Title: Reading the 'anti- conquest': A Critique of Orientalist and Exoticist Representations

in Lucie Duff Gordon's *Letters From Egypt*

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Short Bio: Dr. Sherine Fouad Mazloum is an Associate Professor of English Literature at the Faculty of Arts, Ain Shams University. Her PhD entitled *A Double Vision: A Study of Disraeli's Trilogy* (20020 tackles Benjamin Disraeli's trilogy from a postcolonial perspective while her MA entitled *A Feminist Critique of Virginia Woolf* (1996) engages with Woolf's fictional and non-fictional works from a feminist perspective. Her research interests include areas of gender and postcolonial studies as well as British literature. She has published a number of publications tackling topics such as metonymy in Narayan's fiction, cross genre study of identity formation in Elizabeth Bishop, Egyptian women novelists writing the revolution, displacement in British immigrant fiction, among others.

Abstract

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This paper aims to analyze Lucie Duff Gordon's *Letters from Egypt* in light of Mary Louise Pratt's coined term "anti-conquest" which refers to "the strategies of representation whereby the European subject secures his innocence while maintaining western hegemony" (7). Taking Pratt's term as a point of departure, the paper exposes the complexity of the representations of Egyptians in Gordon's letters which simultaneously perpetuate English moral supremacy while acknowledging Egyptian diversity. These representations have contributed to constructing a specific image of Gordon as the Victorian traveler who could authentically represent "real" Egyptians. In this sense, the constructed image of Egypt is produced by the traveler's gaze; however, this gaze is also a reflective gaze that reflects distorted images of the self. Gordon's representations oscillate between reinscribing imperial hierarchical power relations while simultaneously humanizing the Egyptian Other. The paper draws on Victor Segalen's concept of the exot to further explore Gordon's representations which

emphasize Egyptians' diversity. Hence, the study aims to engage with recent interest in women travel writing filling a gap in studies on Lucie Duff Gordon's Egypt which tends to highlight one aspect only pertaining to her humane perspective of Egyptians.

Key Words: Victorian women travel writing, representations of Egyptians, Lady Duff Gordon, exoticism, Pratt's anti-conquest, Segalen's exot.

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Recent interest in travel studies has focused on its role in supporting Orientalist discourse emphasizing how it played a central role in the European colonial project by creating what Said and others call colonial imaginaries whereby perceptions of the non-western world are constituted to support and provide specific productions of knowledge and specific courses of action. Justin D. Edwards and Rune Graulund in their introduction to *Postcolonial Travel Writing* (2011) describes the genre as “demonized” for it continues to support colonial discourse rather than dismantle it. Similarly, Syed Manzurul Islam’s book *The Ethics of Travel: From Marco Polo to Kafka* (1996) is but one of many examples that condemn the genre for furthering the Orientalist project and for supporting false distinctions between the traveler and the travelee. Following Said, Islam confirms that colonialism relies on perceived cultural boundaries which are maintained in travel writings from the thirteenth century onwards. In this sense, the genre is associated with unethical orientations. However, the genre also allows for critique that disrupts the binaries which subjects the travelee to the traveler’s knowing gaze. Similarly, studies focusing on women travelers though

differentiated women travelogues from those of men continue to highlight their role in colonial discourse. Carl Thompson's (2011) assertion that the genre contributes to "racist beliefs and ideologies that were so common in the high imperial period, for example its role in promoting racial and cultural supremacism" (5) reflects this argument. Lisa Bernasek (2002) points out that women's travel accounts played a significant role in documenting and understanding the Orient especially the harem which was a closed area for male travelers (51). Despite repeated assertions that travel writing as an imperial medium appears most vigorously during the Victorian Age (See Said, 1979 and Blunt 1994), women travelogues, in general, show complex engagements with this imperial discourse. Bernasek notes that women's relationships with empire are complex since they are "shaped by conflicting identities and allegiances" (51). Hence, studies dealing with women travel writings in particular tends to show how these women performed different roles in representing their experience with the Orient sometimes perpetuating stereotypes and at other times deconstructing these stereotypes. It is what Indira Ghose (1998) describes as being "colonized by gender, colonizers by race" (5) which makes women travel accounts complex representations of both the self and the other.

This paper analyzes Lucie Duff Gordon's *Letters from Egypt* which cover the period from 1862 - 69 critiquing the strategies of representations in Gordon's travel account to expose the complexity of its orientalist and exoticist undertakings. The paper draws on Mary Louise Pratt's coined term "anti-conquest," by which she refers "to the strategies of representation whereby European bourgeois subjects seek to secure their innocence in the same moment

as they assert European hegemony" (7). It claims that Gordon is an example of this subject whose perception of the other though appears sympathetic reinforce British supremacy. The compiled volume referred to in this paper is the revised edition published by McClure, Philips and Co in New York and R. Brimley Johnson in London in 1902. This volume includes *Letters from Egypt* and *Last Letters from Egypt* which were originally published separately. This compiled volume will be referred to henceforth as Egyptian letters or letters. This edition also includes a memoir by her daughter Janet Ross and an introduction by George Meredith.

In this sense, this study engages with recent interest in women's travel writing and its complex relation with colonial and orientalist discourses. James Duncan and Derek Gregory (1999) describe imperial writings by women as discerning "both a complexity of imagination and situational specificity in the nature of travel accounts" (9). It is the argument of this paper that Gordon's account of Egypt reveals such complex specificity that subtly represents the colonial paradigm of superior self versus inferior other while maintaining 'innocent' representations of Egyptians. Alison Blunt (1999) emphasizes "the ambivalent imperial representations" in British women travel writings which constructed the domestic and imperial subjectivities of these women (94). Blunt stresses that these women reflected everyday domestic life without reference to imperial terms, yet they were created back home as heroic (93-104). Although Blunt's article focuses on British women diaries on the Indian Mutiny, it draws attention on how these domestic accounts have been used by the English media to reinforce

the ideology of Englishness. Therefore, the study investigates the issue of publication which affected the reception and perception of Gordon and of her Egyptians. Lucie Duff Gordon's *Letters from Egypt* cannot be simply read as perpetuating or deconstructing orientalist stereotyping of Egyptians. Lady Duff Gordon (1821 - 69), the Victorian middle class white woman, is repeatedly represented as a traveler who settled in Egypt and wrote about the 'real' Egyptians. Anthony Sattin's description of Lucie Duff Gordon saying "She was now as tied to the country by her love of the Arab ways as by the health which Egypt's climate restored to her, and she came as close as anyone to lifting the veil between the English and Egyptians" (90) is indicative of how her travel accounts construct an image about herself and Egypt which reinforces British superiority while simultaneously forging rapport with Egyptians. Shirley Foster (2004) signals Gordon's difference from other travelers describing her as "one of the most genuinely open of mid-nineteenth-century travelers to Egypt" (16). Hence, this paper explores the construction of Gordon as the tolerant benefactor and the white English defender of the people in light of the orientalist and exoticist implications of the genre. The paper highlights how Gordon's Egyptian letters represent the British civilizing mission and reinforce projecting the English as the saviors of the oppressed Egyptians while remaining the innocent anti-conquest subject following Pratt's term.

