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## Representations of Islam in Medieval European Literature

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### Abstrak

Sepintas Islam dan Sastra Inggris tampak seperti dua disiplin ilmu dari dua kutub berbeda yang tidak memiliki interkoneksi. Akan tetapi, sejak pertama terjadi interaksi intensif antara dunia Islam dengan dunia barat pada abad pertengahan, sejak itu pula sebenarnya relasi antara Islam dan Sastra Inggris dapat ditelusuri. Sejumlah peneliti baik dari dunia Islam maupun barat telah mencoba mengeksplorasi relasi tersebut dari berbagai sudut pandang, dan makalah ini akan membahas salah satunya yaitu terkait masalah representasi. Ketertarikan di kalangan akademisi dan kritikus sastra akan hal ini sudah terlihat sejak awal abad ke-20, terutama melalui tulisan Byron Porter Smith yang berjudul *Islam in English Literature* (1939) dan semakin mencuat setelah publikasi buku *Orientalism* (1978) karya Edward Said—yang notabene merupakan salah satu teks penting dalam kajian postkolonialisme. Hampir semua penelitian tersebut mengarah pada kesimpulan yang sama yaitu image negatif terhadap Islam dan praktek representasi ini secara kontekstual bermula dari pecahnya Perang Salib. Makalah ini akan memaparkan ulang bagaimana representasi dan konstruksi image Islam dalam karya sastra Eropa Abad Pertengahan hingga periode awal modern untuk memahami dengan lebih kritis baik problematika representasi Islam oleh sastrawan barat maupun juga dinamika interaksi antara masyarakat Eropa dan dunia Islam. Kemudian masih menggunakan kerangka postkolonial, akan dibahas pula beberapa karya sastra Andalusia yang muncul di periode yang relatif hampir bersamaan sebagai bentuk konter-narasi. Penerapan pendekatan postkolonial untuk memahami era pra-kolonial diharapkan dapat berkontribusi bagi pengembangan kajian Islam dan sastra Inggris.

**Kata Kunci:** Islam, Sastra Inggris, Kajian Postkolonial

### INTRODUCTION

USC's annual reports, studying the demographics of 100 most popular films at the North American box office since 2007, show that Hollywood's persistent and systemic problem in diversity and inclusiveness both in front of and behind the camera has never been fully eradicated. Very little effort has been done by the upper echelons in the U.S. movie industry to represent the actual world, the real people in the everyday life, especially when it comes to minority group and U.S. "enemy" abroad. Among others are Muslims. Studying more than 900 films produced between 1896 and 2000 that projected negative images of the Arabs and Muslims, Jack Shaheen found that the stereotyping of Muslims particularly Arab Muslim, as the "cultural Other" in American cinema has been constant for over a century. For examples, *The Sheik* (1921) with its Arab rapist, Looney Tunes' cartoon channel on *Alibaba* (1940) illustrating an Arab with deceitful, angry expressions, Disney's *Aladdin* (1992) with its controversial description of Arabia as barbaric in the original opening theme song, *True Lies* (1994) with its depictions of Arabs as violent, anti-American zealots, and *Rules of Engagement* (2000) with its stereotypical images of Arabs as violent murderers and anti-America religious fanatics. The difference between the past and the present images lies mainly only in the reasons, degree, and content—oftentimes influenced by current social and political situations.

Literary scholars found similar trend in Western literary writings. Stereotypical images of Islam and Muslims had even existed since Medieval era. Prior to Shaheen, Byron Porter Smith and Edward Said shared similar concerns of Orientalism which was disseminated in historical and literary texts. Their works are instrumental in bringing to life voices of the underrepresented and raised awareness of the effects of Western misrepresentations in these writings. The

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problem of representations of Arabs and Muslims by Christian Europeans can be traced as far back to eleventh century European literature, seemingly with lack of voices and self-representation from the subjugated. Kabir and Williams (14) may be right to say that medieval should no longer be antecedent to Orientalism or Other to modern framework; instead, it can be viewed as part of it.

