt's life and identity construction, based upon familial letters held in the Abu Naddara family.⁴⁴ AbuNaddara's son Helmi Sanua, not only communicated with the author Roger about these familial letters but also related precise memories of Eberhardt. Dúnlaith Bird continues in the vein of Rodinson and Roger and modifies the contemporaneous and more recent praise by biographers of Eberhardt's polyglotism.⁴⁵ Bird states that 'she is proficient in four languages: Russian, Arabic, French and German; yet both in her travelogues and private letters she constructs herself as a linguistic outsider completely fluent in none.'⁴⁶ I would modify Bird's concept of Eberhardt as a linguistic outsider to that of a linguistic insider/outsider, corresponding to my positioning of Eberhardt in chapter

⁴² G. Roger, *L'Europe*, July 1956, p.21.

⁴³ Ibid. p. 22 and 26.

⁴⁴ This informative article appears to have been overlooked in Anglophone scholarship. An interesting literary review provided by Jean Dejeux in *Femmes D'Alger* points one towards an *essential* literary review by Simone Rezzoug, 'État Present des Travaux sur Isabelle Eberhardt' (Current State of the Scholarship on Eberhardt) in *Annuaire de L'Afrique du Nord XXI, 1982*. Éditions du Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, 1984. Rezzoug's chapter highlights the G. Roger article plus the overall gaps in the Eberhardt scholarship. Rezzoug is mentioned in the acknowledgements section by Kobak in her biography of Eberhardt.

⁴⁵ Further anecdotal evidence of Eberhardt's fluency in not just Arabic but German is reported in Kobak's biography: 'Richard Kohn, who met Randau many years later, told him how delighted the German soldiers had been to meet someone who could speak their language so fluently and elegantly.' Kobak, *Isabelle*, p. 213.

⁴⁶ Dúnlaith Bird, *Travelling in Different Skins: Gender Identity in European Women's Oriental Travelogues 1850-1950*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012, p. 114.

three and her similar position in Muslim and French colonial society. I present the following image as visual evidence of the attainment of Eberhardt's calligraphic proficiency and fluency in Arabic. Moreover, the fact that Eberhardt writes in Arabic and French only serves to confirm my positioning of her as a divided and ideologically diffracted subject:

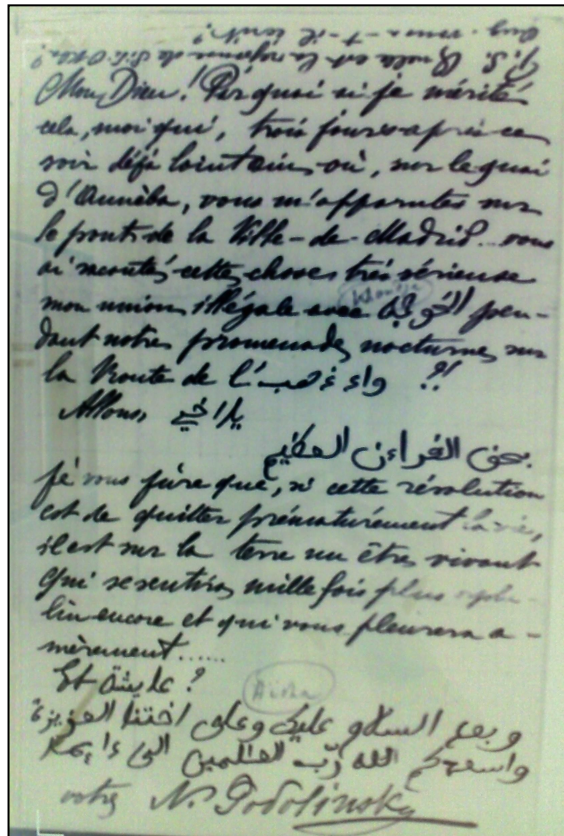


Fig. 4

Letter from N. Podolinsky (Eberhardt) to Ali Abdul Wahab ⁴⁷

In this letter from Eberhardt to her friend Ali Abdul Wahab (although she addresses the letter endearingly ‘To my very dear little brother’) she begins in Arabic with the Muslim prayer (fatiha) from the opening chapter of the Qur'an: ‘In the name of God, the merciful, the compassionate’. ⁴⁸ The end of the letter, seen above, concludes furthermore with the Arabic fatiha, ‘May God preserve you [...]’ The use of the fatihas in this manner is common in any formal text, such as a letter or essay. The style of Eberhardt's Arabic handwriting is antiquated, as stated by G. Roger, but

⁴⁷ 23 X 31, Correspondence Ali Abdul Wahab, CAOM.

⁴⁸ Kobak states that during the 1890s Trophimowsky, Eberhardt's tutor, began to sign all his letters with the Islamic greeting ‘Be happy!’ And this may have had some influence on Eberhardt's habit to start and end her diary entries with Islamic tenets. Kobak, *Isabelle*, pp. 28-29.

the fluency of style suggests that she writes with ease and even with flourish. The flourish and ease of style could easily lead one to believe in more than just the plain level of proficiency that Bird argues for, although Eberhardt's elegant calligraphic style clearly began as excellent mimesis.⁴⁹

The Classical World of the Orientalist Writer

‘The Orientalist if he wants to be complete must start with the classic world’

Anouar Abdel-Malek ⁵⁰

Eberhardt had a summary knowledge of ancient and classical civilisations. I shall demonstrate how Eberhardt was to put that knowledge to use in her literary writing. With the addition of Eberhardt's fluency in standard and colloquial Arabic, Eberhardt can be placed on a spectrum somewhere between the traditional Orientalist who has studied the ancient world and Oriental languages, and the writer with knowledge of the classics. My argument is that Eberhardt utilised this learning to stake a claim to the knowledge-value of herself as a writer versed in a knowledge of the classics and as a woman writer with some Orientalist authority. As such Eberhardt, in her diligent drive for knowledge, educated herself to be aware of, and in touch with, events in the wider Orientalist ‘universe’.

In the nineteenth century the Orientalist congresses became a significant aspect of the Orientalists' *raison d'être*, confirming and consolidating their ‘egotistic drive for knowledge.’ Along with Eberhardt's notes in the archives cataloguing the Orient and her dictation to Slimane, Eberhardt compiled a list of Occidental and Oriental literature and noted the date of the most recent Orientalist congress in London in 1892:

⁴⁹ Credit and thanks to Feras Alkabani for his comments on the Arabic and the fluency of handwriting.

⁵⁰ Anouar Abdel-Malek, ‘Orientalism in Crisis’, *Diogenes* 1963; 11; 103, p. 105.

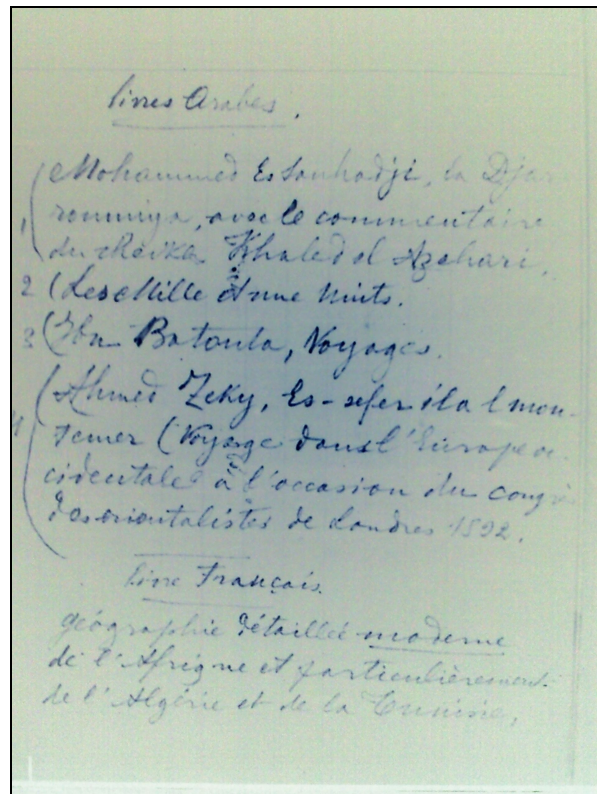


Fig. 5

Eberhardt's list of Arabic and French books and the Orientalist Congress 1892

The Orientalist congresses were a relatively recent phenomenon that we know Eberhardt was clearly paying attention to. Before I elaborate further on the classical world of the Orientalist writer I want to historicize the traditional Orientalist somewhat: what it means to be an Orientalist in the latter half of the nineteenth century (considering my argument that Eberhardt is situating herself somewhere between the two categories of traditional Orientalist and writer with knowledge of the classics).

Anouar Abdel-Malek states that there were two significant phases in the creation of Oriental Studies: the first wave with the creation of Oriental societies (Batavia, 1781; Société Asiatique, Paris 1822; Royal Asiatic Society, London 1834; American Oriental Society, 1842 etc.) and the second wave with the organising of Orientalist congresses, the first of which took place in Paris in 1873 with sixteen more to follow up to World War 1 (the last congress was the one in Vienna in 1912).

⁵¹ Abdel-Malek, 'Orientalism in Crisis', pp. 104-105.

The Orientalist congresses are highly revealing of the academic mindset towards the East: a clear thirst for knowledge, ‘the egotistic drive for knowledge’, that is nevertheless couched in imperialist desires and language. Max Müller was President of the Aryan section at the International Congress of Orientalists held in London on 14-21 September 1874 and his opening address is a case in point. Müller asks the prescient question: ‘What is the good of an International Congress of Orientalists?’ and answers himself with the following:

...our Congress is not a mere fortuitous congeries of barren atoms or molecules, but that we are at least Leibnizian monads, each with his own self, and force, and will, and each determined, within the limits of some pre-established harmony, to help in working out some common purpose, and to achieve some real and lasting good...⁵²

He goes on to say that:

It seems to me that the real and permanent use of these scientific gatherings is twofold:-

- (1) They enable us to take stock, to compare notes, to see where we are, and to find out where we ought to be going.
- (2) They give us an opportunity, from time to time, to tell the world where we are, what we have been doing for the world, and what, in return, we expect the world to do for us.⁵³

Furthermore, he elaborates on the aims of the Orientalist in strongly imperialist language [with my italics and emphasis]:

...meetings such as our own, bringing together so large a number of the first Oriental scholars of Europe, seem to me a most excellent safeguard....if we want to see real progress in that work with which we are more especially entrusted, *the re-conquest of the Eastern world*, we must work with one another, like members of one body, *like soldiers of one army*, guided by common principles, striving after common purposes, and sustained by common sympathies. Oriental literature is of such enormous dimensions *that our small army of scholars* can occupy certain prominent positions only.⁵⁴

Müller also goes on to say that ‘The East, formerly a land of dreams, of fables, and fairies, has become to us a land of unmistakeable reality; the curtain between the

⁵² Max Müller, *Selected Essays on Language, Mythology and Religion* Vol II, London: Longmans, Green, and Co, 1881, p. 1.

⁵³ Ibid., p. 3.

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 5.

West and East has been lifted.’⁵⁵ The lifting of the veil on the East, though appearing a laudable aim, is inextricably linked to imperialism. It is a double-edged sword if the lifting of the veil is only the ‘re-conquest of the Eastern world’.

As I have already established, Eberhardt is not a conventional Orientalist scholar but her desire for knowledge, her desire to ‘lift the veil’ on North Africa (although she is not the first to attempt to do so) in order to communicate her ‘knowledge’, holds some parallels to Orientalist scholarship as outlined by Müller. For the Orientalist the congress served ‘to tell the world where we are, what we have been doing for the world’. Similarly, the world of newspapers and literary magazines was for Eberhardt the appropriate method for disseminating her knowledge of the Orient.⁵⁶ To end this chapter I shall take a brief look at Eberhardt’s story ‘Sojourn in Tunis’ as final confirmation of her successful positioning as a writer and journalist with some Orientalist authority and classical knowledge.

In July of 1902 Eberhardt published some essays under the title of ‘Heures de Tunis’ in the famous Parisian journal *La Revue Blanche* founded in 1891. *La Revue Blanche* was an important nineteenth century periodical associated with the symbolist movement; it published Mallarmé and was the first to introduce Ibsen and Tolstoy to French readers. The now digitised archive of *La Revue Blanche* shows that Eberhardt published in that issue alongside the French poet Guillaume Apollinaire who was credited with coining the word surrealism, and Alfred Jarry, a writer often cited as the forerunner to surrealist theatre of the 1920s and 1930s. Eberhardt’s placement alongside these writers produces an unusual juxtaposition with the twentieth-century, modern literary movement; it provides a stark contrast to Eberhardt’s Orientalist mode of writing and highlights her mutable literary status and her capacity for re-interpretation. It also configures Eberhardt within a modern literary movement and it confirms Eberhardt as an Orientalist writer of reputation and authority.

‘Sojourn in Tunis’ is one of four essays published under the title ‘Heures de Tunis’, a series of literary sketches of Eberhardt’s time in Tunisia in 1899 ‘between two eventful and difficult periods’ of her life; namely the death of her mother in

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 10.

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 3.

November 1897 and of her stepfather Trophimowsky in May 1899.⁵⁷ Eberhardt had just finished a turbulent year-long love affair in Geneva with the Turkish diplomat, Ahmed Rachid. Dressed as a sailor Eberhardt took a boat to Tunis and then rented a small house in the Arab quarter of the city where she could indulge in her ‘dream of the old Orient.’ Not only ‘Heures de Tunis’, but ‘Au Pays des Sables,’ and ‘Un Automne dans le Sahel Tunisien’ provide a detailed account of her life during this period.⁵⁸ The latter title reveals a knowing, Oriental, intertextual reference to Fromentin’s ‘Une Année dans la Sahel’ and ‘Un Été au Sahara’. Fromentin was highly regarded as a writer by Flaubert; and Flaubert in particular, if we look to his novel *Salammbô*, can be traced as one of the literary ancestors to this sketch of Eberhardt’s which ends with a vivid rumination on the ruins of Carthage at dusk, mirroring the opening paragraph of *Salammbô* and the vision of Carthage at dawn:

And here, to the left, profiled against the sky’s conflagration, the stately hill which was once Carthage.

I gaze dreamily at this cape, this spur which stretches into the sea, this corner of earth for which so much blood was spilled.

The white monasteries, remnants of Byzantine Carthage - the bastard Carthage of the decadent centuries - disappear in the western brightness. So the Punic hill seems naked and deserted, allowing splendid images of the past to surge forth from the red blaze and reanimate the sad hill: with magistrates’ palaces, temple to glowering divinities, barbarian festivals and ceremonies - all that Phoenician civilization, egoistic and fierce, that came from Asia to develop itself and regain its glory on the harsh and burning soil of Africa.

Abruptly the sun disappears on the horizon, and the mueddins’ solemn voices reach out to me from distant mosques. And the Carthage of my dream, spun from imagination and reflected light, is extinguished on the evening’s pyre.⁵⁹

The subtext of the passage is a commentary on the decadence of contemporary France. There was nothing new in that comparison, nothing original in Eberhardt’s utilising the topos of Rome versus Carthage to comment on the state of nineteenth century France. In ‘Sojourn in Tunis’ Eberhardt ends her sketch with a vivid reference to antiquity (as mentioned at the outset) with her reference to ‘Byzantine Carthage - bastard Carthage of the decadent centuries’.⁶⁰ Although Norman Vance

⁵⁷ Isabelle Eberhardt, ‘Sojourn in Tunis’, *Prisoner of Dunes*, trans., Sharon Bangert, London: Peter Owen Publishers, 1995, p. 95.

⁵⁸ Behdad, *Belated Travellers*, p.116.

⁵⁹ Eberhardt, ‘Sojourn in Tunis’, *Prisoner of Dunes*, p. 103.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

states in his essay about the use of the Roman model, 'Decadence and the subversion of Empire', that nineteenth century constructions and appropriations of Roman decadence were often chronologically vague, Eberhardt at least specifies 'Byzantine Carthage' and not the Carthage of the Berbers or the Phoenicians or the Muslims.⁶¹ A strongly disproving tone and attitude, that perhaps sees Eberhardt aligned with the camp that considered the late Roman empire as one of moral and political torpor, is made very clear with Eberhardt's strong representation of Carthage as 'bastard Carthage'. Sourcing Carthage is perhaps only natural considering that Eberhardt is in Tunisia, but the metaphor of Carthage is a knowing one considering the half a century of comparisons between the decline of the imperial Roman Empire and the decline of the French Empire.

Eberhardt's references to antiquity are seemingly just descriptions. However, Eberhardt's descriptions are employed with such vividness as to imply meaning, a meaning that is left to the reader to interpret in full awareness of the contemporary cultural context, not only of the decline of the French empire and its moral degeneration, but of a parallel between the French and Roman colonisation of North Africa. As such, Eberhardt's will to knowledge (the 'egotist' drive for knowledge) leads to her historical knowledge of Carthage and the Roman Empire and is utilised as a disguised commentary on nineteenth century France. This mediates in opposition to the desire for the Orient; the dreamy, hazy, romantic Orient represented by Carthage.

This mediated opposition in 'Sojourn in Tunis' results in the first tentative productions of Eberhardt's discourse of discontent as a commentary on colonialism in North Africa, as further discussed in chapters three and four. What I have begun to demonstrate in this chapter overall is the mediation of the paradox between the means and the end; that is, the means by which Eberhardt achieves her literary/Orientalist status. The means is a drive to knowledge that seeks to be atypical of a male nineteenth century domain, the codifying and cataloguing, and the 'acquisition' of the Arabic language. However, the end (the achievement of that literary/Orientalist status as a *woman*) is consolidated, but also deeply complicated, by the manifestation of Eberhardt's *male* Islamic persona. The next chapter explores

⁶¹ Norman Vance, 'Decadence and the subversion of Empire', in Edwards, Catharine, ed. *Roman Presences, Reception of Rome in European Culture, 1789-1945*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999, p. 120.

that manifestation of Eberhardt's Islamic identity, intertwined with that of her literary identity, which leads ultimately to a deepening crisis in representation inherent in her increasingly discontented discourse.

CHAPTER TWO

The Identity Crux: Eberhardt, Islam, and the Ottoman Empire

No one has ever understood that even though I may seem to be driven by the senses alone, my heart is in fact generous, one that used to overflow with love and tenderness and continues to be filled with boundless compassion for all those who suffer injustice, all those who are weak and oppressed...a heart both proud and unswerving in its commitment to Islam, a cause for which I long some day to spill the hot blood that courses through my veins.

Isabelle Eberhardt, 1 January 1900 ⁶²

To say *There is no god but God and Muhammed is his Prophet* is not enough, nor even to be convinced of it. It takes more than that to be a Muslim. Whoever considers themselves to be a Muslim must devote themselves body and soul to Islam for all time, to the point of martyrdom if need be; Islam must inhabit their soul, and govern every one of their acts and words.

Isabelle Eberhardt, 23 July 1901 ⁶³

This chapter is concerned with what I consider to be vital stages in the formation and construction of Eberhardt's Islamic identity. It is an exploration of what I have termed the 'crux' of her identity, to convey not only the formative influences but also to indicate the problematic of her Islamic identity construction within a colonial context. I attend to certain biographical aspects of Eberhardt with a textual, and specifically an epistolary, focus zoning in on archival correspondence plus discussion of relevant images. I include a contextualising history of the Ottoman Empire in nineteenth century Egypt as it relates significantly to the formative influences in Eberhardt's Islamic identity construction that I relate here, and to her position/attitude towards the colonial powers.

The chapter opens with a significant photographic marker in the construction of Eberhardt's Islamic identity. The first primary texts that I shall discuss are Eberhardt's diary entries surrounding her participation in the Bône riots in 1899. Amongst the many diary entries from Eberhardt recording the development and status of her Islamic identity, I isolate these entries as the most powerful indicators of

⁶² Eberhardt, *The Nomad*, p. 24.

⁶³ The italicised text was originally in Arabic in Eberhardt's journal. Eberhardt, *The Nomad*, pp. 142, 143.

Eberhardt's engagement with, and receptivity towards, Islam. The second textual marker of significance, and of primary concern in this chapter, is a document from the archives revealing Eberhardt's attempt to fabricate her genealogy in order to obtain a Turkish passport and to become a Muslim subject of the Ottoman Empire, as Mahmoud Saâdi, in 1900. So far this has been overlooked by Eberhardt scholars (although Kobak provides a brief mention/abbreviated excerpt of it in her biography) and it provides a strong basis for my analysis of her textual identity, and the basis for her textual legitimacy whilst lending support to the complexity of late Orientalism at the turn of the century.⁶⁴ I also argue for the influence that Abu Naddara had in the formation of Eberhardt's identity by highlighting an image from the archives: Abu Naddara's business card. Abu Naddara is the person to whom Eberhardt writes asking for the Ottoman passport and he is a significant factor in Eberhardt's combining of both her Islamic and literary identities to effect. The theoretical framework for the chapter is initially based on Ali Behdad's 'desire for the Orient' which is a springboard for my own argument in the next chapter: that of desire leading to a discourse of discontent, a discourse in Eberhardt that overwhelms the nostalgia that Behdad argues for. Eberhardt's desire for the Orient is frustrated by the reality of living in the contact zone of Algeria.

The Manifestation of Mahmoud Saâdi

The iconic and most widely disseminated image we have of Eberhardt is taken in 1895 in a photographer's studio. Eberhardt is wearing an Arabic costume, a synthetic photographer's outfit, consisting of a bricolage of Oriental artefacts from different regions. I would agree with the latter part of Lesley Blanch's comment, in her 1954 book chapter on Eberhardt, that it is 'curious that she leaves us with a fancy-dress image, posed in fake bedouin dress when she lived among Arabs as perhaps no other European woman has done, without reserve, in dirt, disease and dust.'⁶⁵ This is especially curious when another photograph of Eberhardt exists: taken in 1904, in Algeria, shortly before her death. In this image of Eberhardt in her burnous we can clearly see the effects of her living 'without reserve, in dirt, disease and dust'. She has aged significantly, life in the desert, poverty and repeated illnesses have taken

⁶⁴ Kobak, *Isabelle*, p. 112.

⁶⁵ Lesley Blanch, *The Wilder Shores of Love*, New York: Carroll & Graf, 1982, [1954], p. 292.

their toll. Her posture is hunched and in stark contrast to the posed photograph. The archive contains both photographs, yet the latter has been overlooked by scholars and publishers, and has rarely been reproduced since the reportage following her death.⁶⁶



Fig. 6
Isabelle Eberhardt, Geneva, 1895⁶⁷

⁶⁶ The 1904 photograph is included in Maria-Dolors Garcia-Ramon's article, 'Gender and the Colonial Encounter in the Arab World: Examining Women's Experiences and Narratives', *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 2003, Volume 21, pp. 653- 672, at p. 658. This article discusses both Eberhardt and Gertrude Bell. It also appears in Kobak's biography, *Isabelle*, p.

⁶⁷ Photographed by Louis David in Geneva. Iconography and Press (prints), 23 X 44, CAOM.



Fig. 7
Isabelle Eberhardt, Algeria, 1904 ⁶⁸

Nearly sixty years after Blanch's comment the photograph taken in 1895 is still much noticed and the discussion still critically live, as evidenced in Dúnlaith Bird's recent publication in 2012, *Travelling in Different Skins*. Bird's text examines in depth the concept of vagabondage in relation to Eberhardt and to other women travellers and, through this framework, Bird states:

Eberhardt posed at her own instigation for her brother's friends, the Davids, who owned a photography studio. She was entirely in control of the image she projected, stage-managing every aspect, in a prolepsis of the later textual productions of masculine identity in her Oriental travelogues. Though Cecily Mackworth, another biographer, acknowledges the 'slightly equivocal masquerade' of these photographs, she refuses to articulate their manipulative and premeditated effect, glossing it simply as Eberhardt's 'childish passion for dressing up'. ⁶⁹

This image arguably represents Eberhardt's desire for the Orient and desire for the Other before her actual manifestation as the Other, as evidenced in the 1904 photograph. What can be seen here, as Dúnlaith Bird states, is a prolepsis of her

⁶⁸ Iconography and Press (prints), 23 X 44, CAOM.

⁶⁹ Bird, *Travelling in Different Skins*, p. 137. Cecily Mackworth, *The Destiny of Isabelle Eberhardt*, London: Quartet, 1977 [1951], p. 20.

future identity. The photograph is, according to Bird and other critics, an early example of Eberhardt's conscious construction and manipulation of her Islamic identity. Julia Clancy-Smith, in a brief, critical acknowledgment of this particular image and of Eberhardt's conscious manipulation of image at this life-stage, describes Eberhardt as 'an actress, a playwright in-the-making. The costumes and part of the script had been constructed in Europe; what was lacking was an adequate *mise-en-scène*.'⁷⁰ To extend Clancy-Smith's metaphor, the Orient is the stage, or the '*mise-en-scène*' on which Eberhardt would perform.

Clancy-Smith's critical stance is indicative of a new wave of approaches to Eberhardt initiated by Rana Kabbani's indictment of Eberhardt (in the context of her strong indictment of Orientalism) in her introduction to the first translation of Eberhardt's diaries in 1987. Kabbani describes Eberhardt as coming to North Africa on the 'flying carpet of Orientalism'.⁷¹ Eberhardt is immersed in the Orientalism of the late nineteenth century and, as such, the approach presented by Clancy-Smith and Kabbani is pertinent. However, if the Orient is undoubtedly 'the locus of material for Orientalist construction' the figure of Eberhardt, who is receptive to Islam, and becomes Muslim, invites an alternative reading.⁷² Therefore, I would like to depart here from the critical path of Kabbani and Clancy-Smith (and the standard performative approach/language and theatrical metaphors) in relation to this photograph - the 'amateur rendition', the 'actress' or 'playwright' - and the idea of a solely outward construction, by attending to a more interior reading of the image. Eberhardt is presenting us with something deeper than a theatrical performance, an Orientalist construction or a *mise-en-scène*; thus taking us beyond Bird's performative analysis (which at least acknowledges Eberhardt's later, more 'authentic vagabondage as Mahmoud Saâdi' but ultimately concludes that it is only Eberhardt's 'alter ego'). My approach is not intended to negate the performative stance of Bird and others, but I aim for a more inclusive angle whilst accommodating the complexity of Eberhardt's positioning.

With reference to the photograph, I'd like to take a closer reading of Eberhardt's choice of clothing and gestures. Eberhardt is wearing a tarbush, better

⁷⁰ Julia Clancy-Smith, 'The "Passionate Nomad" Reconsidered: A European Woman in *L'Algérie Française*' in *Western Women and Imperialism: Complicity and Resistance*, p. 64.

⁷¹ Rana Kabbani, *The Passionate Nomad, The Diary of Isabelle Eberhardt*, translated by Nina de Voogd, London: Virago, 1992, [1987], preface, p. x.

