

Mrs. Ellen G. Rogers' *A Winter in Algeria* and the Perpetuation of Colonial Discourse

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A good number of English-speaking writers and tourists visited and wrote about Algeria in the nineteenth century, and yet one rarely, with some few exceptions, comes across a text in the academia devoted to study and analyze their journeys of exploration in this country. Books on travellers abound in their descriptions of the journeys and wanderings of celebrated Victorian travellers and any book of some importance can hardly exclude the likes of Burton and Livingstone, Mary Kingsley and Gertrude Bell, but there are frustratingly few sources from which to draw an outline of those who were in Algeria, especially women travel writers. This essay then proposes to shed light on one of these writers Mrs. Ellen Rogers who visited Algeria in the winter of 1863-64 and wrote an account of this visit in a book entitled *A Winter in Algeria* (1865). Drawing on the writings and evidence of the French as well as on her own "observations," Mrs. Rogers provides a guidebook not only concerning the history, botany and climate of Algeria, but also concerning architecture, arts and manners and customs of the Algerians and everyday life in "French Algeria". It will attempt to demonstrate that though a woman, Mrs. Rogers did not depart from the widespread colonial discourse of her time which considered with a haughty attitude the natives and which glorified colonization and its benefits.

The Lure of the Orient and European Travellers

I remember wishing as a child that the "Arabian Nights" were all true; little dreaming how I should one day discover nothing to be truer than poetic fiction. .. I was no sooner in Algeria than I seemed to hear story after story added to the *One Thousand and One [Nights]*, all as new, as true, and almost as wonderful (Mathilda Bentham Edwards, 1867:1).

These were the words of Mrs Mathilda Bentham Edwards (a nineteenth-century English poet and writer) about Algiers the first time she set her enquiring eyes on it. The Orient has always exercised a strong fascination on westerners. It functioned as fantasy lands and magical places right from the mythic tales of the "Arabian Nights". The Orient attracted and lured painters, writers and travellers who depicted it as lands of mystery, fantasy and exoticism. But the Orient was also represented as voluptuous, backward, immoral and repressive to women.

European Women Travellers

Travel has always been associated with men. Few women ventured to tread on foreign and outlying lands alone before the advent of the nineteenth century. And though there were few exceptions with women travelling with their husbands (missionaries or those working in the diplomatic field), women's travel did not flourish till the 19th century. The vast majority of Victorian women who undertook travel in the nineteenth century came from wealthy and aristocratic families who could afford to finance their travels. But even when these women could meet the expenses of their voyages, they could rarely travel on their own because of the rigid social environment of the time. Few women had the courage to transgress the rigid boundaries of femininity and appropriate behaviour. The rare women who ventured to travel alone were frowned upon and were considered rebellious and even immoral in an age when women had virtually no rights and were expected to marry and raise families. (<http://www.cwrl.utexas.edu/~ulrich/femhist/travel.shtml>)

In her book *Discourse of difference: an Analysis of Women Travel writing* (1991), Sara Mills contends that women travellers' views did not always concur with those of men. These women, she says, were far less influenced by the colonial and imperial rhetoric of the time, and contrary to men they did not overemphasize the themes of power and domination. "*Women travel writers were unable to adopt the imperialist voice with the ease which male writers did.*" (Ibid: 3), she claims. She says that, for the most part, female travellers identified with the natives as objects of study and related to them because, as women, they were also objectified and vilified back at home. She further asserts that:

Because of their oppressive socialisation and marginal position in relation to imperialism, despite their generally privileged class position, women writers tended to concentrate on descriptions of people as individuals, rather than on statements about race as a whole (Ibid).

This is partly true in the case of the English prolific writer and poet Mrs. Mathilda Bentham Edwards who visited Algeria in 1865. Her book *A Winter with the Swallows* (1867) offers a sympathetic perspective on the "natives" (including the Arabs and the "negroes") and their (natives) encounter exercised a long-lasting influence on her and contrary to many other travellers (like Mrs. Rogers) who preferred the Kabyles over the Arabs, her accounts of the latter do them justice to a certain extent:

It is not... easy to forget that splendid comet of Arab civilization which has left a trail of light behind it. For as, Earnest Renan has said, "We may, without exaggeration, attribute to the Arab half of the intellectual work of humanity;" and whatever the present condition of this race may be, a very slight consideration of the past is a prejudice in his favour. Setting the glories of Arab architecture and the enchantments of Arab poetry against the less poetic but solid Berber virtues of stability and thriftiness, the former naturally touch the beam (Matilda Bentham Edwards, 1867:57-8).