Mary Louise Pratt's *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (2003) and David Spurr's *The Rhetoric of Empire: Colonial Desire in Journalism, Travel Writing and Imperial Administration* (1993) point out the need to read travel writing in light of power relations between east

and west. Hence, analysis and critique of Duff Gordon's travel accounts of Egypt requires engagement with women travel writing genre, as well as orientalist and exoticist discourses in order to reveal the power structures inherent in the letters. The structure of the paper is divided into four basic sections. The first explores the construction of Lady Duff Gordon and how it influences her representation as a Victorian woman traveler. The second relates Gordon's letters to the studies on women travelers, especially Victorian women travel writing. The third focuses on analyzing the letters revealing the complex representations of self and other. The fourth relates Gordon's sympathetic attitude towards Egyptians to Victor Segalen's exot.

The Construction of Duff Gordon:

Thompson in *Travel Writing* points out that the reading public's appetite for travel writing has prompted publishers to reissue old out-of-print travel books (1). These republications signal a demand to satisfy the fantasies of a reading public who wants to think that there are still far-away places that cannot be reached. That is why, Thompson calls for scholarly work that critiques rather than celebrates the genre arguing that such works reaffirm cultural difference without neither celebration nor condemnation (5). Thompson argues that a travel account has a two-fold aspect: it is "a report on the wider world, an account of an unfamiliar people or place. Yet it is also revelatory to a greater or lesser degree of the traveler who produced that report, and of his or her values, preoccupations and assumptions. And by extension, it also reveals something of the culture from which that writer emerged, and/or the culture for which their text is intended" (10). Gordon's

Letters from Egypt is both a report on an unfamiliar place and people as well as a reflection of her English audience's culture and preoccupations. It should also be viewed not as "benign products of travelers holiday", but as "a way to document Egypt, to describe and explain it so that the country could be known and thus more easily ruled" (Bernasek 50).A quick survey of the issue of publication of the letters highlights the construction of a specific image of Gordon that would appeal to her reading public and consolidate British civilizing mission.

The first volume of *Letters from Egypt* was published by Messrs, Macmillan and Co in May 1865 with a preface by Mrs. Austin, Gordon's mum, who omitted the parts that would have made her daughter's life "uncomfortable" (Ross 17). The collection of letters went through three editions before the end of 1865. Later in 1875, her *Last Letters from Egypt* together with a reprint of her *Letters from the Cape* were published in a volume by Messrs. Macmillan and Co followed by a second edition in 1876. A 1902 revised edition of all her Egyptian letters was republished edited by Janet Ross, Gordon's daughter, and introduced by George Meredith. The letters were also republished in 1969 by Routledge and Kegan Paul and categorized as "Travelers and Explorers" writings. The process of republication entailed that the letters appear in an appropriate style which signals a conscious effort invested in their editing to satisfy the expectations of the English reading public at that time. Bassnett points out how Victorian travelers in general - Isabella Bird and Lady Mary Wortley Montagu in particular- were conscious of public opinion and anxious about their credibility and dismissive voices (229). This shows that the issue of reception and publication preoccupied and

constrained Victorian women travelers. Hence, the argument that Gordon's letters should not be read as simply personal correspondences of an old sick English woman who managed to live in upper Egypt for health reasons and came to be called 'el-Sitt' or the lady as a sign of her popularity among her Egyptian neighbors and acquaintances. The amount of editing practiced by her mother, Mrs. Austin and later by her daughter, Mrs. Janet Ross, in the process of publishing the letters confirms that it was a consciously contrived task. Reports of deleting parts that were offensive or too family related are included in her daughter's introductory memoir (17). Many editing decisions performed by Mrs Austin during Gordon's life time support this paper's claim. Besides, Gordon herself was aware of the restrictions entailed. Her last letters reveal her regret not to have written all what she knew for fear of being dismissed by her contemporaries. She writes to her husband "Now that I am too ill to write I feel sorry that I did not persist and write on the beliefs of Egypt in spite of your fear that the learned would cut me up, for I honestly believe that knowledge will die with me which few others possess. You must recollect that the learned know books, and I know men, and what is still more difficult, women" (380). In fact, Gordon sets herself as the English lady who has access to the real Egyptians and this becomes her landmark. Commenting on Harriet Martineau's book given to her by Mr. Arrowsmith, she points out a usual defect in European accounts of Egypt, "It is true as far as it goes, but there is the usual defect—the people are not real people, only part of the scenery to her, as to most Europeans" (108). Gordon seizes this opportunity to further emphasize her status as one of the Arabs; "an ancient

Arab Emereeh [princess]" (161). Hence, the argument that a specific image of Gordon was contrived and propagated to both her contemporaries and to later readers re-inscribing British imperial power structures.

Rosemary T. Vanarsdel (2000) in her review of women publications in the mid Victorian period argues that a growing demand for women writings whether in prose or verse marked this era. Alexander Macmillan, the founder of *Macmillan's Magazine*, acknowledges on 1st November 1859 "…room for the ladies is clearly the cry of the day" (*Life and Letters of Alexander Macmillan* 122 qtd in Vanarsdel 375). This review highlights two basic points of special interest to the current study. First, how Duff Gordon's travel accounts were received in Britain. According to the review, Mrs. Caroline Norton (1808-77) wrote "a memorial essay" entitled "Lady Duff Gordon and Her Works" (Sept. 1869) "where the letters were described as bringing the color, romance and intrigue of foreign lands to the readers of Macmillan's Magazine [while] at the same time [showing] human pathos of the keenest kind" (Vanarsdel 388). Two extracts from Gordon's letters appeared in Macmillan's Magazine followed by five other extracts. This process of publication secured a wider range of readers for the letters. Besides, the revenues from these publications saved Duff Gordon and her family from financial problems. The review describes these publications as attracting many tourists to Egypt stressing how "their unique and exotic qualities captured the public fancy" (Vanarsdel 389). The second important point is the stress on how unique and "challenging" Duff Gordon's accounts were which contributed to the construction of a specific image of Gordon as different from other travelers due to her

sympathetic rapport with Egyptians. Vanarsdel's review notes "that she was more than just an idle European seeking health and writing about trivial native customs; she was truly an advocate for justice for the Egyptian people, to the extent that her failing strength would allow" (390). The same image of Gordon is perpetuated in George Meredith "Introduction" to the 1902 revised edition where Gordon is described as "the baked land proof that a Christian Englishwoman could be companionable, tender, beneficently motherly with them [Egyptians] , despite the reputed insurmountable barriers of alien race and religion" (xii). Meredith highlighting Gordon's position stresses that she "brings the Arab and Copt home to us as none other has done" (xii).

