

THE REPRESENTATION OF HUMOUR IN
WOMEN'S TRAVEL WRITING: RODRIGUEZ'S
THE KABUL BEAUTY SCHOOL,
GRIMSHAW'S *FROM FIJI TO THE CANNIBAL*
ISLANDS AND SELECTED HAREM
NARRATIVES

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MİZAHIN TEMSİLİ: RODRIGUEZ'İN *KABUL*
GÜZELLİK OKULU, GRIMSHAW'IN *FIJI'DEN*
CANNIBAL ADALAR'A VE SEÇİLMİŞ HAREM
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Abstract

Travellers are "the cultural other" in diverse destinations, observing the indigenous culture. They share their impressions and experiences by accounts of cross-cultural differences and develop intercultural communication. In some settings, women travellers may be admitted to some spaces that are forbidden to men. Indeed, women's travel narratives may reinforce the binary opposition between the West and the East, turning their gaze on the Orient as exotic, eccentric and open to be examined. Typically, women writers' narratives locate their identities through interaction with other cultures. Although women do not claim authoritarian voices, they make use of satire while drawing a line between the host culture that of 'the other' and their own. As such humour becomes the means through which the Western women travellers gain an imperial authority over the Orient. This article discusses how women's travel writing may employ humour as a way of deprecating the indigenous culture and of strengthening imperial authority with a specific focus on Deborah Rodriguez's *The Kabul Beauty School* (2007) and Beatrice Ethel Grimshaw's *From Fiji to the Cannibal Islands* (1907) and selected harem narratives. The paper concludes that travel writers demonstrate the travelled places as exotic and eccentric that contrast with their own social norms.

Keywords: Orient, Travel Writing, Harem Narratives, Imperial Authority.

Öz

Gezginler, ziyaret ettikleri farklı mekanlarda yerli kültürü gözlemleyen "kültürel öteki"dir. İzlenimlerini ve deneyimlerini kültürler arası farklılıklardan yola çıkarak paylaşırlar ve kültürler arası iletişimi geliştirirler. Bazı durumlarda, kadın gezginler, erkeklere yasak olan bazı alanlara kabul edilebilir. Gerçekten de kadınların seyahat anlatıları, Batı ile Doğu arasındaki ikili karşıtlığı pekiştirerek, bakışlarını egzotik, eksantrik ve incelemeye açık olarak Doğu'ya çevirebilir. Genellikle, kadın yazarların anlatıları, kimliklerini diğer kültürlerle etkileşim yoluyla konumlandırır. Kadınlar otoriter seslere sahip olmamalarına rağmen, ev sahibi kültür ile kendi kültürleri arasına bir çizgi çekerken hicivden yararlanırlar. Böyle bir mizah, Batılı kadın gezginlerin Doğu üzerinde emperyal bir otorite kazanmalarının aracı haline gelir. Bu makale, Deborah Rodriguez'in *The Kabul Beauty School* (2007) ve Beatrice Ethel Grimshaw'ın *From Fiji to the Cannibal Islands* (1907) adlı eserlerine ve seçilmiş harem anlatılarına özel olarak odaklanarak, kadınların seyahat yazılarının mizahı yerli kültürü küçümsemenin ve imparatorluk otoritesini güçlendirmenin bir yolu olarak nasıl kullanabileceğini tartışıyor. Bu makale, seyahat yazarlarının seyahat edilen yerleri kendi sosyal normlarıyla çelişen egzotik ve eksantrik olarak gösterdikleri sonucuna varıyor.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Şark, Seyahat Yazını, Harem Anlatıları, İmparatorluk Otoritesi.