But many women travel accounts belie this stereotype about the exceptional quality of women writings. In fact, many scholars think that these examples are not representative of the general tendency of these women. They argue that most women's travelogues did not present real differences from those of their male counterparts and that their characters varied as much as their motives. Their attitudes ranged from open curiosity and sympathy on the one hand to the shameless conceit of a supposed European superiority and racism on the other. In this respect women travel writers were in no way different from their male colleagues. (Andreas Pflitsch, in www.qantara.de 2005). As Ibrahim Kalin of George argues:

[Travellers'] narrations, ranging from recondite and arid inventory of names and places to spirited depictions and imaginary ruminations, display not so much interest in penetrating into the [Orient] as reflecting and constructing it through the eyes of an upper class Westerner (Ibrahim Kalin on www.islamonline.net).

This was the case of Mrs. Ellen G. Rogers who visited Algeria from November 1863 to May 1864 and wrote an account on her visit *A Winter in Algeria* (1865). The book is characteristic of many 19th century travel books which, though enchanted and enthralled by the richness and beauty of the places they visited and the exotic elements they offered, were nonetheless repelled by the indigenous populations and were insensitive to their sufferings in which French which were in part due to the harsh life and the virtual slavery in which the French held their Algerian subjects, but which Mrs., Rogers prefers to attribute to an inherent defect in the way of thinking and character of the Arabs. Mrs. Rogers was not unusual in her treatment of the indigenous society (especially the Arab one as opposed to the Kabyle "society"). Her "*observations*" which were in fact, for the most part, mere hearsay led her to perpetuate many held generalizations of the time, such as the concept of dirty, lazy, conceited Arabs, Arabs as irrational, violent and as oppressors of women. In short, her narrative indulges in and is permutated with an imperialist discourse which is typical of most writers and thinkers of the period and which provided a moral justification of the imperialist policies and adventure of European countries.

Algeria as a Favourite Destination for English Tourists in the 19th Century

In the nineteenth century, British travellers to Algeria, and Algiers, in particular, increased due to the belief that the climate was particularly good for one's health. Many books were written about the advantages of living in Algiers and its climate. Its climate was said to be better than that of Italy or Madeira and other similar warm areas. As a result Algeria became a popular tourist winter health resort and a favourite destination for those seeking to improve their health and wellbeing. But it was not till the 1850s that the tourist industry really developed and increasing numbers of English tourists flooded Algiers and its surrounding areas. Before this period (1850s and early 1860s) the various local popular resistance movements of Emir Abd-el-Kader and of the Kabyles and thus French precarious presence hindered any real development. In fact, the mildness of the climate, the low costs of living compared to Europe, the botany, the pleasures of outdoor sketching and exotic entertainments were all factors that attracted European, and especially English and German, visitors to Algeria (Deborah Cherry, 2000:62).

It was these favourable conditions and environment that prompted Mrs. Rogers' visit in the winter of 1863-4, and her book was intended to fill a gap in the tourist books written on Algeria and is thus stuffed with practical advice and hints for those contemplating a visit to this country. In this respect she writes:

Last winter, when a residence of some months in Algiers was first contemplated, we naturally sought to obtain every information respecting a country so comparatively unknown to us. On inquiry at the circulating libraries, the answers received were far from encouraging. Few English works were written on Algeria and none of these were very recent. Disappointed in the result of our inquiries, we nevertheless endorsed the opinion of a German writer, that "excursions to new regions are useful, to rub off the cryptogamic growths with which too long a residence in one and the same country, is apt to encrust the human soul;" and we looked forward with the greater pleasure to a *séjour* in Africa, from its very uncertainty, and novelty (Ellen G. Rogers, 1865: V-VI).

The Description of the Book

Mrs. Rogers' undertook her journey to Algeria between October 1863 and May 1864, and it is a description of that journey that forms the substance of her book *A Winter in Algeria* (published in 1865). The book describes, in length the climate of Algeria, its splendid scenery and nature but also its people and their history, culture, manners and religion. Her rudimentary knowledge of the native languages (Berber and Arabic), or we would rather say her total ignorance of these languages, limited any genuine contact with the natives and thus her knowledge about them and their culture rests primarily on what she learnt from the French and other westerners who visited or had some presence in the country.