I will examine, through postcolonial lens, how Islam and Muslims were represented in pre-modern European literature as an evidence of early Orientalist practice. Edward Said's notion of Orientalism itself is one of the key concepts in Postcolonialism. Postcolonial thought has indeed influenced medievalists in recent years. While some are doubtful about the applicability of postcolonial theory to study medieval societies and are concerned with the danger of applying theory out of context, others such as Cohen, Biddick, Akbari, and Holsinger show optimism. Holsinger sees the relevance of translating twentieth-century analytical vocabularies into the distant past and is hopeful that the deep connections between the colonial subaltern and the medieval unrepresented will contribute significantly to academic reconstructions of the lives and voices of the dispossessed (1200). Moreover, despite her acknowledgment that historical specificity of postcolonial society could not be easily translated into pre-modern worlds, Spiegel believes that the adaptive use of critical approach such as postcolonialism has provided historian a new tool to read and understand the past more sensibly (250). Moreover, to compare Western "constructed" image of Islam and the reality, this paper will also look at some Andalusian works in order to attest to how rich legacy from the Muslim Spain could be used as antecedent counter-narratives that immediately challenge Western misrepresentations of these particular groups.

## RESEARCH METHOD

This is a qualitative research using content analysis technique. This paper simply continues the mode of study which has been initiated by previous scholars interested in exploring Western representations of Islam in literary texts. This research attempts to interpret and re-interpret Western representations of Islam in literary writings from Medieval to early modern era. However, in order to obtain a more balanced picture of societies during the period, I will also bring in some Andalusian literature as counter narratives. With the hope to further develop ways to study the interconnection of Islam and English literature as well as literature in English, this paper will engage with further exploration of how postcolonial theory as critical theoretical lens could be useful for this type of study. More researches on representations of Islam and Muslim are needed in order to raise awareness of the issue and comparative study is expected to be able to reconfigure the image of Islam in the real world and help articulate the voice of the negatively portrayed communities.

## DISCUSSION

Postcolonial theory mainly discusses resistance and opposition to colonialism, but it also involves questions of representation by exploring the circumstances and condition of productions that determine the construction of the colonial "Other." In this way, medieval past may offer some insights to present postcolonial conditions. I believe that there is a potential compatibility between medieval and postcolonial studies, as there is some kind of parallel between today's world and the medieval world. In the matter of "Christian" West - "Muslim" East relations, for example, there is a common area between the two worlds: confrontation. Today we have Huntington with his controversial essay "Clash of Civilization" (1993) that evokes centuries old conflict between the West and Islam through the Crusades in the Middle Ages. Israeli occupation/colonization of Palestinian land may partly reflect a deep-rooted obsession to recapture the Holy land. Turkey's Erdogan's resistance against the U.S. may resonate with Muslims' longing for the revival of Islamic/Ottoman Empire. Also, the constant perpetuation of negative stereotypes and representations of Arabs and Muslims in Hollywood films—based on Shaheen's research on more than 900 films, produced between 1896 and 2000—reminds us of a plethora of literary production by premodern European writers that celebrated the superiority of the white race and Western civilization while dehumanizing the Arabs and Muslims. Apparently, contest of power and domination between the two worlds have continued to persist.

According to Ashcroft (2000), the term "post-colonialism" was originally used by historians to refer to the post-colonial state or the post-independence period after the Second World War but then from the late 1970s, the literary critics started to use it to discuss "the

various cultural effects of colonization” (168). It is this historical particularity that makes the application of postcolonial theory to medieval and Renaissance literature seemingly incompatible. However, the proponents of postcolonial medieval studies focus on the gains and insights from the application of this approach. They believe that postcolonial theory allows us to better understand how Europe came into being, how cultural contacts between the European and the non-European people led to colonialism, and how colonization was pretty much part of medieval political life.

In 1978, Edward Said criticized Western constructions of the non-Western world in his book *Orientalism*. He moved colonial discourse into the first world academy and into literary and cultural theory. Said examined the ways that knowledge production and diffusion in the past and present become objects of study for those seeking alternative means of expression. As a result, a Eurocentric cultural construction of the “orient” and the “occident” was created without representation by those who are being labeled as “oriental.” This lack of representation by those who were subject to categorization and the authority claimed by those in high academic standing is the lasting legacy of colonialism which Said focused his critique. Orient is constructed by the West as a mirror image of what is inferior and alien or “Other” to them. In Orientalist discourse, the Oriental man is depicted as dark, savage, backward, posing threat to white women while the Oriental woman is depicted as passive, submissive, eager to be dominated, highly sensual and exotic. Orientalist image is dangerous because of its sweeping generalization across diverse and dynamic cultural and national boundaries of the non-European people.

