



**TRAVELLING THE EMPIRE AND THE REPUBLIC IN AN ORIENTALIST CONTEXT:  
FREDERICK BURNABY'S *ON HORSEBACK THROUGH ASIA MINOR* AND PHILIP  
GLAZEBROOK'S *JOURNEY TO KARS: A MODERN TRAVELER IN THE OTTOMAN LANDS*\***

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**Abstract**

Nineteenth century British imperialism made travel a necessity as well as a possibility for British subjects. In that imperialist context Frederick Burnaby traveled through the Ottoman Anatolia from Istanbul to Kars in 1877. More than a hundred years later it was that time trying to reconstruct the structure of feeling of the nineteenth century travelers that Philip Glazebrook undertook a similar itinerary in 1980. Using Edward W. Said's findings on the common points of the Orientalist discourse, the purpose of this study is to compare the discourses of two travelogues written on Turkey in different centuries. Considering the fact that travel writing is a highly inter-textual genre, the impact of Burnaby's and Glazebrook's travelogues, written on Turkey in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries respectively, makes them especially helpful to us to understand how the Orientalist discourse operate through time.

**Keywords:** Orientalism, travelogue, imperialism, discourse, nineteenth century, Frederick Burnaby, Philip Glazebrook

**1. INTRODUCTION**

Most of us would assume that there is a linear development in the representation of other cultures and peoples. The enormous developments in communication technologies, the vast variety and affordability of travel means, globalism, open door policies and the allure of tourism revenues allow people to get to know about most of the countries in the world. They can actually and physically get there much faster and more comfortable than it could have ever been dreamed of in the nineteenth century. On top of that, the experience of multicultural societies such as Canada, the USA, England and many others has also given people the opportunity to meet members of diverse cultures. We may expect that all these developments have contributed to a better understanding between historically hostile cultures which did not have very friendly relations in the past due to geopolitical, religious, political and imperialist conflicts of interests. A comparative reading of Frederick Burnaby's *On Horseback Through Asia Minor* (1877) and Philip Glazebrook's *Journey to Kars: A Modern Traveler in the Ottoman Lands* (1984) in the light of four common Orientalist dogmas that Said has identified in Orientalist discourse reveals that this presupposition requires a great amount of correction and reconsideration (Said, 1978, 300-1).

Nineteenth century travel accounts can be best understood in their historical and cultural contexts as they are intensely loaded with political issues of their times. In that sense it is almost impossible to talk about travel narratives without referring to power relations in terms of European travel, imperialism which is the keyword that sheds light to every aspect of intercultural communication. With other European nations, England and France ruled over many countries and peoples from Tunisia to India and from Vietnam to Nigeria at such a time when imperialism was justified through "la mission civilisatrice." That is, bringing "civilization" to the supposedly "non-civilized" (meaning non-Christian or non-European) parts of the world. Nineteenth century witnessed the reinforcement of the stereotypes and the vocabulary to talk about other cultures in Europe. As Michael Pickering notes: "representations of other cultures and other countries are rooted in the nineteenth-century nationalisms and the pseudoscientific rationalizations of racial difference developed at that time, in European societies conceiving themselves as modern" (Pickering, 2001, xii). Pickering's

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assessment of the nineteenth-century representation of other cultures brings forth the general assumption that there is an improvement in terms of the representation of cultures and that they are represented more fairly, or with less prejudice in modern times. Michael Kowalewski makes a similar assumption, remarking that “travel writers today often feel less culturally sure-footed than their predecessors” (Kowalewski, 1992, 12). According to Kowalewski, “writers have been alerted, by way of a much-touted ‘crisis of confidence’ in our (their) collective ability to represent foreign peoples, to the limitations of the interpretive grids through which they view life at home or abroad. They are forewarned about the projections of desire that often constitute our images of the ‘primitive’ or the ‘exotic’” (Kowalewski, 1992, 12).

Said holds a quite different view from Kowalewski stating that any Western writing on the non-Western world is restricted by the vocabulary and the imagery Orientalism has formed in a centuries old tradition and what can be said on the Orient is predetermined by this discourse (Said, 1978, 44). On the other hand, there are always exceptions, dissident voices and those who do not take everything they read for granted. There are those who attribute more authority on what they witness and experience through direct personal contact rather than what comes to them through books, magazines and newspapers.