⁷² Nabil Matar, *Islam in Britain, 1558-1665*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999, p. 11.

known in European sources as a fez. In the late-nineteenth century it was the symbol of the Ottoman elite and also signified masculinity (the wearer would be male) as well as a higher social status amongst the Western-educated members of that elite during the Ottoman Empire.⁷³ This nod to the Ottoman Empire not only reflects the late nineteenth-century obsession with the Orient and Ottomanism (as seen in the fad for Ottoman furnishings, dress and chinoiserie) but, significantly, rather informs and presages Eberhardt's subsequent and significant desire to become an Ottoman subject which will be analysed consequently. Her desire for the Orient, captured in this moment, reveals intimations of Islam and Ottomanism in anticipation of her Islamic (and desired Ottoman) identity. It is an amateur rendition of her manifestation of Mamoud Saâdi. It is not merely a 'fancy-dress image'. Furthermore, Eberhardt is holding the misbaha, the Muslim prayer beads or rosary, in her left hand, further encoding her Islamic identity and adding a solemn register to the so-called posturing and 'dressing up', as Blanch describes it. The photograph is an indicator of Eberhardt in metamorphosis, not simply as an actress; and the specific display of the prayer beads, in my reading, is that it is a significant *vestige* of Eberhardt's subsequent transformation into a Muslim. In the succeeding years the act of prayer, as a Muslim, is recounted numerous times in Eberhardt's journal. In a scene described in a journal entry six years later, Eberhardt's actual embodiment of the above image is evidenced:

I stopped among the piles of sand heaped up against the thick and heavily buttressed wall, and in that utter silence I saw a nocturnal animal I could not identify – perhaps a little desert fox – shoot by quite close to me. I raised my eyes to heaven and, on impulse, recited the fahita under my breath. I also implored the Emir of Saints whose rosary I carry and was holding tightly in my hand.⁷⁴

In particular Eberhardt's prose reveals a sophisticated understanding of Islam.⁷⁵ Just before her return to Algeria in 1900, Eberhardt states, 'I have no doubt

⁷³ E.R. Toledano, *State and Society in Mid-Nineteenth Century Egypt*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003, pp. 160-162 quoted in Yasmine, Nachabe 'An Alternative Representation of Femininity in 1920s Lebanon: Through the *Mise-en-Abîme* of a Masculine Space', *New Middle Eastern Studies*, 1 (2011), <http://www.brismes.ac.uk/nmes/>, p. 5.

⁷⁴ Eberhardt. *The Nomad*, p. 81.

⁷⁵ This chapter is not concerned with the Islamic content of Eberhardt's prose, however, her short stories 'The Convert' and 'Yasmina' detail the conversion to Islam (and associated prayer) of the two respective male protagonists. See Isabelle Eberhardt, *The Oblivion Seekers*, trans. Paul Bowles, San Francisco: City Lights, 1982, p. 42, and Isabelle Eberhardt, *Departures: Selected Writings*, trans. and ed., Karim Handy and Laura Rice, San Francisco: City Lights, 1994, p. 9.

that the Islamic faith I need so much would blossom magnificently over there...'⁷⁶
and she rejoices in prayer on her return, continuing in her journal:

Oh, the sense of bliss I had this evening of knowing that I am *back*, once I was inside those solemn mosques and in the ancient hustle and bustle of the Arab *tabadjii* in the rue Jenina!

Oh, that extraordinary feeling of intoxication I had tonight, in the peaceful shadows of the great al-Jadid Mosque during the *icha* prayer!

I feel I am coming back to life again... [In Arabic:] *Lead us along the straight path, the one taken by those to whom you have been generous!*⁷⁷

Despite the tone of ecstatic and aesthetic appreciation of ritual in the above quote, Eberhardt in fact takes on a full embodiment of the act of prayer as she records the toll on her body resulting from her observation of Ramadan (with its increased offering of prayers) and this is detailed in chapter three.

Eberhardt undertakes a double metamorphosis in 'posing' as a Muslim *male*: from Christianity to Islam and from female to male.⁷⁸ Overall I depart from the critical work in relation to Eberhardt's gender performance and magnify the focus on her religious transformation and conversion (discussed in more detail in chapter four).⁷⁹ However, it is impossible to ignore completely the aspect of gender identity and construction, and the inevitable intersection of discourses when presented with a figure as labyrinthine as Eberhardt. For example, as Behdad argues, Eberhardt's cross-dressing problematized the gender boundaries crucial to the construction of colonial authority, which is one aspect that this thesis attends to: Eberhardt's position in relation to the colonial powers and her negotiation of colonial politics.⁸⁰ Furthermore, 'her identification with the Orientals, her cultural assimilation, conceivably disturbed colonial identity based on a discriminatory mode of racial

⁷⁶Eberhardt, *The Nomad*, p. 41.

⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 53.

⁷⁸ See Yasmin Nachabe's recent article, 'An Alternative Representation of Femininity in 1920s Lebanon: Through the Mise-en-Abîme of a Masculine Space' which discusses the staging and construction of the image of the new woman in the photography of Marie al-Khazen in the context of the rising women's movement in the Middle East, reflected in the periodicals of the time. It provides an interesting analysis of al-Khazen's representations of herself and other women in masculine dress and poses which can be applied to a gendered reading of this photograph of Eberhardt. For example, the frontal pose (as seen in the Eberhardt image) represents an assertive masculinity rather than the traditional three-quarter seated poses for women. Yasmine Nachabe, 'An Alternative Representation of Femininity in 1920s Lebanon: Through the *Mise-en-Abîme* of a Masculine Space', *New Middle Eastern Studies*, 1 (2011), <http://www.brismes.ac.uk/nmes/>, p. 2.

⁷⁹ See in particular Marjorie Garber, Sidonie Smith, Garcia Ramon, Dúnlaith Bird, Zayzafoon, Emily Apter, and Michelle Chilcoat.

⁸⁰ Behdad, *Belated Travellers*, p. 126.

differentiation: the desire for the Orient inevitably implies disavowal of the colonizer's claim to racial superiority.⁸¹ At this temporal moment, in 1900, Eberhardt's sympathies lie clearly with the colonised and not the colonisers, although there are instances of diffraction and slippage later in Eberhardt's career, during the ambiguous episode of her collaboration with General Lyautey as a war reporter in 1903-1904.⁸²

Eberhardt's participation in the Bône riots in 1899 reveals the extent to which her sympathy lay with the colonised and provides strong evidence of her commitment to an Islamic identity. Her involvement takes us far beyond a reading of Eberhardt as an actress in a *mise-en-scène*; Eberhardt longs to spill the hot blood flowing through her veins for the cause of Islam. To paraphrase Eberhardt, Islam has inhabited her body and soul.

The Bône Riots 1899

Eberhardt's initial attraction is to an Islam that is inextricably linked with her perception of the Arab character. Eberhardt states, in a typically Romantic and Orientalist tone, that the Arab character is 'proud, impenetrable and discreet', with its 'harsh majesty, born for dreaming and war'.⁸³ Her perceptions of the contradictions in the Arab character mirrored her own: 'peace and adventure, dreaming and war, religion and sensuality'.⁸⁴ However, the Bône riots marked a moment that was to turn Eberhardt from Orientalist musings that valorized the war-like Arab to a serious consideration of martyrdom in the cause of Islam.

After months of inertia following her mother's death in Algeria, Eberhardt is galvanised into action by the Muslim student unrest in Bône (now Annaba) against the colonisers. Kobak documents that, in March 1899, the resentment against colonial rule was coming to a head with Muslims turning against Christians and Jews, whom they claimed had insulted them. Eberhardt was sympathetic to their cause, but

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² I am referring to Eberhardt's friendship and professional relationship with General Lyautey and her much debated role as an imperial agent in the French designs on Morocco.

⁸³ Isabelle Eberhardt, 'Sahel Tunisian', *Notes de Route*, Charpentier et Fasquelle, Paris, 1908, p. 217. Quoted in Kobak, *Isabelle*, p. 85.

⁸⁴ Kobak, *Isabelle*, p. 86.

according to Kobak, Eberhardt wrote on 2 March, in some unpublished journal notes, that it would be foolhardy for the Muslims to respond to the provocation.⁸⁵

The revolt broke out on the evening of 14 March in the Arab quarter. A group of Muslims from the zawiya of the Aissaouas were dispersed by the police. Eberhardt, in a separate Muslim group, witnessed it but was drawn into the commotion and reported that she had heard a ragged Bedouin inflaming the crowd by shouting verses from the Qur'an: 'And do not say to anyone killed in the path of God: he is dead! No, he is alive!'⁸⁶ A Muslim friend of Eberhardt's was covered in blood and trying to fend off the police with his dagger, so she picked up a fallen sword and went to his aid, discarding her previous moment of caution:

For the first time, I felt the savage intoxication of battle, bloody and primitive, of males body to body, wild with anger, blinded by fury, drunk on blood and instinctive cruelty. I knew the consuming voluptuousness of streaming blood, of the atrocious brutality of action triumphing over thought.⁸⁷

Eberhardt's repeated reference to blood in her narrative is worthy of attention. David Cook explains that in martyrdom paradigms, blood or the colour red is the primary symbol of the martyr and plays a major role in the formation of the martyrdom narrative, because the sign that martyrdom is about to occur is the spilling of blood. In martyrdom narratives blood is seen dripping or flowing, as Eberhardt describes. The blood signifies expiation, since as Cook notes, 'the blood of a Muslim is expiation for his sins.'⁸⁸

The Muslims were outnumbered and, when the troops arrived to disperse them, Eberhardt managed to escape without arrest. Aware of the implications of her involvement in the riot, she immediately made arrangements to leave Algeria for Marseilles the following day. Local police records in the administrative area of Constantine subsequently recorded Eberhardt as sympathising with Arab elements hostile to the French. The 1899 Bône riots led Eberhardt, in the early years of her Islamic identity, into a violent rebellion, which ultimately forced her to leave Algeria. Eberhardt needed to find a way to come back to her new 'land of origin'; her search for an Islamic 'fatherland' led her to the Ottoman Empire.

⁸⁵ Kobak, *Isabelle*, p. 63.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 64.

⁸⁸ David Cook, *Martyrdom in Islam*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 117.

Pan-Islam and the Ottoman Empire

In May 1900, two months after the Bône riots and following Eberhardt's repeated attempts to live in Algeria, she took her desire for the Orient and her desire for the Other one stage further. Eberhardt attempted to obtain citizenship as an Ottoman subject. Her Orientalist desire to become the Other aspired to an authentic reality (and a textual legitimacy), with an implied political allegiance to the Porte, in the public sphere. The desire for the Orient displaces the purely Orientalist egotistic drive for knowledge.⁸⁹ Eberhardt's desire not only for the Orient but also for the Other, that is, her quest for Islamic identity, is no doubt defined by that identity having an absolute difference from the West. This is manifested in Eberhardt's retreat from modernity and civilisation (the West) into Algeria (the Orient) and, more specifically, the Sahara (as explored in chapter three). To paraphrase Dietrich Jung in his book exploring the genealogy of the modern essentialist view of Islam, the core aspect of that difference or otherness is religion, more specifically Islam; the absolute 'otherness' of Islam is the attraction.⁹⁰ This is one of the recurrent themes that Said detected in the Orientalist conceptualization of Islam. Jung, in summarising Said, states that, 'the Orient is presented as an unchanging whole, as a systematic unity of 'otherness.' The core variable in understanding this otherness is religion and, more specifically, Islam.'⁹¹

Eberhardt inverts the Orientalist logic - the Western essentialising perception of the Orient as a system of otherness - by actually becoming the Other and converting to Islam. Eberhardt's deeply felt engagement with Islam (and Sufism) is at the core of my argument and demonstrates an offshoot from Said's thematic approach. In a desire perhaps to avoid her own composite and hybrid identity (Russian and Swiss with an unknown father) Eberhardt desires a singular notion of identity under the umbrella of Islam and the Ottoman caliphate. In a significant opening to her journal on 1 January 1900, Eberhardt states that she 'has no fatherland besides Islam.'⁹² Her specific reference to the 'fatherland' as opposed to the

⁸⁹ Behdad, *Belated Travellers*, p. 14.

⁹⁰ See Dietrich Jung, *Orientalists, Islamists and the Global Public Sphere: A Genealogy of the Modern Essentialist Image of Islam*, Sheffield/Oakville: Equinox, 2011, p. 21.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Eberhardt, *The Nomad*, p. 26.

‘motherland’ could infer that Islam has taken on the missing paternalistic role in her life.

Bearing this receptivity and sense of otherness in mind, Eberhardt attempted to obtain an Ottoman passport under the premise that she had Turkish parents in order to substantiate officially her notion of identity as the Muslim taleb, Mahmoud Saâdi. This is revealed in a document from the Eberhardt archives. The document is the response to a letter from Eberhardt and her correspondent is James Sanua, an exiled Egyptian Jewish playwright, living in Paris, also writing under a pseudonym and constructed identity as shaykh Abu Naddara. I regard this as a crucial document in my investigation into Eberhardt’s Islamic identity construction and as fundamental evidence of her sincerity in becoming the Other. Furthermore, this document has yet to receive any critical notice.⁹³ I present the letter in its entirety in order to further explore further its ‘mirrored’ significance. It provides us with only a mirror because there is no letter from Eberhardt in the archive, only the response from Sanua to Eberhardt’s request. This document is also significant as it positions Eberhardt in the wider context of the Ottoman Empire and the Pan-Islamic movement, a thematic link in her engagement with Islam which has yet to be explored by critics.

Eberhardt had strategically returned to Europe in March 1899, four months after her mother’s death in Algeria and immediately following the Muslim riots in Bône in which she had participated, in order to escape any reprisals from the colonial authorities. First she returned to Geneva, then on to Marseille. The letter was posted to Eberhardt in Marseille where she was temporarily residing with her brother Augustin. Before discussing firstly the context and then the content of the letter further, I present the letter here, translated from the Arabic and French. (Underlined words are underlined in the original text.)

⁹³ To my knowledge, the only reference to this document is in Kobak’s biography. However, it is briefly cited and an abbreviated excerpt. See Kobak, *Isabelle*, p. 112. It has escaped comment or critical analysis from other Anglophone critics writing about Eberhardt.

Wednesday 16 May 1900

[In Arabic] My dear daughter Meyriam⁹⁴, may God preserve you, Amen.

[In French] You are lucky. The friend from whom I asked for the Qur'an wrote to me from Constantinople, where my letter found him, since he was away from Syria. He consequently bought me the most beautiful Qur'an that one can find, splendidly bound, but also very expensive; it cost me, in postage alone, from there to Paris and from Paris to Marseille, almost 5 francs. I do not say this to you to give more value to the book, that I pray you will keep in memory of this family that are your friends, but so that you may take good care of it. Let us mention it no more.

Naar has been sick for ten days and he is in a bad way. He gave me the two portraits, one of which made my mother-in-law very happy and who thanks you for it. As for the other portrait, my children took it, and it is in good hands. I assure you that not a single day goes by when your name isn't mentioned within our walls; you must have a bell continuously ringing in your ears.

I do not know anyone at the Turkish Consulate in Marseille and, even if I had friends there, I would not be able to tell them either that you have Turkish parents, or that you are Mahmoud Saâdi, because I must not deceive a representative of the Sultan; that would be immensely harmful for me. I do not think that you should risk it this way, where as you know a boy is in as much in danger as a girl. Furthermore an Ottoman consul never delivers a new passport without obtaining the old one, or without having two Turkish witnesses to accompany the person and to declare in written form that he is an Ottoman subject. Really, there is no use in thinking about it. Ah, if I didn't fear upsetting you, I would say: "Don't go anywhere, stay here where your talent is already appreciated". But you are clever enough to know what suits you best. I only hope that you will not get into any perilous adventure without proper reflection. I assure you, you are as dear to me as Louli and Hilmi, and it is this fatherly affection that makes me speak so freely.

Do not deprive me of your good news and be assured of your Egyptian daddy's sincere friendship,

Abu Naddara⁹⁵

The first point of attention in this letter is the date. Eberhardt's desire for official subject status under Sultan Abdülhamid in the year 1900 is the temporal crux, a vital marker, directly relevant to my assessment of her Islamic identity. Behdad states in his critical theory on the desire for the Orient that:

⁹⁴ Meyriam is a Hebrew /Egyptian/ Arabic variation of Mary, Eberhardt's middle name: Isabelle Wilhelmine Marie Eberhardt. Meyriam was the name Eberhardt used in Paris and in her initial correspondence with Abu Naddara. See G. Roger, *L'Europe*.

⁹⁵ 23 X 43, Letters from Shaykh Abu Naddara, 1897/1901, (in French and in Arabic), CAOM.

The belated Orientalism of travellers such as Nerval, Flaubert, Loti, and Eberhardt vacillates between an insatiable search for a counter experience in the Orient and the melancholic discovery of its impossibility; they are, as a result, discursively diffracted and ideologically split.⁹⁶

Firstly, I would argue against Behdad on this specific point: Eberhardt is in fact taking her search for a counter-experience in the Orient one stage further than Nerval, Flaubert and Loti, and Eberhardt cannot be placed in the same category or conflated with other European writers or travellers; she escapes many Orientalist pitfalls. Furthermore, Behdad compares/conflates Eberhardt with only *male* writers/travellers on the Orient.⁹⁷ Mahmut Mutman, in his chapter on Eberhardt from his recently published book, *The Politics of Writing Islam*, states that she was not a 'mere adventurer, like Lawrence'.⁹⁸ Although there appear to be parallels between Eberhardt and Lawrence concerning the Oriental cross-dressing that both of them undertook, Eberhardt cannot be conflated with either Lawrence or Flaubert in this respect. Behdad does refer to the Orientalist transvestism of Eberhardt (and furthermore, to a lesser extent that of Flaubert) and how this produced an effect of identification with the Other by 'enveloping' oneself in the Other's clothes, giving rise to 'a transcultural urge to become a real Oriental through cross-dressing'.⁹⁹ Eberhardt's 'transcultural urge', evident in Sanua's letter, takes us beyond the level of sartorial transvestism and complicates it by becoming more 'real'. If Eberhardt's desire for the Orient, and her desire to become the Other is taken to its zenith - to be an Islamic subject of the Ottoman Empire - then this is of cardinal importance because of the intensified status of the sultan as caliph, spiritual leader of all Muslims. Moreover, it subsequently reflects on her position in relation to the colonial powers,

⁹⁶ Behdad, *Belated Travellers*, p. 14.

⁹⁷ For examples of female travellers see John David Ragan, 'French Women Travellers in Egypt: A discourse marginal to Orientalism?' in *Travellers in Egypt*, ed. Paul Sarkey and Janet Starkey, London/New York: I. B. Taurus, 1998, pp. 222-223.

⁹⁸ Mahmut Mutman, *The Politics of Writing Islam: Voicing Difference*, London/ New York: Bloomsbury, 2014, p. 115.

⁹⁹ Behdad, *Belated Travellers*, p. 123. See Mary Orr's disagreement with Behdad's reading of adopting national dress as cultural transvestism, in reference to Flaubert. Orr states that, 'First, native dress would have been far more comfortable. Second, Egyptians then, as today, are never taken in by disguised Europeans. Most important, the wearing of non-European clothes allows Flaubert to have a unique insight into the dressing-up of his own culture.' This adds further strength to my own argument that Eberhardt's own construction of identity as Mahmoud Saâdi and thus her Orientalist positioning cannot be conflated with Flaubert. Mary Orr, 'Flaubert's Egypt: Crucible and Crux for Textual Identity' in *Travellers in Egypt*, ed. Paul Sarkey and Janet Starkey, London/New York: I. B. Taurus, 1998, pp. 198-199.

and it is in this context that Behdad's theory of ideological splitting and diffraction in the discourse of the subject can be applied more effectively.

In order to explore this formative component in the wider trajectory of Eberhardt's Islamic identity construction, it is necessary to contextualise the Ottoman Empire in this period as well as specifically, in the year 1900, the date of the letter. Eberhardt desires to be officially recognized, and textually sanctioned through a passport, as a Muslim citizen in an Islamic caliphate. Abdülhamid's highlighted status as caliph, protector of all Muslims, is the all-encompassing umbrella under which Eberhardt seeks to shelter. This letter from Sanua strongly suggests Eberhardt's search for a fixed identity in contrast to, and despite, all other variables under popular and current critical discussion. In particular, it contrasts with the critical debate around Eberhardt's nomadism and vagabondage.¹⁰⁰ I propose that Eberhardt's desire for place and permanence is located in Dar al-Islam, as represented by the Ottoman Empire. My argument is that her desire for a Turkish passport is to be seen as an attempt at identification with Islamic Ottomanism and the caliphate, rather than a national affiliation. She does not seek an alliance with emerging nationalisms nor does her desire correspond with historical narratives of the reform period of modernisation in the Ottoman Empire. In fact, as Frederick Anscombe argues, the Ottoman state never relinquished its ties to Islam during the reform period, and historians have tended to discount the importance of Islam in the Ottoman Empire during the nineteenth century, the scholarly narrative being one of modernisation, Westernisation and secularisation.¹⁰¹

However, the caliph was in fact the protector of all Muslims whether or not they were Ottoman citizens. This reflected the late nineteenth century Pan-Islamic political movement which aimed to unify all Muslims against the encroachment of the imperial powers such as France and England. The Pan-Islam movement arguably began as a reaction against the British in India and was championed by Sultan Abdülhamid II because of the British occupation of Egypt, still a privileged province

¹⁰⁰ See for example, Dúnlaith Bird's recent publication in 2012: *Travelling in Different Skins*. See also Behdad, where he describes Eberhardt as 'the figuration of a self *adrift* in the Other' [my emphasis], *Belated Travellers*, p. 114.

¹⁰¹ See Frederick F. Anscombe, 'Islam and the Age of Ottoman Reform', *Past and Present* (2010) 208 (1), pp. 159-189, for a discussion of how 'Sultan Mahmud II (1808-39), the ruler heretofore credited with committing the empire to modernization, Westernization and secularization [...] embarked upon a plan to centralize authority in Istanbul...[his] motivation was less emulation of Europe than strengthening the state's defence of the Abode of Islam (*Dar al-Islam*) against Christian enemies.' p. 159.

within the Ottoman Empire. It had been traditional, since the conquest of Arabia and Egypt in 1517 by Selim I, for all Ottoman sultans to honour their role as caliph - as the spiritual successor of the Prophet Mohammed - at the outset of their reign, but it had since become a latent authority. Abdülhamid, however, manipulated his status as caliph and played on the universally sacred symbol to reflect his omnipresent authority as sultan.¹⁰² This was for political reasons in an empire that was suffering a crisis of legitimacy in the face of European interference in Ottoman affairs and the loss of territory to European powers.¹⁰³ As Caroline Finkel explains:

Abdulhamid took the latent notion of the Ottoman sultan as caliph and refashioned it to command the allegiance not just of his own people, but of all Muslims, asserting more insistently than any Ottoman sultan before him the potency of his identity as caliph, and the appropriateness of Islam as a focus of loyalty for the state. In the opinion of Sir Henry Layard, British ambassador in Istanbul between 1877 and 1880, Abdulhamid considered his position as caliph superior to that of sultan and accorded it more importance.

¹⁰⁴

I regard it as significant that Eberhardt wanted the status of an Ottoman subject and I reiterate that the significance of this lies in the Ottoman caliphate as an Islamic empire. Furthermore, Eberhardt would have been well aware of the corresponding political implications of such an affiliation. Her association in Geneva with anarchist cells would have placed her in a knowledgeable position concerning Sultan Abdülhamid II. This is because Geneva was second only to Paris as a Young Turk refuge and the Young Turks were opposed to Abdülhamid.¹⁰⁵ My position on Eberhardt's anti-colonial stance, with regard to her association with the Young Turks, is in line with Keddie's analysis on Pan-Islamic politics: that liberals and conservatives were united in the ultimate goal of using a single Islamic state under a revived caliphate in order to end foreign incursion.¹⁰⁶ Kobak describes the relationship, in 1897, between Eberhardt and Ahmed Rachid, a young Turkish

¹⁰² Oded Peri, 'Ottoman Symbolism in British-Occupied Egypt, 1882- 1909', *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 41, No.1 (Jan., 2005), p. 107.

¹⁰³ Ibid, p. 106.

¹⁰⁴ Caroline Finkel, *Osman's Dream: The Story of the Ottoman Empire 1300-1923*, London: John Murray, 2005, p. 492.

¹⁰⁵ Sean McMeekin describes Geneva as second only to Paris as a Young Turk refuge. McMeekin further takes us to a historically later period in an analysis of the role of the Young Turks in the deposition of Abdulhamid I in 1908 which turned him into an international martyr of Islam. Sean McMeekin, *The Berlin Baghdad Express*, London: Allen Lane, 2010, pp. 59 and 78.

¹⁰⁶ See Nikkie R. Keddie, 'The Pan-Islamic Appeal: Afghani and Abdulhamid II', *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol.3, No. 1 (Oct., 1966), p. 50.

diplomat working in the Imperial Ottoman Embassy in Paris. Kobak speculates, ‘as a career diplomat, he was not necessarily tarred with the brush of Sultan Abdülhamid II’s reactionary Ottoman regime, but was still an unusual choice for Eberhardt, who had been more used to consorting with the Young Turks in Geneva who were trying to escape the Sultan.’¹⁰⁷

In fact, although Kobak is referring to the later, more reactionary period of Sultan Abdülhamid’s reign (which was really only the last few years before his deposition), her opinion adds further strength to my argument that Eberhardt, through ‘consorting’ with the Young Turks or Young Ottomans in Geneva, was well aware of the significance of aligning herself with a Pan-Islamic ideology. The reformist Young Ottomans were the original ideologists of Pan-Islam.¹⁰⁸ In addition, Eberhardt’s association with Ahmed Rachid, a diplomat from the Porte, associates him (and thus Eberhardt) with the subsequent and burgeoning Pan-Islamic philosophy of the Sultan, as fervently agitated by Jamal al-Din al-Afghani. Al-Afghani had, since 1881, presented himself initially as a defender of Islam and then of Pan-Islam - the unification of the Muslim world against the West.¹⁰⁹ The Sultan had invited al-Afghani to Istanbul in 1892 following the long petition that Al-Afghani had written to the Porte ‘offering his services as a kind of wandering Pan-Islamic messianic missionary.’¹¹⁰ Dietrich Jung states that al-Afghani ‘enhanced his stress on the dichotomy between Islam and the West, transforming Islam from a religious faith into a politico-religious ideology to fight colonialism.’¹¹¹ Jung also states that, ‘Taking up the essential themes of previous reformers, al-Afghani’s central concern was the call for Muslim unity in order to fight European, in particular British, imperialism.’¹¹² Therefore, Eberhardt’s desire to have an Ottoman passport

¹⁰⁷ Kobak, *Isabelle*, p. 69.

¹⁰⁸ See Nikke R. Keddie, *An Islamic Response to Imperialism: Political and Religious Writings of Sayyid Jamal al-Din al-Afghani*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983, p. 26.