Ashcroft et al. (131) reckon that the concept of modernity is significant in the emergence of colonial discourse. From about the sixteenth century, modernity became synonymous with civilized behavior, with rationality as its core feature. Europe constructed itself as “modern” and constructed the non-European “traditional,” “static,” and “prehistorical.” Orientalism is a constitutive element of the modern West. However, modernity for the Europeans is fundamentally about conquest, and the narrative that the Orient is backward and led by incompetent Islamic rulers who are religiously intolerant impediments to progress is used to justify the expansion of Christianity to the East and Western Imperialism.

In medieval European and Renaissance literature, the most common terms used to refer to the Arabs and Muslims during the Middle Ages are “Saracens,” “Mahomet/Mahound,” “Moor,” and “Turk.” Despite some variation, all these mostly carry negative connotations. According to Encyclopedia Britannica entry on the term “Saracen,” references to Saracens had undergone some shift. In the first three centuries AD, late classical authors applied Saracens (Greek: Sarakenoi, or destitute of Sara) to “an Arab tribe living in the Sinai Peninsula.” Saracens were also associated with Ishmaelites, or descended from Ishmael who was born to Abraham’s wife Hagar. In the Middle Ages, it was applied to “any person—Arab, Turk, or other—who professed the religion of Islam.” Many scholars argue that the term “Saracen” has dual references: ethnic and religious identities.

According to Akbari, for the Medieval Europeans, the single term “Saracen” served as a marker of both religion and ethnicity (155). In the literary and cultural production of the Middle Ages, as she adds further, Saracens were divided into two: the white skinned (well-proportioned, assimilable) and the dark-skinned (deformed, grotesque creature, doomed to destruction). In *The Song of Roland*, for example, the Saracen emir Baligant is depicted as a white tall imposing knight with fair skin and flowing hair.

“His shoulders wide. His face is bright and rugged.  
His look is fierce. His curls are snowy clusters.  
His flesh is fair as flowering fields in summer.  
What valor he has shown through countless struggles!  
O God, were he a Christian knight, how wonderful!”  
(lines 3085-89)

In a similar vein, another light-skinned Saracen Sir Margariz in this epic poem is also portrayed as:

“A galland, valiant knight, Sir Margariz  
Is beautiful and agile, strong and quick”  
(lines 1296-1297)

Spiritual transformation of both Saracens could be seen as the perfection of their flesh. However, they will not be able to experience inward spiritual orientation unless they are able to recognize the presence of the “divine” (Christianity). Their Saracen body may become the site of transformation of both soul and flesh, but their identity remains the product of ethnic and religious identity.

Black Saracens in *The Song of Roland* are represented full of disgust. In contrast to Mǎrgariz, Duke Abisme is physically described “black as field peas cooked for a long time” (line 1454) and accused as a “heretic” (line 1464). In this way, skin color and character are seemingly inseparable. They are used as both moral and social indicators. Another depiction of black Saracens is when Roland addresses the armies serving for Marganice.

“Each with two big ears and a big nose

....

Blacker than ink, riding with Marganice,  
With no white showing but their teeth”  
(lines 1886-1902)

To some extent, they are portrayed like monsters doomed to damnation. Such depiction of black Saracens or black-a-moors can be viewed as racist portraits as their skin color is linked to inferiority. Cohen also argues that Saracen’s alterity is not only racially marked but also gendered as well (119). If we look more closely, most Saracens were imaged as male, though the Saracen’s masculinity is of course deviated from Christian norms.

For Roland, honor includes religious creed. By constructing the “other,” Western Christian’s define both their own physicality and spirituality. Therefore, as Lowney points out, though “some of Roland’s Christian characters may fail the standards expected of honorable men, all Muslims fail the same standard simply by virtue of their pagan beliefs” (137). Saracens, both with lighter or dark skins, are seen as impediments to an ideal world in a Christian frame of reference. In his introduction to an English translation of this epic poem, Staines asserts that Saracens come to represent the concrete embodiment of the oppositional forces to Charlemagne and his people (loc. 220). All this shows how fanaticism penetrated deeply across European medieval societies.