## 2. IMPERIALISM AND ORIENTALISM

In his *Orientalism*, Said draws our attention to the strong connection between European Imperialism and how Orientalism, as a field of scholarly work, served the designs of their Empires. According to Said, Orientalism is not only a scholarly field which studies the Orient but it is also a discourse that we come across in any kind of representation of non-European peoples, whether it be a newspaper, an article, a travel account, or a novel. These are the four dogmas that Said has detected in his study of the Orientalist discourse:

1. Absolute and systematic difference between the West and the Orient.’ The West is rational, developed, humane, superior, while the Orient is an aberrant, undeveloped, inferior.
2. Abstractions about the Orient are always preferable to direct evidence drawn from modern Oriental realities.
3. ‘The Orient is eternal, uniform, and incapable of defining itself’ (or speaking for itself: it must be interpreted).
4. The Orient is to be feared (“Yellow Peril’, ‘Mongol hordes”) or to be controlled. (Said, 1978, 300-1)

What Said defines as four Orientalist dogmas give us a useful tool to assess to what extent narratives affiliate with the Orientalist discourse.

## 3. PHILIP GLAZEBROOK’S JOURNEY TO KARS: A MODERN TRAVELER IN THE OTTOMAN LANDS (1984)

Although it is possible to see the workings of the orientalist discourse in many modern travel accounts such as Eric Lawlor’s *Looking for Osman* (1993), Jeremy Seal’s *A Fez of the Heart* (1995) and Tim Kelsey’s *Dervish: The Invention of Modern Turkey* (1995), it would suffice to give an example from Philip Glazebrook’s *Journey to Kars* (1984) to demonstrate the politics of representation in modern travel writing. Glazebrook’s journey takes place in the autumn of 1980. Glazebrook states that he wants to write a novel whose hero is a Victorian officer who has to travel in nineteenth century Ottoman Turkey. Therefore, his journey is a kind of sketchbook of his novel. Never once questioning the validity of the Orientalist imagery and vocabulary, he depicts Turkey with these words:

You may remember that when I was sailing along the Turkish coast before having set foot upon it . . . I found that I was frightened, and dreaded what lay ahead. I believe it is an ancient fear. Out of Asia by way of Turkey have come not only the Persians turned back by the Greeks, but Atilla and Timur the lame and Cenghis Khan, forces of darkness and disorder which threaten the stability of the European world. To the Victorian traveler the reservoir of such malevolent powers lay in the hidden khanates beyond the Kizil Kum, behind Bukhara, beyond the Oxus and Kashgar, in a howling wilderness of dust and sand to be pictured something like the smoking rent in the earth’s crust from which arose “the gloomy monarch of the realm of the woes” –the Lord of Tartarus, a domain confoundable with Tartary, whose ravishing of



Persephone laid the land under blight of perpetual winter, just as the lords of misrule rode out of Russian Tartary to waste the West. Turkey is the Western outpost of this adversary. Entering Turkish territory, an English traveler braved the destruction of all that he valued in this world and the next...To scold the Turks for letting their houses fall down, as Europeans always have done, is to fix upon a superficial aspect of an elemental dread, like complaining of the sea for destroying sandcastles. (Glazebrook, 1984, 234-5)

Here we see all the four Orientalist dogmas that Said points out. First of all, there is an ineradicable difference between Turks and Europeans. In all the picture, there is not even one element that could suggest that Turks and the Westerns or Europeans could share a common characteristic. Turks are inferior as they represent destruction and devastation. His last analogy, which establishes a comparison between Turks and sea, does not only dehumanize Turks but also devitalizes them. Secondly, we come across all sorts of abstractions about Turks. There is no space left for the individual. In the whole of his account we see that Glazebrook cares little about the current events in Turkey, and when he does he always reads them using the grid mentioned above. Most surprisingly there is nothing, in what he has experienced in Turkey that might stimulate these fears; on the other hand, even before he reaches Turkey he is filled with fear. One more issue that is interesting is that his travel in Turkey does not help him face any of his prejudices; caught in the vicious circle of his own preconceptions he avoids real contact with Turks. Thus what he is left is the Turkey of the orientalist discourse which invokes the clashes between "the East" and "the West" in a time span of more than 25 centuries. This is seen in such an extent that he even associates Turkish conscripts of 1980s with the soldiers of the Monghol hordes. Thirdly, the upshot of all these is that as he shuts out all means of communication with Turks, he does not let them represent themselves in his travelogue. Moreover, associating Turkey with Bukhara and Kizil Kum he reveals that he still sees Turks as an unchanging entity frozen in time. The last Orientalist dogma which predominates his account is the depiction of Turks as a "threat" in the same line with Tartar hordes, Timur and Atilla.<sup>1</sup>