Gordon's reputation as the sympathetic English lady continued to resonate in later accounts. Amelia Edwards in 1877 commented "no one remembers Champollion, or Rosellini, or Sir Wilkinson; but every Arab in Luxor cherishes the memory of Lady Duff Gordon in his heart of hearts and speaks of her with blessings" (455). Moreover, Gordon's reputation as more sympathetic than her contemporaries continued to be reproduced by both her publications and publications on her. Gordon's most quoted criticism of Harriet Martineau's book secured her the reputation of deep humanity and affection for the people. Her condemnation of Martineau's limited knowledge consolidates her position as close to the local population. She explains to her mother that Ms. Martineau "had the feeling of most English people here, that the difference of manners is a sort of impassable gulf, the truth being that their feelings and passions are just like our own" (111-12). The description under her portrait in the National Gallery further emphasizes

how her letters home "[reveal] the close relationships she established in Egypt (unlike the majority of Western travellers of her day)" inscribing her unique status as close to the 'Other'. (http://www.npg.org.uk/collections/search/person/mp05262/lucie-lady-duff- gordon?search=sas&sText=duff+gordon)

In 2010, Gordon continues to be represented as the white humane woman; "an attribute of natural nobility" (Ramsay 229). Sir Allan Ramsay, the British ambassador to several North African Countries, attributes Gordon's difference from other travel writers to her lack of the obsessive gaze. Ramsay continues to support her image as the English traveler who saw Egyptians differently warning his readers that Luxor was far removed from the corrupting influences of colonization and modernization which explains how Gordon enjoyed living in a tolerant mixed community away from the growing fanaticism and nationalism of the rest of Egypt. Similarly, Janet Ann Duff-Gordon Ross, her daughter continued to draw on her mother's image as the tolerant white woman who refused to see the barbaric nature of non- Europeans and who dealt with them as individuals avoiding other Europeans' prejudices. Ross's complied work *Three Generations of English Women: Memoirs and Correspondence of Mrs. John Taylor, Mrs. Sarah Austin, and Lady Duff Gordon* published by J. Murray in 1888 emphasizes the ever growing audience for female travelers' accounts. It further attests to the link between the rise of feminism in late nineteenth century and the tendency to construct these accounts and their respective writers as pioneers. Thus, writings on Duff Gordon and by her helped develop her image as the moderate kind-hearted Christian English woman who settled in Egypt close to the people and

who defended them from oppression. Her constructed image was part of the construction of Victorian women as pioneers who explore the unfamiliar and conquer the unknown under the protection of the British Empire. Hence, she was constructed as part of the dominant Victorian imperialist and feminist cultural context.

The continuation of Lady Duff Gordon's appeal is marked by contemporary writers rediscovering her. Katherine Frank's biography *Lucie Duff Gordon: A Passage to Egypt* (1994) reinvent Gordon's experience of Egypt and weave it with Frank's own experience of contemporary Egypt. This revived interest also resulted in the publication of Kate Pullinger's novel *The Mistress of Nothing* (2009) which tells the untold story of Sally, Gordon's maid and which is inspired by Frank's book. These publications mark the continuation of interest in Gordon. They build on Gordon's image and exploit the readers' appetite for such old unfamiliar stories. The way Gordon is currently referred to on Amazon website that sells Frank's book is quite revealing.

Frank's book/biography is introduced on Amazon.com in words that consolidate the image of Gordon as "a world apart from her Victorian counterparts. An intellectual, traveller, writer and progressive social commentator, she and her husband led a bohemian, eccentric and highly unconventional life in London, socialising with such luminaries as Tennyson, Dickens and Thackeray". The Amazon summary emphasizes Gordon's travel accounts as a sign of her rebellion against the restrictions imposed on Victorian women. Hence, Frank successfully "relates the dramatic transformation that [Gordon] underwent as she

discarded the restrictions of Victorian England, shunned the English community in Cairo and immersed herself in the Egyptian way of life – 'the real, true Arabian nights'". This description appears to be in accordance with critical views on Victorian women travelers which emphasize the feminist dimension in their accounts. Sara Mills points out how feminists see women travelers as precursors or "proto-feminists" whose texts can be read to provide strong role models (21). Similarly, Bassnett points out that Victorian women travelers were presented as exceptional figures whose achievements though beyond the reach of ordinary women were celebrated (229). She further stresses how travel allowed these women to redefine themselves assuming a different persona from the ones they had at home (Bassnett 234). Hence, Amazon makes use of this context to attract readers to Frank's book. Gordon's final description as the traveler who "led an exceptional, luminous life, never afraid to step outside the boundaries of convention and explore the unknown" echoes orientalist and exoticist tenants that continue to attract readers to the genre even in the twenty-first century (http://www.amazon.com/Lucie-Duff-Gordon-Passage-Paperback/dp/1845113314). Moreover, this emphasis on light is associated with the British civilizing mission bringing the light of civilization to the under-privileged non- westerners. It further links to Gordon's nickname given to her by her beloved Egyptians "Noor ala Noor" [or light upon light] which also draws on her role as the English bearer of enlightenment to the native other. Hence, Gordon's image consolidated the notion of the benevolent kind-hearted Christian English woman and the source of light and care.

Another important construction of Gordon is her "doctress" self. As explained by Narin Hassan in her book *Diagnosing Empire: Women, Medical Knowledge, and Colonial Mobility* (2011), Gordon created this title to emphasize her success in curing people. Hassan adds how these female travelers used their medical knowledge to exercise authority over native women. Hassan argues that doctoring empowered British women travelers and facilitated achieving freedom and authority. In a sense, Gordon's letters supported the ideology of the empire. Bassnett's conclusion in her chapter entitled "Constructing Cultures: The Politics of Travel Tales" that travelers construct what they experience based on stereotypes that exist in their own cultures is particularly applicable on Gordon's case (p. 93). Bassnett affirms that these women were familiar with racial travel accounts such as Shelley's and Byron's and examination of travel accounts show how "prejudices, stereotypes and negative perceptions of other cultures can be handed down through generations" (94). Hence, Gordon did nothing but "constantly position [herself] in relation to [her] point of origin in a culture and the context [she is] describing" (Bassnett 99). Nevertheless, since studies on women travel writing assert that women's travelogues must be read as different from men, further consideration of the letters in light of these views is essential.