Another term that frequently appears in medieval European literary production is Mahomet or Mahound. This is a medieval version for Muhammad. According to Oxford Dictionary entry, the term is derived from Anglo-Norman “maumet,” reduced form of mauhoumet, Old French Mahomet. Medieval Christian commonly believed that the prophet Muhammad was worshipped as a god. In his polemical work, St. John of Damascus, a Christian theologian who lived between the years of 675 and 750 AD, accused Muhammad as a false prophet, his teaching a heresy to Christianity, and his followers as forerunners of the Antichrist. In the wake of the Crusades, the myth of Mahomet or Mahound as the enemy of Christendom began to spread among European medieval societies along with the myth of king of the Franks, Charlemagne.

The debates on Muhammad as either a true or false prophet or messiah surrounded the birth of Islam. While Muhammad was a highly respected figure among various Muslim communities, many Christian Europeans were confused between the mythical and historical figure of Muhammad. According to Said, “since Mohammad was viewed as the disseminator of a false revelation, he became as well the epitome of lechery, debauchery, sodomy, and a whole battery of assorted treacheries” (62). The perpetuation of distorted images of Muhammad can be found in Dante’s *Inferno*. This Italian poet places Mohammed in the eighth circle of hell of his *Inferno*. Muhammad is accused and punished as a representative of Christian schism. In Canto XVIII, he describes Muhammad miserably.

“whose body was split apart right from the chin  
to the farthole. Down between his legs his raw  
entrails spilled out, with his vitals visible  
and the sorry sack where what goes through the maw is turned to shit  
(lines 24-28).

According to Mark Musa, Dante's treatment of Muhammad "reflects the medieval belief that Mohammed was responsible not only for a schism but the invasion of Palestine and the dismantling of Christian power and influence in the Middle East. Opinion in Dante's day ignored the fact that Mohammed was a monotheist in a pagan culture and that his split from Christianity followed the development of its Trinitarian dogma" (in Palma, loc. 3558). His misrepresentation of Muhammad does exemplify the structural continuities of an unchanging western discourse of demonization and domination over Islam. At that time, such work could be used as a religious and political propaganda for the Crusades.

Similar description appears in John Lydgate's *Fall of Princess*. The beginning of Book X talks briefly about "Machomeet" or Muhammad as:

"A fals prophete and a magician  
Born in Arabia but of low kynreede  
Al his lyue an idolastre in deede."  
(lines 53-56)

Likewise, he is labeled as a cursed false prophet and a magician, born of low kindred in Arabia, and an idolater all his life (920). The poem goes on by saying that Muhammad is an accomplished flatterer and liar as he openly said that he was Messiah. He soon converted the Saracens, and his clerk Sergius write down his laws and miracles. Lydgate ends his chapter on Muhammad sarcastically:

"Lik a gloutoun deied in dronknesse,  
Bi excesse of mykil drinking wyn,  
Fill in a podel, deuououred among swyn"  
(lines 152-154)

It is said that Muhammad got drunk and finally fell in a puddle and was devoured by hogs (923). Lydgate's disrespectful tale of Muhammad may remind us of modern day Charlie Hebdo's controversial cartoon of Muhammad.

Western representations of the Moors and Turks emerged in early modern European literature. Both terms appeared in various plays. Generally, Moor is applied to the Arab and Berber people of North Africa who inhabited medieval Spain. According to Britannica Encyclopedia, from the Middle Ages to the seventeenth century, Europeans depicted Moors as being black, swarthy, or tawny in skin color. Probably the most lasting, popular Moor character is Shakespeare's *Othello*. In this play, Shakespeare explores a rhetoric of "blackness" and problematizes it as a negative signifier. Iago compares him with "a Barbary horse" while Roderigo portrays him as "lascivious Moor." Different aspects of the term "Moor" are highlighted in Shakespeare's drama, but they essentially carry a sense of inferiority compared to the white race still. Othello and Aaron, for examples, though similarly black from North Africa and similarly not-religious, have different personalities. While Aaron is pathologically evil, Othello is described with a more complex mix of nobility, though still excessively driven by violent jealousy.