She is taken by the exceptional splendour and beauty of the country and describes minutely its stunning scenery, sunsets, sunrises, the colours and odours, mountains, plains and desert. She confesses that nowhere else has she seen a more glorious and magnificent sunrise than that she saw in Algeria:

It is somewhat trite to attempt to describe the glories of daybreak, for sunrise is everywhere beautiful, and poets have sung, and artists immortalized its splendour, for now some thousand years; yet an African sunrise such as we see, every morning certainly boasts unwonted beauties (1865:166).

She sings the praises of the climate of Algiers and its countless advantages on those suffering from consumption and poor health. This favourable climate, she confesses, even surpassed that of Italy according to one Italian woman she met in Algiers. A certain Mrs. H had been to different places including Nice and Madeira and:

Had been at San Remo one winter, where she found it impossible to remain. At Nice, the doctor told her friends it was but a question of time, and that she must never return again to England. Since then, she has resided for three winters at Algiers, and is able to return not only to England, but also to Scotland, every summer. She speaks in raptures of this place (1865:101).

Though the book was intended to be a kind of travel guide to those contemplating to visit Algeria with its various information on the best places to go to and the best spots to choose for those suffering from health problems, Rogers' narrative is saturated with exotic elements that "reproduced" preconceived ideas on Algeria (and by extension what is generally referred to as the Orient) as a setting for legends and everything bizarre and unusual. She thus repeats the images often associated with the *Arabian Nights*. As an example for this, we find her lingering on her descriptions of the bizarre and the different Arab legends, "*The legends of an unlettered people, such as the Arabs of Algeria, convey the best index to their character, habits, and modes of thought* (1865: VII)."

Despite her alignment with the French in their struggle to subdue the natives, the tensions between the two empires of the time, Britain and France, clearly emerge from time to time in the book and Mrs. Rogers naturally lines up with her country (Britain). As a consequence, the reader notices that in spite of her support of French colonization or "conquest" as she prefers to call it, she is drawn again and again into the circles of chauvinistic bickering. This could be illustrated by many examples from the book. Here, for instance, she laments French lack of enthusiasm or perhaps efficiency at making the best use of the very fertile Metidja plain and it surrounding and professes that were it in the hands of the English it would be turned into heavenly spot:

When one looks at the immediate prospect, and towards the city which lies below, one is haunted by the aspect of desolation and barrenness ...it is not that the turf does not display a carpet of many-tinted flowers: it is not that the hedges when you approach them are niggard in their verdant offerings; that the untrained African clematis is not more luxuriant than any creeper that England can boast; it is not that we are insensible to the beauty of the feathery reed...But there is, despite all this, a sort of unfinished, uncultivated, wilderness-look about the whole place, which makes one exclaim continually, "If this were but in the hands of the English!(Ibid: 66-7).

The Natives in *A Winter in Algeria*

Nineteenth-century, colonial accounts of native Algerians is an odd mixture of curiosity, awe, prejudice, contempt, and at times, romanticism. (Marnia Lazreg, 1999:17) This is also the case with Mrs. Rogers whose opinion of the Algerians ranges from sheer racism to a revolting European superiority and at rare occasions a guarded admiration.

Contrary to another Englishwoman, Matilda Bentham Edwards, who visited Algeria in about the same period as Mrs. Rogers and who aligns herself at certain points with the "natives" and seems to be taking the position of "going native," Rogers rarely sympathizes with them. She rarely sees anything valuable in their culture or behaviour. She rather looks at them as potential converts to Christianity and pities them for their wasted efforts in observing, for instance the holy month of Ramadan, and hopes instead that these relentless efforts were rather aimed at a nobler and truer cause which is Christianity: "The implicit obedience which they yield to those hard precepts, shows at least the sincerity of these poor, blind devotees; but alas! Sincerity is no Saviour. Benighted ones, yet how faithful to their creed! Is there no one to go and show them the true light (1865:85)."