¹⁰⁹ See Keddie, *An Islamic Response to Imperialism*, p. 22. Although al-Afghani died in 1897 and after initial productive relations with the sultan, al-Afghani’s criticism of the Shah of Iran led sultan Hamid to place al-Afghani under house arrest and close surveillance until al-Afghani’s death. See Dietrich Jung, *Orientalists, Islamists and the Global Public Sphere: A Genealogy of the Modern Essentialist Image of Islam*, Sheffield/Oakville: Equinox, 2011, p. 240. On al-Afghani’s fall from favour with the sultan and his demise, see also Keddie, *An Islamic Response to Imperialism*, pp. 30-32. Keddie also states that the Sultan associated al-Afghani with Wilfred Blunt’s schemes for an Arab caliphate and that he was invited to Istanbul in order to control him and keep him under surveillance. Keddie, *An Islamic Response to Imperialism*, p. 30.

¹¹⁰ Keddie, *An Islamic Response to Imperialism*, p. 25.

¹¹¹ Jung, *Orientalists, Islamists and the Global Public Sphere*, p. 239.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, p. 229.

and her implicit association with Pan-Islam further deepens her opposition to Western imperialism and the colonial powers.

Furthermore, for Eberhardt to align herself to the Ottoman Empire in the year 1900, 14 months after the revolt in Bône, holds further significance for placing Eberhardt in a dissymmetric relation to the colonial powers. In the year 1900 Sultan Abdülhamid began the now infamous Hijaz railway which was completed in 1908. The British were suspicious from the outset and the project was described by Valentine Chirol, the foreign editor of *The Times*, as an effort to ‘link up the seat of his temporal power in Constantinople with the seat of his spiritual power as caliph of Mecca.’¹¹³ Indeed, just fourteen years later, those suspicions were confirmed when jihad was declared in Constantinople against the Entente Alliance (Britain, Russia, France) on 14th November 1914. Also the Hijaz railway was used to distribute Turco-German jihadi propaganda to hajj pilgrims coming or going from the Hijaz which would allow the ‘waves of rebellion to spread from Egypt via Mecca to the entire Islamic world as far as India’.¹¹⁴ Although this retrospective assessment of the role of the Hijaz railway in fighting British Imperialism provides a somewhat historically distant point with regards to Eberhardt, it is nevertheless relevant because of Eberhardt’s desired alliance to the Ottoman Empire. Her employment of the language of jihad and martyrdom in the 1899 Bône riots, as demonstrated earlier in this chapter, anticipates this fervid tension between Islam and the Alliance.¹¹⁵

However, in order for Eberhardt to align herself to the Ottoman Empire officially, she needed to fabricate this already hybrid genealogy. The Turkish basis for Eberhardt’s paternal speculations and imaginings are mirrored in the above letter: ‘I do not know anyone at the Turkish Consulate in Marseille, and even if I had friends there, I would not be able to tell them either that you have Turkish parents, or that you are Mahmoud Saâdi’. This was a motif that Eberhardt reiterated. Lamia Ben Yousseff Zayzafoon mentions (in the notes to her brief biographical summary of Eberhardt) that Eberhardt claimed to be the daughter of a Turkish Muslim doctor

¹¹³ See James Barr, *Setting the Desert on Fire: T.E. Lawrence and Britain’s Secret War in Arabia, 1916-1918*, London: Bloomsbury, 2007, p. 2.

¹¹⁴ Otto von Wesendock, writing for the Foreign Office Legation Secretary Friedrich von Prittwitz, 16 August 1914, quoted in McMeekin, *The Berlin Baghdad Express*, p. 376. For more on the origins of this extraordinary document, says McMeekin, see Egmont Zechlin, *Die deutsche Politik und die Juden im Ersten Weltkrieg*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1969, pp. 119-120.

¹¹⁵ See Sean McMeekin, *The Berlin Baghdad Express*, for a thorough account of Germany’s plans to utilise Pan-Islam as a ‘secret weapon’ to decide the world war.

who had raped her mother.¹¹⁶ However, Zayzafoon provides no critical analysis on this interesting point, nor does there appear to be any actual documentary evidence to support it. For whatever reason Eberhardt suspected or imagined that she had a Muslim father, in this correspondence between Sanua and Eberhardt she wished to make a claim for both parents being Turkish. Yet her mother, Nathalie de Moerder was Russian with German Lutheran ancestry. Trophimowsky, who is generally suspected of being Eberhardt's father was Russian with Armenian/Tatar ancestry. Mme de Moerder and Trophimowsky left Russia in March 1871. In 1873 Mme de Moerder's Russian husband, General de Moerder, died. In February 1877 Eberhardt was born in Geneva. Eberhardt cites her father as 'unknown' on official documents.¹¹⁷ I would contend that it is the social stigma of illegitimacy that leads Eberhardt to the rape version of her paternity in order to gain sympathy. She disclosed this in a letter to Ali Abdul Wahab on the 1 January 1898, prefacing her revelation with an amendment: 'I had the misfortune of believing and of telling you that I was the illegitimate daughter of my tutor.'¹¹⁸ This is the only instance where Eberhardt admitted that Trophimowsky was her father. The following passage from that letter reveals the extent of Eberhardt's self-consciousness around the issue of her illegitimacy:

'I have learned, with supporting documents, that I was the sad outcome of a rape committed by my mother's doctor, now deceased, for otherwise, yes, I would demand justice for this crime that has put me forever in the saddest of situations.'¹¹⁹

There is no trace of the supporting documents which could corroborate Eberhardt's revelation to Abdul Wahab. The emotive language of Eberhardt's explanation, 'the sad result' and 'the saddest of situations', appears to be an attempt at eliciting

¹¹⁶ Isabelle Eberhardt, *Écrits intimes: lettres aux trois hommes les plus aimés*, ed. Marie-Odile Delacour and Jean-René Huleu. Paris: Payot, 1991, pp. 116-117, cited in Lamia Ben Youssef Zayzafoon, *The Production of the Muslim Woman, Negotiating Text, History and Ideology*. Oxford: Lexington, 2005, Notes, p. 57. See also Hedi Abdel- Jaoud, 'Isabelle Eberhardt: Portrait of the Artist as a Young Nomad,' *Yale French Studies* No. 83, Vol.2, 1993, p. 93, where according to Pierre Arnould in his book *Rimbaud*, Paris: Albin Michel, 1943, Eberhardt was the illegitimate daughter of the French poet Arthur Rimbaud. He bases his thesis on a physical resemblance and a 'common destiny' that brought them to the Maghreb.

¹¹⁷ See for example, the official French document certifying Eberhardt's change of address from Batna in Algeria to Marseille, following her expulsion from Algeria after the assassination attempt in 1901. 23 X 25, papers on the marriage with Slimane Ehhni, 1900/1904, (in French and in Russian), CAOM.

¹¹⁸ Eberhardt, *Écrits intimes: lettres aux trois hommes les plus aimés*, ed. Marie-Odile Delacour and Jean-René Huleu. Paris: Payot, 2003 [1991], p. 133. All further quotations are from this edition.

¹¹⁹ Ibid. [my translation].

sympathy from him around her illegitimacy rather than social condemnation. Eberhardt then goes to state how much she was in need of money, and her effort at gaining sympathy may be towards this end. It is noticeable that, in this letter, she makes no mention of the doctor being Turkish, or Muslim, as referenced by Zayzafoon above. Yet the versions of her paternity that she reproduced publicly at a later date (from 1901 onwards) always revolved around the father being Muslim. Thus she makes a reclamation of her illegitimate status towards her new identity as a Muslim, as Mahmoud Saâdi. By the time that Eberhardt made any public pronouncements concerning her Islamic identity, and paternity, both her mother and Trophimowsky were dead and this gave her a certain freedom in 'becoming'.

Eberhardt's attempt to fabricate her paternity and nationality, by writing to Sanua, may not be the naïve request it could arguably have been. Eberhardt was twenty three years old at this point but her precocity and intelligence were repeatedly referred to by her numerous correspondents and literary editors. Sanua makes such a reference in the above letter, 'but you are clever enough to know what suits you best.' By 1900, just three years after her arrival in Algeria, Eberhardt had already garnered a chequered history in her encounters with the colonial authorities during the Bône riots. As an Ottoman subject, an individual appeal to the caliphate may or may not have brought her some protection in the future but, at least it would provide a sense of overriding security by becoming part of the *umma*, the religious community of Muslims.¹²⁰ Even for non-Ottoman Muslims, 'acceptance of Abdülhamid as their caliph and protector seemed to offer an allegiance with which to challenge the colonizing European empires.'¹²¹ There was a reaction against the British occupation/Western imperialism and a promotion of Pan-Islam by al-Afghani in Egypt from the 1870s onwards amongst Egyptians who became prominent writers and intellectuals, such as Sanua.¹²²

Sanua's response to Eberhardt that he 'must not deceive a representative of the Sultan, that would be immensely harmful for me' indicates both the relationship between Sanua and the Sultan, and between the Egyptians and the Ottoman Empire. Sanua espoused the cause of the Sultan Abdülhamid alongside writers and journalists

¹²⁰ See Shireen T. Hunter for a discussion of the role of the *umma* in Islam, Shireen T. Hunter, *The Future of Islam and the West: Clash of Civilisations or Peaceful Coexistence*, Westport: Praeger, The Center for Strategic and International Studies, 1998.

¹²¹ Finkel, *Osman's Dream*, p, 497.

¹²² Keddie, *An Islamic Response to Imperialism*, pp. 18, 19.

all over the Ottoman Empire in unity against the European powers.¹²³ Eberhardt needed an Ottoman connection, an ally and an intermediary, and one with influence. Sanua had been decorated by the Sultan; such medals proudly displayed by him in the image below. Sanua's Ottoman decorations reflected the contemporary Ottoman trend for the public display of symbols evoking its past: an effort at glorification by the State in its new attempt at obtaining legitimacy.¹²⁴ In his article, 'Ottoman Symbolism in British Occupied Egypt', Oded Peri argues that 'from the Ottoman point of view, the worst thing about the British occupation of Egypt was the damage it did to the Sultan's image as caliph.'¹²⁵ The overriding emphasis on symbols was the effort to counteract this.

Therefore, Eberhardt's desire to become a subject of the Ottoman Hamidian Empire, and her implied support thereof, positions her in direct opposition to the Western powers and Russia and this is where we see her ideologically- split position deepening. The West named the Sultan, 'Abdul the Damned' or 'the Red Sultan' and, to paraphrase Caroline Finkel, he exemplified all that the West found most reprehensible about the Ottoman Empire. Western statesmen pictured him as a cruel and paranoid scion of a dynasty whose days were numbered.¹²⁶ For example, as Caroline Finkel quotes, 'in 1876, following the intercommunal massacres that year in Bulgaria, William Gladstone condemned the Sultan and his people with the words 'from the first black day they entered Europe, they [have been] the one great anti-human specimen of humanity'.¹²⁷ Gladstone's statement not only reflected centuries of stereotyping and conflating of the Turks, Islam, and the Ottoman Empire, but also reversed a counter-current of friendly Anglo-Ottoman exchanges since 1580. This marked a change in British policy.

Not only is this letter to Eberhardt significant in demonstrating her 'dissymmetric relation to the colonial powers', to quote Behdad, but I propose that her Islamic identity is central to that dissymmetric relation. I suggest that Eberhardt's correspondent James Sanua, her 'Egyptian daddy', was furthermore an important and

¹²³ See Oded Peri, 'Ottoman Symbolism in British-Occupied Egypt, 1882- 1909', *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 41, No.1 (Jan., 2005), p.103, and Shmuel Morah, Philip Sadgrove, *Jewish Contributions to Nineteenth Century Arabic Theatre: Plays from Algeria and Syria – a Study and Texts*, Oxford University Press, 1996, p. 27.

¹²⁴ See Peri, 'Ottoman Symbolism in British-Occupied Egypt', p. 107

¹²⁵ Ibid., p. 108.

¹²⁶ Finkel, *Osman's Dream*, p. 389.

¹²⁷ Jeremy Salt, 'The Narrative Gap in Ottoman Armenian History', *MES* 39 (2003) p. 34, quoted in Caroline Finkel, *Osman's Dream*, p. 389.

influential factor in the construction and ultimate metamorphosis of her identity into Mahmoud Saâdi. Indeed, she presents herself to Abu Naddara as his ‘intellectual daughter’ in their first correspondence in 1896, confirming his symbolic role.¹²⁸ According to Kobak, Eberhardt created this new pseudonym for herself in her first correspondence with Sanua in 1896 which began at her instigation.¹²⁹ Therefore, some contextualisation of Sanua’s background and image repertoire is necessary in order to provide a thorough illustration of the parallels between both of their ‘Oriental’ identity constructions.

¹²⁸ G. Roger, *L'Europe*, July 1956, p. 23.

¹²⁹ Kobak, *Isabelle*, p. 45.

James Sanua - Shaykh Abu Naddara



Fig. 8

Poster of Shaykh Abu Naddara/James Sanua ¹³⁰

With the vogue for all things Oriental in Parisian society, James Sanua established a literary reputation and persona as shaykh Abu Naddara and it was in Paris that Eberhardt hoped to gain a literary foothold. Lydia Paschkoff, a Russian writer living in Paris at the time, had written to Eberhardt on 18th March 1900 concerning Eberhardt's literary aspirations and what she needed to do in order to achieve them. Paschkoff writes about 'Abu Naddara' and the construction of both his and Eberhardt's 'Oriental' identities. Paschkoff advises, 'wherever you go you should present yourself in elegant Oriental costume. Abou [sic] will tell you that his clothes did a lot to make him the fashion.'¹³¹ However, according to Mackworth, Eberhardt never followed Paschkoff's sartorial advice and did not represent herself in Oriental 'costume' at the salons in Paris. Eberhardt followed up on Paschkoff's recommendations/introductions but she attended in European male dress.¹³² From this I would deduce that the Islamic identity that Eberhardt was in the process of constructing was not merely for show or effect, but an interior and authentic process. And if Eberhardt engaged in a theatrical performance, as argued by Clancy-Smith and others, she certainly did not perform to Parisian society.

As mentioned previously, James Sanua was an Egyptian Jewish playwright who lived in exile in Paris from 1878. Known as the Egyptian Molière (he translated all of Molière into Arabic), Sanua was the founder of the first satirical journal in Egypt. It was widely read, printed, and disseminated, and was suppressed in 1878, the reason for which he was exiled by vice-regal order in June 1878.¹³³ Sanua was the founder of the first Arabic theatre with plays produced in colloquial Arabic, as opposed to classical Arabic or French. Jamal al-Din al-Afghani (the aforementioned

¹³⁰ 23 X 43, Letters from Shaykh Abu Naddara, CAOM.

Translations of the text: The Arabic: Shaykh Sanwa Abu Nadhara which literally means Shaykh Sanwa the spectacled or the one with spectacles. The French: The Shaykh J. Sanua Abu Naddara; Honorary Interpreter of the Ministry of the Post and Telegraph; Honorary Vice-President of the Scientific and Literary Archeological Society of France; Director and Chief Editor of the "Abu Naddara Journal"; and of the "Attawadod", International Illustrated Magazine; Parisian Correspondent for 'Journal of the Orient'. Hand writing: My respects to your Tutor. Vertically on the left: Author of Arab theatre in Egypt 1869-71; Founder and President of the Circle of Progressists and of the Friends of Knowledge Society 1872-77. Vertically on the right: Advertising Executive, Speaker, Professor and Translator

¹³¹ Mackworth, *The Destiny of Isabelle Eberhardt*, p. 72.

¹³² According to Mackworth, Eberhardt turned up at the offices of *La Fronde*, to meet the editor, the French feminist Séverine, 'dressed in her usual masculine clothes.' Mackworth, *The Destiny of Isabelle Eberhardt*, p. 74.

¹³³ Further information on Sanua's journal and his role in Egyptian nationalism can be found in: Beth Baron, *Egypt as a Woman: Nationalism, Gender, and Politics*, Berkeley/Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2005, pp. 58-62.

‘wandering Pan-Islamic missionary’ who campaigned for the unity and reform of Islam in order to fight European imperialism) was in Egypt from 1871-79, and is said to have advised Sanua to found a theatre in order to spread political ideas amongst the lower classes; hence the production of Sanua’s plays in colloquial Arabic.¹³⁴ Furthermore, al-Afghani was resident in Paris at the same time as Sanua, in 1884. It was here in Paris that al-Afghani organised and co-founded a secret society of Muslims pledged to work for the unity and reform of Islam. Under its auspices it published what became one of the most influential and widely circulated periodicals in Arabic.¹³⁵

Like Eberhardt’s, Sanua’s literary status is now marginal and neglected, despite his having a prominent role in Egyptian political, nationalist and cultural movements and in Parisian society at the time. Furthermore, in parallel to Eberhardt, he created an alternative identity and his activities exposed him to assassination attempts in Egypt prior to his enforced exile. The annotated picture of Sanua (Fig.8) attests to the influence that he had in the formative years of Eberhardt’s own Islamic identity construction. It is a standard representation and probably a type of business card or poster - its A4 original size indicates a poster format. The above image is reproduced from the Eberhardt archives and appears to be Eberhardt’s own copy. The annotation at the bottom amongst the printed text is more than likely a reference to Eberhardt’s tutor, Trophimowsky: ‘Mes hommages à Monsieur votre Tuteur’ - ‘my respects to your tutor.’ As such, I deduce that it was sent to Eberhardt during her first years of correspondence with Sanua whilst she lived at the Villa Neuve in Geneva with her family and Trophimowsky. The images surrounding that of Sanua himself reveal the extent of the Orientalist aura that he created around himself in Paris. Specifically, the images can be read as the historical link between Egypt and the caliphs, and the prominent placing of the pyramids could arguably indicate Sanua’s pro position on Egyptian nationalism.¹³⁶ At the base of the business card one can see to the right the tower of the madrasa of Sultan al-Huri in Cairo and, far away in the background to the right, the Sultan Hassan mosque in Cairo, the citadel

¹³⁴ Shmuel Morah, Philip Sadgrove, *Jewish Contributions to Nineteenth Century Arabic Theatre: Plays from Algeria and Syria – a Study and Texts*, Oxford University Press, 1996, p. 22.

¹³⁵ Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age: 1798-1939*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009, p. 109.

¹³⁶ For a comprehensive study of Abu Naddara see Lisa Lital Levy, ‘Jewish Writers in the Arab East: Literature, History, and the Politics of Enlightenment, 1863-1914. PhD Thesis, Berkeley: University of California, 2007.

founded by Saladin. The other building on the right foreground appears to be the sepulchres (tombs) of the caliphs, while on the left side, a minaret is probably from a destroyed mosque.¹³⁷ The symbolic value of these images lies in the fact that they arguably represent Cairo as the ancient 'City of the Caliphs' and is of consequence to my argument concerning Eberhardt, her relationship with Sanua, and both their positions regarding the current Ottoman caliphate, that is, not an opposing position.¹³⁸ This is an image that Eberhardt more than likely coveted in the 'claustrophobic atmosphere' (her own admission) of the Villa Neuve in Geneva and I suggest that it had a large degree of influence.

In addition to this, Sanua's knowledge of the Qur'an and Islam and his nebulous title as 'Cheikh' led to rumours of his conversion to Islam. This is why I refer to his Oriental construction of identity in Paris as opposed to his Muslim identity, as Sanua's religious affiliation as a Muslim or as a Jew is not clear and varies according to source. It is important to note that the word shaykh does not always imply a relationship to Islam. Although Cecily Mackworth, Eberhardt's first biographer refers to Sanua as 'a moslem of the old school' and Eberhardt writes to him asking for a copy of the Qur'an, one cannot directly infer that he had converted to Islam.¹³⁹ In Sanua's response he described the convoluted process of obtaining a copy of the Qur'an for Eberhardt, which eventually came from Istanbul where the most exquisite editions are known to be crafted. Such an acquisition is simultaneously a demonstration of the Orientalist's 'egotist drive for knowledge' as elaborated in the previous chapter and also an indicator of Eberhardt's burgeoning Islamic faith, if not an affirmation of Sanua's.

¹³⁷ With thanks to Iuliana Gavril for the identification of these images. For her PhD thesis, Gavril worked on Hagia Sophia in Constantinople/Istanbul, and the relationship between architecture and literary texts, with a focus on the experience of the interior space as conveyed in texts. Gavril, Iuliana-Elena, *'Archi-Text' for Contemplation in Sixth-Century Byzantium: The Case of the Church of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople*, unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Sussex: 2012. Gavril also has a further interest in 19th century photography of historical sites /monuments in the Middle East.

¹³⁸ See John Stoddard Lectures (Egypt Part 4) for confirmation of images and information regarding the historical monuments: 'Towering far above the city of the Caliphs is a huge fortress called the Citadel. As is well known, Cairo is of Arabian origin, - a brilliant memento of Mohammedan conquest. Its name (in Arabic, Al Kahireh) signifies "The Victorious." When, in the seventh century after Christ, the followers of the Prophet, inspired with enthusiasm for their new religion, , rushed northward from Arabia on their path of victory and proselytism (which ultimately made the greater part of the Mediterranean a Moslem lake), Egypt was one of their first and most important conquests.' <http://chestofbooks.com/travel/egypt/John-Stoddard-Lectures/Egypt-Part-4.html#.UTTszDwlgg> Accessed 4.3.13

¹³⁹ See Mackworth, *The Destiny of Isabelle Eberhardt*, p. 74. Mackworth also refers to Sanua as 'the old Turk' perhaps reflecting the long held conflation of the Turks with the Ottomans and Islam.

I suggest that James Sanua as shaykh Abu Naddara represented to Eberhardt a classical Orientalist (in the cultural-academic sense of the word). Sanua was an Arabic scholar, a polygot fluent in Hebrew, Arabic, Greek and Latin, and a playwright. Eberhardt's initial correspondence with Sanua in her formative years, one year before she first traveled to Algeria, suggests the influence he had in the early stages of the construction of her Islamic identity. Although unable to provide her with the passport she desired at this point, Sanua had previously provided introductions that were instrumental in her search for knowledge of all things Islamic: he introduced Eberhardt (through correspondence) to Ali Abdul Wahab, a young civil servant (born one year before Eberhardt, in 1876) from a distinguished Tunisian family.

In a circular ending to this section of the chapter it is noteworthy to assess the consequences of the images that Eberhardt produced of herself and disseminated to her correspondents. For example, Sanua mentions in the letter a photo of Eberhardt that she herself had distributed. Previous to this, in 1897, Sanua wrote to Eberhardt suggesting that she might like to correspond with Ali Abdul Wahab, as he was particularly knowledgeable about Islam. Abdul Wahab's attention had been drawn to Eberhardt following the display on Sanua's desk of a photograph of Eberhardt in her sailor costume. According to Kobak, in the autumn of 1896, whilst Sanua still thought that he was dealing with a young man named Mahmoud, Abdul Wahab visited him in Paris and had been struck by the photograph on Sanua's desk that Eberhardt had sent him. This was a photograph taken on the same day in 1895 as the image discussed at the beginning of the chapter, in the studio of the Davids. As a result of Abdul Wahab's curiosity surrounding the photograph and Sanua's encouragement to Eberhardt, she wrote to Abdul Wahab early in 1897 asking for clarification on certain points about Islam.¹⁴⁰

There ensued a long correspondence between Abdul Wahab and Eberhardt, spanning from June 1897 to August 1899, and Kobak speculates that Eberhardt was 'probably' introduced to the more purist, militant version of Islam - Wahhabism - through her correspondence with Abdul Wahab.¹⁴¹ Kobak makes this connection because Wahhabism derives from Abdul Wahab's own family dynasty. Kobak states:

¹⁴⁰ See Kobak, *Isabelle*, p. 46.

¹⁴¹ The entire correspondence between Abdul Wahab and Eberhardt can be found in Eberhardt, *Écrits intimes*, pp. 72-262. The book contains the correspondence between Eberhardt and Ali Abdul Wahab, her brother Augustin de Moerder, and Slimane Ehni.

‘From a long correspondence with the scholarly Wahab before she even set foot in North Africa, Isabelle was introduced to a reformist strain of Islam known as Wahabism (sometimes Wahhabism) deriving from Ali’s own family dynasty.’¹⁴² However, the connection that Kobak draws between Abdul Wahab, Wahhabism and Eberhardt is tenuous. Abdul Wahab and his family lived in Tunisia, not Saudi Arabia, and there was no formal connection between the Muslims of Tunisia and the Wahhabis of Saudi Arabia. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the ‘ulama’ of Tunis had collectively rejected a formal Wahhabi invitation to all Muslims to accept Wahhabi doctrines.¹⁴³ Furthermore, Wahhabism is never mentioned specifically in Eberhardt’s journals, prose or correspondence.¹⁴⁴ Kobak goes on to speculate that the Wahhabi instigation of a return to Islam’s Qur’anic roots fits perfectly with Eberhardt’s fascination and sympathy with mythical, early Islam.¹⁴⁵ However, this return to Islam’s Qur’anic roots can take many forms and I would argue that Eberhardt’s fascination with early Islam is rather an indication of Eberhardt’s retreat from modernity, symptomatic of a certain nineteenth century *fin de siècle* trend and of Orientalism, especially the emphasis on the timeless nature of the Orient, as previously mentioned in this chapter. This retreat is not only present in the journals but filters down into her prose; for example, in the story ‘Printemps au Desert’ discussed in the first chapter:

Bewitching country, unique land where there is silence and peace across *unchanging centuries* [my emphasis]. Country of dream and mirage, untouched by the sterile tumult of modern Europe.¹⁴⁶

If Eberhardt were, as suggested by Kobak, exposed to Wahhabism through her friend Abdul Wahab, it may go some way to her explaining her initial, militant approach to Islam as in the Bône riots. Furthermore, Eberhardt’s militant approach was deepened by her fascination with martyrdom. In 1901, Eberhardt states in her journal, ‘To me, the soul’s supreme achievement would be fanaticism leading *harmoniously*, that is to

¹⁴² Kobak, in her introduction to Eberhardt, *The Nomad*, p. 14.

¹⁴³ Arnold H. Green, *The Tunisian Ulama 1873-1915: Social Structure and Response to Ideological Currents*, Leiden: Brill, 1978, p. 67.

¹⁴⁴ Eberhardt’s fascination with ancient Islam is couched in an exoticised description of El Oued in her story, ‘Homesickness’: ‘with not a single grey roof, not one smoky chimney, El Oued appeared to him for the first time: an enchanted city, as from the vanished centuries of earliest Islam...’ Isabelle Eberhardt, *Prisoner of Dunes*, trans. Sharon Bangert, London: Peter Owen, 1995, p. 54.

¹⁴⁵ Kobak, in her introduction to Eberhardt, *The Nomad*, pp. 14-15.