Gordon and Women Travel Writing:

The position of women travelers vis-à-vis colonialism shows that women are within and without the colonial context; both an observer and an observant. Sara Mills'

Discourses of Difference (2003) takes as its main theme how women travelers write differently from men. In fact, many women travel writing studies stress the unique experiences of women travelers as opposed to that of men. Thompson's insistence that women travelers "could claim an authority unavailable to men" (186) because they could access the harem and other forbidden private spaces supports this claim. Thompson continues to argue that a woman traveler writer "contravenes the patriarchal ideology of separate spheres twice": once by travelling and another by writing and publishing (180). At the same time, Bassnett concludes "Women travelers are therefore categorized as doubly different: they differ from other, more orthodox, socially conformist women, and from male travelers who use the journey as a means of discovering more about their own masculinity" (226). Similarly, Cheryl McEwan in her *Geography and Empire: Victorian Women Travelers in East Africa* (2002) discusses the diversity of women travelers arguing that their writings was positioned between "the dominant culture and the wild zone" highlighting that "there were differences between women in how they occupied these margins, which in turn produced significant variations in their texts" (9). The different experiences of women travelogues are attributed to their ability to 'see' differently and hence to engage in a reciprocal experience of familiarity and alterity. In this sense, the gaze would see otherness but would find the distorted images in the mirror disturbing since these women recognized oppression. Reina Lewis in *Gendering Orientalism* (1996) argues that women's gendered access to imperial discourse produced a less monolithic and less reductive gaze on the Oriental Other than Said's formulation in *Orientalism* (qtd in Foster 7). Similarly,

Foster further argues that women travelers, although subjected to the same sources that exoticised the east, their gendered selfhood affected the way they experienced the other (7). In fact, Rana Kabbani (2008) points out the reflective gaze, "as in a convex mirror" which "reflect[s] the Occident that had produced it" (138) and this reflective gaze become more evident in women's writings. Pratt echoes the same argument when she notes how the imperial metropolis is determined by the peripheries even if it chooses to remain blind to this fact (6). This emphasis on the reciprocity of the gaze is apparent in women travelogues. According to Mills, women travel accounts show "more interaction with members of other nations" where the people encountered are not only seen as "representatives of the race, as in male authored accounts, but … [as] individuals" (99).

One important aspect of women travelogues is their diversity which resists categorization according to Bassnett (239). Moreover, many studies including Sara Mills stress that the work of women travel writers "cannot be fitted neatly within the Orientalist framework … their work exhibits contradictory elements which may act as a critique of some of the components of other colonial writings"(63). Mills reminds her readers that it is important to consider the texts within the discursive frameworks that produced them. Therefore, she supports the notion that the production and reception of texts is a product of discursive frameworks. However, "each discursive position is undermined or called into question by other elements within the text, and while some elements may be dominant, there are sections of the text, which temper a straightforward position being offered" (87). Mills is in favor of assuming that women writers will

protect the native and will be more inclined to go native because of their femininity. Indeed, Mills claim helps better understand Gordon's position. A thorough analysis of Gordon's Egyptian Letters exposes the reflective as well as the reductive gaze simultaneously at work. In this sense, analysis of Gordon's *Letters from Egypt* engages with the complex renderings of a sympathetic supporter of natives tempered by the ethnographer assertion of British superiority. The much debated link between travel writing and ethnography is useful in unmasking the contradictions in Gordon's representations. Holland and Huggan contend that travel writing "frequently provides an effective alibi for the perpetuation or reinstallment of ethnocentrically superior attitudes to other cultures, peoples and places. This thesis is complicated, though, by the defamiliarizing capacities of travel writing" (qtd in Youngs 12). Analysis of these two conflicting tendencies in Gordon's letters also involves engagement with the reflective gaze. Gordon's mirror reveals the 'real' Egypt, criticizes European's false assumptions about Egyptians, and reflects the superiority of the British. As a result, Gordon's traveler's gaze oscillates among her claims to 'true' knowledge of the East, affirmation of British superiority, criticism of European values and self- negotiation.

Representations of Self and Other:

Gordon's first letter constructs her position as "not like other Ingeleez" establishing her role as the possessor of true knowledge of this unfamiliar land and people. Gordon uses her knowledge of the East to render it comprehensible to her English readers. The letters includes many references to Gordon's knowledgeable self. One example is correcting the controversy about 'Samoom' or 'Simoom'- the name of

the strong wind. She explains to her mother that she got the wrong use of the name from an article about Palgrave's book and adds "it is proper to write it 'Samoom," not, as some do "Simoom," which is the plural of sim (poison)" (266). The letters reveal that there are forms of knowledge allowed to Gordon only because of her traveler/pseudo settler status. Gordon asserts "one must come to the East to understand absolute equality". She explains "As there is no education and no reason why the donkey-boy who runs behind me may not become a great man, and as all Muslims are ipso facto equal; money and ranks are looked on as mere accidents, and my savoir vivre was highly thought of because I sat down with Fellaheen [Farmers] and treated everyone as they treat each other" (59). In this account, Gordon is expressing how her position as one of the people has allowed her unique insight which helps to appropriate the Egyptians. In another instance, Gordon explains her privileged position as a woman in the East. She writes of Omar's scheme that will give her access no other European could claim saying, "Omar devised a glorious scheme, if I were only well and strong, of putting me in a takterrawan and taking me to Mecca in the character of his mother, supposed to be a Turk. To a European man, of course, it would be impossible, but an enterprising woman might do it easily with a Muslim confederate" (54). This enterprising model of a white woman must have appealed to the reading public. Gordon's evaluative tone echoes David Spurr's contention "to look at and speak to not only implies a position of authority; it also constitutes the commanding act itself" (14). Gordon's "privileged point of view over what is surveyed" resonates throughout the letters (Spurr 14).

Sections in the letters where European values and racial stereotyping are criticized reveal Gordon's gained familiarity with Egypt which is inaccessible to other Europeans and establish her as the humane English lady. The issue of religious tolerance is one of the key themes that problematize the reflective gaze. One interesting example to reflect on is criticizing a Scottish man religious intolerance to Eastern Christians, Gordon writes

> A curious instance of the affinity of the British mind for prejudice is the way in which every English man I have seen scorns the Eastern Christians, and droll enough that sinners like Kinglake and I should be the only people to feel the tie of the ' common faith'….A very pious Scotch gentleman wondered that I could think of entering a Copt's house, adding that they were the publicans (tax-gatherers) of this country, which is partly true. I felt inclined to mention that better company than he or I had dined with publicans, and even sinners (50).

