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# 20th Century North African Colonial History: A Look at Gender and Race through the Cultural Lens of Isabelle Eberhardt

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**20th Century North African Colonial History:  
A Look at Gender and Race through the Cultural Lens of Isabelle Eberhardt**

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**Senior Seminar: HST 499**

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## **Introduction**

Colonization began in Algeria in 1830 and remained an integral part of France until 1962. Upon becoming a colony, the French authorities opened the gates to the new territory and encouraged immigration, with the hopes of forming a strong settler community. In order to achieve their objective, the first goal of the French Empire was to bring culture and modernization to the “savage” Muslim population. As a result, many Europeans not exclusively French, of very diverse backgrounds, immigrated to the colony.

This thesis will examine the life of one European immigrant, Isabelle Eberhardt, and how she challenged the expectations to which European women were held. Eberhardt was born in Geneva in 1877 and died in Algeria in 1904, her life and writings are important because they demonstrate the ways in which she and other Europeans interacted within the context of gender and race in the colonies. These expectations were both formally and informally expressed in the colonies and Europe itself, and include traditional dress, creating a traditional European household which included marrying another European, keeping the social hierarchy, and promoting European moral codes. The lifestyles of women, like Isabelle Eberhardt, came as a result of a new liberation. For many women the colonies provided many freedoms that were not available to women in Europe. These liberations included access to the new religion, culture, and a new social freedom which can be seen in the mobility both socioeconomically and physically that the colonies permitted. For Eberhardt, her complicated family life allowed her to act however she wished to in Algeria and other European women could travel throughout the country without being stopped and have access to different cultures and religions that the women in Europe did not enjoy.

Through analysis of this controversial character in French colonial history, this paper explains some of the expectations that were placed on women in the colonies as well as ways in which they were liberated. Liberation in the colonies had many forms. For example in the life of Isabelle Eberhardt, she was able to pass through North Africa with meager economic resources.

In addition, Eberhardt was able to cross different social and racial distinctions. For example, Eberhardt's actions of dressing like an Arab man provided her with more opportunities in the colony, as a European and regardless of her sex, she still had more freedoms than any native population and more freedom than she had back in Europe. Many women found liberation in the colonial setting, because of the lack of enforcement of European standards. In Algeria, where the French were constantly trying to keep peace with the local population, it is no wonder that many Europeans, regardless of gender, could get away with breaking the status quo and moral codes. This paper addresses these questions by using the writings of Eberhardt. This thesis will argue that Eberhardt's actions of dressing like a man, crossing gender and racial boundaries, and conversion to Islam, are all the result of the unique freedoms available in the colony.

Isabelle Eberhardt is a very controversial character in colonial Algerian history. She seems to defy all stereotypes held for the European women in North Africa, yet at the same time, she embraces some of the most common European conventions. By converting to Islam, dressing as a Tunisian young man, living in the non-European sections, and marrying an Algerian, Eberhardt defies the expectations that existed. At the same time, she used the same paternalistic language as the Europeans and expressed the same denial of support for Algerian independence.

The center of drama in early 20th century colonial Algeria, Eberhardt made a name for herself with her writings, both in her personal diary and local newspapers, and her embracement of the Islamic culture. She was a tragic character with a scarred past and a controversial present, but she gave a new voice through her writings to the European colonist living in Algeria. The contradictory nature of Eberhardt's character can be seen through the cultural lenses of colonization in regard to race, religion, and gender; additionally, Eberhardt sheds light on the contrasting cultures and their interactions. The French colonies provided liberation for many Europeans. The irony in this liberation is that the French aspired for Algeria to be a settler colony which would replicate French society. However, people like Eberhardt utilized the freedom in the colonies as a means to express themselves and act in a way unacceptable to French standards.

## Algeria's Colonial Experience

Regardless of the countless negative affects their presence in North Africa entailed, the French utilized positive allusion and fictional narrative with the hope of promoting their colonization of Algeria. These negative effects include economic and natural resource exploitation, making claims to lands already owned by the indigenous population, and racism. The French made claims about Algeria as being Latin land. Historian Patricia Lorcin writes, "In Algeria colonial officials, ideologues, and novelists promoted the idea that France was recovering North Africa's sacred Latin past, thus diminishing the importance of Islam and marginalizing its indigenous inhabitants<sup>1</sup>". The French used Algeria's Latin past to justify their imperialism in North Africa. Many historians claim that France was trying to reclaim the glory of Algeria's Roman past and the glory of the Napoleonic Empire. It was during this time period that France claimed that due to the destruction of the Roman Empire it had become France's responsibility to restore the lands of the Roman Empire to their former glory.

The French believed that the assimilation of Algerians was possible. The original hope for Algerians was that they would assimilate to French culture and ideals. Given the right access to education, the French believed that they would be able to cure Algerians of their backwardness and even Islam would no longer have a place in Algeria. The French authorities hoped that all Algerian men would eventually become French citizens. However, by the 1870s French policy towards Algeria began to be more separatist in nature. The French claimed that they recognized Algerian culture for what it was and maintained that assimilation was still possible, but it was obvious that assimilation policies had shifted to association. In the years that followed, with the French colonization occurring in both Tunisia and Morocco, France decided to pursue a different approach. This approach argued that the native culture was to be separated from French but that it was to be equal.

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<sup>1</sup> Lorcin, Patricia M. E. *Historicizing Colonial Nostalgia: European Women's Narratives of Algeria and Kenya 1900-present*. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 26.

Due to France's policy change of association, it was apparent that the French authorities were highly concerned about the population deficits. They recognized that Algerians, regardless to the opened and encouraged immigration to the colony, greatly outnumbered the European colonists. In the year 1870, French authorities had granted citizenship to all Jews that lived in Algeria, at the same time denying citizenship to the majority of Muslim men. Muslim men achieving French citizenship during this time was extremely uncommon and remained as such throughout the colonial period. In the hopes of encouraging more immigration to Algeria, the French passed a law in 1889 which granted French citizenship to anyone born in Algeria to all Europeans. According to Historian Todd Shepard, it was during this time that "France asserted that Algeria was an extension of French national territory and that its native-born inhabitants were national subjects; for most of the period, when and whether most Algerians would be citizens remained an unresolved question<sup>2</sup>".

It is important to note that there is a substantial difference between a colony and a settler colony. Colonialism as a whole requires settlers. However there are two different types of settlers which differentiates a colony from a settler colony. Historian David Prochaska writes, in a colony "there are two primary groups involved - temporary migrants from the colonizing country (colonial administrators, military personnel, merchants and traders, missionaries) and the indigenous people - in settler colonies the settlers constitute a third group<sup>3</sup>". For the majority, settler colonists chose to live in the colony. There are several reasons as to why someone would choose to leave their homeland and move to the colonies but one reason is based off of the idea that "the stratification [of a settler society] is based more on race and ethnicity than on socioeconomic class<sup>4</sup>". In other words, Europeans who were of very low social standing in Europe would automatically be upgraded in a colonial society simply because of their European

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<sup>2</sup> Shepard, Todd. *The Invention of Decolonization: The Algerian War and the Remaking of France*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 2006, 19.