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Women travellers have had the potential to access spaces that have been inaccessible to the male gaze. Accordingly, they may develop more personal relationships, which allows them to offer rather intimate and unique images of the travelled culture. Sara Mills argues that women travel writers often present texts that engage with individuals from the other culture rather than characterising an entire race (Mills 5). This is what distinguishes them from the colonial and imperial framework, while empowering them as colonial authorities in offering poignant descriptions and critiques of that culture. In women travel writers' texts, humour potentially offers imperial superiority over colonial achievement. Having this in mind, this paper explores the ways in which humour functions in Deborah Rodriguez's *The Kabul Beauty School*, Beatrice Grimshaw's *From Fiji to the Cannibal Islands* (1907) along with a number of selected harem narratives. This paper will also demonstrate that humour in women's travel writing is directed towards the traveller's society, whereas women travellers tend to employ humour in contradiction to culture, customs, and manners of the travelled destination. The overarching argument suggests that these travel writers employ humour to humiliate the visited culture, depicting it as exotic, and in turn empowering the narrator as a cover for femininity. Accordingly, Rodriguez relates the foundation and development of a beauty school in Kabul, which provides a haven for Afghan women remote from spousal violence. Along similar lines, Grimshaw records her travel to Fiji as a woman in the "Cannibal Islands". Other women authors narrate their experiences, travelling in Turkey, Egypt, Arabia and India. They write their observations about the visited culture of harems in letters, illuminating the facts about spaces forbidden to men.

Women travel writers employ humour in their texts to indicate their knowledge about the visited place for their affiliations. They draw images of cultural contradictions, which can only be understood by those who are familiar with these differences. Mills proposes that much of the travel writing is limited in scope as they focus on the idea of difference. She suggests that "one of the striking features in all of the descriptions of other countries is that objects are presented only in terms of their difference to objects in Britain" (Mills 86). Thus, humour covers issues that apply contradictorily in women's native culture. They narrate scenes in their own words so that readers can thoroughly grasp the content. Rodriguez demonstrates her position as superior in society by presenting her knowledge of both cultures. She entertains her Muslim customers with a CD of Christmas Carols and then suggests that they will not understand them (Rodriguez

7). She also provides out-dated magazines for her customers, as she knows they will not criticise them for being out of fashion (8). The travelled culture is unable to understand this contradiction because it has no information of the other culture. Music also differs in meaning and function between the two cultures as described by Rodriguez; Afghanistan is totally foreign to these cultural places, and since they do not know the difference, they are not amused by the situation. The humour is directed against the addressee from the other culture creating entertainment out of their inferiority.

Rodriguez mocks the other culture by drawing denigratory images in her work. She gives an insight into the possible influence of those pieces on the Western people. She creates an image of traditional Afghan wedding ceremony, and critiques some of the traditions of high cultural importance such as the bride's appearance. While aiming to help brides escape from the cultural expectations they are confined to, she also compares them to drag queens, painted up with their stage makeup. She is not after achieving her purpose by transforming them into more attractive characters. Rodriguez rather creates a satirical effect by describing brides to her readers through a Westernised language. This depiction enables readers to visualise the bridal tradition and ironically presenting the West in a superior position for having the power of knowledge on both cultures.

Similarly, Grimshaw draws the image of a ridiculous jail for her readers. She satirises the penal system, the situation in the prison, and the naivety of the prisoners in Fiji. Prisoners are convicted of minor crimes such as tax evasion or swearing in public. Grimshaw is surprised at the low levels and the nature of the crimes. The concept of prison is that of "a toy to be set on the mantelshelf", which is formed of only three walls "leaving the back completely open to the bush and the hills [...] to look pretty" (Grimshaw 6). There is another shock for Grimshaw when she learns that hardly any prisoners are inclined to escape from the prison. They do not feel any disgrace at being incarcerated, simply alluding to the incarceration as "being in the King's service" (7). The image of prison is narrated jokingly to the reader when discussing why prisoners do not simply walk out. Grimshaw shares the joke within her narrative because she feels the urge to reflect upon the inferiority and simplicity of the host culture. The penal system is amusing to the outsider gaze, given that penal systems in other areas of the world take a harsher view of incarceration. However, Fijians do not report any inconvenience while in prison as a matter of their culture. It is understood that women travel writers ridicule the situations they encounter when they travel outside the margins

of their own societies. In doing so, they raise up their own culture whilst ridiculing the alternate, because the differences appear amusing when viewed through a different cultural lens.