In this section, Gordon's mirror criticizes European's intolerance which is contrasted to her tolerance. Later, there are other instances where she complains that Coptic Good Friday was "so queer [with] the bobbing of the Copts" (283). Despite examples where she speaks respectfully of Eastern Christians, Copts as well as Muslims, one cannot argue that this stemmed from identification with the people but rather from her liberal inclinations and her Unitarian beliefs. On the on hand, Gordon is the open minded lady who when referred to as a Nazarene by the locals is not offended like other Europeans who regarded this as an insult. On the other hand, there are instances where she reveals the pretentiousness of claims of religious tolerance. The story of

Mabrook, the young slave boy who refuses to return to the Nazarene Palgrave preferring to stay with her until he realizes that she too is Nazarene is one significant example. Mabrook falls into a fit of slapping his face in denial while Gordon tries to manage his shock by kindness further reveal that the whole issue of eastern religious tolerance is a pretense (324). Another incident which emphasizes that Egyptians seem only to be religiously tolerant is Zeynab's story. Zeynab, the young slave, refuses to eat or drink Gordon's food because she is a Christian even though Omar eats it which shows that "to instill the bad part of religion" is much easier than to spread the good (82). Moreover, Gordon makes many positive references to Islam but some of the stories reveal hidden fanaticism. The following quote reveals the complexity of Gordon's style. She writes to her mother in March 1867, after five years of settling in Egypt saying "Yussuf wants me to write a short account of the faith from his dictation. Would anyone publish it? It annoys him terribly to hear the Muslims constantly accused of intolerance, and he is right—it is not true" (338). Her defense of Islam is tempered by the rest of her commentary which represent her condescending attitude. She adds "They [Muslims] show their conviction that their faith is the best in the world with the same sort of naiveté that I have seen in very innocent and ignorant English women" (338). The complexity of Gordon's representations is evident especially since she uses the traits of naivety and ignorance echoing familiar stigmatization of the inferior native. Discussing religious tolerance shows the reflective gaze detecting fanaticism and intolerance in both self and other.

In fact, the religious references are better evaluated when linked to Gordon the ethnographer. Bassnett explains that among the diversity of women travel writings "patterns can be traced" especially "the epistolary travel account, which tends to be more frequently produced by women", still "lines become blurred between the autobiographical, the anecdotal and the ethnographic" (239). Gordon subjects all religious sects to her ethnographic endeavor. Her remarks on the Copts reveal true ethnography. She remarks how Copts take one wife but keep her locked up more than Arabs do (30). Elsewhere, she explains the differences among Copts, Arabs and Ababdeh echoing the style of British ethnography,

> The Copts are evidently the ancient Egyptians. The slightly aquiline nose and long eye are the very same as the profiles of the tombs and temples, and also like the very earliest Byzantine pictures; du reste the face is handsome, but generally sallow and rather inclined to puffiness, and the figure wants the grace of the Arabs. Nor has any Copt the thoroughbred, distingue look of the meanest man or woman of good Arab blood. Their feet are the long-toed, flattish foot of the Egyptian statue, while the Arab foot is classically perfect and you could put your hand under the instep. The beauty of the Ababdeh, black, naked, and shaggy haired, is quite marvellous. I never saw such delicate limbs and features, or such eyes and teeth. (49-50)

Moreover, her account of Sheykh Abdurrachman continues to reflect western supremacy. He is described as "extremely liberal and tolerant…like all the learned theologians I have known". However, the gaze is quick to undermine learned men in this part of the world, "You can conceive nothing

more interesting and curious than the conversation of a man learned and intelligent, and utterly ignorant of all our modern Western science” (346). Hence, Gordon’s alterity is reflected as she plays the role of an outsider who like other European travelers observes and describes the native other.

Indeed, the letters abound with instances where she assumes the role of the ethnographer and where her representations though contaminated by cultural conditioning and preconceptions show the sheer pleasure of making knowledge accessible to others. Gordon writes “I intend to write a paper on the various festivals and customs of Copts and Muslims” (296). Her ethnographer role is further emphasized by verifying other produced knowledge of Arabs. Commenting on how killing is a terrible act among Egyptians, Gordon draws affinities between herself and Palgrave saying “The horror of killing seems greater here than ever I saw it. Palgrave says the same of the Arabian Arabs in his book: it is not one's notion of Oriental feeling, but a murder in England is taken quite as a joke compared with the scene here” (325). Hence, Duff Gordon produces the Orient for consumption by western readers. Despite the empathy and the extensive local knowledge, there is still the structural imposition of western knowledge and frames of reference on the local surroundings. This is especially evident when superstitious beliefs and customs are reported in realistic terms which show Gordon, the heir of western rationalism and scientific thinking, not convinced with eastern superstitions. However, these incidents in the letters are downplayed in order not to appear as exotic interludes. For example, the story of the Christian girl who was moved to the burial place of the Muslim corrupt merchant in order

to be saved from punishment since she is a pure soul is given a humanitarian twist by Gordon's comment that this is part of Muslim's belief that good deeds do not go unrewarded. In all cases, Gordon uses western structures of knowledge to mediate the non-western context of Egypt. Hence, she uses western frames of reference to explain things in Egypt. Bassnett points out how female travelers assume an air of superiority among the natives and hence problematize their role in the imperial project (227). Gordon's patronizing tone is evident despite her genteel nobility. The rendering of the story of Sally's marriage is quite revealing of Gordon's awareness of oriental stereotypes and of western superiority despite her claimed naturalization. In fact, "Sally's proposals would be quite an ethnological study". The Sheikh's son proposes to Sally, the English maid who is older than him, promising her a good dowry and respect for her customs and religion. However, "since a handsome offer deserves a civil refusal", Sally would have to apologize that her father refused (108). Thus, Gordon realizes that no matter how close she feels to the Egyptians, she and her maid must maintain superficial relationships that involve empathy but not marriage. Gordon's racial attitude is best exemplified when she categorizes the "queer" passengers on board the boat taking her to Cairo. Thus, the Illyrian Arnouts who are as white as fish, the Turkish effendi who has no impropriety, and the low class unpleasant Copts who blasphemy the Greeks are all others to her. In this respect, Gordon is exteriorizing all the passengers and uses her cultural frame of references to relate the scene which is evident in her remark "the boat is as quite as clean as an English boat" (91-3).