<sup>3</sup> Prochaska, David. *Making Algeria French: Colonialism in Bône, 1870-1920*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1990, 9.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, 10.

heritage. This ability to move up in the social scheme greatly encouraged the immigration of the lower classes and also greatly affected the life of Isabelle Eberhardt. When Eberhardt arrived in Algeria the first time she still maintained a wealthy lifestyle, however, when Eberhardt moved to Algeria in 1899 before the finalization of her inheritance she arrived with very little money and by the end of her life she owed several debtors money. In the colony, she maintained the persona that she belonged to a wealthy European family and her lack of monetary funds did not impede her ability to travel or survive in Algeria. Additionally, it was extremely common in France at this time to use the immigration of the lower class as a means of releasing social and political pressures in the motherland.

The presence of European women in Algeria during the colonization period indicated that this was more than just a colony. Encouraged by French authorities, European women moved to the settler colony with the hope of marrying and producing offspring with other Europeans. In analyzing the actions of the French in Algeria, it is clear that with the growing European population due to immigration, promotion of European women settling in the colonies, and the original desire of the natives to assimilate to French culture, that France had intended on Algeria becoming an essential part of Europe but in a different space. In France especially, the life of women had changed dramatically throughout the nineteenth century. According to Lorcin, women's mobility had greatly improved both in urban and rural areas in France. This mobility transferred over to the colonies. Algeria, due to its proximity to France, offered women the perfect opportunity to expand their horizons. Algeria provided many women with opportunities of advancement, Lorcin explains that social mobility was far easier in the colonies than in Europe and that although social hierarchies existed in Algeria, they were much easier to cross class boundaries.

Due to the settler colony ideals of the French authorities, all types of women were encouraged to immigrate to the colony. Professions of these women ranged from the wives of French authorities to travelers, such as Isabelle Eberhardt, to missionaries. In fact, female

missionaries were encouraged to migrate regardless to the tense relationship between the Catholic Church and secular France. It was believed that women would have easier access into the lives of Algerians than male missionaries. In addition, women had more access to the indigenous women. Lorcin writes that female missionaries were encouraged because of “(a) the prevailing beliefs that local women were the ‘guardians’ of traditional social values and perpetrated ‘archaic’ customs and (b) women [were] generally more easily influenced than men [which] meant that [the] ability to enter the home was a prized asset<sup>5</sup>”.

### **Review of the Literature and an Introduction to the Primary Sources**

Eberhardt is an extremely fascinating character in colonial history and for that reason several biographers and historians have researched her life in great detail. While some historians provide excellent background information on her upbringing and short life, others analyze Eberhardt’s personal involvement in the colonial experience. Eberhardt’s writings provide excellent information in discussing the real persona of Eberhardt and provide additional insight on the French colony and time period. European primary sources that deal so directly with the indigenous population and Muslim religion are hard to come by and for that reason Eberhardt’s life and works are extremely important in analyzing the French colonization of Algeria. Eberhardt’s writings include diaries, newspaper articles, and short-story fictions. Sharon Bangert, Rana Kabbani, and Annette Kobak are all three historians who provide introductions for Eberhardt’s writings and additional information about her life. Each of these women provide different primary source analysis and insider background on Eberhardt. Unfortunately, there are times that these historians contradict each other or give different information on particular instances. When this occurs, I have chosen to elect Annette Kobak, who writes the introduction for the book, *The Nomad: The Diaries of Isabelle Eberhardt*, as the source with the most credibility in that her publishing date is the newest. In addition, Kobak is explicitly named in

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<sup>5</sup> Lorcin 28.

Kabbani's introduction in the book *The Passionate Nomad: The Diary of Isabelle Eberhardt* for being "Isabelle's most recent and thorough biographer."

Kabbani is extremely critical of Eberhardt and her life. Kabbani writes that, "She [Eberhardt] explored the state of her psyche rather than that of the country. The reader becomes familiar.. with her moods and fears, but hardly learns anything about the domestic or social or political dimension of her life<sup>6</sup>". Kabbani believes that Eberhardt wasted her potential and had held herself back from achieving anything because of her many addictions and psychological problems. Kabbani alludes to the fact that Eberhardt's death, although she died in a flash flood, may have committed a form of suicide by not trying to save herself during the accident. Kabbani believes that had Eberhardt lived longer that "she could have mustered enough emotional strength to harmonize between her many warring selves<sup>7</sup>". Kabbani's writings show disdain towards Eberhardt's life and actions. Her voiced opinions of Eberhardt have rendered her writings too impartial.

Julia Clancy-Smith provides a very important analysis and interpretation of Eberhardt's life and writings. In *Western Women and Imperialism*, Clancy-Smith's essay titled, The "Passionate Nomad" Reconsidered, examines Eberhardt's life and determines that Eberhardt is not as much of "anomaly" as other past historians have claimed. Clancy-Smith argues that Eberhardt was simply a symptom of the time period. She writes of Eberhardt, that she was not "an enemy of France" nor was she "profoundly Algerianized" but rather a "collaborator in the construction of French Algeria<sup>8</sup>". Clancy-Smith also indicates that Eberhardt's upbringing was very important to the woman she became. Her access to the education that she received and her instructions to dress as a boy in her youth would influence her immensely in Algeria. Clancy-Smith's work in understanding Eberhardt's life will provide excellent scholarship in discussing

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<sup>6</sup> Kabbani, Rana. *The Passionate Nomad: The Diary of Isabelle Eberhardt*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1988. xi.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid xi.

<sup>8</sup> Clancy-Smith, Julia. "The "Passionate Nomad" Reconsidered." *Western Women and Imperialism: Complicity and Resistance*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1992. 62.

the ways in which Eberhardt was not a phenomenon but rather the result of what could happen in a colonial setting.

Patricia Lorcin's book *Historicizing Colonial Nostalgia* is utilized as a secondary source in discussing the life of Isabelle Eberhardt and the colonial setting. In it she discusses colonialism, European women in the colonies, and explicitly discusses Isabelle Eberhardt's life. Lorcin's work supports arguments that state why women's voices were so important during this time. This work provides a model of how the ideal women would have acted during this time period and then provides examples of women who broke away from the ideal. Lorcin uses primary materials found in letters, memoirs, and other non-fiction writings to make her arguments valid. Lorcin writes that, "Women had an ideological role to play in the colonies, whether it was consciously assumed or not. Personal narratives help us to understand just how important this role was... Listening to women's voices is one way of gauging what women feel and think or, more to the point, what they think listeners should know about what they do or do not feel and think<sup>9</sup>".

Lorcin discusses the changes in women's rights in both Britain and France. She discusses how, "education for women improved in both France and Britain over the century providing women with better formal educational opportunities. Additionally the reform movements that took shape in both countries during the century raised women's political awareness and encouraged the emergence of feminist and women's labor movement<sup>10</sup>". This change in women's roles greatly affected the life of Isabelle Eberhardt, who had received a specialized education from her tutor that provided her with access to more education that most women had access to. However, it was thanks to this period of time, that Eberhardt was able to travel to the African continent and live in the French colony.

The Primary Sources utilized in this thesis are all written by Isabelle Eberhardt, these writings are the compilations of diaries, travel journals and fiction and non-fiction stories. The

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<sup>9</sup> Lorcin 6.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid 26.

primary sources used are: *Writings in the Sand*, *The Nomad*, *The Passionate Nomad*, *Departures*, *In the Shadow of Islam*, and *Oblivion Seekers*. These documents are the first-hand accounts of what Isabelle Eberhardt saw or claimed to have seen in the French colony of Algeria. When reading these primary sources it is important to remember that Eberhardt maintained a very romanticized view of the North African colony and its inhabitants. It is also important to note that Eberhardt was a very educated European woman and although she led a controversial life and a gloomy adolescence she originated from a relatively wealthy background.