Roger's opinion about the natives can be best summarized in the following passage which deals with a ferocious and unruly native species of dogs called "Kabyle dogs":

The training and education of these dogs must be as defective as that of most of the population, for they have neither discrimination, nor discretion. They never distinguish between friend and foe, and even after a visitor's knock has been answered by the servants, the furious barking continuous ceaselessly, imperiling one's peace, if not one's safety, while in any degree of proximity. Riders, too, are pursued by the smaller fry of these pests [making an analogy most probably to the little Arabs], and often the long tails which here are allowed to adorn the horses, have a small dog pendant, actually borne along the tail between its teeth. (1865:156)

Her remarks about the black community (whom she refers to as was customary back then by the term Negroes) have a shocking and nauseating quality and speak volumes about her racism and her deep-rooted belief of a supposed white superiority and supremacy. They were described as such:

With every feeling of heart and head enlisted against the Darwinian theory [because she was intensely religious] it ...one's fraternal sentiments to the utmost, at all the corners of the arcades to stumble upon the negresses, enveloped in their blue check takhelila. If they would only adopt the Moslim fashion [veil], and hide their repulsive features, it would save one many a shock. They are usually to be seen in pairs...and looking very like monkeys on a large scale (1865:71).

As most travel and adventure fiction writing of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, it was biased by virtue of the fact that it was written in the so-called age of empires. Judgements are often blinded by a harsh superiority complex of the western civilisation. Mrs Rogers seems, at times, fascinated and impressed by the grace of the Algerians and their exotic and picturesque beauty which seemed to surprise her very much:

Nothing surprises one more here than the general appearance of both Moors and Arabs. With everything unfavourable to a fine physical development, in their social and domestic habits-their women kept in the most rigid and listless seclusion; married frequently at the age of eleven years, and always in their early teens; the poor classes suffering from constant exposure to the night air, and all weathers, privations arising from want of proper food, and indulging incessantly in the narcotic weed- they yet are, as a rule, whether poor or rich, a remarkably fine, tall, robust, handsome race.(ibid:80).

The picturesque and the fine-looking Arabs "*any of whom might have sat for the picture of a patriarch of old*" was not the only feature which stuck Mrs Rogers and left a lasting impression upon her. The cleanness of the Moorish abodes of the poor were certainly in sharp contrast of what most travellers spoke of during their numerous visits to different parts of the East and of the desolate dwellings of the poor back in London:

But oh! How great the contrast with our London dwellings of the poor, and these Moorish abodes. Instead of the cellars, where free air enters never, and where the open door only admits the impurities of the underground tenements, here each door opens to receive the air of heaven, every window looks into the court, and every room we visit is beautifully whitewashed (ibid:115).

The reason behind this cleanness is the religion of the Moors which she belittles elsewhere in her book:

where the Moors reside, there cleanliness will be found, as enjoined by the religion they so scrupulously obey, and once a week-every Friday- their houses are washed, and thoroughly rinsed down with water, from the highest storey to the lowest. A cistern is an indispensable adjunct to every Moorish dwelling (Ibid).

Despite her positive attitude towards French colonization in general, Mrs. Rogers regrets the looting and plunder that immediately followed the French occupation and regrets the lack of discipline the French soldiers showed:

It must ever be a source of regret that when the French found themselves installed in the Casbah ...so little discipline or supervision was exercised, that, under the very eyes of the officer in command, the public archives were utterly destroyed; the common soldiers actually lighting their pipes with documents ...their organs of destruction were allowed free scope; the country between Sidi Ferruch and Algiers was laid waste: trees were cut down, gardens destroyed, aqueducts irreparably damaged, and in every respect the conduct of the army was as though they had only come to invade, to pillage, and to retire.(ibid:37).

She also shows her opposition at the devastating effects of French colonization on the picturesque ancient Moorish architecture and the ancient city of Al-Djazair:

I tried to picture the Pirate-City [the corsair past of the Algiers is ever-present in the western visitor's mind]as it must have looked from the sea, before the French invasion, but the immense increase of modern buildings, especially in the lower part of the town, involved, the necessity of a wide stretch of imagination. Each year it will be more and more so; those, therefore, who wish to have any idea of its past should not delay their visit, till the Moorish dwellings have passed into the hands of Gallic owners. (1865:163).