Harem narratives are likewise intended for the consumption by other cultures. By its very nature, the harem forbids the visits from men, and until women visited the harem, it was viewed as an oriental fantasy; thus, women travellers filled in the information gap regarding the harem. By writing on the harem, these writers gained powerful positions in their own cultures. The location of the Orient contributed to the binary opposition of the West and the East, whilst supporting Western colonial and imperial power (Lewis 3). For instance, Anastasia Valassopoulos suggests that such writings aims to offer the Western reader “an overwhelming [...] knowledge about the Orient” (134). Therefore, during their visits, women travellers boosted their sense of superiority within the colonial binary. The harem is sometimes depicted as a reference point for the Western readership. While women travel narratives satisfied curiosity about the secrecy of harem culture, they also narrated it as inferior and far from Western progress and rationality. For instance, Anne Elwood ridicules the curiosity of the harem women concerning the Western clothing. She writes:

They were amazingly struck with my costume, which they examined so minutely, that I began to think I should have had to undress to satisfy their curiosity; but what most amused them, was, the circumstance of my gown fastening behind, which mystery they examined over and over again, and some French tucks at the bottom seemed much to astonish them, as they could not discover their use. (Elwood 33)

It is clear from the quote that Elwood enjoyed being the focus of attention in the harem. The Eastern women attempted to examine her clothes carefully and in curiosity. Elwood mocks that the harem women did not understand the use of French tucks on her costume, evoking the perceived backwardness of the East. The narrative in this excerpt also highlights the superior and progressive aspects of the Western culture. Women travellers enjoy the privilege of having knowledge they hold within the matrix of Western imperialism. They create the images of the travelled places for their readership in their own knowledge and terms, making the Orient a focus of objectification and entertainment. Edward Said considers this Oriental gaze, that which is constructed by the women travellers, as a construction of the East in a confined space (Said 207). Here,

the Oriental gaze of women travellers, such as Elwood's, produces knowledge of the self in contradiction to the Oriental culture. In defining the Orient as confined, they offer the West a temporally and spatially frozen image of the Orient while they position themselves outside of that space and time (Ramakrishnan 134). Michael Harris similarly argues that "the European social body had to be defined in contradistinction to the foreign body; at the same time, it had to be protected from the contamination and disease signified by that of the alien body" (Harris 23). Judging from Harris's argument, Western women travellers sought to redefine their identity in contradiction with the other's body. They both examined the host culture and tried to keep their distance from being absorbed into that culture to avoid the contamination of the self.

Fashion Sense

Women's travel humour further consists of jokes about the customs and manners of the Orient, the eccentricity of which contradicts Western culture. John Mcleod debates the cultural clash of the customs and manners, which "[is] considered evidence enough of the Orient's inferiority" (44). Topics related to humour mainly point to the inferiority of the Orient in terms of fashion and table manners, examples of which are used to support the perceived backwardness of the travelled cultures. Oriental clothes heavily occupy travelogues as subject matters. Rodriguez underlines the general acceptance of clothes in Afghanistan, which sometimes degrades the use of the burqa. As mentioned, the fashion of brides was discussed in the American context and seen as a comedic factor when spoken of in reference to other Afghan clothes. She draws a connection between the dullness of the country and the people who wear "mostly drab, [and] dark clothing" (Rodriguez 4). The country is criticised for its monotony through the exposure of people in public places:

The clothing was almost always the same, either close to white or close to black. The only clothes that seemed to stand out were the blue burqas covering the women. These were just a whisper of color—soft, fluid ripples that moved through the black and white and gray and tan stream of men, usually with a few children attached to their blue fringes. (Rodriguez 36-7)