Many historians that study Eberhardt agree that Eberhardt had not intended to publish the writings in her personal diaries. In fact, it is possible that Eberhardt wrote the diaries to help herself in her future endeavors in writing. In her writings, she constantly alludes to the fact that she hopes to become a famous writer because of her African experiences. Some of her biographers, such as Annette Kobak, indicate that Eberhardt wrote these items as a means of helping her remember what happened in a specific occurrence and how she felt about them. This indicates a high level of bias and predisposition; Eberhardt did not have to be fair in her writings or try and conceal her bias against certain European or Arab ideals nor her preference for the male Arab's way of life.

Due to the bias nature of Eberhardt's writings there could be concern about whether or not her writings are credible in relation to Algeria. However these documents are not used to describe or explain the relations of all Europeans in the context of gender and race in Algeria but rather a micro-history through the lens of Eberhardt's life and writings. Eberhardt's character through her writings, provides an interesting juxtaposition between a highly educated European woman from a wealthy background and this same European woman who converted to Islam, dressed like a man, and married an Arab Muslim. Her writings provide excellent examples of someone who tries to assimilate to the indigenous culture yet still maintains the popular Orientalist romantic language of European society.

### **Introduction to Isabelle Eberhardt**

Isabelle Eberhardt's contentious life begins with her birth as the illegitimate child of a wealthy Russian woman, Nathalie Eberhardt, and an unknown father, that many historians believe to be her former priest, anarchist Armenian tutor, Alexander Trophimowsky. At a young age Nathalie Eberhardt married 63 year old Russian General Pavel de Moerder. In 1873, during her pregnancy with Isabelle's older brother, Nathalie Eberhardt went on vacation with her stepchildren in Switzerland where she received the news that the General had died. Four years later, Nathalie Eberhardt gave birth to Isabelle but chose not to name who the father was. Isabelle Eberhardt was registered as an "illegitimate daughter." This was simply the beginning of what became a very complicated and stressful childhood and youth.

Young Eberhardt's writings indicate that she dreamt of living in the African continent, her reasons ranged from a desire for freedom that she believed only the colony could provide to wanting to escape the never ending pressures of European society. Before the turn of the century, Eberhardt had travelled to North Africa twice. The first time with her mother in 1897 and the second time by herself in 1899. During her first visit, Eberhardt and her mother, Nathalie, both converted to Islam. However it was at this time that one of the first tragedies hit Eberhardt. Her mother died while the two women were in Algeria, Eberhardt buried her mother in the Muslim cemetery and this event would be extremely difficult for Eberhardt to recover from. In her second visit, Eberhardt dressed as a Tunisian male scholar and travelled alone to the Saharan desert, a trip that she had been dreaming about for years. Eberhardt writes in her diaries that she believed that as a European woman she would never see the real culture of Algeria and for that she disembarks on a journey which further distances her from the Europeans. Eberhardt gradually picked up spoken Arabic which had been made easier thanks to her training in classical Arabic by Trophimowsky. Additionally, her decision to dress as a Tunisian male was also influenced by Trophimowsky, who had encouraged her to dress as a boy in her childhood. Trophimowsky's eccentric teaching style encouraged his female students to dress as males as a means of promoting equality between the genders. Furthermore, perhaps due to her upbringing, Eberhardt felt that this

male persona was the real her. Her dress also allowed her to travel with far less restrictions had she remained dressed as a woman, European or Arab.

In her third trip, during the fall of 1900, Eberhardt arrived in French colony with extremely low financial resources after losing out on her inheritance because of her rash decision to leave Switzerland before the inheritance had been settled. Had Eberhardt waited for the inheritance to go through she would have had enough private income for the rest of her life. Instead, Eberhardt was dependent on others. Kabanni explains, “She [Eberhardt] slept wrapped in her dirty burnouts in public gardens or in the houses of acquaintances; she arranged her social calls to coincide with meal-times, knowing that she would certainly be asked, in accordance with custom of Arab hospitality, to remain and share food<sup>11</sup>”. Eberhardt spent the rest of her days depending on others, working menial jobs, and living with constant debt.

It was after her arrival during the third trip that Eberhardt joined the Sufi sect, Qadrya. Soon later, Eberhardt had an assassination attempt on her life by the member of a rivalry Sufi sect, Abdallah Mohammad ben Lakhdrar. This attempt had been almost successful and her life was spared by the fact that there had been a laundry line above her head which the assailant hit first with the sabre instead of her skull. According to Kobak, this proved to be a turning point in her life as Eberhardt chose to pardon her attacker. It was during this time that Eberhardt wrote to local newspapers in order for his life to be spared. Kobak writes, “This contact with the newspapers, and Mohammad’s trial, put her in the public eye for the first time.. From now on Isabelle would live a more publicly accountable life<sup>12</sup>”.

Apart from what became a very public life, several historians believe that in her private life, Eberhardt had severe health problems and some argue mental health problems as well. Evidence indicates that Eberhardt suffered from anorexia, which would have helped with her to

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<sup>11</sup> Kabbani vii.

<sup>12</sup> Kobak, Annette. *The Nomad: The Diaries of Isabelle Eberhardt*. Northampton: Interlink Books, 2003. 11

pass as a man due to some of the side effects. In addition, Eberhardt's writings demonstrate what could be severe depression by the time she arrived in North Africa. An example of this depression is found in the foreword written by historian Sharon Bangert, she explains a detailed scene in which Eberhardt attempted to commit suicide. While in recovery, Trophimowsky offers her a gun and Eberhardt refuses. The extent of her depression could be in response to the recent deaths of her mother, "Vava" or Trophimowsky, suicide of her depressed older brother, and the recent marriage of her closest brother Augustin to a woman she despised.

Eberhardt also had a dangerous addiction to drugs and alcohol<sup>13</sup>, which is believed to have started from a very young age and influenced by her brother Augustin. For the remainder of her life, Eberhardt depended heavily on narcotics and alcohol. Historian Kabbani writes of Eberhardt that, "she would function for days without sustenance, as long as she had enough *kif* and *arak* to stun herself with. Every last borrowed franc was spent on these habits<sup>14</sup>". In addition to an addiction to drugs and alcohol, Eberhardt lived an extremely promiscuous life. Some historians argue that Eberhardt had a mild form of syphilis which she may have contracted in her extensive sexual encounters. Despite her sexual escapades, Eberhardt married Arab Muslim Sliméne Ehnni. Their relationship was not traditional by any means but despite their constant separations and her continued eroticism, Sliméne is one of the most discussed themes in her writings. As we shall see, Ehnni is featured prominently in her writings.

Eberhardt's life was cut short at the age of 27, when she was caught in an unexpected flash flood and died. Many historians point to the irony in Eberhardt's death by flood in the desert. Although Eberhardt died at a very young age, she left behind thousands of "notes, articles, and fiction... Apart from the diaries, there were four posthumous volumes of stories about desert, village, and town life in the Maghreb, much of it affected by the clash of codes between the occupying colonial forces and the local inhabitants, but also full of evocative descriptions of

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Eberhardt never alludes to her own addiction to drugs or sexual promiscuity. However, it is well documented in several secondary sources that discuss her life.