Carrying the traits of all the Orientalist dogmas that Said has brought to our attention, Glazebrook's account stands as a perfect example to the workings of the Orientalist discourse. His explicit affiliation with the nineteenth century agents of the British Empire also affirms Said's emphasis on the relation between the Empire and the way it is justified and legitimized.

#### **4. FREDERICK BURNABY'S ON HORSEBACK THROUGH ASIA MINOR (1877)**

Said firmly argues that it is almost impossible for the Westerners to give a fair account of non-Western lands avoiding the Orientalist discourse; he, nonetheless, states that if had not believed that an alternative, a more honest way of representation and studying other cultures did not exist he would not have written his *Orientalism* (Said, 1978, 326). According to Said, the anthropologist Clifford Geertz is a perfect example of what the study of other cultures could be at its best. Said praises Geertz "whose interest in Islam is discrete and concrete enough to be animated by the specific societies and problems he studies and not by the rituals, preconceptions and doctrines of Orientalism." (Said, 1978, 326). Burnaby can also be classified under the same category with Geertz, as he also makes great effort to distinguish the nuances between different ethnic groups and traditions. Instead of relying on the textual tradition and preconceptions, Burnaby prefers his own observations and gives people the opportunity to represent their own point of view in his account. Therefore, Burnaby's account tries to dissociate itself from the Orientalist discourse and its four dogmas obviously. Thus a totally fresh view of Turks emerges in his book, near the end of which he writes:

Those people in England who have declared that it is impossible to reform the Turks would do well to learn the Turkish language, and travel in the Sultan's dominions. Human nature is everywhere much the same. There is more good in the world than bad, or otherwise, as a French philosopher once said, the bad would have destroyed the good, and the human race would no longer exist. (Said, 1978, 323)

<sup>1</sup> (Glazebrook is not a unique example in drawing Turks that black, modern travel writers like Seal, Lawlor and Kelsey also share a similar attitude.) For example, Seal sees nothing wrong with drawing an analogy between Turkish application to the European Union and the Vienna sieges, calling the application the third Vienna siege.



Obviously these lines contest the predominant, not a very flattering Turkish image in England in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. His challenging of the idea that there is an ineradicable difference between Turks and Christians and that the Western or European is always the best goes as follows:

People in this country who abuse the Turkish nation, and accuse them of every vice under the sun, would do well to leave off writing pamphlets and travel a little in Anatolia. There is an old saying that “the devil is not so black as he is painted,” and in many things writers who call themselves Christians might well take a lesson from the Turks in Asia Minor. (Burnaby, 1877, 75)

Here Burnaby invites those who prefer abstractions on Turkey and Turks to visit Turkey and draw their evidences from the actual realities of the country. This is a direct defiance of the second orientalist dogma that Said points out. All through his travelogue, we see that Burnaby scarcely relies on the previous travel writers. When he does he hardly ever accepts any of their statements without putting them to test first. For instance, he checks out Layard’s observations on Yezeeds, “the devil worshippers” on many occasions and gives a detailed account of what Layard says and what the Yezeed’s remarks on the point are. And while doing these he does not regard Layard as a sublime authority, his approach always allows for correction and further explanation (Burnaby, 1877, 257). This inquisitive nature is best understood in his motive for travel to the Ottoman Turkey. He states that he undertakes this journey, having suspected the accuracy of the reports on the country. He writes:

It was difficult to arrive at the truth amidst all the turmoil which prevailed. Were the Turks such awful scoundrels? Had the reverend gentlemen . . . really seen Christians or were these clergymen under the influence of a hallucination? There was one way to satisfy my own mind . . . I determined to travel in Asia Minor; for there I should be with Turks who are far removed from any European supervision. (Burnaby, 1877, x)

Burnaby contests the Orientalist dogma that the Orient is uniform. As he takes his journey to verify the suspicious reports on Turkey, Burnaby lays bare another example of misinformation he witnessed in Istanbul. He narrates the story of a European journalist whose conversation he coincidentally overhears at a Café Chantant in Istanbul. The correspondent listens to a song in Turkish and takes notes about it. His companion realizes that he gets everything wrong and wants to warn him:

‘Patriotic song,’ he remarked to his companion, ‘capital scene for a graphic letter—sympathy between French and Turks—you see she says France loves the Turks.’ ‘Nonsense,’ said his companion, ‘she is singing about the Turcos in Algeria, not about the Turks—you have written it all wrong.’ The Special changed colour for a moment, and then muttered, ‘Confound it! Yes! Algeria is not Turkey, but it does not much signify.’ And he went on writing. (Burnaby, 1877, 19)

According to the correspondent, there is no difference between Turkey and Algeria. They can be represented as if they were a homogenous entity. Burnaby’s counter-discursive attack does not stop here. He draws our attention to the tensions between Turkey and Russia. According to him, all the misrepresentations of Turkey were used by the Russian Empire to rob the Ottoman Empire of England’s support. He reveals the Turkish “structure of feeling” at the time. Thus he lets Turkish voices represent their own version of the political agenda:

“People in England blame us for the massacres,” continued Suleiman. “What could we do? Our regular troops were employed elsewhere. This was owing to the intrigues of Russia; we were obliged to employ Circassians. The Circassians hate the Russians, and indeed they have reason to hate them. Those whose own mothers and sisters have been ravished and butchered, cannot be expected to love their oppressors. The Circassians looked upon the Bulgarians as Russians, hence the bloodshed.” (Burnaby, 1877, 61)

Burnaby’s account gives the hope that just as travelogues can be used as a weapon to blacken the image of a people, they can also be used as an apparatus to contest misrepresentations. In the winter of 1876, when Burnaby arrived in the cities where allegedly Eastern Christians were being massacred by the Turks, he saw that nothing was as reported in England.

“Are there many secret police?”





“No, there is, if anything, too much liberty in Constantinople; the papers write about what they like, and abuse the Government freely, hardly any of them being suppressed in consequence, whilst some English newspapers which are more bitter against Turkey than even the Russian journals, are sold at every bookstall.”

“Do you think that there is any chance of another massacre of Christians?” I remarked.

“Not the slightest; that is to say, if Ignatieff does not arrange one for some political purpose. The Turks and Christians get on very well together. . . .” (Burnaby, 1877, 9)

Contrary to the general belief in England of his time, namely that there was a severe clash between Muslims and Christians in the Ottoman Empire. Burnaby travels all around Anatolia starting from Istanbul, then going to Ankara, Yozgat, Erzurum and Van among many other insignificant hamlets, villages and towns and he is told everywhere except that Christian minorities in their area are not persecuted but their co-religionists in the Eastern provinces are oppressed. Asked about those claims, Yozgat Christians are surprised but report that their Christian brothers in Erzurum are being persecuted. By going to the original source and reporting his findings as realistically as he can, Burnaby explicitly defies the fourth dogmatic attitude and challenges the hegemonic discourse in England.

## 5. CONCLUSION

In view of Glazebrook’s 1984 travelogue *Journey to Kars* which includes all the four Orientalist dogmas, it is safe to assert that Burnaby’s 1877 travel account *On Horseback Through Asia Minor* is a much fairer account which rejects the restraints of this discourse. His mostly anti-Russian, pro-Turkish attitude leads him to focus more on similarities than differences between cultures because Burnaby does not put his loyalties in terms of religious affinities. The fact that Russia is Christian does not much signify for him. He recognizes the differences between cultures, but we also see him trying to understand these differences by giving them the voice to speak in his account. Unfortunately, Burnaby and a few writers like him stand as exceptions in the predominantly biased travel writing based on othering and stereotyping.

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