As represented in Rodriguez's travelogue, the sameness of society in terms of clothing stands for the hidden inferiority that constitutes a target for humour. What is also questioned here is the originality of the travelled culture. The culture is disparaged because of the totality of the culture without any antagonist voices. In reference to

colour, the presence of women's burqas, in the social sphere is additionally discussed to underline the problem of a lack of opposition within the society. People are compared to whispers of colour rather than autonomous individuals. They are accepted as "fluid ripples" as the writer mocks the individuality of society pointing out how they move. People are seen as inferior due to their clothing preferences, which are seen as barely there "whispers" compared to the writer's culture. Dressing comes to represent the culture, and it is used to substantiate not only the inferiority of the travelled cultures but also the perceived subordination of the women. Women travel writers used the power of humour to further stereotype the Oriental women. Stuart Hall states that "stereotyping is a key element in the exercise of symbolic violence, [...] the power to represent someone or something in a certain way" (Hall 259). Thus, women travellers employ symbolic violence as they violate the right of the Orient to remain intact whilst undermining the voice of the Oriental women to "whispers" and their existences to phantasmic burqas.

Likewise, Grimshaw uses images of Fijian people to mock with their sense of fashion. Fijian fashion is provided as evidence of the inferiority that underlies the humour of travel narratives. Grimshaw writes that "the hair of these islanders is so extraordinarily thick, stiff and wiry, that it can hardly be dressed after any European fashion, and many heads may be seen in the mountains [...], uncultivated and undressed" (13). Their hairstyle is ridiculed in the text, as the writer compares it to the Western coiffure styles. Fiji is proven to be inferior in relation to Western culture as shown through evidence of fashion backwardness. The characterisation of the Orient as the inferior exotic relieves the traveller from the responsibility of correcting the so-called inferior behaviour because it implies an innate unsuitability for development. They are seen as "uncultivated and undressed" much like the mountains, likening them to the forces of nature. Fashion therefore becomes the very means through which their inferiority is confirmed, and further evoking a sense of humour.

Harem narratives also reveals several interesting scenes about clothing. They variously depict the pride of the harem, or indicate the inferiority of the Orient. Emilia Bithynia narrates their experience in the harem and their fear of people within the harem:

The slaves laughed and clapped their hands, and two or three of the principal ones rushed out of the room. We could not think what they were about, and poor Madame de

Souci became very nervous. 'I hope to goodness they won't undress us', said she, colouring up, and every ringlet shaking with fright; [...] 'Never mind if they do', said I [...] 'we must look out though that they do not divide our garments among them, and that they turn out these black men'. (Foster and Mills 49)

Here Madame de Souci worries about being undressed by the Oriental women; a situation Bithynia takes one-step further to ridicule women in the harem. They are frightened of the Orient because they view the women as mysterious and inferior. Bithynia implies that harem women might steal their clothes because they are deprived of such Western belongings. Bithynia also suggests that harem women may turn into black men referring to their outwears. She criticises the way that the women dress in public, making them undistinguishable from other people. While the veiled/covered women's bodies are a source of entertainment for Madame de Souci, they are also a source of intimidation. Meyda Yeğenoğlu argues that the veil in an Oriental context was a way to "prevent the colonial gaze from attaining such a visibility and hence mastery" (12). Hence, the excerpt also indicates the woman traveller's frustration at the inability to observe and "master" over the Oriental women's bodies.

The Orient's Table Manners and Western Etiquettes

Oriental eating habits are also described and mocked in women's travel writing. The Orient is depicted as unmannerly and uncultured compared to the standards in Western culture. Women travel writers make fun of the native population's table manners that lack politeness and aristocracy of the Western service. Grimshaw underlines the fact that Fiji used to be cannibal before the missionary activity. She complains about the preoccupation of English people about the security of Fiji Islands. She aligns the progress made in their eating habits with that of missionary settlers, who provided improvement and "a better state of civilisation" in public (Grimshaw 4). She suspects one woman of being a cannibal that remarks about Grimshaw as "vinaka na kakana! – what good food" (12). She is "a young woman, shoebrush-haired, wild-eyed, and long of tooth" (12). Grimshaw describes the women here as uncivilised, still according to their "hereditary" customs. She takes it as a compliment of her British skin, a fact that is intentionally funny and indicates her superior position in Fijian society. The Fijian woman symbolises the island's continuing inferiority to the West. The woman's appearance and actions lead the traveller to doubt her cannibalism. Thus, eating habits are linked to the culture's colonial situation. In this case, cannibalism stands for Fijians'

inferiority and is a target of humour in Grimshaw's travel writing.