Gordon's reflective gaze extends to include deconstructing/correcting western stereotypes about the Orient. Her first letter again sets the tone of correcting wrong assumptions. She writes, "of all the falsehoods I have heard about the East, that about women being old hags at thirty is the biggest" (20). Contesting the western assumption of Arab laziness, Gordon describes how the men work seven hours during the day and seven more hours during the night after which they go home at sunset to eat dinner and sleep "a bit, and then to work again,- 'these lazy Arabs!'" (152). She further explains that what Westerners think of as laziness is simply the "unutterable dullness of Eastern life" especially among the more privileged classes: "In short, there was no means of killing time but the narghile, no horse, no gun, nothing, and yet they did not seem bored" (142-143). These instances reflect familiarity with Egyptian/ Arab ways and reinforce her going native. Omar hails her acquired laziness saying "Alhamdulilah ! laughs Omar, 'that I see the clever English people do just like the lazy Arabs'"(187). This comment shows how the Other Omar has internalized the western 'mis'conception and is echoing the imperial structures of power relations where the non-western corrupts the western subject.

The reflective gaze also allows the other to reveal their misconceptions. There are several reports of Omar or Mustapha voicing misconceptions of the English. In this sense, analysis of Gordon's letters reveals the reflective gaze whereby the Other projects his inability to understand the imperial center values. The misunderstanding mostly revolves around marital issues which continue to be at the heart of east/west stereotyping. Gordon reports "Yussuf is

quite puzzled about European women, and a little shocked at the want of respect to their husbands they display. I told him that the outward respect shown to us by our men was our veil, and explained how superficial the difference was. He fancied that the law gave us the upper hand" (164). Gordon continues to play the role of the knowledgeable commentator who can bridge the gap between east and west. She explains "The English would be a little surprised at Arab judgments of them; they admire our veracity and honesty, and like us on the whole, but they blame the men for their conduct to women" (142). The complexity of the reflective gaze increases when the issue of women is discussed.

In fact, the position of Eastern women has always preoccupied western mind. The fascination with the harem and with the alleged sensuality of the east is at the heart of colonial / orientalist discourses and continues to do so in the present twenty first century neo-colonial context. Gordon's exploration of the issue of women and polygamy exposes the limited western point of view in this respect. Gordon refutes the Western assumption that polygamy is a sign of sexual indulgence pointing out that many times it is a social/familial obligation to provide for a deceased brother's widow and her orphan children. She stresses, "Very often a man marries a second wife out of duty to provide for a brother's widow and children, or the like. Of course licentious men act loosely as elsewhere" (112). Gordon further exposes the unknown philosophy of polygamy to the Westerners emphasizing how it sometimes entails sacrifice arguing that "so you see that polygamy is not always sensual indulgence, and a man may practice greater self-sacrifice so than by talking sentiment about deceased wives' sisters" (87). She further highlights the financial independence women enjoy because "the man

must provide all necessaries for his Hareem, and if she has money or earns any she spends it in dress; if she makes him a skullcap or a handkerchief he must pay her for her work" (79). Gordon's comments expose western misconceptions about women and reveal the reflective gaze at play.

The reflective gaze represented through the voices of the natives also reveals a distorted image. It must be noted that the voices of the Other are always reported through Gordon's words despite the occasional use of both direct and free indirect speech. Gordon's perspective is the one communicated even when it is the Other's point of view that is being reported. Besides, the use of epistolary form allows Gordon to control her narrative adding authenticity to the population of European, American, Arab, Turkish, and Armenian characters she encounters. Moreover, the issue of language is never resolved in these accounts. The reader is told that very few Egyptians can communicate in foreign tongue. Gordon explains her ardent wish to learn Arabic because "If I could but speak the language I could get into Arab society here through two or three different people, and see more than many Europeans who have lived here all their lives. The Arabs are keenly alive to the least prejudice against them, but when they feel quite safe on that point they rather like the amusement of a stranger" (54). Hence, mastering the language is linked to gaining authority and autonomy. Gordon gradually learns Arabic to overcome the language barrier; however, she repeatedly admits that her accounts are second hand reports mostly relying on Omar's reporting but "Omar's English is too imperfect to get beyond elementary subjects" (31). Hence, the letters are a collection of visual observations together with first hand and second

hand reports and stories which Gordon listens to and communicates mostly to her husband and her mother. Moreover, the letters written sporadically over a long period of time appear to be coherent following the same style. It is worthy of noting that Gordon's consistent style despite duration, movement and sickness betray the amount of editing invested in making these letters accessible to the readers. Moreover, the letters were originally compiled in two volumes *Letters from Egypt* and *Last Letters from Egypt*, but no significant changes either in style or in structure appear attesting to the contrived production of this travel account. In short, the structure of the letters claims authenticity based on the actuality of Gordon's experience but the degree of authenticity is further challenged because of the language barrier.

Gordon's reflective gaze explains her role as the anti-conquest subject whose humanitarian concerns towards the injustices endured by the Egyptians are interwoven with reinforcing British imperial values. Omar reports Gordon's compassion towards the farmers saying "he knew the Sitt would cry out, as she always did about the Fellaheen, as if she were hurt herself" (31). However, this preoccupation with the injustices suffered by the Egyptians due to the oppression and tyranny of Khedive Ismail is coupled by overt attack on the French and subtle acknowledgment of British moral superiority. The letters offer a political critique of the exaggerated taxation and forced labor inflicted upon the honest hard-working Egyptians. These are repeatedly linked to the French negative influence on the khedive and on the whole country. Gordon is perpetuating the endless rivalry between France and Britain and in this sense she is reflecting her Englishness. There are many

examples that show the French colonial influence on Egypt as devastating whether on the political or the social levels. One example is when she refuses to live in Thayer’s house “because the march of civilization has led a party of French and Wallachian women into the ground-floor thereof to instruct the ignorant Arabs in drinking, card playing, and other vices” (71). Moreover, the horrendous conditions which the Egyptians face because of the digging of the Suez Canal are repeatedly mentioned. Gordon’s readers learn how men are forced to leave their land uncultivated and take their families’ food portions to go dig the canal. The Khedive’s cruelty is emphasized since he leaves the diggers without food or shelter. Other families starve because of taxation. Another story of French villainy is reported by one of her French acquaintances who assured her that the Boat under M. de Lesseps left 200 men and women to drown from the floods and heartlessly passed by ignoring their cries for help (74). Voiced by a French eye witness, the story marks a forceful condemnation of French inhumanity.