Othello is respected for his virtues and competence in military as well as technically allowed to marry Desdemona, but he lives in a racist society where the mixing of races is generally undesirable and can be a source of anxieties. It makes Shakespeare's *Othello* both "a fantasy of interracial love and social tolerance, and a nightmare of racial hatred and male violence" (in Loomba, 91). During this time, sexual contact across races and cultures was considered scandalous, thus making relationships between Othello and Desdemona as well as Aaron and Tamora regarded with horror by several characters in the plays.

Borrowing from Lacan's concept of mirror image, Said argues that Europe's self-definition as the most superior civilization of the world depended in part upon the construction of an "Orient" as "Other." The difference between the two was crucial to sustaining Europe's image of itself. In the case of Othello, Loomba argues that this Moor character "moves from being a colonized subject existing on the terms of white Venetian society and trying to internalize its ideology, towards being marginalized, outcast and alienated from it in every way until he occupies his 'true' position as its other" (48). Like other Saracens or Moors, such attributes as "irrational, backward, lazy, and sensuous" are attached to Othello. Regarding Turks, Shakespeare's *Othello* also draws on early modern anxieties about Ottoman's threat to

European Christendom. The demonization of the Turks is driven by their fear of being conquered and converted.

Chaucer's *The Man of Law's Tale* also incorporates Islamic elements. He addresses religious difference between Christian Rome and Islamic Syria through Sultan of Syria's desire to marry Custance, a virtuous Christian woman. Stereotypical images of Arab or Muslim man as irrational and lustful persist. Sultan's illogical decision to convert to Christianity, not only himself but also his entire kingdom, over a woman could be viewed as a sign of weakness. Interestingly, however, Chaucer contrasts him with his mother. Though the Sultanness might be depicted as the evil villainy, from postcolonial feminist perspective, her brutal actions clearly demonstrate her agency. She predicts slavery and massive conversion by foreign nation; thus, her fear of subjection could be viewed as a form of resistance. To defend her principle and faith, she chooses to sacrifice her son.

“Lordes,” quod she, “ye knowen everichon,  
How that my sone in point is for to lete  
The hooly lawes of our Alkaron,  
Yeven by Goddes message Makomete.  
But oon avow to grete God I heete,  
The lyf shal rather out of my body sterte  
Or Makometes lawe out of myn herte!”  
(lines 330-336)

To add to the complexities of medieval societies, *Poem of El Cid* might be an interesting discussion. Unlike Roland, El Cid is more nuanced. Lowney (137) states that Roland's universal struggle between good and evil contrasts with El Cid's personalized study of the noble person. What makes the Cid, or anyone, honorable is neither station in life nor religious beliefs but deeds. The epic portrays El Cid as a brave, optimistic knight and loyal family man. He makes friend with his Muslim vassal Abengalbon. Abengalbon is portrayed as a far nobler man than the evil heirs of Carrion. Cid had also served for both Christian (Sancho II and then Alfonso VI) and Muslim (al-Mu'tamin and al-Musta'in) rulers. Perhaps, the difference between French Roland's and Spanish El Cid's treatment and relationships with the Muslims can be explained based on the actual context. Unlike French, the Spaniards had been and were still physically neighbors with Spanish Muslims. Both still traded and did business as usual. Direct contacts and interactions between the two worlds might have helped humanized Arabs or Muslims in the wake of the heated Holy wars.

Also, Dante's treatment of Saladdin, Ibn Sina and Ibn Rushdi is also interesting. Despite the fact that they are followers of Muhammad, Dante places them at Limbo among the Greek intellectuals who lived before Christ. During the Middle Ages, Saladdin seemed to be more well-known as a mythic figure than a historical person. His reputation had been unusually positive, and it might be due to his good diplomatic relations with the West. Western view of Saladdin was only focused on his chivalrous standards that “matched” with the European aristocracy, generosity, gallantry, and humane leadership. Ibn Sina and Ibn Rushdi were respected for their knowledge contribution to modern science that the Europeans learned from. However, regardless of the fact that Muhammad is also highly respected by Muslims for his great virtues, Christian Europeans never seemed to be able to forgive him for introducing Islam in Arabia in the first place. The fact that this religion could expand very quickly apparently had created fear among the Europeans.