<sup>14</sup> Kabbani vi.

natural beauty<sup>15</sup>”. Eberhardt wrote on many subjects that many writers do not mention. In addition, Eberhardt’s writings are infused with contradictions. Historian Rana Kabanni, best explains these contradictions when she states, “a woman disguised as a man, an aristocrat living the life of a beggar, a sensualist haunted by the soul, and a transgressor in the best Byronic tradition<sup>16</sup>”. These contradictions could be the symptom of the confusion Eberhardt felt coming from the family she belonged to, as well as, being caught between two very different societies. Regardless of her claimed love and respect for Algerian Muslims and explicit despise for Europe and Europeans, Eberhardt’s writings indicate that Eberhardt subscribed to many of the Orientalist beliefs held in Europe during this time period.

### **Eberhardt and “Orientalism”**

Orientals or Arabs are thereafter shown to be gullible, ‘devoid of energy and initiative,’ much given to ‘fulsome flattery,’ intrigue, cunning, and unkind to animals; Orientals cannot walk on either a road or a pavement (their disorder minds fail to understand what the clever Europeans grasp immediately)... they are ‘lethargic and suspicious,’ and in everything oppose the clarity, directness, and nobility of the Anglo-Saxon race<sup>17</sup>

This is a prime example of the common language used to describe the colonies during Eberhardt’s lifetime. This type of language is known as Orientalism. It gains its legitimacy from the idea that European culture is far superior than the Orient culture. Orientalism covers a wide range of subjects, such as “discourse with supporting institutions, vocabulary, scholarship, imagery, doctrines, even colonial bureaucracies and colonial styles<sup>18</sup>”. This indicates that during Eberhardt’s lifetime, Orientalism was perhaps the most common trend of thought. The majorities of Europeans regardless to education, religion, or gender was being subject to and believe these racial stereotypes. Orientalism and paternalism (limiting a person because of their racial inferiority) is accepted because it tries to fix the backwardness of the inferior races and claims the

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<sup>15</sup> Kobak 12.

<sup>16</sup> Kabbani v.

<sup>17</sup> Said, Edward. "Orientalism." *Odsq.org*. Penguin, 2003. Web. 03 May 2014. 38.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid 2.

inferior race's as being "irrational, depraved, (fallen), childlike, 'different'"<sup>19</sup>. Orientalism had an array of effects on the European society. Orientalism literature also opened the doors of the Orient to Europeans that would most likely never have stepped foot in the colonies, this explains Eberhardt's introduction to the "Orient" prior to her travels.

This information best explains why Eberhardt had a deep passion and love for the Orient before her adventure in the North African colony began. Eberhardt's language is also entrenched in the popular language of the Oriental era. Just as Eberhardt did not mean the words she said to sound racist as they can now be understood, many Oriental authors wrote using Oriental language to develop a new literature genre that glorified the mysteries of the Oriental culture. Several quotations from Eberhardt's writings, utilized in this thesis, demonstrate the ways in which Eberhardt states something that would be deemed appropriate by Orientalism standards but also demonstrates paternalist, racial, and sexual prejudice.

The obsession with the "Orient" was prevalent during this time in Europe, the "notion of the East as the coffer of erotic delights and unlimited freedoms"<sup>20</sup>. Not only did Eberhardt fantasize of this new land that would bring her out of her reality of European society but she also had an obsession with the idea of the Arab man. One of the main reasons behind her controversial life is her sexual promiscuity with both Arab and European men.

Eberhardt embraced the stereotype of the rugged and passionate Arab. Eberhardt writes about one of her lovers, "his very harshness and violence are Arabic, in fact. There is also something savage about the way he loves, something un-French and un-modern"<sup>21</sup>. This quote, taken from Eberhardt's personal diary is entrenched in Orientalist language. However, Eberhardt does not use this language in a negative way. When Eberhardt writes "un-French and un-modern", she uses this language in a way to promote the way in which the Arab man makes love and to explain that it is better than the ways in which the modern man makes love. This manner of

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid 40.

<sup>20</sup> Kabbani vi.

<sup>21</sup> Kobak 153.

using paternalistic language in a way to promote a specific trait is very perplexing. In another one of Eberhardt's writings she described an occurrence that happened while she was in Morocco and traveling at night with her male Arab companion, Maamar ould Kaddour, in which they came across a nomad and a young, beautiful woman. Eberhardt describes the girl's actions as if she knew her, "she had come to this rendezvous recklessly". Eberhardt mentions that the girl seems to have realized her error and seemed scared but that before she could do anything, the nomad had picked her up and silenced her in the dark. Eberhardt states, "then the two bodies, convulsing in love's superb fury, rolled together upon the shadowy earth." Her companion, noticing Eberhardt's concern or rather interest in the relations between the two, retorts, "Leave them! We sons of Arabs know how to love. We gamble our lives for women but when we take them in the night, like hunters of gazelles, we press them against us in a way they'll remember<sup>22</sup>".

Isabelle Eberhardt's acceptance of Orientalism and its language provide an interesting juxtaposition due to her claims of loving the Arab culture and her rejection of her European heritage. It is yet another example of her contradicting natures, on the one hand, Eberhardt embraces this idea of the Arab man and his excelled sexual ability but at the same time Eberhardt utilizes language that is extremely demeaning and paternalistic. Additionally, with the knowledge that Eberhardt may be writing her journals to better help her in her future writing endeavors, this statement by an Arab and his embracement of the ideas passed onto Arab men by Orientalism causes speculation. Eberhardt's choice to add this claim by an Arab, could be an example of the types of writings she would later use in literature with the hopes of gaining recognition in Europe. Undoubtedly, Eberhardt's living amongst the Arabs, marriage to a Muslim, and conversion to Islam would provide her with the information needed to write an Orientalist work. Nevertheless, whether or not this Arab man made the claim, Eberhardt felt that it needed to be included in her journal.

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<sup>22</sup> Eberhardt, Isabelle, and Sharon Bangert. *In the Shadow of Islam*. London: Peter Owen, 1993. 92.

### **Eberhardt's Language in the Context of Gender and Race**

Eberhardt's writings cover a variety of subjects. She wrote about everything from Algerian nationalism to small Muslim towns to experiences with fellow Muslims. Her ability to cover such a wide range of subjects is due to her decision to not provide much background on her topics and the amount of time she spent with the indigenous population. Eberhardt's writings are just as contradictory as her life but they provide very interesting details about the colonial experience.

Although truly infatuated with the Arab land, Eberhardt did not maintain any nationalist views for Algeria. Her lack of nationalist views for Algeria could be due to the fact that Eberhardt did not hold any nationalistic views for any nation. Eberhardt's mixed cultural identity may explain her feelings on the subject. Her writings vary text to text, however, some indicate that she believed that the French belong in North Africa. She holds the same general belief as many of the other Europeans living during this era. This belief stated the North Africans, the "Orientals", needed the European's modernity to bring it out of its backwardness. In discussing the uprisings that were occurring in Algeria, Eberhardt writes, "they have no idea at all of war in the real sense of the world, of race against race battle or one of religion against religion... They are, with their slow ways of all nomads, very simple and primitive people, herders and camel drivers continuing their usual existence while changing hardly a thing<sup>23</sup>". In this particular excerpt, it is as if Eberhardt is agreeing with the Europeans reasons of backwardness and the need to modernize the Algerians, but at the same time denying that she thought the Arabs would ever be able to fully understand French laws because they are too primitive or simpleminded.

As Lorcin indicates in her chapter on women in the colonies, many other colonial women had similar beliefs during this time period. For example, Hubertine Auclert (1848-1914) a French feminist who lived in Algeria for four years because of her husband's position as a magistrate.