¹⁴⁶ Eberhardt, ‘Desert Springtime’, in *Prisoner of Dunes*, p. 92.

say, through absolute sincerity, to martyrdom.¹⁴⁷ However, I have found no evidence, in the correspondence between Abdul Wahab and Eberhardt, of his influence on her 'fanaticism'. What Abdul Wahab does reveal to Eberhardt, through personal testimony, is the influence of Islam on his own happiness and peace of mind:

In any case it is a fact that, for a year, as I just said above, I ended up understanding myself and getting rid of this gloomy appearance that I had. What is this change due to? This time I know it. To my unlimited belief in Islam. To my blind respect for its saintly and wise principles that, in reality, once conscientiously carried out, not only contribute to but consist of man's happiness.¹⁴⁸

Abdul Wahab never directly refers to himself as a Wahhabi and what further complicates the nature of his Islamic influence on Eberhardt is the fact that he refers to himself as having a European outlook, 'raised in a civilised environment (European) and having received a modern education' but as one who has wholeheartedly embraced Islam.¹⁴⁹ Thus, if Eberhardt was influenced by Wahhabism via Abdul Wahab, this would have been modified somewhat by Abdul Wahab's own Western education which in itself would have been in opposition to Wahhabism. Furthermore, Eberhardt's subsequent initiation as a member of the Qadiriyya brotherhood would be anomalous because, according to the Wahhabis, the Sufis were infidels.¹⁵⁰ Therefore, Abdul Wahab's own admission of his European outlook/education suggests that he is not wholly the Islamic mentor suggested by Kobak.¹⁵¹ Abdul Wahab occupies a divided position similar to that of Eberhardt, as a Tunisian but also not wholly Other due to his European education. Similarly, James Sanua had a European education, in Italy. Both of Eberhardt's Islamic mentors were from a Maghrebian, educated elite familiar with European intellectual frameworks.

The matter of Wahhabism as an influence on Eberhardt is therefore subject to speculation only. However, Eberhardt's militant approach to Islam, as evidenced in her participation in the Bône riots, cannot be contested. The next chapter examines Eberhardt's deepening Islamic identity, now as a Sufi, following her initiation into

¹⁴⁷ Eberhardt, *The Nomad*, p. 103.

¹⁴⁸ 23 X 31, correspondence Ali Abdul Wahab, Abdul Wahab to Eberhardt, (original in French), 25th August, 1897, CAOM. The entire letter is published in Eberhardt, *Écrits intimes*, p. 91.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ David Cook, *Understanding Jihad*, Berkeley/Los Angeles/London: University of California Press, 2005, p. 75.

¹⁵¹ Kobak, in her introduction to Eberhardt, *The Nomad*, pp. 14-15.

the Qadiriyya Sufi brotherhood, and the consequences of the presentation and mediation of her Islamic self that we have seen constructed in this section. Her search for solace in Sufism results in fractious relations with both the colonisers and the Algerians. The next part of my argument is to explore Eberhardt's Islamic identity as a locus of contestation between Algeria and France.

Chapters three and four examine the textual, and public, mediation of Eberhardt's Islamic identity through the lens of two notable events in her life: firstly, the assassination attempt on her life and, secondly, the reportage following the press banquet for the French President in Algiers. The focus is on Eberhardt's letters to the newspapers concerning those events and the unpublished archival correspondence. The next chapter goes into further detail to assess Eberhardt's Sufi identity and initiation into the Qadiriyya brotherhood. This is contextualised around the history of the Sufi brotherhoods in French Algeria and the relationship between Islam and the colonial authorities. The effects/consequences of Eberhardt's Islamic textual presence and identity on colonial society with regards to the French and Algerians consequently leads to a discussion of the possible religious or political motivations behind the assassination attempt, reflecting Eberhardt's divided position between the two cultures.

CHAPTER THREE

Dar al-Harb: Eberhardt and the Discourse of Discontent

Following the trans-cultural transformation of Eberhardt into Mahmoud Saâdi explored in the previous chapter, this chapter focuses on Eberhardt's mediation and further self-fashioning of that identity, publicly, in the contact zone of colonial Algeria. In addition, this analysis is layered with a comparison to Eberhardt's private discourse from unpublished archival correspondence in the related time period. Throughout this chapter there are several inter-locking concerns in Eberhardt's complex and contradictory positioning to negotiate and examine: that of career, colonial politics and religious belonging. Rather than discuss the general performative aspect of Eberhardt's public self-fashioning or the implicit theatricalised Orientalism already legitimately attended to by critics such as Emily Apter, my opening focus here is on how Eberhardt's positioning and self-promotion are in some degree a strategic career manoeuvre.¹⁵² As debated in the previous chapter, her outward 'Oriental construction' could go a long way towards the furtherance of her literary career. However, in my argument, this is not in any measure a negation of her sincere and deeply felt engagement with Islam which, as this chapter demonstrates, aggravated the relationship between 'Islam and the West'.

Although I make a general reference to Islam and the West, my specific attention is on the matrix of Eberhardt, Islam, and the French colonial administration in Algeria. I shall demonstrate how Eberhardt, through her public discourse, provides not only a human spotlight on the historical relationship between Islam and the West but becomes the locus of contestation between Algeria and France as demonstrated in the assassination attempt on her life. French colonial Algeria was identified by

¹⁵² See Emily Apter, 'Acting Out Orientalism: Stereotype, Performativity, the Isabelle Eberhardt Effect' in *Continental Drift: From National Characters to Virtual Subjects*, Chicago/London: University of Chicago Press, 1999, in particular pp. 134-137. Apter describes Eberhardt's identity politics as one of the most astonishing episodes in feminist performance history - the acting out of what she calls 'The Isabelle Eberhardt complex'. P. 143. See also Bird, *Travelling in Different Skins* which uses Judith Butler's theories of performativity as a theoretical framework to analyse Eberhardt alongside other female travellers.

Muslims as Dar al-Harb, the Abode of War - a territory that had not submitted to Islam nor was in active war against it - whereas the Ottoman Empire was designated Dar al-Islam, the Abode of Peace, 'the sum of the territory in which Islam and the *sharia* was supreme.'¹⁵³ I shall adopt the Muslim terminology in this chapter in order to represent the tensions present in colonial Algeria (and thus to give a certain charge to my argument), and shall occasionally use the representation of Algeria as the 'Orient', in my discussion of Eberhardt in the Sahara. The terms are a useful indicator of the 'desired Orient' of Eberhardt's adolescence in Geneva, based on her readings of Pierre Loti and Eugène Fromentin, and the reality of colonial Algeria that she discovers and negotiates.

Following her failure to become an Ottoman citizen, Eberhardt was unable to locate herself within Dar al-Islam under the Ottoman Empire. As such, she re-located her identity to a site under the designation of Dar al-Harb. This choice was influenced by familiarity and proximity (following her previous visits to Algeria in 1897) and, by an imagination infused by literary texts about Algeria such as *Une Année dans le Sahel* by Eugène Fromentin published in 1859 (the English translation/edition is *Between Sea and Sahara, An Algerian Journal*).¹⁵⁴ In this chapter I will consider the consequences of Eberhardt's self-fashioning of an Islamic identity (as an initiate of the Qadiriyya) in the environment of the Sufi brotherhoods in Algeria. This, alongside an analysis of the manipulation by the colonial administration of those brotherhoods, and of the assassination attempt on Eberhardt's life, provides some historical context to the assassinations of explorers in the latter half of the nineteenth century.

Furthermore, ample biographical and critical attention is paid to Eberhardt's entire biographical trajectory at the neglect of a combined close analysis of any significant event, the textual moments signifying those events, and accompanying historical specificity. This chapter combines all those elements. Apart from the extensive biographical accounts from Blanch, Mackworth, Kobak, and Edmonde-Roux, the assassination episode usually receives no more critical mention than a paragraph, except in Ursula Kingsmill Hart's biographical monograph, *Two Ladies of Colonial Algeria* and Laura Rice's article ' "Nomad Thought": Isabelle Eberhardt

¹⁵³ Cook, *Understanding Jihad*, p. 20.

¹⁵⁴ Eugène Fromentin, *Between Sea and Sahara, An Algerian Journal*, trans. Blake Robinson, Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1999.

and the Colonial Project'.¹⁵⁵ My approach, in its critical attention to the colonial project, is close to that of Rice. However, Rice, along with other critics, neglects any detailed analysis of Eberhardt's letters to the press in relation to the attempted assassination. Rice lists the speculated reasons behind the assassination attempt and discusses the correspondence between the French authorities and the Russian consul concerning Eberhardt's 'hatred for France'.¹⁵⁶ Rice concludes that Eberhardt's public pledges of loyalty to France were made under duress when she was at the mercy of the judicial and military systems. Here, Rice is referring obliquely to the letters that I will discuss. I agree that this is certainly an aspect of Eberhardt's careful and considered representation.

A more recent publication in France in 2009 by Soazic Lahuec reveals some significant information concerning the assassination attempt.¹⁵⁷ Lahuec utilises previously unpublished documents from the archives d'Outre-Mer in Aix en Provence (CAOM) that have only been accessible since 2001. Lahuec states four possible motivations for the assassination attempt based on contradictory testimonies from Abdallah in the criminal file: firstly, that Eberhardt was a victim of the Tijaniyya; secondly, that she was a victim of the French presence in Algeria; thirdly, a victim by mistake; and fourthly, a victim too embarrassing for the authorities. All of the major biographies of Eberhardt, named above, plus the significant critical articles on Eberhardt, were published before Lahuec's research. To my knowledge, Lahuec still remains un-cited. Lahuec states that:

This file entitled 'Criminal File of Abdallah Ben Si Mohammed Ben Lakdar' contains all the documents concerning the investigation into the assassination attempt of which she [Eberhardt] is a victim in Béhima. Her biographers concur that she was the target of a religious fanatic belonging to the Brotherhood of the Tidjanias [sic.], rival of the Kadryas [sic.]. However, reading the criminal file sheds a new light on the reasons for such an act.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁵ Ursula Kingsmill Hart, *Two Colonial Ladies of Algeria: The Lives and Times of Aurélie Picard and Isabelle Eberhardt*, Ohio University Center for International Studies, Monographs in International Studies, African Series No. 49, Athens, Ohio, 1987; Laura Rice, ' "Nomad Thought": Isabelle Eberhardt and the Colonial Project', *Cultural Critique*, No. 17 (Winter, 1990-1991), pp. 151-176 and pp. 168-170.

¹⁵⁶ Rice, 'Nomad Thought', p. 169.

¹⁵⁷ Soazic Lahuec, 'Tentative d'assassinat d'Isabelle Eberhardt: un dossier judiciaire qui interroge', *Cahiers de la Méditerranée*, 78 (2009), Migration et religion en France (Tome 2), pp. 307-16.

¹⁵⁸ Lahuec, 'Tentative d'assassinat d'Isabelle Eberhardt: un dossier judiciaire qui interroge' p. 2.

Lahuec concludes that the political motivations put forward by the accused himself in the two interrogations were at no time put forward by the military authorities. The authorities concluded that Abdallah acted solely for religious reasons despite the fact that there was no tangible proof to determine his affiliation to this or that brotherhood. My analysis of Eberhardt's letters to the press coincides with Lahuec's conclusion but also focuses on the self-serving motivation behind Eberhardt's public declarations. I aim to address the previous imbalance by paying attention to the context and content of two letters that Eberhardt wrote to the newspaper *La Dépêche Algérienne* in May 1901, alongside unpublished, private correspondence. Inclusion of Lahuec's scholarship reveals the measure of Eberhardt's considered, but no less provocative, negotiation of the situation for her own advantage and provides the evidence for my own speculations and assessment of Eberhardt's textual 'performance'.

Due to the total length of the published letters (three thousand words) relevant sections will be quoted herein and the letters can be found in the appendices. Rather than summarise the intricate nature of the events in advance of any analysis, I shall let

narrative tell
the relevant
my argument.

La Dépêche



Eberhardt's
the story in
sections of

Algérienne

Fig. 9

An issue of *La Dépêche Algérienne*, February 27, 1904¹⁵⁹

Prior to the trial of her assassin Eberhardt wrote the above mentioned letters to *La Dépêche Algérienne*, a daily newspaper with a circulation of 20,000 (compare to the *presse indigène* which was never more than a minor player with few full-time journalists and a circulation of 1,000 copies per week).¹⁶⁰ Eberhardt's choice of newspaper amongst many was telling, as Eberhardt herself attests in the subsequently quoted sections.¹⁶¹ The audience for *La Dépêche Algérienne* was comprised of the French settlers (colons) in Algeria; therefore Eberhardt's choice of a colon newspaper to publish in, in the context of her commentary, implies that she wished to make a public and political point to the colonial administration and to the French colons whilst simultaneously appeasing the administration in a strategic manner. Furthermore, Eberhardt's critical attitude is contained within a polite and articulate gesture of deference to the newspaper editors in the opening paragraphs of these two letters. The deferential tone turns obsequious in the second letter, as Eberhardt is clearly careful either to maintain or to nourish contacts in journalism to aid her literary career. This was an intelligent approach because, by 1903, Eberhardt was on the staff of this same newspaper.¹⁶²

Eberhardt begins by 'sincerely' thanking the newspaper for the publication of her initial 'long letter' (two thousand words) and continues, 'I should add that I could hardly have expected less from a newspaper with your reputation for impartiality: *La Dépêche Algérienne* has always shown considerable moderation, compared with the excesses that have unfortunately become standard policy for other Algerian publications.'¹⁶³ Eberhardt's reference to the impartiality and moderation of the newspaper indicates her awareness and suspicion of prejudice and bias towards her or the trial of Abdallah or from colonial society in general. She goes on to state in the next sentence that 'it seems to me, however, that as the question of foreigners

¹⁵⁹ The archive has a partial holding of *La Dépêche Algérienne*, 1892 to 1946. BIB AOM/30635, CAOM.

¹⁶⁰ Peter Dunwoodie groups the newspapers into four categories: government-owned, financed and inspired; colonist; *indigénophile*; and Arab-Berber or *indigène*, in Peter Dunwoodie, *Francophone Writing in Transition: Algeria 1900-1945*, Bern: Peter Lang, 2005, p. 50.

¹⁶¹ According to Dunwoodie, 'Algeria had a remarkable number of newspapers – approximately one hundred by 1900', *ibid.*

¹⁶² See the 1903 letter to *La Petite Gironde* concerning the Kahina accusation where Eberhardt states her journalist credentials as 'a contributor to *La Revue Blanche*, *La Grande France*, *Le Petit Journal Illustré* and *La Dépêche Algérienne*, of whose staff I am a member at present'. Isabelle Eberhardt, *The Oblivion Seekers*, trans. Paul Bowles, San Francisco: City Lights, 1982, p. 88.

¹⁶³ Eberhardt, *The Nomad*, p. 122.

residing in Algeria is such a burning topic at the moment, I ought to expand upon my earlier letter for those who have taken the trouble to read it.' Eberhardt is all too aware that there was resentment in colon society toward the presence of immigrants. Dunwoodie explains the situation in late nineteenth and early twentieth century colonial Algeria:

For the French settler population, Algeria was by now part of France (as long as metropolitan policies did not conflict with settler interests...), the indigenous population had been rendered invisible in their own homeland, and all other European immigrants were foreigners whose labour was absorbed but whose presence – as even Bertrand's panegyric occasionally revealed - was resented.¹⁶⁴

Here it becomes apparent that Eberhardt realises the full consequences of her initial public declaration and her precarious situation as a Russian citizen, as a 'foreigner' dressing as an indigenous inhabitant, residing in Algeria. The second letter functions as a partial retraction in order to soften any retributive consequences from the colonial authorities and resentment from colon society.

Eberhardt and Abdallah

Eberhardt's letters to *La Dépêche Algérienne* reveal multiple positions and motivations. Ostensibly, the first letter aims to ameliorate the full weight of the colonial justice system against Abdallah and to mitigate his life sentence by personally pardoning him for his actions and taking away his personal responsibility. Eberhardt diverts attention by placing the responsibility elsewhere, alluding for the second time in the letter to a 'mysterious' case and thus a covert motivation for the assassination attempt; implying the role that the French colonial administration may have had in it. Thus Eberhardt's description of the affair as 'nebulous' is particularly apt. Eberhardt ends her letter with the plea:

I trust the Military Court at Constantine will not be content merely to convict and sentence Abdallah Ben Mohammed and let it go at that, but will also try to throw light on this nebulous affair.

It seems to me that Abdallah was only an instrument in other hands and

¹⁶⁴ Peter Dunwoodie, *Writing French Algeria*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998, p. 108.

his conviction will not satisfy me, nor, for that matter, anyone who cares for truth and justice. It is not Abdallah whom I would like to see in the dock, but rather those who incited him, that is, the real culprits, whoever they may be.¹⁶⁵

The mitigation of Abdallah's life sentence she achieved successfully. The 'real culprits' were never uncovered and the 'nebulous' issue of the 'real culprits' is touched upon in further depth in Lahuec's article concluding that the military authorities refused to divulge any political motivations.

Secondly, I argue that, in this letter, Eberhardt aimed to inscribe her Islamic identity publicly and, through this public pronouncement, to raise covertly her literary profile. Furthermore, I suggest that this public declaration of identity functioned simultaneously to confirm a private need 'to reassure herself that such a core identity existed.'¹⁶⁶ For example, Eberhardt confirms a sense of her true identity in the private as well as in the public arena in a double textual confirmation of identity and placement. This is evidenced in her diary. Eberhardt records the fact of the letters' publication one month after the event, whilst in Marseille, in her Friday 7 June 1901 diary entry. Furthermore, she then transcribes both letters to the newspaper into her diary with the preface: 'May 6, publication of my letter concerning the Béhima episode in *La Dépêche Algérienne*. Sent letter of rectification on the 7th.'¹⁶⁷

Eberhardt shows awareness of the possible visibility of this self-serving promotional motivation when she states that she is not 'someone affecting Islamism for show, or assuming a religious label for some ulterior motive'.¹⁶⁸ As Kobak states, 'this contact with the newspapers, and Mohammed's trial put her in the public eye for the first time. Tales of "the good nomad" and the "Amazon of the Sahara" began to reach a Paris eager for such spicy fare.'¹⁶⁹ Eberhardt's attempt to ensure a raised profile and justice for Abdallah was made not just to the colons in Algiers but also to the metropole. From now on, according to Kobak, Isabelle would lead a publicly accountable life.'¹⁷⁰ I would modify Kobak's statement about Eberhardt's

¹⁶⁵ Eberhardt, *The Nomad*, p. 121.

¹⁶⁶ Bird, *Travelling in Different Skins*, p. 73.

¹⁶⁷ Eberhardt, *The Nomad*, p. 115.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 116.

¹⁶⁹ Kobak, in her introduction to Eberhardt, *The Nomad*, p. 11.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.* The issue of a publicly accountable life is evident in the Kahina episode to be discussed in the next chapter. Furthermore, Eberhardt's activities, her use of multiple pseudonyms/personas, and her sheer presence in Algeria is drawn attention to repeatedly in the colon press, particularly the

accountability. In the first letter Eberhardt desires her life to become accountable, in what appears a highly mature manner, and she stakes a firm claim to her opinions, as when she states in the letter quoted below (having the opposite effect to a legal disclaimer), 'I would be most obliged if you would be so kind so as to publish this letter under my name. The responsibility for its contents is entirely mine.'

The tone of the entire first letter is promulgatory. Eberhardt takes this opportunity to announce, officially and textually, her identity as a Muslim, alongside other concerns to be examined:

Sir,

On June 18th next, a native by the name of Abdallah Mohammed Ben Lakhdar, from the village of Béhima near El Oued (district of Touggourt), will appear before the Military Court at Constantine for trial. He stands accused of murder, or rather of attempted murder, and his guilt is an established fact. I myself was the victim of his deed, which almost cost me my life.

I have been quite surprised to find no mention of the affair in the Algerian press, despite the fact that it is one of the strangest and most mysterious cases ever to be tried in an Algerian court. I can only suppose that the press has been left in the dark about the facts. I believe that for the sake of justice and truth the public ought to learn a number of details before it comes to trial. I would be most obliged if you would be so kind so as to publish this letter under my name. The responsibility for its contents is entirely mine.

I should like to preface my story with a few facts, in order to clarify the tale that follows.

The investigating magistrates have repeatedly expressed their surprise at hearing me describe myself not only as a Muslim but also an initiate of the Qadrya sect; and they have not known what to make of my going about dressed as an Arab, sometimes as a man, and at other times as a woman, according to the needs of my essentially nomadic life....¹⁷¹

In this opening section to her 'long letter', Eberhardt attempts a degree of objectivity through the presentation of 'facts' in order to place herself in a position of some authority on the case and to compel her readers. In addition, there is a simultaneous tone of righteousness which also compounds her tone of authority in the following sentence, 'I believe that for the sake of justice and truth the public ought to learn a number of details before it comes to trial.' This suggests perhaps a mediating role from Eberhardt in her desire to save Abdallah from a life sentence and, it has a

newspaper *L' Union Républicaine* whom she threatens to sue for defamation of character. See chapter four.

¹⁷¹Eberhardt, *The Nomad*, p. 115.

biblical resonance.¹⁷² It is as if she mythologises herself into a dimly biblical past, as that of the saviour for the wronged, her position reminiscent of Job's own righteousness, 'I put on righteousness, and it clothed me: my judgement was as a robe and a diadem. I was eyes to the blind, and feet was I to the lame.'¹⁷³ There is precedence for this mannered literary style. We see it in the French tradition with Pierre Loti, whose novels Eberhardt read avidly and quoted from liberally in her diaries and correspondence. Loti was brought up on the cadences of the Old Testament which, according to Lesley Blanch, often sounded in his writing.¹⁷⁴

Eberhardt has literally put on her righteousness as a garment, defending her guise as an Arab male and as a 'Muslim, but also as an initiate of the Qadyra sect'. Furthermore, the Job motif also serves Eberhardt as that of the righteous sufferer. It is as if Eberhardt feels herself put on trial by the colonial administration, alongside Abdallah and, arguably, she is. Three weeks after the assassination attempt, on 20 February 1901, Eberhardt writes a letter to Slimane's brother describing it alongside the business of Slimane's removal from El Oued to Batna by the military authorities. This letter contains the seeds of her sense of injustice and it is written in French, interspersed with the odd phrase in Arabic. Eberhardt states, 'avoid like the plague the crowd of French politicians who deceive Muslims shamelessly, and who cowardly deserted all of us after having pushed us forward as sacrificial victims [...]' This is the sincere advice of the most tested of us all. The future will prove to us that we have been odiously abused.'¹⁷⁵ Eberhardt signs the letter 'your brother, Mohammed Ben Saad.' Here, in Eberhardt's private correspondence, her discourse of discontent is plainly visible, there is no strategic manoeuvring for political purposes, and it is strongly worded and felt. Although the signature of Mohammed Ben Saad appears a performative gesture, there is a sense in this letter of Eberhardt's genuine and welcome belonging to a Muslim family, that of Slimane Ehhni whose parents had just been to visit them. For example, in telling Slimane's brother to avoid the French 'like the plague [...]' who deceive Muslims shamelessly' Eberhardt shows

¹⁷² Abdallah was sentenced to hard labour for life following the guilty verdict of pre-meditated murder. Eberhardt wrote a further statement and lodged an appeal on Abdallah's behalf, determined to reduce the severity of the sentence. It was reduced to ten years in prison as a result of her efforts. For Isabelle's statement see Eberhardt, *The Nomad*, pp. 131-132.

¹⁷³ Job 29: 14-15, *The Bible*, authorized King James Version, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997, p. 628.

¹⁷⁴ Lesley Blanch, *Pierre Loti: Travels with the Legendary Romantic*, London: I.B. Taurus, 2004, p. 147.

¹⁷⁵ 23 X 28, Letters to Augustin de Moerder and the brother of Slimane Ehhni, 1900/1903, CAOM.

her protectiveness towards her Muslim brother (in-law to be), as she is protective of her would-be assassin Abdallah. It is a protection offered against the colonial administration. Eberhardt goes on to advise her ‘very dear brother [...] not [to] let yourself be fooled anymore by the deceptive promises of those people’, meaning the French authorities.¹⁷⁶ Still, the tone of the righteous sufferer is evident when she positions herself and Slimane as that of unwilling ‘sacrificial victims’ and describes herself ‘as the most tested of us all’ and ‘odiously abused’.¹⁷⁷ Eberhardt’s use of the phrase ‘sacrificial victims’ has a biblical connotation and that is an undercurrent in her public letters. Eberhardt’s private attitude towards the authorities and her discourse around them is not just discontented but bitter.

Eberhardt certainly had a familiarity with the Bible, alongside the Qur'an. This can be seen in her diaries where she quoted from both; commonly using the *fatih*as throughout her text and quoting from Jeremiah, in the Old Testament. For instance, on 15 June, 1900, in Geneva, Eberhardt included the following passage in her diary: ‘Thus said the Lord, Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls.’¹⁷⁸ Moreover, Kobak notes that Eberhardt “was particularly fond of the sentence from Matthew’s gospel, with which she ruefully identified: ‘Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding garment?’ ”¹⁷⁹ Kobak goes on to state that, for Eberhardt, ‘life was a feast to which she had not been invited and, for which, in the end, she did not have the right clothes.’¹⁸⁰ A fitting comment, for Eberhardt debated what to wear to the trial in a letter to Slimane (soon to become her husband) and she ended up wearing the clothes of an Arab woman. Despite the gender fluidity that Eberhardt is capable of undertaking, she is nevertheless reinforcing ‘the difference between the colonizer and colonized’ whilst demonstrating that her sartorial choice fails to define her ‘true identity’ as a Muslim: outwardly presented as either the Arab male Mahmoud Saâdi, or the female Russian (read European), Isabelle Eberhardt. Behdad claims that Eberhardt’s male Arab disguise, rather than challenging the ‘categories of race and gender, as Garber claims, is a phallogocentric appropriation of an oriental signifier that reinforces the differences between the

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷⁷ The tone of the righteous sufferer in Eberhardt’s discourse can be observed and is compounded in her letter to the press concerning the Kahina accusation in 1903, to be examined in the next chapter.

¹⁷⁸ Jeremiah 6:16. Eberhardt, *The Nomad*, p. 37.

¹⁷⁹ Kobak, *Isabelle*, p.245.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

colonizer and colonized.¹⁸¹ However, in Eberhardt's decision to wear Arab women's clothes, her sartorial choice can no longer be argued as a 'phallogentric appropriation'. Nevertheless the wearing of Arab women's clothes performs the same function that Behdad argues for: reinforcing the difference between the coloniser and colonised.