In his intensive study of the Islamic materials in English Literature, Smith found that the European's ignorance of the true nature of Islam was related to the flow of information during those times—whether first-hand or second/third-hand information. The materials available in England before the twelfth century were mostly through the channels of the Church but also the translation of the Quran into a Western language, “Risalah” by a pseudonym ‘Abd al-masih ibn Ishaq al-Kindi, and travelers. However, what then became popular among European societies was the image of Islam disseminated in literary works.

Aside from the bombardment of Western misrepresentations of the Arabs and Muslims by premodern European writers, people who lived at the Iberian Peninsula under Muslim governance developed a rich, vibrant culture and literature which was seemingly undisturbed and uninterested in global political issues. If the marker of “modernity” are progress and

innovation, then the Muslim Spain embodied those features. The Muslim Spain reflects the moment of cultural superiority over Europe, where exoticised version of the Arab is present within Europe itself (Menocal, 11). At the center of Andalusian splendor was a progressive Muslim ruler like Abd al-Rahman who aspired to create a little “heaven” on earth. Interestingly, this Islamic golden age existed when Europe was in the Dark Ages.

Medieval studies on the literature of al-Andalus is very important not only to decenter Eurocentrism from the field but also to bring voice to the Muslim world. Based on her research, Menocal found that literature of al-Andalus constitutes an admixture of ethnicities and linguistic communities and cultural traditions even religion. Away from the center of Islamic Empire, the caliphate oversaw La Convivencia. This region was home to Muslims, Jews, and Christians that co-existed, cultivating a spirit of openness and cultural hybridity. Both male and female poets contributed to literary production. They also developed muwashshah, a branch of Arabic poetry which is exclusively associated with the Andalusian period because the Arab East did not expect violation to Arabic literary tradition. Built from classical Arabic qasida, they incorporated the ancient motifs and imagery such as love, wine, and praise.

One of the most exemplary works in Medieval Spain is Ibn Hazm’s prose-poem *The Ring of the Dove*, exploring the psychology of love. This work consists of thirty parts which deal with love such as of the nature of love, the signs of love, on falling in love at first sight, on falling in love through a description, of concealing the secret, of the messenger, of fidelity, of betrayal and of separation. Ibn Hazm celebrates love: “It is not condemned by religion nor forbidden by religious law, for hearts are in the hand of God” (6). For him, union offers the highest, “sublime bliss” and “an outstanding happiness” (86). His poem does highlight the features of courtly love. Like other, garden is also an important feature.

Another prominent male poet from the Muslim Spain is Ibn Zaydun. His poetry also “seems to capture the essence of Andalusian poetry at large, shining in two areas considered characteristics fortress of Andalusian literature: the description of gardens and the relatively unstylized presentation of emotion and experience” (Stewart in Menocal, 306). One of his best-known poetry is his love poetry that is associated with Wallada—which will be discussed later. According to Ibn Zaydun, it was Wallada who suggested their first secret meeting:

“Wait to visit me when darkness gathers,  
For I ding that night will keep our secret best.  
Were the sun afflicted with the love I feel for you,  
It would not shine, nor the moon rise, nor the stars traverse the  
sky.”

It is also believed that Wallada inspired Ibn Zaydun’s most heartfelt and immortal verses “Nuniyya.” This fifty-two-verse qasida is considered one of the most famous love poems in all of Arabic literature.

During the period, women of Al-Andalus also formed an important part of the society and a considerable number of literate Andalusian women were actively involved in literary activities. Like their male predecessors, female poets also dealt mostly with the themes of love and wine, often erotic. Their poems not only allow one to see how Andalusian poetry was like but also provide valuable reflections on the ways in which particular Andalusian women navigated the social roles available to them in the public sphere—though one must also be careful not to assume that these poems reflected the actual social and cultural life of all Andalusian society during the period.

Segol (147) argue that a rich body of Arabic poetry written by medieval Islamic women has been very little studied because most scholars of women in Islam are doubtful whether their poems reflect the experience of either individual women or groups of women. However, Segol believes that the poetry of these Andalusian women does provide valuable reflections on the ways in which particular women viewed their social roles, their place in the public sphere, and their own bodies. Their opinions might seem revolutionary or dangerous, but they were very much a product of the milieu in which they were produced and performed. To some extent, these women embodied the spirit of postcolonial feminist. They had agency, even when western feminism was still non-existent.

In the courts of medieval Muslim Spain, as Segol observes, mastery of literary skill could become very significant as poetry itself was the language of public and political discourse.