Harem writing also includes Oriental eating habits, contradicting Western manners. Emilia Bithynia observes the table manners of the harem she visited, and draws attention to the cultural inferiority of the harem presenting an image of the dinner service. She states:

I was curious to see if they really seemed to like the modern innovation of knives and forks. For the first few minutes they used them, - evidently to do as we did; but the Circassian beauty [...] threw those incompetent auxiliaries down, and grubbed successfully [...] with her fingers. (Foster and Mills 54)

Bithynia specifically observes their eating habits to deduce whether the Orient can cope with modern inventions. However, this scene offers the western readership an image of the harem people who are neither educated, nor modern enough to keep pace with the western innovations. They fall behind in terms of the progress of the West and are labelled as inferior because of their incompetence in the modern world.

Femininity and Sexuality in the Orient

Humour allows women writers to offer an escape from the restrictions of femininity in colonial discourse in some issues. McLeod states that the position of Western women have been defined in a sexual hierarchy in relation Western men, similar to how the Orient is defined in a racial hierarchy (McLeod 49). The discourses of femininity and colonialism contradict one another because of distinct demands (Mills 21). Alongside their humour, women travellers are able to exist in an imperial sphere wherein they are also restricted due to the male preserve (Mills 58). Humour gives them the freedom to be superior in the travelled culture as they are not limited by the Western male gaze. Mills states that "the narrator is shown to be in control, and also to be in a position of knowledge, superior to that of the inhabitants of the country" (79-80). Women travel narrators often claim the power of knowledge by acknowledging both their own culture and the travelled culture with the earlier one being superior to the local inhabitants.

Western women travel writers also rely on humour to reformulate their sexuality, claiming authority and disassociating themselves from feminine weakness. Sexuality was once seen as a male preserve, and it is highly prevalent in men's harem narratives. However, men could not be admitted to the harems, which western women could freely

attend. Sexuality was a topic that privileged men over women. However, the employment of humour in harem narratives by women writers create the ways in which male authority on sexuality could be dislocated.

Rodriguez eliminates restrictions of femininity with the images of sexuality that were once forbidden to disclose. She feels authority due to her Western position and knowledge about Afghan society. The writer freely narrates her experiences in reference to her Afghan friend's consummation of marriage. Advising on sexuality for both men and women in Afghan society earns her a superior position over the Oriental men, subverting constraints before her femininity. She instructs the groom to touch the bride "like the way you'd pat a dog if it's scared" (28). In this way, Rodriguez subverts established sexual norms to her own benefit, strengthens her own position over men and disempowering and mocking the Oriental woman with the metaphor of the bride's fear about sexuality. It is held, as an understanding of virginity and purity is that the bride is not notified of anything about consummation process. Thus, her fear represents her lack of knowledge. Nonetheless, Rodriguez finds this practice cynical since the brides demonstrate terror.

She increases her power with the advice she gives to the bride, "so many women who don't really like sex cling to—just lean back, open your legs, and try to think of something else. [She] tell[s] her that it won't hurt after the first few times, that she might even find it as pleasurable as [she] do[es]" (Rodriguez 30). It could be read as an implicit insult on the femininity of the Orient, as she implies that they may not find pleasure in it because they do not take sexuality in the same way as the Westerner women do.