This attitude is characteristic and highlights the approach of many 19th century western travellers who though not opposed to colonization and the imperialist spirit of the colonizers, were critical of the abuses engendered by this process. Her lamenting of the fate of many of the old buildings is shown through many examples. She relates one particular incident in which a millennium-aged mosque, which she calls "Djamer Abde-er- Rahman-et-Tcalbi" (Djamie Abdel Rahman Althaalibi showing her utter ignorance of the language), was being abolished in order to make space for a new French road. Despite her suspicion and aloofness towards the Arabs she seems at loss as to why the French authorities were compelled to sacrifice such a national treasure. In this respect she says:

I felt almost as indignant as the Arabs themselves, on hearing that this mosque, the most ancient in Algiers, barring the Grand Mosque, and boasting, I fancy, the most elegant minaret in the place, is about to be destroyed, because it interferes with the line of a new French road, to be constructed through the heart of the Arab town...Why it cannot pass just behind this beautiful little mosque, it is impossible to say (1864:98).

Essentializing the Natives and the Arab/Kabyle Dichotomy

Many writers believed that racial groups had underlying and inherent essences. The concept of essence is the notion that some core meaning or identity is determinate and not subject to interpretation. This concept was widely used in imperialist writings to justify domination and intervention since the colonizer saw the colonized as lacking good judgment and thus needed protection and paternal imperialism since they were unable to govern themselves and rule their own affairs:

In colonial context, we find essentialism in the reduction of the indigenous people to an "essential" idea of what it means to be "native"—say, Africans as singing–dancing–fighting, Chinese as duplicitous, Arabs as cruel and oppressors of women, Tibetans as religious, and so on. Imperialism drew its strength from representations of natives as quintessentially lazy, ignorant, deceitful, passive, incapable of self-governing, and the native rulers as corrupt and despotic (Dibyesh Anand, 2007:25-6).

This essentializing is also found in *A Winter in Algeria* through the different stereotypes that appear again and again. The Arabs are described as being lazy, untrustworthy, and treacherous:

[One of our acquaintances] told us that the Arabs were a most idle, lazy race; and that they had tried again and again to employ them on the public works in vain. They work admirably for a day or two; then go off, and never turn up till money and food become absolute necessities. [They are also] a most litigious people, [and I have often heard that] it is impossible to form an idea of the tenacity with which they spin out a lawsuit, or of the means they employ for defeating an adversary. They shrink from neither fraud nor falsehood (1865:22).”

The author of *A Winter in Algeria* was not the only one to hold such generalisations. The French themselves helped to perpetuate these views. In her process of colonising and appropriating the country France needed to create an enemy and thus the Arabs became demonised as the bad “Other”. The notion of the other according to Edward Said was a core concept in the relation and attitudes of the West towards the East or “Orient”. A huge propaganda machine was thus put into place in order to justify French intervention by the fact that these populations needed paternal protection and guardianship. In order to achieve this, many writers, intellectuals and historians engaged in efforts to prove that the Arabs were inherently bad and had a propensity towards despotism, intolerance, vanity, treachery, hypocrisy and every other conceivable defect. The following passage summarises in short French attitude towards the Arabs and Mrs. Rogers endorses it heartily

On se plaît à vanter la noblesse de l’Arabe; des poètes l’ont chantée en vers dithyrambiques. Pourtant elle n’est trop souvent qu’une façade ; elle réside surtout dans le geste lent et grave, dans le port de tête orgueilleux, dans l’ordonnance sculpturale des plis du long burnous; apparences flatteuses mais décevantes... Sans colère, il tend le cou au joug que lui impose la force et volontiers devient le flatteur servile du pouvoir auquel sournoisement il garde toute sa rancune. Il est souple, ondoyant, fourbe ; tour à tour, au gré des circonstances, obséquieux et hautain, « il mange avec le chacal, dit un proverbe kabyle, et pleure avec le berger ». Âme vénale, il cherche à corrompre quiconque au pouvoir; à l’affût des défaillances de ses maîtres, il n’hésite jamais à acheter une conscience qui chancelle, et trafique toujours lui-même de son autorité si peu qu’on lui ait conféré.(Maurice Barrés, 1925 :14).