Most poems during the period were produced by qaynahs and noblewomen. Qaynahs are women who receive proper training or literary education. Their position could be fluid as they do not live in harem. Itimad ar-Rumaikiyya is one of the examples. Formerly a slave, Itimad became a queen after Prince Muhammad married her for her intelligence in playing with poetic language. Another renowned qaynahs is Hind. She is skillful on the lute, reciting lines that accentuated her mobility by equating her words with her body. The vizier Amir ibn Yanaq invited her to perform at his majlis, and this is her response:

“Noble Lord, proud line of the highest rank,  
I’ll quickly come to you as my reply with your messenger”  
(in Segol, 156).

Her magnificent use of language reflects her mastery over poetic conventions. In this way, “she is the reply, and as such she is the poem.”

Besides the qaynahs, noblewomen also participated in the arena. Two of the best known noble poetesses are Hafsa bint Hajj ar-Rakuniyya and Wallada bint al-Mustakfi. Hafsa bint Hajj ar-Rakuniyya lived in the twelfth century and was known for her free way of life. She was perhaps the most celebrated woman poet of her time. Below is her poem that is addressed to Abu Jafar.

“Shall I call on you or will you come to me?  
I’m always yours whenever you want me.  
When you break at noon you’ll need a drink and you’ll find my mouth a bubbling spring  
and my hair a refuge shade.  
So be quick with your reply as it’s not nice of Jamil to keep Buthayna waiting.”

Below is Abu Jafar’s reply:

I will honour you, because of the fact that you visit me. I  
would have liked to go, if I had had the opportunity.  
It is usually not the garden which visits someone, but it is  
the gentle breeze which visits the garden.

Hafsa’s initiative to visit the man is considered unconventional. In traditional custom, it is usually the man that visits a woman, not vice versa. Apparently, Hafsa not readily accepts the traditional role of women decided by society. She also seems more aggressive than Abu Jafar. It is contrary to popular belief that all Muslim woman is passive. Her action is a manifestation of women’s emancipation in some way. Typical to Andalusian poetry, nature is also inherent. Woman and her beauty is also compared to garden.

Wallada bint al-Mustakfi was also a noblewoman who excelled in poetry. Her love poetry with Ibn Zaydun was even more well-known than that of Hafsa. In real life, Wallada was best known for her self-presentation. Like some other high-profile noblewomen writers, she refused the veil. She was very conscious about her body. The poem below expresses her strong opinions about her own worth. She has a choice to do what she is willing to do. Both in words and action, she dared to challenge certain upper class social conventions at that time, one of which was veiling.

“right side:  
I am, by Allah, fit for high positions  
And am going my way, with pride!  
left side:  
Forsooth I allow my lover to kiss my cheek  
And bestow my kisses on him who craves it.”

This poem is fascinating in a way that it reverses conventional discourses of desire. Wallada clearly made her point against the seclusion of women. Her agency as a woman is demonstrated through her choice to dress the way she wants, aspiring for freedom of movement both in

Indeed, Wallada was a free-spirited Andalusian woman. She did use her privilege to fullest. Other than her refusal to wear veil, she also refused to marry. Based on various sources, it is said that Wallada remain unmarried though having several lovers. As already stated, Ibn Zaydun was not only a poet but also a leading figure in the courts of Córdoba and Seville. However, both Wallada and Ibn Zaydun kept exposing their love affair with very publicly. It was their scandalous love affair that made them famous. Though their free lifestyle could not be taken as a reflection of the life in medieval Muslim Spain, it does say something about a greater freedom that the local people enjoyed under an Islamic caliphate.