Rodriguez also narrates her experiences with Afghan men during her visits. She depicts them as immature as little children who like playing games. She shows her readers that the men, whom the world is afraid of, are indeed childish. She writes that "Daud and Muqim would let themselves fly off the swings at the high point, tumble on the grass, and joke about who had gone the farthest. I'd have to laugh, remembering that these were those scary Afghan men half the world was afraid of" (42). The writer presents this naivety and childlike games to the enjoyment of Western world. In this way, she deconstructs the myth of Oriental masculinity within the Western ideology. While the hierarchy between the Orient and the West tends to construct the Orient as feminine, the Oriental man is portrayed as a horror icon and that who shall be avoided

due to the scare of rape (Fanon 120). However, Rodriguez unsettles this myth and further feminises the Oriental men with her depictions. She opens herself an imperial window from Afghan society to deconstruct the norms of masculinity and femininity of the Orient. Sam Vasquez discusses on the topic:

Humorous representations of native populations as simple-minded and childlike were combined with depictions of these places as out-of-civilisation amusement parks for the hardworking, conscientious, and responsibility burdened European or North American subject. Images of sometimes servile, sometimes savage blacks, as well as depictions of unintelligent, unattractive, primitive, animalistic individuals, typified tourist representations, often to comic effect. (Vasquez 81)

Vasquez clearly demonstrates that Western readership takes the native populations as “simple-minded” and childlike. This positions a degrading influence on the native country. They are belittled into little amusement representations. Specific images of blacks or natives are used to convey the message that they are primitive and unintelligent. These representations give way to the “hardworking, responsibility burdened” Western addressee to exert power on the primitive subject in order to develop them.

Grimshaw deconstructs the boundaries of femininity of her time by travelling alone to Fiji, which was deemed as a cannibal island at a time when women were mostly allowed to leave the house only with a chaperone. She narrates most of her assumed dangerous experiences on the island as funny and harmless events. She shows courage as she jumps into several adventures and adopts a semblance of masculinity. She uses the image of a woman who pretends to bite her arm, as a compliment to her nationality. She dares to go to the island, ‘certainly not a spot where any sane man would either travel for pleasure or emigrate for profit’ (Grimshaw 3). She feels the power of for being a Western subject among the indigenous people. Her stance justifies perceived Western superiority and influence on others. Similar to Rodriguez’s experience of liberated position as a Western woman in the Orient, Grimshaw also feels free from gender constraints, relying on a colonial authority that defines and controls the indigenous. Mills discusses how femininity is belittled through the narrator’s relations and behaviour towards others because the narrator is never shown as being disobeyed (Mills 22). Grimshaw also depicts how she is respected and obeyed by the natives. They address

her respectfully as “sir”, a term also used for respectable women in Fiji. She is given Fijian convicts to serve her, and they move so femininely before a masculine woman traveller that she suggests there might be confusion about their gender and colonial positions. Therefore, Grimshaw gains imperial power free of her gender identity in Fiji, where she is distanced from the clash of discourses between femininity and colonialism. As a woman traveller, Grimshaw crosses the border set before her feminine identity with her courage to visit places where “a sane man” would not go.

Exotic and Eccentric Oriental Woman

Another purpose of humour in women’s travel writing is to humiliate the travelled place by presenting parodied images of the host culture as exotic. As discussed earlier, women travellers use figures and images that substantiate the inferiority of the travelled culture by evoking humour. Thus, humour sometimes used to create effects that humiliate the host culture and demonstrate its eccentricity. Rodriguez shows the differences between the host and guest cultures, employing humiliating terms while describing them. She writes:

She has left her parents’ house under cover of burqa and will emerge six hours later wearing her body weight in eye shadow, false eyelashes the size of sparrows, monumentally big hair, and clothes with more bling than a Ferris wheel. In America, most people would associate this look with drag queens sashaying off to a party with a 1950s prom theme. Here in Afghanistan, for reasons I still don’t understand, this look conveys the mystique of the virgin. (Rodriguez 4-5)