Most revealingly though, Mrs. Rogers speaks highly of another indigenous group: the Kabyles and in that also she did not really depart from the French discourse. In a fascinating book, *Imperial Identities: Stereotyping, Prejudice and Race in Colonial Algeria*, Patricia Lorcin underscores French racial policies in the 19th century Algeria. She centres her thesis on the French colonial images of “good” Kabyle and “bad” Arab (usually referred to as the Kabyle Myth “le myth Kabyle”) and examines the circumstances out of which they arose. She convincingly argues that the division of the indigenous population into a “good” Kabyles and “bad” Arabs was nothing random or innocent but was rather an instrument of French colonial politics to “*divide and rule*”. This policy deliberately favoured the Kabyles over the Arabs. It resorted to sociological and religious disparities between the two groups to say that the Kabyles were inherently superior to the Arabs and suggesting by this that the former were more prone to assimilate the French culture and accept Christianity.(1995:2). In fact, the religious difference between the Arab and the Kabyle were emphasized and given a significance which lead to the conclusion that the Kabyle was inherently indifferent and less profoundly religious than the Arab and hence had a propensity to conversion to Christianity (Ibid: 3). The supposed intrinsic secularism of the Kabyle was also stressed.

The French were fascinated with the Kabyles and their form of “democracy” which was symbolized by their traditional council of *tadmaat* which reminded them of early forms of western democracy in Greece. Their egalitarian society, respect for women and virtual absence of polygamy was,

according to the French, an antithesis of traditional Arab society with its hierarchical social structures and its secluded and muffled women. They were also fascinated with what they seem as a contrast between Arab laziness and shying away from any physical activity with Kabyle love of work and Mrs Rogers endorsed this position when she declares:

The Kabyle is the soul of honour and integrity, and prides himself on his loyalty and hospitality, and on the sacredness of his word...He is quick and intelligent though illiterate ...Their moral character certainly places them in the foremost rank amongst the natives of Algeria. In strong contradistinction to the Arabs, they are fond of labour and despise idleness. A nomadic life is consequently unsuited to their taste. (1865:41-5).

Interestingly though, this racial myth had never benefited the Kabyles and was never concretised on the ground because, contrary to the Jews who profited from the “Loi Cremieux” of October 1870 which gave them the French citizenship, France had never passed pro-Kabyle legislation. Nevertheless this policy had some advantages in that contrary to many other regions of Algeria, modern education, whose hidden aim was to introduce Kabyles to Christianity, was introduced to the Kabylie.

Women’s Conditions and Polygamy

Two significant issues have dominated French colonial discourse when they dealt with indigenous family life: women’s status inside the family and society, and the convoluted issue of polygamy. These two issues, according to Patricia M.E Lorcin (1994:90) were used as indicators to compare between both the Arab and Kabyle societies with the French one from one side, and between the Kabyle and Arab societies from the other side. Conclusions that were drawn were not encouraging, for neither group, for both were far from the French ideal, though the French considered the Kabyles to be nearer to this ideal than the Arabs.

Mrs. Rogers takes a keen interest in the Moorish women confined behind the walls of their family dwellings and their thick veils which she sees as a pictogram of the enslavement and injustice these women were subjected to. These “*poor veiled creatures-veiled alike in mind and body- bound in shackles which none but their own sex can loose* (1865:58). This state of bondage could not even be compared to that of the black American slaves:

Few positions in life, not even excepting American slavery, can be so utterly wretched as that of the very poor Arab woman. Among the richer Moslems the degradation of the women is mental and moral. Superadded to this, amongst the poorer classes the husband lays upon the shoulders of his wife, every conceivable burden (Ibid: 59).

Arab Women’s perpetual oppression is according to her caused by Islam. This cliché rests on a deep suspicion from her part of other religions (even Catholicism which she refers to as the popish religion), and this because of her strict evangelical upbringing that is manifest in the book, but also the prevailing views that saw Islam as the enemy and the anti-thesis of everything the west stood for. The explicit association of Islam to the oppression of women is characteristic of 19th century travel writers and intellectuals “*whose critiques of native women centred primarily on Islam as a religion and culture* (Marnia Lazreg, 1999:13).” A vast corpus of knowledge was developed in the 19th century about Islam which has always been targeted by orientalists for its supposed role in maintaining women in an inferior status and for the patriarchy that characterized most Muslim societies. For Algerian sociologist Marnia Lazreg, “The orientalist tradition supports the notion that Islam is an archaic and backward system of beliefs that determines the behaviour of the peoples who adhere to it (Ibid).” Islam was viewed as a backward and repressive religion which kept the “poor” Muslim women behind closed doors and in complete seclusion and reduced them to mere sexual objects and harem slaves.