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<sup>23</sup> Eberhardt, Isabelle. *Writings from the Sand Volume 1*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 2012. 135.

Auclert spent this time conducting several interviews and living amongst the women of Algeria. Auclert's writings can be summed up as feminist views and the belief that Arab women needed access to better lives and improvements which Auclert believed that European influence could bring. Auclert believed that fundamental problems exist in the colonial society, primarily in the ways the natives are treated. However, Auclert did not believe that the French should give up the colony. She wrote, "what is most important now is to criss-cross our North Africa with roads and railways, so that both the settler and indigenous population can benefit from their produce<sup>24</sup>".

Eberhardt upholds the dominating European "prejudices based on caste, rank, and especially race: the Frenchman imagined the Arab to be only instinctive, animal like<sup>25</sup>". It is obvious that Eberhardt feels superior to her Arab friends and this is evident in the language she uses. Eberhardt uses the language that was prominent during this time era, she uses words such as simple and primitive to describe everything from the Arab man's personality, to animals, as well as room furnishings. She describes an Arab man that she comes into contact with as having, "the nomad personality, the great lack of concern, the extreme mobility of spirit, the instability of passions, sometimes childish, deep, but never lasting very long<sup>26</sup>". Eberhardt is torn between the love she holds towards the North African colonies while maintaining ties to her European background.

The book *In the Shadow of Islam* is a compilation of articles, diaries, and short stories written by Isabelle Eberhardt which was translated and compiled after her death by her friend, Victor Barrucand. Barrucand owned the newspaper, *Les Nouvelles*, which had published Eberhardt's writings while she was alive. After the untimely death of Eberhardt, Barrucand published and translated, *In the Shadow of Islam* and attached himself as co-author. The writer of the translation that this thesis examines, Sharon Bangert, explains that there has been speculation

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<sup>24</sup> Lorcin 31.

<sup>25</sup> Eberhardt, *Writings from the Sand* 82.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid 204.

about his translations and mentions that some critics have claimed that this source cannot be fully trusted in that Barrucand may have taken some liberties and changed Eberhardt's writings.

Nevertheless, this primary source has the makings of a travel journal. Eberhardt writes about who and what she comes into contact with throughout her journeys, as well as, explaining how she feels about what she comes into contact with. An example of her travel writings is found in her description of an Arab town, Sfisifa, which according to Eberhardt, "is without a single European, without even a Jew". The importance of this town is not in its name but in the manner Eberhardt describes the town and its inhabitation. Eberhardt writes, "Everything fallen to ruins... sickly villagers - pale, whinging, and effeminately dressed - a race weakened by ancient inbreeding and sedentary lives.... And I realized then, there are people, too, who exude decay<sup>27</sup>". The language that Eberhardt utilizes in this entry demonstrates extreme disgust and disparagement towards the people of the small Muslim town. Another interesting aspect about this passage is that Eberhardt uses the term effeminately in a negative way, not only does Eberhardt choose to dress like an Arab man, she also exposes her negative sentiments towards the female gender. This account may also be translated to demonstrate her disgust in regards to what she believed to be the backwardness in some North African towns.

In another section of *In the Shadow of Islam*, Eberhardt describes the Arab in a very affirmative light and once more uses the male gender to represent something she finds to be positive. Eberhardt writes, "The Arab understands manly honour, and he wants to die bravely, facing the enemy; but he is absolutely innocent of the desire for posthumous glory... They voluntarily bring to the service of France their valour, their audacity, and their tireless endurance; they 'serve loyally, and this is enough for them<sup>28</sup>". Eberhardt maintains a high level of romanticism in writing about Arab men. The romanticism in this particular entry, assumes that all men that serve France, serve France because they want to and not because it is required of

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<sup>27</sup> Eberhardt, Isabelle, and Sharon Bangert 21.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid 37.

them. In addition, Eberhardt romanticizes Arab men, when she writes that he [the Arab man] is void of searching for glory.

There is so much irony in discussing Eberhardt's writings. In one page of her travel journal, she can be writing about how she wants to give an unbiased account and then in the next she will use extremely biased language to describe something. For example, in the text of *In the Shadow of Islam*, Eberhardt writes, "For this attempt I should have no prejudices in either direction; it should be a natural history as well as a social history. I should first have to be cured of my prejudices about superior races, and my superstitions about inferior ones<sup>29</sup>". In the following page she gives an "unbiased" account of her visit to the compound of Lella, the "elderly Muslim queen-mother". Eberhardt writes, "The male [black] slaves manage to contain somewhat the urgings of their blood [in regards to sexual advances], but all of black womanhood abandon themselves to instinct, and their quarrels are as frivolous as their loves<sup>30</sup>". Eberhardt buys into the idea that black men and women are unable to control their savage desires, because it is in their skin color and there is no way to control themselves.

In Eberhardt's *In the Shadow of Islam*, she describes the politeness of the Arabs. She describes how Europeans are more blunt and straight to the point and when they try and be more sincere and polite that "their speech is pretentious, awkward." However, when the Arabs are polite, it is much more natural, she states, "here [with the Arabs], politeness is not a formula, it is a way of being and is completely sincere: it takes part in characters, it harmonizes with costumes, there is nothing subservient and nothing affected about it. It pleases<sup>31</sup>". Eberhardt views the tradition of being courteous as a positive quality, one that she believed that Europeans do not have the ability of maintaining.

According to historian Sharon Bangert, Eberhardt, after the death of her mother, extremely depressed had contemplated suicide. However, when Trophimosky arrived and offered

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid 47.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid 48.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid 71.

her his gun, she declined and made steps towards recovering. In light of this information, after a local woman kills herself, Eberhardt writes in, *In the Shadow of Islam*, “A people for whom suicide is still possible is a strong people. Animals never kill themselves; nor negroes, unless that is, they are stimulated by alcohol. Suicide is a kind of drunkenness, but a deliberate drunkenness<sup>32</sup>”. The woman had killed herself because she had no means of escaping her husband who beat her and a family that kept returning her to him. According to Eberhardt, the woman had been unable to go to the religious leaders because “she was a slave, more slave than the negresses, in that her servitude brought her suffering. At the end she was calm, for she had grasped the key to ultimate liberation<sup>33</sup>”. In continuation of this scene, some young Muslim scholars comment on the women’s unhappiness. Eberhardt then condemns men, for they do not understand what unhappiness is.

The example of the Arab woman who killed herself due to unhappiness in her life is one of the few Arab women that Eberhardt discusses. Eberhardt does not make any attempt to form bonds with or converse with them. She believed that Arab women are boring, she writes “the bleak boredom of life among unintelligent beings, in the midst of the mediocrity and indiscretion of indigenous females<sup>34</sup>”. One exception of an Arab woman that Eberhardt respects profusely is Leila Zayneb. Eberhardt writes, “my case, my way of life, and my story keenly interest the marabout. When she has heard all, she approves of me and assures me of her friendship forever”<sup>35</sup>.

### **Eberhardt’s Conversion to Islam, explanations for Non-Traditional Dress, and her Marriage to an Algerian man.**

After Eberhardt’s first trip to North Africa, she and her mother both converted to Islam. In the years to come Eberhardt became one the first Europeans, although dressed like an Arab

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid 74.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid 74.

<sup>34</sup> Lorcin 52.