Here Rodriguez critiques the process and tradition of the wedding ceremony and Afghan’s bride styles according to her Western norms. Firstly, the bride leaves her parents’ house in a burqa. She is freed from the burqa when she puts on her wedding dress and makeup. The sanction power of the burqa is paused for the wedding ceremony, and reinstated thereafter. Marriage, likewise, is supposed to free her from the control of her parents. However, the writer evaluates this process as a fake freedom. The woman steps into a false appearance of freedom for her wedding. The bride’s appearance is compared to “drag queen”. “Drag queen” consists of gender performance but a purified gender identity. Similarly, the bride undergoes a performance, which does not give her a purified identity. The bride’s appearance is considered as intrinsically unoriginal denying her, as Rodriguez implies, a chance for self-expression. The bride’s

external appearance is socially constructed and performative. The bride gains no solid identity or voice with the marriage, thus, remaining generically female even when they get married. This performance is also connected to another traditional performance, the proof – mystique – of the bride's virginity. Drag queens have alter ego aside from their appearances, which normally do not correspond to purity. Rodriguez implies that this mystery is ironically made extremely public by means of the theatrical wedding performance. The bride's "stage makeup", which is compared to that of drag queens, undermines the reliability of innocence and virginity. Therefore, Rodriguez ridicules the traditions of Afghan culture with the metaphor of a drag queen while depicting the ceremony as eccentric to her readership.

Rodriguez also mocks the traditions of the wedding ceremony while also interfering in her friend's consummation process. She accepts her marriage to a native man, but she mocks the rituals and routines of the native culture such as dowry negotiations with the groom. The narrator then also mocks the process stating that she would only adhere to the Western ways in terms of being able to speak up for herself. She establishes clear limits for her marriage, ignoring what the housework traditionally meant for women. Rodriguez does not pay attention to the officials. She tricks the judge who interrogates about her marital status. While asking for a proof of her single status, she shows them the "single entry" on her passport, where there is only one entry. Likewise, she interferes in the wedding ceremony of her friend, Roshanna. The consummation ceremony and the mystique of virginity are very important in Afghan culture, since the groom's family maintains the right to terminate the marriage if the bride is not a virgin. Aware of the fact that Roshanna was not a virgin, Rodriguez seeks to help her friend obviously by violating the Afghan folklore. She bleeds herself and wipes her blood on a handkerchief, which is supposed to be Roshanna's proof of virginity exclaiming that her virginity is already protected before the wedding. She circumvents the sanction of falsity and deception of virginity. The play on traditions of a culture that Rodriguez does not belong to implies that she is not in favour of respecting Afghan's folk culture on its own terms, but rather and degrading the family and ceremony with her imperial actions. The Western traveller initially observes and introduces that culture to be "backward" and "inhuman". Here the West becomes the norm according to which these traditions are defined. Then, it is not surprising that the narrative empowers the traveller as she takes a responsibility to save her friend against that culture.

Conclusion

This article has discussed the role of humour in women's travel writing, demonstrating how the Western images presented Orient as inferior. The harem narratives produced on different cultures at different times have demonstrated that humour is central to women's travel writing. However, the satire is particularly addressed to the Western reader who has a knowledge of both cultures. They gain power over the host culture with their knowledge of both Western and Oriental culture, often acting as they wish disrespectful of the local culture. Indeed, these cultural differences constitute the basis of humour and mocking created. For example, Rodriguez mocked the heavy makeup of Afghan brides, Grimshaw draws attention to the old tradition of cannibalism in Fiji, and Bithynia references the harem's inability to utilise Western innovations, such as knives and forks. Grimshaw and Bithynia satirise the travelled culture's eating habits that are given as evidence of their lack of civilisation. Grimshaw strictly informs her readership about the safety of Fiji Islands where cannibalism ended sometime after the arrival of missionaries. The indigenous population is believed to have made a progress as shown by the transformation in their eating habits from cannibalism. However, Grimshaw highlights the fact that the Orient culture differs from theirs in terms of eccentricity. Fiji is demonstrated as inferior and uncivilised with its traditions. Similarly, Bithynia humiliates the host culture with their table manners as stated by mocking their inferiority. They are exotic because they eat with their hands instead of accomplishing modernisation with the innovations of the West. The travel writers demonstrate the travelled places as exotic and eccentric that contrast with their own social norms. Therefore, they are presented as subservient for Western readership. This article concludes that humour gives Western women an imperial power and control over the Orient, either men or women. In this way, Western women are released from the very restrictions of their femininity in their own cultures.

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