Like most of her contemporaries Rogers declares the western, or rather Christian, women's achievements and place in society to be the sole and universal ideal and model for women without considering the local context or the historical development of each nation and she seems to forget that Victorian women's rights were also thwarted and muffled. And if we exclude the issue of polygamy and the veil, it is clear that Muslim and Victorian women were both victims of prejudiced and misogynist societies, nonetheless Rogers seems to be fixated on these two issues and, which though important, were not in any way an indication that "Christian" women's status was not in any way better than their "Muslim" counterparts.

In her book *Colonial Fantasies: Towards a Feminist Reading of Orientalism* Meyda Yeğenoğlu writes that the question of the veil has always been associated in the West with the oppression of women and was considered as an impediment for any real progress of these nations. She further asserts:

The veil is taken as the sign of the inherently oppressive and unfree nature of the entire tradition of Islam and oriental cultures and by extension it is used as a proof of oppression of women of these societies. When the necessity to modernize these cultures was taken for granted, there was no hesitation in morally condemning the practice of veiling, for it was regarded as an impediment to modernization (1998 :100).

The Kabyle woman on the other hand was lauded and hailed for her independence and the status she held in Kabyle society. The French saw her as a symbol of the free woman in opposition to stereotypical "secluded" and oppressed Arab woman who was forced to nominal servitude by her deeply religious society behind the veil. The heroic role of Lalla Fatma N'soumer in the 1857 revolt against the French troops clearly impressed the French. And Contrary to other Algerian women, Kabyle women were free from the practice of polygamy or the traditional Algerian veil the "Hayek". Mrs. Rogers also join this chorus, "the Kabyle not unfrequently contents himself with only one wife, to whom he is faithful and attached, and who, therefore, is considerably removed above the level of the Arab woman (1865:41)."

In his book *The Persistence of Patriarchy: Class, Gender, and Ideology in Twentieth Century* (1987), Peter R. Knauss offers an original enlightenment on why the Algerian women dwellers of the cities put the veil whereas the Kabyle woman, for instance, didn't cover their faces. Instead of the then widespread analysis relating this trend to the fact that the Kabyles were less Islamized and consequently more secularized than the Arabs, he argues that the French presence was more noticeable in cities like Algiers, Blida for instance than in isolated regions like Kabylie. Consequently there was a general apprehension of the French civilization and culture and there was a widespread feeling that they posed a threat to the local culture and traditions. Since women were considered as the guardians of traditions and family life it was normal back then that their society would attempt to protect them from any undesired corruption.

French colonial authorities recognized the weight western education had in their relentless efforts to achieve the aims of their civilizing mission or "la mission civilisatrice". French intellectuals believed in the virtues of assimilation, but any political, economic and judicial assimilation should be preceded by the spread of the European culture. As a result, the colonization of Algeria involved not only the pacification of the local population but also efforts to introduce them to the new culture and civilisation. Colonial authorities realised quickly that their efforts aimed at bringing the Algerians closer to European culture and assimilating them would be worthless if women remained unmolested by these efforts. This is what Frenchwoman Véronique Eugénie Allix-Luce, or Madame Luce as she was commonly known, realized when she came to Algeria in 1832.

The spirit of "la mission civilisatrice" is ubiquitous in Rogers' discourse. She salutes every move that could bring the natives closer to European civilization and way of life. Rogers also lingers on the remarkable story of Véronique Eugénie Allix-Luce and her school for Muslim girls founded in Algiers in

1845. She, along with many other Englishwomen like Barbara Bodichon and Bessie Rayner Parkes, championed the cause of this French schoolteacher and considered her as a heroine who was trying to bring light and civilization to Arab dwellings through women. For Mme Luce, any lasting influence of French civilization and culture was doomed to failure unless the French worked for the reduction of differences between the conquered race and the conquering race and women were the key to reducing these differences and to uniting the races:

I was intimately convinced that our efforts to effect the fusion of civilisations would come to naught, as long we were unable to have our morals, our habits and our beliefs penetrate within families. How else to achieve this goal but through the education of women, the touchstone of the family, women who were destined as daughters, wives and mothers to either inspire love or hatred of the French? (Rebecca Rogers, 2009: 41).

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