Furthermore, Eberhardt literally becomes 'eyes to the blind' when she states in the second letter that 'I used what little medical knowledge I had to treat the ophthalmia, conjunctivitis and other complaints that are endemic to the area.'¹⁸² Eberhardt repeats the reference to her medical knowledge although there is no evidence to confirm any medical training. In her 1903 letter to the French press, Eberhardt states, 'I began by studying medicine, but I soon abandoned it, feeling myself irresistibly drawn to a writer's career.'¹⁸³ In the 1901 letter Eberhardt goes on to state that this (her medical knowledge and assistance) is the reason that the members of the Sufi brotherhood are sympathetic to her and are sorry to hear about the attempt on her life. This is a repeated motif in both letters, as if Eberhardt needs now to confirm to the colons, as well as to herself, her alignment with the Other as a Muslim and as a Sufi. Her medical knowledge is a product of her western European difference but she contributes from her difference on the basis of beneficial knowledge, evidencing her position as a split subject. Eberhardt states in the first letter, 'witness the khouans [initiates of a sufi brotherhood] grief at hearing about the crime. As I passed through the villages around El Oued on a stretcher on my way back to the hospital, the inhabitants, men and women alike, all came to the road to shout and wail the way they do for funerals.'¹⁸⁴

In the first letter, Eberhardt refers to the 'natives', aligning herself in some degree to the French civilising mission with the single pejorative use of the word 'native'. By this choice of word Eberhardt publicly 'others her Muslim brother', Abdallah, and thus aligns herself to her chosen audience (she does the same in the second letter when she refers to Algeria as the 'Annexe').¹⁸⁵ The connotations of the

¹⁸¹ See Behdad, *Belated Travellers*, p. 123. Also quoted in Zayzafoon, *The Production of the Muslim Woman*, p. 53.

¹⁸² Eberhardt, *The Nomad*, p. 123.

¹⁸³ Eberhardt, *The Oblivion Seekers*, p. 85.

¹⁸⁴ Eberhardt, *The Nomad*, p. 121.

¹⁸⁵ Zayzafoon describes a similar strategic response from Eberhardt when she responds to the decree of her expulsion. Zayzafoon states that 'Eberhardt strategically calls France her "adoptive country", others her Muslim brothers as "natives" and writes herself off as an agent of imperialism.' Zayzafoon, *The Production of the Muslim Woman*, p. 43.

word ‘native’ are of nineteenth-century colonialism and Orientalism and the etymology of the word suggests an inferior status/culture to that in particular of European colonists and was used pejoratively at that time. However, this just serves to demonstrate Eberhardt’s both ideologically diffracted position and the moments of slippage in discourse that Behdad argues for when the subject’s egotist drive for knowledge is complicated by the desire for the Orient, as discussed in the first chapter. In Eberhardt’s case, the reality of living not in the imagined Orient of writers that she admired, such as Loti and Fromentin, is contrasted with the real world territory of Dar al-Harb. In the second letter, Eberhardt uses the term ‘inhabitants’, perhaps a less loaded expression, reflecting the chameleon-like nature of her discourse and the public slippage between her European and Arab self for strategic purposes. Despite Eberhardt’s reference to ‘inhabitants’ and her protestations of the khouan’s sympathy as a result of her medical knowledge, her role in administering medical attention to the local population has connotations of the role of a colonial missionary, although perhaps in a humanitarian rather than a religious role, tending to the sick and needy.

As such Eberhardt feels compelled to state in the second letter on the subject of English missions in Algeria that she ‘abhorred all kinds of proselytism and above all hypocrisy, which is the feature of the English character, as unappealing to us Russians at it is the French’ and that she was ‘no English Miss in Arab disguise but a Russian writer.’ This was a strategic attempt to align herself to France through her Russian status (Russia was a friend of the Third Republic, England’s archenemy) and it is likely that she would have been viewed with suspicion by the local population outside of her close contacts in Slimane’s family and the Qadiriyya brotherhood.¹⁸⁶ In fact, Eberhardt’s attempt at affiliation with France via her Russian status was misguided. Zayzafoon notes that ‘the order for expulsion against Eberhardt did not come solely from the French authorities, but also with the benediction of the Russian consulate, who without hesitation supported the eviction of the Russian woman from the French territories of North Africa.’¹⁸⁷ Eberhardt was disowned by the Russians,¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁶ Ibid, p. 123

¹⁸⁷ Zayzafoon, *The Production of the Muslim Woman*, p. 39. Zayzafoon bases her statement on Kobak, *Isabelle*, p. 59.

¹⁸⁸ In February 1901 the General Consul of Russia in Algiers ‘urges [the authorities] to rid the South region of this lady [...] and to have her escorted to the border’ CAOM, série H, Affaires indigènes, sous-série 20H, Affaires diverses, carton 20H9, Dossier divers, dossier Affaire Eberhardt 1900-1901, Lettre du Consul de Russie en Algérie, février 1901. Quoted in Lahuec, ‘Tentative d’assassinat d’Isabelle Eberhardt: un dossier judiciaire qui interroge’, p. 6.

the French and, arguably, the local, Muslim population and this is elaborated upon in the next section of this chapter regarding Eberhardt's relationship with the Arab Bureaux. Therefore, Eberhardt's sense of religious belonging to the Qadiriyya and claims of acceptance into Muslim society deserve attention in order to demonstrate her divided position as representative of neither France nor Algeria.¹⁸⁹ Firstly, it is necessary to place the Qadiriyya in its historical context before examining how Eberhardt's initiation and association with the brotherhood presented a threat to the colonial authorities, as represented by the Arab Bureaux. Then secondly, to question to what extent Eberhardt was accepted by Muslim society despite her manifestation of an Islamic identity and the suspicions of the French Arab Bureaux. It is Eberhardt's displacement from both cultures that leads to her ideologically diffracted position and discourse of discontent. As such, the next section also elaborates further upon Eberhardt's divided position through her documented history with the Arab Bureaux.

The Arab Bureaux and the Qadiriyya

In July 1900, just two months after her unsuccessful request to Sanua asking for an Ottoman passport, Eberhardt returned to Algeria and in October was initiated into the Qadiriyya brotherhood. Eberhardt's failure to be incorporated as an Ottoman citizen did not lessen her desire for Islam, instead it mutated to Algeria as a source, as the 'new land of origin'.¹⁹⁰ However, by relocating her Islamic self in French Algeria, with all of its religious and political complications, Eberhardt found herself inextricably bound up, and at the centre of, the political tensions in the Dar al-Harb. Paradoxically, at this time Eberhardt was in retreat from politics and her fervid and militant approach to Islam developed a sense of interiority, a pursuit of inner peace, within Sufism. Furthermore, Algeria was not the mythical, timeless land of the Orient that she had first read about during her adolescence in Geneva. It was the site of colonial domination and Muslim resistance, as Eberhardt had experienced first-hand in the Bône riots in 1899.

¹⁸⁹ See Dunwoodie, *Francophone Writing in Transition*, p. 117.

¹⁹⁰ Utilising Bird's phrase from this quotation: 'Eberhardt's travelogues are the location where she attempts to re-write her misfiring performances to reproduce her identity as a consistent whole, with Algeria as her new land of origin.' I would further modify Bird's comment and make the addition of Eberhardt's letters to the press. Bird, *Travelling in Different Skins*, p. 75.

The Qadiriyya was one of the oldest Sufi brotherhoods, founded by Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani in the twelfth century in Baghdad, their headquarters.¹⁹¹ In nineteenth-century Algeria, the Qadiriyya was one of the five largest Sufi brotherhoods and it had a history of resistance to the colonising empires of France in the Western part of Algeria. The early nationalist leader Amir Abd al-Qadir was a member of the Qadiriyya order and he famously resisted the French in an uprising in 1832. The Sufi brotherhoods had a vast influence on the local population and the French sought their co-operation and monitored those who did not directly fall into line. The shaykh of the Qadiriyya order, Sidi el Hachemi, was particularly powerful within the local population. Therefore, Eberhardt's alignment to Islam via the brotherhood that she belonged to placed her in a hostile and precarious position with regards to the French colonial administration, that is, the military officers governing Algeria in the Arab Bureaux.¹⁹²

This is evident in an incendiary anonymous letter sent from Paris to General Dechizelle, the general of the Constantine subdivision of the French army at Batna in Algeria, on 7th September 1900 (just four months before the assassination attempt) highlighting the insecurity around Eberhardt's presence in Algeria. In this letter Eberhardt is accused of harbouring 'a profound hatred for France and would like nothing better than to excite France's Arab subjects against her.'¹⁹³ As Zayzafoon states, she was presented as the enemy within.¹⁹⁴ Furthermore the letter states that she was 'installed in El Oued in order to spy on the activities of the officers in the Arab Bureaux on behalf of the Paris journal *L'Aurore*, with the aim of aiding and abetting the relentless press campaign against the officers of the Arab Bureaux in particular and of the Army in general.'¹⁹⁵ Furthermore, the writer casts aspersions on her genuine relationship with Slimane, stating that it existed purely for the purposes of gathering information. The writer states that 'this woman is dangerous from all

¹⁹¹ An early historical link between the Qadiriyya and the Ottoman Empire. Shortly after they conquered Baghdad in 1534, Suleiman the magnificent commissioned a dome to be built on the tomb of the founder of the Brotherhood establishing the Qadiriyya as a main ally in Iraq. Eberhardt, albeit tenuously, is historically aligned to the Ottoman Empire, this time via a Sufi religious brotherhood

¹⁹² Clancy-Smith has written numerous articles on the history of the Sufi brotherhoods in Algeria and of Eberhardt's relationship with Leila Zayneb of the Raymanniya brotherhood, at the El Hamil zawiya.

¹⁹³ According to Kobak, Eberhardt was not aware of the letter's existence. Kobak, *Isabelle*, p.142 The slanderous content of the letter includes a reference to Eberhardt having poisoned Trophimowsky and stolen money from the Villa Neuve. This is highly improbable.

¹⁹⁴ Zayzafoon, *The Production of the Muslim Woman*, p. 43.

¹⁹⁵ Kobak, *Isabelle*, p. 142.

points of view'.¹⁹⁶ Consequently, General Dechizelle recommended that Eberhardt should be expelled from El Oued and Touggert and also that Slimane should be dismissed from El Oued and replaced and this recommendation was endorsed by the Governor General of Algeria. This recommendation was modified by a member of the Arab Bureau in El Oued (Captain Cauvet) who suggested a more harmless case for Eberhardt's position there, as purely an eccentric. As a result Eberhardt was put under observation for a number of months and the expulsion recommendation deflected for the time being. However, they did transfer Slimane out of El Oued and posted him to Batna, in order to remove Eberhardt (as mentioned at the beginning of chapter one and in the correspondence from Eberhardt to Slimane's brother).¹⁹⁷

Kingsmill Hart states, 'the French watched her every step - waiting for her to put a foot wrong but could hardly deport her for 'going native', embracing Islam, and dressing like a man.'¹⁹⁸ However the assassination attempt gave the authorities the fuel that they needed in order to remove the 'dangerous woman' for what they considered to be once and for all. Eberhardt, however, unaware of the anonymous letter and of Dechiville's recommendations to have her removed, is full of a sense of her own righteousness in this first letter to the press. Eberhardt, in an astute assessment of how the colonial administration might utilise the event in order to justify their control and repression of the local Muslim population, wishes to state publicly that the assassination had nothing to do with her being a European, that is a 'Christian', because she is a Muslim and 'all the Souafas know it', and that the assassination was due solely to a rivalry between the two Sufi brotherhoods.¹⁹⁹ Furthermore, in light of Eberhardt's long- held desire for the Islam of her dreams and imaginings, and her subsequent trans-cultural transformation, the idea that she is still considered an outsider is perhaps untenable and needs deflecting. Eberhardt's letter consists of a palimpsestic layering of public and private desires. I suggest that the ostensible public goal of saving Abdallah and the private need to inscribe her Islamic identity through public proclamation can be seen in this section of the letter:

Now, it is clear that Abdallah was not motivated by any hatred of Christians, but that he was pushed into it and acting on behalf of others, and then that his crime was premeditated. I told the investigating authorities that, in my view,

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁹⁷ See p. 67

¹⁹⁸ Kingsmill Hart, *Two Ladies of Colonial Algeria*, p. 90.

¹⁹⁹ Eberhardt, *The Nomad*, p. 116.

the attempted murder can best be explained by the hatred of the Tidjanya for the Qadrya, and that the reason for the Tidjanya kaba or khouans wanting to do away with me was that they knew their enemies loved me...²⁰⁰

Again Eberhardt's tone of authority is evident (my italics for emphasis): '*I told the investigating authorities, that in my view*', or '*Now, it is clear* that Abdallah was not motivated by any hatred of Christians' for she did not want the case against Abdallah to be utilised by the French as an excuse to punish their colonised subjects for actions against 'Christians'. However, the consequence of Eberhardt's defence of Abdallah is that they punished her; Eberhardt in fact becomes the focus of the authorities alongside Abdallah.

Eberhardt, as a cross-dressing European, was certain to have held an antagonistic position in sections of Muslim Algerian society, despite Eberhardt's repeated claims of evidence to the contrary: the public grief and the fact they loved her. The attempted assassination and the 'nebulous' motivation behind it arguably demonstrates that she was still considered as an outsider, despite her efforts at trans-cultural transformation. Not only does Eberhardt risk opposition from the French authorities but also from those to whom she seeks to ingratiate herself: the Muslim community of Algeria itself. Sidonie Smith argues that Eberhardt never loses her European identity and that the visibility of the 'masquerade' was what ensured her safety.²⁰¹

Smith's stance that the visibility of Eberhardt's masquerade ensured her safety does not hold in the case of the assassination attempt. As Rana Kabbani states, 'her disguise endeared her to no-one.'²⁰² Sidonie Smith refers to the failure of Eberhardt's 'disguise' and represents her as 'not-quite, not-Muslim', 'not-quite, not-European'. Smith, in this phrasing, is modifying Spivak's binary terminology of 'not-quite, not-male', in her article 'Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism.'²⁰³ Here

²⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 121.

²⁰¹ Sidonie Smith, 'Isabelle Eberhardt Traveling "Other"/wise', in *Encountering the Other(s): Studies in Literature, History, and Culture*, ed. Gisela Brinker-Gabler, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995, p. 311.

²⁰² Rana Kabbani in the introduction to the first translation of Eberhardt's diaries, *The Passionate Nomad, The Diary of Isabelle Eberhardt*, trans. Nina de Voogd, intro. Rana Kannani, London: Virago, 1992, p. ix.

²⁰³ Smith quoting Spivak, in 'Isabelle Eberhardt Traveling "Other"/wise', in *Encountering the Other(s): Studies in Literature, History, and Culture*, p. 314. See Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism,' *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 12, No. 1, 'Race,' Writing, and Difference (Autumn, 1985), pp. 243-261 at p. 244 where Spivak's phrase 'not-quite, not-male' is used in reference to her reinscription of Jane Eyre's subjectivity. The essay as a whole discusses *Jane Eyre*, *Wide Sargasso Sea* and *Frankenstein*.

Spivak uses this phrase in a reinscription of Jane Eyre's subjectivity. Smith argues that Eberhardt called into question systems of codification in civilized society, either Arab or French, and that Eberhardt existed not so much outside the system of binary opposition but resided deeply within it, or rather within several systems simultaneously. I would agree with Smith's argument to a certain extent in that Eberhardt did exist within several systems of codification simultaneously, however, whilst Smith's argument also focuses on gender, with Smith defining Eberhardt as 'not-quite, not-woman', my analysis focuses solely on Eberhardt as 'not-quite, not-European' and 'not-quite, not-Muslim'; that is, to the outside world. However, I depart from Smith in that my approach does not negate the fact of Eberhardt's deeply felt engagement with, and conversion to, Islam as it is this assertive positioning of her Islamic identity that far from ensured her safety.

Zayzafoon notes in her chapter on Eberhardt, 'even though she has "gone native," Eberhardt has always remained the *roumia* (convert); hence the attempt on her life by Abdallah.'²⁰⁴ Zayzafoon also pertinently points out how Eberhardt felt embarrassed with her *roumi* cap whilst sitting in a Constantine café.²⁰⁵ However, Zayzafoon's intelligent analysis of the assassination episode takes a gender identity focus with an isolated discussion of Eberhardt's considered sartorial choice at the trial, this time dressed in the clothes of an Arab *woman*.²⁰⁶ My particular take on this episode zooms in on Eberhardt's negotiation of the colonial political situation. In addition, my approach demonstrates how Eberhardt in fact becomes the locus of contestation between Algeria and France because it is from these two oppositional forces, the French authorities and the rival Sufi Brotherhood to the Qadiriyya, that the suspected motivations for her assassination attempt stem. This is in contrast to Zayzafoon's feminist argument positing that it was Eberhardt's masquerade as an Arab man that provoked the attack by Abdallah, being a violation of the Islamic 'sexual division of gender' and therefore of 'hudud Allah'.²⁰⁷ However, the mainstream approach from critics and biographers tends to centre on whether it was

²⁰⁴ Zayzafoon, *The Production of the Muslim Woman*, p. 53.

²⁰⁵ Ibid., p.44. Zayzafoon provides an etymology of the word *roumia*: 'In Arabic, the word *roumi* (masculine) or *roumia* (feminine) means a non-Muslim of European origin, usually Christian. Derived from *al-roum*, the Arabic plural for "Romans," this word is loaded with connotations of cultural, racial and religious otherness.' Zayzafoon, *The Production of the Muslim Woman*, p. 53.

²⁰⁶ Ibid., pp. 53-54. In the Ottoman context, the term 'Rum' was applied to the inhabitants of the Roman (Byzantine) Empire conquered by the Ottomans. Later it referred to inhabitants of the southern Balkan regions that were primarily Christian.

²⁰⁷ Quoted in Zayzafoon, *The Production of the Muslim Woman*, p. 44. See also Abdelwahab Bouhdiba, *Sexuality in Islam*, trans. Alan Sheridan, London: Routledge, 1995, pp. 30-32.

the French who had a hand in her assassination via the Tijaniyya Brotherhood or the rivalry stemming between the two brotherhoods of Qadiriyya and Tijaniyya (without a discussion of gender politics). In addition, the standard critical justification for the sentencing of Abdallah and the expulsion of Eberhardt following the trial has not changed much since Blanch's statement in 1954 that the pacification of the Sahara was not yet complete and the French feared disturbances.²⁰⁸ Blanch favours the rival Sufi brotherhood argument but her statement about the French fearing disturbances could also justify the role of the French in the assassination, alongside or separate from a desire to 'quiet' any dissident behaviour or furore from the interaction of explorers with 'natives', which would disrupt the delicate colonial situation. The extent to which Blanch's view applies to Eberhardt will be examined in the next section.

Assassinations in the Sahara

In order to understand more fully the assassination attempt on Eberhardt, and her positioning in relation to the colonial administration in such circumstances, it is necessary to give a brief history of assassinations in the Sahara. In his study *A Desert Named Peace*, Benjamin Claude Brower presents the concerns of, and tensions between, the colonial administration and the French explorers of the Sahara in the nineteenth century. Firstly, Brower focuses on the concerns of the administration for the safety of those explorers. For simplicity of argument I shall place Eberhardt in the category of explorer, as does Brower. He states that the colonial administration:

...felt a personal responsibility for the explorers' safety and worried that recriminations might follow if they were harmed. Moreover, local administrators generally spent many years at a given command and jealously guarded their jurisdictions. They worried that outside explorers would compromise the relations they had developed with Saharan contacts.²⁰⁹

Secondly, in what could be a contradictory statement, or perhaps in acknowledgement of a pragmatic approach from the colonial administration, Brower

²⁰⁸ Mackworth, *The Destiny of Isabelle Eberhardt*, p. 302.

²⁰⁹ Benjamin Claude Brower, *A Desert Named Peace: The Violence of France's Empire in the Algerian Sahara, 1844-1902*, New York/Chichester: Columbia University Press, 2011, p. 204.

goes on to argue that the colonial administration utilised any investigation around an assassination in order to garner intelligence and to make allies:

The investigations that followed explorers' deaths produced thousands of pages of intelligence and had the effect of pushing events forward, thereby breaking up stalemates and standoffs. Old enemies had to restate their positions and would-be neutral parties were forced to choose sides. In some cases new allies presented themselves in the hope of gaining an advantage by cooperating with investigators.²¹⁰

I suggest that the above information explains somewhat the silence around the case and the lack of attention paid to the 'real culprits' behind the attempted assassination on Eberhardt, given that the evidence pointed to the fact that Abdallah was contracted to kill her. The investigation around the attempt no doubt led to a great deal of intelligence with regards to the Qadiriyya and Tijaniyya brotherhoods, and that was of primary importance to the authorities.

The attempted assassination of Eberhardt was not an isolated event and there was precedence for the reaction from the Arab Bureaux. There was a history in Algeria of assassinations of explorers. Furthermore, considering the recent assassination of the Marquis de Morès, Eberhardt would have been fully aware of the danger. This sense of danger was highlighted by Sanua's expression of concern for Eberhardt in his letter of May 1900, quoted in the previous chapter: 'I only hope you will not get into any perilous adventure without reflection.' This should be read as a serious concern of Sanua's about Eberhardt's desired return to North Africa. Sanua was considered Eberhardt's 'mentor', and his reference to 'adventure' I think is to be taken literally as connoting a risky or bold enterprise fraught with danger.²¹¹

Eberhardt states in her letter that the issue of 'foreigners' in Algeria was 'a burning topic'. Eberhardt's comment was ostensibly aimed at reflecting and ameliorating the concerns of colon society toward the issue of foreigners residing in Algeria, namely herself. However, Eberhardt's 'foreigner' could also be read as a non-indigenous person in the colonised country, from the perspective of the indigenous inhabitant. Although a 'foreigner' is not necessarily an explorer, the explorers discussed come under the category of 'foreigner'. Both arguably represented the Occidental Other

²¹⁰ Ibid., p. 207.

²¹¹ To co-opt Zayzafoon's description of Sanua's relationship to Eberhardt. Zayzafoon, *The Production of the Muslim Woman*, p. 63.

and embodied the domination and exploitation of Algeria by France. Thus there was a political charge to the presence of ‘foreigners’ and explorers in Algeria from the perspective of both the indigenous and settler population. And although the term assassination comes under the wider definition of murder, an assassination in legal discourse is specifically a murder that has political or ideological motives. Furthermore, the murder of an explorer was not necessarily an assassination, but the emphasis in this chapter is on the murders that arguably had political and ideological motives and thus I use the term assassination.

Whilst in Paris following up on the recommendations and connections of her compatriot Lydia Paschkoff (mentioned in the previous chapter for advising Eberhardt to dress in oriental clothes to gain literary notice, citing James Sanua/ Abu Naddara as an example) Eberhardt met the widow of Antoine de Vallambrosa, Marquis de Morès. Vallambrosa was an aristocrat, businessman, politician, and also an explorer in his spare time and, whilst on an expedition in Southern Tunisia and Algeria in 1896, he was assassinated in an area near the Tripolitanian frontier. His widow commissioned Eberhardt to solve the four year old mystery of his death by financing an expedition to the region, frustrated as she was by reluctance of the Arab Bureaux to throw any light on the case.²¹² The expedition never came to pass, although Eberhardt received the money which enabled her return to Algeria. By a turn of events, only one year later an assassination attempt was made on Eberhardt’s own life which would necessitate her return to Europe, albeit by force of the colonial administration through an expulsion order. Just like Eberhardt’s case, the Vallambrosa affair remained a mystery, suggesting the uninterested role that the Arab Bureaux took in finding the ‘real culprits’, as Eberhardt suggests.

To complicate matters, the desire of the explorers to gain fame for their exploits in the Sahara, despite the risk, presented a threat to the Arab Bureaux but also could be pragmatically used to their advantage. Furthermore, the desire of the explorers was fueled by forces outside the colonial administration. Brower notes that, in the latter half of the nineteenth century, a significant impetus for Saharan exploration was provided by an announcement from the Geographical Society of Paris in 1855 of a cash prize for the first explorer to cross the Sahara from Algeria to Senegal via Timbuktu (or vice versa).²¹³ Brower goes on to provide an interesting list

²¹² Mackworth, *The Destiny Of Isabelle Eberhardt*, pp. 76-78.

²¹³ Brower, *A Desert Named Peace*, p. 205.

of nineteenth-century French Saharan explorers that were murdered or assassinated in the pursuit of wealth and fame engendered by such an announcement, including the Marquis de Morès, mentioned above.²¹⁴ However, although Brower makes a mention of Eberhardt in his list as one of the ‘explorers’ that came to the Sahara for ‘inchoate reasons’ in the latter half of the nineteenth century, in contrast to those who came for military and scientific purposes prior to that, he fails to mention the assassination attempt, and only that she died in a flash flood. Brower’s analysis typifies the paradigms of exploration that are outlined by Mary Louise Pratt in *Imperial Eyes*. Inclusion of the assassination attempt on Eberhardt would actually be highly relevant to Brower’s discussion of explorers that were assassinated; and his argument, if applied to this episode in Eberhardt’s life, clarifies the complex political situation in which Eberhardt is embroiled and supports my argument for placing Eberhardt in a dissymmetric relationship to the French colonial administration. Eberhardt, as the locus of contestation between the local population and the Arab Bureaux provides the Bureaux with the opportunity for obtaining reliable political intelligence. However, Eberhardt’s letter to the press and her discourse of discontent, nevertheless presents a threat to their strategic interests in the Sahara.

The Sahara versus the Algerian Tell

Eberhardt ends her first letter to the press with a final note of ethnographic authority, eliciting a point of view with ‘insider knowledge’. Eberhardt, in positioning herself this way, locates her narrative in opposition to those travellers and writers who insist on describing things that they have not seen.²¹⁵ Eberhardt is self-consciously drawing attention to her own privileged access as a prime mediator and interpreter. Eberhardt continues with this motif in her 1903 letter to the press when she states, ‘I study life by being close to it, this ‘native life’ about which so little is known, and which is so disfigured by descriptions of those who, not knowing it, insist on describing it anyway.’²¹⁶ Furthermore, Eberhardt’s authoritative and conscious self-

²¹⁴ Paul Soleillet (threatened with execution), Camille Douls (strangled en route to Timbuktu), Norbert Dournaux- Dupéré (murdered by thieves), Marcel Palat (killed after losing the protection of the Ouled Sidi Cheikh), Marquis de Morès (killed by raiders, according to Brower, after spurning the protection of the colonial administration), Brower, *A Desert Named Peace*, pp. 205-207.

²¹⁵ Reminiscent of the narratives of Lady Mary Wortley Montague, for example.

²¹⁶ Eberhardt, *The Oblivion Seekers*, p. 87.

positioning is even more evident as she appears to recognise the loaded connotations of 'native'.