<sup>35</sup> Eberhardt, *Writings from the Sand* 116.

man to be accepted into an Islamic Sufi Order, the Qadrya. After Eberhardt's conversion to Islam she began to write fervently about her love for Islam. Eberhardt's writings demonstrate her strong love for Islam, and in one of her diaries she writes, "whoever considers themselves to be Muslim must devote themselves body and soul to Islam for all time, to the point of martyrdom if need be; Islam must inhabit their souls and govern every one of their acts and words"<sup>36</sup>. However, what she wrote is completely opposite from the way she lived her life, in regards to drug usage, alcohol, and sexual exploits. Her life and her actions would be extremely looked down upon not only in European society but also under this Islamic law she claims that she would want to die for.

The historians that have examined the life of the Isabelle Eberhardt explain her style of dress, amongst other reasons, as being a way to further devote herself to Islam. Lorcin writes that Eberhardt's disguise as a Arabic Muslim was, "an extension affiliation to Islam, her efforts to acquire fluency in Arabic and her desire to familiarize herself with Islamic customs and laws"<sup>37</sup>. Her untraditional dress allowed her to see and view things within the Islamic community that she would not have been able to view dressed as a European male or especially female.

Eberhardt rarely discusses women in her writings but her one exception that she describes in great detail is Lélla Zayneb. Zayneb was a great spiritual leader who had been designated to take over her highly respected father's place when he died. Many of the men she had power over were incredibly jealous of her position and were constantly questioning her rights to the position. Eberhardt's writings show sympathy for Zayneb, for she believed that Zayneb's life is full of deep sadness. Eberhardt sees their relationship only being possible because of their similar destinies. Eberhardt and Zayneb formed a very interesting friendship, in that they both did not conform to the norms of their societies. Eberhardt writes, "my case, my way of life, and my story keenly interest the marabout. When she has heard all, she approves of me and assures me of

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<sup>36</sup> Kobak 15.

<sup>37</sup> Lorcin 42.

her friendship forever”<sup>38</sup>. There is a possibility that Zayneb approved of Isabelle because of her own desires to be accepted. In Islamic culture, Eberhardt’s actions of dressing like a man and ultimately acting like a man would never be accepted by a man. Zayneb who was placed in a traditionally man’s position may have seen the way Eberhardt was able to act and dress like a man and be accepted. She may have felt a sense of longing for her own position to be accepted by the men in her life.

Eberhardt had access to the different factions within Islam regardless of her affiliation to a specific one. She discussed the violence between the different sects and fell victim in one specific act of violence in an assassination attempt on her life. Eberhardt, in addition, discusses the cultural differences between the different Muslim groups, she writes, “Moroccans [Muslims] abhor Algerians... Moroccans may detest Algerian Muslims more deeply than Christians, for they see the former as having abjured Islam, while the latter remain what they’ve always been: infidels<sup>39</sup>”. Her acceptance into this Sufi Order and insider knowledge, helped her in the relations with European authorities, such as General Lyautey, who is discussed in a later section.

Eberhardt believed that she was unnoticeable in her disguise as an Arab man. It is clear that she believed that if she was to wear women’s clothing that she would receive too much scrutiny. She writes, “I’m able to pass everywhere completely unobserved, an excellent position to be in for observing. If women are not good at this, it’s because their costume attracts attention. Women have always been made to be looked at, and they aren’t yet much bothered by the fact. This attitude, I think, gives far too much advantage to men<sup>40</sup>”. In this particular context, Eberhardt does not clarify about whether or not she is talking about European women or Arab women, regardless of whom she is addressing Eberhardt is making a point about why she dresses a certain way.

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<sup>38</sup> Eberhardt, *Writings from the Sand* 116.

<sup>39</sup> Eberhardt, Isabelle, and Sharon Bangert 49.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid* 38.

Eberhardt's choice of clothing greatly impacted her relations with both the Arab and French worlds in Algeria. In regards to relations with the Arabs, Eberhardt had greater access to religious areas and more time spent with men than is allowed by women in their society. Lorcin indicates that the Arabs knew that she was a woman dressing like a man but because of the tradition of being polite they would "never expose someone against their wishes<sup>41</sup>". By some it would be seen as a means of deceiving them. However to most Arabs, her decision to dress like a man would not, for the most part, have been interpreted negatively. Whereas the response elicited by the Europeans was "prompted by sentiments of 'betrayal of one's own' and accompanied by vociferations designed to bring the errant individual back into line<sup>42</sup>".

Her relations with the French became more tense, because of her decision to dress like a man. Her actions showed evidence of refusing to pursue "traditional gender roles". Which in most cases her style of dress was "offensive, because of their effect of reversing or blurring the boundaries of sexual difference, enabling women not only to look like but also act like men<sup>43</sup>". There was undoubtedly a concern of Eberhardt influencing other European women to forget their sex and to reject the cult of domesticity. However, the French and European societies would have more to complain about than Eberhardt's untraditional dress. When Eberhardt dressed as an Arab man she not only turned her back on her own gender but her European heritage. In colonial society everything that was good was European and everything backward was the other. To European society, Eberhardt was a phenomenon that they could not understand. Why would a European woman from an upper class background choose to be viewed as a "lowly" Muslim Arab?

Eberhardt wrote, "In proper young European women's clothing I would have never seen anything - the world would have been closed to me - for life in the outside world seems to have

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<sup>41</sup> Lorcin 52.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid 52.

<sup>43</sup> Roberts, Mary Louise. *Samson and Delilah Revisited: The Politics of Women's fashion in 1920's France*. University of Chicago Press, 1993. 669.

been made for men and not for women<sup>44</sup>”. Eberhardt had far more freedom in Algeria than she had in Europe regardless to her dress. As a European, Eberhardt was able to travel throughout the African colony with little obstruction whereas the indigenous populations were restricted in their traveling. Due to the fact that the French authorities restricted the movements of Arabs with the hope of quieting calls for an uprising. This restriction was known as the native code. With this knowledge, it must be assumed that Eberhardt wanted access to Arab men and more importantly Islam.

Eberhardt’s refusal to conform to tradition drove the French authorities to expel Eberhardt from the North African country. However, it was this same refusal that granted her access to it. Eberhardt’s relationship with Slimène Ehnni had begun in August of 1900. Slimène Ehnni was an Arab soldier and part of the French Army. Ehnni was one of the few Muslims that attained French citizenship. Eberhardt describes Ehnni that he was her, “best friend, chosen brother and profound love... His family, furthermore, had long been in the service of the French. His father, a descendent of an important maraboutic (holy) family had been head of indigenous recruiting for the French Army and was appointed Head of the Security Service in Constantine in 1882<sup>45</sup>”. In fact, Eberhardt’s official French-sanctioned marriage to Slimène Ehnni, in 1901, bestowed citizenship on her. With this citizenship, Eberhardt was permitted to return to Algeria after the expulsion after the assassination attempt on her life and gained even more access to mobility throughout Algeria. However, their relationship also caused an even more tense relationship to grow between Eberhardt and the European society.

Not only did Eberhardt break away from the social norm and associated with the colonized Arabs of Algeria, she married one of them. Initially, women were brought to Algeria with the hopes of forming a settler colony. The settler colony differed from other colonies in that the European women were expected to marry another European and start a family. In fact,

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<sup>44</sup> Eberhardt, *Writings from the Sand* 59.

<sup>45</sup> Lorcin 52.

European women were encouraged to come to Algeria, because the French believed that if there were Europeans there to intermingle with and marry, then the European men would not intermix with the Arabic women. Additionally, by marrying a Muslim and Arab man, Eberhardt broke the idea that these men were far more inferior to European men. Clancy-Smith states that, "Isabelle Eberhardt, compromised that equilibrium by fraternizing, both culturally and sexually, with those relegated to the 'other side of the tracks,' and in doing so, she threatened to expose the phantasms of the invented community<sup>46</sup>".