The image of the morally superior British contrasts sharply with that of the corrupt exploiting French. There are many references to Egyptians’ crying for the British to come rescue Egypt. Gordon hints that French exploitation is the main reason for the bad state of the Egyptians; hence, Gordon’s White Man’s Burden is purely English in nature. She repeats Hekekian Bey’s exact words that the people deserve to be “decently governed” and makes him the one who says “No wonder the cry is, ‘Let the English Queen come and take us’” (64). Furthermore, the English are judged as fair and honest by the natives. Omar explains to Girgis “the English customs did not allow people to work

without pay, which evidently seemed very absurd to the whole party" (31). Elsewhere, Gordon is represented as the ambassador of the British Empire for she is worth more than ten men; "these ingeleez have only one word both for themselves and for other people doghree – doghree (right is right)" (95). Hence, Gordon's letters show the British as the appropriate saviors of Egypt because of their moral values.

Lucie Duff Gordon as the exot:

Gordon's emulation of British values is part of her culture but one cannot argue that Gordon is complicit with the colonial project. Following Pratt's term of anti-conquest, Gordon's representations involve this dichotomy of an innocent account permeated by imperial ideology. Therefore, one cannot claim that Gordon's empathy towards the Egyptians is hypocritical or pretentious. Indeed, her Egyptian letters show genuine sympathy and admiration towards Egyptians which are better understood in light of Segalen's exoticism.

Traditionally, exoticism meant the representation of the strange/unfamiliar in a faraway land. With the rise of travel writing and exploration, exoticism has been appropriated to support colonial discourse. Travel writing is accused of unconscious insertions of imagery that perpetuate the classical exotic mode. Generally, exoticism is associated with colonialism and with the fantasizing unfamiliarity of the dehumanized inferior other. Bringing the unfamiliar strange inhabitants of the far-away lands to the familiar context of western home facilitate dominating the native and reassure western supremacy. This involved systemization of the unfamiliar rendering it in familiar terms in order to dominate it. Exoticism produce a myth of the non -western world for European consumption. Rousseau and Porter notes that

exoticism "encompassed styles of being and behavior which defied normalcy ... indeed, defied *humanity*" (qtd in Jenkins 2). In this sense, exoticism passes on knowledge of the world where representation of the foreign allows controlling it. This contributed to the dominant fixed imperialist ideology that has perpetuated the binary opposition between European self versus the non-European other. However, alternative formulations of exoticism focus on cultural diversity and plurality. The tendency to focus on diversity and plurality aimed to free exoticism from consolidating the native's inferiority and dehumanization while stressing that the exotic appeal comes from the unfamiliar and unknown. Victor Segalen's *Essay on Exoticism: An Aesthetics of Diversity* (*Essai sur l'exotisme: Une esthétique du diver*) (1904) is a major work which enriches the current analysis of exotic representations in Gordon's letters adding to the overall critique intended by the current research. Gordon's account reflects authentic representations of the other/strange stressing their normalcy in this part of the world. Gordon's letters avoid reproducing any of her contemporaries' fascination with the Hareem. In fact, Bassnett refers to how Luice Duff Gordon like Monatgnu shows the "daily lives of Egyptian women in terms that contested the fantasizing of her male contemporaries" (229). These two women travelers refuted "the growing tendency towards eroticization of the unfamiliar that characterizes so many texts by male travelers" (229). Bassnett adds that these two women's focus on the normality of Turkish and Egyptian women respectively "[rebut] male-inspired fantasies about harems as places of highly charged sexuality" (230). Bassnett notes that these women's emphasis on the everyday and the personal

was their tool in order not to be silenced; that is why they choose letters or diaries as a sign of their not being involved in public spheres (231-2). Hence, Gordon's representation of the exotic is further connected to the reflective gaze at work in the letters. Segalen's notion of exoticism contributes to analyzing exotic references in Gordon's travel account.

Victor Segalen's fragmented essay on exoticism (written from 1904 to 1918) aims at purifying exoticism from its colonialist association. Victor Segalen (1878-1919), a naval doctor from Britanny, introduces a new meaning of exoticism that is not Eurocentric or imperialist. To engage with exoticism from Segalen perspective is to see multiple prospective versions of the world and its inhabitants. In her "Introduction: Exoticism, Cosmopolitanism, and Fiction's Aesthetics of Diversity" (2012), Eugenia Zuroski Jenkins refers to Segalen's endeavor to associate exoticism as a term with a new meaning of diversity other than its inferior dehumanizing colonial ones. Segalen argues that exoticism is rooted in the inability to grasp the Other. He explains that the exot, someone who commits to living a non- western life, is able to culturally interact with his surroundings: "An Exot is a born traveler, someone who senses all the flavors of diversity in worlds filled with wondrous diversities" (25). This exot has to have a strong sense of self and keep a sense of distance between himself and his environment. Segalen elevates his exot for he can enact the essence of exoticism which involves resolving cultural separation and colonial assimilation. Despite the fact that Segalen does not indicate that his exot could be a woman, it is the argument of this paper that Gordon can be considered an exot in the sense of a strong woman who attempted to culturally interact with her unfamiliar surroundings and succeeded in appreciating

cultural differences because of her alterity. Upon her decision to return back to England in 1863, Gordon emphasizes this connection saying "This is what I have met with from everything Arab—nothing but kindness and politeness. I shall say farewell to Egypt with real feeling; among other things" (37). Segalen frees exoticism from its colonial agenda to allow the traveler's gaze to escape reduction and recognize diversity. For him, "the knowledge that something is other than one's self" and "the ability to conceive otherwise" constitute exoticism (Segalen 19). Moreover, Segalen's diversity maintain that the subject and the object are strange to one another but show that they are both engaged in a reciprocal cycle of acknowledging diversity since they continue to be strangers. Segalen stresses the eternal pleasures of sensing diversity and finds in the inability to assimilate those who are different a source of rejoicing. This notion of pleasure is particularly interesting when reading Gordon's representations of strangeness that offer instances of interaction and connection. One example of the pleasures of discovery and the possibility of interaction is discovering that the Copts Mar Girgis is Saint George for the English. She addresses her husband saying "I wrote a curious story of a miracle to my mother, I find that I was wrong about the saint being ae Mussulman (and so is Murray); he is no less than Mar Girghis, our own St. George himself" (36). Pleasure is also possible because of the alterity entailed in a traveler's account. In this sense, Gordon position as an accepted stranger among the diversity of Muslims, Copts, Ababdeh, Nubians, Arabs whom she interacts with during her stay in Egypt and whom she welcomes as different is in accordance with Segalen's

version of exoticism. She maintains alterity which Forsdick (2014) following Segalen explains as realizing that the other cannot be contained and hence accept him as diverse. In this sense, the exotic gaze will combat standardization and dismantle the homogeneity imposed by imperial structures of power (160). Travel studies offers alterity or mimesis as possible mediums for representing the other. Kuhen notes that the representation of otherness can either follow alterity which maintain difference or mimesis which assimilates, contains and systematizes (10). Hence, Gordon's alterity is better understood in light of Segalen's exot which allows the travelogue to revel in discovery and excitement. The unveiling of the veil which informs a traveler's account could be tied to the exot's rewards of cultural diversity.