In Eberhardt's public discourse there is little sense of the Romantic spirit, or of the Saharan imaginary as to be expected of explorers of this period. Here my point of view coincides with Rice in that Eberhardt's real life existence, as genuinely reflected in this letter, was 'less formulaically exotic than the romantic model of the existence of a degenerate adventurer'.²¹⁷ Rice states that although 'Eberhardt certainly told varying stories about her heritage [...] she tended to be far more straightforward about her daily activities and goals.'²¹⁸ However, a conflict between the reality and the imaginary is present in her correspondence and diaries. In these private accounts of her time in the Sahara, Eberhardt inscribes herself within the 'exoticist project', taking refuge from what Chris Bongie calls 'the constitutive mediocrity of the modern subject.'²¹⁹

In this letter, however, Eberhardt is making a point to the French public about the reality of life in the Sahara from her privileged 'insider' position; and thus to the newspaper editors. In this, her budding journalistic guise, Eberhardt states:²²⁰

I trust, Sir, that you will not refuse to publish this letter in your worthy newspaper, for I believe it to be of some interest. From the political, if not a social point of view, the Algerian Tell is not all that different from other French provinces; however, the same cannot be said of the Sahara, where life is very different indeed, to a degree that people in France can hardly begin to imagine.²²¹

Here, Eberhardt's position comes full circle, considering my argument at the beginning of the chapter that Eberhardt opens her letter with a view to her journalistic career. However, Eberhardt's point that the Sahara is very different to the Algerian Tell, not just from a social but also from a political point of view, is, in my view, an implicit criticism of the colonial administration of the Sahara. Eberhardt's criticism and discontent come from bitter personal experience.

²¹⁷ See Rice, 'Nomad Thought', p. 166.

²¹⁸ Ibid.

²¹⁹ Chris Bongie, *Exotic Memories: Literature, Colonialism, and the Fin de Siecle*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991, p. 21. Quoted in Smith, 'Isabelle Eberhardt Traveling "other"/wise', p. 296.

²²⁰ By the time Eberhardt writes her letter to the press two years later, in 1903, she is able to define herself as a journalist: 'It is enough for me to be a journalist [...]' Eberhardt, *The Oblivion Seekers*, p. 87.

²²¹ Eberhardt, *The Nomad*, p. 121

Rice states in her article on Eberhardt and ‘the Colonial Project’ that ‘The further one got from European-style civilization, the more genuine and alien was the otherness to be experienced [...] It was in the Sahara that one found the truly exotic other: the Chaambaa, the Tuareg, the nomadic tribes of the Sud-Oranais.’²²² In El Oued, of the Sud Oranais area Rice mentions, deep in the Sahara, four hundred miles south east of Algiers, Eberhardt felt more able to experience a genuine otherness, mirroring the otherness that she honoured within herself as manifested through her transformation into Mahmoud Saâdi. Eleven days before the assassination attempt, and before Slimane’s transfer to Batna, Eberhardt nostalgically writes to her brother Augustin in Marseilles of her retreat in El Oued, far from the European civilisation which she repeatedly claimed to have abhorred: ‘I feel the deep isolation of this town lost in the impassable – so it seems to me – barrier of dunes, six days away from the railway, from life, from Europe.’²²³

But to what extent is Eberhardt’s Sahara and her manifestation of Mahmoud Saâdi compliant with the exoticist project of the nineteenth century Romantics; and to what extent is this reflected in her private correspondence, her letters to the press, her overall discourse of discontent? And how does Eberhardt’s split identity in the Sahara impact on the colonial authorities? This is the focus of this section. Smith states:

with other Romantic intellectuals, she [Eberhardt] ascribed to the nomads what Rice calls “some essential difference,” an essential difference she tapped for her true self and transformed within her imagination into a superiority, perhaps even an aristocracy of soul [...] in the (reverse) assimilation into her legitimate home, she embraces the accoutrements of essential difference, the repertoire of signifiers, the specificities of language, dress and religious affiliation, all of which secure her essential difference from “those idiotic Europeans” with their own vitiated culture.²²⁴

In order to assess Eberhardt’s sense of ‘essential difference’ from ‘those idiotic Europeans’ I shall further examine the letter that Eberhardt wrote to Augustin de Moerder on 18 January 1901, mentioned briefly above (the letter in its entirety can be found in appendix 3). Although one can find Eberhardt’s thoughts on her observation of Ramadan scattered in her journals, this letter has yet to be discussed by critics and the nature of the correspondence produces a different discourse to

²²² Rice, ‘Nomad Thought’, p. 155.

²²³ 23 X 28, letters to Augustin de Moerder, 1900/1903, El Oued, January 18th, 1901, CAOM.

²²⁴ Smith, ‘Isabelle Eberhardt Traveling “Other”/wise’, p. 297.

journal writing. The letter demonstrates that there can be no simple binary positioning of Eberhardt, except that of an ideologically diffracted subject and it supports my reading of her positive engagement with Islam. Her public and private discourse of discontent is a reflection of her inability to be either European or Arab, and her attempts at negotiating the colonial environment via her own Islamic identity construction and career goals form a labyrinthine path.

Firstly, in this letter Eberhardt writes of her destitution and ruined health. She writes during Ramadan, which she assiduously observes. Thus I would argue, contrary to Smith, that Eberhardt is embracing significantly more than the 'accoutrements of difference'. The letter clearly displays the uncomfortable reality of living in the 'desired Orient' with Ramadan a bodily toll on the subject:

Your long letter from the 10th finds me once more in bed and sick. Nevertheless I wanted to answer tonight, at least partly, as I really want to write to you at length and that I am exhausted and weak. We are getting close to the end of Ramadan. The first fortnight, as I only just started to fast – in bed, I recovered, started to work, to ride. But alas, it's been almost ten days that I don't eat anything at all. Food disgusts me deeply, even though I can feel I'm going away with inanition. I became so weak and so skinny that even the bed hurts [...]

Last night I had to stop writing, due to being worn out. I suffer from intolerable pains in all of my limbs, of a total lack of appetite, of a nameless weakness and inanition delirium, with no fever, and as soon as I am on my own, hallucinations start and what is the most painful, I perfectly realise the futility of all these images that follow one another around me at a breathtaking, harrowing speed.

Ramadan, forcing us to look after our everyday fare in order to support our weak health, caused us excessive expenses and the bills for [...] are not yet paid. You see that all this is very menacing and very sad.²²⁵

Eberhardt's observation of Ramadan is a basic demonstration of her Islamic faith, as explored in chapter two. Eberhardt's observation of one of the main pillars of Islam, is not heralded, it is not a performance. It is mentioned as a matter of fact of her daily existence, alongside the poverty that she and Slimane experience, 'the two of us who are struggling here and among whom, day after day, pile up all the menaces of poverty...' Furthermore, their strict observation of Ramadan leads them into further debt, for buying the food with which to break the fast each day: 'Ramadan, forcing

²²⁵ 23 X 28, letters from Eberhardt to Augustin de Moerder, 1900/1903, El Oued, 18th January 1901, CAOM.

us to look after our everyday fare in order to support our weak health, caused us excessive expenses and the bills for [...] are not yet paid. You see that all this is very menacing and very sad.’ They cannot even afford to eat. No wonder, in fact, that when the moment arises for her to make a living from her writing and her experience in the Sahara, Eberhardt astutely grabs the opportunity.

Eberhardt’s situation of discontent, her poverty and ill health, never spark the slightest desire to return to Europe or even to the coastal cities of the Algerian Tell: Algiers, Oran or Constantine, the location of Abdallah’s trial, to which she is forced to return. And it is in the nearby town of Béhima, close to El-Oued, that the attempted assassination takes place. Therefore, El Oued turns out to be no exotic idyll, despite its picturesque qualities, its situation as an oasis fed by the underground river, with the consequent construction of brick houses, leading it to being known as ‘the city of a thousand domes.’ It is in the Sahara that Eberhardt finds her home, giving her a sense of permanence: ‘Yes, I love my Sahara, with an obscure, mysterious deep and inexplicable love, but real and indestructible.’²²⁶ The ‘mystery’ of El Oued represented the ‘timeless otherness’ that characterised nineteenth-century perceptions of the Sahara and that which attracted explorers then and now, including Eberhardt.²²⁷ It represented a vision of otherness ‘rooted in a dimly biblical past’.²²⁸ It was also a vision of Africa influenced by Eberhardt’s readings of Loti, who, as previously mentioned in this chapter, also evoked a dimly biblical past in his cadences reminiscent of the Old Testament. Eberhardt had absorbed Loti deeply and she writes reflectively, quoting him: ‘Sometimes I start chewing over some Loti. Remember that passage of *Roman d’un spahi* that began like this... “He loved his Senegal, the poor man...”’²²⁹ This passage is a reference to Loti’s 1881 novel, *Le roman d’un spahi*, the story of a doomed love affair set in Senegal. Although according to Blanch, in her biography of Loti, the real theme of the novel is Africa.²³⁰ The fact that Slimane was a spahi lends resonance to Eberhardt’s memory of this character. In this recollection, Eberhardt could be making a comparison between the fictional character of the spahi (although this was Loti’s most

²²⁶ 23 X 28, letters from Eberhardt to Augustin de Moerder, 1900/1903, El Oued, 18th January 1901, CAOM.

²²⁷ See the discussion of the ‘timeless, unchanging Orient’ in chapter two.

²²⁸ Smith, ‘Isabelle Eberhardt Traveling “other”/wise’, p. 296.

²²⁹ 23 X 28, letters from Eberhardt to Augustin de Moerder, 1900/1903, El Oued, 18th January 1901, CAOM.

²³⁰ Blanch, *Pierre Loti*, p. 91.

autobiographical novel) and her own 'sad' situation in the Sahara, the real Sahara, which does not necessarily conform to her romantic vision. This is because it is in this city, deep in the Sahara, four hundred miles from Algiers, that Eberhardt's presence is most unacceptable, despite her Islamic identity. In El Oued, Eberhardt is most in danger: the 'perilous adventure' personified, that Sanua had predicted in his letter to Eberhardt in May 1900, and discussed in the previous chapter.²³¹ Eberhardt professes naivety when she states in her second letter to the press, 'How can it harm anyone if I prefer the undulating misty horizons of the dunes to the boulevards?'²³²

The 'barrier of dunes' to which Eberhardt refers in her letter to Augustin, is unable to provide Eberhardt with the barricade from European civilization that she so desires and once more she states publicly in her second letter to the press:

I am only an eccentric, a dreamer anxious to live a free and nomadic life, far away from the civilised world, in order to say afterwards what she has seen and perhaps to communicate to some people the charm, the melancholy and the thrill which I have felt in the face of the sad splendours of the Sahara... That's all.²³³

As Eberhardt states above, the Sahara provides her with material for her literary career. And, although her vision of the Sahara is one seen through the prism of Romanticism - the Romantic consciousness with its veneration for the ancient and remote, as represented by Keats - it is nevertheless utilised in a pragmatic attempt at survival, by earning a living as a writer. As Eberhardt says in the above passage, she just wants the opportunity to communicate 'to some people the charm, the melancholy [...] of the sad splendours of the Sahara.'²³⁴ As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, *La Dépêche Algérienne* was a colon newspaper but Eberhardt considered it to have a reputation for impartiality and fairness and indeed she was on the staff for the newspaper two years later, in 1903.

Eberhardt feels compelled to emphasise the difference between the Saharan towns and those of the Atlas Tell in her letter to the newspaper from her 'insider' position. Smith argues with reference to Eberhardt's journals that there is a disturbing irony underwriting Eberhardt as 'the "colonizer" who appropriates the identity of the "colonized" living off the very "colonized" she mimes [...].'²³⁵

²³¹ See chapter two and Sanua's letter to Eberhardt.

²³² Eberhardt, *The Oblivion Seekers*, p. 124

²³³ Eberhardt, *The Nomad*, p. 124.

²³⁴ Ibid.

²³⁵ Smith, 'Isabelle Eberhardt Traveling "other"/wise', p. 311.

Smith's argument could furthermore be applied to Eberhardt's letters to the newspapers as the same irony could be considered to be present here too. Smith's positioning of Eberhardt follows Behdad's notion of Eberhardt as a colonial parasite. However, I would not describe Eberhardt's relationship with colonial Algeria as parasitic. Although Eberhardt had ambiguous and ambivalent relations with the French colonial authorities she engaged sympathetically with the colonised population. This produced in her writing a certain amount of noise, a discourse of discontent. Here I agree with Behdad that 'her scandalous identification with the Other' in fact contributed to a certain '*noise* in the orientalist discourse, disturbing its order and disavowing its oppressive power relations.'²³⁶

Eberhardt's letters to the press not only served to reduce Abdallah's sentence but also served as an experimental means of self-promotion towards literary status, utilising her perceived 'insider' knowledge of the Sahara from living in El Oued. Nevertheless, Eberhardt's literary goal and utilisation of her 'Islamic' identity for artistic means, do not negate her receptivity to Islam nor her desire for textual legitimacy in that respect. Rice states that, 'Eberhardt's *Journaliers* show that she wanted to do two things: first to experience Dar al-Islam as her spiritual home, and second, to be a writer. The second goal was almost always seen as secondary and as a means of attaining the first goal.'²³⁷ The two aims existed simultaneously, however, I would argue that there were moments of tension and that her goal to become a writer, and to make a name for herself in Paris, sometimes took precedence.

The next chapter sees the progress of, and the tension between, both goals two years later, in 1903, through an examination of the press campaigns against Eberhardt and her public response.

²³⁶ Behdad, *Belated Travellers*, p. 115.

²³⁷ Rice, 'Nomad Thought', p. 166.

CHAPTER FOUR

‘The true story about me’: Eberhardt and the Kahina

In April 1903, Isabelle Eberhardt attended, by invitation, the press banquet in Algiers for the French President, Monsieur Émile Loubet. Eberhardt arrived dressed in her usual Arabic male attire, in white wool with a Sahara-style turban.²³⁸ The two-day visit of the President of France on 15/16 April was a high-profile event and naturally attracted a great deal of attention. Amongst the sixty or so estimated ‘foreign and metropolitan journalists’ present in Algiers for the Presidential visit, the official entourage consisted of thirty French journalists: the majority from metropolitan France and the minority from colonial Algerian newspapers.²³⁹ The French journalists focused on the enigmatic presence of Eberhardt in their reportage. Knowing only spurious details of Eberhardt’s life, they compared her to the Kahina, the Berber queen of the Aurès who rose up against the Arab invaders and eventual conquerors of North Africa, between AD 693 and 702.²⁴⁰

This chapter continues with what I consider to be Eberhardt’s highly strategic response to the journalists in her published letter to the editor of the newspaper *La Petite Gironde*, a moderate Republican publication. This follows an already tempestuous (and ongoing) relationship between Eberhardt and the colon press.²⁴¹ Not only was she dealing with a high degree of tension in Algeria, but now her ‘infamy’ was to reach metropolitan France in a manner beyond her control. However, Eberhardt did not keep silent and she responded publicly, compounding and

²³⁸Barrucand’s description of Eberhardt’s attire at the banquet. See Eberhardt, *The Oblivion Seekers*, p.84. Also quoted in full later in this chapter.

²³⁹See *L’Union Républicaine*, ‘Le Voyage Présidentiel’, 9th April 1903. It lists every French journalist, newspaper and press agency that was part of the official entourage. BIB AOM/3054, 1902 to 1904, CAOM.

²⁴⁰Kahina literally means sorceress, her real local name is Dihya. The ‘Kahina’ is a pejorative Arabic term for the queen of the Aurès who resisted the Arab conquest.

²⁴¹See the series of despatches entitled ‘Propagande Dangereuse’ and ‘Graves Révélations’ concerning Eberhardt, Barrucand and Bouchot in *L’Union Républicaine* between February and April 1903. Ibid. On 12th April, 1903 Eberhardt’s protest letter to *L’Union Républicaine* is published (the content in a similar vein to the letters examined in this and the preceding chapters, declaring her neutral status as a writer, and not as a politician). BIB AOM/3054, 1902 to 1904, CAOM.

enforcing her own visibility through a canny invocation of the ‘right to reply’.²⁴² This was not only an exercise in obtaining a fair chance to respond to allegations in a colon press consistently unsympathetic to her cause, but it also provided an opportunity for her own self-fashioning and representation.

An exploration of the Kahina legend goes some way toward explaining not just the attitude of the journalists and settlers to Eberhardt but also the colonial administration’s existing suspicions of Eberhardt as a dissident figure, as exemplified in the previous chapter. From the public platform of her letter, I argue that Eberhardt takes the opportunity to re-fashion her Islamic identity with great self-awareness, attempting to ally herself to a French public. Once more she performs a delicate balancing act in the arena of colonial politics whilst simultaneously not shying from, but actively seeking, a degree of celebrity status with which to further her literary career. This culminates in a heady mix of politics, religion, career, and fame.

The Kahina incident has so far been overlooked by Eberhardt scholars and yet the palimpsestic nature of the Kahina legend mirrors the intricate layering of Eberhardt’s identity construction. I reprint the entire letter in this chapter due to its shorter length and in order that the text can be present before analysis. The letter contains repeated motifs from the previous letters (see below), some of which have been discussed in chapter three and therefore will not be considered here. I shall be focusing on passages pertaining to Eberhardt’s declarations of Islamic identity; a motif examined in detail for the first time in this chapter. Significantly, Eberhardt makes no direct reference to the Kahina, just an allusion to the legend, which shows Eberhardt’s refusal to give the accusation any textual power for fear of recrimination of being branded a war-like figure. However, Victor Barrucand, Eberhardt’s friend and colleague at the *Akhbar*, makes a direct reference to the Kahina accusation in his published preface to Eberhardt’s letter, and his response to this episode will be printed later in the chapter.

The true story about me is perhaps less romantic, and surely more modest, than the legend in question, but I think it my duty to tell it.

My father was a Russian subject of the Moslem faith, and my mother was a Russian catholic. I was thus born a Moslem, and I have never changed my religion. My father died shortly after my birth in Geneva, where we lived.

²⁴² See for example Eberhardt’s letter to the editor of *L’Union Républicaine*, April 9th 1903 quoting her right to reply in the article entitled ‘A Propos de Révélations’. BIB AOM/3054, 1902 to 1904, CAOM.

My mother then stayed on with my great-uncle. It was he who brought me up, and he did so exactly as though I had been a boy. This explains the fact that for many years I have worn, and still wear, men's clothing.

I began by studying medicine, but I soon abandoned it, feeling myself irresistibly drawn to a writer's career. In my twentieth year (1897) I went with my mother to Bône in Algeria. Not long after our arrival she died, first having been converted to Islam. I returned to Geneva to care for my great-uncle. Soon he also died, leaving me a fairly large sum of money. I was alone then, and eager to lead the life of a wanderer, eager to explore the unknown. I went back to Africa, where I examined Tunisia and eastern Algeria, travelling alone on horseback. Subsequently I visited the Constantine Sahara. For greater convenience and also as a matter of aesthetics, I grew used to wearing Arab clothing. I speak Arabic fairly well, having learned it at Bône.

In 1900 I happened to be in El Oued, in the far Southern Constantine. There I met M. Slimène Ehnni, who at that time was a *maréchal des logis* in the Spahis. We were married according to the Moslem rite.

Generally in military territories, a dim view is taken of journalists because of their tendency to ask embarrassing questions. It was like that in my case: from the outset both the military and administrative authorities treated me with the utmost hostility. When my husband and I attempted to have a civil marriage performed in addition to the Moslem ceremony, permission was refused.

Our stay in El Oued continued up until January 1901, when, under the most mysterious circumstances, I was the victim of an abortive attempt at murder at the hands of a native maniac. In spite of my efforts to shed some light on this matter, when the case came to trial before the Conseil de Guerre of Constantine in June 1901, nothing whatever was accomplished in that direction.

At the end of the hearings, at which I had been obliged to appear as principal witness, I was suddenly expelled from Algeria. The expulsion order brutally separated me from my husband. Since he had been naturalized as French, our Moslem marriage was not considered valid. Fortunately the order did not exclude me from France as well.

I went to my brother's in Marseille, where presently my husband rejoined me. There, after some small research, we were given permission to marry. It was very simple. True, this was in France, far from the proconsuls of the Southern Constantine. We were married at the Marie of Marseille on the 17th of October, 1901.

In February 1902 the term of my husband's re-engagement in military service expired. He left the army and we went back to Algeria, where he was shortly offered the post of *khodja* (interpreter and secretary) at Ténès, in the north of the district of Algiers, an office he still holds.

That is the true story of my life. It is the life of an adventurous soul, one that has got himself free of a thousand small tyrannies, free of what is called *usage* a soul eager for the constantly changing aspects of a life far from civilization. I have never played any kind of political role. It is enough for me to be a journalist. I study life by being close to it, this 'native life' about which so little is known, and which is so disfigured by the descriptions of those who, not knowing it, insist on describing it anyway. I have never

engaged in any propaganda among the people here, and it is totally ridiculous to state that I pretend to be an oracle.

Wherever I go, whenever possible, I make a point of trying to give my native friends exact and reasonable ideas, explaining to them that French domination is far preferable to having the Turks here again, or for that matter, any other foreigners. It is completely unjust to accuse me of anti-French activities.

As for the insinuations made by your *envoyé spécial* to the effect that I am anti-Semitic, I can only reply that besides being a contributor to *La Revue Blanche*, *La Grande France*, *Le Petit Journal Illustré* and *La Dépêche Algérienne*, of whose staff I am a member at present, I have also written for *Les Nouvelles* which, under the editorship of Monsieur Barrucand, has done so much in the fight to destroy anti-Semitism. I went to work on *El Akhbar* at the same time as Monsieur Barrucand when he took over that old newspaper to give it a line that was essentially *French* and *republican*. It is an organ that defends the principles of justice and truth, principles which must eventually be applied here to all, without distinction as to religion or race.

I hope, Monsieur le Redacteur-en-Chef, that you will see fit to print my rectification, and thus allow me the opportunity of defending myself. I consider my cause entirely legitimate.²⁴³

Isabelle Eberhardt

A brief, partial overview of the historiography of the Kahina legend that Eberhardt is responding to offers a historicizing initial approach to Eberhardt's identity construction as seen in the above letter. It also widens the field of postcolonial studies from a nineteenth-century imperialist focus to an awareness of wider ideological formations in order to assess colonial ideology, as exemplified by Amar Acheraïou in his study *Rethinking Postcolonialism*.²⁴⁴ Acheraïou explores the connections between ancient and new imperialism, and the multi-dimensional, palimpsestic character of modern colonial discourse, viewing colonialism as a synergetic phenomenon.²⁴⁵ His main concern is in mapping the ideological and cultural 'contact-zone' between Greco-Roman thought and modern colonial cultures (French and British).²⁴⁶ Similarly, I shall contextualise the various contemporary legends of the Kahina within a wider history. Abdelmajid Hannoum, in his book-

²⁴³ Letter published in *La Petite Gironde*, 23 April, 1903. Re-printed in Eberhardt, *The Oblivion Seekers*, pp. 85-88.

²⁴⁴ Amar Acheraïou, *Rethinking Postcolonialism, Colonialist Discourse in Modern Literatures and the Legacy of Classical Writers*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008, p. 1. Acheraïou considers the legacy of the writers: Lysias (440-380BC), Isocrates (436-338 BC), Plato (427-327BC), Aristotle (384-322BC), Cicero (106-43BC) and Sallust (86-34BC).

²⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

²⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

length study of the Kahina, presents an analysis of the legend from late antiquity to the postcolonial era. He observes of the French colonial period:

The legend of the Kahina, which in its various guises served all types of mythology, symbolized the chasm in Algerian society. In the colonial period, for both groups the Kahina was the symbol of Algeria, whether as a Muslim or a Berber country. For both groups, she was a symbol, but with different content.²⁴⁷

Since France first sought to colonise Algeria in 1830, its *mission civilisatrice* was imposed through the twin doctrines of assimilation and association. Assimilation became the official colonial policy of the Third Republic in 1870 until it was seceded at the end of the First World War and replaced with the more flexible policy of association. The policy of assimilation had aggressively sought to make Algeria an extension of France, both administratively and culturally. Foreign settlers and Europeans of native origin (mainly Spanish, Italians, Maltese, and Sicilians) and the indigenous Algerian population could theoretically become naturalized French citizens if they were to demonstrate love and allegiance to France and speak its language.²⁴⁸ For instance, Slimane, Eberhardt's husband, obtained French citizenship after serving in the French army as a spahi. Moreover, the principle of assimilation was not solely a French colonial construct. The assimilative impulse, to be found at some time among most of the peoples of the conquering West, became a conspicuous policy during the Roman Empire with the latinization of the Barbarian regions, particularly under Caesar,²⁴⁹ thus revealing the interconnections between ancient and new imperialism, as highlighted by Acheriaou.²⁵⁰ The eventual goal of France was to become more successful than the Arabs and their own civilizing mission of Islam in Algeria.

The French version of the legend of the Kahina was constructed by historiographers in order to aid them in their goal of assimilation. French historiography elaborated a whole mythology to justify the enterprise and to explain the historical basis for making Algeria French. This justification was not for purposes of convincing the indigenous population but rather to convince France of the validity

²⁴⁷ Abdelmajid Hannoum, *Colonial Histories, Post-Colonial Memories. The Legend of the Kahina, A North African Heroine*, Portsmouth: Heinemann, 2001, p. 189.

²⁴⁸ Zayzafoon, *The Production of the Muslim Woman*, p. 35.

²⁴⁹ See Raymond F. Betts, *Association and Assimilation in French Colonial Theory, 1890-1914*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1961, p. 10.

²⁵⁰ Acheriaou, *Rethinking Postcolonialism*, p. 4.

of the enterprise.²⁵¹ Whereas the Arabs justified their colonisation of North Africa by maintaining that North Africa chose to be both Arab and Muslim and that the Berbers adopted Islam of their own free will, motivated by their common origin with the Arabs, the French, argues Hannoum, proceeded differently and '*focused on the resistance of the Kahina to demonstrate that North Africa did not choose to be Arab, but was forced.*'²⁵² Furthermore, continues Hannoum, the French saw North Africa as being originally Roman and that, at the time of the Arab arrival, it was at once Byzantine and Berber. For this reason the French viewed their occupation of Algeria as justified. Hannoum corroborates David Proschka's view that French colonial historiography obscures the Arab period and presents the Romans as the ancestors of the French in North Africa.²⁵³

The Arabs were not really colonised; the French took from them what, in the past, was Roman, therefore French. This view justified any exclusion of the Arabs from power, any expropriation of their property, and any nullification of their cultural presence. The matter was different for Berbers, who in the French view were originally European, but who missed the boat, so to speak. The task of the French was to help them progress. This mythology is expressed in all the French writing about the legend of the Kahina, with differences, sometimes slight and sometimes significant, between each historian.²⁵⁴

With the complications and resistance that the French encountered in attempting to implement a policy of assimilation, the Kahina legend emerged anew. No longer was she a heroine or a unifying figure, she was now the figurehead of resistance, representing disorder and anarchy.²⁵⁵ With this new version of the legend thrust upon Eberhardt by the French journalists, she was positioned antagonistically toward the French colonisers. It was indeed as if time had 'stood still, producing similar personalities and incidents'²⁵⁶ from different colonial moments. In fact, Eberhardt represents different aspects of the varying legends; both the Arabic version of the

²⁵¹ See Hannoum, *Colonial Histories*, p. 187.