## CONCLUSION

To sum up, Western reference to Islam and Muslim in pre-modern world reveals ignorance and prejudice. As Omar Farrukh notes in his introduction to Smith's book *Islam in English Literature*, for twelve centuries, humanity had been unable or reluctant to consider Islam in a reasonable manner. In Said's words, Orientalism provides a rationalization to justify colonial rule. In this way, the application of postcolonial thought to medieval studies is useful to better understand the variety of engagements in pre-modern societies. Both postcolonial and medieval worlds share similar issue regarding lack of representation. The colonial subaltern a.k.a. the "medieval unrepresented" in this case is people from the Muslim world. They are not only misrepresented within the fictional work but also underrepresented in actual publication. Based on the analysis of some pre-modern European literary works, it can be learned that Western misrepresentations of the Arabs and Muslims and the practice of othering can be traced as far back to the eleventh century. Islam's rapid expansion to areas which were once under former Roman Empire shocked Christian Europeans. Their campaign to recapture their territories from the Muslims was done not only through actual mobilization of army but also with words. They created narratives against Islam in order to gain support from local people. They tried to make sense of God's abandonment of Christendom while in favor of expanding Muslim civilization since the eighth century. In their works, the teachings of Islam were distorted. They particularly targeted Muhammad. Much of European literature created a mythical figure of Muhammad as a false prophet, a liar. As for Muhammad's followers, the European writers used references such as Saracens and Moors. All these terms carry negative connotations, and they were caricatured in a variety of ways. All this was part of religious and political agenda in the wake of the Crusades, and this practice led to the constructions of Orientalist discourse.

Though many would argue that the Crusades is not part of European colonization, there is no doubt that the spirit of domination was inherent during the process. If they did not come to the Muslim world to colonize, they apparently wanted to come to Christianize the land and convert the people to Christianity. Conversion means imposing a particular religion on someone, and it does involve the act of subjugating, which is a basic feature of colonialism. Also, it would be easier to conquer people with similar ideology. If the period of European conquest to the New World which was largely motivated by the slogan "God Gold and Glory" is categorized as colonial period, then the same may potentially apply to the Crusades. Sometimes it is not clear when history begins and where the story ends. Though their initial attempts for domination in the Muslim world were quite unsuccessful because Muslim Empire was stronger, their obsession towards the Arab world seems to remain. In short, medieval period should no longer seen as antecedent of Orientalism. Instead, it should be viewed as part of the formation of Orientalist thoughts.

The rise of Islam occurred during the era when Europe was in Dark Ages. Largely driven by the fear of subjugation by Islamic Empire, European began to redefine itself to restore their power. As already stated, Europe's self-definition as the most superior civilization depended in part upon their construction of an "Orient." They began to create an image of Orient as savage, backward, threatening, passive, etc. The sweeping generalization is of course dangerous because if such images are constantly perpetuated across different media, they will create a discourse. It can blur the lines between myth and truth. However, it should also be noted that Christian West and Muslim East relations were not that simple. Countless contacts and exchanges did shape the complex patterns of relation between the two worlds throughout the premodern period. The Crusades, the long history of Islam in Spain as well as Reconquista had offered opportunities for fundamental tensions and open conflicts between Christians and Muslims. However, direct contacts through peaceful trades and cultural exchanges also shaped their relations and the manner in which the Arabs and Muslims were represented in some

works. One of the examples can be found in *Poem of El Cid*. Literary work such as this is important to help reduce bias and inaccuracy.

However, comparative research of works produced in a relatively similar era could be useful as counter narratives. In a world where Islam is highly politicized and Muslim women are deeply misrepresented, a piece of story from medieval al-Andalus could help break stereotypes as they depicted a strikingly different reality. This era could be regarded as an ancient manifestation of postcolonial feminism spirit. Contrary to western constructions of Muslim women as passive and oppressed, thus needing to be saved, Andalusian female poets like Itimad, Hindi, Hafsa, and Wallada openly expressed their love and feelings. Inherent in their poems are secular traits as they were not even hesitant to explore their bodies. Their poems indicate a great deal of freedom of expression, involvement in public space, and mobility that women could enjoy under Muslim governance. Though probably not all Andalusian women had equal access to public sphere, these women did use what was available to them to the fullest. This, however, still shows that Muslim women to some extent had enough access to education and literary professions. It is similar to what happened to women in Egypt, Indonesia, and some other third world countries in the wake of Independence. At this point, medieval societies of Iberian Peninsula could offer corrective insights to modern Western feminist, by shifting their focus of attention from religious factor to politics. Islam should not be seen as the primary inhibitor to progress. Instead, it is the local politicians that often use Islam as a means to control their subjects. Lastly, to quote Omar Farrukh, “the unfavorable comments and the faulty notions regarding Islam in the West neither illustrate the points of belief in Islam nor portray its social and more aspects; they represent the Westerners themselves” (iv).

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