Exotic representations in Gordon's Egyptian letters build on the colonial legacy but refrains from assimilating the other. Her very first letter to her mother starting with "I write to you out of the real Arabian Nights" evokes nineteenth century exoticism of the Nights (18). However, Gordon represents the diversity in Luxor and Upper Egypt as part of the normal everyday life that should be accepted for what it is. She plays the role of mediator between fantasy and reality to keep the authentic appeal of her letters. Her knowing of the unknown adds to her image as the lady who knew "real" people. The issue of knowing and unknowing and the familiar and the unfamiliar are at the heart of any discussion of exoticism. Tzvetan Todorov (1993) points out the constitutive paradox of exoticism, "Knowledge is incompatible with exoticism, but lack of knowledge is in turn irreconcilable with praise of others; yet praise without knowledge is exactly what exoticism aspires to be" (Todorov, 265). Hence, travelogues engage with discourses

of exoticism and colonialism but one must be aware that discourses are open-ended since their “exterior limits are constituted by other discourses that are themselves also open, inherently unstable, and always in the process of being articulated” (Doty, 1996, 6). In fact, negotiation is one of the features of the genre. Thompson explains “All journeys are in this way a confrontation with, or more optimistically a negotiation of, what is sometimes termed alterity… all travel requires us to negotiate a complex and sometimes unsettling interplay between alterity *and* identity, difference *and* similarity” (9). Therefore, travel could be defined as “the negotiation between self and other that is brought about by movement in space…all travel writing is at some level a record or product of this encounter, and of the negotiation between similarity and difference that it entailed” (9-10). Gordon writes to her mother reflecting that her Egyptian experience is “the reverse of all one's former life when one sat in England and read of the East ‘Und nun sitz ich mitten drein’… [and I] don't know whether ' I be I as I suppose I be 'or not” (34). The German quote is translated as ‘now I sit right in the middle’ which reflects Gordon’s complex position as far as knowing and unknowing are concerned. Her experience has shown attempts to unravel the unknown and to connect beyond the differences. One example helps to reveal how Gordon becomes entangled as both subject and object of her adventure. In April 1863, Gordon speaks of having “a black slave- a real one” who puts a big pin in her ear thinking that Gordon wanted them bored for rings. This eight year old girl who feared that her mistress might eat her decided to pierce herself to please this mistress. On the other hand, Gordon shocked by the girl’s action reflects how both

of them have false perceptions about the other. In this respect, the exotic gaze is actually reciprocal since both self and other are unknown and are engaged in a sort of negotiation to try to penetrate the opaqueness of the unknown. One thing that Gordon's experience among the Egyptians reveals is the possibility of connecting even if the opaqueness remains. Moreover, Pratt refers to "a "contact" perspective" where "subjects are constituted in and by their relations to each other. It treats the relations among colonizers and colonized, or travelers and "travelees," not in terms of separateness or apartheid, but in terms of copresence, interaction, interlocking understandings and practices, often within radically asymmetrical relations of power" (Pratt 6). Gordon's relationship with Omar is one example of this contact perspective. Omar's representation is intriguing because he is the one who manages her affairs and protects her so he controls decisions of renting the boats, paying for the food, and setting her itinerary. Yet he is also her servant who sleeps on the floor and does chores. On the one hand, he is her Friday but on the other hand, he is her interpreter who allows her access into the exotic tropes. Moreover, Omar repeatedly corrects Gordon's as well Arabs' wrong assumptions and plays the role of mediator in her cultural encounter emphasizing the possible asymmetrical relation of power.

Moreover, the exotic representations in the letters welcome normalcy and diversity while evoking the fantasized Arabian Night's appeal. Gordon asserts to her husband that the real people are exactly as described in the most veracious of books, the ' Thousand and One Nights '; the tyranny is the same, the people are not altered—and very charming people they are" (54). However, her letters do not

include any erotic references and when she speaks of strangeness, her comments make it sound acceptable in this part of the world. Her reference to "the reckless way in which Eastern women treat their fine clothes gives them a grand air, which no Parisian Duchess could hope to imitate—not that I think it a virtue mind you, but some vices are genteel" (310). The exot in Gordon reconciles the conflicting tendencies in the letters.

Conclusion:

This paper analyzed Gordon's *Letters from Egypt* revealing its complex representations of Egyptians. Pratt's anti-conquest formed the basic methodological framework that informed this argument. Critique of the letters showed that they belong to travel writing genre representing "a period spent residing in an unfamiliar place" (Thompson 18) where the lines between true and false are blurred and the accounts are made up. In this sense, the letters are 'constructions' rather than 'reconstructions' to use Thompson's terms supported by the use of free indirect discourse (27-8). During the current examination of Gordon's "real" Egypt, the distorted mirror of the traveler gaze disclosed the distorted productions of self and other reflecting racial stereotyping and patronizing tendencies as well as self- examination and empathy for otherness. Therefore, Gordon's letters are an example of Pratt's anti-conquest where the innocence of the traveler's experience cannot be disentangled from the culturally conditioned preconceptions of imperial ideology. Hence, the letters not only construct Egypt and Egyptians but they also construct a version of Gordon's Englishness. Moreover, exploring and engaging with the unknown which are central motifs in the

genre of travel writing inform Lucie Duff Gordon's accounts of Egypt. She assumes the air of knowing the unknown and of correcting stereotypical misconceptions about Egyptians but her superior status is never denied and she still objectify the other even when she sympathizes with him/her and acknowledge cultural diversity. In a sense, she is controlled by her cultural orientations. However, since women writings and travel writing resist clear cut categories, Gordon's representation of Egyptians could still be read as a form of cultural understanding that tries to acknowledge diversity and expose the reflective gaze. Rather than dismissing Gordon's travel account of Egyptians as racist stereotyping, this paper shows the unconsciously constructed British cultural supremacy that infiltrated a supposedly open minded woman engaged in radical and intellectual activities. The demands of publications and the stress of reception are also integral elements in analyzing the construction of Gordon's letters to satisfy British readers. However, Gordon's representations are full of gaps that problematize her representations in which echoes of British supremacy are simultaneously interwoven with exposure of western stereotypical misconceptions. Nevertheless, the exot in Gordon's representation saves the text from claims of unethically contributing to the imperial project. Future research on Gordon can further compare Gordon's representations of Egyptians with other travel accounts by Victorian travelers and it can also juxtapose Gordon's account with later writings on Egypt exploring whether specific stereotypes are carried forth.

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