²⁵² Ibid., p. 186.

²⁵³ David Prochaska, *Making Algeria French: Colonialism in Bône, 1870-1920*, Paris: Editions de la maison de sciences de l'homme, 1990. p. 213. Quoted in Zayzafoon, *The Production of the Muslim Woman*, p. 45.

²⁵⁴ See Hannoum, *Colonial Histories*, p. 186.

²⁵⁵ For a full account of the legend from the French historiographer, Gautier, see Hannoum, *Colonial Histories*, p. 187.

²⁵⁶ Patricia Lorcin, *Imperial Identities: Stereotyping, Prejudice and Race in Colonial Algeria*, London: I.B. Taurus, 1995, p. 21.

legend, which maintains that the Kahina and the Berbers adopted Islam of their own free will (as Eberhardt had done), and the French version of the legend which focused on the initial resistance of the Kahina to the Arab invaders. Eberhardt embodies both the unifying aspect of the Arabic and the divisive aspect of the French historiographies.

Citing the Kahina legend with reference to Eberhardt thus demonstrates its transformative abilities and its multiplicity of use; it is now in complete reversal to its prior function as an ideological crutch or tool used by the French colonisers. In embodying Eberhardt as the Kahina in her current guise, the journalists set Eberhardt up in opposition to the colonial authorities. Eberhardt's contemporary embodiment of this legend further adds to its content and complexity. Not only this, it also compounds her already complex and contradictory positioning as an Arabised European female, with an Arabic male persona who opposed the brutalising aspects of European colonisation in publications of 'fiction' under her female birth name. At the same time she inscribed herself to be pro-French in letters to newspaper editors and, finally, absorbing the persona of a historical figure who (initially) opposed the Arabs' own earlier form of oppression of the Berbers.

To complicate matters, Eberhardt's status with the colonial authorities was decidedly unassured, given her history. Despite her recent patriotic protestations, the authorities had consistently considered her to be a dissident figure and a threat to the colonial order. This is not surprising, since Eberhardt had physically participated in the bloody uprising on the side of Muslim students against the colonisers in Bône (now Annaba) in March 1899, as discussed in chapter two. The colonial records in Constantine record her as 'a dangerous Russian woman conniving with the natives.'²⁵⁷ What is more, two years after the Bône riots, and two years before the Kahina episode, Eberhardt was expelled from Algeria following the assassination attempt on her life, detailed in the previous chapter. Considering Eberhardt's precarious history and her expulsion, the careful elaboration of her identity and her purpose in Algeria, following the Kahina incident, was extremely politic. Eberhardt did not want to be expelled from Algeria a second time.

²⁵⁷ Kobak, Isabelle, p. 65.

‘That is the true story of my life. [...] I have never played any kind of political role. It is enough for me to be a journalist.’

So states Eberhardt halfway through her 800 word letter to the editor of *La Petite Gironde*. Eberhardt’s chequered history in not only North Africa, but also in Geneva, reveals a different story and a palimpsestic narrative once more. In unpublished journal notes she decided in advance that:

I shall be fighting for the Muslim revolutionaries like I used to for the Russian anarchists...although with more conviction and with more real hatred against oppression. I feel now that I’m much more deeply a Muslim than I was an anarchist.²⁵⁸

Eberhardt’s fervid opposition to oppression (read colonialism), vis-à-vis her status as a Muslim, as seen in the above passage from her journal, is not present in her letters to the press. In the letter to the editor she plays down her previous political (read anarchist) sensibilities and activities, in which she was involved in Geneva before arriving in North Africa, and plays down her empathy for the colonised Muslims and Berbers in Algeria. Despite her early activities in Algeria, by the time this letter to the editor was written, some four years after her participation in the Bône riots, Eberhardt arguably had no interest in becoming embroiled in colonial politics and endeavored to operate as an educated observer, in her disinterested and impartial ‘journalistic’ guise. Eberhardt found what she termed the *kitchen politics* of Algeria repugnant.²⁵⁹ She states in the letter:

I have never played any kind of political role. It is enough for me to be a journalist. I study life by being close to it, this ‘native life’ about which so little is known, and which is so disfigured by the descriptions of those who, not knowing it, insist on describing it anyway. I have never engaged in any propaganda among the people here, and it is totally ridiculous to state that I pretend to be an oracle.

Wherever I go, whenever possible, I make a point of trying to give my native friends exact and reasonable ideas, explaining to them that French domination is far preferable to having the Turks here again, or for that matter, any other foreigners. It is completely unjust to accuse me of anti-French activities.²⁶⁰

²⁵⁸ Kobak, *Isabelle*, p. 63.

²⁵⁹ Lorcin, *Historicizing Colonial Nostalgia*, p. 60.

²⁶⁰ Eberhardt, *The Oblivion Seekers*, p. 87.

Eberhardt is keen to defend herself against the accusation of ‘anti-French activities’ because the representation of Eberhardt as the Kahina places her in a dangerous position, and therefore justifies her vociferous response. As she states at the end of her letter, ‘I consider my cause entirely legitimate.’²⁶¹ After several years of experience in negotiating colonial politics, Eberhardt’s approach is evidently more considered and she openly acknowledges the ideal of France’s *mission civilisatrice*, explaining to her ‘native friends’ that ‘French domination is far preferable to having the Turks here again’. Here, Eberhardt’s journalistic stance is necessarily allied to metropolitan France and the French colons in Algeria. However objective or impartial she claims this position to be, there is a degree of embeddedness evident in this letter, as she positions herself ‘with France’. This is further emphasised at the end of letter when she states that she worked for the *Akhbar* (the bilingual weekly newspaper based in Algiers), which under the new directorship of Barrucand took a line that was essentially French and republican and that the newspaper is ‘an organ that defends the principles of justice and truth, principles which must eventually be applied here to all, without distinction as to religion and race.’²⁶² Barrucand’s newspaper had the stated aim to serve equally the interests of the French and of the Muslim population of Algeria, leaving aside the lies and looking only for what is just and true.²⁶³ However, the colon newspapers already considered the *Akhbar*, under Barrucand, as an anti-French publication, contrary to Eberhardt’s protestations.



²⁶¹ Ibid., p. 88.

²⁶² Ibid., p. 8.

²⁶³ ‘Propagande Dangereuse’ *L’Union Republicaine*, 15th March 1903, BIB AOM/30454, 1902 to 1904, CAOM.

Fig. 10
French-language edition of the *Akhbar* ²⁶⁴



Fig. 11
Arabic-language edition of the *Akhbar* ²⁶⁵

Eberhardt's stated alliance to France does not truly reflect her ambiguous and divided position. In her short stories and in her diaries there is a strong sense of partiality towards indigenous Algerians, both Arab and Berber. For instance, in her diary entry of 13 October 1902 she states that she would like to write a piece in defence of her Algerian Muslim brethren, the 106 Algerian rebels who were to be tried in Montpellier, France, following riots in the Algerian village of Margueritte where many inhabitants were killed.²⁶⁶ The reference to Algerian Muslims as her 'brethren' indicates the opposite of a stance allied to France. She did not publish this piece, perhaps due to fear of reprisal from the colonial authorities. This was a legitimate concern in the climate of fear following multiple riots in Algeria in 1901 and the French authorities suspected collaboration between the 'foreigners' present in Algeria and the indigenous inhabitants. *The Times* (London and New York) reported on 22 November 1922, that the French authorities had accused British missionaries of carrying out anti-French propaganda and distributing rifles to the natives. In her stories and travel sketches, from 1898 to 1903 onwards, Eberhardt's attitude to the colonial system is more transparent although not straightforward. Eberhardt starkly conveys the consequences of colonialism on the indigenous

²⁶⁴ CAOM.

²⁶⁵ CAOM.

²⁶⁶ See Eberhardt, *The Nomad*, p. 186.

population, in stories such as ‘The Major’.²⁶⁷ The story is told through the eyes of the protagonist, Jacques, a doctor in the French army. Jacques develops a conflicted allegiance to France’s civilizing mission and a sympathy for the people he administered to, who suffered under the inhumanity and brutality of the French colonial system.

The subject matter in Eberhardt’s writing and the issue of her impartiality was perhaps just a matter of chronology and strategy, dictated by events as they unfolded. She developed an increasingly careful view of her audience, and an increasingly strategic response towards the French colonial authorities, as she became more notorious. Eberhardt’s fiction was published before her career as a journalist was established, although specific mentions of her desire to become a journalist appear from 1901. The daily newspaper *Nouvelles*, based in Algiers and currently edited by Barrucand, published Eberhardt’s literary travel sketches, ‘Printemps au Desert’ and ‘El Maghreb’ on 19 and 20 July 1901. A few days later she wrote to Slimane from Marseille (following her recent expulsion from Algeria), with news of the publications. She states that this autumn her name would not be forgotten in Algeria (she planned to send them something twice a month); and that she also had a French newspaper (no name given) that would publish her, give her a voice, as well as a reputation as a journalist.²⁶⁸ It appears that the opportunity to express herself, and to be legitimised by a metropolitan newspaper in that capacity, is paramount, alongside establishing her reputation. Above all, she wished to make a name for herself and consistently made efforts towards that goal. Throughout 1902 Eberhardt made repeated references in her diary about making a name for herself in the Algerian Press, while waiting for the opportunity to do the same in Paris.²⁶⁹ This was to prove a delicate balancing act in the following two years. The reality of colonial Algeria did not allow her the complete freedom of expression that she so desired, complicating her planned trajectory.

Eberhardt had been subjected to a great deal of negative press coverage and political criticism in the years 1902-3.²⁷⁰ Thus her response to the latest accusation in 1903 is predicated upon accumulated events and experience. In particular, the

²⁶⁷ Eberhardt, ‘The Major’ in *Departures: Selected Writings*, trans. Karim Handy, Laura Rice, eds. Karim Handy and Laura Rice, San Francisco: City Lights, 1994, pp. 38-60.

²⁶⁸ Eberhardt, *Écrits intimes*, p. 378.

²⁶⁹ For example, Eberhardt, *The Nomad*, p. 167 and p. 187.

²⁷⁰ See Kobak’s chapter ‘Mischief’ on the background to the political tensions in Ténès and the ensuing press campaign against Eberhardt and Barrucand. Kobak, *Isabelle*, pp. 193-206.

criticism in the newspaper *L'Union Républicaine*, became so relentless that she threatened to sue for defamation of character. The following passage (published on 10 May 1903, in the weekly colon newspaper *Le Turco*, a few weeks after the Kahina episode) is indicative of the intensity of the press campaign against her:

What relationship is there between madam Mahmoud of the *Turco*, madame Ehnni of *L'Akhbar*, and mademoiselle Eberhardt of the *Dépêche*? Is this a reincarnation of the Blessed Trinity? [...] Is this young man a woman? Is it a miss or a madam, what is her real name? Does she live in Ténès or Mustapha? Oh, cruel, cruel enigma.²⁷¹

The sarcastic tone of the 'cruel, cruel enigma' and 'a reincarnation of the Blessed Trinity' in reference to her three names - Ehnni, Eberhardt and Mahmoud - confirms the argument presented in the previous chapter that Eberhardt's 'disguise' deceived no-one. Her presence in Algeria, her subversion of gender norms and her threat to racial hierarchies by dressing as an Arab man (as well as being married to one) created a considerable noise in the colonial system; a corresponding 'discourse of discontent'.



Fig. 12
*Le Turco*²⁷²

The title page of the *Le Turco*, with its contorted depiction of an indigenous figure, aptly demonstrates the colonial mind set of the publication, its contributors, and its

²⁷¹ Randau, *Isabelle Eberhardt, notes et souvenirs*, p.20. Cited in Kobak, *Isabelle*, p. 204. Randau was deputy administrator of Ténès when Eberhardt and Slimane were there in 1902-3. The entire letter in *Le Turco* can also be found in Eberhardt, *Lettres et journaliers*, présentation et commentaires par Eglal Errera, Actes Sud, Babel, 1987, p. 329-30.

²⁷² BIB AOM/30707 1902, CAOM.

colon audience: one that could not comprehend the subversive Eberhardt. Her multiple identity constructions confused and provoked her detractors. She did have her supporters, although they were less vocal during her lifetime. One such person was Victor Barrucand, Eberhardt's friend and colleague, in his capacity as editor of the *Akhbar*. The following passage was written posthumously by Barrucand, in the appendix to his publication of Eberhardt's *Dans l'ombre chaude de l'Islam*, three years after the event, in 1906. Here Barrucand (belatedly) comes to Eberhardt's defence, aestheticizing her in the process:

The presence of this young Moslem divinity student with the powerfully sculpted forehead and the long thin hands, the soft voice and slow speech, did not go unnoticed by the reporters who were following the presidential tour. Certain of them, poorly informed, sent back to their newspapers inexact information as to the identity of, and the life led by Isabelle Eberhardt, comparing her to the warlike Berber queen of the Aurès, La Kahéna, who rode from tribe to tribe preaching hatred of the conquerors. These reports were merely local calumny, disseminated by a few small-time journalists afflicted with Arabophobia. Isabelle Eberhardt felt that she must put things straight.²⁷³

Her letter of 23 April 1903 to *La Petite Gironde* responding to the Kahina incident was not the first time Eberhardt had had to 'put things straight'. As mentioned above there was an incessant press campaign against not only Eberhardt, but also involving Barrucand.

In 1903 Eberhardt was living in Ténès with her Algerian husband Slimane following his posting there as an interpreter (khodja). The town was preparing for elections and Eberhardt, alongside her colleague and editor of the *Akhbar* Victor Barrucand, was embroiled in a vicious press campaign that invited a vociferous response from Eberhardt to the newspaper in question, *L'Union Républicaine*. Eberhardt's justifications of her purpose in Algeria, and the avowal of her status as merely a journalist, mirrored her letter in 1901 following the assassination attempt. These motifs were repeated in her response to the French journalists following the reportage of the President's banquet, the subject of this chapter. In this campaign

²⁷³ Victor Barrucand, in the appendix to Eberhardt, *Dans l'ombre chaude de l'Islam*, ed. Victor Barrucand, Paris: Librairie Charpentier et Fasquelle, 1906. (This edition includes a fifty page closing biographical essay by him, 'Notes sur la vie et les oeuvres d'Isabelle Eberhardt'.) Quoted in Eberhardt, *The Oblivion Seekers*, p. 84.

both Eberhardt and Barrucand were implicated. Only Eberhardt replied publicly to the newspaper.²⁷⁴

The duo of Eberhardt and Barrucand, as they were often referred to, was also known as Barrucand-Mahmoud-Saâdi-Eberhardt by journalists in *L'Union Républicaine*. This press campaign has received, as yet, no mention by Anglophone critics, who have tended to rely on the same narrow range of published sources of Eberhardt's own works, without investigating the full range of sources in the archives, such as the newspaper articles. However, Kobak's biographical account does provide a brief background to the political campaign in Ténès. The backdrop of the press campaign in *L'Union Républicaine*, immediately prior to the French journalists' accusation of Eberhardt as the Kahina, explains Eberhardt's vociferous public defence but it does not account for the explication of her Islamic identity. I contend that Eberhardt utilised her Muslimhood, and the press campaign against her, to further her literary career and 'make a name for herself'.

'The true story about me [...] I was born a Moslem.'

The true story about me is perhaps less romantic, and surely more modest, than the legend in question, but I think it my duty to tell it.

My father was a Russian subject of the Moslem faith, and my mother was a Russian Catholic. I was thus born a Moslem, and I have never changed my religion. My father died shortly after my birth in Geneva, where we lived. My mother then stayed on with my great-uncle. It was he who brought me up, and he did so exactly as though I had been a boy. This explains the fact that for many years I have worn, and still wear, men's clothing.²⁷⁵

In this letter there is conflict between that to which Eberhardt confesses in her lifestyle, how she happens to be the way she is (why she dresses as a man, for example), and the clear and deliberate self-fashioning in which she seems to be actively engaged for a triad of reasons: political, religious, and career-minded. For political reasons, as previously discussed, Eberhardt is keen to play down the association between herself and the war-like Kahina. Eberhardt refuses the mantle of the Kahina and, in exchange, creates a legend around her religious identity: an Islamic identity of her own construction. Eberhardt continues with what she purports

²⁷⁴ See *L'Union Républicain*, 'A Propos de Revelation', 12th April, 1903. BIB AOM/30454, 1902 to 1904, CAOM. The press campaign, and Eberhardt's response, provide scope for further investigation.

²⁷⁵ Eberhardt, *The Oblivion Seekers*, p. 85.

to be the true story of her life, 'My father was a Russian subject of the Moslem faith, and my mother was a Russian catholic. I was thus born a Moslem, and I have never changed my religion.' This version of her heritage compels me to the following interrogation and contextualisation of Eberhardt's personal history.

Eberhardt scholars commonly refer to her conversion to Islam (alongside her mother's conversion) at the end of the nineteenth century in Algeria.²⁷⁶ Existing studies of Eberhardt's life state that she converted to Islam at some point in 1897 when she visited Bône in Algeria with her mother. However, although there is no evidence of Eberhardt's conversion at this point in time - it is highly probable that this is a deduction of fact - there is evidence that her mother did convert in 1897 and took on the name Manoubia Fatma. Eberhardt referred to her mother as 'la rouma convertie'.²⁷⁷ The French word 'roumi' means Roman and Eberhardt's phrase literally means 'the converted Roman woman'. The word 'roumi' tended to be used disparagingly, but the concept of 'roumi' or 'rum' is used here by Eberhardt to simply convey a convert to Islam. Interestingly, in the letter above, Eberhardt refers to a fictional Islamic paternity, 'my father was a Russian subject of the Moslem faith', to justify her 'belief' that she was 'born a Moslem'. However, this fictional Islamic paternity is ultimately negotiable for Eberhardt, in a letter to Abdul Wahab she declared that her mother was raped by her doctor (as discussed in chapter two), and these multiple constructions of her paternity are due to the fact of her own illegitimacy and the imaginative rein that she gave to it. Furthermore, Eberhardt's emphasis on paternity is also indicative of her masculine identifications throughout her life and career.

Eberhardt's very particular relationship with Islam and conversion is notable, bearing in mind, firstly, the Western relationship with Islam in the nineteenth-century colonial era, and secondly, more specifically, the historical context of any pan-European conversions to Islam. Indeed, conversion to Islam is a subject that Eberhardt covets and it extends into her fiction; it is written into several of her short stories, such as 'Yasmina' and the aptly named 'The Convert' (as footnoted in chapter two). From the early modern period onwards, conversion to Islam was commonly referred to as 'Turning Turke' and a convert was referred to as a

²⁷⁶ See, for example: Hedi Abdel-Jaouad, 'Isabelle Eberhardt: Portrait of the Artist as a Young Nomad', in *Yale French Studies*, No.83, Post-Colonial Conditions: Exiles, Migrations, and Nomadisms, Vol.2 (1993), p. 97.

²⁷⁷ Zayzafoon, *The Production of the Muslim Woman*, p. 32.

‘renegade’ or ‘renegado’.²⁷⁸ In brief, conversion was more often than not a pragmatic action in order to secure survival on behalf of the significant number of slaves captured by North African, Barbary pirates (the Algiers pirates being particularly active in this practice); although Nabil Matar notes that a significant number of voluntary cases are also well documented.²⁷⁹ In addition, Antonio de Sosa’s *Topography of Algiers* (1612) recounts numerous ‘renegade’ marabouts in Algiers.²⁸⁰ But by the end of the nineteenth century, after the decline of the Ottoman Empire as a world power, and the end of the Napoleonic Empire, the balance of power between Europe and the Islamic countries had fully shifted in favour of Europe. Only then did the lands of Islam become material for Orientalist construction and colonization.²⁸¹ It is within this cultural context of ‘Orientalizing’ and ‘othering’ the Muslim that we encounter the surprising figure of Eberhardt, who voluntarily embraces Islam and claims it as her birthright.

What Eberhardt constructed, she began to believe was true. As Patricia Lorcin points out, citing Valentine Cunningham, “What is perceived as reality is ‘as much a part of the truth [...] as what ‘actually’ happens.’ ”²⁸² It is thought that it was only during her adulthood that Eberhardt came to believe she was born a Muslim. Although Eberhardt did not know definitively who her father was, she herself suspected that it was indeed Trophimowsky, as mentioned in the letter to Ali Abdul Wahab in chapter two. In fact, it was Trophimowsky who had sparked her interest in Islam through his own. In Eberhardt’s first novel, *Trimadeur (Vagabond)*, we read of the protagonist Dmitri Orschanow’s thoughts on his own maternal ancestral links to Islam which closely mirror Eberhardt’s claim that she is Muslim through her paternal side. It is also noticeable how much the portrait of Dmitri’s father’s resembles Trophimowsky, whose own horticultural schemes dominated family life at the Villa Neuve in Geneva, suggesting the highly biographical nature of the novel:

²⁷⁸ The Spanish word ‘renegado’ specifically means a convert from Christianity to Islam and was first used in English in 1583. For more in-depth coverage, see Nabil Matar’s chapter on ‘Conversion to Islam in English Writings’ in *Islam in Britain, 1558-1665*, (Cambridge University Press, 1999). p. 22; and *An Early Modern Dialogue with Islam*, Antonio de Sosa’s *Topography of Algiers* (1612), ed., Maria Antonia Garces, trans., Diana de Armas Wilson, (University of Notre Dame, Indiana, 2011).

²⁷⁹ Matar, N., *Islam in Britain, 1558-1635*, (Cambridge University Press, 1998). pp. 23-30.

²⁸⁰ See the chapter ‘The Marabouts of Algiers’ in *An Early Modern Dialogue with Islam*, Antonio de Sosa’s *Topography of Algiers* (1612), pp. 174-180.

²⁸¹ Matar, *Islam in Britain*, p. 11.

²⁸² Lorcin, *Historicizing Colonial Nostalgia*, p.107, quoting Valentine Cunningham in Edward Berenson and Eva Giloli, eds. *Constructing Charisma*, p. 4.

Dmitri's father, Nikita Orschanow, had been a member of the government in Samara. He was a utopian, full of humanitarian ideas, who had ruined himself with expensive horticultural schemes which used all the latest equipment to no avail, and were doomed to failure. He had married a poor teacher of Tatar origin, Lisa Mamontow, who had died giving birth to Dmitri.²⁸³

Ever since the evening he sat daydreaming on the quay of La Joliette, watching the *Saint-Augustin* leave for Oran, he had been haunted by the idea of Africa, and above all of Muslim Africa. He thought of all his own atavistic links to Islam through his maternal side, Tatar and nomadic.²⁸⁴

These fragments draw attention to a collective Islamic ancestry in such a way that Eberhardt's creative claim to an Islamic lineage could be considered to have some basis in fact: in Trophimowsky's native Kherson. Kobak states that Trophimowsky's family probably emigrated from Turkish [Ottoman] Armenia, to Kherson, in Russia [now Ukraine], in the early years of the [nineteenth] century. Kobak continues:

Trophimowsky talked to Isabelle of the Caucasian and Kalmuck steppes between Armenia and his native town of Kherson – barren, mountainous regions, home to millions of nomadic Muslim Tatars, the mixed descendants of Genghis Khan's far-off Mongol hordes, and described them so well that Isabelle's later writing is suffused with detailed nostalgia for steppes which she had never seen. Significantly, she felt an obscure, subconscious ancestral bond with this area around the Black sea, which had so recently become part of Russia, and which had been so much more oriental in its history.²⁸⁵

Trophimowsky's ancestry, as described in the above passage by Kobak, provides yet another palimpsestic narrative in Eberhardt's Islamic identity construction. Prior to the Russian annexation of the region in 1778, Kherson was part of the Tatar Khanate of Crimea which was a vassal state of the Ottoman Empire. Eberhardt's repeated reference to the Tatar ancestry of Orschanow, in a novel where Orschanow's story is a thinly veiled account of her own life, strengthens the Tatar aspect of her atavistic desire. Kobak's argument about Trophimowsky and Armenia is, however, problematic:

Trophimowsky's own familiarity with the language and culture of Islam went back to his Armenian origins: his family were probably some of the thousands of Armenians who emigrated from Turkish to Russian territory in

²⁸³ Isabelle Eberhardt, *Vagabond*, trans. Annette Kobak, intro. Annette Kobak, London: The Hogarth Press, p. 7.

²⁸⁴ Eberhardt, *Vagabond*, p. 88. This passage is also quoted and discussed in Abdel-Jaouad, 'Isabelle Eberhardt: Portrait of the Artist as a Young Nomad', p. 98.

²⁸⁵ Kobak, *Isabelle*, p. 28.

the early years of the century. Arabic was not the language of Turkish Armenia, but Islam was its principal religion and the vast Muslim majority were well acquainted with Arabic through the Koran.

Jo Laycock states that ‘Armenia does not fit easily into the dichotomous categories of ‘East’ and ‘West’ emphasised by Said. Instead images of Armenia have been characterised by ambiguity and fluidity.’²⁸⁶ The Armenian population was dispersed across the borders of the Russian, Persian and Ottoman Empires, a region frequently portrayed as the boundary between civilisation and barbarism or Europe and Asia. It was also perceived as a religious borderland, the meeting place of Christianity and Islam. Armenia was problematic as it straddled these borders. On the one hand, Islam was the principal religion in Armenia, under Ottoman rule, and Islam had been adopted in Armenia centuries before, following the Mongol (Muslim Tatar) invasion in the thirteenth century. Moreover, Armenia became loyal to the Arabic caliphate as early as the ninth century. This supports Kobak’s argument. On the other, there is the discourse of Armenia as a suppressed Christian minority under Ottoman rule where Islam has very little place. Armenians sought to keep their cultural and religious identity and language, yet the well-educated learned multiple languages in order to gain posts as traders, lawyers etc. and used it to their advantage, without assimilating.

The fact that Trophimowsky spoke many languages, including Arabic, and taught those same languages to Eberhardt, suggests a historically functional purpose which he passed down to her. Furthermore, Trophimowsky’s status as a Muslim is debatable. He was an Orthodox priest in Kherson before he became a tutor to the De Moerder family in St Petersburg. He then rejected the Church and had anarchist associations in Russia and Geneva. However, Trophimowsky developed, and later came to exhibit, a deep sympathy for Islam, as evidenced in his signing his letters with Islamic tenets and the fact that he taught Eberhardt to read the Qu’ran in Arabic. Eberhardt’s nostalgic atavism (as evidenced in the excerpt from the novel) and her claim to a Muslim ancestry (as seen in her letters to the press) can be attributed to Trophimowsky to some degree. Although we do not have a precise history of Trophimowsky’s family, it is his geographical association with Muslim Tatars and the Ottoman influence in Armenia (rather than the unlikelihood of having any

²⁸⁶ Jo Laycock, *Imagining Armenia: Orientalism, Ambiguity and Intervention* Manchester/New York: Manchester University Press, 2009, p. 11.