Eberhardt's unconventional marriage with Slimène Ehnni caused the French authorities problems. If marrying Slimène was not enough, Eberhardt's decision to continue her promiscuous lifestyle had created an even bigger issue. In Algeria, "[sexuality was] a crucial means to distinguish themselves [Europeans] from the Algerians and maintain dominance and cohesion as a colonial community... how could the French be a fit model of civilization if their morality was no better than that of the polygamous Algerians"<sup>47</sup>. In other words, Eberhardt's inability to remain faithful in her marriage denied the belief that Europeans held moral supremacy over the colonizers.

**Eberhardt's Views on French Rule and Occupation, her Interactions with other Europeans and French Authorities, and Eberhardt's Relations with General Hubert Lyautey.**

Interestingly as a woman who believed that she has joined the Arab world and claims to have nothing but love and respect for the indigenous population, Eberhardt never denies that she believed that the French should not be in Algeria. In fact, she wrote about how the emissaries that the French sent weren't adequate or kind enough to its inhabitants but she has no problem with the overall mission of the French. Some of her journal excerpts indicate that she believed that if only the French authorities knew how to handle the Arab population then there would not be incessant problems.

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<sup>46</sup> Clancy-Smith "The "Passionate Nomad" Reconsidered." 198.

<sup>47</sup> Clancy-Smith, Julia. *Domesticating the Empire: Race, Gender, and Family Life in the French and Dutch Colonialism*. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1998. 186

In another example of her contradictory opinions, she writes, “my heart is in fact generous, one that used to overflow with love and tenderness and continues to be filled with boundless compassion for all those who suffer injustice, all those who are weak and oppressed<sup>48</sup>”. However, colonialism brought countless injustices, racial prejudices, and exploitation yet Eberhardt still believed that the colonizing mission was just. Eberhardt writes about the complex relationship between the French authorities and the Algerian colony. Eberhardt’s writings indicate that she is fervently against Muslims assimilating to European society. She describes the action of assimilation as extremely detrimental for the Muslim. She demonstrates great disgust when discussing the Arab spahi, she writes, “he is no longer a Bedouin; and because he is a soldier, he truly believes himself superior to his brothers<sup>49</sup>”. Eberhardt believed that the two societies need to remain separate. It is apparent that Eberhardt believed that the “Orientals” could not understand the French modern ways and that by trying to assimilate them, she argues, that you destroy the beauty of the “Orient”.

In another instance, Eberhardt describes an incident in the desert in which a young man killed another man from a different tribe and how the tribe of the dead young man wanted justice. Eberhardt uses this opportunity to explain the ways in which the Arabs cannot fully understand the French policies. She writes, “he is in the hands of a human justice that the nomads, like all simple men, fear instinctively and dislike, for this justice is foreign to their ways<sup>50</sup>”. Although Eberhardt does not intend this example to demonstrate paternalistic ideals, by describing the Arabs as simple men that is precisely what she is doing. This statement could be translated to indicate that if only the Arabs were not so simple, perhaps they could understand the correct form of justice. Eberhardt’s journals indicate that she subscribes to the idea of the “noble savage.” It was precisely during this time period, in all parts of the world not only in the African continent, which Imperialist nations and literary writers from these nations wrote about the indigenous

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<sup>48</sup> Kobak 24.

<sup>49</sup> Eberhardt *Writings from the Sand* 210.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid 212.

populations. In these works, it would be common to encounter writings that depicted the native as violent and dangerous but more likely these writings would discuss the benevolent and simple indigenous people who only became violent when a force, such as the European colonization, came into play.

Eberhardt's writings, show great extreme distain towards the ways in which the French authorities collect taxes. She describes it as, "the most revolting and barbaric manner." It is ironic that Eberhardt utilizes this term because the term "barbaric" is most commonly used by Europeans to describe Arabs. Eberhardt uses this language to describe both the French and the Arabs because she is neither and therefore has the ability to use this term because she does not fully associate herself with either culture, regardless to her claims. Eberhardt states, "France assures itself of its mission in the countries it has conquered or protected... but alas the majority of those the mother country sends far off, to be the instruments of the fruitful work of which she dreams, do not understand it in this way<sup>51</sup>". This statement could signify a variety of things, for instance, it could be understood in a way that implies that Eberhardt believed that intentions of the French are good but that the people that the French have sent to Algeria to act on these intentions have their own motives.

Primary sources found in Eberhardt's diary, *The Nomad*, and her compiled writings found in *Writings in the Sand*, indicate that at several points in Eberhardt's life, she was the center of malicious gossip not only by the European colon but French authorities. Eberhardt very rarely mentions European women, however in this excerpt Eberhardt responds to the malicious gossip, she writes, "the problem with Ténés is that herd of neurotic, orgiastic, mean, and futile females. Needless to say here as elsewhere, mediocre people cannot abide me. In itself, all this mud-sliding means nothing to me, yet it does annoy me when it starts to get too close<sup>52</sup>". The European women that were colonizing North Africa had a strong dislike for her because she

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<sup>51</sup> Eberhardt *Writings from the Sand* 201.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid 182.

“declassed, desexed, and de-raced herself<sup>53</sup>” but her interactions with Arab men were unforgivable in the eyes of European men. Her relations with Arab men are one of the main causes of disputes between herself and the European colon in Algeria. Eberhardt defied the idea of the moral supremacy of the Europeans and had become a “political nuisance”.

Eberhardt constantly criticizes European society and ironically uses the predominant language that was utilized in describing the Arab populations. For example, in the section titled *The Drama of Hours*, found in Eberhardt’s *In the Shadow of Islam*, Eberhardt describes her sentiments towards the business of European life in Algeria. She writes, “In Algiers, seeing all the Europeans flocking at the same times to the same side of the arcades, to feel as if they belong, or promenading around the music-filled square, I sense the herd mentality<sup>54</sup>”. It is important to note that Algiers during this time period was predominately European, with little access to the real Algeria. In other writings, Eberhardt describes the actions and lifestyle of Europeans and believed it to be nonsense. However, in this entry, Eberhardt’s perception of the city of Algiers is clearly negative. She associates the movement of large groups of Europeans to the herding of animals.

After traveling to the border between Morocco and Algeria, Eberhardt received a letter from a friend asking her to return to the European city of Algiers. Eberhardt writes in *In the Shadow of Islam*, that she no longer has the love and desire that she once had for the city. Moreover, in this context, Eberhardt explains her sentiments about women by writing, “Women cannot understand me, they see me as a freak. I am much too simple for their taste, which is obsessed with the superficial and its artifice... When woman becomes the comrade of man, when she ceases to be a plaything, she will begin another existence. But for now, they only know how to breathe in time and to the theme of a waltz<sup>55</sup>”. Eberhardt, once more, shows her disdain for her gender. Eberhardt does admit that she believed that women can evolve, but until they do, they are worthless. She continues to write that she had received news that some women do exist that

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<sup>53</sup> Clancy-Smith *Domesticating the Empire* 186.

<sup>54</sup> Eberhardt, Isabelle, and Sharon Bangert 24.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid* 69.

“know how to speak without flirting” but Eberhardt does not buy into this idea. She also condemns men by stating that even if said women existed, the men “especially in the provinces, are still nothing but skirt-chasers”. Implying that if women hoped to marry, that their hopes lied in remaining, in her words, “worthless.”