Muslim Armenian ancestry) that is the probable basis to Eberhardt's imaginative claim of having a Muslim father and of being a Muslim from birth.

Eberhardt's engagement with not only the past but the contemporary Islamic world was expressed in her first novel *Rakhil* (as yet un-translated into English, it was never completed, and was published posthumously), through the protagonists Rakhil, a Jewish prostitute, and a well-to-do Paris-educated Muslim, Mahmoud. In her journal, Eberhardt states that, '*Rakhil*, solely a plea in favour of the Koran and against the prejudices of the modern Muslim world, will interest no-one.'²⁸⁷ However, contrary to Eberhardt's doubts, her plea in favour of the Qur'an and her antipathy to the modern Muslim world is exactly what is interesting. There was a surge of reform and revival within Islam at this time in Wahhabism which sought ways to resist the West, although resisting the imperialist West was not the sole reason for reform in Islam by any means. Nevertheless, Eberhardt identifies with the former motivation for reform, as a means to resist the West. In her text '*Silhouettes d'Afrique*,' she states: 'May our Islam, instead of assimilating the lies and impure posture of the West, return to its purity of the first centuries of the *Hedjira*, especially in its original simplicity.'²⁸⁸ Wahhabism did not have a monopoly on 'original simplicity' however; there were many forms of this, including Sufism.

Ultimately, Eberhardt's trajectory can be traced from her early sympathy for the Qur'anically-defensive call to arms in the Bône riots, to her support for her Muslim brethren in Margueritte, to the necessity of mediating (and allying) herself to a French public in order to ensure her literary reputation. If, as I argue, Eberhardt's letter to *La Petite Gironde* consists of a strategic response, not only to negate any negative political action against her, but to further her career with celebrity status; the self-fashioning of her Islamic identity is the defining part of the legend she chooses to create. If fame derives from the Greek and Latin 'to speak', Eberhardt's utilisation of the newspaper's mass readership is the perfect means of doing so. If fame is to be 'much talked about' in order to achieve renown,²⁸⁹ Eberhardt doubly succeeds. The colonial space enabled her creative and professional development and thus her ambiguous navigation between an Arab and a French public has continued

²⁸⁷ Eberhardt, *The Nomad*, p. 39.

²⁸⁸ Quoted in Abdel-Jaouad, 'Isabelle Eberhardt: Portrait of the Artist as a Young Nomad', p. 97

²⁸⁹ See Berenson E. and Giloli E., (eds.), introduction, *Constructing Charisma*, p. 5.

to intrigue posterity. Just as in the myth of the Kahina, Eberhardt remains a complex symbol with potential for ideological re-construction.

CONCLUSION

Eberhardt as Frontalier

While the myth of a reconciling *frontalier* is an evident social need, with the function of mediating between societies which are in conflict, the concrete fact of being such a person is not always entirely comfortable, as we see, for example, in the case of Isabelle Eberhardt in Algeria or Francois Bonjean in Morocco. Writers and intellectuals are *frontaliers* par excellence, but the message and example which they provide may come in for a rough ride at a time of open conflict between the two societies to which they belong.

By incarnating simultaneously between Self and Other, to the point where one becomes open to charges of treachery (one thinks of Anwar Sadat), one comes to represent the quest for universalism....the natural temptation to somehow transcend identity. It opens the way for individual itineraries to become magnified into legendary lives which will subsequently serve as mythical reference points and models of identification.²⁹⁰

This thesis has traced a very particular journey and chronology throughout Eberhardt's short life and career: the mediation of her desire for literary status and Islamic identity in the contact zone of colonial Algeria which resulted in her discourse of discontent from 1895-1903. It has uncovered previously unexamined archive material and highlighted up-to-date scholarship in the Anglophone and Francophone world, including articles that have previously been overlooked. However, there is still a large area needing further research due to a lack of attention to the archival material, and this thesis opens new questions as well as offering some answers.

Eberhardt's brief ambiguous episode as a war reporter for Barrucand and Lyautey and her early death in a flash flood in the desert in Aïn Séfra, Algeria, only adds to the dramatic elements of the reputation recounted here. Indeed, in the months before her death she foresaw her coming demise. To paraphrase Jean-Robert Henry, the figure of Eberhardt, simultaneously incarnating between Self and Other, opens the way for an individual life to become magnified and legendary. In the words of

²⁹⁰ Jean-Robert Henry in the introduction to *French and Algerian Identities from Colonial Times to the Present: A Century of Interaction*, eds., Alec G. Hargreaves and Michael J. Heffernan, intro., Jean-Robert Henry, New York/Ontario/ Lampeter: Edwin Mellen Press, 1993, p. 13.

Mary Louise Pratt, such complexities as these are irresistible, as they often seem to occur whenever women protagonists appear in the lore of the colonial frontier.²⁹¹ Although Eberhardt is no doubt a figure embedded in the ideologies of the nineteenth century, this thesis has shown that Eberhardt had a greater awareness of her century's prejudices than her contemporaries. Significantly, she shows prescience in her convictions, and sees the future of Islam as an unspent force. Eberhardt states:

What so many dreamers have searched for, simple people have found._
Beyond science and the progress of centuries, I can see as under a lifted
corner of a curtain into ages to come, and the future man who dwells there.²⁹²

Eberhardt, in her manifestation as Mahmoud Saâdi, is indeed the precursor to the future *man* or *woman* who dwells there, somewhere between Algeria and France, mediating problematically between the two cultures. Her statement is resonant of, and foreshadows, Franz Fanon's conclusion to *The Wretched of the Earth*:

For Europe, for ourselves and for humanity, comrades, we must turn over a new leaf, we must work out new concepts, and try to set afoot a new man.²⁹³

Fanon published his psychological analysis of the dehumanising effects of colonisation in 1961, one year before the declaration of Algeria's independence. Since the revolution in Algeria, the street names have reverted back from the French to names which are ideologically appropriate to their own country and only a handful of European names survive: Shakespeare, Victor Barrucund and, Isabelle Eberhardt. To echo Kobak's final words on Eberhardt, 'For her elected country to have honoured her memory is an endorsement of her life'.²⁹⁴ To focus the narrative more closely on Eberhardt's receptivity to Islam and her choice to create an Islamic identity, rather than solely an Algerian one, is a timely endeavour. Eberhardt's legendary status was confirmed only two decades after her death by neighbouring

²⁹¹ Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes, Travel Writing and Transculturation*, Second Edition, Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2008, p. 21.

²⁹² Isabelle Eberhardt, *In the Shadow of Islam*, trans. Sharon Bangert, London: Peter Owen, 2003, p. 114.

²⁹³ Franz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington, London: Penguin, 1990, p. 255.

²⁹⁴ Kobak, *Isabelle*, p. 248.

Egyptian feminists, as they celebrated her in their new journal, *L'Egyptienne*, as one of the 'great women figures in Islam'.²⁹⁵ Eberhardt would have approved.

As this thesis has demonstrated, Eberhardt's desire to be a 'good' Muslim ran parallel to, but was at times in tension with, her desire for literary fame. She utilised her insider knowledge as a Muslim, living in Algeria, to nourish the content of her writing and to gain eventual status and credence as an Orientalist writer and a journalist in metropolitan France. This proved an explosive combination in French colonial Algeria. Eberhardt's metamorphosis into the male Muslim, Mahmoud Saâdi, her identification with (and defence of) her Muslim brethren and her membership of the Qadiriyya Sufi brotherhood (in addition to her marriage to an Algerian) all caused her to be seen as a dissident figure by the Arab Bureaux and the colon press. The assassination attempt in 1901 and the resulting expulsion, followed by the press campaigns against her in 1902-1903, led Eberhardt to respond publicly and strategically. Necessarily allying herself to France, she made a claim for, and defended, her Islamic identity, whilst simultaneously using it as a platform to gain a literary reputation. The ideal, rather than the circumstantial, meshing of these two desires is to be found in the final pages of her diary:

I have had an idea, and I think it's a useful one. I was travelling slowly in the sunshine along the road between Baghdoura and Fromentin, munching on a deliciously crisp cake I had bought in the market and on some dried figs I had been given by my travelling companion: Write a novel, tell the unique story of a man – rather like myself – who is a Muslim and sows the seeds of virtue everywhere he goes. I must still find the plot, which must be simple and striking.²⁹⁶

Eberhardt did not write the novel of the virtuous Muslim. What remains is the plotline of her life which calls us to attention.

²⁹⁵ Jeanne Marques, *L'Egyptienne*, September 1925. Margot Badran, in 'Deserts of the Heart', *The Womens Review of Books*, Vol.5, No.3 (Dec., 1987), pp. 7-8. Eberhardt prefigures the rise of Islam and feminism in the neighboring countries of North Africa, such as Egypt. For an in-depth look at Islam and feminism in Egypt, see Margot Badran, *Feminists, Islam, and Nation, Gender and the Making of Modern Egypt*, Chichester: Princeton University Press, 1995.

²⁹⁶ Eberhardt, *The Nomad*, p. 189.



Fig. 13
Eberhardt's sketch of a Muslim cemetery ²⁹⁷

²⁹⁷ Drawings (by Eberhardt), 23 X 45, CAOM.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1

Marseilles, Friday 7 June 1901

May 6, publication of my letter concerning the Béhima episode in *La Dépêche Algérienne*

Sent letter of rectification on the 7th.

Sir,

On June 18th next, a native by the name of Abdallah Mohammed Ben Lakhdar, from the village of Béhima near El Oued (district of Touggourt), will appear before the Military Court at Constantine for trial. He stands accused of murder, or rather of attempted murder, and his guilt is an established fact. I myself was the victim of his deed, which almost cost me my life.

I have been quite surprised to find no mention of the affair in the Algerian press, despite the fact that it is one of the strangest and most mysterious cases ever to be tried in an Algerian court. I can only suppose that the press has been left in the dark about the facts. I believe that for the sake of justice and truth the public ought to learn a number of details before it comes to trial. I would be most obliged if you would be so kind so as to publish this letter under my name. The responsibility for its contents is entirely mine.

I should like to preface my story with a few facts, in order to clarify the tale that follows.

The investigating magistrates have repeatedly expressed their surprise at hearing me describe myself not only as a Muslim but also an initiate of the Qadrya sect; and they have not know what to make of my going about dressed as an Arab, sometimes as a man, and at other times as a woman, according to the needs of my essentially nomadic life.

In order that I should not be thought of as someone affecting Islamism for show, or assuming a religious label for some ulterior motive, I wish to state unequivocally that I have not been baptised and have never been a Christian; that although a Russian subject, I have been a Muslim for a very long time. My mother, who belonged to the Russian aristocracy, died in Bône in 1897, after having become a Muslim, and now lies buried in the Arab cemetery there.

Consequently, I have no reason to convert to Islam, nor to play-act in any way, something that my fellow-believers in Algeria have understood perfectly, to the extent that Sheikh Si Mohammed El Hussein, brother of the naib [deputy] of the Ouargla brotherhood, Si Muhammad Taieb, has agreed without reservation to initiate me into the sect. The reason for my explaining all this is to nip in the bud any suggestion that the motive for Abdallah's attempt on my life lies in a fanatical hatred against everything Christian, for I am not a Christian and all the Souafas know it, Abdallah included!

What follows is a description of the attempt made on my life, at three in the afternoon on 29th January. It took place in the house of a certain Si Brahim ben Larbi, a landlord in the village of Béhima, 14 kilometres to the north of El Oued along the road to the Tunisian Djerid.

I had visited El Oued at the time of my first journey into the Constantine part of the Sahara, in the summer of 1899, and had a vivid memory of the area's immaculate white dunes, lush gardens and shady palm groves. In August 1900, I went to live there for an indefinite period of time. That was where I was initiated into the Qadrya brotherhood, and became a regular visitor to the three zawiyas located near El Oued, having won the friendship of the three sheikhs, sons of Sidi Brahim and brothers of the late naib of Ouargla. In January I accompanied one of them, El Lachmi, to the village of Béhima. He was on his way to Nefta in Tunisia with a group of khouans [initiate into a religious brotherhood] for a ziara at the grave of his father, Sidi Brahim. For reasons of my own I could not go as far as Nefta, but accompanied the sheikh to Béhima where the pilgrims were to spend the night. I expected to return to El Oued that same evening with my manservant, a Sufi who had followed me on foot. We entered the house of the man named Ben Larbi, and the marabout withdrew to another room for the afternoon prayer. I myself stayed in a large hall giving on to an antechamber that led into the public square, where there was a dense crowd and where my servant was looking after my horse. There were five or six Arab figures of note, both from the village and the surrounding area, most of them Bhamania khouans.

I was sitting between two of them, the owner of the house and a young tradesman from Guémar, Ahmed Ben Belkassen. The latter had asked me to translate three telegrams for him, one of which was badly written and gave me a great deal of trouble. My head was bent in concentration, and the hood of my burnous covered my turban, so that I could not see what was going on in front of me. I suddenly felt a violent blow to my head, followed by two or more to my left arm. I looked up and saw a badly dressed man, obviously a stranger to the house, brandishing a weapon above my head, which I took to be a truncheon. I leapt up and ran to the opposite wall to try to seize El Lachmi's sword, which was hanging there. But the first blow had hit the crown of my head and dazed me, and I fell on to a travelling trunk, aware of an acute pain in my left arm.

A young Qadrya mokaddem [local shaykh] named Si Muhammad Ben Bou Bekr and a servant of Sidi Lachmi's named Saad disarmed the assassin, but he managed to free himself. When I saw him coming toward me, I stood up and tried to grab the sabre again, but could not because my head was spinning and the pain in my arm was too sharp. The man ran out into the crowd, shouting: 'I am going to find a gun to finish her off.' Saad then showed me a sword whose blade was dripping with blood, and said: 'This is what the cur wounded you with!'

Alerted by the commotion, the marabout came running in, and he was immediately given the name of the assassin by the people who had recognised him. He sent for Béhima's independent sheikh who, like the assassin, belongs to the Tidjanya brotherhood. It is common knowledge that the latter are the Qadrya's staunchest adversaries in the desert. The sheikh in question stubbornly resisted the marabout's request with various ploys, telling him that the murderer was a sheriff, etc. etc. The marabout publicly threatened to tax him with complicity in the eyes of the Arab Bureau, and insisted that the assassin be arrested on the spot and taken away. The sheikh finally did so, but with very bad grace.

The culprit was taken into the same room where I had been put down on a mattress. He first pretended to be mad, but was caught out by his own fellow citizens who knew him to be a calm, reasonable and sober man. He then said God had sent him to kill me. I was fully conscious and knew that I had no idea who the man was. I began to interrogate him myself and he said he did not know me either, had never set eyes on me but had come to kill me nevertheless. He said that if he were set free, he would attempt it all again. When I asked him what he had against me, he replied: 'Nothing, you have done me no wrong, I don't know you, but I must kill you.' When the marabout asked him whether he knew that I was a Muslim, he said he did.

His father, when summoned, said they were Tidjanyas. The marabout forced the local sheikh to inform the Arab Bureau, and asked both for an officer to come and fetch the culprit and start an investigation, and for a medical officer for me.

The investigating officer, a lieutenant from the Arab Bureau, and the doctor showed up by eleven o'clock. The doctor found my head wound and the injury to my left wrist to be superficial; I owed my life to sheer luck: a laundry-line just above my head had cushioned the first blow, which would otherwise certainly have been fatal. My left elbow, however, had been cut to the outside bone; both the muscle and the bone had been severely slashed. I had lost so much blood in six hours that I was very weak, and I had to be kept in Béhima for the night.

The next day I was taken by stretcher to the military hospital at El Oued, where I remained til February 26th. Despite Dr. Taste's efforts, I left the hospital a cripple for life, unable to use my arm at all for anything strenuous.

At the time of my first journey, I had run into difficulties with the Arab Bureau at Touggourt, which oversees the one at El Oued, difficulties that were due solely to the suspicious attitude of the Touggert Bureau. The head of the Arab Bureau at El Oued, its officers, those at the garrison and the army doctor have all been extremely good to me and I should like to express my thanks to them publicly.

The investigation showed that for five days before committing his crime, Abdallah had tried to buy firearms, but had been unable to find any. The day we arrived in Béhima, he had transferred his family – the poor devil has young children – and his belongings to the house of his father, where he had not lived for six years. Although both father and son were prominent Tidjanyas, they had both suddenly withdrawn from their brotherhood; the father told me he was a Qadrya, and the son told the investigating magistrate he was a member of the Mouley-Taieb brotherhood. The police officer, Lieutenant Guillot, established that Abdallah was lying.

A few days before I left El Oued there was a rumour among the native population that shortly before the crime, Abdallah, who had been riddled with debts, had gone to Guémar (centre for the Tidjanya) and that upon his return he had settled his debts and even bought a palm grove. At about the same time, Abdallah's father went to Sidi Lachmi's zawiya, and, before witnesses, told him that his son had been paid to attack me, but, since he did not know himself who the instigators were, he was seeking permission to see his son in the presence of an official in order to get him to make a full confession. The marabout advised him to go to the Arab Bureau. The old man also asked one of my servants if he could speak to me, and, telling me: 'This crime did not start with us'; added that he was anxious to see his son in order to persuade him to come clean. Those are the facts.

Now, it is clear that Abdallah was not motivated by any hatred of Christians, but that he was pushed into it and acting on behalf of others, and then that his crime was premeditated. I told the investigating authorities that, in my view, the attempted

murder can best be explained by the hatred of the Tidjanya for the Qadrya, and that the reason for the Tidjanya kaba or khouans wanting to do away with me was that they knew their enemies loved me- witness the khouans grief at hearing about the crime. As I passed through the villages around El Oued on a stretcher on my way back to the hospital, the inhabitants, men and women alike, all came to the road to shout and wail the way they do for funerals.

I trust the military Court at Constantine will not be content merely to convict and sentence Abdallah Ben Mohammed and let it go at that, but will also try to throw light on this nebulous affair.

It seems to me that Abdallah was only an instrument in other hands and his conviction will not satisfy me, nor, for that matter, anyone who cares for truth and justice. It is not Abdallah whom I would like to see in the dock, but rather those who incited him, that is, the real culprits, whoever they may be.

I trust, Sir, that you will not refuse to publish this letter in your worthy newspaper, for I believe it to be of some interest. From the political, if not a social point of view, the Algerian Tell is not all that different from other French provinces; however, the same cannot be said of the Sahara, where life is very different indeed, to a degree that people in France can hardly begin to imagine.²⁹⁸

²⁹⁸ Eberhardt, *The Nomad*, trans. Nina de Voogd, pp. 115-21.

Appendix 2

Transcribed in Eberhardt's diary: Marseilles, 7 June 1901

Sir,

I should like to thank you most sincerely for having published my long letter dated May 29th. I should add that I could hardly have expected less from a newspaper with your reputation for impartiality: the *Dépeche Algérienne* has always shown considerable moderation, compared with the excesses that have unfortunately become standard policy for other Algerian publications. It seems to me, however, that as the question of foreigners residing in Algeria is such a burning topic at the moment, I ought to expand upon my earlier letter for those who have taken the trouble to read it.

You have credited me with an honour I do not deserve in the least – that is, your assertion that I have a certain degree of religious influence on the native population in the district of Touggert. In actual fact I have never played, nor tried to play, any political or religious role, for I feel I have neither the right nor the requisite competence to meddle with anything as serious and complex as religious matters in a country of this sort.

At the time that I set off for Touggert in 1899, I felt that it was my duty to go and see Lieutenant Colonel Tridel, who was in charge of the district of Biskra, and inform him of my departure. This officer gave me a most cordial reception and, with military forthrightness, asked me point-blank whether I was an English Methodist missionary. I showed him my papers, which are all in order and which leave no doubt about the fact that I am Russian and have permission from the imperial authorities to live abroad. I also gave Lt. Col. Tridel my opinions on the subject of English missions in Algeria, and I explained that I abhorred all kinds of proselytism and above all hypocrisy, which is the feature of the English character, as unappealing to us Russians as it is to the French.

The officer I found to be in charge of the Arab Bureau in Touggert in the absence of the commanding officer was a captain by the name of De Susbielle, a strange man of an odd turn of mind. Once again I had to establish that I was no English Miss in Arab disguise, but a Russian writer. One would think that if there is one country where a Russian ought to be able to live without being suspected of dubious intentions, that country should be France!

The officer in charge of the El Oued Bureau, Captain Cauvet, saw for himself over a six-month period that there was nothing to be held against me, apart from my eccentricity and a lifestyle that is perhaps a bit unexpected for a young girl like myself, but quite innocuous just the same. It did not occur to him that my preferring a burnous to a skirt, and dunes to a domestic hearth could present any danger to the public security in the Annexe.

As I have stated in my earlier letter, both the Souafas belonging to Sidi Abdel Kadir's brotherhood and those of other ones friendly to it have all let me know how

sorry they were to hear there had been an attempt on my life. The reason these good people all had a certain affection for me is that I had helped them as best I could and had used what little medical knowledge I had to treat the opthalmia, conjunctivitis and other complaints that are endemic to the area. I had attempted to be of some help in my vicinity, and that was the extent of my role in El Oued.

Hardly anyone in this world is without a passion or mania of some sort. To take as an example my own gender, there are women who will do anything for beautiful clothes, while there are others who grow old and grey poring over books to earn degrees and status. As for myself, all I want is a good horse as a faithful and dumb companion to a solitary and contemplative life, and a few servants barely more complicated than my mount, and to live in peace, as far away as possible from the agitation of civilised life, where I feel so deeply out of place.

How can it harm anyone, if I prefer the undulating misty horizons of the dunes to the boulevards?

No, Monsieur le Directeur, I am not a politician, nor am I an agent of any particular party, because to me they are all equally wrong in their exertions. I am only an eccentric, a dreamer anxious to live a free and nomadic life, far away from the civilised world, in order to try to say afterwards what she has seen and perhaps communicate to some people the charm, the melancholy and the thrill which I have felt in the face of the sad splendours of the Sahara... That's all.

It is of course true that in the summer of 1899 it was unusually hot in the Sahara, and that mirages will distort many a perspective and account for many an error!

I.E. ²⁹⁹

²⁹⁹ Eberhardt, *The Nomad*, trans. Nina de Voogd, pp. 122-124.

Appendix 3

El Oued, 18 January 1901

Very dear friend, [crossed out]

Your long letter from the 10th finds me once more in bed and sick. Nevertheless I wanted to answer tonight, at least partly, as I really want to write to you at length and I am exhausted and weak. We are getting close to the end of Ramadan. The first fortnight, as I had only just started fasting – in bed, I recovered, started to work, to ride. But alas, it's been almost 10 days since I have eaten. Food disgusts me deeply, even though I can feel I'm going away with inanition. I became so weak and so skinny that even the bed hurt. You could not guess how much pain the details that you gave about your life caused me! Helene and the poor little one, sick, the financial difficulties in the house. Indeed all this is just an atrocious nightmare. My God, as long as I thought your situation strong and safe, my abandonment, my destitution, the sickness even didn't seem so harsh, so terrible. But now, instead of thinking only of the two of us who are struggling here and among whom, day after day, pile up all the menaces of poverty, I must also think with anxiety about you, your family, your house.

I was hoping – and this hope gave me a little courage – to see you attend my wedding, to know at last the strange, sandy country where I live and that I love. And now, I must leave this hope behind and give up seeing you again – until God knows when, since for you there cannot be any question of undertaking such lengthy and costly travel. My heart sinks even more since I feel myself wasting away very quickly and I sometimes wonder with anguish whether I will have to resign myself to disappearing without having seen you again. Yesterday night I had to stop writing, because I was worn out. I am suffering from intolerable pains in all of my limbs, a total lack of appetite, a nameless weakness and inanition delirium, with no fever and, as soon as I am on my own, hallucinations start and, most painful of all, I perfectly realise the futility of all these images that follow one another around me at a breathtaking and harrowing speed.

We have, thanks to what you sent me and to several little sums of money that S. was able to obtain, paid advances to all of our creditors so that, for the moment, we do not risk seeing the start of the nightmare of the complaints to the Bureau Arabe or to Slimène's Chiefs; a dreadful thing for both of us. Ramadan, forcing us to look after our everyday fare in order to support our weak health, caused us excessive expenses and the bills for [...] are not yet paid. You see that all this is very menacing and very sad.

In any case, there can be no question of travelling for me, no change of existence. Indeed, I confess to you that I do not care to travel, at least from the point of view of a departure. I have become attached to this country – though one of the most desolate and [...] – deeply and forever and from now on. If I ever again have to leave the grey town with its innumerable little arches and domes, lost in the grey

vastness of the grey dunes, I will take with me everywhere and for ever the intense nostalgia of the lost spot where I thought so much and suffered so much and where, too, I encountered – finally – the simple affection, naive and deep that alone right now lights my sad life with a ray of sun....

I have been here too long now, and the country is too absorbing, too simple with its lines of an ominous monotony, for this feeling of attachment to be a transient, aesthetic illusion. No, indeed, never any other place on earth enchanted, charmed me as much as the moving solitudes of the great dry ocean that, from the stony plains of Guémar to the cursed dregs of the chott Mel'riri, leads to the naked deserts without water of Sinaoun and Rhadamès.

Often at sunset, leaning on the ruined parapet of my coarse terrace, waiting for the hour when the nearby muezzin announces that the sun has disappeared under the horizon and the fast can be broken, while contemplating the fawn-colored, bloody or violet dunes, or livid under the winter sky black and low, I feel a great sadness in me, a sort of dark anguish : it seems that at this hour more than any other, from a sudden awakening of my mind, I feel the deep isolation of this town lost in the impassable – so it seems to me – barrier of dunes, six days away from the railway, from life, from Europe. And it seems to me then that, under the great violet night that comes down and buries the silent city, the immense dunes, like monstrous beasts, come closer and higher and that they enclose the town and my place closer and closer, the last of the eastern part of Ouled-Ahmed, to keep us jealously and for ever. Sometimes I start chewing over some Loti. Remember that passage of *Roman d'un spahi* that began like this:

'He loved his Senegal, the poor man...'

Yes, I love my Sahara, with an obscure, mysterious deep and inexplicable love, but real and indestructible.

I am certain that never again and under no circumstances will I be able to live away from this country. Indeed, why hide it from you?

I have this innermost conviction – with no logical ground whatsoever – that my life is now bound for ever to this country and that I must not leave it anymore. Just as well as I do, you know these intuitions [...end of letter fragment] ³⁰⁰

³⁰⁰ 23 X 28, letters from Eberhardt to Augustin de Moerder, 1900/1903, 18 January 1901, CAOM, (original in French). The original letter has many crossings out and is barely legible in places. The entire letter can be found transcribed in Eberhardt, *Écrits intimes*, pp. 295-302. However, there are numerous obvious omissions from the original. For instance, the published text omits the sentence containing Loti, and it is not crossed through on the original.