As mentioned in the introduction, Eberhardt had an assassination attempt on her life that affected her for the remainder of her short life. This attempt was at the hands of a fellow Muslim, Abdallah Mohammad ben Lakhdrar, but of a different sect. During this time period it was not uncommon for the different sects to have a fierce rivalry that at times resulted in the assassination of fellow Muslims. However, Eberhardt writes that she believed that the French authorities may have had something to do with the incident. According to some historians, because Eberhardt had become a “political nuisance” to the colonization of Algeria this was highly possible. Additional information that provides insight to this event is that shortly after the assassination attempt, the French colonial government formally exiled Eberhardt from Algeria. Eberhardt does not understand the exile, she does not understand that her relations with Algerians, her sexual promiscuity, drug and alcohol addictions would be enough for the French to keep her out of their colony. It is at this point that Eberhardt argues she has said nothing but positive things about the French government, however, her nice words did not make up for her inability to behave like a proper European woman.

General Hubert Lyautey is known as the “Maker of Morocco” or “French Empire builder” but before Lyautey became the first French military ruler of Morocco, he had been placed in Algeria as a cavalry officer. Lyautey was not like many of his other French or European counterparts. He believed that in order to rule the indigenous people he needed to have insider’s knowledge on such a diverse group of people. Lyautey was constantly searching for ways in which the French could colonize the North African colonies, this desire lead to General Lyautey and Eberhardt meeting in October of 1903. Victor Barrucand a good friend of Lyautey but also publisher of Eberhardt’s works in his local newspaper recommended that Lyautey meet the young

European woman who had infiltrated the indigenous population and who had access to information that Lyautey needed.

Lyautey had been posted to Algeria in 1903. According to Bangert, Lyautey was, “in charge of pushing France’s influence westward into Morocco... [that he was] an imaginative man, with more original ideas on colonization than his military colleagues in North Africa... goal of ‘pacific penetration’ rather than military conquest of Morocco<sup>56</sup>”. Lyautey had great interest in Eberhardt because of her relations with Arab Muslims, her conversion to Islam, her ability to communicate in native language, and her knowledge of local customs. In addition to her conversion to Islam, Eberhardt’s admission as a European into the Sufi sect, Kadriya, gave her more access than any other European. According to Lorcin, “the Sufi brotherhood, the Quadiriya.. had strongly resisted French penetration of Algeria... Her knowledge, therefore, placed her in an exceptional position<sup>57</sup>”.

Eberhardt realized that her position as a European who had infiltrated the Algerian population could provide her with more opportunities. In fact, Lyautey granted her more freedom because of her cooperation with him, this freedom also included financial sustenance. Eberhardt was eager to share the inside information that she had learned in her time interacting with the native populations. Kabanni writes that Eberhardt shared her insight when she thought, “it could help the French colonial authorities expand their sphere of influence and crush nationalistic unrest<sup>58</sup>”.

In addition to Eberhardt’s access to information, according to Bangert, “Lyautey shared Isabelle’s attraction to Islam, mysticism, and Africa, and admired her rebelliousness, her rejection of ‘prejudice, servitude, and banality. Isabelle seemed to respect Lyautey’s attitude and his quick grasp of local issues<sup>59</sup>”. After Eberhardt’s death, it was Lyautey who had ordered the search for

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid 10.

<sup>57</sup> Lorcin 53.

<sup>58</sup> Kabbani viii.

<sup>59</sup> Eberhardt, Isabelle, and Sharon Bangert 10.

her papers in the house in which she had drowned. Lyautey was responsible for assembling the papers and helping to preserve them. He wrote of Eberhardt, after her death, that he would always ‘cherish the memory of the exquisite conversational evenings passed together.... I loved her for her prodigious artistic talent...<sup>60</sup>’. Lyautey acknowledged that Eberhardt’s writings contained countless information that he would not be able to find elsewhere. He believed that no one knew the Algerians as well as Eberhardt.

### **Conclusion**

The European population was higher in Algeria than most other European colonies due to French encouragement of European immigration. Algeria provided an opportunity for France to make claim to the Roman Empire. They believed themselves heirs to Empire with the right and duty to restore the previous Roman Empire to its glory days. The French justified their conquest because of Algeria’s “Latin” land and heritage.

The hope of the settler colony was to diminish the importance of Islam in the Arab lands. Europeans had very conflicting ideas on how the Algerians should be treated. Originally assimilation was the aim of the French for the Arabs however these ideas changed drastically and are both reflected in the language of the French government and Eberhardt’s writings. This conception of Muslim Algerians’ inability to assimilate to European culture is rooted in Orientalism and paternalism. Orientalism, and its language, during this time period was the common trend of thought in Europe. It had originally started as positive propaganda of the conquering of other nations but soon entered into everything from artwork, language, and literature. In books that range from *A Thousand and One Nights* to *Les Femmes arabes en Algérie* European society was introduced to a very romanticized version of the Orient.

Eberhardt claimed that conversion to Islam dictated many of the decisions she made. For example, Eberhardt’s non-traditional dress and even marriage was rooted in Islam. However, Eberhardt’s life on paper is far more Muslim than her real life. As seen above, Eberhardt’s actions

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<sup>60</sup> Lorcin 52.

did not promote Islam and indicated that she lived in a revolting manner to most Muslims. Her marriage to fellow Muslim, Slimène Ehnni provided her with an opportunity she would not have had otherwise. Her French citizenship was bestowed on to her from her marriage to an Algerian Muslim man. Although their relationship was not traditional, it is the language she uses to describe their marriage and Ehnni which provides even more important insight on how she views Arab men “un-modern” and “uncivilized.”

Eberhardt’s interactions with fellow Europeans was less than ideal and extremely stressed. Her actions of fraternizing with the Algerians and dressing like a male Arab Muslim instead of an elite European women caused countless confrontations and several expulsions. Her sexual relations with Arabs was perhaps her worst downfall to European men. In the eyes of the Europeans, Eberhardt’s actions with the Arab Muslims were unforgivable. Eberhardt used this same sexual language to describe the Arab man, but to Eberhardt and several other women of this time period, their sexuality was something that was desired rather than condemned.

In conclusion, Eberhardt may have simply been the product of her surroundings and upbringing. Her outlook, prejudices, and language have several similarities with the common ideals of the time period. The evidence located in Eberhardt’s personal diaries argue that Eberhardt knew what she would think of Algeria before she even stepped foot on it. Eberhardt searched and interpreted instances in a certain way to guarantee that her views of Algeria remained unaltered. In other words, Eberhardt thought she knew what she was going into when she arrived at the French colony and she intended on having the experiences she had dreamed of. Because of her European heritage she passed far more easier through the Orient than in any other time period before the colonization and although women still had restrictions on them and Eberhardt was able to get away with actions that she would never be able to get away with in Europe.

Eberhardt’s short life and writings are important to the study of colonization in early 20th century Algeria in that they display the contradictions of French colonialism that existed during

this time period. Eberhardt defies the European set boundaries of traditional dress and sexual expectations and is a prime example of the ways in which many characters from the colonial era refused to be restricted to the expectations that were held over Europeans. Eberhardt's refusal to uphold traditional European values in her promiscuous lifestyle and non-conformity to status quo is a direct contradiction to her usage of the common paternalistic and orientalist language. This contradiction illustrates the countless inconsistencies that existed in the colonies and its practices.

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